



Gender and the Work Force

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ABSTRACT

Through the ages, as in the 21st century, women have been strategizing dissent, its concerns and appeal varying according to world views. The world has been relatively sensitized to hierarchical positions that define women's everyday problems, the impact of which is visible in terms of changing gender dynamics through redefining problems that hitherto couldn't be labelled. Every day problems can simply be understood as recurring challenges that do not yet have a solution, and yet manage to be sufficiently grave to necessitate the immediate finding and implementation of solutions. This paper will look into support systems that ensure the secure mobility of women who at this point in time find themselves crippled during stated specificities of time (to roughly state between 7 pm to 6am) in a metropolitan city like Bangalore. The case study that is referred to in this paper to begin with involves the efforts of "Taxshe" in empowering women economically, psychologically and socially by both providing employment to the women cab drivers and secure transport to the mostly female passengers. The other case in point is the experiences that I had working with the "World Resource Institute" to quantify the relative safety of different areas in Bangalore through safety audits. These audits were uploaded on the mobile phone application called "Safetipin" built by a Delhi-based NGO called Jagori.

Key words: Gender, Taxshe, Safetipin

INTRODUCTION

The paper is an attempt to understand and reflect upon the necessity for women's empowerment and support systems which aid and propagate the same. "Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach the person to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." The paper aims at establishing guidelines for equality in work forces and hence strategizing efficient participation of women in work environments.

EMPOWERMENT

Every individual instinctively constructs a set of desires or objectives and aspires to translate them into reality. Each individual, irrespective of gender, deserves sufficient space and freedom to put their aspirations into action. Only when an individual's work-space has no restrictions with respect to accomplishing their targets and exploring their abilities, can one freely go about fulfilling their desires.

However, certain socio-political impositions on women hamper their sense of freedom. These restrictions which hold women back from taking active initiative to progress towards their

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objectives are the residual enforcements of patriarchy and hierarchy. This is the root cause for gender related inequality in a wide range of spaces- largely, work environments. The agency that one discusses through the course of this paper may range from moving beyond constricted mobility to security threats. In order to fill the vacuum left by the imbalance in work forces due to inequality between men and women, strategizing women's empowerment is more than ever necessary today. Redefining spaces and minimising possibilities of threat as discussed through the paper strengthens the process of translating women's aspirations into productive and constructive actions. Strategizing empowerment as discussed through this paper are nascent steps towards mediating gender disparity in turn redefining attitudes and mind-sets.

Empowerment is relatively defined by individuals. It is not only co-related to the mile-stone that the individual aspires to reach, but also to the intensity of the aspiration.

In the present day scenario, empowerment still comes with countless struggles. Several women still face unjustifiable hindrances in the process of being empowered. In sensitised work environments, women do not face difficulties with gender related power-plays. Yet in heterogeneous work places, where acceptance of women's empowerment comes into test, women still face several obstructions. Although there is considerable dissolution of gender-biased power-play, there are several elusive details and hindrances which make an inexplicable impact on women's consciousness and their drive to work.

Hence there is a need to establish self-sustaining and self-propagating systems for women's empowerment. This can be made more effective and efficient by following the three-step cycle discussed below:

STEP- 1:

WANTING TO BE EMPOWERED: A GOAL-SETTING PROCESS

Several women look at compromise as the most accessible solution to gender related power-play. They cater to the convenience of the accessibility of this solution, which couples with the inconvenience of non-fulfilment of their aspirations. But several others pioneer to break-through any limitations put forth. Such an attitude which steers women out of the inertia caused by restrictions is the first step towards empowerment. The initiative to have such an approach is the key to goal-directed actions. Empowerment should hence be a woman's choice and her strongest motivation. Therefore, wanting to be empowered is the first step.

STEP-2:

SUPPORT SYSTEMS: THE PILLARS OF EMPOWERMENT

Despite choosing to move a step closer to empowerment, women who choose to stand up for themselves independently are still vulnerable. Women are susceptible to several issues such as safety, employment, finance etc. Most gender-related issues can be tackled only when the society collectively works towards building reliable systems which can act as pillars to aid their growth. So, women's commitment towards empowerment must be supplemented by support systems.

Structures which provide practical and emotional support to women are prerequisites to aid women's empowerment. Support systems create, provide and enable opportunities for women to reach their aspired goals. Further, they protect women throughout their pursuit of success.

1. An ideological support system: Influence of family and community to support women

Reconditioning conventional mindsets sub-consciously enhance the work-drive of women. The following ideologies support women's growth at the grass-root level.

The Concept of Acceptance:
Favourable responses to women's liberation can catalyze empowerment. Each individual, at the levels of both- family and community, must accept the dissolution of patriarchal and male chauvinistic hierarchy, further giving way to redefine conventional gender roles. Acceptance of the fact that women too have every right to be treated equal to men is essential to ensure women's independence. Culturally defined gender roles which restrict women to households, must be deconstructed. Subtle criticism of women's career achievements and presumption of its connection with non-commitment to their personal lives has a huge negative impact on their minds. This criticism is observed to implant fear of success in a woman's mind. However, in reality, empowered women are liable to social evils like dowry system. Additionally, empowered women not only ensure quality education and growth of their children, but also pay attention to subtle aspects in their nurture. This improves rationality and sensitivity of the society with every generation. One must accept the fact that women must be allowed to unravel their acumen which is potent enough to revolutionize the society. Men must accept, contribute and complement a lot more in holding and appropriately shifting familial responsibilities.

