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## **BREAKING BARRIERS: EXPLORING WOMEN'S IDENTITIES AND CHALLENGES AROUND WORK THROUGH PHOTOS AND REPORTS IN DELHI NCR**

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BREAKING BARRIERS: EXPLORING WOMEN'S IDENTITIES AND CHALLENGES  
AROUND WORK THROUGH PHOTOS AND REPORTS IN DELHI NCR

by

Sonal Amy Vij

M. A. Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi, 2012

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science

School of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
August 2023

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**RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL**

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Professional Media and Media Management Studies

Approved by:

Professor Julia Rendleman, Chair

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
April 19, 2023

## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF**

Sonal Amy Vij, for the Master of Science degree in Professional Media and Media Management Studies, presented on April 19, 2023 at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

**TITLE: BREAKING BARRIERS: EXPLORING WOMEN'S IDENTITIES AND CHALLENGES AROUND WORK THROUGH PHOTOS AND REPORTS IN DELHI NCR**

**MAJOR PROFESSOR:** Professor Julia Rendleman

This paper explores the relationships between women and their work in India's Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). Using a journalistic ethnographic research approach, the study examines women's experiences from different socioeconomic backgrounds, professions, and castes. The research aims to understand the complex dynamics of female relationships at work, focusing on how women negotiate and resist patriarchal structures. The research uses participant observational techniques and involves spending time with the participants in their workplaces, observing their interactions, capturing them on camera, and conducting semi-structured interviews.

The data is analyzed thematically to identify the patterns and themes that emerge from the participants' experiences. The findings suggest that women at work in the National Capital Region of India experience a range of patriarchal nuances. The study also highlights the role of intersectionality in shaping women's experiences and the importance of creating spaces that support women's empowerment and encourage interrelationships. The research paper concludes by suggesting that men in their lives can play a crucial role in creating supportive environments for women to pursue their careers. Certain patterns emerge that indicate why certain women are empowered; some are yet to be empowered. The study emphasizes the need for future research to explore the interrelationships among women, work in other contexts and develop interventions that support women's empowerment.

*Keywords:* Women, Work, India, Delhi, National Capital Region, Socioeconomic backgrounds, Professions, Patriarchal structures, Participant observation, Semi-structured interviews, Intersectionality, Empowerment, Supportive environments, Male support, Patterns, Themes, Journalism, Ethnography, Research

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## **DEDICATION**

The researcher wants to take a moment to dedicate this research paper to all those who have played a significant role in her journey toward its completion. Firstly, the researcher would like to thank those who supported her throughout this process. Your unwavering encouragement, guidance, and support were invaluable, and the researcher could not have accomplished this without your help.

Secondly, the researcher wants to thank those who have pulled her down along the way. Although their actions were disheartening, they have taught her invaluable lessons that have shaped who the researcher is today. Their criticism and negativity pushed the researcher to work harder and strive for excellence.

Therefore, this research paper is dedicated to both her supporters and detractors alike. Each of you has played a crucial role in shaping the researcher's academic and personal growth; the researcher is genuinely grateful. Thank you.

## PREFACE

The present research paper, "Breaking Barriers: Exploring Women's Identities and Challenges Around Work Through Photos and Reports in Delhi NCR" is the result of extensive research examining the complex challenges women face at work in Delhi, NCR, India. The study aims to visually produce, report and analyze the factors that contribute to the low representation of women in the workforce, the gendered nature of work, and the experiences of women in different occupations in Delhi NCR, India. The project seeks to understand the complex dynamics of gender and work and contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender and work globally.

Throughout the research process, this research has received invaluable support and guidance from Professor Julia Rendleman, whose expertise and insights have been instrumental in shaping this work. The researcher also wants to express my gratitude to Professor Jan Thompson and Professor Kavita Karan for their valuable feedback and suggestions that have significantly improved the quality of this research paper.

The researcher would like to thank all participants who generously shared their experiences and insights with me, without whom this project would not have been possible. Their openness and willingness to share their experiences have provided invaluable insights into the complex and multifaceted issues women face.

Thank you to the researcher's family, friends, and staff members at Southern Illinois University who have supported her throughout this academic journey. Their love and encouragement have been a constant source of motivation, and their unwavering belief in the researcher has been instrumental in helping the researcher overcome the challenges and obstacles the researcher faced during this research.

Lastly, this research paper will contribute to the existing knowledge and understanding of women and work and serve as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to promote gender equality in society.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"-- *Simone de Beauvoir*

According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949), biological, psychological, and intellectual differences do not figure into femininity. In reality, femininity is a modern construction of civilization arising not from fundamental differences between men and women but from differences in the circumstances in which they live. A person's character is determined by their situation, not the other way around. A woman's upbringing gradually shapes her; she is not born fully formed. A woman learns her role from society and other men - biology does not determine what makes her a woman. The external world conspires to make a woman passive, second-class, and unimportant, but she is not born this way. Individuals are entitled to subjectivity regardless of gender; only outside forces have robbed women of this right. It is important to chronicle the struggles and wins of women.

Why choose Photography? One needs a medium to represent changing social constructions like femininity, masculinity, and other alternate multifaceted identity characteristics.

Photography can play a vital role in the representation of these. Every person with a mobile phone is a person with a still and movie camera. Never before, the access to images has been so easy. Photography, "especially now, with its overarching presence" (Vij, 2021, p.1 ) on the internet, "on social media platforms" (p. 1) like Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok, and YouTube, has a global audience. These photographs are important in "shaping cultural ideologies and playing a significant role in representations." (p.1) Also, Photography "constitutes a vantage point to analyze the elaboration and diffusion of an ideological position concerning how social relations and political problems are defined. It also gives the scholar an insight into

the production and transformation of dominant perspectives that circulate in society. In particular, Photography becomes a site of the construction of cultural and gender identities."

(p.1)

India remains a society deeply entrenched in patriarchal and conservative beliefs. Unfortunately, violence against women and girls is all too common. Women are discouraged from pursuing work outside the home. Shockingly, according to the last Census, women only make up 11% of Delhi's workforce, marking the lowest rate of female workforce participation in the country (Chowdhury, 2023).

Empowering women and building a stronger nation is the essence of female employment in India. With a population of over 1.3 billion, India holds a vast pool of talent and potential, and unlocking it requires breaking down the barriers that prevent women from entering the workforce. Creswell & Poth (2018) write, "India ranked 140 among 156 countries on Global Gender Gap Index in 2021, and India dropped 28 places from 2020." This report indicates enough of the country's glaring inequalities. This patriarchal system is reflected in various aspects of society, including— gender roles and expectations; the subdued role of women; education and employment; violence and criminal acts, and lack of education.

In conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that femininity is a construct of society is still relevant today. Women's experiences are shaped by the circumstances in which they live, not by inherent biological differences. Photography, as a medium, has the potential to challenge these societal constructions and provide a platform to document the struggles and wins of women. In India, where patriarchal systems are deeply entrenched, empowering women through employment is essential for building a stronger and more equal society. However, with a low rate of female workforce participation and gender inequality, it is clear that more needs to be done to

break down barriers and create opportunities for women. Through research and documentation, such as photography and reports, one can continue to shed light on these issues and work towards a more equitable future.

Through interviews and photographs, this research aims to understand how gender-based stereotypes, patriarchy, and discrimination impact women's identities as working women and their experiences in Delhi NCR.

### **Objectives**

- To study the barriers women face in terms of work and employment in Delhi NCR
- To study the relationship between women, their work, and their family/patriarchal systems
- To analyze what strategies worked well for women to succeed at work
- To analyze what strategies did not work well for women to succeed at work

### **Operationalizing**

Empowerment can be defined as a multifaceted process that involves individuals making their own choices, gaining financial independence, breaking gender stereotypes, and demonstrating resilience and determination. This includes personal preference, financial independence, breaking gender stereotypes, and resilience and determination. Empowerment involves an individual's ability to take control of their lives, access and control resources, challenge societal norms and gender roles, and persist in the face of challenges.



## CHAPTER 2

### BREAKING THE BARRIERS: CHALLENGES AROUND WORK

The topic of women and work in India is a multifaceted and complex issue that has far-reaching implications for women's empowerment and participation in society. Deeply ingrained cultural norms and values shape patriarchal expectations that limit women's access to education and employment opportunities, perpetuate gender-based violence, and hinder their safety and mobility in public spaces. (Grant, 2023). The protection of honor is often prioritized over women's careers and independence, and religious values play a significant role in shaping cultural practices that can have harmful consequences for women.

The caste system has been a prominent feature of Indian society for centuries, dividing people into different social classes based on birth. The Brahmins occupy the highest caste, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The lowest caste is occupied by the Dalits, who are also known as the "untouchables" (Dirks, 2001). The caste system has significantly impacted the social, economic, and political aspects of Indian society. Despite being officially abolished in India in 1950, it persists in various forms, and the lower castes continue to face discrimination and exploitation. A study conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation in 2012 revealed that the average monthly income of a Brahmin was almost double that of a Dalit (NSSO, 2014). Furthermore, the 2019 National Crime Records Bureau report revealed that crimes against Dalits increased by 7.3%, highlighting the continued marginalization of lower castes in India (The Hindu, 2020). In conclusion, the caste system remains a significant social issue in India, and its eradication remains challenging for the country's policymakers and civil society. The challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities, accessing childcare, and combating gender-based violence highlight the need for continued efforts toward

gender equality in India. Achieving this goal requires significant changes in cultural norms and values, greater access to education and employment opportunities, and more robust protection for women's rights.

### **Gender Roles**

Traditional gender norms strongly influence work-family responsibilities, with men often viewed as breadwinners and women as homemakers. These stereotypes have a lasting impact on women's career advancement opportunities, as patriarchal expectations shape managerial behavior and occupational outlooks in the workplace. As a result, women continue to face significant barriers to achieving professional success. (Calvo-Salguero et al., 2011; Uddin, 2021; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Mitchell et al., 2022 noted that:

“Many Indians express egalitarian views toward some gender roles in the home. For instance, 62% of adults say both men and women should be responsible for taking care of children. But traditional gender norms still hold sway among large segments of the population: Roughly a third of adults (34%) feel that child care should be handled primarily by women.” (p.3)

Despite progress toward gender equality in recent years, traditional gender norms continue to shape attitudes and behaviors in Indian society.

