

*Emergence of Women Chefs and their Status in the Hotel  
Industry: A Study with Special Reference to Bengaluru*

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*Abstract: The hotel industry of Bengaluru has seen a remarkable growth providing opportunities for women and men to function as a chef in hotels. However the executive chef population throughout the world are men with over 90%, reflecting on the dominance of males in the position. For women it has been difficult to penetrate a historically male dominated professional kitchen, thus relegating them to the background when employed. Despite the presence of well educated women chefs with enormous skills, their presence in the hotel industry is not truly visible. Hence the need to discern the status of women chefs in the hotel industry of Bengaluru. 60 women chefs working in star categorized hotels, fine dining restaurants and faculty members of hotel management institutions of Bengaluru, Karnataka were the universe of the study and the research design being a descriptive survey. Purposive sampling method was adopted and exploratory data analysis was used in analyzing the data. Research findings indicated that the perceived view of inadequate experience and lack of leadership qualities among women chefs is regarded as a stumbling block for women chefs to operate and progress in a male dominated profession. Women chefs are slowly changing their styles by adopting masculine mannerisms in order to compete with men in attaining leadership position. The reasons for the lack of adequate women executive chefs gives weightage to the perception that the overriding masculine syndrome is the prime cause for this state. The necessity for the women chefs to arrive at a significant work-life balance is of paramount importance. The HR policies of the hotels need to be revisited to strike a healthy balance between women and women chefs in terms of opportunities and career growth.*

*Keywords: Women Chef, Gender Discrimination, Work- Life Balance, Glass Ceiling.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Women in India have witnessed diverse status levels conferred upon them since ages. Indian women have been an integral part of marriage and family which are the oldest and the most basic fundamental form of an institution essential for the existence and functioning of life in an Indian society which enables the formation, sustenance and continuance of the very human beings who constitute the society (Kapur, P. 1975). Apart from women playing a pivotal role in creation; other aspects in time have shaped the women's status in India.

### **Woman and Work in India**

The assertion of Hindu philosophy that a woman is a Sahadharmini, that is one who shares the challenges of life with a man in all his work and helpmate, has remained merely a saying of the scriptures till recently (Kapur, P. 1975). Women of the twenty first century have started feeling and becoming competent of work in every field along with men (Kapur, P. 1975). Today, apart from their homes, all classes of women are discovering a meaning to their lives. With the changing ideals, the Indian Constitution has provided absolute freedom to women in every field of life.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Societal Views of Women and Work

*Leonard Karen, (1979)* brings out that Indian women belonged to a stratified society which were well characterized by the philosophy and adoption of inequality. The ideology of caste envisaged certain privileges and authorizations according to inherent traits, which varied depending upon on the gender and caste of the individual. Segregation of work was based on the caste system initiated after the Vedic era and followed until Independence.

*Hale, Sylvia M., (1989)* brings out that employment of women outside the home and their economic independence threatened the orthodox communal caste status, whereas their professional employment raised the class status of the individual family. She further points out that women in professional employment were segregated into predominately female occupations or specialties and even there males dominated the higher ranks. These women find themselves less likely to get promoted, due to discrimination in the numerous working conditions which restrains women's progress, such as restricted physical mobility due to lack of facilities, threat of sexual assaults and eve teasing are some of the mechanisms that serve to limit gender freedom. In practice, women were commonly stereotyped as less intelligent than men due to the fact that men deem themselves to have a higher capacity for learning and argue women are less competent at work. But it should be noted that women were perceived as weaker and unable to meet the demands of various jobs only because of the various mechanisms which prevented making the jobs and work environment conducive for women to work, which led to this misleading assumption that women were weaker or incapable.

*Uma Shankar Jha et al., (1998)* argues that a persistent feature of Indian society, has been the division of labour based on gender and age. In terms of gender they have made a relevant example of where males are seen as the producers providing material requirements for their women and children. Women are considered as 'consumers' who stayed in their dwellings and executed publically defined roles of cooking and child care. Symons, Michael, (2000) makes similar observations stating that "since the most primitive division of labour, women have conducted whatever remained of domestic production, while men have constructed the political economy. Therefore, the male member of the household has had a bigger responsibility of procuring the products that were further prepared by the women of the household. Though Symons views do not pertain to the Indian context specifically, this gender division theory is an apparent in the Indian context with women and work.

