



## Leading effects of traditional Indian mentality on women

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### Abstract

The culture and tradition of India is considered as old and great all over the world where people used to worship various female goddesses, saints and poets. India is also a powerful nation and famous worldwide for being the largest democracy in the world however, women backwardness is also very clear in the Indian society because of the social issues, problems and lots of restrictions against women.

Has the Indian mentality really changed? We believe and say that we being into 21<sup>st</sup> century have upgraded ourselves and lots of things have changed as compared to the past. Partially, yes! But it is still a matter of concern as to how far this improvement really is! It is very unfortunate and sad to say that Indian society still has not been able to overcome the taboo in many areas. This paper is an insight on this issue and the challenges faced by women in Indian society. Let us have a look at this.

**Keywords:** Indian mentality, traditional mentality, corporate women, men dominance, gender inequality

### Introduction: Indian context

India is country which promotes 'Unity and Diversity' and is a land of different cultures and religion. India has a great history and mythology, which talks about female goddess who are the supreme power for Wisdom & Learning - Saraswati; Wealth - Lakshmi; Prosperity - Parvati; Death and Shakti (power) - Kali; warriors like Jhansi ki Rani - Laxmibai and great mothers who gave birth to freedom fighters. We find many examples in Indian mythology which taught us to value & respect women and treat them as equals or supreme than men; but unfortunately these learning are loosing the flavor and are fading out.

Why is it always explained to the females that there are certain things which they can't do or should not do? A question always is raised on their talent, potential and capability! There are challenges for them, personally and professionally both. So when an Indian woman thinks of certain aims she wishes to achieve in her life, it is explained to her that she should not be so ambitious. She should not have dreams, aspirations, ambitions or the desire to become somebody as she has to take care of family and household responsibilities. She needs to cook and take care of the baby, so it is not advisable for her to work after marriage. She first needs to take care of the social commitments and then she can think of her personal desires.

*Why should be one's self the second priority? Why can't men shoulder these responsibilities as well? Men & women both shall handle the household and financial responsibilities together so that women don't have to compromise with their career. There are few people who have started accepting this ideology and shoulder personal and professional responsibilities equally. However, there are majority of instances where people in Indian society still live with the traditional mindset and draw lines as to what a man should do and what a woman should do!*

I have observed many men who call themselves as upgraded

ones, someone who believes in gender equality, who will make big impressive statements in public to woo them but actually don't practice all what they say. When it comes to a reality check, these same men turn out to be big-time male chauvinists. The same men tell their wives that they can't do business or should not think of going beyond the traditional standards which the society has set for them. *These men wear two different masks, one for the society & public and other for themselves and family.* I had met and observed that the former holds true for both the directors of Nagpur based education (coaching) institute (Names kept anonymous). There are many more such two-faced men in India!

### Women in Indian defence: Comparison with other countries

In every field and stream, there is gender biasness. To quote few examples, if we look at the esteemed Indian Air Force (IAF), women were not given helicopters till the year 1996 and fighter aircrafts till the year 2016. It is now that in the year 2017, IAF will allow women to fly fighter aircrafts. India now joins the ranks of countries such as China, Pakistan, Israel, France, Turkey, Greece, the US and, best of all, the former Soviet Union where women were allowed to fly fighters.

The year 2016 will forever be marked as the year the Indian Air Force changed. Flying officers Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh became the country's first female fighter pilots to be commissioned, entering a world that was thus far reserved only for men. These women fighter pilots were first trained in Pilatus and Kiran; they will complete the training in AJT Hawk in 2017. And only after the successful completion of Hawk training, they will get an opportunity to fly supersonic warplanes. The last time the air force did something so dramatic as far as women are concerned was 22 years ago, when it said yes to female

helicopter pilots.

"Finally they have decided." That was the first thought that crossed Gunjan Saxena's mind when she heard the news. Saxena became one of India's first female helicopter pilots in 1996, the second batch of women to fly a Chetak and Cheetah. Until a few years ago, women were only allowed to fly these single-engine helicopters; now they fly twin-engine Mi-8s too, expanding the scope of their duties.