"Indians tend to say men should have more prominent roles than women. About nine-in-ten Indians agree with the notion that a wife must always obey her husband, including nearly two-thirds who *completely* agree with this sentiment." (p.3)

### **Childcare and Housework**

A significant proportion of women in India face challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, with many opting out of their jobs due to maternity and childcare issues,

spouse relocation, long working hours, and other factors. A Times of India report (2015) noted:

"37 percent of women opt out of their job due to maternity childcare issues and 18 percent due to spouse relocation, followed by nine percent due to long working hours, organizational politics and marriage." (p.1)

Indian men spend very little time on unpaid housework, which places a more significant burden on women and limits their ability to pursue paid work. While there is a lack of recent data on this issue, it is clear that domestic work and childcare remain significant barriers to women's participation in the workforce. Rukmani (2019) noted that:

"According to International Labor Organization data, Indian men shoulder less than 10% of the burden of unpaid housework in terms of time spent (an average of 31 minutes), among the lowest in the world. However, that comparison is based on India's last time-use survey, which was in 1998-99, and there is no more recent comparable data. Other, more recent data sources buttress the fact that domestic work and childcare still restrict women from taking up paid work." (p.5)

Patriarchy in India can also be seen in women's unequal access to education and employment opportunities. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, women in India still face significant barriers to accessing education and employment, limiting their ability to achieve financial independence and participate fully in society. International Growth Centre (2021) noted:

"In India, 39.4% of adolescent girls (15-18) are not attending school. A drop in enrolment is especially pronounced at puberty, during the transition to secondary schooling. There is a multitude of factors deterring girls from pursuing secondary education – the expectation to help out with the household chores and look after

younger siblings, low familial aspirations from a girl's education, the norm of getting her married early, lack of toilets, and threats to safety in and on the way to school.” (p. 4)

Education is valued more than ever in Indian society. "Education means empowerment and a threat to the ongoing male dominance" (Vij, 2021, p. 1), so many men attack women's decision to acquire education and ultimately go to work. “It's not very manly if their wife contributes to the family income.” (Akhina Hansraj in Mazumdar & Chaudhary, 2022, p. 6). They want to create this dependency. “People believe if women get educated, they might work and become financially independent, and then they may not obey and respect the family.” (Mazumdar & Chaudhary, 2022, p. 18)

However, access to this education is a battle in itself. According to Sharma (2021):

“...girls not only have to struggle against social norms and prejudices, and risk their safety, in their pursuit of education but also have to spend more money to do so. In the reality of families with limited means and social preference for sons, cycles to school or safer routes to college might prove to be more expensive and harder to secure than their actual cost.”  
(p. 12)

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in many societies, and India is no exception. As Asian Human Rights Commission (2007) wrote:

“Criminal acts, like verbal, emotional, and physical abuse of women within the home, is not considered a crime in the state. Even courts reject complaints filed by women complainants on the grounds that a woman has no right to complain, particularly if the complaint is against her husband or any other relative. This situation gives a handle to criminals abusing women.”  
(p. 4)

Thus, gender roles and expectations in India are complex and deeply rooted in traditional cultural norms and values. Despite some expressions of egalitarian views, conventional gender norms still hold sway among a significant segment of the population. Women face numerous barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities, limiting their ability to achieve financial independence and participate fully in society. Gender-based violence is pervasive in Indian culture, and women's complaints are often dismissed, leaving them vulnerable to further abuse.

Patriarchy also plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward women's education and employment, with many men viewing women's empowerment as a threat to their dominance. These challenges highlight the need for continued efforts toward gender equality in India, including changes in cultural norms and values, access to education and employment, and greater protection against gender-based violence.

### **Honor**

Many women are not allowed to do night shifts or venture out late at night in Delhi NCR in an attempt to protect “honor”. The concept of "honor" in the context of a woman's behavior and actions is deeply ingrained in Indian culture. It is linked to ideas of purity, modesty, and respectability, with women expected to uphold these virtues to maintain the honor of their families and communities. The concept of honor is often associated with a woman's sexual behavior, with any deviation from expected norms considered a threat to her and her family's honor (Agarwal, 1994). Delhi has often been called the rape capital of the world. "Delhi saw a more than 40 percent rise in crimes against women in 2021 compared to 2020, with two girls being raped every day last year in the national capital, making it the most unsafe metropolitan city for women in India, according to National Crime Records Bureau data." (Rao, 2022, p.1).

The honor of a family resides in the body of a woman, and men must protect this honor, be it at the cost of a woman's career or independence. "Virginity is highly valued in Indian society; especially, women are expected to be virgins before their marriage. Confirmation and violation of social norms regarding virginity status bring both rewards and punishments. Sexually active unmarried women are bullied and may lose their social status. Their families are also frowned upon." (Ezaz, 2022, p.1154) Therefore, most families do their best to protect their/the woman's honor.

Religious values play a significant role in shaping cultural practices and customs, including the practice of honor crimes, which are often associated with religious contexts. In patriarchal societies, women's bodies and sexuality are seen as the source of honor. Men are expected to protect this honor and control female activities related to marriage, sexuality, or love. (Atakav, 2015)

According to a recent report, "A female passenger in a public bus was found bleeding from her thighs, and her fellow passengers took her to hospital. At the hospital, the doctors who examined the lady found that she was wearing a chastity belt. The lady was bleeding from the injuries caused by wearing the belt." (Asian Human Rights Commission, 2007, p.1 ). Thus, even now, a woman is supposed to preserve her chastity, and the measures cited above are dangerous not only emotionally but also physically.

Thus, protecting women's honor is deeply ingrained in Indian society and often comes at the cost of their careers and independence. Unfortunately, this mindset has contributed to the prevalence of violence against women in Delhi NCR, where women are not allowed to do night shifts or venture out late at night. The rise in crimes against women in Delhi in 2021 underscores the need for cultural change and more excellent protection for women's rights. Religious values

also play a significant role in shaping cultural practices, including the practice of honor crimes, which are often associated with religious contexts. However, the protection of honor can have harmful consequences for women, as seen in the example of the woman wearing a chastity belt, highlighting the need for greater awareness and advocacy for women's rights in India.

### **Safety**

The perceived threats to safety hinder the entry of women into the labor market. These threats become more severe with the increasing entrenchment and internalization of patriarchal norms. According to Chakraborty et al.'s research (2017), women are less inclined to work in areas with a higher risk of harassment. When deciding to work outside their homes, they face a dilemma between the opportunity cost of the wage and the social cost of harassment, stigma and defying societal expectations. (Rukmini, 2019). As per Sundholm (2013):

“A survey by UN Women findings have revealed that 95% of women aged 16-49 years feel unsafe in the public spaces of the national capital city of Delhi. In order to avoid the psychological burden of being harassed and retain their sense of safety, women incur additional economic costs such as hiring a private vehicle or taking a safer (but more expensive) mode of public transport (such as metros over buses), not going out alone at certain times, or even not going out at all.” (p.1)

Female students at Delhi University are willing to attend lower-ranked colleges on safer routes, pay almost double the yearly tuition fee of men, and travel an additional 40 minutes for safety, which results in the economic cost of attaining human capital. This tradeoff shows that women with high potential are sacrificing their futures and the country's future due to the fear of harassment and safety risks. Patriarchy and competition for limited resources also make it harder for women to access available resources, further restricting their mobility (Sharma, 2021),

In conclusion, complex gender roles and expectations deeply rooted in traditional cultural norms and values hinder women's progress towards achieving financial independence and participating fully in Indian society. Women face significant barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities, including limited access to childcare, gender-based violence, and patriarchal attitudes towards women's empowerment. Women's safety is also a crucial issue in India, with high levels of perceived threats and incidents of harassment. Protecting women's honor is deeply ingrained in Indian society and often comes at the cost of their careers and independence. Cultural change and greater protection for women's rights are necessary to address these challenges and empower women to contribute fully to India's future.



## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of women in society is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been the subject of much research and debate. While progress has been made in recent years, women still face significant barriers to achieving full equality and empowerment. This literature review explores various aspects of women's experiences in society, including gender bias and discrimination, work-life balance, intersectionality, and women's role in society. The review draws on various sources, including academic literature, photojournalism projects, and surveys, to highlight women's challenges and opportunities in contemporary society. Overall, the review emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression women face in getting empowered.

Susan Sontag's book "On Photography" (1977) explores the relationship between photography and society, including the portrayal of women in photographs. She argues that photographs of women are often objectifying and reinforce gender stereotypes. Sontag writes, "The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. The painter's way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on canvas or paper. Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing" (Sontag, 1977, p. 3).

Concerning women, Sontag argues that photographs often emphasize women's physical appearance over their accomplishments or personalities. She writes, "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by knowing them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (Sontag, 1977, p. 14). Sontag's analysis highlights the power dynamic inherent in photography and the potential for

images to reinforce, document, and challenge societal norms.

Gender bias and discrimination are still prevalent in the workplace, which affects women's opportunities and experiences. In the photojournalism project titled "Women at Work" by Mary F. Calvert (Beaudry, 1993), the photographer highlights the challenges faced by women in male-dominated industries such as mining and firefighting. The photos depict women often not given equal opportunities and facing gender discrimination, leading to a hostile work environment.

Gender inequality at work is a persistent problem, despite progress made in the past few decades. Studies suggest that women still face significant barriers to accessing equal opportunities, equal pay, and equal treatment in the workplace (Moss-Racusin et al., 2014; Budig & England, 2001). Research also shows that women are often undervalued and underrepresented in leadership roles, which can lead to further marginalization and discrimination.

