

## **Reflection of Social Behavioral Pattern on the Inclusiveness of Women in Architecture**

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### **Abstract**

Traditionally, Architecture has been a male domain. Twenty-first century saw the changing relationship of gender and the built environment which became part of the conceptual framework of related professions and academia. Today more than 60% are girls in academia but women in professional practice is just 13-14%. They veer off to more feminine opportunities for developing their career. The decision to develop a career is often not a priority. Cultural norms continued to keep women domesticated. Women were asked to prioritize family life and their earning capacity was never appreciated. Instead their educational training and grooming was aimed only at making them better homemakers and mothers. She often gives up her intellectual and professional aspirations. Long hours of work, inability to deal with the demands of practice such as site visits, lack of aggressiveness and assertiveness among Indian women also influences their capacity to develop a successful practice. A survey was conducted with women architects on this issue. Survey also put multiple choices and opportunities for women to make them inclusive in the profession. The findings suggest to initiate conducive atmosphere with a revived and renewed options of allied services and a forum to sensitize the industry of probable danger of losing working hands.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Architecture is culture's physical expression, which creates, built environment considering setting of life, its various rituals and activities and self-expression. Social, political and economic forces and values shape the built environment and its form. Caste, community, region, ethnicity and other variables affect spatial interactions. Women form the primary focus to the discourse, since women face direct and indirect restrictions in terms of availability and access to space. The same impact is seen in women taking lesser interest in Architecture professional practice.

Traditionally, Architecture has been male dominated profession as it includes more of fieldwork and interaction with labor class and clients, consultants, builders etc are male. It was considered as male domain where women have no place to stand. But slowly women started taking formal architecture education. Slowly the number increased and by late seventies it was approximately 23%, which increased slowly, and later by late nineties increased to 40%. Today it is almost 45%.

Many parents in Indian society see the importance of educating girls to equip them to find a suitable match, to be socially supportive to the husband, to bring up children and perhaps participate in economic activities. The decision to develop a career is often not a priority. As, it depends on the attitude of the husband and the in-laws. In the past decade, a preference for the "professional" bride is on rise but this does not mean that the girls will be allowed to pursue a profession if it is "non-traditional", meaning barring professions like medicine, law, teaching, nursing, government jobs, etc. Cultural and social norms continued to keep women domesticated even though it was now possible for them to work outside the house. Women were asked to prioritize family life and their earning capacity was never appreciated. Instead their educational training and grooming was aimed only at making them better homemakers and mothers.

The professional undergraduate period of Architecture is long and a fresh graduate after a couple of years in job are pressurized by the family to settle down by getting married. After the marriage a woman's effort at developing a career may face number of obstacles. As years pass by, her confidence and skills as a professional suffer irreversibly. She often gives up her intellectual and professional aspirations. The Indian woman's identity is influenced by both tradition and modernity. A study by the Royal Institute of British Architects on the loss of women in architectural practice is that women make choice reluctantly; they love architecture and don't want to go.

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Feminism has been one of the significant social movements of the twentieth century. It has had a vast and far-reaching impact on society, changing its very fabric and creating new identities for women. In India the women's movement has affected both activism and scholarship in several fields such as health, literature, law, art, theater and human developments, in disciplines connected with the built environment. However, this lagged far behind in Indian context. Not much research has been done in the past. It's only from 1990 onwards that the research has become more interdisciplinary, bringing insights from other fields to bear on architectural studies. Thus, in the twenty first century, the relationship of gender and the built environment has increasingly formed part of the conceptual framework of related professions and academia. No matter what the location, feminist criticism and consciousness have played an important role in the design and use of the built environment.

In the post-independence era, Indian society underwent tremendous economic, technological, socio-cultural and political transformations. New work ethics, technology and lifestyles were introduced. There were new structural and institutional patterns generated by modernization. Family structures, household organizations and lifestyles also began to change and all this affected woman. A reduction in the number of children, the gradual acceptance of women's employment outside the home, the increase in nuclear families – all these began to make a difference. Education fueled a desire in women to improve their circumstances, enter the mainstream and gain recognition. But these were not widespread changes. By and large, women continued to be seen as caretakers of children and managers of household activities/resources. This period also became one of the transitions for women, Higher education for girls became widespread, at least in urban areas.