But last year (2016-17) the air force took a big leap and shrugged aside its largely sexist fears about female fighter pilots: How will she handle high G conditions if she's menstruating? (When you're pulling G, or heading away from the earth at a certain speed, blood starts moving away from your head and down because of gravitational forces.) What will happen if she gets pregnant and doesn't know it yet and flies a fighter? If she does get pregnant, that's a two-year time-out from flying. Then she has to be retrained when she returns. After investing crores (the government calculates the cost of training a fighter pilot by adding up the hourly cost of operation-which runs in lakhs-of her aircraft), what if she decides she doesn't want to be a fighter pilot? Yet male pilots quitting for more lucrative opportunities never qualifies as a gender issue. "The women always complain. You don't treat us at par with the men," says Air Marshal Nair<sup>[1]</sup>.

India had until now kept women out of the *combat role*, and away from frontline warships and ground combat, citing concerns over their vulnerability if captured and their physical and mental ability to handle the stress of such deployments but at least 16 countries have broken the gender barrier.

1. **Canada:** Since 1989 all military occupations have been open to women. The submarine service was a little late in opening up, but it did in 2000.
2. **The US:** Women in the US military are playing a more active role in direct combat women since 2002, as a result of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Guardian reported that in January 2013 the US military officially lifted a ban on female soldiers serving in combat roles and said anyone qualified should get a chance to fight on the front lines of war regardless of their sex.
3. **Australia:** From January 01, 2013, the country opened all employment categories in Australian defence force to women who were serving in the ADF.
4. **The UK:** In July 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron lifted a ban on women serving in close combat units in the British military.
5. **Denmark:** The Danes adopted a policy of total inclusion in 1988 following trials in 1985 and 1987 exploring the capabilities of women in combat, according to a 2010 survey by the British ministry of defence.
6. **Finland:** Finland allows women in close combat roles. All services and units of the Finnish defence forces and the Finnish border guard accept females.
7. **France:** Women can serve in the French military except on submarines and in the riot-control gendarmerie. In 2006, 1.7% of combat infantry comprised women and 19% of French military personnel were female, the British survey found.
8. **Germany:** Women first joined German combat units in 2001 following a ruling by the European Court of Justice, which said preventing women from combat roles

was against the principles of gender equality.

9. **Israel:** It was in 1995 that the Israeli defence force began incorporating women in combat positions.
10. **The Netherlands:** The Dutch allow women in close combat roles.
11. **New Zealand:** The country has no restrictions on roles for women in its defence force, says the UK survey. They can serve in the infantry, armour and artillery divisions as a consequence of legislation that came into effect in 2001.
12. **Norway:** In 1985, equal opportunities legislation was applied to the Norwegian armed forces and Norway became the first Nato country to allow women in all combat functions, including submarines.
13. **Poland:** Poland employs women in close combat roles. The country allows women to volunteer and serve in all services of the army.
14. **Romania:** There is no distinction between Romanian men and women with regard to combat roles.
15. **Spain:** The armed forces personnel law in May 1999 eliminated gender discrimination and women were allowed to join all positions in any service.
16. **Sweden:** Since 1989, there have been no gender restrictions to any positions in the Swedish military. According to the British survey, women are allowed in all services and roles including combat<sup>[2]</sup>.

The Indian armed forces began recruiting women to non-medical positions in 1992, yet only 2.5 per cent of its more than 1 million personnel are women - most of them administrators, intelligence officers, doctors, nurses or dentists.

In recent years, the courts of law pushed the military to widen opportunities for women, by giving them permanent commissions, for example, instead of limiting them to five-year terms.

Mr. Manohar Parrikar, defence minister of India from 2014-2017, confirmed plans to extend combat roles for women in the army and navy, adding it would take time. "There are still a lot of technical and administrative difficulties in several areas in taking more women. We need to create a lot of infrastructure for women, especially in air force and navy wings," he told reporters at the event. "Yet, we will work towards creating more opportunities for them," he said<sup>[3]</sup>.

