

Women and Changing Social Values In India: Findings from the World Values Survey

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This paper attempts to map the changing perceptions and attitudes of women in India to critical social questions. The data emerging from the World Values Survey — a study done in more than 82 societies and more specifically the India component of the World Values Survey is analysed and relevant conclusions drawn. The study attempts to compare the attitude and perception of women in India with those across the world. Further, the attitude of women in India is compared with those of men in the country. Finally the study identifies the major areas of difference in perception among women when different social groups and other social variables are taken into account.

Keywords and Phrases: World Values.

Several studies have focused on the changing role of women in modern societies in general and in the Indian context in particular. The debate has often focused on the diverse strategies of empowerment that have been adopted with varying degrees of success in a variety of social, political and cultural contexts.

Most studies have begun with the premise that empowerment was about ushering in meaningful and

significant social transformation (Bagchi 1995; Devasia 1994; Everett 1979; Gupta 1995; Kaushik 1993; Mohanty 2000; Narasimhan 1999; Pillai 1995; Sonalkar 1999.) More importantly the discourse on women's empowerment should be a narrative about ordinary women — who faced social, economic and cultural disadvantages. Above all, it is about power. Power is, beyond the shadow of doubt, at the root of any strategy or effort to promote, ensure and engage with issues of empowerment.

It is in this framework that this paper attempts to tread an alternative and possibly less fashionable route to negotiate issues linked to understanding the changing 'world views' of women in India by focusing attention on a select range of issues. The World Values Survey provides a window of opportunity to measure popular perception on important social variables. The World Values Survey is a worldwide investigation of social, cultural and political change. Representative national surveys of the basic values and beliefs of publics in more than 82 societies on all six inhabited continents, containing almost 90 per cent of the world's population¹.

The India component of the survey was completed in 2002². As the paper attempts to draw certain inferences from the India survey, a note on the methodology adopted would be relevant and is appended³.

The World Values Survey Questionnaire has a wide range of questions that tap the social values and preferences of society. In this paper, the response of women respondents specifically in India to five selected questions are analysed in depth. These questions were selected as they help assess a wide range of important social indicators and are specifically relevant in the context of developments in Indian society. These questions are: a) When job are scarce men should have more rights to a job than a woman; b) A women needs to have children

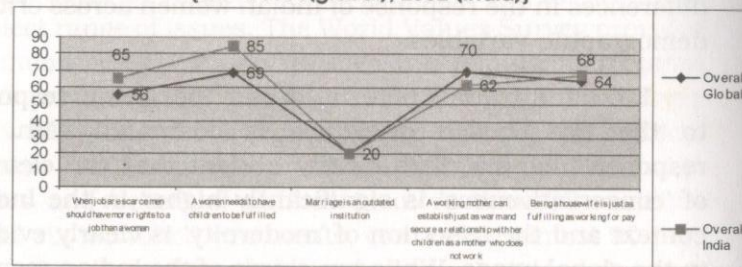
to be fulfilled; c) Marriage is an outdated institution; d) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work; and e) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay. The analysis has been undertaken at multiple levels. In the first place, the response of women in general in India is analysed in the backdrop of the overall response of all those interviewed in India. At the next level, the global response to these questions is compared to the response of those from India. The response of women across the world is also compared with the response of women specifically in India. Finally, the paper attempts to study whether there are significant differences in the response of Indian women across critical demographic variables.

First the overall picture. When the global response to the five chosen questions is compared with the response in India, it is clearly evident that the element of 'conservativeness' is significantly higher in the Indian context and the assertion of 'modernity' is clearly evident in the global image. While two-thirds of the Indian respondents endorsed the comment that when job are scarce men should have more rights to a job than a woman. Globally, a little over half the respondents supported this stand.