*Kapur, Promilla, (1975)* states that men attended to difficult activities, heavy and arduous tasks that required physical strength, whereas women were expected to perform household –dominated activities, which were relatively less arduous but supplementary and supportive to men. This proof of segregation in work force has been a noticeable feature in the Indian economy even though female empowerment has been an important agenda for the different governments. This is an important aspect which has been an influential cause for restraining women from the culinary profession.

*Ramu G.N. (1989)* points out those terms such as 'womanly duties' 'domestic', 'home maker' or 'housewife' signifies the assigned nature of household work. In effect, women tend to take up professions which are on similar lines of the domestic front (as seen with the housekeeping and front office sections) or on the contrary have such an aversion towards any profession similar to their domestic area that they choose professions away from that such as engineering, law, accountancy and medicine. The inevitable component of the Indian feminine role is domestic duty. It is an article of faith among Indian men and among some women too, that women are naturally endowed to undertake housework. A woman who is not predisposed to cook, clean or raise children is seen as lacking essential wifely attributes. This could be a justification for the lack of women cooking in professional kitchen.

### Women in Professional Kitchen

*Cooper, Ann. (1998)* questions why is it that one of the few traditionally women's arenas, excludes women. Why are there only men in the kitchens? This rather ambiguous question needs to be clarified. Cooking, without a doubt, is traditionally a

women's role but only with regard to the domestic arena. This is an undisputed view, but with retrospect to women cooking as a profession is not traditionally a women's occupation. Evidence reveals, that it has been a male dominated profession for centuries. The few women in the profession show that it is an unquestionable fact that it's been a profession reserved for men and non-traditional for women. Hence it can be concluded that though cooking is viewed as traditional, it is non-traditional when taken up by women as a profession, whereas housekeeping and front office are traditional at the domestic level as well as the professional level.

*Kivlehan, Noella Pio., (2002) portrays that decisions and choices of families are instrumental in making decisions on behalf of their children, especially girls, due to the incorrect attitudes displayed by the children when training. Thus when young girls spoke of difficult experiences while working as interns in a kitchen, parents would often encourage them to leave. Indoctrination of girl students by their teaching faculty that the treatment and hardships that they would face in the kitchen would be disheartening and hence proposing a career in the housekeeping and front office department as it would be more lucrative creates an impression in young minds which dissuades girls from the kitchen domain. The majority of these girls use education as an asset in the marriage market in order to attract and bargain for better suitors as men are lured to prospective wives who are good homemakers and even better cooks! All these combined forces worked against women during their educational years which crumbles their determination in wanting to be chefs.*

### **Overview of Women Chefs**

Cooking is one arena where women have been included and culturally they are expected to cook across the globe. They have been known to provide nourishment by giving warm meals on the table. Researchers have also argued that it is women's biological role to nurture her family with cooking (Woolf 1929). So, it seems that women's dominance will be reflected in professional restaurant kitchen as well, since they already have years of experience their skills in the traditional kitchen will be transferred into the professional field. However, numbers suggest otherwise with only 10% of the executive chefs across the global hold this position. As can be noted by different research scholars, the professional kitchens since long time have been male dominated. The reasons for paucity of women chefs can be traced back to fourteenth and fifteenth century, when during the war time, army was expected to cook (Cooper 1998). This military style hierarchical culture was also observed in the professional kitchen which still exists in the modern day scenario as well. For decades, men have distanced their work in the kitchen to be different from what women do in household kitchens and it is only in the latter half of the twentieth century that women were able to build inroads in the professional kitchens (Cooper 1998).

According to the research, conducted in the past, (Hoobler *et al.* 2011), almost 91% of the entire executive chef population throughout the world are men reflecting on the dominance of males in the position since last two decades from when the hospitality industry have become one of the prime sectors to deliver services. There are few women who have been able to break this barrier and represent themselves as executive chef in the culinary industry. In relation to the position or presence of women in the hotel industry, it can be said that women are overpowering the hospitality sector with their skills and talent in the respective areas (Mackenzie and Chan, 2009). In the developed countries like UK and USA, women are pursuing their professional education and their career in the hotel industry (Diplock *et al.* 2011).

A decade ago, being a chef was not considered to be a best career for women in India, however, with advent of globalization, many women across different cities aspired to work as a chef. However, in Bengaluru, women have seen long hard road and have not been recognized to similar levels as men (Silicon India Report, 2011). There are very few women in Bengaluru, who took their passion of simple cooking to work as a chef making an impact on the culinary industry. However, due to several challenges not many women have been able to continue to reach the pinnacles.