The issue of work-life balance is another critical factor affecting women at work. In her project "A Mother's Job," photographer Elinor Carucci portrays the challenges working mothers face in balancing their professional and personal lives (Carucci, n.d.). The photographs show women struggling to balance the demands of their work and their responsibilities at home, leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Intersectionality is an important concept that recognizes the multiple and intersecting identities that individuals possess and how these identities can affect their experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality has been used to understand the experiences of women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities, among others. Research shows that women who experience multiple forms of oppression are often at a greater disadvantage in the workplace (Catalyst, 2019), and that addressing intersectionality is crucial for achieving women's liberation at work.

The experiences of women in the workforce are not homogenous, and the intersectionality of gender with race, class, and sexuality needs to be considered. In the project "Women of Power" by Lelanie Foster, the photographer highlights the experiences of women of color in leadership positions (Binaev, 2019). The photographs showcase these women's challenges due to their gender and racial identities, such as being overlooked for promotions and stereotyped.

A recent study conducted in India found that women who work are more empowered than those who do not believe in work, home, and freedom. The study also revealed that women aged 51 and above are the most empowered, while those aged 20-35 are the least empowered. For single women, parents play a significant role in household decisions, while for married women living in joint families, in-laws have more influence. Married women have more empowerment at home, but single women have more freedom at work due to fewer restrictions (Menon et al., 2020).

Women's empowerment and liberation have been central goals of feminist movements, and the workplace is a key arena for achieving these goals. Research has shown that women's empowerment and liberation can have positive effects not only for women themselves but for their families and communities as well (Duvvury et al., 2013).

The Pew Research Center surveyed 15 countries to understand the views on women's role in society. The results showed that most people believe women should have the same rights as men in education and employment. However, significant numbers of people think that women should prioritize their traditional roles as wives and mothers over their careers. The survey also revealed differences in views based on factors such as gender, age, education, and religion. The findings indicate that attitudes toward women's societal role are complex and vary widely across different cultures and contexts (Mitchell, 2022).

Thus, this literature review has highlighted the complexity and diversity of women's societal experiences, particularly around patriarchy. Despite progress in recent years, gender bias, discrimination, and inequality continue to pose significant challenges to achieving full equality and empowerment for women. Research has also highlighted the importance of addressing intersectionality and recognizing the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that women face.

The literature review has also emphasized the potential for photography and other visual media to challenge harmful stereotypes and empower women through positive representation and advocacy. However, there remains a need for further research and action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in society, particularly in underrepresented areas such as the Delhi NCR region in India.

This is where the proposed project, " Breaking Barriers: Exploring Women's Identities and Challenges Around Work Through Photos and Reports in Delhi NCR," becomes crucial. The project aims to explore and document women's experiences in the Delhi NCR region through photography and written reports, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities facing women in this understudied area. By providing a platform for women's voices to be heard and their experiences to be shared, the project seeks to promote greater understanding and awareness of gender issues in the region and to contribute to ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the ongoing challenges and opportunities facing women in society, particularly in the workplace. It emphasizes the importance of addressing intersectionality and recognizing the diverse and intersecting forms of oppression women face. The proposed project, " Breaking Barriers: Exploring Women's Identities and

Challenges Around Work Through Photos and Reports in Delhi NCR," represents an important and timely initiative to promote greater understanding and awareness of gender issues in underrepresented area research.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

In this research project, the researcher aimed to explore women's experiences from diverse backgrounds and professions. The chapter describes the data collection process, including reaching out to community centers, attending meetings and events, and organizing focus groups to gain insight into the challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds. The researcher selected twenty women from different backgrounds using purposive sampling to ensure that the research included diverse perspectives and experiences. However, after conducting the interviews, the researcher decided to have only ten participants whose stories aligned with the project's research question or objectives and could provide rich and detailed data.

The chapter also provides an overview of the qualitative research methods used in this project, including thick description, case studies, and ethnography. Thick description allowed the researcher to understand cultural practices and symbols in their social and historical context. At the same time, case studies provide a detailed analysis of specific behavior or events. Ethnography enabled the researcher to systematically study cultural phenomena and social interactions by observing and interacting with individuals within a particular group or community. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding individuals' or groups' subjective experiences, perspectives, and behaviors within a specific context, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

#### **Process**

The researcher knew that she wanted to explore the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and professions for her research project. She wanted to ensure that the women she chose to feature in her project were representative of different classes, castes, religions, and

professions. She started her research process by reaching out to community centers that worked with women from marginalized communities. She attended meetings and events and even organized a few focus groups to gain insight into the challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds.

Through these interactions, the researcher was able to identify a few potential participants for her research project. She also relied on her personal network and recommendations from friends and colleagues to find more women to include in her project. After conducting extensive research and connecting with potential participants, she selected twenty women from different backgrounds to feature in her project. These women came from various castes, classes, and professions, including a maid, a masseuse, a journalist, a makeup artist, and an educator.

The researcher carefully crafted interview questions to ensure that she was able to capture each woman's unique experiences and challenges. She also used purposive sampling to ensure that she was able to gather a range of perspectives and insights from women belonging to different backgrounds. After conducting the interviews, the researcher decided that some participants needed to meet the inclusion criteria for the project. The researcher found that some participants' stories did not align with the project's research question or objectives or that some participants needed to provide the rich and detailed data that the researcher was seeking.

Over a few weeks, the researcher interviewed each woman, collecting their stories and experiences. She also took photographs of them at their workplaces and homes, capturing their daily lives and routines. Through her research, she was able to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by women from different backgrounds and the barriers they face in achieving empowerment. She hopes that her project will serve as a platform to amplify the voices of these women and inspire others to break barriers and challenge stereotypes.

Ultimately, the decision to include only 10 participants in the final project likely reflects the researcher's effort to select the most relevant and representative cases for the research question and objectives while also ensuring that the project provides a nuanced and detailed understanding of the topic at hand.

### **Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selects participants based on their knowledge, expertise, or other specific characteristics relevant to the research question or objectives. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to select participants who can provide in-depth information about the phenomenon of interest. Similarly, Creswell (2014) notes that purposive sampling is useful when the researcher wants to focus on a particular group or subgroup of individuals who can provide unique and valuable insights into the research problem. Purposive sampling is a valuable technique for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to select participants who are most relevant to the research question and can provide rich and detailed data.

In order to find case studies that show diversity in caste, class, and religion, the researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research question. In this case, the researcher wanted to select participants who represent a range of caste, class, and religious backgrounds. The researcher did this by identifying organizations or communities that are known to be diverse in these respects and reaching out to potential participants within these groups. The researcher also asked initial participants to refer other potential participants who fit the criteria. By using purposive sampling, the researcher could ensure that the research includes a diverse range



of perspectives and experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of women's identities and challenges around work in Delhi NCR.

### **Thick description**

Thick description is a method of cultural interpretation developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) that emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural practices and symbols in their social and historical context. The method involves moving beyond surface-level descriptions of cultural phenomena to uncover their deeper cultural meanings and significance.

As Geertz writes, "The aim of thick description is to provide an account of the meaning of an action that is so complete that one could infer from it. " (Geertz, 1973, p. 10). By examining the cultural context of a phenomenon, thick description seeks to uncover the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that underpin it.

Thick description has been widely used in anthropology and other social sciences to study a range of cultural practices and phenomena, including language use, rituals, and social interactions (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). The method has been particularly useful for understanding complex social phenomena and how they are interpreted and understood by different cultural groups.

Despite its popularity, thick description has also been the subject of criticism. Some scholars have argued that the method is too subjective and reliant on interpretation (Bailey, 1994), while others have noted that it can be resource-intensive and time-consuming (Kirsch, 2010).

Nevertheless, the thick description remains a valuable and widely used method for cultural interpretation. Providing a detailed and context-specific account of cultural practices and symbols, allows researchers to better understand the cultural context in which they occur and the

meanings they hold for different cultural groups.

### **Case study**

Case study methodology is a research approach that involves in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). It is used in various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, and business to gather detailed information about a complex and specific problem or issue (Merriam, 2009). Case study methodology comprehensively explains the problem, its causes, and potential solutions.

There are different types of case study methods such as exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, and instrumental (Stake, 2006). The choice of method depends on the research question, the type of data needed, and the availability of resources. Case study methodology involves multiple sources of data collection such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data is analyzed using various techniques such as coding, pattern recognition, and narrative analysis.

One of the strengths of case study methodology is that it allows researchers to obtain rich and detailed data that can provide insight into the complexity of real-life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It also allows for exploring multiple perspectives and examining the context in which the phenomenon occurs. However, the generalizability of case study findings may be limited due to the small sample size and the specificity of the case.

### **Ethnography**

Ethnography is a research method that systematically studies cultural phenomena and social interactions by observing and interacting with individuals within a particular group or community (Moustakas, 1994). According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), ethnography is a qualitative research method that emphasizes the importance of understanding a particular

culture from the perspective of the people being studied. Ethnographers typically use techniques like participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to collect data on cultural practices, beliefs, and values (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Ethnography has also been used to study various industries' organizational cultures and work practices. For example, an ethnographic study by Bate and colleagues (2008) examined the role of leadership in a UK hospital trust. The study found that the organization's culture was characterized by power struggles, mistrust, and a lack of communication, which negatively impacted the quality of patient care.

One of the critical strengths of ethnography is its ability to provide a rich and detailed account of cultural practices and experiences from the perspective of the people being studied (Pink, 2019). Ethnography can also uncover hidden aspects of culture that may not be apparent through other research methods. However, ethnography has also been criticized for its potential for researcher bias and subjectivity and for concerns about the ethical implications of studying vulnerable populations (Sandelowski, 1995).

Thus, ethnography is a valuable research method for studying cultural practices and social interactions. Ethnography can provide a detailed understanding of a particular culture from the perspective of the people being studied and can uncover hidden aspects of culture that may not be apparent through other research methods. However, researchers must be mindful of potential biases and ethical considerations when conducting ethnographic research.

In conclusion, the methodology chapter of this research project provides a detailed description of the research process, including the sampling methods and data collection techniques used to explore the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds in Delhi NCR. The researcher utilized various qualitative research methods, including ethnography, case

studies, and thick description, to gather rich and detailed data that provided insight into the complexities of women's lives and experiences in the region.