Nearly seventy percent of the respondents across the world felt that a women needs to have children to be fulfilled. In India, the percentage who supported this stand was significantly higher — crossing eighty five per cent. More than seven out of every ten global respondents asserted that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. In India, the percentage who supported this stand was a clear eight percentage points less. There was a four percentage point difference in the response in India and across the world on the question

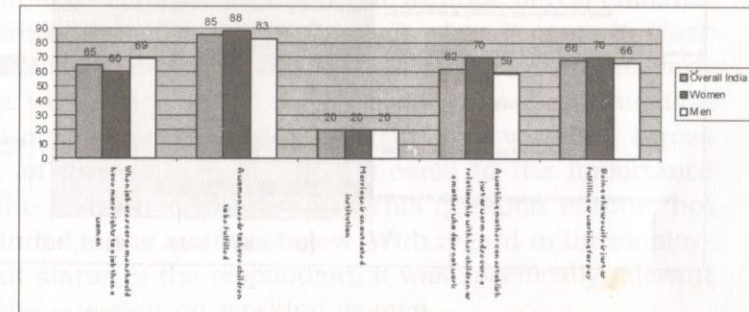
of whether being a housewife was just as fulfilling as working for pay, with the global support for this statement being higher. The only issue (among the five) on which there was no difference in the attitude of people in Indian and the rest of the world, was in their explicit rejection of the view that marriage was an outdated institution, with only twenty percent supporting this stand. The trend as delineated in Chart 1, is transparently indicative of the fault lines of modernity and conservatism in both the Indian and global context.

Chart 1
World Values Survey
`Strongly Agree/Agree` response to select questions
{n = 55638(global); 2002 (India)}



At this stage, it would be appropriate to compare responses of men and women in India to the five questions. Men in India more convinced than women that when jobs are scarce they should have more rights to them than a woman. It must also be noted that a very high percentage of women (6 of every ten) felt that when jobs were limited, men have a more legitimate right to stake them as compared to women. There was a small five percentage point difference between men and women in India on whether women needed to have children to be fulfilled, with women agreeing with the statement more than men. A much higher percentage of women (70 percent) felt that a working mother could establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. Men were less supportive of this stand, with just half of them endorsing this position.

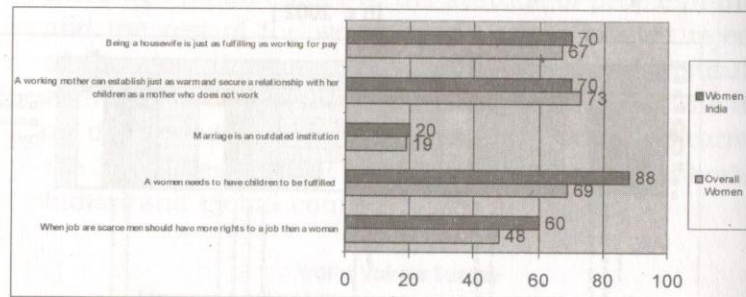
Chart 2
India Component of World Values Survey
`Strongly Agree/Agree` response to select questions
{n = 2002 }



There was only a marginal difference in the stand adopted by men and women on the level of satisfaction experienced by a housewife and a women working for pay. Both men and women felt similarly on the institution of marriage with one-fifth among both men and women asserting that it was an outdated institution.

The third level of analysis involves an assessment of the views expressed by women in India and across the world on the five selected questions two clear patterns have emerged. The first pattern involves a clear divergence in the views expressed by women across the globe and in India. On whether women need to have children to be fulfilled, nearly ninety percent women in India endorsed this view. The support for this particular gender role dips to seventy percent in the global context. Across the world, the World Values Survey data shows that less than half the women respondents subscribe to the view that men should have a preference over women when jobs or scarce. In India, this view is endorsed by nearly sixty percent of the women respondents.

