
**AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN
IN THE PAST 25 YEARS FROM BREAD-MAKERS TO BREAD-
WINNERS**

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ABSTRACT

The paper researches the various reasons that led to the upliftment of the social and economic status of women in the past 25 years and the extent of their contribution to the economic development of the country. It examines the various schemes set up by the Government of India for the development of women in professional spaces. The impact of such change on businesses and demands for certain goods and services is also discussed.

Keywords: Women, Economic Development, Bread-Maker to Bread-Winner, Equality

Research Question: An attempt will be made to understand the transition of women from passive housewives to active members of society and their increasingly prominent participation in the economic development of our country. Moreover, how this involvement in economic activities has led to the establishment of several mechanisms within the organisation and outside to support women in the workplace will be critically analyzed. The changes in the market demand for many goods due to this change will also be explored.

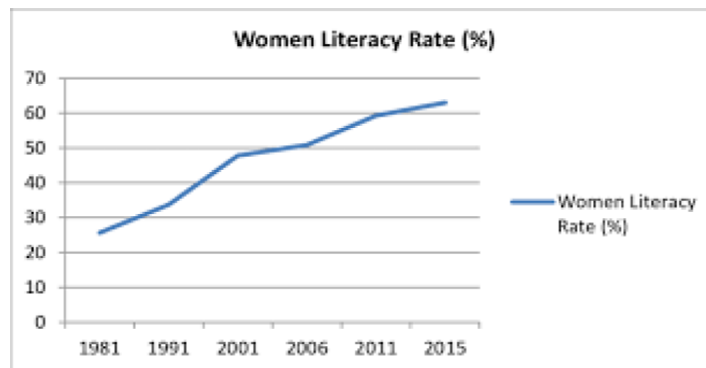
1. Introduction

As the literacy rate in the country increased, there was a shift in the mindset of people. Instead of regarding women as merely a source to produce children or work in the kitchen, they were looked at as underutilised manpower. The economy realised the possibility of increasing its productivity exponentially by just increasing investment in the education and health of women and encouraging women to transform from passive housewives to active members of society.

The usual in most places in the country before, and unfortunately even now, is that as girls reach a certain, which in most cases is alarmingly low, they must be 'married off'. This hasty process

was usually performed to maintain family pride or confer to existing social norms. However, as the outlook of people widened, women were encouraged to be independent and earn their own living. The literacy rate and primary education completion rate increased drastically as women began wanting greater freedom - socially and financially. This also increased the number of females in the workforce, increasing the productivity of several sectors.

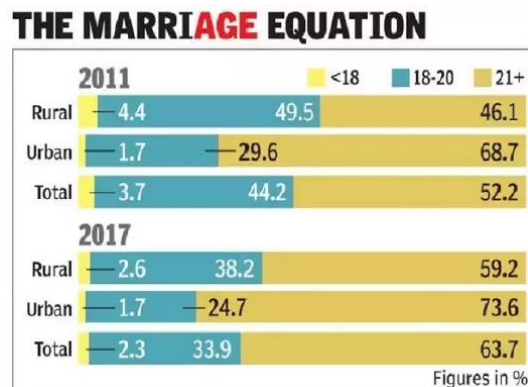
Fig 1: Increase in Literacy Rate of Women in India



Source: Tripathy, Biplab & Raha, Subhechya. (2019), A Comparative Analysis Between Women Work Participation And Literacy Rate In India

The latter half of the 20th century also witnessed a gradual rise in the average age of marriage among women and couples started bearing children at much later ages. This is both a cause and indicator of the increased time females have started devoting to the establishment and growth of their careers. As the expectation to get married and bear kids at the earliest has mellowed down, women are able to focus on their professional endeavours.

Fig 2: Increase in Age of Marriage for Women in India



Source: The Times of India

The advent of the 21st century brought several alterations in family life. Family sizes have started decreasing due to economic adversities, lower income levels, higher living costs, and the desire to maintain a better standard of living. These problems and aspirations can be addressed most effectively by building a small-sized family.

The urbanization of India resulted in a large proportion of the population migrating to urban cities in the last two decades. This has stabilized the nucleation of the traditional family structure as urban congestion and residential setups are incapable of supporting the existence of large households.

Hence, the concept of 'nuclear families' was popularized. There was a shift away from the traditional joint-family units, which comprised three or more generations, to nuclear families, which only consist of parents and their children. In this way, women are liberated from familial responsibilities such as taking care of all the children in the house or cooking for a large number of people. Contrastingly, the work that would have been distributed among many gets concentrated on 2 adults supporting everyone. With the male and the female in the family working, the financial burden on one person decreases, making it a much more peaceful and desirable setup.

