

Working Women, Social Security and Marriages in Urban India (1970s to 2000s)

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Abstract: The present study has been undertaken to study some vital aspects related to the empowerment of women in the modern urban India. After the independence, most of the families of the upper middle class encouraged women to take proper education with higher and professional degrees. Subsequently, since the decade of 1970s, women gradually started to make their mark in the job market. The increasing professional work participation of women in country's public and private sector jobs, sprouted several challenges before the women like choice of job in the city of choice, struggle to find right and comfortable accommodation, social security, balance between the traditional household customs and demands of westernized working place and several issues in marital adjustments often leading to separation and divorces etc. To study the above challenges coming before the working women and whether it is a threat to traditional fabric and culture of communities, the paper

takes up the issues of upper middle class women in the white collar jobs. The factual and analytical understanding of the study has been helped by the government reports, government sponsored project reports, research papers, books and Newspaper articles.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Working women hostel, Social security, Anxiety, Divorce

As we know due to growing education among women in the post independent India, various government and public service sectors invited work contribution from women. Women traditionally placed as a domestic creature in society especially among the middle and upper strata, chose to take on professional responsibility as well. An interesting movement in this direction can be seen, work participative rate of women from 1970s to 2000s show increasing number of women in various kind of services (accounted by census data and other government sponsored reports). Rise of education and women entry into the job market emerged as major movement of women empowerment in contemporary India. However, this movement cannot be disassociated with the challenges before it and kind of changes initiated in societal trend to counter these challenges. The present paper focus on the following two major challenges that encounter women entering the job market:

1st The relation of women empowerment with

family support system

2nd The relation of women empowerment with conventional marriage system

The cases taken up for the present study belong to middle and upper class women in white collar jobs.

Women Empowerment and Support System

Traditionally support system for both men and women comes from family. But to have chosen job not available in the home city, women like men moved out to take on job in other city. For this they needed safe accommodation. The NGOs like the Young Women's Christian Association, the All India Women Conferences, the Women Graduates Union in Mumbai, the Avvai Home, and the Guild of Service in Chennai were pioneers in responding to the housing needs of women working in white-collar jobs. They started working women hostels in 1972 with the financial support from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Central Social Welfare Board. However after various reports regarding safe and subsidized accommodation for women submitted to Government (like by shramshakti statistical profiles of women in India, National perspective plan for women etc.), Government sponsored working women hostel came into existence all over India in cities. The Government of Maharashtra Committee Report (1972) deputed to examine the

problems faced by women in Government service in Maharashtra. It was found that women felt insecure because they were not well protected from anti-social elements or alcoholics. They felt insecure as they lived alone, away from their families and unsure of securing support from the community in times of difficulty and also decent private accommodation was available on exorbitant rent.

The issues which gradually affected societal norms were that since 1980s number of working women hostels are constantly increasing (as shown by government surveys) which is reflective of women empowerment but also visibly causing a major overhaul in the traditional Indian home system. The sense of protection which used to be derived by a family system is gradually losing its significance in changing environment.

Since 1981, the work participation rate of female workers has shown a continuous rise in India. According to the Registrar General of India, the work participation rate of women increased from 19.67 per cent in 1981 to 25.68 per cent in 2001 (The Financial Express , March 22 , 2006 , <http://www.financialexpress.com/printer/news>). In the organised sector, women workers constituted 18.4 per cent in 2003, of which about 49.68 lakh women were

employed in the public and private sectors (The Financial Express, March 22, 2006, <http://www.financialexpress.com/printer/news>).

Bank nationalization policy of 1969 seemed to be an important factor in more women being recruited, as discrimination against women are less in this sector. In 1969, total number of women employed in this sector were 22,200 and in 1987, 1,20,000 (Rashmi Arya, 1990).

Since 1995, emergence of Information Technology industry attracted women in large number. By 2003, around 21 per cent of females in metros were very much part of the ICT sector (Paper presented by R. Rajalakshmi, 2003) The trend in employment of women in Information and communication technology work arena is with a gender ratio (female: male) varying from a good level of 1:3 to the least level of 1:7 in important organizations (Paper presented by R. Rajalakshmi, 2003). If we see, company wise, female: male ratio, The WIPRO had 1:5, INFOSYS had 1:5, PHILIPS SOFTWARE had 1:4, HCL TECHNOLOGIES has 1:5, HEWLETT-PACKARD had 1:7, L&T INFOTECH had 1:2.5, ORACLE INDIA had 1:5 and SIEMENS INFORMATION had 1:6

We can see several central government reports on the status of women in India which discusses

central scheme of assistance for construction of hostel buildings for working women (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1974). The scheme of assistance for the construction of hostel building for working women was launched in 1972-73 for the construction of new and expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women were growing up (https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Working%20Women%20Hostel_about_revised_about.pdf).