We have reached 21<sup>st</sup> century and have observed so many nations accepting women in the defence forces. We are running in a race of becoming a super power nation and yet the government and the system still needs time to absorb women in challenging roles in Indian defence!

### Women in sports

If we look at sports, the situation is not very pleasing either! Sports in India have always been identified with men. Women living in this country are not encouraged to actively participate in sports! The conditions of women in India who take up sports are sub-par when we examine it with the international level. If a woman wants to pursue sports like cricket, wrestling, boxing, shooting, martial arts, etc., she has to face a lot of traditional challenges. People consider that certain sports are meant for men and females should not get into it. Body building is considered as a male sport; but what if a

woman wants to pursue it and is also capable of the same? Car/ bike racing is also one amongst this. She has to face the stigma in situations like these. Despite of all the odds, few women have made India proud!

Jaipur based 25-years old engineer, Shweta Rathod participated in the 6th World Body Building Championship & Physique Sports Competition at Bombay Exhibition Centre, NESCO, organized by The Indian Body Builders Federation (IBBF) during December 2014. Deepika Chowdary, 31, molecular biologist turned figure athlete, became the first Indian to win an International Federation of Body Building and Fitness (IFBB) title. Ashwini Waskar, 32, marine researcher had to quit her job to be a full-time bodybuilder and has participated in three championships, including an international event<sup>[4]</sup>. It is now that few Indian women have started coming up since 2015 and pursue this profession.

Motorsport is generally a domain dominated by male contestants. But there are some woman racers who have stunned the world with their amazing skills and performances. Alisha Abdullah from Chennai is one such woman who is showing the Indian women a new dimension in the arena of motorsports. Alisha is the *first Indian woman* racing champion in the National Super Bike Racing Championship. Not only that, she has also won several karting championships and road racing championship as well. She is best known as the super bike champion, but the Chennai girl is equally comfortable behind the wheel of a racing car as well<sup>[5]</sup>.

Vadodara's (Gujarat, India) young racer Mira Erda will become the *first Indian woman driver* to compete in one of the highest classes of Formula racing in the country after signing up for the Euro JK series in the upcoming JK Tyre-FMSCI National racing championship in 2017<sup>[6]</sup>.

There are similar examples in other sports as well. To name a few - Geeta Phogat & Sakshi Malik in wrestling, MC Mary Kom in boxing, Dipa Karmakar in gymnastics, Mithali Raj in cricket, Saina Nehwal in badminton, Sania Mirza in tennis, PV Sindhu in badminton, Deepika Kumari in archery, Dipika Pallikal in squash, Tanya Sachdeva in chess, Sharmila Nicollet in golf<sup>[7]</sup>.

Woman always has to justify and prove why she wants to pursue something which is considered as a man dominating field. Only few females turn to be lucky and win/ prove themselves in the respective fields. But the point of study is how many aspire for something like this and out of that how many were able to overcome the taboo and pursue what they aspired to in their lives. We can find so many Indian women who aspired to do something in their life but had to forego their dreams and career aspirations because of the traditional mindset of people around them. The challenges faced by them are more than that faced by the man.

### Women in corporate

We have some good number of names under this head however; life is not easy even for these ladies! Being a woman in the Indian corporate setup is a mixed bag, and while large companies are trying various ways to retain their women employees, there are several challenges that women still face. Culturally and socially, India has a long way to go before women are genuinely treated as equals in the workplace. Here are some of the issues that women struggle to overcome in

corporate India.

- **The infamous glass ceiling**

The imaginary ceiling up to which a woman can grow in her career is a concept that is taken for granted in the Indian society.

There are several reasons why very few women make it to the top rungs of a firm – family commitments and gender discrimination in the workplace are just a couple.

When two people are considered for the same role, many a time a male employee is chosen over a woman simply because they don't have as many strings attached like pregnancy and childcare.