Chart 3
World Values Survey
`Strongly Agree/Agree` response of women to select questions
{n = 28104 (global); 865 (India) }

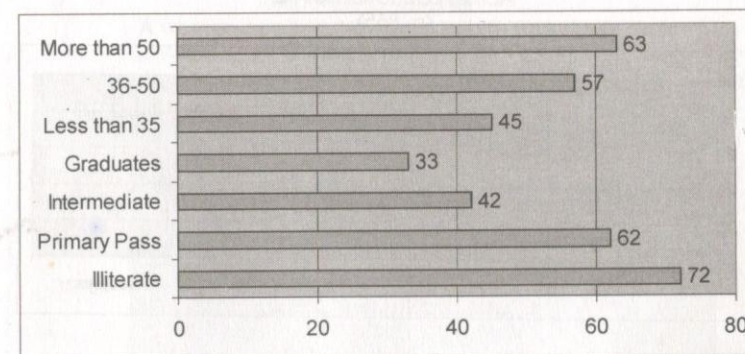


There is a very marginal difference in the views expressed by women respondents globally and specifically in India on the remaining three questions. A marginally higher percentage of women across the world as compared to those in India, supported the view that a working woman could establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a woman who does not work. The reverse is true in the case of the perception of the level of fulfillment a woman derives from being a housewife. The endorsement is marginally higher among women in India as compared to women across the globe. There is hardly any difference in the attitude of women in India and the rest of the world to the continued importance of marriage in modern society. The justification of the 'stereotypical' role of women appears more prevalent in India as compared to the rest of the world. A caveat needs to be added at this stage. A significant number of nations in the World Values Survey are the modern western societies. While the global view incorporates the response across the societies in which the study was undertaken, the fact that a significant number from among them are modern western societies (European and North American) needs to be kept in mind.

Do all segments among women in India think similarly on the issues raised in the five questions. To examine whether any such variations exist, we examined the impact of level of education, place of residence, age, employment and economic status on the attitude of respondents. There was no significant variation when it came to place of residence and economic status. Variations on this variable were more significantly linked to level of education and age. There were also no significant variation across any of these variables when it came to the importance of the institution of marriage. This question is thus, not included in the analysis below. With regard to the employment status of the respondent, it was specifically relevant to the question on working women.

It was earlier reported that sixty percent of the women respondents in India felt that when job were scarce men should have preference over women. The variation across age groups and level of education is significant as is reported in Chart 4.

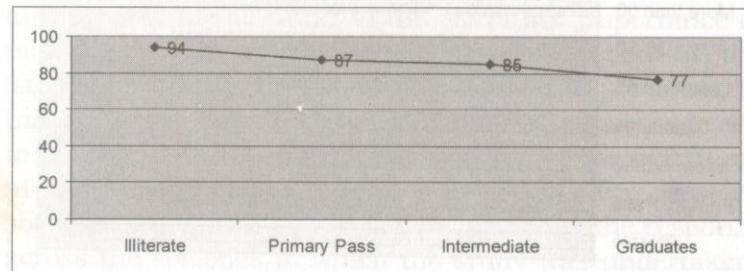
Chart 4
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
When job are scarce men should have more rights to a job
than a woman (n= 865)



The data clearly shows that as the level of education increases, the belief that when jobs are scarce, men have a greater claim to a job than women decreases. While more than seventy percent of the illiterate women endorsed the primacy to be accorded to men only one- thirds of the women who had a University degree endorsed this view point. It is also noticed that older women tended to support this view more as compared to younger women. This is directly linked to the fact that the level of education among the younger generation of women is significantly higher. This important and significant change in perception would have important implications for policies and setting priorities in the years to come.

Variations across education levels and age groups on whether a women needed to have children to be fulfilled is reported in Charts 5 and 6.

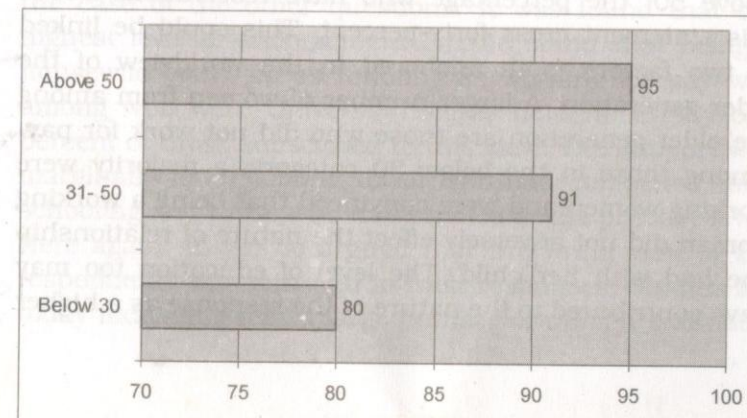
Chart 5
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
A women needs to have children to be fulfilled :
Across Education levels
(n- 865)