The combination of purposive sampling and the researcher's network allowed for selecting participants from various castes, classes, and professions. The use of thick description contextualized the data and provided a nuanced understanding of the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that underpin women's experiences. Additionally, the case studies provided a detailed analysis of specific behavior or events.

While each method has its strengths and limitations, they offer a comprehensive and detailed account of the research phenomena. This research approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of individuals or groups within a specific context, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXPLORING THE LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT AMONG TEN WOMEN: A STUDY ON SOCIAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

This research is focused on studying the empowerment of ten women and is divided into two main sections based on their level of empowerment. The first section explores social and economic empowerment, examining the experiences of women who are considered empowered based on their ability to make decisions regarding their lives, access resources, and opportunities, and participate in social and economic activities. The second section focuses on financial empowerment and includes the experiences of the remaining women who are considered non-empowered, with limited access to and control over financial resources. For the purpose of this research, the researcher defines empowerment as the ability of women to make choices and take actions that influence the direction of their lives, based on their own values, interests, and priorities. It involves having control over resources and the ability to access and use these resources to achieve their goals. By examining both empowered and non-empowered women, the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to women's empowerment, ultimately contributing to the development of policies and programs that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

#### **Empowered**

##### **Areeba Falak**

The researcher had the opportunity to interview Areeba Falak, a 29-year-old Muslim woman currently working as an editorial program manager at The Times of India. Falak began her journalism career and was one of the youngest TV reporters in India in her early 20s. During the interview, Falak shared her passion for media and journalism, which started in her teens,

when she was always curious about the world outside her comfortable upbringing. She expressed that journalism was a chance to expose herself to different cultures and develop a go-getter attitude toward things she wanted to do. Falak chose media and journalism as her industry as it was an organic decision, and she came to the profession naturally despite being discouraged by her peers.

Falak also talked about her desire to live differently than most women around her, who had limited or no control over their lives because they lacked financial independence. She emphasized the importance of controlling one's resources and the ability to access and use them to achieve one's goals. Falak advocates individual rights and believes everyone should be allowed to choose religion and culture. She expressed her support for the right of an individual to choose what they want to wear.

Although conservative gender roles, especially in Muslim families, made Falak skeptical about marriage, her perception changed when she found a progressive man who knew how to balance home and work. She did not change her surname after marriage, which is still a rare practice in India. Falak and her husband distribute finances and household chores equitably, and she continues to grow in her career while being financially independent. In conclusion, Falak's experiences highlight the importance of individual choice, financial independence, and the need to break gender stereotypes for women to achieve empowerment.

Falak is breaking religious stereotypes by advocating for individual rights, including the right to choose one's religion and culture and the right to decide what to wear. As a Muslim woman working in media and journalism, Falak's career choice challenges the stereotype that Muslim women are not supposed to work outside the home. She also challenges traditional gender roles within Muslim families by advocating for financial independence and equitable

distribution of household chores with her husband. By choosing to keep her surname after marriage, she challenges the traditional practice of women taking on their husband's surnames. Falak's experiences demonstrate that embracing one's cultural and religious identity is possible while challenging and breaking stereotypes that limit individual choice and agency.



Figure 1– Editorial program manager and former TV reporter Areeba Falak works from home, determined to build her identity and career in media and journalism in Delhi, India, January 7, 2023.

### **Shakuntala**

Shakuntala, a 70-year-old maid in Delhi, India, is a remarkable example of an empowered woman. She does not use her second name. Despite the cultural norm that aging parents are cared for by their children, especially sons, Shakuntala's three sons provide her with no support.

She rises at 5:00 a.m. each morning and sets out to work, cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the needs of others. Her work is not a choice but a necessity, as she had no financial support after her husband's death four years ago.

Although she has no education and doesn't even know how to write her name, Shakuntala works quietly, washing dishes, scrubbing floors, and dusting furniture, honing her movements through years of hard work and repetition. Work provides her with a means of survival, purpose, and dignity, and she believes that working empowers women who have had no opportunities for education or upward mobility.

Shakuntala's situation is not unique, as many elderly people in India, especially women, struggle to find support from their families when their husbands die. However, her refusal to use her second name, which denotes her caste, sets Shakuntala apart. In India, the caste system is deeply ingrained, and one's surname often reveals their social status and caste. Shakuntala's decision to not use her second name challenges the caste system, as she refuses to be defined by her social status or judged based on her caste. By rejecting the use of her second name, Shakuntala asserts her identity as an individual and refuses to be labeled or restricted by the caste system.





Figure 2– Shakuntala, a 70-year-old maid who depends on work to make a living, poses for a photograph. Despite receiving no financial assistance from her three sons, she remains resilient and determined to keep working in Delhi, December 27, 2022.

### **Sarita Devi Pal**

Sarita Devi Pal (30 years old) is a domestic helper from Ghazipur, Delhi, mother of two boys. She spends her days moving from house to house, cooking meals, cleaning, and organizing spaces for her clients. Despite the injury to her foot, she remains determined to provide her children with a better life and future. She and her husband have created a cozy and hospitable atmosphere for their children in their small, one-room dwelling. Pal's commitment to her children's education and well-being is evident in her fierce pride and determination.

Sarita Devi Pal's story highlights her determination to challenge the class system in

India. As a domestic helper, she faces many challenges and is often looked down upon by others due to her social and economic status. However, Pal remains undeterred and is determined to provide her children with a better life and future. Pal's story also highlights the importance of financial independence and the need to challenge the class system in India. Through her hard work and determination, she is breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for her family, inspiring others to follow in her footsteps to move from a poor family to a middle-class family.



Figure 3– Sarita Devi Pal, a 30-year-old domestic help from Ghazipur, Delhi, works diligently to support her family of four by providing cooking and organizing services to households; her dedication to building a better future for her children, December 26, 2022.

### **Rajni Wadhwa**

Rajni Wadhwa (54 years old) is a woman who has significantly impacted children's

education in her community. She founded Learning Point, a tutoring center in East Delhi, India. Her journey has been a challenging one, having to balance her work and family life. However, her dedication and passion for education have remained strong. Wadhwa's background in teaching has enabled her to provide individual attention and support to her students, helping them excel academically. Her students arrive at the center eager to learn, and Rajni tailors her lessons to meet their unique needs. Her impact on her students' education is evident in their improved grades and enthusiasm for learning.

Despite the challenges of running a tutoring center in a low-income area, Wadhwa remains committed to providing quality education to every child in her community. She dreams of expanding Learning Point to reach even more children, creating a space where every child can receive a quality education regardless of their background or financial situation.

Wadhwa's dedication to her work is matched only by her commitment to her family. She balances her double shifts at the tutoring center and at home, managing to find time for both. Her son, Ankush, is the pride and joy of her life, and she worked hard to ensure he had the best education possible. She and her husband sent him to the US for his master's degree, a significant expense for a family in India. Ankush's success in life and career is a testament to Rajni's hard work and dedication to her family.



Figure 4– Rajni Wadhwa, a 54-year-old tutoring center owner in Delhi, India, balances running her center, Learning Point, with her responsibilities as a homemaker, managing to keep both worlds in check with ease and determination, even contributing to sending her son to the US for his master's degree. December 20, 2022.

### **Geeta Mishra**

Geeta Mishra, a 45-year-old masseuse working in Delhi, has earned high praise from many of her clients for her exceptional skills and dedication to her craft. Mishra takes pride in being the highest earner in her household, even more than her husband, in Kaushambi, Ghaziabad, NCR. Her work as a masseuse in Delhi has received high praise from many of her clients, who have experienced the benefits of her exceptional skills and dedication to her craft. Mishra's commitment to her clients and craft has made her a valuable asset in the community. As a Brahmin by caste, she has defied societal expectations by pursuing a career as a masseuse instead of a priest. She has defied traditional gender roles and succeeded in a male-dominated world,



earning considerable respect and admiration. One of the most notable aspects of her success is that she makes more than her husband. In a culture where men are often considered the primary breadwinners and women are expected to prioritize domestic duties, this significant achievement challenges long-held assumptions about gender roles. Mishra sees her success as fighting against patriarchal attitudes and beliefs and aims to inspire other women to break traditional gender roles and achieve financial independence.



Figure 5– Geeta Mishra, a 45-year-old masseuse in Kaushambi, Ghaziabad, National Capital Region, India, challenges traditional gender roles by earning more than her husband and is respected for her skills in her field, January 8, 2023

### **Sabeeha Masood**

Sabeeha Masood is a woman from Delhi who has dedicated her time and energy to underprivileged children in her community for the past ten years for free. Despite being a

housewife and not the primary breadwinner, Masood has become a source of hope and inspiration for many children in her community. She teaches children of all ages and backgrounds, preparing them for entrance exams to some of the city's top schools, and has helped six students gain admission last year alone. Masood's makeshift classroom in her small, cramped house has become a beacon of hope for many underprivileged children.

Her work has been recognized by her close friends and family, who have rallied behind her, donating clothes, money, and stationery to help support her cause. Masood's husband, Hussain, has also been an integral part of her efforts to help the community's children, providing moral and physical support and reaching out to friends and business associates for donations. For Masood, the rewards of her work are not measured in accolades or recognition, but in the success of her students.



Figure 6– Sabeeha Masood, a Delhi resident in her fifties, has dedicated the past decade to teaching underprivileged children from her community December 28, 2022. Clad in traditional Indian attire, Masood tutors children aged six to twelve, helping them reach their potential and prepare for entrance exams for some of the city's top schools. Masood's work has profoundly impacted her community and brought her immense joy, measured not in recognition but in the success of her students.

### **Naina Amatya**

Naina Amatya is a successful businesswoman and makeup artist in her thirties who co-owns an upscale beauty salon, Hair and Shanti, with her husband, Aditya (Adi). As a makeup artist, Amatya's expertise is creating unique and personalized looks for her clients. She is highly skilled in applying makeup, which is evident in her intricate designs with eyeliner. Amatya's

salon is modern and luxurious, offering beauty and grooming services with high-end products from renowned brands. She manages a team of around twenty staff members who are impeccably dressed in sleek, black uniforms, and the salon atmosphere is peaceful and serene. Adi and Amatya are equal partners in their business, and they work together to balance their professional and personal lives while taking care of their family.