- **Unequal Pay**

Women in a lot of firms are paid 20-30% less than their male counterparts, often without valid reasons. Again, the skepticism of a firm to invest in their women employees is very evident. "What if she resigns because she needs to take care of a parent or a child?"

"What if she quits because her husband needs to move out of the city?" - These are just a couple of questions that run through the employer's mind. Unless women are paid the same as men for the same work, it is very difficult to retain female workforce.

- **Employee Security**

A lot of times women, especially in the BPO setup and in many IT firms are required to work for very long hours. Shweta Chawla, an employee of an IT firm says, "My Company has cabs for us to use when we get delayed, but who's to say we're safe even in the cabs at 11 pm?"

There have been several cases of women employees of BPO organizations being raped and murdered by cab drivers in the wee hours of the morning. Security is a factor that is extremely important when a woman makes a choice about working.

- **Sexual harassment in the workplace**

Suggestive statements made by bosses or peers, a careless brush of the backside, conversation with sexual overtones - these are not uncommon in corporate India. Organizations usually have a system in place for women employees to report sexual harassment and take legal action.

However, there are two major issues here – inability to recognize sexual harassment in some cases, and fear of career setbacks if they report a superior.

- **Lack of support from immediate superiors**

Many a time women have a tough time dealing with immediate bosses who are male. This is due to factors like lack of sensitivity of the boss towards the employee's health concerns or family commitments, and assumptions about her capabilities on the basis of her gender.

Namrata Rao, an engineer in a reputed Telecom firm says, "I wanted to pursue a business development role and I spoke to my manager about it. He started the conversation by saying 'If you are really serious about your career, my suggestion would be to ...' as soon as he said 'if you are serious about your career' I switched off because I was so mad at him." Incidents like these are not uncommon.

- **Lack of support from family**

While this is not an issue directly at the workplace, if a woman doesn't have the support of her family, it affects her performance at work.

Spouses and parents in law sometimes are unwilling to share responsibilities at home and with respect to childcare. This makes it all the more difficult for women to focus on work.

- **Insufficient maternity leave**

Firms like Infosys and Ernst & Young have women employee friendly policies for maternity leave. But in a lot of other companies, women are forced to either quit or cut short their break post childbirth, depending on their financial condition.

- **Rewarding face time as opposed to results at work**

This is a predominant culture in the Indian workplace, where the more you are "seen", the better you are rewarded. So while measures that give flexibility like working from home or flexi-hours work well for women, they lose out on a lot of recognition in spite of the hard work that they put in, simply because they are not physically present<sup>[8]</sup>.

There are many talented women in India but they are not able to contribute to the GDP of the country because of all these traditional things. Let us see few examples of successful Indian women and what they have to say.

Anita Dongre has made a name for herself in the fashion world, but there was a time when she faced difficulty in getting a store in a mall in Mumbai. The designer says she comes from a "traditional family where the women were always homemakers" and had to overcome her family's resistance while starting out. "I come from a traditional family where the women did not have professional careers outside the house. I had to overcome the family's resistance initially, but once they showed their support, there was no looking back," Dongre, who is based in Mumbai, told IANS in an email interview. "Women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges today and I hope they find a firm support system and follow their gut as I did," she added. She has stitched together three brands under her label with distinct identities. There is AND with its line of contemporary western-wear for women; Global Desi which boasts of boho-chic ensembles; and then there is Anita Dongre label which shines with special curated looks in bridal, couture, pret and menswear<sup>[9]</sup>.

For Pepisco CEO Indra Nooyi, 'having it all' is just an illusion that comes with painful sacrifices and tradeoffs. "You have to cope," advises the 58-year-old exec, "because you die with guilt. You just die with guilt." Nooyi admits that her daughters may not feel she's been the strongest of mothers, but "the person who hurts the most through this whole thing is *your spouse*. There's no question about it." She added, "I don't think women can have it all. I just don't think so. We pretend we have it all. We pretend we can have it all. My husband and I have been married for 34 years. And we have two daughters. And every day you have to make a decision about whether you are going to be a wife or a mother, in fact many times during the day you have to make those decisions. And you have to co-opt a lot of people to help you. We co-opted our families to help us<sup>[10]</sup>."

