

THE GLASS CEILING AND DOUBLE BURDEN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The academic debate on women, work and motherhood has expanded and evolved tremendously in last few decades. This debate is now focussed on the issues, concerns and perspectives of mothers regarding challenges and changes in their lives after motherhood and experiences as stay-at-home mother. Earlier the focus of the discourse was on the effects of labour force participation on the marital harmony, quality of mothering and child-care. Now the body of work on women, work and motherhood has been enriched with different dimensions of womens' lives like identity, self-actualization, experiences of motherhood other than economic freedom. In this paper I would like to examine motherhood and maternal employment dynamics and how it creates the glass ceiling for women with the responsibilities of care-giving and nurturing.

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Today we live in a globalized world where legally, women have been given equal rights but in student life itself the gender disparity becomes evident as young women have to cope with the double burden of studies and household duties. The boys are usually not handed over any domestic responsibility to shoulder as they are considered to be the future ‘bread-winners’ of the family. A stereotypical “masculine job” is expected of them. Hence, they are provided with all the opportunities and often unrestrained access to family resources. In societal perception, pursuing a career is considered an optional path for girls because getting married is still an obligatory ritual for the majority of them. Their education, career and dreams for future are entirely dependent on the family circumstances. Poor economic condition of the family, health problems, maternal mortality, even a failed crop or a monsoon is enough to put a full stop to their dreams. Even within normal families, parenting is still patriarchal since it does not prepare or train the male offsprings to shoulder the household duties especially the care-giving responsibilities. The reason for this apparent neglect is that care-giving, nurturing and offspring care are still considered a woman’s duty and such “feminine” tasks are less valued by the society. “Caring is part of the world of women”(Tarlow,1996). Though there is appreciable reason to rejoice when newspapers highlight girls outnumbering boys in secondary and senior secondary exam results, it is not surprising to discover that a significant majority of these girls have disappeared before college.

Young girls and boys complete their education and pursue their dreams with equal zeal, enthusiasm and level of efforts put in are almost same. Surprisingly as soon as girls complete the education, they are made to accept and internalize, irrespective of their ambition, family’s care is and will remain sole and primary concern and responsibility for them. Hence, they have to deal with dual responsibilities, firstly the demanding schedule of board exam and coaching for competitive examinations and along with that they have to acquire domestic skills too. They are honed to cook, clean and take care of family members’ needs. This differential socialization of young females surely enables them to multi-task in their later life. Visibility of successful career women motivates and propels young girls to, not leave any stone unturned to achieve their goals. But when the time comes to shoulder the family responsibilities the career graph of women starts to trail behind. Family responsibilities and motherhood takes its toll. Many of these women strategize to balance their personal and professional life. Fatherhood does not interfere on the path to professional success and men continue to climb the career ladder. On the other hand, with motherhood many successful women either stop working completely or take a long break or compromise on professional front and try for part-time job with flexible working hours. For women who decide to work full-time even after motherhood, taking care of the baby’s needs is considered to be her personal responsibility for which there is little or no family support and complete vacuum of institutional support. Life for them involves juggling and balancing of duties and conflicting demands of child-care and profession. On the contrary, familial duties especially child and elderly care do not create obstacles for men and thanks to differential socialization most of them do not confront or comprehend the dilemmas their life partners face as working women because “womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories”(Forcey,1994).

Equality, access and empowerment for women will continue to remain text-book concepts till society considers household chores women's prime duty. Times have changed but in most societies professionally ambitious women have to continuously juggle between professional and familial responsibilities.

In a changed world scenario where more and more women have made their presence felt into what were earlier considered typically male bastion. Consequently, it seems absolutely normal to see successful women doctors, entrepreneurs, political leaders, journalists, engineers, lawyers or even police officers. As if the doors of different professions and career options have been flung open for female work-force by the equality promised in the constitution. But when we see the picture in a holistic perspective, it depicts the struggle for equality is still incomplete as "we liberated women to be bread-winners, we left caregiving behind, valuing it less and less as a meaningful and important human endeavour."(Slaughter:UnfinishedBusiness:2015).As a consequence, women are left without any or few options, choices and social support. If they choose to work outside their home, in that situation ,women in question, have to either shoulder the care- giving responsibilities or make arrangements for these so called primary duties of theirs.Although, fathers of the current generation seem closer to their children but most of them still have the choice to share or not to share parenting responsibilities with their wives.Due to this differential socialization men inculcate this notion that nurturing and care- giving is the prime responsibility of women, hence there is no guilt for this non- cooperative behaviour. Moreover, socialization justifies this as a masculine behavioural pattern in the eyes of women. Internalization of accepted patterns of behaviour and values mould womens' thinking that familial roles always come first in their priority. They go through the pangs of guilt,self accusation, self pity and regret in case they are unable to fulfill their domestic responsibilities. There are instances where women have sacrificed their dreams, ambitions and aspirations to fulfill the family responsibilities. The socialization and dominant ideology of motherhood gets internalized during the crucial years of upbringing and later on.The role models, influential personalities and media etc glorify the patriarchal values and create ideal types for women and men that are stereotyped . These work so subtly that even well educated women tow the line. Slaughter's(2015) own experiences and confessions too reveal that she was painted as someone who just lacked the skill of balancing and juggling of work and family. Slaughter emphasises that discussion must take one step forward from the balancing skills of employed mothers to discrimination against care and care-giving. The need of the hour is to realize that we need a paradigm shift about care-giving skills as they are not natural and inborn. "Caring involves thoughtfulness, deliberation, and good judgement. It requires self-knowledge, adequate resources, and knowledge of the situation in which one cares. It requires that immediate needs to be balanced with long term needs, that those who care think through their priorities and resolve conflicting demands for care."(Tronto,1996). In the twenty first century society needs trained care-givers to enable mothers with young children to give the best of their potential to society .