## **II. GENDERS IN EDUCATION AND ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION**

Women have progressed considerably in terms of education and schooling over the past few decades. Just 20 years ago, a smaller percentage of women than men aged 25 to 54 had a postsecondary education. Today, the situation is completely different. Education indicators show that women generally do better than men. This gap in favor of women is even noticeable at a young age, since girls often get better marks than boys in elementary and secondary school.

As well, more girls than boys earn their high school diploma within the expected timeframe and girls are less likely to drop out. More women than men enroll in college and university programs after completing their high school education. A greater percentage of women leave these programs with a diploma or degree. Despite all that, certain challenges persist: women's employment earnings are on average still lower than men's, even when they have the same education level.

Recent studies have demonstrated that, during their first years at school and even earlier, young girls do better than boys. At age 15, slight differences between boys and girls are also noticeable in the test results measuring various skills. Although girls do better than boys in reading, they do slightly less well in mathematics. We also see the same types of gaps within the adult population. In fact, in 2003, the last year for which data on the adult population are available, women aged 16 to 65 did better than men in comprehension and interpretation of prose. Thus, 40% of women were at the low level of competence in reading, compared with 44% of men (namely 4,227,800 women aged 16 to 65 at the low level of competence versus 4,698,600 men in the same age group). However, women did not fare as well as men did in numeracy.

*Architecture matters in the daily play of gender, and vice versa. A myriad of projects, research studies, and writings lends increasing insight to understanding the gendering of architecture in its many manifestations and doing something about it* (Ahrentzen, 2003, p.179)

Women in architecture have been documented for many centuries, as professional (or amateur) practitioners, educators and clients. Since architecture became organized as a profession in 1857, the number of women in architecture has been low. At the end of the 19th century, starting in Finland, certain schools of architecture in Europe began to admit women to their programs of study. Only in recent years have women begun to achieve wider recognition with several outstanding participants including two Pritzker prizewinners since the turn of the millennium. However, despite the fact that some 40% of architecture graduates in the western world are now women, not more than 12% are estimated to be practicing as licensed or registered architects.

## **III. REFLECTION OF SOCIAL ETIQUETTES**

Society is the community of people living in a particular country or region and having shared customs, laws, and organizations. Society is not the outcome of overnight process. In fact, it is the result of the beginning of the human race when realized that living in a group is safe and beneficial and when the number grew, the wiser men started with certain unwritten rules which were made compulsory for everyone to follow if they have to remain part of the group called as a society. There are certain unwritten rules that are expected to follow by the inmates of the society. Willingly or unwillingly members of the society abide by these rules and try to maintain the harmony. Over all these decades there have been many revolutions against some of these obligations but a person has to compromise on some of the factors even if he/she do not agree to that.

The influence of these unwritten rules is seen more on the weaker section. Women in all the parts of the globe irrespective of caste, creed, place, religion, culture has suffered on her personal identity. In India, traditionally Indian women are expected to be domicile and look after the family and keep her bounded by the set of rules formed under the heading of “culture and religion”. With the strong influence of this social binding, it is very difficult for a woman to carve a space and a place for herself.

20<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginning of woman education and liberation. And with great efforts of few revolutionary people, could succeed to force the society to recognize and accept girl’s education. 21<sup>st</sup> century saw major change in the picture a now we see girls excelling in academics. But, the apathy is, still today women failed to make their own identity in its true nature and are still under the shadow of male dominance. Financial independence though seen on paper, but reality check gives a different picture. Family, children are still the priority of women and often they career for the same. It is always the responsibility of a woman to keep her family above all. If husband is financially well off then girl is expected to sit at home and is not permitted to work for two reasons 1) no need on financial front and 2) his status does not permit her to work. If husband has a transferable job, then job with a private practicing architect is the only option. If the family is big and joint family then the responsibilities are so much that it is difficult for her to squeeze out the time for her passion / profession. These family bindings restrict her to take up a career.

