

# Examining the Impact of patriarchy over the working women in Jorhat, Assam: A Sociological Analysis

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## Abstract

This study critically examines the enduring influence of patriarchal structures on the lived experiences of working-class women in Jorhat, Assam's service sector. Patriarchal norms continue to shape the experiences of working-class women in the service sectors of Jorhat, Assam, limiting their professional opportunities and reinforcing gender inequality. This study uses qualitative interviews to explore nuanced regional dynamics, showing how restrictive social expectations, invisible barriers, and limited family support hinder women's career advancement. Findings highlight that patriarchy remains a significant challenge, and addressing these deeply embedded social structures is essential for promoting gender equality and fairer workplaces in peripheral regions like Jorhat. By comparing Jorhat's context with that of metropolitan areas, the study highlights how regional socio-cultural dynamics influence gender inequality.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

My thesis "Examining the Impact of Patriarchy on Working Women in Jorhat, Assam: A Sociological Analysis", deeply investigates how patriarchy shapes the professional lives of women in Jorhat mostly working in different fields of organised sectors, in service sectors which includes both public and private sector. I grew up in Jorhat and thus have first-hand experience with its social fabric which shows how pervasive patriarchal norms are and how they hinder women's opportunities. I chose this topic because I have always wanted to study the society where I grew up, Jorhat, Assam and want to know how patriarchal attributes is different from metropolitan cities. I am particularly interested in understanding how patriarchal attributes in our society impact working women in this contemporary era, especially in a small city like Jorhat, which is also known as the knowledge city of Assam. What intrigues me even more is how our culture differs from other parts of India. Although we follow Hinduism, Assamese culture is heavily influenced by the teachings of Saint Srimanta Sankardeva, a Neo-Vaishnavite who spearheaded the Bhakti movement and advocated against idol worship (Borah 2016). Through the chapters of history, Assam is known for its cosmopolitan nature, with minimal caste-based clashes or religious turmoil, thanks in part to Sankardeva's teachings, but the position women had in Assamese society, particularly in Satra monasteries has changed over time. Initially, women's roles were largely restricted by religious norms and patriarchal structures within these institutions. However, the initiation of Vaishnavite movement by Sankardeva brought considerable alterations to the roles and status of women in these religious institutions thereby allowing them to play institutional roles and contribute positively to the environment. The impact of religious reform, particularly Neo-Vaishnavism led by Srimanta Sankardeva, on patriarchy in Assam was significant. On the other hand, as much as the religious movement espoused equality and spiritual upliftment; it inadvertently reinforced patriarchal structures within society (Das & Saikia 2020). Since the

reform only sought to exhibit principles of gender equality and spiritual unity, some patriarchal norms still existed. This resulted into a situation where while caste system gave up for gender equality but also unknowingly strengthened patriarchal influences that consolidated their power within Assamese society. Despite these reforms, caste factor remained significant. After his demise Sankardeva's cast aside this time around played an important role in determining their fate as well as status unlike before when they used to hold positions at temples called Namghars but now in various Satra but now, in various Satra's like the Barpeta Satra, women are barred from entering temples. This illustrates how religious reformers were sometimes unable to challenge patriarchal mindsets prevalent in society. Thus, I chose this topic because while our culture and tradition underwent religious reform movements, the patriarchal mindset remained deeply ingrained. It is a vital endeavour to understand and address gender inequalities in our society. In Jorhat just like many other parts of the India, traditional gender roles often influence societal expectations that people are expected to conform to. The persistence of patriarchal systems has however hindered access to education, employment opportunities and career advancement for women despite progress made towards gender equality. The interface between tradition and modernity results in a convoluted terrain where women engage with professional spaces while grappling with deep-rooted gender norms.

To understand further more on my thesis, let us understand what patriarchy here stands for. Kamala Bhasin (1993) patriarchy as a social formation of male-gendered power that exists in various aspects of social life and intersects with other forms of power. This article demonstrates that patriarchy is more than just sexism; it is a system combined with white supremacy, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness. This intersectionality solidifies the subordination of women and their oppression throughout the family and the discourses of police, military, and organized religion. This system subject's women to economic dependence, violence, and domestication. Through her definition it highlights how patriarchy impacts women in various service sectors, reinforcing gender inequalities and hindering their advancement. It is critical to have more equitable society by understanding how working women across various service sectors, both in public and private domains, and how they navigate patriarchal challenges. Although well-documented, research on the experiences of working women in organised sector must go beyond the surface levels, recognizing that their experiences are heterogeneous and diverse. In countries where patriarchy is deeply rooted such as India, women face multiple layers of oppression and inequality within the workplace in various service sectors, Patriarchy acts as a social system that keeps men in power over women reinforcing gender inequality and reducing women's opportunities for advancement into mostly marital motherhood focused roles. Women's abilities are still being questioned even in organised sectors leading to obstacles for attaining leadership positions due to cultural and social norms. This study is about how patriarchy prevails in every part of our society and as we already know it leads to gender inequality and oppression of working women in workplace and households, but how it is still prevailed in progressive and contemporary era. As a result, this study seeks to bring in women's experiences and interpretations in the organized working sector, and resistance strategies in relation to patriarchy in their marriages and day to day life. The study is descriptive in nature and seeks to identify the mode of patriarchal attributes faced by working women in different organized sectors. Further the study also aims at finding out the organizational supports for women employees so that the women employees are able to give their best to their organization and are able to reach their full potential. The present study surveyed only working women employees in white collared jobs such as bankers, accountants, administrative officer, finance advisor, nurses, project worker, academic administrators etc. who have been in their jobs for at least six

months. Primary data was collected from 15 working women of the organized sector using a qualitative approach that included interviews.