There are 500 Working Women Hostels functional in the country (Hostels for Working Women, posted on: 04 Feb, 2022 4:31PM by PIB Delhi, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1795473>). Working Women Hostels are a demand driven scheme and sanction for new hostels is given on receipt of proposals from the State Government/UT Administration as per Scheme Guidelines.

In the different surveys conducted on working women hostels, specifically, it can be observed that the majority of the residents were young women, unmarried with high educational qualifications. All held white collar jobs. 85 percent were in permanent jobs.

If we look at the general findings of survey reports on working women hostels, we find;

1. It is the younger working women who seek the security of the working women hostel. Most of the residents in wwh that is almost 94 per cent were relatively young. Nearly two thirds are below 30 years of age.

2. A great majority remain single. A tenth are married, 50 per cent of whom are legally separated from their spouses.

3. If we go by the employment status: Only a one-third, hold clerical positions. The rest occupy position of greater responsibility or those that require technical skills include teaching, administrative and supervisory post, research, medical, paramedical and lawyer.

A study based on women hostellers in Bangalore city (Saroja Krishnaswamy et.al, 1997) accounts the shortage of wwh in the city. The common atmosphere found in a working women hostel was that of an overcrowded place which often used to be confined and oppressive. As being forced to live in a crowded hostel with lack of another amenities, women are likely to be subjected to anxiety. The anxiety at increased levels may adversely affect the working woman adjustment, career development and quality of her life in general. The study suggested that 'the state and central governments should give more aid and

encourage more voluntary agencies to increase the number of working women hostels proportionate to the demand. This remedial step is very essential as most of the hosteller's problems in general, and the problem of anxiety in particular arise out of overcrowding and ever increasing demand for working women's hostel accomodation'.

Women Empowerment and Marriage

The academic studies on the issues related with working women published in journals like International Journal of Sociology of Family, Perspective in Education and Indian Journal of Social Work highlight the following points:

1.A study on the occupational dilemmas of educated women (A.J.A. Rajakumariamirthagowri et.al, 2005) infer that married working women had more problems than their counterparts. This may be due to the load of family responsibilities added with the occupational expectations. Working women in the age group of 41-50 had significant problems perhaps owing to the inherent physical conditions due to which they might not be able to cope up with occupational demands at work place. It was also inferred that working women having female co-workers had more problems than others because, there may be less cooperation and understanding among them.

2.A study on marital adjustment among working women (Saroja Krishnaswamy, 1997) emphasizes on personality traits and psychological factors that affected mutual adjustment in marriage. The findings of study implies that as opposed to Indian stereotype model of self sacrificing silently suffering woman inhibited in her emotional expressions, there is a need to encourage girls to develop qualities of extroversion and a personality devoid of unnecessary anxieties as the preparation for good adjustment in their marital life. These qualities are significantly helpful for the women to carry out the dual burden of both being a wife and an employee.

3.A study (Kameshwari Pothukuchi, 2001), conducted on working women hostels in Bangalore to explore how much it actually empowers women. The study though finds that hostels empower women by facilitating experiences of independence otherwise unavailable to them but also opines that such hostels can be quite disempowering as an alternative form of shelter over the long term. Hostels can be oppressive in their variety of forms of control, in their reinforcement of the family as the appropriate source of shelter and social security, in prohibiting long-term residence, let alone secure tenure, and in disallowing any participation of the residents in decision-making.

The profile of the women boarding working women hostel suggests that maximum of them are unmarried and single either after being divorced or due to family stresses. The surveyed data highlights another trend that the singlehood of women no longer seems to be an unconventional norm. The basic data to support this comes from increasing number of divorce rate among working women especially in urban areas. The data from different Newspapers like The Hindu, Times of India, Telegraph and Tribune etc. and e matrimonial services like second shadi.com underlines the fact that since the era beginning with 2000s, there is a sudden rise in the divorce rate among the working couples.

If we start from Delhi, Times of India (4 August, 2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow>) made one of its headlines, Is Delhi India's Divorce Capital? Report says the city has emerged as the de facto divorce capital of the country with about 8,000 to 9,000 cases filed here every year. The number is almost the double of what was seen four years ago. Also, the number of women filing for divorce has seen a steep increase. Paper quoted psychologist and marriage counselor, Madhumati Singh who said, 'Couples are very impatient these days. Earlier marriage was about adjustment and compatibility but

now its more like a power game where both the husband and wife strive for an equal status. Women are financially independent these days and they don't want to change that after marriage. Money matters come into play and when things don't work out, couples file for divorce'.