Presently women have a significant participation in the economic sector of the country, participating in every industry, including hotel industry. However, despite their increased participation in the professional world, there has been relatively less

presence of the gender as chef (Konkol, S. 2013). The culinary sector, within the concerned industry is still a male-dominated affair, as has been observed from the above review of literatures; hence the study necessitates it to understand the reason behind such minimal presence (Copper and Ann, 1998). Besides, academically too, studies on the concerned industry are focused towards India, as a whole, reflecting very minimally to this negligible presence of women.

### **Work - Life Balance of Women Chef**

“Work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). According to Clark (2000), work-life balance is the fulfilment of acquiring efficiency at home and at work with minimum conflict of interest.

Participation of women in all forms of profession and in every position of the organization along with the ever increasing numbers of dual earning couples has made work-life balance an important facet in the uninterrupted growth of the organization (Bharat, 2003; Komarraju, 1997; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000; Sekaran, 1992). According to Baral, R and Bargava, S, (2011b), the diversified policies of accommodating the requirements of women employees have enhanced their work comfort and in turn benefitting the organization.

### **Career Progression of Women Chefs**

Swanson & Woitke, (1997) in their study bring out the gap between the abilities and achievements of women besides bringing out their reservations of their career ambitions. Powell (2000) claims that barriers towards career advancement of women chefs describe themselves into two well defined types of being person centric and the other being situation centric. Traits of personality, gap in skills and performances which are void in fitting into a managerial position are person oriented whereas barriers found within the environment may be termed as situation centric. This may lead into providing higher priority to job satisfaction and a balanced work and family life for a women chef against the sole aim of an ultimate career success for a man.

### **Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment of Women Chefs**

Boella (2013) renders that in the context of providing information about the reason behind the shortage of women chefs in the Indian hotel industry, the gender discrimination can be identified as one of the prime reason. It has been evidently observed from decades that, though women perform the household works and cooking with sheer expertise, it is the patriarchal society that nurtures the obstruction that women cannot be as good as men. Women are allowed to exhibit their skills in their personal kitchens, but not in the professional world. On the other hand, in the professional world the male dominated society thinks that women have less skills and talent than men and not deserving enough as men do.

Kingir & Mesci, (2010) reveal that women chefs have to face daily challenges in working with their male counter parts in terms of abusive languages, tormenting remarks, and so on. Hence, it can be realized that discriminating women in the professional world is one of the main reasons that accounts for the shortage of women chefs in the hotel industry

### **Glass Ceiling**

Another significant aspect in this regard that can be mentioned is described through the term glass ceiling which has been considered as an invisible barrier in the path of enhancing the career of women chefs in the hotel industry (Diplock, et al. 2011). The term glass ceiling can be described in the context of position of women chefs in the hotel industry. It is an invisible barrier that prevents women to get the deserved position despite possessing the requisite talent and skills. It is also widely believed that women are not able to possess the quality that can beat their male counterpart. As a result women chefs easily get disheartened and tired of fighting for their deserved place in the organizational structure (Cohen & Huffman, 2007).

It can be realized that the challenges that women chefs face in their routine life can be considered as the reason that effects their decision in getting involved in the hotel industry that beholds large scopes for women in the modern era. Besides, it can

also be depicted that women now a days have located strategies to overcome such difficulties and shine with their own brightness in the professional world rather than living in a patriarchal society (Feature, 2011).

### III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The hotel industry of Bengaluru is witnessing an exponential growth resulting into enormous job opportunities for many young women chefs. Burke, (2015) in his study finds that many women chefs are not burdened with domestic responsibilities thereby enabling them to take up the jobs in the kitchen, unless both the partners are employed. Despite the availability of resources, the hotel industry in Bengaluru has a miniscule presence of women chefs. This anomaly necessitates studying the current status of women chefs in Bengaluru city.

### IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The phenomenal growth of Bengaluru hotel industry provides immense employment opportunities but the poor visibility of women chefs inspires the researcher to study their status.

### V. OBJECTIVES

To highlight on the emergence and status of women chefs in the hotel industry of Bengaluru.

### VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Women chefs working in star categorized hotels, fine dining restaurants and faculty members of hotel management institutions of Bengaluru, Karnataka were the universe of the study, the unit of study being woman chefs in the age group of 21-60 and the population being 60. Descriptive survey was adopted as the research design. The sampling framework for the case study consisted of 12 senior level chefs with more than ten years of experience and 48 entry to middle management level chefs with a minimum of one year service, all possessing a degree or diploma in hotel management, to gain insights and to determine the relationship of multiple factors concerning the status of women chefs in the hotel industry of Bengaluru. Purposive sampling method was adopted and 60 women chefs were selected from 40 star categorized hotels and 10 fine dining restaurants of Bengaluru for this study. Exploratory data analysis was used in analyzing the data.

### VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Response rate

The researcher identified 60 women chefs from various service levels for the interview but the final respondents who participated in the interview were only 51 which indicates an overall response rate of 85%. The respondents provided their age, marital status, type of hotels employed and their positions within the hotels.

#### Age and Job Positions of Women Chefs

**Table 1: Distribution of Women Chefs by Age and Job Positions**

Category of Job Positions of Chefs	Age in Years				Total No. of Women Chefs	Total % of Women Chefs
	21 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	51 to 60		
Senior Level Chefs with greater than 10 years of experience	-	-	7	3	10	19.61
Middle Level Chefs with 4 to 9 years of experience	12	10	4	-	26	50.98
Entry Level Chefs with 1 to 3 years of experience	15	-	-	-	15	29.41

The age of respondents reflected in Table 1 reveals that majority of the respondents are in the age group of 21 to 30 (52.94%) followed by 31 to 40 (19.61%) and 41 to 60 (27.45%) reflecting that 72.55% of the respondents are fairly young

being in the age group of 21 to 40 years. Similarly progressive decrease of women chefs is observed from the entry to senior level.

### Marital Status of Women Chefs

**Table 2: Distribution of Marital Status of Women Chefs**

Category	No. of Women Chefs	Total % of Women Chefs
Single	32	62.75
Married	15	29.41
Others (Single, Divorcee)	04	7.84

In terms of marital status as reflected in, more than half of the respondents are single (62.75%), while 29.41% of them are married and 7.84% of them were either single or a divorcee as seen from Table 2. On probing it was found that over 95% of the married chefs below 35 years of age were unable to cope up with their job and repent having been married.

### Work-Life Balance of Women Chefs

The necessity for the women chefs to strike a healthy work-life balance is of paramount importance and it is the joint responsibility of the employer and the employees to ensure such a healthy balance that would ensure outstanding results to the employee and the hotel industry.

### Career Progression of Women Chefs

The perceived view of inadequate experience and lack of leadership qualities among women chefs is a stumbling block for women chefs to operate and progress in a male dominated profession. Moreover the position of executive chefs being only one in the kitchen the opportunity for a women to climb the ladder becomes extremely difficult. Ambiguous responsibility and lack of decision making powers are also factors that prevent the rise of women chefs to the top which is unlikely without the indiscrete support of the management.

### Organization Culture and Gender Discrimination

A miniscule presence or absence of women chefs in the senior management positions has generally been witnessed in the hotel industry giving rise to the perceived feeling that organization culture is predominantly masculine. There are also instances where normal day to day casual interactions unconsciously accrue over a period of time leading to professional decisions adversely impacting women chefs. The reasons for the lack of adequate women executive chefs gives weightage to the perception that the overriding masculine syndrome is the prime cause for this state. Besides, lack of mentors at senior levels hampers the growth of women chefs.

### Glass Ceiling

Women chefs in most hotels have overcome their desire and efforts in changing the work place environment in being unbiased and favorable. Considering their plight of dual management of profession and family, they find it difficult in entering into a confronting situation in changing the prevalent bias. On the contrary women chefs are slowly changing their styles by adopting masculine mannerisms in order to compete with men in attaining leadership position. Those who cannot adapt to this new masculine culture tend to leave the hotel industry and being independent by opting to be an entrepreneur to successfully continue their dreams and passion.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overcoming marginalization of women chefs through stringent policy implementation, flexibility in working hours and a considerate approach, ensuring mentoring for providing a positive direction, provision of a work environment free of sexual harassment and devoid of discrimination are of paramount importance for the management to act upon.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

Women chefs are gradually increasing with eye catching contributions in the hotel industry. Considering the requirements of a balanced work life for a women chef to be successful in the professional kitchen and home care, the management of the hotel industry need to assess the situation in the right perspective and formulate appropriate policies. The tendency of the management to discreetly overlook women chefs in providing career opportunities and responsibilities besides their reluctance in nominating them as executive chefs need to undergo a change. In fine the status of women chefs is not pleasant which is the prime reason for the poor visibility of women chefs.

**X. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is limited to Bengaluru and not inclusive of the participation and sampling of male chefs which are important to obtain a different dimension of the status of women chefs.

**XI. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

A Comparative study of chefs of both the genders would provide a pragmatic perception into the current status of women chefs in the hotel industry.

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