To appreciate and address the imbalance and obstacles that women labourers most likely experience in work environments, the examination of qualities related to dominance of women at work is crucial. This research study becomes very important in towns like Jorhat of Assam where the traditional patriarchal notions are very entrenched and might be dominating women's working environments more in comparison to cities like Kolkata which are larger and diverse. It is to be noted that the reformist movements that influenced Bengal and many other parts of India as early as the 19th century, its impact was felt by the society of Assam only during the 20th century (Jahnabi Gogoi Nath, 2011), so this may be a problem in the 21st century as small cities like Jorhat are still different from metropolitan cities like Kolkata. There are smaller towns in Jorhat, where community values also strongly influence gender expectations to a relatively narrow community, and patriarchy in women workplace is more prevalent. This impact oftentimes leads women to be left out when it comes to promotion chances. The word domination in women at work includes characters of confident leadership, and decision making, and the ability to achieve outcomes for the workplace. Learning how these features are receiving and accepted in different socio-cultural systems is crucial for developing strategies to achieve gender equity, give women the power to excel professionally, and create an impartial and inclusive environment that facilitates women's career development and success. The smaller community size of village Jorhat in Assam, as compared to larger cities like Kolkata, and the sense of tradition that is the faithful guide of gender roles here, make Jorhat a truly unique field site. This is the type of environment where patriarchal norms tend to be more overpowering, and this leads to the creation of more complications for women who might want to advance in their careers. By investigating the unique socio-cultural settings, researchers can learn varied ways in which patriarchy manifests itself, making it possible to develop interventions, designed specifically to achieve greater gender equity, advance social justice for women, and increase the success of women in professional environment.

Patriarchy has been one of the dominant features of Indian society. The study area is patriarchy and the researcher is trying to study how patriarchy as a dominant social feature is still intact in the 21st century India and how it effects working women of organised sectors. The field of the study is Jorhat, which is in Assam. I have selected this field for my study as it is my hometown and I was always curious about to study the patriarchal structure within working women in Jorhat. I have selected 15 working women of voting age and conducted my oral interview with them through an interview schedule. The interlocutors were very much cooperative.

### **1.1 Review of Literature**

The scholarly works in this sphere are focusing on the women and patriarchy in contemporary society. As such, it illustrates all the sides of this phenomenon and its negative influence on women nowadays, namely working women and their preferences, women's life, gender-based stereotypes and, finally governments' activity. The literature review chosen explains and analyses from many angles the problem of patriarchy and gender discrimination that still plays an essential role in society. The review is international and equally represents the problem in a global perspective and the local perspective, with the special focusing of the mentioned problem in India, where patriarchy remains one of the most severe. As Nath (2011) explains, the environment "reflects a situation where patriarchal conventions are more prevalent, making it difficult for women to make it to the top and for those who do, to navigate the limitations concomitant to societal expectations". An in-depth exploration of both historical and modern contexts reveals the

degree to which the phenomenon of patriarchy must be eradicated to strengthen the position of employed women and develop a just society. It is remarkable that scholars have emphasized the entrenched nature of patriarchy in Indian culture and discussed how it interacts with different forms of power to render the power of men and growth opportunities of women impotent.

Sylvia Walby's (1990) seminal work "Theorizing Patriarchy" serves as a foundational framework for understanding how patriarchy has evolved in the 20th century. While the traditional concept of patriarchy denoted a society controlled by men, Walby argues that it persists in modern society but has taken on a more complex and pervasive nature. She identifies six patriarchal structures that restrict women's freedom and maintain male domination: paid employment, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. These structures manifest in various ways, such as the gender pay gap, unequal distribution of household labour, cultural norms, and violence against women. Theories of patriarchy by Walby clearly talk about private and public realms of patriarchy. Whereas private patriarchy is practiced at home, which is based on materialism; where a home maker has no power because she does not earn money, despite of the work and her contribution to the household, in the form of services and emotional support. The other, public patriarchy is practiced at public places, i.e. work place and state. The system of patriarchy, often, creates obstacles for women's growth and development both in their careers, society, and personal life. Patriarchy debars women from their legal rights. Patriarchy is a system whereby women are kept subordinate in several ways. The subordination that they experience at a daily level, regardless of the class they might belong to, takes various forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence – within the family, at the place of work and in society.

Marxist feminist theory posits that the subordination of women is inextricably linked to the capitalist mode of production and cannot be viewed in isolation from other forms of exploitation and oppression, such as class exploitation and racism (Beechey, 1979). Marxist feminists have demonstrated that orthodox Marxism and even socialist movements regarded women's discrimination as secondary to class exploitation. Even though living in a capitalist society and developing human qualities as homo sapiens is characterized by the fact of biology in disregard of their economic structure, economic system still conditions society; hence gender equality is impossible under capitalism. Regarding the thesis, when I write about the effect of patriarchy on the working women of Jorhat, Assam, Marxist feminist theory helps to understand the connection between patriarchy and the mode of capitalist production. When I consider how patriarchal practices are interrelated with notions of class oppression and other types of oppression, you come to a deeper understanding of the problems that the women in Jorhat experience. Preferential treatment will be given to men, with the male commanding more power to both family & society. There is different treatment given to the male and the female child, with preference to the male child. Women of most households accept the system of patriarchy so unknowingly that they themselves encourage the system in their own households.