Fig 3: Joint Family and Nuclear Families



Source: Google Images

Moreover, globalisation has accelerated the movement of not only goods and services but also people, from one country to another. In the expectation of better job opportunities, higher pay and enhanced standards of living, the skilled and educated labour move to developed countries.

Consequently, the primary decision-making authority that initially resided with the male member of the family started diminishing due to the better social and economic status of women.

In many cases, even the women become the primary ‘bread-winners’ in the family while the men adopt the role of a ‘house husband’, that is, he becomes dependent on the wife and has ultimately redefined the role of women in modern families.

2. Participation Of Women In Economic Development

The commercialization process, which opened markets in many emerging nations, has been successful in replacing the historical competitiveness in economic relationships with those of cooperation. The social structures of these nations came into confrontation with the main features of the new economic systems during this process. Opportunities in the job market play a significant role in determining the family's economic structure and the sexual division of labour within the family. The evolving economy of India has made it easier for women to leave behind their domestic duties and enter the workforce. A rising number of female family members are now involved in economic activities as a result of men's decreased capacity to be the sole breadwinner due to the growing demand for money for family maintenance.

Women who are working professionals have put in a lot of effort over the previous few decades with their talent, devotion, and excitement. They make a significant contribution to India's economic development and prosperity. India has 432 million women who are in the working age group at the moment, 343 million of whom labour in the unorganised sector. According to a McKinsey Global Institute analysis, India's GDP is set to increase by 770 billion US dollars by 2025 simply by providing equal opportunity for men and women. However, women continue to contribute only 18% of the GDP at the moment.

Fig 4: Women in Workplaces



Source : Google Images

Every day, women are achieving new milestones, even in rural India. Women have fought for their right to financial independence, started their own enterprises from scratch, and served as an inspiration to those around them despite social and familial marginalisation. In the panchayat system, women are given a 50% reservation, and numerous government initiatives, including the "National Rural Livelihood Mission," give them the opportunity to lead at the local level.

Government programmes like the "Swachh Bharat Mission" and the "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act" have opened supervisory job prospects for women in the workforce.

Fig 5: Women Working in Rural Areas



Source: Google Images

India currently has the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world and the third-largest unicorn community. However, only 10% of them have been led by women founders. More financial and mental assistance must be mobilised to help women entrepreneurs launch their businesses off the ground. Fortunately, there has been a paradigm shift in how women become business leaders and start firms during the past few years.

Keeping this progress in mind, there is also a huge flaw in the measurement of economic growth itself. It does not take into consideration the unpaid care work done by women in society.

Economist Jayati Ghosh in a podcast with the International Monetary Fund highlights the 5 R's to recognise work of such nature.

Fig 6: Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst



Source: Google Images

These 5 R's are -:

1. Recognise -

Recognise the care work and acknowledge its existence. Measure the amount of work in terms of time and effort.

2. Reduce -

Upon recognition, develop mechanisms to reduce this burden. Women spend countless hours collecting water in India. Introduce public policies that, for instance, allow for the delivery of water to every dwelling to minimise the extent of unpaid labour.

3. Redistribute -

This work then should be redistributed among other family members, private provisions and the public sector. Presently, 75% of unpaid care work is undertaken by women which must be delegated in order to ensure their participation in economic activities.

4. Reward -

Workers undertaking care jobs, paid or unpaid, should be rewarded for their time and efforts.

5. Represent -

Encourage unpaid care workers to find a voice and express their opinions and wants.

3. Government Initiatives

I. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

Launched by the Prime Minister of India on 22nd January 2015, this initiative guarantees the survival, safety, and education of girls. It intends to tackle the issue of unequal sex ratio in the country, raise social awareness, and improve the effectiveness of welfare benefits for girls.

Its objectives are -:

- Prevention of female infanticide and other methods of sex-selective elimination
- Safeguarding the survival and protection of the girl child
- Protecting survival and active involvement of the girl child

This scheme aims to ensure the survival of girl child for development into actively contributing members of the economy.

Fig 7: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme



Source: Google Images

II. Sexual Harassment Of Women At Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, And Redressal) Act

The POSH Act is legislation enacted by the Government of India in 2013 to address the issue of sexual harassment faced by women in the workplace. The Act aims to create a safe and conducive work environment for women and provide protection against sexual harassment.

