

Changing role of women in the uae



Women have been and are playing a vital role in developing their families for a long time. During the times of pre-historic periods, women have played an important role as bread owners and hence they assumed a definite cultural role. Evidences say that in the periods of Hunter-gatherer, women used to collect food while men used to go hunting.

During the recent history, the role of women has changed to a great extent. Due to the modern changes like the economic reforms, feminist movements and the demands for equal opportunities, women in many parts of the world have right of entry to careers apart from the role of traditional homemaker. In these modern days, women started to gain power equivalent to men which was not there in the past days. In spite of this, a few people could not recognize women as a power and as an agent, who brings change in the society, may be due to the traditional beliefs or due to the fear of loss of power and authority over women. Not only do men have a fear of women empowerment, but studies say that women at work places are less encouraging towards their gendered (women). Apart from this, in many parts of the world, including the developed countries, women are paid less when compared to their peers in the male gender. This critical role of women in every field they are in is due to the fact that they are capable of multi-tasking i. e. doing more than one job at a time with more care and accuracy which men can hardly do.

Background/Context

Many believe that nonexistence of gender socialization would not exist at all. The list of top ten world's most powerful people would contain the name of at least a woman personality constantly through years. Many renowned

awards were designed and were won by the women in UAE which indicates the growing awareness about women's role for the society.

History says that the role of women have been of utmost importance in the society. As men used to go out doing their jobs in the fishing and pearling industries for months, women used to take care of the needs of family besides raising their children, which cannot be denied to be an easy task in the hot desert weather. But, due to difference in the work done and a few other aspects, women were rarely treated at par with men. (Wilson)

Issue

Nowadays, with the recognition of women as a key person in the development, this face has changed to completely opposite. Women are making a significant progress towards better participation in events at both national level and also at local levels. A most significant achievement was during the time of elections in 2007 in which 22% of the seats were occupied by women. Presently, nine women among them are the members of the body of 40-members. Also, half of this strength is appointed which gives UAE a far superior degree of representation of women in the legislature than any other nations in the Gulf.

Pre-Arguments

Women of the Emirates have performed a key role in the modernizations processes through their participation in the women's associations throughout the country. These associations have laid stones to train the women in vocational courses, welfare assistance, placements and also in health care sector. Women of the Emirates are found in significant number in the five

detailed economic industries, some details; females make up 20% of the public segment. Women outstandingly hold positions in the Education sector and also in the government with 30% women playing key decision-making roles.

Not just in the field of job market, but UAE women also seem to have entered the education sector with the fact that the total enrollment of the female students in the higher education has grown to 40%.

Apart from the above discussed facts about women in UAE which portray a growing trend of female empowerment in different aspects, there are areas in which women lag behind men which are to be concentrated upon. The healthy trend observed in education doesn't seem to be visible in the participation of women in the economy which stands at a mere 7%. A study at the global level on entrepreneurs proved that the participation of female entrepreneurs in the economy of UAE is extremely low when compared to men and women in other countries; let it be a startup company or an established firm. The women in UAE comprise of only a mere 4% in the private sector and they are mostly in the private financial companies. The female established industries contain of only 16. 2% of the total net GDP in the Non-oil sector. (Women in United Arab Emirates, 2010)

If the number of unemployed women is compared to the number of unemployed men, women stand at a higher figure of 71% and men are at 29. Efforts should be done to improve these numbers in order to see complete development in every field. Women also are active in the military

establishment. Specially trained women cops would provide security to the female VIPs and also take part in the military activities.

Discussion

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The government of United Arab Emirates has tried to improve the roles played by women in the recent past. This made the UAE a leader for rights of women in the Arabian Countries. Before the discovery of oil in 1960, there were a very less number of opportunities for women in the country outside their home and family. As per the constitution, equality for women on par with men is guaranteed including the areas like legal status, title claims and even in access to the education. The stepping stones for women empowerment were laid by the then President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan's wife Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak. She was the founder of General Women's Union (GWU) which still stands as a powerful component of State and in participation in the various initiatives of the organization. (Salama, 2008)

The leaders of Emirates have keenly tried to promote the complete participation of the women in society activities, aligned with the objectives of optimizing the human resources. Not only did the government take steps to improve the condition of women in the UAE but also, there were associations formed which work autonomously for the improvement of life of women. Not only operating in their circles, but the six existing women associations were joined together to expand their reach to the public more and more and to provide more services to women.

