

Growth of Women Professionals: A Pragmatic Prospective Professional Women Striving to Break the Glass Ceiling

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Women have always held a certain paradoxical position in our society. But then in recent years the role and status of women has undergone some positive changes due to globalization and commercialism. There can be little doubt that women have made progress in breaking the glass ceiling - that invisible barrier that prevents some weaker groups from ascending to the highest-level positions in organizations. Statistics show that the number of Fortune 500 companies that have at least one woman among their top five earners has doubled since 1995, and, for the first time, over half of these companies had more than one-woman corporate officer. The data also suggest, however, that the progress toward equity has been slow, partial, and superficial.

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Introduction

"Every woman I know, particularly the senior ones, has been called too aggressive at work. We know in gender blind studies that men are more aggressive in their offices than women. We know that. Yet we're busy telling all the women that they're too aggressive. That's the issue."

– Sheryl Sandberg
COO of Facebook

THE fight is not for woman's status but for human worth. The claim is not to end inequality of woman but to restore universal justice. There have been innumerable debates about gender in India and in the world over the years. These generally includes women's positing in society, their

education, health, economic position, gender equality, etc. The main outcomes from all these different views and discussions is that women have always held a certain paradoxical position in our society.

Silent Growth of Women Profession with Reference to India

During the Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good (Altekar, 2016). Along with the men the women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. The emergence of child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and

polygamy further worsened the women's position. But then in recent years the role and status of women has undergone some drastic changes due to globalization and commercialism.

It's an irony when we see that at one side India has seen an increased percentage of literacy among women, and women are now entering professional fields, the practices of female infanticide, poor health conditions and lack of education still persisting and is still continuing. Even the patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman's 'real domain' and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn't changed much. When our country got its independence, the participation of women nationalists was widely acknowledged. Then the Indian Constitution was formulated, it granted equal rights to women, considering them legal citizens of

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the country and as an equal to men in terms of freedom and opportunity.

Things were not as simple legal rights were not enough to provide opportunities and access to women. As we are talking of the development of women in outer world, let us bifurcate here into two broad regions of study - one which was happening in India showing the increasing dropouts rates of women in development sector and the world scenario showing how the promotion of women was done by various strategies as WID, GAD and gender mainstreaming.

Talking about the world's scenario, to recognize the role and to promote the status of women in development process WID (Women in Development) was introduced in 1970s. It is meant to give special attention to the women's role, while extending development assistance. The 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year at Mexico City, and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), gave expression to the major pre-occupations of women around the world: improved educational and employment opportunities; equality in political and social participation; and increased health and welfare services. In sum, the WID approach calls for greater attention to women in development policy and practice, and emphasizes the need to integrate them into the development process. Women's subordination was seen in terms of their exclusion from the market sphere, and limited access to and control over resources. Programmes informed by a WID

approach addressed women's practical needs by, for example, creating employment and income-generating opportunities, improving access to credit and to education. Women's 'problem' was therefore, diagnosed as insufficient participation in a benign development process, through an oversight on behalf of policy-makers.

The gender roles framework was developed by researchers at the Harvard Institute of International Development in collaboration with the Women in Development Office of USAID and has become a popular approach within other mainstream development institutions. This framework derives from insights and concerns of the early WID approach, in particular from project appraisals. Like the WID approach, the emphasis of the gender roles framework is placed squarely on economic arguments for delivering resources to women.

In contrast to WID, the GAD (or Gender and Development) approach to development policy and practice focuses on the socially constructed basis of differences between men and women and emphasizes the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations. GAD approaches generally aim to meet both women's practical gender needs and more strategic gender needs by challenging existing divisions of labour or power relations.

In light of this, the need was identified for broader institutional change if pervasive male advantage was to be challenged. Adding women-specific activities at the margin was no longer seen

as sufficient. Most major development organizations and many governments have now embraced 'gender mainstreaming' as a strategy for moving towards gender equality. With a mainstreaming strategy, gender concerns are seen as important to all aspects of development; for all sectors and areas of activity, and a fundamental part of the planning process. Responsibility for the implementation of gender policy is diffused across the organizational structure, rather than concentrated in a small central unit. Such a process of mainstreaming has been seen to take one of two forms. The agenda-setting approach to mainstreaming seeks to transform the development agenda itself whilst prioritizing gender concerns. The more politically acceptable integrationist approach brings women's and gender concerns into all of the existing policies and programmes, focusing on adapting institutional procedures to achieve this. In both cases, political as well as technical skills are essential to a mainstreaming strategy.