The next highlighting data comes from Bangalore where there is rising divorce rate specifically in IT sector (<http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/aug/02divorce.htm>, 2 August, 2007). The statistics reveal that in 2006 alone, 1,246 cases of divorce pertaining to those in the IT sector have landed in the matrimonial courts in Bangalore. The total number of divorce cases in the Bangalore city since 2003 to 2008 were as follows:

2000 - 1,280

2005 - 1,860

2006 - 2, 493

2008 - 5000

The Times of India report on 22 July 2009 states that the city sees an average of 25 divorce cases filed everyday (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bangalore>).The fact which raised concern is that the number of divorce cases pertaining to those in the IT sector has seen a steady rise since 2003. The opinion of Dona Fernandes, a member of women right's group

Vimochana has been published by the Times of India, where she says, 'today's empowered women are refusing to follow the traditional diktats of Indian marriages...It is the wife who is supposed to adjust. But today's financially strong women are not ready to take undue pressure on their individual existence and thus marital discords are bound to increase. Similarly, marriage counsellor Sujit Kumar says that 'financial stability is a major cause of rise in divorces. The couples do not try to work out the marriage as they are confident they can lead a life independently as both are financially stable'.

A report in Telegraph estimates that in Bangalore city where women work in call centres and as IT managers, the number of divorces tripled between 1988 and 2002 (01 October, 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india>)

The divorce cases in Mumbai (http://sarkaritel.com/news_and_features/infa/november2009):

1995 - 2055

2004 - 3400

2009 - around 5000

The divorce cases in Kolkata ([http://sarkaritel.co](http://sarkaritel.com/news_and_features/infa/november2009)

[m/news_and_features/infa/november2009](http://sarkaritel.com/news_and_features/infa/november2009)):

2003 - 2400

2009 - around 4000

Punjab and Haryana, both agricultural states, have seen an increase of 150 per cent divorce cases. Kerala, a land of maximum literacy in India, recorded an increase of 350 per cent in the ten years from 1997 to 2007 (The Tribune, 17 July, 2007, Chandigarh, India, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007>).

Earlier divorces were limited to the affluent upper class in cities. But in the last decade, more and more middle and lower middle class couples have been coming out of their shells to escape the pains of a discordant family.

Nowadays, many young highly educated working couples go for agreements to separate rather than fight it out for years. Dr. Poppy Kannan of the Department of Social Work, Stella Mari's College has been referred in a News daily, The Hindu (23 September, 2002, <http://www.hinduonnet.com /thehindu/mp/2002/09/23>) where she has been highlighted to dealt with more cases of separation rather than legal divorce. She claims that all the ladies in question have not remarried but continue to stay single.

There is an another dimension that all the matrimonial sites have a substantial number of divorcees seeking remarriage. According to business head of shadi.com in 2008, about 11 per cent of its

m e m b e r s w e r e d i v o r c e e s
(<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080227/jsp>, The Telegraph, 27 February, 2008). Marriage bureaus agree that second marriage is a growing trend. About 30 per cent of their clients were divorcees wanting to marry again and the number has gone up by at least 50 per cent in the past two years that is from 2006 to 2008 (<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080227/jsp>, The Telegraph, 27 February, 2008).

Second Shadi.com reveals that the first marriages of their clients were brief as many divorcees were in their thirties. Average age of clients is 35 years (<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080227/jsp>, The Telegraph, 27 February, 2008). About 50 per cent of clients were from the top seven cities of the country. Also women have a strong representation. Women members reported to be frequently updating their profiles which implies they are getting a good response.

Taking into account, the opinion of divorce lawyers, marriage counsellors and sociologist on the issue, one can deduce one basic factor behind these divorcees from their statements that rising divorce rates are an indicator of women's empowerment. Financially, independent women is now open to the option of ending relationship rather than to hold life

long distress silently. In India 80 to 85 per cent of divorces are initiated by women.

Women NGOs in different cities receives calls from upper middle class women frequently for counselling to sort out marital discord (<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060205>, The Telegraph, 05 February, 2006). The Janodaya helpline claims to receive 20 to 25 calls from upper middle class women everyday. The International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim care (CPVC), Chennai, claims that 40 per cent women seeking help at the NGO come from upper middle class families. Dr. Prasanna Purnachandra, CEO, CPVC said that 'now, with increasing awareness, economic independence and a changing value system, they have become fiercely protective of their rights' (<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060205> The Telegraph, 05 February, 2006)

Conclusion

Hence, the education of women in contemporary India have made them self reliant but in the social domain women who are aspiring to make a successful career like men (except individual cases) finds it difficult to carry on like them while meeting the challenges of traditional family expectations. However, since last 2-3 decades choice of career among men

encouraged the culture of nuclei family but increasing working women accomodation and divorces seems to further break the system in the respect of individualism. Still this change which appears to be in favour of women disturbs the traditional Indian psyche which seeks stability in the Indian family system where women have equal participation. However, rising demand for women hostels and other types of accomodations is not only devoiding women of their close family environment but gradually disturbing the concept of Indian family.

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