Uma Chakravarti (1993) To understand the historical context of patriarchy, the review delves into early Indian society. It is highlighted that gender relations and women's subordination were profoundly influenced by social and cultural environments. Religious traditions, especially within Hinduism, played a significant role in maintaining women's subjugation. The caste system, combined with patriarchal structures, created intricate layers of gender inequality. Early Indian history reveals how women's subordination was deeply ingrained through religious beliefs and caste hierarchies. The Rig Veda exemplifies how the Aryans perceived indigenous people as inferior, enslaved women from these groups, and perpetuated patriarchal norms. In the context of your work on examining the impact of patriarchy on

working women in Jorhat, Assam, Uma Chakravarti's (1993) insights on the historical context of patriarchy in early Indian society in her work, "Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy in early India: Gender, Caste, Class, and State", particularly regarding the influence of religious traditions and the caste system, offer a valuable lens through which to analyse the experiences of working women in Assam. The historical entrenchment of patriarchy through religious and caste structures provides a backdrop for understanding the complexities of gender relations and women's subordination in contemporary Assamese society. In the case of Assam, where Neo-Vaishnavism and Srimanta Sankardeva as religious and societal influences have contributed, the caste question intersects patriarchy in a distinctive manner. As the caste system in Assam has evolved through history, it continues to cause the gendered divisions in the roles and status of women, especially in religious establishments like Sattra monasteries because of the influence of brahminical vaishnavism. As Neo-Vaishnavism reform movements were designed to advance equality and spiritual upliftment of Assamese society, at bottom they affirmed patriarchal norms in life which also affected women regarding their position and access to these institutions. By incorporating the historical analysis of patriarchy and the caste system in early Indian society, as discussed by Chakravarti, into my thesis on working women in Jorhat, Assam, I can provide a complex aspect of how these historical factors continue to impact gender dynamics and women's opportunities in the contemporary era. This argument can be integrated into my thesis to highlight the significance of historical legacies in shaping the experiences of working women in Assam, emphasizing the need to address the intersection of patriarchy, caste dynamics, and gender inequalities to promote gender equity and empower women in professional settings.

Manisha Gupte's (13th Jan, 2018.) vision for a gender-equitable society paints an aspirational picture of a future devoid of gender and patriarchy. Her vision emphasizes the need to challenge and eradicate gender-based violence, discrimination, and gender role ideology. In this future world, traditional hierarchies where men dominate women would be a thing of the past, offering individuals more control over their choices and defining the institution of marriage in a way that promotes equality, freedom, and autonomy for all. The article by Manisha Gupte envisions a future without gender and patriarchy, highlighting the need for transformative changes. This vision includes challenging traditional notions of marriage and women's autonomy in choosing their partners, eliminating public and private patriarchies, ensuring women's freedom of mobility, and eradicating gender bias in law and societal norms.

Veena Venugopal's (13th Sep, 2018) article sheds light on the low female workforce participation in India, primarily due to societal norms that view marriage as a career stopper for women. This gendered division of labour also results in women shouldering the bulk of household chores and not having leisure time for self-care. The article underscores how these cultural norms and the persistence of patriarchy contribute to the decline in women's participation in the workforce. Additionally, the discussion delves into research that reveals how patriarchy influences women's workplace behaviour, with men often regarding women as inferior and incapable of taking on certain roles. The impact of gender role ideology on workplace dynamics is explored, emphasizing the importance of understanding how patriarchy affects women's professional lives.

The problems faced by working women in India, as outlined by Dr. Kamini B. Dashora (25th Aug, 2013), highlight the pervasive gender bias that hampers women's progress in their careers. This bias manifests in the unequal treatment of women in terms of recruitment, remuneration, and promotion. The article also addresses the double burden women face, as they are expected to handle household chores while pursuing their careers. The lack of financial independence is another aspect discussed, as many women are required

to hand over their salaries to male family members. Kamini B. Dashora's article focuses on the specific challenges faced by working women in India, despite legal protections. Social attitudes and patriarchal beliefs in male superiority continue to hinder women's professional progress. Gender bias during recruitment, unequal remuneration, and higher expectations of women's performance vis-à-vis their male counterparts are persistent challenges. Moreover, the unequal burden of household chores and limited control over earnings further compound the difficulties faced by Indian working women.

This extensive research works provides a comprehensive analysis of the enduring influence of patriarchy on the lives of working women, with a specific focus on the unique challenges faced by women in India. The patriarchal system is shown to permeate various aspects of society, leading to disparities in paid employment, household production, cultural norms, sexuality, violence, and political power. These consequences of patriarchy extend beyond the workplace, shaping women's roles in society and eroding their autonomy. It articulates a shared vision of eliminating gender-based violence, discrimination, and traditional gender role ideologies, enabling women to thrive in both their personal and professional lives. This body of work highlights the critical imperative of dismantling patriarchal structures to empower working women and foster a society where gender equality is not the exception but the prevailing norm. In summary, this literature review offers a rigorous and insightful exploration of the impact of patriarchy on working women. It incorporates insights from diverse sources to provide a well-rounded perspective on the subject. It not only acknowledges the persistent influence of patriarchy on women's lives but also emphasizes the urgency of deconstructing patriarchal structures to pave the way for a fairer and more just society. This issue is of paramount importance as it directly impacts the rights, opportunities, and well-being of women in the workplace and society at large. This research works offers a comprehensive exploration of the many-sided nature of patriarchy and its implications for women in contemporary society, both in India and globally. It underscores the necessity of transformative changes to confront and disassemble the enduring patriarchal structures that continue to impact women's lives, both in their professional and domestic spheres. While there has been some progress, the persistence of patriarchy remains a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. In the realm of research discussed there is a need to delve deeper into the challenges that working women encounter in smaller towns, like Jorhat, Assam. Additionally, it is crucial to explore how influences, caste dynamics and patriarchal structures to influence the experiences of working women in Assam. The research works sheds light on how historical movements like Neo Vaishnavism led by Srimanta Sankardeva reinforced norms in society. Understanding the lasting impact of these legacies on women's opportunities in sectors such as banking, administration and academia is vital for devising strategies to empower working women and promote gender equality. This research aims to bridge the existing gap in literature by examining how patriarchy operates within communities like Jorhat, Assam and its interaction with traditions, religious teachings, and caste dynamics, in shaping the experiences of working women.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of the paper is to analyse and examine the effects of patriarchy on the development process, particularly its effects to working women in various service sectors. The paper endeavours to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To find out why working women is still a problem in contemporary era.
2. To gain knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by working women in the workplace in different service sectors.