Indra Nooyi said in one of her other interviews, that one day she was asked by her mother to get milk for home after she got home late after long day at work. On reading her reluctant body language, her wise mother explained to her that she is the boss at her office and should not carry professional designations, power, status and baggage at home. At home, she is a daughter, a wife and a mother!

When we talk so much and promote gender equality, shouldn't this be applicable to men also? Normally, it is believed in India that it is the job of women to take care of household responsibilities. I think, when both (man and woman) are working, it is mutual responsibility of both.

Yeshasvini Ramaswamy, a successful entrepreneur, founder of e2e People Practices, said in one of her interviews, "I don't know why we have put it on resolve to be perfect all the time; men don't talk about work-life balance, we do! We have to be a perfect mom, but men don't say perfect dad or perfect anything. It's a global thing. We've done a lot of studies on the pressure to be a good daughter, a good wife.

When girls in India come back from school, they go straight to the kitchen. The boys go out to play. I was into a lot of extracurricular activities, a tomboy. When I was in the kitchen I told my mom you have to bring my brother in here too. My mom is a gold medalist in economics so I can see that with education and the way one treats their children. She was given an opportunity and gave us one too<sup>[11]</sup>."

From an Indian context, we need more women to enter corporate. It is important not only for economic well-being, and that it makes business sense, etc., but also from a societal perspective. If children have working mothers, they treat women very differently, with a lot of respect. So when they marry, they will treat their wives differently. They will give their daughters a chance to succeed. It's better when a woman can be a role model for her son. It changes a person's life forever. And she has something to look forward to.

We have a long way to go for women's empowerment in India, but it will create a whole generation of citizens who are more inclusive in their thought. Right now, we are behind on creating these generations that could be thinking differently forever, so lot of work has to be done internally.

Organizations need to understand that unless they put in genuinely effective measures that will encourage women to work with little hassle, not just the companies, but Indian economy as a whole will take a big hit.

### **Women: Social challenges**

There are few social issues against women which are prevailing in Indian from ages. It was there in past and is ruining the present too! There are lots of social challenges which women still have to face. To name a few:

- Selective abortion and female infanticide
- Dowry
- Domestic violence
- Disparity in education
- Child Marriages
- Inadequate Nutrition
- Sexual harassment
- No Equal pay for equal work
- Property rights
- Gender inequality

There was a research which says: India is ranked as the world's fourth most dangerous country for a woman; about half a million female fetuses are aborted every year because of the preference for boys; nearly half of India's girls are married off before the age of 18; domestic violence is common<sup>[12]</sup>.

After looking at these surprising facts, can we still claim ourselves as developed/ changed/ upgraded individuals? I believe a lot of work has to be done in this area and the society need upliftment; and this has to start with our own selves first. Few external measures are been taken and will have to continue so that we see some strong impact of the same.

### Effects of traditional Indian mentality on women

There are various effects of all the above discussed situations on women. It is seen in diverse aspects:

- Comprise in career/ professional growth
- Mental illness
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Compromise in relationships
- Suicide
- Marital issues
- Abnormal blood pressure
- Facing stereotype
- Inequality

### Conclusion

A woman has to face challenges on personal, professional and social sides. Why Indian men and Indian society can't accept women as athlete/ entrepreneur/ sportsperson/ career oriented/ ambitious individual! She has to prove herself every time on all the aspects of life. We have been talking a lot about gender equality and equal opportunities. I think, it's high time that this talking should reflect as the change in mentality and the vision towards women.

*"The change has to come and it has to come from within!"* No external change can help in this situation. The Indian mentality which just has traditional acceptance needs to change so that Indian women can come forward, pursue their dreams and live at par with men. The line which is drawn for women as to what they can do needs to be removed. There are few women who have proved themselves going against the wind. However, there are still many more who aspire to prove themselves! If all these women also start contributing to the growth of the country, our country will indeed get laurels in all the fields!

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