The main argument of this paper is that motherhood ideology is the decisive factor in maternal labour force participation choices. Motherhood ideology is deeply rooted in the psyche of women and exerts enormous pressure on them. Frequently, this can be traced in the thought processes of these women. Most of the women including well educated ones are unable to overcome the negative feelings, depression, self pity and guilt despite giving their best at their workplace. For most of them ,even in the present century the recognition ,adulation, identity and

appreciation at the workplace does not seem to equalize the fulfillment they would have derived while performing their duties as mothers and wives.

The role of motherhood ideology and socialization matters. Intensive motherhood ideology reinforces the traditional gender-based division of labour (Fineman, 1995; Hartsock, 1998). On one hand, they affect the choices mothers make regarding their career and work, on the other men achieve, excel and thrive in the public spaces without getting affected by their role as father or their familial duties. These roles and responsibilities do not create hurdles for them. Their responsibility as a care-giver still tends to be peripheral which includes offering help just when it is convenient. Reason being the ideology of motherhood and family as institutions is deeply rooted in the ideology of patriarchy (Ferguson, 1989) and capitalism (Michaels, 1996). Even though women have made inroads into what were once considered male spaces, men have not accepted care-giving and parenting responsibilities in the same spirit.

Hattery points out that women explore the choices and options they have and then weigh the choices the other women have made before taking any decision. Media floats the views on mothering endorsed by different people from varying strata of society which includes icons of society, experts and common people's perspective on mothering in general. It reinforces the belief that juggling, balancing and interweaving motherhood and work or career is a private issue or the problem of women. Society views familial responsibilities and care-giving as an isolated problem and women are perceived as an axis on which life of the whole family revolves till that time women are unlikely to realize their optimum potential and become visible in public spaces. When women fail in this balancing act, they are judged by society and most often by other women. That is why, they tend to introspect the choices they have made and strategies they have devised to juggle and balance the home and work. This attitude of women creates a vicious circle which again reinforces the notion that balancing and weaving work and family is an individual problem and a personal responsibility of women.

The dominant ideology of motherhood in the society reflects and reinforces the belief that nurturing and caregiving is primarily a women's responsibility.

Parenting, nurturing and care-giving is an essential responsibility of women in the society if the family as an institution is to survive. This notion creates an invisible glass ceiling for women as it not only justifies this status quo but becomes an efficient tool of patriarchy. The family becomes a major site for this discrimination as differential socialization within the family gives grounds for it and rationalizes it in the eyes of women. Ann Snitow's question is very apt and relevant "To what extent is it a patriarchal construction that inevitably places mothers outside of the realm of the social, the changing, the active?" (1992, p.49). Then what is the way out of this problem? We need social engineering to alter this pattern to make women visible in the public spaces. This visibility can only be achieved by breaking this invisible glass ceiling. First and foremost, to tackle this problem we need to give greater importance and status to nurturing and care-giving in society. We must emphasize and put value on care as a profession. Society needs to have a change of perspective from belief that feminine care is all that is needed for effective parenting. Instead alternative substitutes can be employed to provide the caretaking be it for the children or the elderly. This will alter the thinking that women can effectively handle the children and elderly alone by providing viable structural supportive mechanisms such as care-giving institutions. This will not only create a trained workforce for care-giving but also create jobs for trained persons. New generation fathers need to participate actively in parenting

responsibilities to share the burden of these nurturing and caring duties equally with their wives. In addition to this change in traditional perspective of society, state needs to take care of structural part of it to eliminate the hurdles like affordable child and elderly care solutions, child-care leave for both the parents and child-care centres adjacent to workplace. As long as society views nurturing, caregiving and workplace tussles as personal, no attention will be paid to structural problems. Therborn emphasizes “as long as the links between home and work continue to be obscured by gender ideologies, women will not be able to resolve the dilemmas posed by gender inequality”(1980).

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