THE IMPACT OF CLASS AND INCOME ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN’S CAREERS AND CAREER CHOICES

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Abstract

The status of women is defined by the cultural norms and not their monetary status. But if we compare their monetary status with their cultural status, we come across a very strange result. Regardless of the class she belongs to, she is free and independent only for two reasons. Either she can be happily ambitious, or she is in need of money and has no other source. Equality of gender still does not exist. It might never exist, according to the culture we follow. Male domination will still be in fashion, women will still have to act within the boundaries of cultural norms and this will continue until the women of our nation raises their son with the values of eliminating dominance of the female gender. Also, for this to happen, a woman herself needs to understand and accept her importance of existence. The change in the psychology and acceptance power of both women and men will bring about existence of ‘woman empowerment’, until then, these two words will merely remain just two words.

Key words: Cultural Norms, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women,” said Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru (Srivastava,N.K).India is very rich in its culture and heritage. We are also very lucky to have been learning of multiple religions residing in India. It is a land where women are worshiped. But it has been observed, only on a few days of the year, Durga Ma, Saraswati Ma, Mother Mary and on Diwali, they receive all the respect. Why is that not a daily routine? India seems to be the capital of rape cases these days. The sad part is even the women of our country follow the same system. Women seem to be meant to only satisfy the physical
desires of only men. Even in today’s time women are objectified as machines for producing kids. The dowry system is almost a means of ‘trading of women’ indirectly. All fathers want to do is get rid of the liability. The change will happen when they think of these women to be assets.

The fact that India is changing in all prospects still lacks in the change of social and cultural norms for women. There is a distinct number of women who have broken the glass ceiling and proved themselves in front of the world. Difficulties they faced despite of stories. Women have great potential and endurance power. But it seems as if the role of women is defined clearly by the dominating sex of our country. Any woman trying to break that line is considered a woman of no values. The entire game revolves around male ego which leads to women unemployment.

Let’s examine the present status of women in different classes of public. But the thing which is common in all classes is that the women must let their husband’s career be the priority compared to hers regardless of any negative financial situation the family faces in future. Practically this compromise of a woman’s career makes a woman week from the inside and they start losing confidence in starting up a new business. Even today it is believed that a married woman shall be extremely educated, smart, skilful and beautiful but shall not have the nerves to be seen at a higher level compared to her husband in the society. She is supposed to take care of children all day with very little help of her spouse. The demand of modernity is leading to increase in divorces in the urban areas and I think the women of rural areas are still under pressure. The female of the rural areas (of poor class) seem to have no choice, are always objectified and end up being caged within the boundaries set by their in-laws. But the female of the urban areas (lower class to higher class) still have a choice of being educated and soar high, the only thing what they lack in is that little push of motivation. There still is a lot of difference between the different classes to which these women belong to, which is discussed further in my research paper.

Diagram

Figure 1 presents a model, based on the work of M. Brewster Smith (1968), of how various factors may interact to maintain traditional behaviors
The top cluster of variables (A and D) operates at the societal level. Cultural norms (A) provide the background against which one's choices are evaluated. Each culture has its own prescriptions of sex-role appropriate behaviors. In the process of acculturation, we come to accept these prescriptions about the roles of men and women as fact; we evaluate ourselves and others in terms of these prescriptions; we raise our children to fit the designated patterns; and we punish deviations from the cultural norms. By providing the evaluative framework for oneself and others, these cultural stereotypes affect men's and women's judgments and beliefs regarding the appropriateness of various roles.
By influencing the political realities of one's society, the cultural standards affect institutional factors, such as the existence of institutional prejudices which can either facilitate or inhibit various role choices. The existence of widespread discrimination against women has been amply documented. Women's entry into and advancement in professional careers are blocked at all levels and in a variety of ways, ranging from the blatant refusal to hire women to the subtler "stag-turf" protection mechanisms enumerated by Bernard (1976).

Although highly important, these institutional and cultural barriers are not entirely responsible for the underemployment of women. There is evidence that other factors also contribute to women's under representation in professional careers. Psychological investigations have highlighted several such factors which influence female professional accomplishments by influencing career aspirations in such a way as to predetermine the training young women seek and the skills they acquire. These factors are represented by the bottom cluster of the model.