Traditional upbringing has a huge impact on the mindset of people/society. A girl’s upbringing always tries to prepare her to serve her in laws in a best possible manner. Though educating girls is a priority with middle /upper middle class but career is still left with the husband and his families wishes. Sacrifice, adjustment, compromise, social bindings are the main ingredients of the thought process given to a girl child. Self-identity is asked to see in the identity of husband. Her whole life revolves around her husband and his family. All of this ultimately becomes ethical bindings for a girl. Before marriage a girl’s life shapes as per the wishes of parents and after marriage it is the husband who decides her course of life. A girl though a graduate is indirectly not allowed to take any decision on her own and do not expresses her wish. To abide by the family is **ethical binding**, which she is bounded by.

So, it is always this family and ethical bindings that automatically forces a girl to follow the framework of social binding. If she doesn’t follow this, she is termed as aggressive, indecent and revolutionary. In all the circumstances if a girl is fortunate enough to get all the backing to start her own office she is forced to negotiate her professional life with all these three main aspects of life—family, social and ethical bindings.

Women are better at time management and management in general always find out a way to balance her home and her profession. Many a times it is seen that women carry their babies to site to perform her job. This shows her commitment towards her work.

Commonly it is said and believed that architecture is a man’s domain but never it is understood and realized that they devote more time (not to bother on social, ethical and family bindings) and practice un interrupted throughout the life, whereas, women has to take breaks to for family planning and time constraints are more on her.

#### **IV. GENDER INEQUALITY**

The reflection of social behavioral pattern is reasoning behind an apparent lack of representation of women in senior roles and significant leadership positions in architectural practices. Women, and the concept of feminism in architecture, are sometimes overlooked or devalued, with reference to the implications of feminist movements and ideologies within the realm of professional architecture. The roles of gender differ from biological roles of the feminine and masculine, although they may overlap in nearly all societies and demarcate responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities access to resources decision making authority. These roles shift and evolve with changes in social, economic and technological revolutions. The distinction between sex and gender changes with social and cultural factors. Gender sensitive planning is a process of rational decision-making and calls for comprehensive information on the condition and position of women and men, thereby suggesting actions for transforming their current conditions and needs. This refers to conditions imposed on the individual by current practices, experiences and positions (in the home as well as in the workplace). It should be noted that information on the specific roles of individuals influences the direction of transformation. Further exploration can help individuals and professional bodies analyze and develop methods of intervention to increase gender equity. From this, plans can be developed to improve the positions and responsibilities of women within professional planning, design and architectural roles.

Female urban planners, designers, and architects face a series of provocative questions in relation to gender and planning spanning over the past 30 years. Although much of the gender values and theory encountered today is largely intended for an academic setting, and quite densely theoretical, many matters of feminist perspectives in design area accessible to a much wider audience. Specifically, the intention of this thesis project is to provide outcomes, answers, and suggestions, which could be useful to the participation of women in architectural practice.

Architectural practice is the combination of technological knowledge and business management.

To become a good professional, three basics are required *i.e.*, 1) knowledge 2) attitude, and 3) personality

- 1) Knowledge delivers the perfection in creating a design and details
- 2) Attitude gives self-confidence as manifestation by behavior
- 3) Personality gives a special edge to trust you with the project and give return value of the amount invested by the client.

Girls upbringing in Indian society do not help her to give the perfect atmosphere to understand and learn these qualities and as detailed here. It is quite evident that girls are forced to abide by social and ethical values which has an impeccable influence on family social behavior norms and which do not provide conducive environment for the inclusiveness of women architects in the profession.

It is high time that a thoughtful dialogue on the participation of feminism in design movements, social and family acceptance and architecture should be initiated. Architecture still is considered as a male domain and also there is wrong notion that the women have better flair in interiors and other jobs, (lighter in nature) are more suitable for ladies. There is hardly any major contribution of women architects in huge projects apart from housing colonies, hotels, etc.