Adi's unwavering support has been a crucial factor in Naina's success, as his encouragement has given her the confidence to pursue her passion with even more enthusiasm. Naina Amatya is challenging gender stereotypes by being a successful female entrepreneur in the beauty industry. Amatya's husband is also supportive of her work and is vocal about her talent, breaking the stereotype of men not being supportive of their wives' careers.





Figure 7– Make-up artist Naina Amatya, in her thirties, works on a client December 25, 2022, at Hair and Shanti, an upscale unisex salon that she co-owns with her husband Aditya in Delhi, India. Amatya specializes in make-up, Aditya specializes in hair, and they manage a staff of around 20 people. As a mother of two, Amatya says that she has found a balance between her professional and personal life with the help of Aditya's support and mutual understanding.

### **Dr. Sonia Chawla**

Dr. Sonia Chawla is a skilled dentist and maxillofacial surgeon who has worked tirelessly to achieve her dreams. Her modern dental clinic in East Delhi is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, and strict hygiene protocols are followed to ensure patient safety. Dr. Chawla is approachable and takes the time to explain the treatment process to her patients, making them feel at ease.

In addition to her clinical work, Dr. Chawla is also involved in research and has published several papers on various topics related to dentistry and maxillofacial surgery. She credits her success to her family's support and her husband's passion for dentistry, and they work together to ensure their patients receive the best care possible.

Dr. Chawla's focus never wavers during dental surgeries, and she works with precision and care, using the latest techniques and equipment. She is passionate about making a difference in people's lives and relieving their pain or improving their smiles.

Dr. Sonia Chawla is challenging traditional gender stereotypes in several ways. Firstly, she is breaking the stereotype that dentistry and maxillofacial surgery are male-dominated by excelling as highly skilled dentists and maxillofacial surgeons. She has proven that women can be as successful and accomplished in these fields as men.

Secondly, Dr. Chawla's financial independence challenges the traditional gender stereotype that women depend financially on men. By emphasizing the importance of taking charge of one's finances, she inspires other women to be financially independent and break free from the societal norms that have held them back for so long.

Finally, Dr. Chawla's supportive relationship with her husband challenges the stereotype that successful women cannot have a happy and fulfilling personal life. Her husband's passion for dentistry exemplifies how couples can work together as a team and support each other's career goals, regardless of gender.



Figure 8– Dr. Sonia Chawla, a dentist, and maxillofacial surgeon performs dental surgery on a patient at her modern clinic in Delhi, India, December 23, 2022. Dr. Chawla, Chawla put herself through a decade of college and internships to open her own business. She works alongside her husband to manage a staff of professionals who follow strict hygiene protocols. Dr. Chawla is also involved in research and has published several papers on various topics related to dentistry and maxillofacial surgery.

### **Not Empowered**

#### **Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu**

Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu is a 42-year-old woman from Delhi NCR, India, who works as a cow farmer and housewife. Her work involves taking care of cows by feeding, milking, and cleaning them, as well as ensuring their health and well-being. Mrs. Munnu works approximately 10 hours a day and must be highly skilled and knowledgeable about cow care, including



identifying and treating illnesses, managing breeding and reproduction, and maintaining hygiene.

Despite her hard work, Mrs. Munnu is not allowed to speak for herself, and her work often goes unnoticed by her family and community. Patriarchal cultural norms in India limit her opportunities and require her to balance domestic duties and work, often resulting in the underappreciation of her contributions. Although Mrs. Munnu is committed to providing the best possible care for her cows, she is not allowed to keep any profits from selling milk in the neighborhood, as her husband considers himself and his sons the primary breadwinners.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Munnu believes that cow farmers need support and help from their families and communities to overcome everyday challenges and build better lives.



Figure 9— A cow farmer and housewife in the National Capital Region, India, who is not allowed to reveal her first name works 10-hour days caring for her cows and maintaining her household but is not allowed to keep the profits from selling the milk she produces, January 4, 2023.

**Kavita Singh**

Kavita Singh, a woman in her thirties and successful farm owner in the National Capital Region (NCR) of India, has faced significant challenges in her life. She was forced to marry at a young age, which prevented her from pursuing an education and forced her into domestic duties. However, Singh's confidence and determination have allowed her to overcome these obstacles and achieve success as a farmer. Despite her accomplishments, Singh faces criticism from some of her employees and neighbors, who question her husband's dismissive attitude towards her work and the working conditions on her farm. Singh denies these accusations and insists that she and her husband work as a team, making all the decisions together. Her story highlights the need for liberation from patriarchal attitudes and systems that often undervalue and dismiss women's contributions.



Figure 10– Kavita Singh, a successful farm owner in the National Capital Region, India, faces challenges due to her lack of education and early marriage. Despite her accomplishments, Kavita's husband's dismissive attitude highlights the struggles women face in patriarchal societies; January 4, 2023.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Empowerment is essential for women to achieve their full potential and lead fulfilling lives. From the experiences of the women interviewed, several critical factors for empowerment have been identified, including individual choice, financial independence, breaking gender stereotypes, resilience and determination, education, and supportive networks. However, not all women have access to these factors, and barriers to empowerment can arise due to patriarchal cultural norms, lack of financial independence, criticism and doubt, and a lack of support. In particular, the non-empowerment of Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu and Kavita Singh is characterized by these barriers. These barriers must be addressed for women to achieve empowerment and lead fulfilling lives. From the experiences of the women interviewed, several vital factors for empowerment can be identified. These include:

**Individual choice:** Areeba Falak emphasizes the importance of personal preference, whether in one's profession, religion, or clothing. Shakuntala takes charge of her life by working as a maid despite societal expectations of her to rely on her sons. Sabeeha Masood dedicates her time and energy to educating underprivileged children in her community, showcasing her choice to make a difference.

**Financial independence:** Financial independence is crucial for empowering women, as it gives them control over their resources and the ability to access and use them to achieve their goals. Areeba Falak and Sarita Devi Pal stress the importance of being financially independent to live on one's terms. Geeta Mishra's success as a masseuse challenges traditional gender roles and demonstrates that women can be the primary breadwinners in their households.

**Breaking gender stereotypes:** Women who break gender stereotypes and succeed in male-

dominated fields inspire others to follow in their footsteps. Rajni Wadhwa's commitment to education challenges gender roles by founding a tutoring center in a low-income area, empowering children, and providing them with quality education regardless of their background or financial situation. With the support of her husband, Aditya, Naina Amatya's success as a businesswoman and makeup artist shows that gender roles can be fluid and that women can achieve success in their careers while maintaining their personal and family lives.

**Resilience and determination:** Resilience and determination are essential factors in achieving empowerment. Shakuntala rises at 5 AM each morning to work, while Sarita Devi Pal works tirelessly to provide her children a better life. Sabeeha Masood teaches underprivileged children despite being a housewife and not the primary breadwinner. Dr. Sonia Chawla's unwavering focus and passion for dentistry and maxillofacial surgery have enabled her to succeed professionally.

### **Positive Experience Quotes (Reports in Appendix)**

Here are some positive quotes from the empowered women studied in the research paper:

1. Areeba Falak: "The ability to control one's resources and access them is critical for achieving empowerment."
2. Shakuntala: "Work provides me with a means of survival, purpose, and dignity, and it empowers women who have had no opportunities for education or upward mobility."
3. Sarita Devi Pal: "I remain determined to provide my children with a better life and future."
4. Rajni Wadhwa: "I dream of expanding Learning Point to reach even more children, creating a space where every child can receive a quality education regardless of their background or financial situation."
5. Geeta Mishra: "My success is a way of fighting against patriarchal attitudes and beliefs and



inspiring other women to break traditional gender roles and achieve financial independence."

6. Sabeeha Masood: "The rewards of my work are not measured in accolades or recognition, but in the success of my students."

7. Naina Amatya: "Adi's unwavering support has been a crucial factor in my success, as his encouragement has given me the confidence to pursue my passion with even more enthusiasm."

8. Dr. Sonia Chawla: "Taking charge of one's finances is critical for achieving empowerment."

### **Barriers to empowerment**

**Patriarchal cultural norms:** Patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms in India often limit women's opportunities and require them to balance domestic duties and work, resulting in the underappreciation of their contributions.

**Lack of financial independence:** Mrs. Munnu is not allowed to keep any profits from selling milk in the neighborhood, as her husband considers himself and his sons the primary breadwinners. Similarly, Kavita Singh's forced marriage prevented her from pursuing an education and forced her into domestic duties. This lack of financial independence can limit women's ability to make their own choices and achieve empowerment.

**Criticism and doubt:** Kavita Singh faces criticism from some of her employees and neighbors who question her husband's dismissive attitude towards her work and the working conditions on her farm. This criticism can undermine her confidence and discourage her from pursuing her goals.

**Lack of support:** Both women need support and help from their families' challenges and build better lives. Without support, it can be challenging for women to achieve empowerment and

pursue their goals.

In conclusion, the experiences of the women interviewed provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to women's empowerment and the barriers preventing it. Empowerment requires individual choice, financial independence, breaking gender stereotypes, resilience and determination, education, and supportive networks. However, patriarchal cultural norms, lack of economic freedom, criticism and doubt, and lack of support are significant barriers that prevent women from achieving empowerment. It is essential to address these barriers to create a more equitable and inclusive society where women can realize their full potential and contribute to their families, communities, and society.

## CHAPTER 7

### CHALLENGES

The thesis, "Breaking Barriers: Exploring Women's Identities and Challenges Around Work Through Photos and Reports in Delhi NCR," presented several challenges throughout the research process. One of the key challenges you faced was concerning a case study involving Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu, who was not allowed to speak for herself. Whenever she spoke, the researcher was unable to comprehend the language. As a result, the researcher had to use a male translator to communicate with her, which may have introduced interpretation biases.

The use of a male translator in the case of Mrs. Munnu's interview raised the issue of potential gender bias in interpretation. This was a significant challenge, as it was important to ensure that her experiences and perspectives were accurately represented in the research. However, the use of a male translator may have resulted in a loss of nuances or other meanings in the data. It remains unknown if the male translator's interpretation of Mrs. Munnu's responses differed from what she would have said if she had spoken for herself, and this was a limitation in the research.