As the level of education improves the intensity with which the view that women need to have children to be fulfilled is articulated, reduces. If an overwhelming number of illiterate women respondents (ninety four percent) held this view, just over three fourths of the women who had completed their graduation subscribed to this stand. The impact of education on the recognition of the fact the world of opportunity is extremely vast is clearly reflected in the attitude of women across education levels on this critical question.

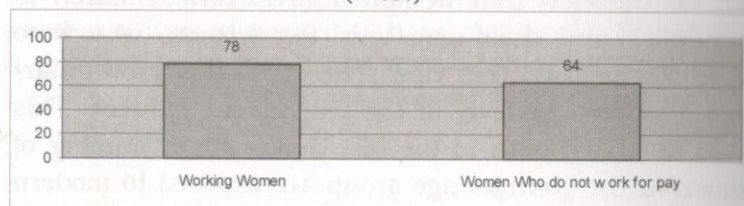
Chart 6 unequivocally demonstrates the fact that there is a direct co-relation between the intensity of support for the view that women need to have children to be fulfilled and their age. Very few women, who were above 50, opposed this view. The opposition grows marginally as the age level of the respondent reduces. This could be linked both to the fact that a larger number of women in the younger age group are exposed to modern education and in more importantly, have grown up in an age and time when the social and cultural environment was significantly different.

Chart 6
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
A women needs to have children to be fulfilled:
Across Age
(n- 865)



On whether a working woman could have as warm a relationship with her child as a mother who does not work, the difference between working women and those who did not work for pay was significant. While one-third of the women who did not work felt that a working woman could not have as warm and secure a relationship with their children as compared to a woman who does not work, only twelve percent of the working women held this view.

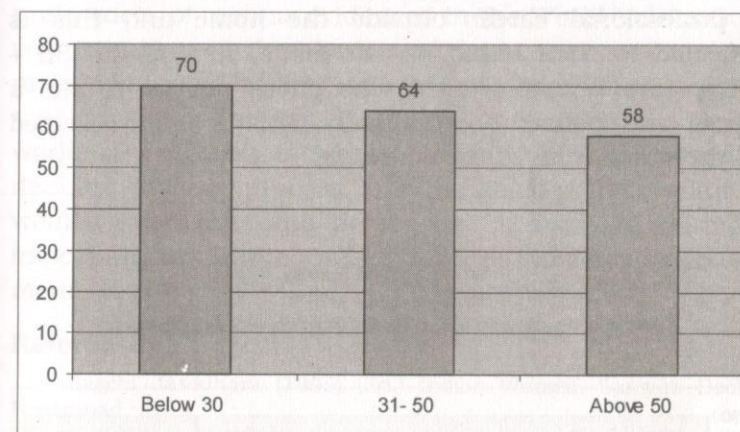
Chart 7
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work
(n- 865)



The study also shows that younger women are more convinced that a working woman can have as warm a relationship with her child as someone who does not work. As the respondents age increases the greater is the apprehension in endorsing this view. Among the women above 50, the percentage who have reservations about this statement cross forty-percent. This could be linked to two factors, both anchored in the worldview of the older generation. A larger number of women from among the older generation are those who did not work for pay. Among those in the below 30 category, a majority were working women and were convinced that being a working woman did not adversely effect the nature of relationship she had with her child. The level of education too may have contributed to the nature of the response as a higher

percentage of younger women had access to higher education as compared to those belonging to the older generation.

