



Prison of patriarchy

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Highlights

- Last week Ram Kadam, a BJP MLA from Maharashtra, told the men in an audience that if they were interested in women who didn't reciprocate the feeling, he would help kidnap the women, so they could marry.
- While the video of this speech provoked outrage when it leaked on social media, the truth is that Mr. Kadam was only describing in crude terms the reality of marriage for a large percentage of Indian women, where usually the preferred form of spousal captivity is financial.

Marriage being the career stopper

- Marriage is a career stopper for the majority of Indian women and this cultural abhorrence towards women working is a not-so-subtle way of ensuring that the escape routes out of a marriage are minimised, if not entirely closed.

Reasons of Low Workforce Participation

- India's female workforce participation is among the lowest in the world.
- The Economic Survey 2017-18 revealed that women comprise only 24% of the Indian workforce.
- In fact, as India grows economically, the number of women in workplaces is declining steadily.
- This, even though the enrolment of girls in higher education courses is growing steadily — to 46% in 2014 from 39% in 2007.
- In India's leaking pipeline of women employees, the first and most significant drop-off point is between the junior and middle management levels.
- A survey by Catalyst, a management consultancy firm, pegged this number at a whopping 50%, compared to 29% in other Asian economies.
- When plotted against life milestones, this often corresponds to the time women choose to get married.
- The cultural baggage about women working outside the home is so strong that in most traditional Indian families, quitting work is a necessary precondition to the wedding itself.
- Also, counter-intuitively, this phenomenon is far more significant in higher income demographics, implying that the richer the family is, lower the chances that they allow women to pursue a career.
- In low-income families, economic pressure sometimes trumps social stigma.
- Childbirth and taking care of elderly parents or in-laws account for the subsequent points where women drop off the employment pipeline.

- On the macroeconomic level, this suggests that we're giving up on a 27% boost to the country's GDP.
- At the individual level, without any recourse to financial means, women stay tethered to the family. Ending a marriage is such a daunting task — socially and legally — that even the thought of embarking on it without financial independence is terrifying.
- The Supreme Court has set a benchmark of 25% of a husband's net salary as a "just and proper" amount for alimony, leaving divorced women with full custody of the children at a quarter of the family income.

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