The bottom cluster of variables in the model represents the processes involved in translating the cultural myths into personal attitudes and aspirations. Women acquire, through a process of socialization, a set of sex-role attitudes and beliefs and choices and behavior which are consistent with the sex roles they are expected to play in society. Sex role socialization, then, is key to these processes. Sex role socialization operates in several ways to influence career decisions. On the one hand, it can foster a negative self-concept. For example, both women and men have been shown to view women as inferior, passive, submissive, not skilled in business and excitable during minor crises (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Goldberg, 1963). Women who share this negative view of themselves must perceive fewer levels of the professional hierarchy as appropriate and should devalue what ever accomplishments they have made. Other such inhibitory attitudes include fear of success (Horner, 1971), fear of loss of femininity (Tangri, 1972), and fear of an inability to fulfill the "primary" role ascribed to women (Epstein, 1971). It should be noted that each of these mechanisms assumes that women avoid professional careers out of fear, anxiety, or lack of confidence. Career aspirations can be seen, on the other hand, as life choices selected from a large array of alternatives. Viewed in this light, women's career aspirations be positively motivated and based on somewhat more rational criteria. Within this frame, sex-role
socialization can have at least two effects. First given a thorough socialization experience, women may never consider roles other than the traditional ones of wife and mother. Typically, socializing agents do not present alternative attitudinal -behavioral models nor do they require children to question the validity of their beliefs. As a result, traditional ideology is internalized by women on-consciously, as fact rather than opinion, and the restrictions it places upon self-development are accepted as "natural", (Bern and Bern, 1970). In support of this notion, investigations have demonstrated an inverse relationship between sex-role ideology and achievement aspiration. For example, Lipman-Blumen (1972) found that women who believed they should achieve success vicariously through their husbands have significantly lower educational objectives. Similarly, Parsons, Frieze, Ruble and Croke (1978) found that holding traditional sex-role values was significantly related “traditional career aspirations.” These traditional values included a belief that women should not achieve greater recognition than their husbands and, among women who planned to marry, a belief that the emotional life of the family suffers when the wife works. Sex role socialization can also influence women's value hierarchy. A woman might well desire both a professional career and a family. But if she sees these goals as conflicting then her choice should reflect her relative priorities. For example, Poloma and Garland's (1971) observations suggest that, women's attitudes regarding the demands inherent in the wife/mother role influence occupational aspirations. Professional career aspirations are more probable when career obligations are not perceived as interfering with the fulfillment of the wife/mother role. If women believe that facilitative institutions and spouse support are available which can lessen the burden of childcare without harming the child, they may choose a nontraditional life style. However, if these institutions and support are not available or if existing childcare facilitates are believed to being adequate in quality, selection of a professional career is unlikely. Additionally, if a woman feels it is important to be the major socializer of her children during the preschool period and is committed to being available to her children throughout their childhood years, then she is unlikely to select a professional career that allows for little flexibility in both career commitment and time scheduling across those years.
Objectives of the Study:

- To understand why women belonging to the Indian culture still restrain themselves from being independent and having ambitions?
- If not cultural norms, then what is that factor which holds back women from achieving their goals?
- To also examine the views of men regarding this topic.
- To examine the behavioral patterns of responses received through this study.
- To research whether there is any true emphasis on women equality or is it just superficial.
- To recommend solutions for the drawbacks of the cultural upbringing of women.

Methodology

The research is based on primary data and secondary data of married women majorly. To compliment and give support to the argument, interviews of a few men from all the different classes of the society had been taken and key observations were drawn.

A sample size of 65 women from different classes was taken, to draw conclusions about the objective of the study.

The primary data has been collected with the help of a questionnaire and interviews which were then closely analyzed.

Literature Review

Not just our nation, but the entire world faces the issue of gender equality. It is a human’s right to have equality in all forms. The major gaps of inequality are shown in access to opportunities and decision making power for women and men. Women are not considered important or suitable over men for activities in the corporate world or even for major decisions in their families. Women are not even allowed to pursue education of their own choice and are often indirectly threatened by the risk of security. A woman must know her self-worth, decision
making power, access to opportunities and her power of control over her own life. (Global Issues: Gender Equality and Woman’s Empowerment)

India’s population in the context of women is getting better these days. Almost half of the population is female. Since centuries in India, due to cultural norms females were deprived of access to opportunities for growth and education the reason being cultural or religious norms. Before independence, women were caught under the bully of cultural norms and customs which were all set by the humans of the society. This leads to increase in the illiteracy of women who were tortured with rules like the purdah system, child marriage, violence, sati, prostitution if remarried, etc. Domestic work was the major trouble faced by women. This framed a picture of women meant only for household chores and a community of lower importance. Thinking of achieving something or dreaming of a career was out of the picture. “In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent.” (Jain et al, 1997: 39). A woman was meant to be a mother of a wife or a sister and was asked to play her role but was never respected as a woman alone. (Parsons, J. E. PH. D)

Our culture and the minds of people play an important role in the position of the status of women of our country. Surely there has come a change since the olden days where women faced problems, but the rules have been not eliminated from the roots. Somewhere women are still facing some discrimination, some barriers or simply being devalued. Now a days it is not the case of women being bullied but indirect forms of barriers still exist.
Findings

Q1. What is your per annum income?