Chart 8
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work
Across Age
(n- 865)

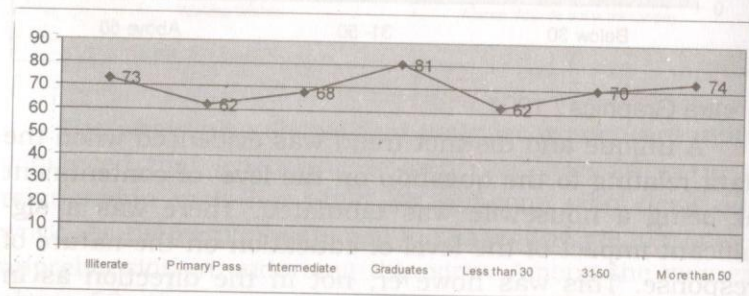


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A unique and distinct trend was evidenced when the data relating to the question on the level of contentment at being a housewife was tabulated. There was a significant impact of the level of education on the nature of response. This was however, not in the direction as in the case of the other questions. It was found that the highest level of endorsement for the stand that being a housewife could be as fulfilling as working for pay was among who were University degree holders. Eighty one percent of those subscribed to this view. The support was marginally lower among those who had completed their schooling and those who had studied at the primary level. Here again, it can be argued that the world view of the respondents was mirrored in their responses. Studies are today indicating that a large number of women graduates

(and professionals) in India, are choosing to pursue a career at their pace and choice and tend to give primacy to the family. This is clearly reflected in the stand that they have adopted about the level of satisfaction and contentment a housewife experiences. This can also be linked to the response to this question across age groups. Older women appear to support this view more than those who are younger. Many among the older women did not pursue a professional career outside the home and this is reflected in their stand on the issue. Among the 30 + group, are several women who chose not to pursue a career and focused on the family. This is again reflected in their response to the question.

Chart 9
World Values Survey
Response to Question -
Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay
(n= 865)



The survey data generated from the India component of the World Values Survey provides empirical proof of the changing role perceptions and attitudes of women in India and provide useful indicators for the direction of change of social attitudes and preferences in the country. It mirrors in significant ways changing landscape of Indian society and permits a more meaningful assessment of the emerging social values and attitudes in India among women in particular and the society in general.

The study clearly points to the impact of empowering women through access to education. A wide range of positive social attitudes often get internalized as a result of the benefits of education. Yet, given the male dominated characteristic of society, the study also shows that unless women enjoy access to the structures of decision-making process, it would be difficult to transform the emerging aspirations into positive social outcomes. Given the values preferences of men as evidenced in the World Values Survey, it is beyond the shadow of doubt that sensitizing a male dominated society on gender issues and ensuring that the dominant way of thinking is society reflects the world of a women is what is essential. Sensitizing the decision making process and the socio-political elite to women's concerns and perspective is possibly the more important task in the journey towards women's empowerment.

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Notes

The World Values Survey is a worldwide investigation of social, cultural and political change. Representative national surveys of the basic values and beliefs of publics in more than 82 societies on all six inhabited continents, containing almost 80 percent of the world's population. It builds on the European Values Surveys, first carried out in 1981. A second wave of surveys, designed for global use, was completed in 1990-1991, a third wave was carried out in 1995-1996 and a fourth wave took place in 1999-2002. This investigation has produced evidence of gradual but pervasive changes in what people want out of life, and the basic direction of these changes is, to some extent, predictable. This study has given rise to more than 300 publications, in 16 languages. This project is being carried out by an international network of social scientists. The countries in which this study has been conducted include : Africa (8) : Algeria Congo; Egypt; Ghana; Morocco; Nigeria; South Africa; Tanzania; Asia (19) : Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; China; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran; Israel; Japan; Jordan; Russia; Pakistan; Philippines; South Korea; Singapore; Taiwan; Tambov; Vietnam; Australia (2) : Australia; New Zealand; Europe(40) : Albania; Andalusia; Austria; Belarus; Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina;

United Kingdom; Bulgaria; Croatia; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece, Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Latvia, Lithuania; Luxemburg, Macedonia; Malta; Moldova; Netherlands, Montenegro; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Serbia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; Ukraine; North America (6) : United States of America; Canada; Mexico; El Salvador; Dominique Republic; Puerto Rico; South America (7): Brazil; Argentina; Peru; Colombia; Chile; Uruguay; Venezuela. For details see Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997. 2000, 2002, 2003.

