

# RELEGATION OF WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN ARCHITECTURE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The status of Indian women is being subjected to many changes over the time and always been the most debatable issue among the scholars. Participation of women in professional field not only talks about social justice but also focuses on the economic growth of any country. Although female architects has witnessed a positive transformation in the field of education and profession during last two decades but traditional framework of architectural education and profession is causing gender disparity at work place for females. The educated women are just on the threshold of transition from tradition to modernity. The dialogue at this moment is no longer about 'equality' but of recognizing the 'issues' and going beyond male/female duality*

*The study unfolds the issues and recommendations for the active participation of women in the field of Architecture. It also explores the need of pedagogical shift in exploring the role of women as creators of space with sustainable solutions that creates environment and empowers the woman architect along with their male counterparts.*

**Keywords:** *Gender disparity, Architectural education, pedagogical shift.*

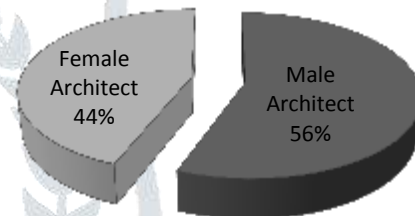
## BACKGROUND

The status of Indian women has witnessed various ups and downs from the time of prehistory. In Vedic period women education was prevalent and due importance was given to women intellectuals. The status of Indian women declined with the passage of time. During the medieval period, position of the women further deteriorated and gender inequality was at its peak. The British period witnessed rapid progress in breaking down prejudices against women education and revival of status of women. After independence several measures were taken by government of India to assign equal status to women in economic, political and social fields. The modern trends suggest more and more female participation in the growing technology sectors of India contributing significantly in the field of Politics, literature, art and so on but still barriers remain in pursuing their career in professional fields particularly in architecture which primarily combines intellectual rigor and practical skills.

## SCENARIO

Women have been closing the gender gap when it comes to education. Research shows 45.9 per cent of all enrolled undergraduate in India today are women. On the other hand, the labor force participation rate of women has been falling from 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 29 per cent in 2009-10. In 2011-2012, women comprised 14.7 per cent of all urban workers, a small increase from the 13.4 per cent in 1972-73. The architecture profession has long been dominated by men. This does not mean however that many women do not become architects. Women make up 25 to 50 percent of

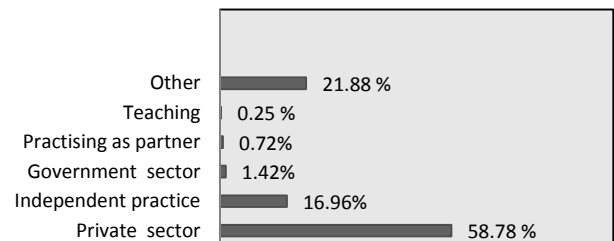
student population in architectural colleges and majorities of these women complete their degrees but question arises that why after they have completed their education women apparently leave the profession. However even today there are very few large practices where women are the sole principals, generally women opt to establish partnership firm with their male counterparts or diversify into some other roles. So they are much less visible in terms of leadership, academic success and excellence in practice. The situation is in strange paradox where architecture course is perceived as feminine profession with the assumptions that the girls will be able to work from office and also handle the home front. As the website reveals that around 61544 architects are registered with COA out of which 55.86% are male architect while remaining 44.14% are female professional.



Ratio of Male -Female architects as on 26.7.2017

Source: COA Website

The following statistics taken from the COA website gives clear image and substantiate less visibility of females in terms of leadership, academic success and in private practice



Employment statistics of female architects as on 26.7.2017

Source: COA Website

## KEY ASPECTS FOR ABSTENTION OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE:

Women in architecture have not yet developed a critical mass in professional practice due to the several reasons that might be socio-cultural, psychological, situational and traditional.

**Physiological:**

Question of talent: According to survey 83% of the women feel that being a woman may be disadvantaged in the field of architecture as they feel discriminated at work not only with their boss or male colleagues but from the clients too

Attitudinal: Lack of confidence & self-esteem is itself a major barrier which is the essential quality to get the desired success in the field

**Socio-cultural:**

Marriage: Most newly married women look for work from home options, change into less stressful work spaces or seek more manageable opportunities to keep their professional status intact after marriage. It is at times either a woman's own decision or the pressure of relocation or at times demands of her new family that make her look for more convenient and harmonious work options.

Work life balance: For women, the continued struggle between the role of mother and wife in the family affair, together with other domestic responsibilities seems particularly problematic even when the women concerned had opted for reduced working week.

Limited areas of work & working hours: As security is a major concern for females in India it is quite troublesome to manage the late working hours and precarious visits on fields.

**Situational:**

Family commitments, Lack of family support, living in isolated areas, unsupportive colleagues, and financial backup, social class are the key factors from the endless list which impacted the career of women in architecture. The career breaks arise due to these reasons often make women to struggle for restarting their career. It is common for the women in profession to feel they are not seriously taking upon reentering the work force after having a family



Source: Author

All the above mentioned constraints all together or solely apply to the majority of women professional but not true for each and every case and might vary according to level of education, age of women and local context

**EXIGENCY OF PARADIGM SHIFT: Unfolding the questions At Education level**

*Active participation of colleges:* Architecture colleges must facilitate expansion of female student's professional network through events, construction site exposure & social media and also provide general support and advice during the transition from graduates students to the practicing professionals.

*Mentoring & leadership strategies:* Mentoring in Architecture college can be a big tool to ensure an overall growth of female students so that they can develop self confidence and get geared up to start with the architecture career. In particular, offering mentoring arrangements with experts of architecture can help students to provide road map before developing their career

**At professional level**

*Flexible working policies:* Flexibility around working hours is a priority for many women, so workplace must be designed keeping females in mind. Employers must consider flexible approach towards policy implementation which ensures that these arrangements work for each individual, rather than blanket policy which may not be appropriate for some staff.

*Work experience consideration:* In today's cut-throat world of job market, finding the right job is a nightmare. In such a scenario, women considering to return to work after a career break could be a daunting task hence a chance of considering their old experience and understanding the value of their experience gained during their workforce will be a great tool for attracting and engaging women to return to the field.

*Family friendly industry:* Female professionals expect their employer to have policies to help their female staff to achieve a balance between work and family life. Architecture industry must have well documented policies regarding maternity, Daycare, childcare, and other social liabilities etc.

*Government Initiatives* In this regard, the government must support to fill the gender gap in field of architecture by adopting policies like as providing incentives to the companies ensuring equal gender ratio in employment and having female architect as project head. Reservation policy for women may be implemented during the tender bid of the projects.

**CONCLUSION**

This article discusses the current scenario and traditional framework of architectural education and professional exposure of females of India. It advocates the remodeling of institutional frameworks and realigning of the curriculum. There is a need for a pedagogical shift in exploring the role of women as creators of space. On a positive note that despite the overwhelming obstacles that they face in the profession, women are working hard to gain recognition and respect in the field of Architecture. The question at this moment is no longer about 'equality' but of recognizing the 'issues' and going beyond male/female duality. Thus, the challenge is to make sustainable solutions that create environment that empowers the woman architect along with their male counterparts and make the discipline more democratic as well as diversified in the true sense.

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