

# Contrast womens position in the mauritian sociology essay



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There has been a marked change for the better in our overall approach towards the women in Mauritius. Gone are the days when their place was considered to be behind the four walls of the house and their only job was confined to looking after the household affairs. But now they can be seen working shoulder to shoulder with men in every sphere of life. This is undoubtedly a good sign and an indication of their emancipation. It is a known fact that women have played an active role in the economic development of Mauritius since its independence in 1968.

In the period 1983-2001 the number of women in full-time employment rose by 81 per cent, from 93, 000 to 168, 700. Women now represent 51 per cent of the population (608, 458 out of a total population of 1, 205, 665) and 35 per cent of the labour force (186, 400 out of 538, 500). The share of women in total employment stands at 34 per cent in 2001, up from 23 per cent in 1972. As in most developing countries, women's increased economic importance has been the result of a gradual process of change and not an explicit policy focus. But it is important to stress that since ratifying the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984, the Mauritian Government has undertaken a number of significant legal reforms to remove all instances of discrimination against women in Mauritian law. However, while the economic empowerment of women has known significant progress over the decades, there is still a long way to go to raise their standard of living to be at par with that of their male counterparts in the work sector.

## **Women in the Mauritian's public and private sector**

Women still have to strive to be at the same level of their male counterparts in the Mauritian public and private work sector. According to Central Statistical Office, employment in the General Government Sector decreased by about 500 from 74 300 (52, 100 males, 22, 200 females) in March 2006 to about 73 800 (51 200 males, 22 600 females) in March 2007. Three out of four persons employed in General Government were males. Male workers were predominant in all activity groups, except in " Real estate, renting and business services" where the female employees accounted for 66 percent of the total employment in the activity. It is to be noted that female employment in " Public administration and defence; compulsory social security", " Education" and " Health and social work" together accounted for around 96 percent of total female employment in General Government.

## **Employment by Ministry/Department and gender in the General Government, March 2007**

### **Government Services**

#### **Male**

#### **Female**

#### **Total**

Budgetary Central Government

37 367

16 975

54 342

Office of the President, Judicial and National Assembly

503

245

748

Prime Minister's Office

12 465

1, 033

13 498

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade

157

169

326

Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries

220

242

462

Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources

5765

5811

11576

Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment

276

233

509

This table show that the majority of public jobs are being allocated to males rather than their females counterparts, hence, perpetuating the notion of gender inequality in the public work sector.

In the private arena too, the scene is more or less the same. Men are the more preferred employees and dominate almost all the spheres of work. Occupation-wise, women are largely confined to low level, low paid jobs, such as machine operators in the EPZ enterprises, clerk, typists and shop assistants. Nearly 60 per cent of women work in the manufacturing sector, of whom 91 per cent in the textile factories. 75, 000 employees in the private sector earn less than Rs 5000. 75 per cent of them are women. Only 14 per cent (or one in seven) of women in full-time paid employment in the private sector hold senior management or professional posts.

Despite the positive developments that had taken place in Mauritius in this modern era with respect to the increase in women's employment, the

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promotion of their human rights and their economic independence, this inequality between man and woman in the labour force still insists although we are all now talking about combating gender inequality. For example women are more likely to be employed in jobs like sales girls, clerks, assistant, speakers, whereas on the other hand, jobs with big positions and which require leadership skills such as ministers, managers, engineers, doctors, lawyers are mostly reserved for men. Why is it so? The statistics are showing us that girls are outperforming boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education. How come they are not allocated the big post public or private jobs in the country. This is the question that renders us perplexed. Women continue to aspire for leadership positions in all spheres of governance in both the public and private sector. However it has not been easy we can say.

Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today. Although the number of female leaders has increased, they are often named as an afterthought. This belief that men lead and women follow is so impregnated in the Mauritian mind that the second sex though intelligent are being deprived of many facilities in the workforce. They are not treated fairly as their male counterparts in the work setting. Despite efforts made to ensure that female representation is achieved at all levels of governance, women are still underrepresented in many government and non-government organizations particularly in positions of power and leadership (de la Rey, 2005).

From statistics presented by Sadie (2005) on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) parliamentary structures, it is evident that the target of 30% representation by women in political and decision-making structures of member states was not met, except in South Africa and Mozambique. For instance, by 2004 the proportion of women in parliament was 15.4% in Angola, 15.9% in Botswana, 12% in Lesotho, 14.4% in Malawi, 17.14% in Mauritius, 25% in Namibia, and while South Africa and Mozambique had 32.8% and 37.2% respectively. Great strides have been made in the political realm, and women's participation in both the freedom struggles and democratic processes of many African countries including Mauritius have been notable. However, this participation has not always translated into equal representation in political leadership positions. Once elections are conducted, and positions are assigned, one realizes that women are no longer visible, thus, we can notice that in politics, women have been marginalized because men monopolize the decision making structures and are in the majority.