2) This paper is based on the analysis of the survey data from the India segment of the World Values Survey. Dr. Shastri was the National Coordinator of the study and Ms. Padmavathi was the Research Assistant attached to the India Component of the World Values Survey project. We would like to thank several individuals whose contributions were critical for the completion of this study. We would like to record our deep sense of appreciation to the State Coordinators for the Survey: Dr. K.C.Suri (Andhra Pradesh); Dr. Sandhya Goswami (Assam); Dr. Sanjay Kumar (Bihar, Delhi and Jharkhand); Dr Ram Shankar (Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh); Dr. Priyavadan Patel (Gujarat); Dr. Ashutosh Kumar (Haryana and Punjab); Dr. Harish Ramaswamy (Karnataka); Dr. Gopa Kumar (Kerala); Dr. Suhas Palshikar (Maharashtra); Dr. S.N.Misra (Orissa); Dr. Sanjay Lodha (Rajasthan); Dr. G. Koteswara Prasad (Tamil Nadu); Dr A.K.Verma (U.P.); Dr. A.K.Chaudhuri (West Bengal). We would also like to thank Dr V.B. Singh and Dr Yogendra Yadav of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) for their help and advise during the conduct of the survey. Dr. Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Dr Pradeep Chhibber of the University of California at Berkeley and Dr Richard Sisson of the Ohio State University provided support for the conduct of the study and we wish to express my gratitude to them. However, we take full and sole responsibility for the interpretation and analysis of the data as it appears in this article.

3) It was decided to conduct 2000 face-to-face interviews. A rigorous scientific method was employed to generate the target sample for the study. The survey was conducted in 18 states of India, which covered nearly 97 % of the nation's population. 40 districts, spread across these 18 states, were identified for the purpose of the survey, keeping in mind the population of the states, even while ensuring that the survey was conducted in at least one district in each of the sampled states. Within each state, the district/s in which the survey was to be conducted was selected by circular sampling (PPS: Probability Proportion to Size). Once all the 40 districts were selected, the Lok Sabha constituency that covered the district was identified. If the sampled district had more than one Lok Sabha constituency, the one, which had a larger proportion of the district's electorate, was selected. The next stage in the sampling process was the selection of 2 State Assembly constituencies in each of the sampled 40 Lok Sabha constituencies. Every

Lok Sabha constituency covers a specified number of Assembly constituencies and even though the number of Assembly constituencies within a Lok Sabha constituency would vary from state to state, the number is the same within a state. Circular Sampling (PPS: Probability Proportion to Size) was once again employed. Thus, 80 Assembly Constituencies in 40 Lok Sabha constituencies (in 40 districts) were selected. Subsequently, a polling booth area in each of the 80 sampled Assembly constituencies was selected by simple circular sampling method. The number of respondents to be interviewed in each state was determined on the basis of the proportion of the states share in the national population. This was equally divided among the polling booth areas that were sampled in a state. The number of respondents in the polling booth area was the same within a state, but varied from state to state. In a polling booth area, the respondents were selected from the electoral rolls (voters list) by circular sampling with a random first number. While drawing up the random list of respondents to be interviewed in every sampled polling booth area, the number of target respondents was increased by nearly 20 %. This was done in view of the fact that the field investigators were required to interview only those respondents whose names were included in the sample list. No replacements or alteration in the list of sampled respondents was permitted. Previous survey experience has shown that it has never been possible for the investigator to interview all those included in the list of sampled respondents. The investigators were told to make every effort to interview all those included in the list of respondents. In the event of the investigator not being able to complete an interview, they were asked to record the reason for the same. Such a rigorous method of sampling was followed in order to obtain as representative a national sample as possible. The analysis of the sample profile clearly indicates that the detailed and objective criterion employed has eminently served its purpose as the sample mirrors the nation's social, economic, political, cultural and religious diversity. A few writings that have emerged from this study include Shastri 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2003)