In addition, this research topic itself presented challenges, as the researcher was exploring women's identities and challenges around work in a society where gender inequality and discrimination are still prevalent. Collecting data and conducting interviews with women who may have faced discrimination and harassment at work was not an easy task, and required a sensitive and nuanced approach. It was important to create a safe space for the participants to share their experiences, while also being mindful of any potential risks to their safety and well-being.

Furthermore, working with photographs as a research tool presented its own set of challenges. The interpretation of images is subjective and can vary depending on the viewer's

experiences and biases. It was important to be aware of this subjectivity and to analyze the photographs in a way that was sensitive to the context in which they were taken.

Despite these challenges, the researcher was able to provide valuable insights into the experiences of women in Delhi NCR and the barriers they face around work. The researcher's limitations and challenges during the research process also highlight the need for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to understanding gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace.

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## APPENDIX A

### REPORTS OF WORKING WOMEN

#### **Areeba Falak**

Areeba Falak is a 29-year-old Muslim woman working as editorial program manager at The Times of India. She began her career as a journalist and was one the youngest TV reporters in India in her early 20s. She married at 27. Areeba Falak's room is bright and airy. The space is a large dining room she uses to eat with her husband at night. But during the day, she works from home.

In the corner, Falak, a 29-year-old Muslim woman working editorial program manager at The Times of India, sits on a table chair, typing on her laptop with a determined expression on her face. A small foldable table is placed next to her (which she sometimes uses when she feels like sitting on the rug). Falak stacks her documents around her work area and settles in for a day of editing word files.

"My choice to be a working professional is two-fold: love and instinct. One is the love for my trade, i.e., media & journalism, and the other is the instinct to build my identity in a big world," she said.

Falak's love for media and journalism started in her teens. She was always curious about the world outside her own comfortable upbringing.

She said journalism was a chance to expose herself to different cultures. "I had always been curious about the world outside the realm where I was raised as a child," she said. Falak believes that she developed a go-getter attitude towards things she wanted to do because she understood that if she didn't push, it wouldn't happen.

Falak said choosing media and journalism as her industry was an organic decision.

During her undergraduate, she became the youngest person at her local radio station to win a radio jockey competition. Despite being discouraged by her peers who told her that women in the media are exploited, she came to the profession naturally.

Falak said she desired to live differently than most women around her, who had limited or no control over their lives because they lacked financial independence. "This became the second driving factor in my decision to be a career woman," she said. "My appreciation for different cultures and my need to be my own person led to the decision to be a career woman."

Falak believes everyone should be allowed to make their own choices regarding religion and culture. "I don't wear hijab, and I support the right of an individual to choose what they want to/don't want to wear," she added. Although conservative gender roles, especially in Muslim families, made Falak skeptical about marriage, her perception changed when she found a progressive man who knew how to balance home and work.

"After marriage, I didn't change my surname.," she said. Even now, very few women in India continue to use their maiden names. Falak and her husband distribute finances and household chores equitably. "I continue to grow in my career and am financially independent," she said.

### **Shakuntala**

Shakuntala is a 70-year-old maid in Delhi, India. Her skin is weathered, her hands rough from years of hard work, but her eyes are bright and sharp. Shakuntala's story is one of hard work in a culture where aging parents are typically cared for by their children, especially sons.

Despite having three sons, none support her in any way, leaving her to rely on her work to survive. She rises at 5 AM each morning and sets out to work, moving steadily. She travels from house to house, 5 in total—cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the needs of others, all

while silently bearing the weight of her struggles.

As long as her husband was alive, Shakuntala was a homemaker. Her husband passed away four years ago, leaving her without financial support. Despite her age, she is determined to continue working as long as possible. It's not a choice for Shakuntala but a necessity.

Household cleaning is typically associated with women, while house construction is typically associated with men. Shakuntala doesn't have any other option. She has had no education, she doesn't even know how to write her name, and household work is the only thing she knows how to do. "If I don't work (in households), who will feed me?" she said.

Her footsteps are heavy, and her breathing is labored. At each house, she works quietly, washing dishes, scrubbing floors, and dusting furniture. Her movements are practiced and methodical, honed by years of hard work and repetition.

Work provides her with a means of survival and gives her a sense of purpose and dignity. "Work is important for everyone. It gives one a reason to wake up even on this chilly morning and keeps me engaged," she said.

Shakuntala's situation is not unique, as many elderly people in India (especially women) struggle to find support from their families when their husbands die. For many elderly people, work is not just a source of income but also a way to stay active.

"Working empowers women like me, who may have had no opportunities for education or other forms of upward mobility. By working hard and earning a living, I have taken control of my life and shown that I can provide for myself," she said.

Despite the challenges she faces, Shakuntala remains optimistic about the future. She takes each day as it comes and finds joy in life's simple pleasures. "I am grateful for my work and the people who support me," she said.

As the sun sets, Shakuntala finally finishes her last job of the day. She gathers supplies and starts the long journey home, her steps slow and fatigued. But even as she walks, she is already thinking ahead to tomorrow, planning the next steps of her journey and the tasks that await her. For Shakuntala, there is no rest or respite from the demands of her work

### **Sarita Devi Pal**

Sarita Devi Pal, a 30-year-old domestic help from Ghazipur, Delhi, spends her days moving through the kitchen, her hands moving deftly as she chops vegetables, stirs pots, and cooks meals for her clients at their home. Pal is a domestic helper and a mother of two boys – 10 and 12. She works in different houses (she comes on call) and helps women with cooking and organizing in different houses.

Pal is a whirlwind of activity throughout the day, taking care of everything from meal prep to cleaning and organizing spaces. She moves effortlessly between tasks, never missing a beat or slowing down momentarily.

"I may not have a fancy job, but my work is just as important as anyone else's," Pal said. As the day wears on, Pal's movements become more frenzied, her pace quickening as she strives to get everything done before the day is done. But even amid this feverish rush, she never loses her calm or focus, remaining steady and centered in the face of even the most daunting challenges.

At another client's home, Pal sits on a stool in the kitchen, focusing intently on the pile of tomatoes in front of her. With a quick flick of her wrist, she expertly slices through the vegetable, her hands moving with a practiced ease that speaks to years of experience and dedication.

Despite the injury to her foot, Pal refuses to let it slow her down. She is determined to provide her children with a better life and a brighter future, and her commitment to that goal is

evident in every aspect of her work. Now, around noon, Sarita starts wrapping things up and goes to pick up her children from school, and arrives home.

Pal and her family reside in a compact, one-room dwelling that serves as both their refuge and confinement. The room is minimally furnished, containing only a solitary bed pushed against a wall and two chairs huddled together in a corner. However, despite the limited space and resources, Pal and her husband have created a cozy and hospitable atmosphere for their children.

She speaks of her children with fierce pride and determination as she chops tomatoes. "I work hard so my children can have a better life and a brighter future," she said, her voice ringing with conviction. "I want them to have opportunities I never had, to go to private schools and access better jobs and a more comfortable lifestyle," she said.

Her husband works as a security guard at night, taking care of their children during the day, while Sarita is out working in the day as domestic help. It is a partnership that is both rare and admirable, a testament to their shared commitment to creating a more equal and just world for themselves and their children. Despite their challenges, she and her husband remain dedicated to their children's education and well-being. They work tirelessly to provide for them, sacrificing their needs and desires to ensure their children have a brighter future.

As the day drew to a close, Pal and her family gathered around in the center of the bed, sharing a simple meal and discussing the day's events. Pal stands and prepares the Indian bread and serves it fresh in the small, cramped room that is her home. Now, her second shift begins at home. At her home, her hands move with practiced ease as she goes about her daily tasks, whether cooking a simple meal on the small stove or folding clothes on the single chair that doubles as a workspace. Despite the challenges of living in such close quarters, everything she does has a sense of order and purpose.

**Rajni Wadhwa**

Rajni Wadhwa, 54, balances work and family life in Delhi. Wadhwa reclines on a plush couch in her sprawling pousse house in Delhi, e and entitlement. She holds her latest iPhone in one hand, scrolling through messages "Housewives really do nothing," she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. "What they do can be done by a maid for 10,000 rupees a month," she continued as she counted currency notes in her house after she finished cooking and started getting ready to head to the tutoring center.

Wadhwa runs a tutoring center called Learning Point in East Delhi, India. Wadhwa started Learning Point at her home in 2007 as a response to the lack of quality education in the area. She saw a need for a center where children could receive individual attention and support to excel academically. With a background in teaching, she decided to use her skills to help the children in her community.

"I began working in my teens to support my family," Wadhwa said, her words filled with purpose." However, it is generally expected that a woman will quit working after she gets married and will be a homemaker. I felt very uneasy when I stopped tutoring after I got married, so I began again, " she said.

The center began with just a few students, but over time, it became a popular destination for parents looking for a better education for their children. Today, Learning Point has over 50 students, ranging from first grade to tenth grade. Wadhwa's dedication to her students is unwavering.

"I started Learning Point because I saw an opportunity in my community. I wanted to create a space where children could come and learn without distractions," Wadhwa said. Her



students are equally passionate about their education. They arrive at the center eager to learn and ready to work hard. Wadhwa's teaching style is focused on individual attention, and she works closely with each child to understand their strengths and weaknesses. She then tailors her lessons to meet their unique needs. "My teacher, Rajni Ma'am, is the best. She helps me with my homework and teaches me things I don't understand in class," said Neha, a student at Learning Point.

Parents in the community praise her for her impact on their children's education. "Before my daughter started coming to Learning Point, she struggled in school. But since she started coming here, her grades have improved significantly.

Rajni Ma'am is an excellent teacher," said Sunita, a parent of one of Wadhwa's students.

Wadhwa's journey has been challenging. Running a tutoring center in a low-income area comes with its difficulties. Financial constraints make it challenging to provide the best resources and materials for the students.

"Running a tutoring center is not easy, but I do it because I believe in the power of education. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn and grow," she said.