The primary goal of my study is to look into how working women in Jorhat, Assam, are there experiencing

patriarchal dominance and which practices they do. Through the analysis of the local socio-cultural setting of Jorhat, I intend to comprehend how patriarchal practices operate in the professional lives of women in this small region and examine the kinds of difficulties which come in the way of these women in the workplace. Working women can be an umbrella term that covers many positions in the organized sectors, like banking, accounting, finance, and academia, but mostly, those women struggle with the mixture of traditional gender roles and modern professional expectations. Jorhat, a town emphasizing group ethics and traditional Jorhat norms, has its own distinct field site, where a patriarchal influence may be stronger as compared with the large cities such as Kolkata. This study tries to identify the subtle ways in which patriarchy leads to the experience of women regarding employment, figuring out the obstacles such as females face in climbing up to better positions and the organizational support needed to enrich their careers through qualitative interviews with 15 employed women. I endeavour to examine the study within the distinctive framework of social dynamics of Jorhat for further unravelling of the composite structures of patriarchy that impact the lives of working women of small towns, thereby emphasizing the necessity for special interventions that offer empowerment to women in the professional.

I have induced five themes for my thesis which will provide an in-depth analysis. Firstly, Women in the organized sector, which argues about how they encounter obstacles rooted in traditional gender norms that limit their career growth and opportunities. Secondly, Societal expectations shows how often prioritize familial obligations over individual pursuits, leading to gender disparities in the workplace. Thirdly, it shows how workplace discrimination, gender bias, and limited opportunities for advancement persist, hindering women's professional development. Fourthly, it shows how workplace dynamics work in small cities like Jorhat, where traditional gender norms and how some voices of the women are suppressed through a patriarchal lens. And lastly, the glass ceiling effect further restricts women's access to top-tier positions, reflecting systemic barriers to their progression. To address these issues, initiatives focusing on education, awareness, skill development, supportive work environments, advocacy, and networking are crucial. By challenging traditional norms, promoting inclusivity, and providing equal opportunities, societies like Jorhat can empower women to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential in the workforce.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is the systematic way to solve the research problem. It gives an idea about various steps adopted by the researcher in a systematic manner with an objective to determine various manners.

### **2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research is majorly descriptive, as it involves an exhaustive study of patriarchy in Indian society in which women are dominated in every field. This study is descriptive because the problem is diverse and the method would be best suitable for designing a research framework, selection of respondents and collecting data with the most appropriate tool. According to Creswell (2014), a prominent figure in research methodology, the choice of a descriptive research design is essential when the research problem is complex and not clearly defined. Additionally, Maxwell (2013) emphasizes the significance of inductive reasoning in qualitative research, highlighting its role in generating theories from specific observations. The researcher would follow an inductive approach in this study, as the study in this research begins with some loosely held observations and assumptions and might secure in providing certain theories and policy formulations. The research is descriptive in nature as descriptive data tells what is the information derived. It is essentially descriptive research as it is an attempt to determine, describe or identify the data derived.

Descriptive research design is most befitting for this research problem because descriptive research is conducted when the research problem area is not clearly defined and the major part is unknown. To understand the patriarchal attributes how women are dominated in home or workforce, this research design will be very much suitable for this research.

## 2.2 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method that is used in this research is qualitative method. A quantitative approach is appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand relationships between variables. Because the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of working women on patriarchy, a qualitative approach will be the most appropriate choice. As indicated by Creswell (2014), qualitative research strategies are very useful in providing a detailed and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. The qualitative data analysis facilitates the in-depth evaluation of the individuals' experiences, opinions, and the way these are interpreted, revealing the details and complexity of human existence as well as thoughts. The aim of this research is to acquire complete, detailed description. Qualitative data are analysed data elaborate on personal's experiences, opinions, and meaning. Non-numerical data utilized in this kind of research allow researchers to discover the quality and nature of people's actions, practice, and comprehension. Individual understanding of happenings is very important and this can be obtained through observation and in-depth interviews with questionnaire.

## 2.3 FIELD OF THE STUDY

The universe of the study will include all working women who are working in different service sectors in Jorhat, Assam. The field is a combination of working women's experiences in Private and Public organised sectors. The criterion of selection of universe will be including those women who are having:

- Age group of women from 25- 60.
- Married and Unmarried women related with organized sectors in both public and private sector.

