

Urban Women, Work and Family: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

The first report on the status of women 'Towards Equality' by National Committee in 1975 can be marked as the first official attempt to study the status of Indian women in the post- independence era. This report verified that despite having the right to equality, the roles, rights and participation of women in the public sphere was limited and constrained. In these contemporary times, the flux, presence and participation of the urban middle class woman in public spheres has increased but she still experiences suppression and inequality in the family as well as in the workplace. The educated and professionally qualified women have to shoulder dual responsibilities as an earner and as a care-giver. This double burden leaves her with no quality time and space for personal growth. She has to undergo stress, conflict and criticism in the patriarchal society while juggling the dual responsibilities to weave and balance the work and home. The Constitution of India has accorded the right to equality irrespective of sex, race, caste and class. However, there is a deep disquiet over whether the urban educated working mothers\ women have really become equal and empowered? or has inequality only changed the garb ! This paper is an attempt to find out how far the gender equality has become a rule /reality and not an exception in urban Indian families.

Key words: *Middle class , Patriarchy , Household work ,Balancing and Weaving*

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Introduction

In the preceding four decades, women's struggles have received considerable attention from the women's organizations, the government and the media. Due to the multiplicity and simultaneous emergence of various factors such as women's movements, increased access to education, economic empowerment, legal awareness and atomizing family systems in urban areas, it is assumed that the urban women have received a disproportionate share of the benefits. In spite of the education and professional qualifications the women in urban India find it difficult to come out of the traditional and stereo-typical mould of womanhood. Dual responsibilities as an earner and as a mother or nurturer make their life hectic and stressful. Experiences of stress, conflict and guilt are routinely expressed when women are unable to balance and weave in the patriarchal family. Even though the Constitution of India has accorded right to equality irrespective of sex, race, caste and class, but the concern here is whether women have really become equal and empowered?

This paper tries to find out how far the 'gender equality' has become a rule not an exception in the Indian urban middle class families and how far have they been accepted as earner or professionals with their conventional role of wife and mother, how far the household tasks and nurturing responsibilities and family decisions are being equally shared between the couple and other family members.

Objectives

- 1- what are the problems faced by urban mothers /wives while balancing and weaving work and family which are caused by the incongruence between their social situation and the ideal-type of womanhood ?
- 2- how does the patriarchal normative structure creates obstacles for women when they try to achieve and carve a niche for themselves ?
- 3- how do these urban women behave and react while multi- tasking and juggling in conflicting situations ?

Definition of the terms

Class and middle Class- refer to a socio-economics category.

Social Class- The concept of social class in sociological literature comes from the writings of Marx and later from Marxian thinkers. Marx has mainly talked of two Classes – the Bourgeoisie and the proletariat. But it would be an oversimplification to say that there simply exist two classes at any given point. The middle class represents a 'marginal position', 'transitional class', which is agitated by two historic tendencies of class formation bourgeoisie and proletarianisation.

Max Weber while defining *class* emphasized 'power' and 'status' as equally important dimensions of class structure because they not only interact with the economic structure but can also increase or decrease its capacity to determine the social hierarchy. Thus, "power creates parties and prestige creates status groups" Most of the sociologists agree in recognizing the existence of three classes in a modern capitalist society.

For the present study it had been important to identify the indices which would have helped the researcher to define the middle class; the most common measures of class ranking includes of income, education and occupation; and these indicators are used in the present work to define the concept of middle class.

(a) Middle class income: monthly income starting from Rs.45,000

(b) Education – graduate and above in any discipline – arts, science , commerce

(c) Occupation – engaged in white-collar jobs – teaching.

Research Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected through interview- schedule. The respondents were women alone. Data was collected in the year March 2015-16 The study has been conducted in the city of Moradabad. 15 respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling from different private secondary schools. 15 respondents were selected from different degree colleges. Teaching is noble profession and professionals hold different stress levels and have different working conditions in terms of temporal and spatial structures.

Result and Discussion

Middle class working mothers in domestic sphere: The basic form of division of labour in human society is based on gender. Some jobs are categorized as 'masculine' whereas some are termed as 'feminine'. Man as the breadwinner of the family, and the owner of the economy enjoys exclusive rights and a preferential position within the family .Some social scientists rendered biological factors to the inequality, the protagonist of biological school consider these inequalities as a universal feature of all societies. Parsons characterizes the role of a woman in the family as "expressive" and that of the man as "instrumental". Parsons advocates a clear division of labour on the basis of sex for the effective functioning of the social system, and believes that instrumental and expressive roles are complementary to each other. Many social scientist reject the idea of biological school and opine sex discrimination is culturally determined behavior. The main champions of this school of thought are Ann Oakley, Ernestine, Friedle, Sherry B Other, Lester F Ward and Komarovsky. Ann Oakley strongly feels that inequality cannot be explained on the basis of biological

factors. The relationship between the division of labor inside the family and the division of labor outside has provided much fuel for theoretical debate (Oakley, 1997).

In the light of the observations made above, this paper tries to assess the situation of middle class working mothers in the family. It analyses of the division of labour, decision making, impact of women's employment on the power-relations within the family and specifically with 'the husband'. It also tries to evaluate changes in the normative pattern of the patriarchal family and compares the expected and actual role performance and power-relations in the family.