All organizations (whether public or private) having 10 or more employees (whether permanent, temporary, ad-hoc, consultants, interns or contract workers irrespective of gender) are mandated under Law to comply with certain requirements laid down under the POSH Act. This Law also lays down the redressal mechanism wherein the aggrieved person can file a sexual harassment complaint with the Internal Committee of the organization.

III. Naari Shakti Puraskar

Initiated in the year 1999, the Naari Shakti Puraskar is the highest Civilian Honour for Women in India. The President confers this award on International Women's Day (8th March) annually. This carries a cash award of Rs.2 Lakh and a certificate for individuals and institutions.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national-level awards for individuals, groups, NGOs, or other institutions. The awards are given for:

- A. Encouraging women to participate in decision-making roles
- B. Recognising women in non-traditional sectors like science and technology, sports, art and culture concretely
- C. Promoting the safety and security, health and wellness, education, life skills development, respect and dignity of women in the society

Fig 8: Pooja Sharma receiving the Naari Shakti Puraskar for Remarkable Contribution to Skill Development and Empowerment of Women and Entrepreneurship



Source: Google Images

4. Market Impact

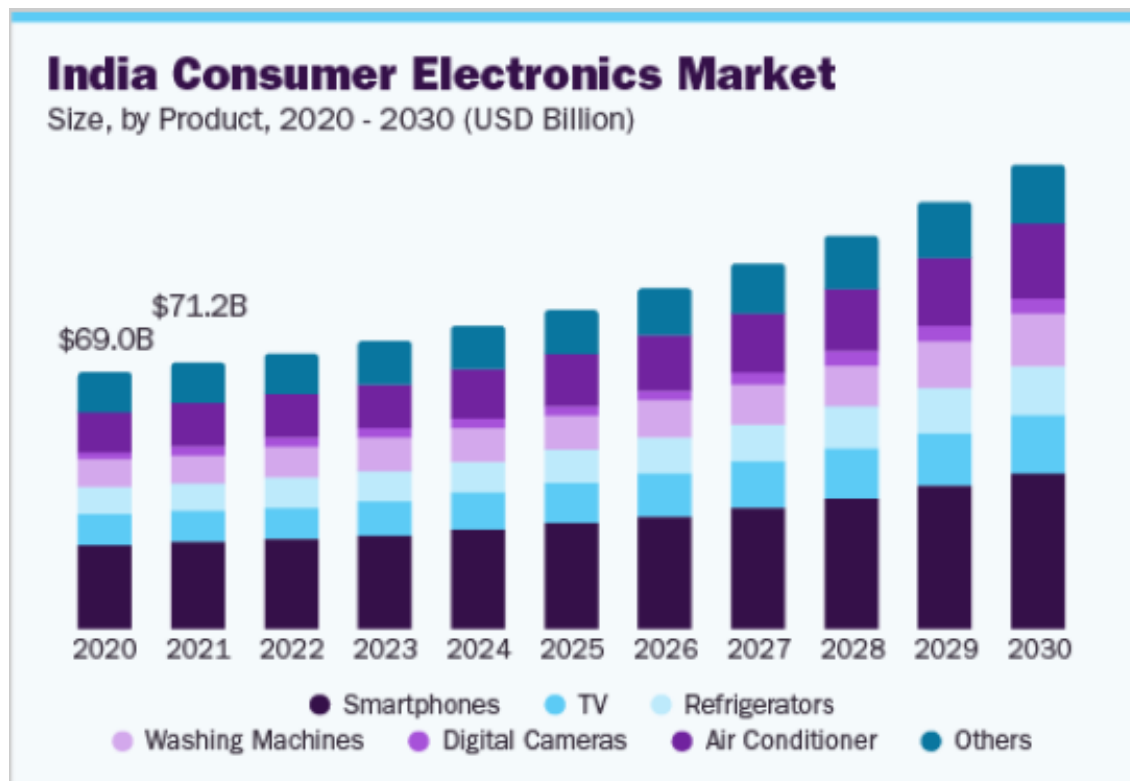
The business environment is a sum total of all individuals, institutions, and other forces that are outside the control of a business but impact its functioning. These can be economic, social, political, legal or technological changes.