Viewed from this perspective, the shift from WID to GAD can be interpreted as a way of disposing of both women and equity two issues presumably most likely to meet a wall of resistance from policy-makers primarily interested in talking economics. Thus, there was as shift from WID to GAD.

At the Indian front a lot has changed since those dark ages for the women. Though at some levels like dowry, crimes like rape, sexual harassment at office or public places, and molestation, eve-teasing, even after seventy-five

years of independence women are still exploited, which is the shameful side of our country. Yet one can't deny that the situation has improved since the earlier times. Women, who now represent 48.2 per cent of the population, are getting access to education, and then employment. From 5.4 million girls enrolled at the primary level in 1950-51 to 61.1 million girls in 2004-05. At the upper primary level, the enrolment increased from 0.5 million girls to 22.7 million girls.

Dropout rates for girls have fallen by 16.5 per cent between the year 2000 and 2005. Programmes like 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' and 'Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy' has helped increase the literacy rates from less than 10 per cent to more than 50 per cent today. The result of this is that India has world's largest number of professionally qualified women. In fact India has the largest population of working women in the world, and has more number of doctors, surgeons, scientists, professors than the United States.

Women in India slowly started recognizing her true potential. She has started questioning the rules laid down for her by the society. As a result, she has started breaking barriers and earned a respectable position in the world. Today Indian women have excelled in each and every field from social work to visiting space station. There is no arena, which remains unconquered by Indian women. Whether it is politics, sports, entertainment, literature, technology everywhere, its women power all along.

There have been huge changes for women in terms of employment

also in the past decades, with women moving into paid employment outside the home in ways that their grandmothers and even their mothers could only dream of.

There are some high-profile women chief executives. There is a small but increasing number of female presidents. Women are moving into jobs that used to be done by men. But their experience is contradictory, as feminist economist Ruth Pearson points out:

- As individual workers they experienced both the liberating or the "empowering" impact of earning a regular wage, and of having increased autonomy over their economic lives; at the same time many were also well aware of the fact that their work was low paid, both in comparison with male workers but also with women workers employed in industrialized countries.

The Invisible Barriers

And at the top of industry and government, the faces remain stubbornly male. In fact, there is some evidence that the numbers of women are actually decreasing. As Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, said: "Women are not making it to the top of any profession in the world. "It is true that progress in terms of gender equality is uneven, but the proponents of the argument that women are taking over the world at work need only look at statistics on employment, equal pay and political representation of men and women to see just how wrong they are.

Gender analyses of labour markets tend to look at women's participation in paid employment compared with men's - and not the huge informal sector in which so many women work. The number of women owning small and medium-sized businesses is estimated to be between 8 million and 10 million, and although this is still far fewer than that for men owning similar enterprises, numbers are slowly growing. In most countries, the informal sector is far larger than the formal one.

There are also more women in formal paid work today than at any point in history. They now make up about 40 per cent of the global formal labour force, and 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force, although this varies considerably from country to country.

Despite the fact that in many countries girls are forging ahead of boys when it comes to educational attainment, this doesn't always pay dividends when it comes to employment. Despite the youth bulge in much of the global south, even secondary and university education, where girls and young women are excelling, are failing to translate into employment for many young women. As one report from the World Bank notes: "Progress in education is not matched by higher labour force participation. By age 24, women lag behind in all regions."

While they cannot be said to be representative, the highest positions are even more elusive for women: only seven of 150 elected heads of state in the world are women, and only 11 of 192 heads of government. The situation is

similar at the level of local government: female elected councillors are under-represented in all regions of the world and Women Mayors even more so. And many of the women in top positions are already lined up for success. The few women in the Forbes rich list mostly come from rich families or business dynasties such as Walmart or Apple.

In the private sector, women are on most boards of directors of large companies but their number remains low compared to that for men. Furthermore, the “glass ceiling” has hindered women’s access to leadership positions in private companies. This is especially notable in the largest corporations, which remain male dominated.

Conclusion

Things are moving in positive direction. Due to compulsion to follow gender mainstreaming strategies, organizations are looking for potential women. But social and organizational structure are yet to have change for such gender mainstreaming initiatives. Gradually, women employers in India have been successfully raising to top positions in Indian organizations, despite facing numbers of obstacles. It can be said that woman can definitely break glass ceiling with a bang if all the barriers are tackled properly by society, employer, and government and most importantly by women herself.

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