## 2.4 SAMPLING DESIGN

The practice of selecting units i.e., for instances, individuals or organizations from a population of interest so that we may properly generalize our findings back to the population from which they were picked is known as sampling design. Purposive Sampling was used as the sample design for this study. This design was chosen because it allowed me to access a particular subset of the population that shares certain characteristics, such as working in organized sectors. By using purposive sampling, I was able to focus in depth on relatively small samples and identify the cases, individuals, or communities best suited to answer the research question.

## 2.5 SOURCES DATA OF COLLECTION

The study relies heavily on both primary and secondary information. To elaborate on the processes of gathering information as well as the concepts used in this process, the paper reviewed existing literature from published books, journals, and articles. Field data on the other hand was executed with an aim of generating qualitative data that speaks to the influence of patriarchy on working women which leads to oppression of women and gender inequality. The primary data is being collected through one-to-one in-depth interviews through telephonic interview using a semi-structured interview schedule. On the other hand, for the secondary data, study is relied on suitable book, journal, articles, e-papers available on the website. Whereas a descriptive approach of the field data with the existing literature has been used to present the field data, narratives from the voices of women were also useful in depicting the scenarios in the research.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of data gathered through interviews conducted with working women of organised sector in Jorhat, Assam. The aim is to examine the impact of patriarchy on their professional experiences and career trajectories. The analysis is structured around key questions, exploring various facets of patriarchy's influence in the workplace. Patriarchal norms contribute to gender inequality, in part, by dictating that men should have priority in access to resources in the family, market, state, and society writ large (Walby, 1990). In Indian society, patriarchal beliefs are deeply ingrained and upheld through various channels like laws, customs, and rituals, shaping power dynamics within households. For example, most households within India are headed by a male, with only 15% of the total number of households in India having a female head of household (IIPS and NFHS, 2017)

In Assam, women have historically held a unique position characterized by a remarkable degree of autonomy and authority in decision-making, a distinction not commonly observed in other regions of India. Their societal standing has been shaped by entrenched gender ideologies, significantly impacting values and interpersonal dynamics within their daily lives. The impact of colonialism on the status of women in Assam has been mixed. On the one hand, colonial institutions brought women into the public sphere, and the introduction of new laws and institutions transformed traditional social structures. On the other hand, the colonial period also saw the imposition of patriarchal values and norms on local communities, which led to the marginalization of women in some areas. Post-independence, the Indian government has implemented various programs and policies to promote gender equality.

However, the reality on the ground is often different, with women facing discrimination and violence in various forms. For example, women in Assam have been the victims of ethnic conflicts and insurgency, with rape and sexual violence being used as weapons of war. Women's aspirations to progress in society are often frustrated by the male dominance and subordination of females. Patriarchy systemically and traditionally underrates the social conditions of women's lives in Assamese society. Assamese society is, traditionally, extremely patriarchal. For example, one interlocutor stated:

*A woman needs to ask her husband for permission to attend to activities that will help her to achieve ample amount of satisfaction. For example, going to the socialise, attending parties hosted by colleagues, and on Sunday are my own nonwork activities; and, of course, there are also the traditional domestic duties such as without taking bath I cannot serve food to any household members, especially in-laws. However, I cannot attend to any of these activities without my husband's approval.*

Another interlocutor commented on how her husband and indeed most of the Assamese men unilaterally engage in making decisions without asking to their partners opinions, and the culture supports them. She commented:

*I'm not much into religion, but I absolutely love hanging out with my friends at parties. It's like my recharge button—every time I go, I come back feeling pumped up and balanced between work and everything else. But, since 2016, my husband has put a stop on my party plans, and you know how society is all about backing him up. So now it is just work, home, and back to domestic duties... feels like I am stuck, honestly.*

Certain interlocuter in the study held positive perceptions relating to the integration of work and life roles.

An interlocutor stated:

*My husband is a liberal minded person. Thanks to my partner—he is a huge help with everything around the house. We're a team when it comes to domestic chores, which gives me plenty of time for my career and other things I enjoy, hanging out at social events, and just doing stuff that makes me happy. It's not the usual deal around here, but I'm grateful for it.*

These findings indicate a well-established historically rooted, ideologically admitted, psychologically internalized state of male domination. Though some of the women enjoyed the liberal side of their partner, but other than that the structure remains same. This raises question regarding the significance of women's growth mentally? Why is it so important that women should be submissive? That they should compromise?

### 3.1. WOMEN IN ORGANISED SECTORS

Women in the workforce in diverse service sectors earning wages or a salary are part of a modern phenomenon, one that developed at the same time as the growth of paid employment for men; yet women have been challenged by inequality in the workforce. To keep her in captivity, without access to work or finance or interaction with the outside world, is less than fair (Vani Borooah & Sriya Iyer, 2002). Economic, social, and political empowerment of women is essential for the development of any society. The empowerment of women in the workplace is a vital element of public progression yet it frequently features its very own collection of difficulties, especially in areas like Assam, Jorhat. Historically societal standards and also typical gender roles have actually formed women's occupation options as well as possibilities frequently restricting their capacity for expert development as well as improvement. Through qualitative study in Jorhat Assam, I looked for to recognize the nuanced experiences of women in different aspects of society. For example, one interlocutor stated:

*"Being a lady in a mostly male field, my skills have often been doubted and my capabilities questioned," she narrated.*