Despite the challenges, Wadhwa has big plans for the future of Learning Point. She hopes to expand the center to reach even more children in the community. Her dream is to create a space where children can come and receive a quality education, regardless of their background or financial situation. "I want to make Learning Point a place where every child in the community can come and learn. I want to provide the best education possible so these children can reach their full potential," she said.

When Wadhwa leaves the center for the day, she has to rush home to do household work. It's evening. Wadhwa rushed around her home; she was frantic and energetic. She is a woman on

a mission, her eyes focused and determined as she moves from task to task. "I constantly drive and shuffle between the coaching institute and home," Wadhwa said, her voice filled with urgency. "There are some tasks at home that you must do on your own and can't leave to maids. But I manage to balance both worlds and am proud of it," she said.

As she spoke, her hands moved with practiced ease, folding clothes and preparing meals with fluidity. Despite the demands of her double shifts – one at the tutoring center and one at home - Wadhwa feels satisfied. Her husband runs the household expenditure, but she accumulated money to send her son to the US without a scholarship for his master's degree, a huge expense for a family in India.

"All I wanted was that my son (Ankush) should have the best degree among all his cousins and be in the best country," she said with a haughty wave of her hand. "Now he is in the US and earns the most amongst all his cousins," she continued. "When I last went there, he surprised me with a car and bought me a Coach luggage bag," she added.

Ankush graduated from George Washington University two years ago and now works with a technology company. Her pride in his achievements is evident in every word she speaks. "I must go and call him," she said, checking the time on her latest Apple watch. "It must be morning in Virginia.

### **Kavita Singh**

Kavita Singh is a woman in her thirties who exudes confidence and self-assurance. She stands tall and proud, with her shoulders squared and her head high. Her hair is neatly tied back, and her attire is simple yet elegant, reflecting her no-nonsense approach to life. Her farm is a sprawling greenery expanse, with crops stretching as far as the eye can see. The land is well-maintained and fertile, with diligent and careful workers tending to the crops.

Despite her successful landowning status, Kavita's life has been challenging. She got married at the young age of 13, which forced her to forego her education and begin a life of domesticity and responsibilities. Kavita has made peace with her situation, evident by how she carries herself. Her confidence and determination shine through, suggesting a woman who has overcome adversity and come out on the other side stronger and more resilient.

While Kavita stands tall and proud, her husband appears to tower over her, with his arms crossed tightly across his chest. His gaze is fixed on Kavita as if monitoring her every move, and his tone is condescending and dismissive. Kavita's husband and business partner is often seen counting currency notes. At the same time, Kavita oversees the three women who work on her farm. The girls on the farm have criticized Kavita's relationship with her husband, claiming that he is taking advantage of her and not allowing her to fully realize her potential. He gives the final go-ahead, and Kavita works for him.

Some neighbors have also questioned the working conditions of the women employed on Kavita's farm. One woman, Geeta Puhani, who works on Kavita's farm, said, "The women working on Kavita's farm are not treated well. They are overworked and underpaid, and their health is not a priority. Kavita claims to champion women's rights, but her actions speak otherwise." As for her farm's working conditions, Kavita denies mistreating her employees. She said, "The women who work on my farm are like family to me. I ensure they are treated well and paid a fair wage. I understand that farming can be hard work. Still, we do everything possible to make it a safe and healthy environment."

When questioned, Kavita stood by her choices. "I am doing what I have to do. I love my work on the farm, and I am proud of what I have achieved. My husband and I work as a team, making all the decisions together. I understand that some people may not agree with my choices,

but I am happy with the life I have chosen for myself," she said. Despite her significant contributions to the farm's success, her husband treats her like a subordinate rather than an equal. A community member echoed these sentiments. "It's unfair for the farmer to take credit for his wife's hard work. She deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated for everything she does to make the farm successful," she said.

The contrast between Kavita's confidence and her husband's dismissive attitude is stark, highlighting the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies like India. Despite her accomplishments, Kavita is forced to navigate a system that often undervalues and dismisses women's contributions, which is evident in her husband's behavior towards her. Kavita's relationship with her husband has also faced scrutiny. "My husband is my partner, and we work together to make decisions for our farm. I trust him completely, and he has always supported me in my work," Kavita said.

Her lack of education and early marriage are barriers most women in the country's capital-- National Capital Region (NCR), face. Kavita said, "I am proud of myself and my achievements. I may not have had the opportunities others have had. Still, I have worked hard to create a successful business." Overall, Kavita's surroundings suggest a successful farm owner who has overcome significant challenges to achieve her success.

The story of the farmer's wife and her contributions to the farm's success highlights the need for liberation from patriarchy in all aspects of life. Her lack of education, early marriage, and the dismissive behavior of her husband towards her hard work are all products of a patriarchal system that has long oppressed women. However, her story also serves as a reminder that everyone's journey toward liberation and success is unique.

## **Geeta Mishra**

Geeta Mishra, a 45-year-old masseuse working in Delhi, has received high praise from many of her clients for her exceptional skills and dedication to her craft. Geeta takes pride in earning the most money in her household, even more than her husband, in Kaushambi, Ghaziabad, NCR.

"Geeta is one of the best masseuses I have ever had. She takes the time to understand what I need and always provides a customized experience that leaves me feeling rejuvenated.

"Neeta Juneja, a client, said. Some clients have expressed concern about how this identity may impact their work as a masseuse. One client, Anshu Minrai, said, "Geeta seems more interested in the title of being the highest earner in her household than actually providing quality services. It's like she's lost sight of what it means to be a good masseuse."

Mishra differs; she said, "I love my job, and I am always looking for ways to improve my techniques and provide the best experience for my clients." Many in the community regard Geeta's identity as a masseuse important, and she is "allowed" by her husband, which is revolutionary for her upper caste community. In most cases, women working outside the home is still frowned upon in the upper-caste Brahmin community in India.

Mishra's work as a masseuse in Delhi has received high praise from many of her clients, who have experienced the benefits of her exceptional skills and dedication to her craft. Others feel she needs to catch up on what is essential-- not passing the time but understanding the pressure points on the body and giving the proper treatment. However, her identity as a masseuse is highly regarded among friends and family. Mishra's commitment to her clients and craft has made her a valuable asset in the community.

Her story is about a fight against patriarchy through work. Mishra has defied traditional

gender roles and succeeded in a male-dominated world, earning her considerable respect and admiration. One of the most notable aspects of her success is that she earns more than her husband. In a culture where men are often considered the primary breadwinners and women are expected to prioritize domestic duties, this significant achievement challenges long-held assumptions about gender roles.

Mishra's success has been challenging, however. As a woman in a male-dominated country, she has faced numerous obstacles and has had to work hard to establish herself as a respected and successful professional. "Geeta's story shows that women can break traditional gender roles and achieve financial independence. She has set an example for other women who may have thought their gender would prevent them from succeeding in their chosen fields," said Sunita Batra, her neighbor.

Mishra is proud of her achievements and sees her success as a way of fighting against patriarchal attitudes and beliefs. "I want to show other women that they do not have to accept the roles that society has assigned them," she said. Mishra concluded, "We can be successful in any field if we work hard and stay determined."

### **Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu**

Mrs. Divinder Singh Munnu, a 42-year-old woman from NCR, India, is a cow farmer and a housewife. Her job entails the daily care and maintenance of cows, which includes feeding, milking, and cleaning them. She is responsible for ensuring that her cows are healthy and well-cared for, which requires significant physical labor and attention to detail.

Mrs. Munnu works approximately 10 hours daily, from sunrise until late at night. She runs two shifts at home, caring for the household and looking after the cows and buffalos. As a cow farmer, Mrs. Munnu's work requires her to be highly skilled and knowledgeable about the

care and maintenance of cows. She must be able to identify and treat illnesses and injuries, manage breeding and reproduction, and maintain the cleanliness and hygiene of her cows and their living environment. She must also take care of how much to feed, have a veterinary doctor on call, and ensure that her cows produce enough milk to generate a steady income. She said that cows are considered sacred in Indian culture, and she feels fortunate to be able to care of them.

Despite her hard work, Mrs. Munnu is not allowed to speak for herself. When interviewed by a journalist, she was not allowed to reveal her first name and couldn't have a solo picture facing the camera. Her husband, Mr. Divinder Singh Munnu, notes that Mrs. Munnu can work as she works from home, but he added that he would never 'allow' any female household member to work outside the home. He added, "My sons and I are the primary breadwinners, and men should be the ones to bring home a living." Mrs. Munnus's two shifts— farming and household chores are not acknowledged in conversations with her family members.

Mrs. Munnu's situation is common, as many women in India are expected to balance domestic duties and work. However, the expectations placed on women to perform both roles often result in their work as housewives needing to be recognized and recognized. Moreover, the patriarchal culture in India often leads to women being subordinated to men, which restricts their opportunities. Women like Mrs. Munnu often succumb to patriarchal norms and accept their role as housewives and farmers, limiting their ability to pursue other aspirations. Many people in the culture also consider extra work, such as farming, as part and parcel of domestic life.

Mrs. Munnu believes her work is essential to her family's and community's livelihood and is committed to providing the best possible care for her cows. She said her daily routine has its challenges. "It's not easy. I work all day and night and don't get a break, but that's my fate." her family— her two sons and her husband, does not allow her to keep any profits from selling

milk in the neighborhood. Instead, a boy named Munna comes on a bicycle to sell and deliver the milk to families in the neighborhood. When he returns with five hundred rupees (he sells at 50 rupees per kilogram), the money he collects by distributing the milk to the customers, and he gives that amount to her husband.

Mrs. Munnu's story sheds light on the inequalities faced by women in Indian society. She is a hardworking woman who cares for her family and contributes to her community, yet she is not allowed to speak for herself or keep the profits from her work. However, as previously mentioned, Mrs. Munnu faces many challenges as a woman in agriculture. These challenges include limited access to education and training programs and a need for access to credit and market information. "I do not want to be trapped in this cycle forever," Mrs. Munnu said. "I want to be able to support my family and build a better life for us. But I cannot do it alone. We as cow farmers need help and support from our families and communities to overcome our everyday challenges."