The respondents belong to the age of 25 to 50 years. 73% respondent were between 35 to 50 years and above, 27% are less than 35 years. All the respondents were highly qualified, and among them 82% were post-graduate in science, rest 50% respondents were post-graduate in arts, and commerce faculty and a few (i.e. 12%) had Ph.D. degree. All the respondents were married. Among them span of marriage of 35% respondents was less than 10 years. 35% respondents had a married life between 10 to 20 years, whereas marriage span of 30% respondents was more than 20 years. Thus, it can be said that 65% respondent had long experiences of married life. 78% of respondent had a nuclear family and rest 22% had an extended family set-up.

From the data analysis it becomes evident that in most of the cases it is the husband who takes decision in a family. The data clearly shows that in comparison to the extended family women in nuclear family have more decision taking power. Though in nuclear family too this decision power is tokenistic. As in nuclear families respondent's contribution is more in child related activities and it reinforces the sexual division of labour. It is also apparent that white collar women enjoy greater power particularly in respect of children's education and mate selection, yet at the same time enjoy lesser power in respect of economic activities like-investments, saving, sale and purchase of property, even buying of household items is the privilege of the male. As far as religious activities are concerned it appears to be an exclusive domain of women except for those celebrations and festivals which involve big expenses.

Family Structure and Sharing in Household Work

Traditionally household is woman's domain of work but under new situation change can be seen in male perspective as small percentage of husband (33.5%) and (12.5%) of sons have started helping wives and mothers in household work in nuclear family. In most of the cases it is the daughter who helps her mothers and in joint family other female relatives extend some help to the respondents. The data reveals the correlation between the family structures and sharing in household works.

The data shows that nuclear family structure goes in favor of the equality of husband and wife and is more liberal in patriarchal norms in comparison to extended family structure. In nuclear families husband and wife mix freely. They get more opportunity for interactions and communication with each other. Extended family continues to have patriarchal hegemony where a man occupies higher status by gender based ascribed status and woman occupies a lower status because of being a woman. Domestic work is devalued in the patriarchal society therefore the respondents get help from their own gender.

Care of Children:

When a child falls sick, the question arises as to who of the two- father or mother shall take leave from work if need arises, since both of them are working. Here we observed different kind of responses as 50 percent respondents were teachers in school and other 50 percent respondents were college teachers.

It was found in the study that among the respondents, in 60% of cases it was both the husband and wife who shared the responsibility equally as the wife's profession was time demanding, her job did not involve much relaxation in performance of the duty, secondly in this profession she had to be always prepared for the class and devote lot of time in her workplace, due to this nature of job the sick- child is cared by both of them, in 20% cases mother-in-law and sometimes even daughter takes care of sick child and in rest 20% cases the respondents themselves looked after the child. Among these 20% cases many of the respondents were in the administrative field side of the job that involved much of desk job. But when we look at the response given by the school teachers, 60% of respondents themselves looked after sick child, in 6.6% cases some female relative helped them and rest 33.3% (both husband and wife) shared the responsibility. The difference in the data has a direct correlation with the nature of the job. The working hours of a college teacher are less than a school teacher, it is less tiring and less time intensive. But on the whole it is observed that in 40% cases it is the female who looks after the sick child whereas in 46% cases both husband and wife share the responsibility. The burden of child care in rest of the cases falls primarily on the mother-in-law and other female relatives. Some respondents revealed that the fathers leave no opportunity to remind the mother that the working status of a mother does not necessarily lead to a change in the role of a woman as a nurse and nurturer of children, and therefore whenever it is needed it should be a woman who should take leave from the work.

Traditional Image of Women

In a patriarchal culture masculinist definition of ideals and images of women,

which are not women's creations, they are not born out of their own experiences. The sociological perspective identified in the functional framework reserves instrumental functions for men and expressive functions for women. The psychological perspective views her as passive, masochistic and dependent. Marriage and motherhood are perceived and constructed realities and hence considered mandatory for fulfillment and identity formation. In this culture, marriage and motherhood are still dominating life goals for women but those who are single bear less social stigma now and there is an increasing number who endure this status. Most of the respondents 26(86.6%) opined that marriage and motherhood are compulsory for the formation of woman's identity. Woman is socialized in such a manner that she becomes naturally family oriented. Even in today's society it is expected from the mothers to prepare their daughters for marriage and motherhood, not for career.

Even today, a couple can do without a daughter but not without a son. Most of the respondents (96.6% or 29) felt that 'son is must', socially, economically and religiously. This is because a son is still considered the real heir who owns the property of his parents, perpetuate the line of descent, would look after the parents in the old age and also perform the rites-de-passage of the parents. Despite being highly educated and occupying prestigious office 93.3 percent of the respondents consider a female child to be an economic and social liability. There are valid ritual and economic reasons for sexism in Indian society. With negligible ritual significance a daughter normally is an unmitigated expense, someone who will never contribute to the family income and who upon marriage will take away a considerable part of her paternal family's fortune as her dowry.

Several factors are responsible for the growth of the emerging class of mothers or wives. The rise of consumer culture, global market and also hike in prices are the dominant phenomenon that has propelled and compelled the Indian women to come out of their homes and to marvel the art of weaving and balancing the work and family.

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