Moreover, in education and academic circles too, the picture is more distressing especially if one looks at higher education. One would expect that things would change faster in this environment. After all, as Carleene Dei (2006) observed, universities are traditionally viewed as centres of free thought, change and human development. But leadership in higher education is still a man's world and universities are male dominated institutions. Men also dominated positions at professorial and senior lecturer positions. It is therefore quite evident that men dominate the governance and management levels of higher education institutions. Consequently, men

have the decision-making power and authority regarding strategic direction, and allocation of resources.

Various factors are at work in limiting women's potential to aspire to positions of leadership both in the public and private sector. Sadie (2005) advanced the argument that women face the patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the hands of males. Despite women's education and entry into the job market, the woman's role is typically one of homemaker. The man, on the other hand, is bread winner, head of household and has a right to public life . Confining women's identity to the domestic sphere is one of the barriers to women's entry into politics. The media too has a major part in influencing and perpetuating the second sex as being inferior. For example, they always portray women to be sensitive, calm, caring, looking after children and men as being assertive, courageous, and valiant. Thus, it is not surprising to see men dominating the work arena. The table below shows that all types of public and private jobs are mostly suited to men rather than female. Women dominate in the clerical sector only.

### **Employment by occupational group and sex, 2009**

However, despite inequality prevailing, there are some women who were able to transcend cultural barriers, stereotypes and rise to positions of leadership (whether in politics or elsewhere), such as Margaret Thatcher, Sonia Gandhi, Julia Gillard. But these are exceptions and exceptions do not make the rule! In fact, it has been argued that women themselves are often reluctant to run for public positions and this is partly attributed to cultural prohibitions on women speaking in public or going to public places. Political

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campaigning for instance, requires that one travel extensively, spend nights away from home, go into bars, and for women it means meeting men.

Women who struggle for public office have to consider the risk of being labelled ' loose' or ' unfit' as mothers and wives, and being socially stigmatized. Such considerations make many women shy away from politics, and positions that put them in the public eye.

Furthermore, in other public and private arenas also, women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping. Women are more or less persecuted for seeking an executive position. This is largely due to society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles. Women have to face the sticky floor, preventing them to get access to the high position jobs. In fact, the recruitment processing itself is discriminating women. For instance, in the private sector, the manager will choose a married man employer rather than a married woman in the recruitment process. Since they all have the prejudices that women can fall pregnant at anytime, they will have to take maternity leaves, thus, hampering the productivity of the company during their absences. Therefore, with a male worker, there is no such problem. Hence, men are more favoured and are more likely to be recruited.

### **Comparison of salary in the public v/s private sector**

If the public service, decrying those at the top of the wage scale are worse off compared to the private sector, in the private sector, it insists that the preservation of jobs is more important than salary increases that might putting the company at risk. In the private sector, employees whether men

or women are better paid than in the public sphere. The table below shows this evidence. Its source is from MEF.

## **Types of jobs**

### **Public sector**

#### **Private sector**

Receptionist / Telephonist

Between Rs 8400 and Rs 16000

Between Rs 5, 000 and Rs 28, 210

Human Resource Officer

Between Rs 17, 200 and Rs 26, 400

Between Rs 15, 358 and Rs 41, 420

Secretary

Between Rs 9600 and Rs 21400

Between Rs 10, 167 and Rs 29, 434

Human resource manager

Between Rs31, 250 and Rs 45, 000

Between Rs 35, 000 and Rs 94, 600

Civil Engineering

Between Rs 22, 000 and Rs 45, 000

Between Rs 20, 375 and Rs 65, 300

General worker

Between Rs 6, 425 and Rs 10, 200

Between Rs 6, 205 and Rs 18, 300

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Women continue to enter the workplace in increasing numbers in all developed countries. Several factors account for this trend. An increasing number of economies have become industrialized, the service sector has grown opening up positions for women, and growth in public and not-for profit sectors have created new opportunities for women. However, the pace of advancement for women in the top position jobs continues to be slow and uneven in different countries and cultures. Women still cannot crack the marble ceiling and are thus at a disadvantage despite they possess lots of skills and aptitudes. Educational institutions can help by teaching the equality of the sexes through lessons. Further, the family too should not be biased and give the same kind of upbringing to the sons and daughters. Boys should be made to help in the domestic chores as much as the girls. The mass media should also project the picture of the women as an equal with the same desires, ambitions and intelligence. True liberation of women is possible only when our overall attitude is changed!