This narrative reveals the need for disrupting cultural gender stereotypes and supporting functional workspaces that embrace varied and equivalent competencies. The stretch of women's work participation in the organised sector is qualitatively different from that in the unorganised sector. As we already know that in the organised sector, women workers are employed following strict procedures of recruitment. They have specific educational and training qualifications. They are entitled to several economic and social security benefits as stipulated by the law of the land. However, women workers in general have been the victims of the patriarchal social order. The pre-market discrimination that starts in the family, and with larger social arrangements which leads them to employed in the lower ranks of the organisation. Women face several problems like inequality in pay, inadequate benefits, and problems of sexual harassment within organised sectors. As a large number of women are placed in unskilled and low paid jobs, they have little power to voice their grievances. They mostly remain silent on all issues of oppression including the issues of sexual harassments as power relations are involved. One of my interlocutors said she faced harassment but she could not narrate me the exact story, but she said that how she was forced to leave the job she was doing because she complained about the harassment done with her by one of her senior executive officer.

In the corporate world, women often feel pressured to outperform their male colleagues to succeed. This can lead to higher expectations from their bosses, causing stress. Also, limited maternity leave adds to their stress as they must balance work targets with caring for their baby. In Jorhat, working women often feel unsafe at work. Some male bosses ask for sexual favours from female subordinates in exchange for promotions, taking advantage of their vulnerable position. One of my interlocutors given her views about how she escaped a matrix of sexual favours, but she did not elaborate much on her actual situation which I think is a limitation because if these things will remain silenced then the bigger picture will remain same. This unfair treatment stems from the belief that women are weaker than men in the workplace.

### 3.2. Societal Expectations and Gender Roles:

Societal expectations dictate traditional gender roles, imposing limitations on women's career aspirations

and opportunities. A key theme that emerged from the interviews was the broader impact of social expectations and gender roles on the lives of working women in Jorhat. Participants expressed pressure to integrate with traditional roles of care and housing into their professional responsibilities. Historically, Assamese society is patriarchal, with the division of labour determined by defined gender roles. While men are expected to be the primary caretakers and decision makers, women are often the only ones to perform household chores and caregiving roles. However, emerging educational and economic opportunities have gradually challenged these norms, resulting in an increase in the number of women in the workforce in Jorhat as noted by one interlocutor:

*As a working woman in Jorhat, I constantly feel the burden of balancing my career aspirations with familial duties. Society expects women to prioritize family over career, which often hampers our professional growth.*

Cultural and familial expectations intersect with professional aspirations, creating conflicting demands for working women. Chakravarti (2016) emphasizes the influence of cultural norms on gender roles and responsibilities, shaping women's choices in balancing work and family life. For instance, one interlocutor remarked:

*I was discouraged from pursuing a career in a male-dominated field like engineering or finance, and instead, steered towards more 'feminine' professions such as teaching or nursing. This limitation of options based on gender stereotypes not only restricted my personal growth and fulfilment but also perpetuated the cycle of gender inequality in the workforce.*

Despite their presence in the workforce, working women in Jorhat face numerous challenges rooted in societal expectations. Firstly, there exists a pervasive belief that a woman's primary duty is to her family, regardless of her professional commitments. This pressure often leads to women shouldering the burden of both household chores and office responsibilities, resulting in physical and mental exhaustion. For instance, one interlocutor stated:

*I live in an Assamese family where my mother-in-law and sister-in-law were always on my case, saying I should not argue with my husband and just put up with whatever he says silently. They kept warning me that if I stood up for myself, my marriage would fall apart and everyone would blame me.*

Men seem to get a free pass when it comes to household chores, leaving women to shoulder the bulk of the work on top of their day jobs. Interlocutors experience stats the facts:

*It's like this unwritten rule, you know? Women are expected to handle everything at home, while men just chill as the "head of the family" without lifting a finger. So, how are we supposed to find any kind of work-life balance when we're juggling all the domestic stuff solo? And serving my in-law parents are different scenarios, I have to take shower before serving them food after coming back from work.*

Another interlocutor stated how they must manage all their household cores and still have to present themselves in a more active way.

*You know in my home, it's like this unspoken expectation that as a woman, you're automatically the household manager. Cooking, laundry, taking care of the kids, even looking after elderly family members – it's all on you. And then on top of that, there's the full-time job. Trying to balance it all and still have some kind of work-life balance? Almost feels like impossible.*

Another interlocutor stated: *One day I realised how easy to have a life being a man, for one part of men, who thinks they are trying to understand the situation of her daughter, wife, daughter-in-law. I was having dinner with my father after marriage when I went back home, we were having a dinner table talk, where everyone was talking about the series "DELHI CRIME" and how my father and along with all male*

*members they confronted the ongoing atrocities that women has to face and they were like okay we should support our girl child and etc etc,..... after having the dinner he didn't even took his plate and wash it, kept it for my mother, and that day I realised, it may be a small thing but this is a story of bigger picture, how women are taken for granted with every aspects....*

These findings represent that working women despite of their carrier duty they must heavily engage on household works, child care and elderly care which somehow shows the attributes of patriarchy which still prevails in modern day society of being a woman first who must engage in all activities regardless of their carrier workload pressure.