I have taken responses from different classes of the society to study whether it is the class, or it is the mentality, which actually matters when it comes to choice of career for women.

The above graph clearly shows women from four different classes as the sample for this study.

The classes have been classified with the help of income status of women.

50000-100000 – lower class

100000-500000 – middle class

500000-1000000 – upper middle class

1000000 and above – rich class
Q2. What is your age group?

This chart simply shows women from different age groups taken for this research. The real significance of age group as a factor can be well explained when the analysis of the entire result has been done, only to conclude what is the psychology of women of different age groups.

Q3. Do you think that women are capable of handling a business of any scale if given a chance?

The above graph proves that many women believe in their capabilities and their community of gender. The results show that, 78.5% women as strong headed and are capable of handling business of any scale.
History has proved it with an example of Mrs. Chanda Kochhar – the former MD and CEO of ICICI Bank.

A few women (12.3%) do not have confidence. The result of the entire study also proves this by showing that they were not allowed to dream big, grow mentally and achieve their ambitions. They end up accepting the cultural norms and carry forward this norm to implement it over their children.

There are also a very few women (9.2%) who are not sure of their capabilities or fear risk. That maybe simply a human trait I believe. This does not mean that they do not believe that women are not allowed to pursue their careers.

Q.4 Are you a home-maker?
65 responses

- Yes: 44.6%
- No: 33.8%
- Partially: 21.5%

The above pie chart clearly shows our culture. Still today, majority of women are home makers, regardless of whatever the reasons are. This chart is very important for the study because it can prove the reason behind the existence of the problem of my study.

The positive part here is that many women are getting independent and tend to work, regardless of their reason for working. We will study further about this, in the paper.
The 21.5% of women who are partially working is majorly out of self-satisfaction. This shows that a few women are acceptable with the cultural system of men earning for the family and tend to be self-occupied with themselves.

Then above graph shows that many women (35.4%) are pre-occupied by the household responsibilities and are so much in love with their children that they tends to dedicate their life to them.

Since education has been enough promoted for women of the 21st century, this graph still shows a certain amount of illiteracy which needs to be improved.

As our society and their culture suggests that women are meant to stay with only the management of the household as a responsibility that many women just tend to relax, as their husband can earn enough. They themselves are not motivated or wish to be ambitious.
26.2% of women do service which shows they are very well educated professionally.

15.4% women join their family business just because they also want to give good amount of time to their children and want to really invest their time at very useful place. Their contribution to family business gives them a sort of self-satisfaction.

12.3% women are entrepreneurs which shows they have confidence aim to achieve their goals.

But the sad picture here is that most of the women do not contribute to their personal growth, but instead are bound by cultural barriers and household chores, either by choice, or by force.
43.1% of women want to grow and learn something new which in fact develops their personality.

33.8% of women are homemakers may be as they are less educated or do not take interest in personal growth.

13.8% of women really want to value the time they have.

9.2% of women who may or may not be educated want to work for the family and want to support their family’s financial condition.

Q8. What is the level of control over your decisions regarding your own personal growth?

49.2% of women take most of their decisions on their own.

13.8% of women take some decisions in consultation with family members.

30.6% of women take few decisions in consultation with family members.

9.2% of women don’t take any decisions, they are taken by senior members of family.
49.2% of women think that it is better to take decisions consulting with family member as by themselves. This shows that still there is an indirect domination of the family over the woman’s rights.

30.8% of women take their own decisions.

13.8% believe that there are some decisions which really needs advice of other members too. This indicates a beauty of our culture where we respect our elders.

Q9. If given a choice which of the following profession would you prefer?

18.5% of ladies who choose to work in the film industry is because they fantasize about fame, freedom and success.

But are not allowed to work into fields where men members can excel.

But the majority of women chose other fields, maybe due to the popularity of other field or self-interest.
81.5% women belong to families which are improving their lifestyles and want to cope with the new generation.

67.7% women said that they worked before marriage. This shows that they faced no restrictions in their own house.
32.3% of women didn’t work before marriage. This might be due to personal choice as the father’s income was enough or they were not allowed to work.

49.2% of women have substantial amount of control for which the reason can be the forces around them which influence them for such expenses though which they can have complete control.

32.3% of women have somewhat or little amount of control over finances, the main reason could be the domination of male members over the decision makings and financial plans.

18.5% women are strong enough and are capable enough to take decisions.
35.4% of women have never felt guilty while neglecting their familiar responsibilities.