The changing role of women is categorised as a social change. When women enter the workforce, the family structure, the internal functioning of organisations, demand for various products and the business environment as a whole undergo drastic changes. Some of these changes are highlighted below:

I. Demand For Electrical Appliances And Gadgets

The increasing incomes have led to an increased demand for consumer goods such as refrigerators, television sets, microwave ovens, washing machines, vacuum cleaners and other home appliances

Fig 9: Indian Consumer Trends for Electrical Appliances



Source: Grand View Research

II. Fashion Industry Trends

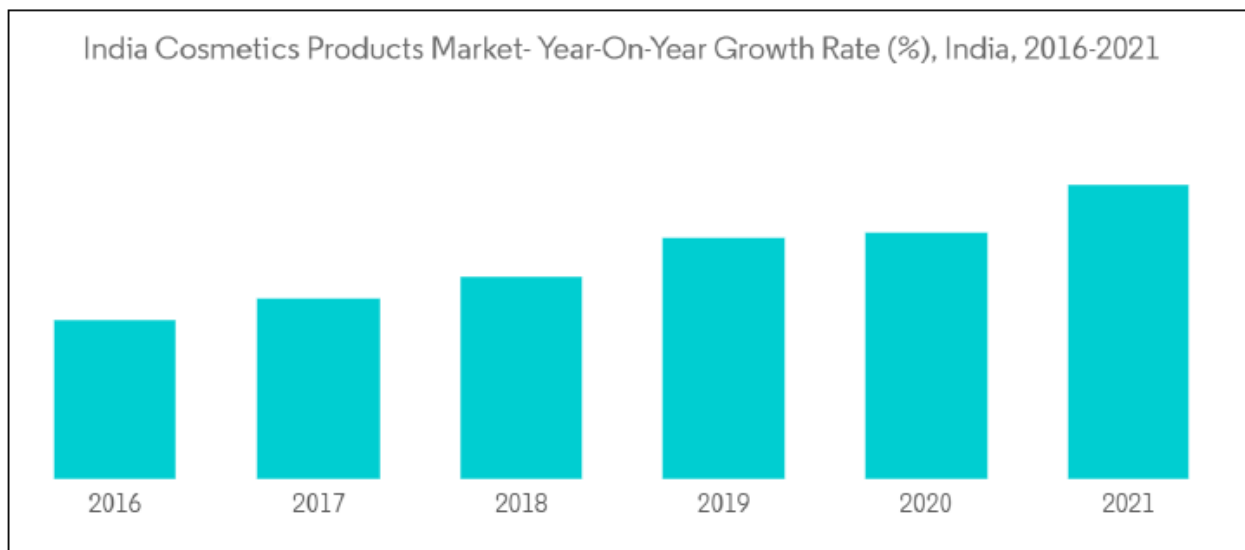
There is a shift in the tastes and preferences of women regarding clothes. From ethnic wear, the preference has shifted to universally acceptable formal wear. The working women demand for smart, readily available, durable and reasonably priced apparel.

Hence, all garment-producing companies have altered their production and styles to cater to changing requirements of their customers.

III. Demand For Cosmetics

With time, the range of cosmetics, skincare and beauty products has been widening to provide the luxury of choice to women. With better living standards, higher earning capacity and exposure to worldwide media, women have the opportunity to live a life of glamour and beauty.

Fig 10: Indian Cosmetics Products Market (2016-2021)



Source: Mordor Intelligence

IV. Food Habits

With an increase in the number of working women with varying food habits, there has been a drastic change in the food industry as well. Companies produce more packages and pre-cooked food to ease the cooking process for women. There is also a rise in tiffin centres to cater to the regular need for home-cooked meals for families. Food joints have also seen increased sales as families prefer eating outside the home after a tiring day to spend time with each other.

V. Demand For Vehicles

With multiple members of the family having to leave for work, there has been a rise in the sales of vehicles such as scooters, bikes and cars which are used by women to commute to work.

VI. Creches and Housemaids

As women need to step out of their homes for work, the responsibility of taking care of the children and elderly is passed onto caretaking institutions such as creches and daycare centres or to housemaids. Hence, their demand has increased, especially in urban areas.

5. Conclusion

There has been a phenomenal change in the role played by women in domestic and professional settings in the last 25 years as their status has changed from that of mere supporters of working men to working hand-in-hand with the male members of their family to earn and sustain the household. The Government of India has supported these efforts through various initiatives and schemes.

With this change in the social structure of the country, there are also considerable changes in consumption patterns and demands for various products. This has changed the business environment for many consumer goods and services such as electrical appliances, cosmetics, and caretaking services, among many others.

Although many advancements have been made by women to enhance their social status and attain financial independence, there is a long way to go still to ensure equality for women in the professional as well as the social structure.

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