The government has launched a new statute of law under which, new laws would be incorporated on issues related to protecting women and also to provide family guidance, divorce issues and compensation, etc. The UAE government has also signed agreements internationally to specific issues related to the women and children welfare. United Arab Emirates was the first country to establish a college for women army recruits among the Gulf countries. The Dubai Women and Children Shelter started by the government to protect women and children from domestic violence they face every day. Under this project, support and emotional care would be provided to the sufferers of abuse and crimes such as human trafficking. The government has launched many projects and awards for women to encourage them and make their role known to everyone. Example can be taken about the Intelaq project which aims at increasing the participation of women in the government departments. Because of these new initiatives, the government has offered women, the jobs that are reserved for men like the appointment of Fatima Saeed Obaid Al Awani as the country's first female marriage registrar. (Salama, 2008)

As a result of all the initiatives and projects, United Arab Emirates was ranked at 29th position among the 177 countries for Gender Empowerment Measures which is the best rating any country in the Arab World has received. Along with this, the Chairperson of the GWU, Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak was awarded with the Mohammad Medal, the highest honor given by the UN. (Women in the UAE, 2010)

CHALLENGES WOMEN EMPOWERMENT FACES:

Even after witnessing such a progress regarding the women empowerment and their participation in different activities related to development of the society, still they face discrimination and there are forces which try to stop this progress of women. The major rejection is from the male folks who cannot see women going ahead of them. Even as UAE has the highest number of women representation in the parliament, there are issues and challenges to be dealt with to completely eradicate the evil against women development. The government has taken appreciable steps and established applauding projects; progress of women is still facing problems in the private sector. The employment representation of women in the private sector is very less when compared to the strength of the male employees.

Tradition and culture is another threat to the women development. The cultural and traditional factors impact every aspect related to the society. People with more traditional beliefs perceive that the development of women would trade-off the values and ethics being followed for many centuries and this would halt the progress of women. Women are meant to be good decision makers and can handle multiple tasks at a time where as men cannot. Women are known for their patience, strong analytical skills and dedication towards work which would bring them far ahead of the male employees. This fear of overpower and dominance by a female is a main cause why women cannot progress in the society. (Ioannidis)

Harassment of women at the work place is another factor due to which the progress stops at the beginning that is women fear to enter into the male dominated world fearing harassment.

Lack of funds and support is another reason why women entrepreneurs cannot do well in the market. Even after having a good idea and plan to start up the business, women can rarely progress in the market due to lack of available funds or due to lack of support from their colleagues. According to a recent research, the progress of a woman can be endangered by another woman if not by a male peer. Women employers rarely encourage their female subordinates to progress fearing dominance by their subordinates at some point and this clearly is another main obstruction to the women empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

From the discussion above, it is clearly evidential that the women are progressing in the path of empowerment and also it is made clear that the government has recognized the role of women in improving the society and her family. Women are known for making decisions in the right way at times of stake. The UAE has also been seeing a great amount of progress in this area: The women literacy rate has gone up to 90% in 2007; Increased number of women enrolled for the higher education when compared to men (24% more than men); Every five students have three female children in higher education; Women are 66% consisted in the government sector jobs; Women entering into crucial areas like the military, air force and police are a few important achievements apart from many others made in the UAE towards women empowerment. This process of empowering women is a continuous and never ending path in which every step taken towards attaining women empowerment would certainly earn the country and the society a lot.

While the above discussion states that women empowerment is a necessary for development of any country, there are also few factors that bar the progress of women and hence that of the country. Those are to be dealt with utmost focus and attention. The government should try to launch more programs in order to encourage female participation in the arts, culture and other social activities. It is also beneficial if the government provides all kind of monetary or mental support needed for female entrepreneurs which would benefit in attaining more development. Women in UAE are into the fields of army, police and air-force which were perceived as only male oriented areas earlier. This shows that with proper amount of training and guidance, women can perform well even in shop-floor related jobs. Women can be provided coaching in work related issues and also they can be educated regarding the traditions and culture so that the culture which is being followed from centuries would not get affected and also there would be development.

From all the discussion above, it can be concluded that women are key role players in the development of any economy and an economy which gives a considerable amount of importance to this would definitely see progress towards success and development of the society as a whole. Also, it can be said that with proper care and education methods, the traditions wouldn't get disturbed and so is the progress of a country.