The rest rarely or frequently have experienced guilt maybe due to the inability to focus equally towards work and home both.

Even if this pie chart shoes that there is a good ratio of gender equality I don’t this that it is the case in real. That is explained well in the observations from the interviews that was taken.
This chart shows that women still do not have substantial control over their decision makings. 43.1% feel that women should have the power to take decisions alone.

This chart indicates that women know and believe that the reason for their status in the society is because of them not raising their voice against inequality and rights.
Still there are many women who rely on men when it comes to security, be it before marriage or after marriage. They do not tend to live an independent life. Once they lose the support of a male member they become handicapped.

However many women strive high to live a strong and an independent life bravely.

36.9% women think that, the work done by women is de-valued.

44.6% women do not feel the work done by them is de-valued due to the appreciation.
Key observation from the interviews of married men

- Male members tend to lie while they answer to save their image in the society just so that they are perceived as an orthodox.
- They assume, somewhere down the line that male dominates women in some way or the other. Most of the men believe that women shall not get into professions like mining, astronauts, film industry, army, etc, as these career fields do not suit their gender.
- One of the major observations was that regardless of any class or educational backgrounds the thoughts of many men are still narrow minded. Only a very few men believe in gender equality.
- The thought of male being the masculine gender and female being the feminine gender with more delicate features, is still in fashion. Men believe that women and men have a distinctive field of jobs. Women do not suit the activities done by the men and they are not physically suitable.
- The men of every class try to keep their family image regarding the female member up to the mark of the societal norms and customs.
- The thought of the male member's income is enough to feed the family is still in priority among the male members. They neglect the fact that the women have dreams as well. These males then gain higher decision powers in the family. The one who earns gets to take major decisions.
- Men also have a big ego clash if they confront women of higher income capability, higher decision-making powers, intellectual power and intelligence. They find it difficult to work under them.
- Men often believe that if women are ambitious about their career choices and strive to succeed then they tend to neglect their family responsibilities which are only a female member's duty.
Key observations from unmarried ladies

- They fear getting married due to family pressure and interference into their ambitions.
- Their educations status does not let them fall into hands of domination by the male gender; therefore they try hard to find a man who respects their ambition.
- Most of them are feminist, even if they do not say it.
- They believe in the power of women and are ready to raise their voices.
- Very few ladies tend to hide the truth from the people who try to dominate over them and do what they want secretly. This helps them maintain good relations as well as get self-satisfaction. They accept the fact that ‘they will not be allowed’.
- Some of them also fear lack of security in monetary terms.
- Even today for approximately 70% ladies, the decisions of her personal life are being taken by the family, therefore the choice of marriage and career vary accordingly.

Key observations from interview with unmarried men

- They say that they believe in gender equality, but they seem to be diplomatic while answering this question because when it comes to their woman they become possessive or dominant.
- They cannot handle woman being better than them any ways. For example, driving a car. They believe only men can drive properly.
- A major observation was that, while I spoke about the topic of my interview a few of them laughed back on my face and said “you ladies are always talking about equality, don’t you have enough of freedom? Rules are rules and you stand at the right place”.
- Many men respect this study and totally agree with the fact that women shall raise their voice and make a stand in the society.
Conclusion

The society has very well spread the words about gender equality and upbring the status of women from being dominated to being equal to their opposite gender. We all talk about how it is the 21st century and women are free enough to achieve their goals but while studying about this, very shocking results came out from this research. Also, a very interesting factor came up where marriage was a big difference in the lives of the women. Even though if they worked before marriage, somehow, they stop working after marriage due to family pressure which is in indirect, for example, they are said to be neglecting the family responsibility to achieve their goals.

Also, while getting primary data it was very difficult to get accurate data due to the diplomatic and image-oriented responses received from the respondents. A very great observation made was that the people of our society tend to show that they believe in gender equality but they deep down their minds still hold traditional views. Not just men but even women were not very true to themselves while answering to questions, thinking that they would be judged as an orthodox.

Another very important observation made was that the family culture and upbringing play a vital role in the minds of the women of their family, regardless of which class they belong to. A girl and a boy since childhood see and learn from their family the most. And if the family teaches them to dominate women or get dominated by men then they take it to be correct and continue to pass on the culture.

There are many articles uploaded online and in books which talk of the revolution of the domination which was faced by women which has not totally eroded now. But if you dive deep into the picture, not much has changed yet. One cannot blame the culture but instead blame the humans as they do not accept change with the growing generation. Instead they indirectly tend to inculcate the old culture into the newer generation if possible by them. Someone must be the first one to break the glass ceiling. There is a lot more to change to be called a nation with gender equality.
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