Today there is no such area where ladies are not contributing on equal level. Right from auto rickshaw driver to electric engine driver to space shuttle flight, women have shown their talent, guts, strength, knowledge, sincerity and honesty towards work. They have scaled all the heights (literally) including Mount Everest. But, unfortunately the fact is percentage of women contribution in field-oriented profession is less. This state good for engineering, architecture, law, medical representative, real estates, etc.

There is a definite relationship between the four words – social, family, ethics and profession and has a tremendous impact on every individual as he/she is a part of the society. For almost everybody as a member of the society, is ware of the fact that women are referred as a weaker section and are domesticated and family comes first for women. But since they are given good education by parents, they intend to make their own identity and career but for most of them, time fails to make an impression and is restricted to small time job/work. Also, it is observed that they become more dependent on husbands or on all the matters including finance. Even though, women are financially earning, they are not financially independent.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

After carefully following the professional road map of women after their graduation, it is seen that they have tremendous will power but fails to convert that into an opportunity and make a career. Things become easy if they work, teamed up with husband or any other family member.

The study undertaken brought many issues in front that are related to women participation in Architectural Professional Practice. It is observed that our society has a bias way of upbringing a girl child and a boy child, is a known fact, but what is more interesting is that over a period of time we have developed certain systems at home which rules our reaction to any situation or event that arises at home. A boy is delegated with works that requires technique or power and softer works are delegated to a girl child. But, on the other hand equal opportunity of education (urban area) is given to a girl child and they excel in almost all the exams, as they are much sincerer towards studies. This is one big reason to see a greater number of girls taking up professional courses. But when it comes to life after graduation, parents, again go back to conservative mind of getting their daughter married in a well to do family. So, often girls are instructed to take up a career at a place which will be safe and will give good return in terms of remuneration. Very few parents motivate and help their daughters to start their office and settle down and then get marry, which ironically is true in case of boys.

Women are proved to be great at management but when it comes to setting up an office, little hesitation is observed and level of confidence also is on lower side. One of the reasons for this is seen in the fact that architecture education does not provide much of the practical knowledge needed for office setup. Also, traditional upbringing of a child does not give enough chances for a girl to develop her decision-making capacity (management or financial). Professional motivation at later stage of education, should be taken up as a part of syllabus or at least guest lectures from practicing architects should be arranged.

Confidence level is very high in girls but decision-making usually is left to parents. Almost all the girls are clueless on the course of action after graduation. Very few are decisive about what they want to do after graduation. Marriage within a year or two after graduation is one thing that they are sure about and hence do not think in terms of advancing to practice but utilize the time gap to learn more about the practical aspects of architecture by taking up a job with private practicing Architect. Unfortunately, after marriage husband's financial and social status decides the course of a girl's professional journey and so often it is also measured in terms of financial gains (job with private affirms do not offer much salary).

Lastly, the recommendations the researcher make in this section are by no means sufficient in addressing the myriad of trials and tribulations that professional women encounter on a day-to-day basis. They are merely indicative of some directions, which reform and education of feminist education can shift. It is

important to realize that fundamental shifts are not going to be achieved over a few years, but rather, allow women in planning, architecture and urban design to become conscious of the possibilities that they can help to create.

Women are part of the locality or the neighborhood or the area. They are important contributors to income, ecology, and demography, yet remain largely irrelevant to the analytic action. They reflect a group's social organization and culture, but they don't seem to be much involved in the process of creating it. Being a woman of substance (for that matter all the women fraternity) the researcher strongly recommends some changes in curriculum design and its application.

#### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Talent Mapping** program should be conducted at 7<sup>th</sup> semester level to judge a student his/her area of interest, capacity and capability.
2. **Training and thesis** should strictly be *based on the outcome* of this program.
3. **3 years written bond** to contribute to profession with compulsory attendance at Regional Level Conference— Regional Level Conferences should be promoted for two reasons— easy accessibility and knowledge upgradation on current technology. All this to be verified at renewal of registration with personal interview.
4. **Exploration of allied services** to architecture and promoting the same for women to help them to associate with the profession

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