### **3.3. Workplace Discrimination and Gender Bias:**

Another significant finding from our research is the prevalence of workplace discrimination and gender bias faced by working women in Jorhat. Participants recounted instances of unequal treatment, sexual harassment, and limited opportunities for career progression. Discriminatory practices and gender bias persist in Jorhat's workplaces, hindering women's professional growth. A study by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) highlights how implicit biases influence decision-making processes, leading to disparities in promotions and leadership opportunities. The interview reveals instances where qualified women are overlooked for advancement in favour of less qualified male counterparts, underscoring the prevalence of gender-based discrimination. These experiences highlight the systemic challenges that women encounter in the workplace. For instance, one interlocutor shared her experience:

*"Despite being qualified and competent, I have encountered numerous instances of gender bias in the workplace. Male colleagues often dismiss our contributions and underestimate our abilities, perpetuating a culture of inequality."*

The experience sheds light on the obstacles women faces in gaining recognition for their skills and contributions, despite their qualifications and capabilities. The scarcity of women in leadership positions underscores underlying biases entrenched within organizational structures. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that gender stereotypes perpetuate the perception that leadership is inherently masculine, disadvantaging women seeking to ascend to higher roles. The challenges women face in breaking into senior management positions due to prevailing gender norms. For instance, one interlocutor remarked:

*There is the perception that women may not be as dedicated or ambitious as their male counterparts because they are expected to take on more caregiving responsibilities at home. This can lead to biases in performance evaluations and promotions, where women are judged not solely on their professional merits but also on perceived dedication to their jobs. Furthermore, there is often a lack of representation of women in senior management roles, which can create a self-perpetuating cycle. Without visible role models or mentors at the top, it is harder for women to envision themselves in those positions or to receive the support and guidance needed to advance their careers.*

The persistent obstacles faced by women in gaining recognition for their skills and contributions highlight the systemic biases embedded within organizational structures. Gender stereotypes, societal expectations regarding caregiving responsibilities, and a lack of representation in senior management roles contribute to the challenges women encounter in breaking into higher positions.

Another interlocutor stated: *Oh, totally, gender bias is definitely a thing, especially in the tech world. It's like guys always seem to get the upper hand in snagging promotions or landing certain gigs. And don't even get me started on those meetings where it feels like nobody takes you seriously just because you're a girl. It's beyond annoying, honestly.*

Another interlocutor stated: *My manager sometimes gets into my nerves, shouting at me and to all the co-workers also, but I can see his patriarchal attitude of behaving with others, one day I couldn't control and told him about his attitude and he was like, who gave you the right to speak with about me and how to behave, I have a wife like you in my house... And many times several colleagues came to complaint, and for such attitudes my stress at home and work makes me sick.*

These gender bias workplace attributes show how still, women are deprived of their working skill. I think women in small places, where the structure of working culture mainly in private sectors are not very much grown, because for long time small cities like Jorhat did not have any MNC or any private company jobs, which would show the working women the workplace environment, these findings show how, cultural lag might become a problem for societies where traditional gender roles are very much intact.

### **3.3.1. Workplace Dynamics and Gender Norms:**

Gender norms are central to workplace dynamics, which give rise to the organizational culture and perpetuate inequalities. Therefore, gender expectations influence both individual actions and relationships and the decision-making process within organizations themselves. As Ridgeway (2001) asserts, these assumptions develop a power structure that frequently marginalizes women voices as well as strengthens manly supremacy within the labour force.

One important issue here is therefore how gender stereotypes manifest themselves unfairly rebuking against professional competence on grounds of gender roles. That is why Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasize on societal attitudes about what is considered “feminine” or “masculine” in leadership capacity judgments. According to these biases, leadership is seen as inherently masculine with qualities like assertiveness and decisiveness attached to male leaders while simultaneously undermining those that are often associated with females such as empathy and cooperation. These stereotypes portray leadership as inherently masculine, associating qualities such as assertiveness and decisiveness with male leaders, while simultaneously undervaluing qualities often attributed to women, such as empathy and collaboration. For instance, one interlocutor said:

*Every time I had something to contribute during meetings and decision-making processes, it appeared like everybody else did not care enough about my ideas. This is because sometimes I felt that as a woman, I was not given the same authority as men.*

That was another sign of marginalization of women in this area. Simply put, it prevents diversity in thinking when some voices are always being left out. It cuts off possibility of having new ideas come up with possible solutions by limiting certain voices. Finally, this promotes perpetuation of an equal cycle which reduces chances for women to express their professionalism and knowledge.

Moreover, prevailing gender norms deeply intermingle with workplace culture dynamics leading to obstacles that hamper advancement among women while continuing gender inequality. To deal with these issues thus necessitates challenging entrenched stereotypes, fostering inclusiveness and creating environments in which individuals can grow irrespective of their gender based on their ability and outputs.

### **3.5. The Glass Ceiling Effect**

Women continue to face obstacles in their efforts to reach the highest positions, which is known as the glass ceiling. According to Morrison et al. (1987), there exist invisible walls that prevent women from rising the corporate ladder, resulting in obstructed career paths. Even in places like Jorhat, Assam where traditional concepts of gender and socio-cultural organization are hindrances towards the advancement of women's careers, it is observed that the glass ceiling effect is still a global problem. Therefore, society expects more on family responsibilities rather than better career opportunities. Women in Jorhat confront

challenges that are exclusive to many small towns and cities of Assam and these challenges originate from the society's sociocultural structure. The social conception about gender roles in most of the cases classifies women to be majorly responsible for household chores. These traditional gender-roles perpetuate that women's dreams should always be secondary compared to their domestic chores; thus, hampering their ambition for better career prospects. For example, one interlocutor stated:

*I used to work at a local startup, doing managerial tasks like scheduling, handling deposits, and training new hires, even though I didn't have the official title. I got Employee of the Month a bunch of times, not to brag, just giving you the facts. So, when the startup started booming, I asked them to officially make me the manager. But they shut me down, saying, "Women can't manage." It was a wake-up call about how society sees women in the workplace. For which I left the job, and started working at another company as an employee.*