2. An employment related support system: Decentralization of jobs to empower women

The typical social construct follows a set pattern of careers specific to each gender. Stereotypically, women are least expected to be seen anywhere other than home-making, clerical, nursing and teaching careers. However, this conformity has been erased to a large extent and women are seen succeeding equally well in corporate jobs and other organized sector jobs. In such large scale work areas, oppression of women is strictly kept in check. Nevertheless, women are still not seen employed and empowered in small scale and relatively disorganized work environments with currently male-dominated jobs like taxi-driving, labour work, plumbing, electrical work etc. De-marginalizing jobs for women is a fundamental strategy to empower them in every facet of the society. This allows greater exploration of women's abilities to work efficiently in a wide range of fields. In a society where we hardly find female taxi-drivers, Taxshe is a start-up which initiates such empowerment.

Case Study: Taxshe- Women as cab-drivers

An Interview of Mrs Vandana Suri, founder of Taxshe and Mrs Hemalatha, co founder of Taxshe

1. *What inspired you to begin Taxshe?* Every woman at one point of time in her life undergoes some kind of abuse. There's a lot of news about it and there are so many discussions about it. But each one waits for another to take initiative. We decided to come up with a practical solution for it. Our idea was hence to set up a company which had women drivers who catered to take care of our women, senior citizens and children.
2. *What does Taxshe do?* We provide women drivers for your cars to ensure safe travel of women, children and senior citizens around Bangalore.
3. *Do you have partners for Taxshe?* Yes. A few of them including Bimal Auto and Maruthi as our training partners
4. *What's the story behind the Kangaroo logo?* Kangaroo symbolizes strength and protection. So we call ourselves "Rooes" instead of drivers.

5. *Could you please tell us more about your "Rooes" or drivers?* Our Rooes undergo intensive training for driving skills, communication skills and self-defence strategies. We extensively cross check their background via police verifications.
6. *What are your personal experiences of Taxshe?* It gives us pride. It is beyond being a so called driver. It takes a lot of responsibility. It is unconventional; it is something new that is being done. I want to support these ladies. Someday, they may become franchisees or fleet operators. Taxshe is an entrepreneurial model.
7. *What are the challenges you face?* The inertia of women to come and do something different. Most of them still feel it is an unsafe job. We need to move beyond the typical "blue collared job" story in India.
8. *What are the aims of Taxshe?* We need to take a stand and we need to find a way about the way we live. That is the aim of Taxshe.

The story of RooSuman

<https://www.taxshe.com/roobies-3-a-big-overwhelming-thankyou-from-our-client-a-moment-of-pride/>

Taxshe is a start-up that has been bringing about confidence and independence at both ends-to the customer as well as the Roo. Such initiatives have liberated women working as Rooes from any mental blocks caused by hierarchical power-play. It helps these Rooes build an identity independently. This projects true empowerment of a woman. At the other end, it makes the female customers feel more secure and free, since they do not have to depend on others, essentially men, for everyday acts like travelling. This mode ensures independence and co-existence of women.

Taxshe also draws attention towards the various facets that the woman could offer being a driver hitherto defined as male prerogative. Jobs which are tagged insignificant can in fact make a huge difference because these jobs make demands of skill sets not readily available to all and security issues that threaten and render women immobile. Women-based start-ups and employment based support systems therefore throw light on the innate ability of a woman to challenge the world view in vogue. Such initiatives give space for empowerment in terms of employment.

3. A psychological support system: Widening the vicinity of safety to instil a sense of security amongst women

The increasing rate of abuses against women has brought in deep seated fear amongst women. They feel crippled to independently move around in the locality between 7pm and 6am. Familial hierarchy and power-play attacks this fear and is the reason for several restrictions imposed on women. This de-accelerates the advancement of women. Hence, psychological support systems are essential to steer away this fear and instil in them a sense of being secure.

Case study: Safetipin- Widening the vicinity of safety

An interview of KalpanaVishwanath- Co-founder, Safetipin:

- *Why did safetipin begin?* Most women, even in a city like New Delhi, find it threatening to use public transport especially in the evening. So we need a solution to fix the safety issue.
- *What is safetipin?* Safetipin is an app which is taking steps for women to feel safer in the city. It gives a safety score for different routes in the city. It also allows others to engage in the process of creating safety. Safetipin crowd-sources information about an

area. This is converted into a score which is based on nine parameters - lighting, openness, visibility, people density, security, walkpath, transportation in the area, gender and feeling. Additionally, photographs of the area are taken at night and the location is then rated to be safe, moderately safe or unsafe.

The 'My Safetipin' app will alert a person when she is in a place with a low safety score. She can then ask her friends or family to 'Stay with Me'. These friends can then track her location. Another feature of 'My Safetipin' is 'the safest route'. It shows the safest and alternate routes from one place to another. The person can then follow the route on Google Maps.

- *What is the aim of Safetipin?* When more and more people start involving in the issue of safety, it will begin to change the way people think and reflect in their behaviour. In this way it helps in making the city much safer.

Amidst the heating debate in the country to bring in laws which can cut down the rate of sexual violence, Safetipin is a practical and handy way to enhance safety for women. Such initiatives which address the most sensitive issue of the society, act as an inspiration for hundreds of women to confidently move around in the city during any time of the day. These support systems have a great significance since it ensures women's empowerment by providing space for safe mobility.

STEP-3

ROLE MODELS: BEING EACH OTHER'S STRENGTHS

Role models are a source of motivation to any individual. Empowered women with appreciable achievement must initiate motivating other women to work to their fullest potential. Women have to aspire to be like other women who are educated, independent, employed and have the power to choose their life-style. Women must inspire each other to achieve beyond presumed limitations.

This three-phased sequence further expands and propagates empowerment of women, thus continuing the cycle and exponentially increasing the pace of empowerment.

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