Another interlocutor stated that: *After my marriage, I got an offer from a renowned company where I was posted as senior analysts, but my in-laws were against it said that now she is married and whatever job she will do she can do from her hometown, and not to shift anywhere else, my partner also convinced me about how it will be difficult to manage in house, I was capable but only because of the barrier set in house after so called marriage, these happens....*

The glass ceiling isn't just about individual failure or lack of skill that stops employees, especially women, from climbing to top positions. These barriers are more like invisible walls that hold women back from reaching senior management roles and these barriers sometimes come from familial aspect also. This makes it hard to recognize and deal with the problem. It seems like women get stuck in jobs that don't let them move up because of these barriers. They end up staying in the same position without getting promoted because of these obstacles in their career paths toward senior management.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of key themes such as societal expectations, workplace discrimination, cultural influences, and the glass ceiling effect, this research highlights the structural inequalities that impede women's advancement. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to challenge gender norms, promote inclusivity, and create equitable opportunities for women in the workforce. Furthermore, societal expectations influence women's choices regarding education and career paths. Efforts to challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality must be integrated into educational curricula and community initiatives. Workplace policies should be enforced to ensure equal opportunities and protections for women, including provisions for maternity leave and childcare support. Additionally, awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts can help empower women to assert their rights and challenge discriminatory practices. By promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for working women, Jorhat can harness the full potential of its female workforce and foster sustainable economic growth and social development. To overcome the glass ceiling effect in small cities like Jorhat, proactive measures are crucial at various levels. Firstly, initiatives focusing on education and awareness are vital. These programs should aim to educate communities about the significance of gender equality and the advantages of women's economic empowerment. By challenging traditional norms and stereotypes, such efforts can lay the groundwork for a more equitable society. Additionally, implementing skill development programs specifically tailored for women is essential. These programs can enhance their professional competencies, making them more competitive in the job market and better equipped to break through barriers to advancement. Moreover, creating supportive work environments is imperative. Employers must foster

inclusivity and provide equal opportunities for career growth. Policies such as flexible work arrangements and childcare support can mitigate the challenges faced by working mothers, enabling them to pursue career progression without sacrificing family responsibilities. Lastly, advocacy and networking play a crucial role. Establishing platforms for women to network, mentor each other, and advocate for their rights can amplify their voices and catalyse collective action toward shattering the glass ceiling. By implementing these multi-faceted strategies, small cities like Jorhat can create pathways for women to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential in the workforce.

Drawing parallels with Kolkata's working women can offer valuable insights into strategies that have proven effective in addressing similar challenges in urban contexts. For example, Kolkata has seen the emergence of women's support groups, mentorship programs, and advocacy campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace. These initiatives could serve as models for adaptation and implementation in smaller cities like Jorhat. By addressing the systemic barriers to women's advancement and fostering an environment conducive to gender equality, Jorhat and similar cities in Assam can unlock the full potential of their female workforce, driving socio-economic development and creating more inclusive societies. But still there are women who end up feeling misunderstood and distressed. Lack of safety prevents women from fully participating in the public life. Thus, providing safety or finding solutions also need to be observed within a framework of rights. Only through this collective effort can women truly access the full range of rights afforded to them as equal citizens. To break down patriarchy in Assamese society, it's important for both men and women to take initiatives. We've got to change the old ways that keep women down, starting from childhood when families teach about dominance and submission. Instead of telling women to just deal with it, they should be encouraged to take charge and solve their own problems. NGOs can spread awareness about women's rights, religious leaders can guide people in the right direction, and most importantly, women need access to education so they can realize their own power and role in society. Although Patriarchy has outgrown the family and deeply affected the society at large but the socialization begins at home. It is because the leader for change comes from strong homes and not from society. As patriarchy negatively affects the womankind, it is a calling of every woman to take accountability to change the system. It is time for mothers to think for themselves whether the patriarchal system has truly been beneficial for them or has it cut their wings that had the power to soar high in the skies of wonderful opportunities. Due to the more nuclear family system, it is now easier for parents to stop encouraging patriarchy at homes as they do not have to fight the thought process of elders now. Both parents should never belittle their daughters for trying to think independently and standing against the unreasonable supremacy of the men in the family. Young girls and boys must be educated in the concepts of gender equality. Every household or outdoor work must be taught and work to be distributed irrespective of gender. Children must be encouraged to take a strong stand against any such practice in their household or work environment that puts them below their gender counterparts. Men also can support it by introspecting their own beliefs and prejudices against women. They need to become more open-minded to accept this change so that men and women can stand on equal grounds and work together to make our country and the world a truly wonderful place. We are the same people that celebrated when P.V. Sindhu won an Olympic medal and marvelled at Kalpana Chawla's space expedition. In the end, however, patriarchy heavily influences our lives, dictating the unfair standards for women and stripping them of their chosen paths. Cases also arise in the family settings where women who give double attention to their jobs and homemaking can experience disrespect and unacknowledged dedication. This bias is imparted from generation to generation, resulting a vicious circle where women are expected to perform

in dual, aspects, yet their contributions are generally invisible. This inequality is not only seen in individuals but it too goes even further to societal structure and women's aspirations are unequally valued. Finally, empowerment means being able to make one's decisions without any coercion, therefore, there should be a tolerance for all women, regardless of the decisions they make.

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