Despite her work as a cow farmer, Mrs. Munnu's contributions to her family and community often go unnoticed. Her labor as a housewife is taken for granted, and her work as a cow farmer is often seen as secondary to her duties as a wife and mother.

### **Sabeeha Masood**

From a small, cramped house in Delhi's bustling slums, children walk to Sabeeha Masood's home, where she is hard at work. For the past ten years, she has dedicated her time and energy to educating underprivileged children from the community, preparing them for the entrance exams of some of the city's top schools for more than a year.

Masood's home has become a makeshift classroom where she teaches children of all ages and backgrounds for a year, despite the challenges of teaching and mentoring students. Every



day, from 2 to 4 PM, she can be found working with students, helping them reach their full potential, and providing the education they need to attend formal schools. Last year about six students made it to formal schools after Masood tutored them.

Masood is dressed modestly in a traditional Indian salwar kameez and a headscarf that framed her face. She speaks softly, using simple props like small toys and handmade flashcards to help illustrate her points. The children listen carefully, asking questions and repeating the lessons to the woman as they absorb new knowledge and skills.

The small room is simple and sparsely furnished; only a few pieces of worn furniture and basic supplies are scattered around. Despite the cold winter day outside, the room is warm and cozy, thanks to sunlight through the window. In the corner of the room, a group of about ten children sits cross-legged on a thin, threadbare carpet.

They range in age from about six to twelve years old, and they all wear simple, worn, and warm clothes; some are too big for them. Their faces are bright and eager as they listen to Masood sitting on a bed at the front of the room. For Masood, the desire to give back to her community stems from deep gratitude for the blessings she has received in her life.

"I am lucky to have received an education and had the opportunities many of these children do not have. I am glad God has chosen me to help these kids," she said. "It is my duty to help them in any way I can.," she added.

Masood's work has been noticed. Her close friends and family have rallied behind her, donating clothes, money, and stationery to help support her cause.

When the children succeed in gaining admission to school, Masood still helps - she is there to provide them with everything they need to succeed - from textbooks and school supplies to uniforms and other essentials. Masood's efforts have profoundly impacted the

community, and her work has been praised by all who know her.

"Her dedication and commitment to these children is something we should all aspire to," said a neighbor.

For Masood , the rewards of her work are not measured in accolades or recognition. It is the success of her students that brings her the greatest joy. "When I see a child who was once struggling in school now thriving, it fills my heart with happiness," she said. "These small victories make it all worthwhile.," she added.

Everyone in the housing complex knows that Masood teaches from 2-4 PM daily, and she is open to teaching anyone wanting to get into schools. There is no distinction between caste, class, or religion. Everyone is equal in her eyes and deserves a chance to succeed.

Masood's husband, Hussain, is an integral part of her efforts to help the children of the community. She said he is a constant source of encouragement and support for her and is always eager to help in any way he can.

Hussain's involvement in Masood's work extends beyond just moral support. He has also been instrumental in spreading the word about her cause, reaching out to his close friends and business associates to help donate finances, clothes, and other supplies for the underprivileged children. But Hussain's contributions don't stop there. Despite physical challenges, he is always willing to lend a hand, doing the literal heavy lifting when he brings school supplies and donated clothes to their second-floor apartment. Their building has no lift, and the stairs can be daunting, but Hussain perseveres, driven by his dedication to the cause.

Having Hussain by her side has been a source of immense comfort and strength for Masood. "I could not do this work without him," she says. "He is always there to support, help, and lift me up when I need it, " she added.

## **Naina Amatya**

Naina Amatya, in her thirties, is standing at the main counter of the salon waiting for her next booking. She is settling bills with clients who have just had their services. The counter is sleek and modern, with a polished marble surface and a row of cash registers on one side. She is focused on her clients, carefully calculating the cost of each service and accepting payment in both cash and card. Naina Amatya is challenging gender stereotypes by being a successful female entrepreneur in the beauty industry.

The spacious interior has elegant furnishings, plush chairs, and gleaming marble floors. The salon is bathed in soft, warm lighting, casting a flattering glow on everyone within its walls. The walls are painted in soothing shades of beige and cream, with tasteful accents of gold and silver that add a touch of glamor to the space.

The main area of the salon is divided into several sections, each dedicated to a specific aspect of beauty and grooming. There are plush chairs and mirrors for hair styling, manicure and pedicure stations, and private rooms for women's facials, makeup, and massages. The shelves are lined with high-end beauty products from renowned brands, and the staff is impeccably dressed in sleek, black uniforms. The atmosphere is peaceful and serene, with the gentle hum of soft music in the background.

As the client enters the upscale beauty salon Hair and Shanti, a salon run by Amatya and her husband, Aditya (Adi). Both of them greet the clients equally. Naina specializes in makeup, while Adi specializes in hair. Both manage a staff of about twenty people in this unisex salon. They are equal partners. It's time for Naina's regular client, who came to get her makeup done. The makeup room is brightly lit, with natural light streaming from large windows and additional lighting fixtures such as overhead lamps and vanity mirrors. The walls are painted soft and

muted, creating a calming ambiance.

A large, ornate mirror is hung on the wall, surrounded by smaller, decorative mirrors. The centerpiece of the room is a large, comfortable make-up chair, upholstered in plush fabric and decorated with an array of throw pillows. Next to the chair, a stylish make-up table with sleek lines and a glossy surface provides ample space for tools, cosmetics, and accessories. Drawers and shelves are neatly organized and filled with products, ranging from foundations and concealers to eye shadows, lipsticks, and brushes. The room is equipped with a sound system, playing soothing music or upbeat tunes, depending on the mood.

Amatya's client, a young woman, Meghna sits comfortably surrounded by mirrors and bright lights. Naina stands behind her, holding a make-up brush in one hand and a compact in the other. Amatya carefully applies the foundation, blending it seamlessly into the client's skin. Amatya's movements are precise and fluid as she expertly applies the makeup. She consults with the client, asking about the desired look and offering suggestions based on her experience. As she works, she occasionally steps back to assess the overall effect, ensuring that everything is perfect.

Amatya's personal touch to makeup is evident in her intricate designs with eyeliner. She delicately draws delicate kohl-marked eyes with a steady hand and a fine-tipped brush. Her favorite quote is, "Makeup is not a mask, it's art, and it's an expression of individuality." The client looks relaxed and happy as Amatya continues to work her magic, adding the finishing touches to the eye makeup and lipstick. Finally, Amatya hands the client a mirror. The client has just had her makeup done by Naina and admires her reflection in the mirror. Her eyes are closed, and a soft smile plays on her lips.

As a mother of two, Amatya has maintained a balance between her professional and

personal life thanks to Adi's support and mutual understanding. "We both have a passion for the beauty industry, but we also understand the importance of taking care of our family," Adi said. "It's important for us to be there for our kids, and we make sure to take turns so that one of us is always available," Amatya shared.

Amatya's husband also supports her work and is vocal about her talent, breaking the stereotype of men not supporting their wives' careers. As a mother of two, Amatya has also balanced her personal and professional life with the help of Adi's support, demonstrating that women can pursue their careers while also fulfilling their familial duties.

### **Dr. Sonia Chawla**

As patients step into the modern dental clinic in East Delhi, they are greeted by a pristine white reception area. The walls are adorned with vibrant paintings and photographs.

The receptionist smiles warmly and ushers them to a comfortable seating area where patients can wait for their turn. The waiting room has cozy chairs and a large flat-screen TV playing informative videos about dental health.

The patients enter a spacious treatment room when called for an appointment. The room is equipped with state-of-the-art dental technology, including a digital X-ray machine and a computerized system for managing patient records. The dentist, Dr. Sonia Chawla, is friendly and approachable and takes the time to explain each step of the treatment process. The clinic follows strict hygiene protocols. The instruments are sterilized before use.

Dr. Chawla is a dentist and maxillofacial surgeon who has achieved her dreams through hard work and dedication. After completing her bachelor's in dentistry in 2001, she did not stop pursuing her dreams. After she got married, she completed graduate school in 2006, specializing in Maxillofaciology.

As Dr. Sonia Chawla prepares for dental surgery, she puts on a pair of magnifying glasses and begins assessing the patient's oral cavity. The surgical room is bright and sterile, with gleaming metal instruments arranged neatly on a tray.

Dr. Chawla is focused and methodical as she administers local anesthesia to the patient, ensuring their comfort throughout the procedure. She works with precise movements, using a scalpel to make incisions and retractors to keep the surgical site visible.

With the help of an assistant, Dr. Chawla expertly navigates the complex network of nerves and blood vessels, skillfully extracting the problematic tooth or performing the necessary procedure. The patient's vital signs are closely monitored, and Dr. Chawla's skilled hands work efficiently and smoothly.

As the surgery progresses, the room fills with the dental drill and suction sound, and the air is filled with the subtle smell of disinfectant. Her focus never wavers as she works tirelessly to complete the procedure with precision and care.

Dr. Chawla has achieved success through her family and husband's support. She credits her husband's passion for dentistry and her practicality for their success. "My husband and I complement each other. He is passionate about dentistry, and I am the more practical one. We work together to ensure our patients receive the best care possible," she said.

Dr. Chawla is not only an academician but also a practitioner. She has worked in clinical dentistry for many years and has helped countless patients with their dental needs. "I love making a difference in people's lives. It's a great feeling to relieve someone's pain or improve their smile," she added.

Dr. Chawla is also involved in Research and has published several papers on various topics related to dentistry and maxillofacial surgery. "Research is an important part of dentistry.

It allows us to stay up-to-date with the latest techniques and treatments and helps us provide better care to our patients," she said.

Dr. Chawla's success is not just limited to her profession. She has also been able to manage her finances and handle all money matters on her own. "It's important to be independent and take charge of your finances. It gives you the confidence to pursue your dreams," she concluded.

**APPENDIX B**  
**QUESTIONS ASKED**

1. What motivates you to work in your industry?
2. How do you balance your professional and personal life?
3. What role did culture and religion play in your decision to become a career woman?
4. How do you view the issue of personal choice in religion and culture?
5. What challenges do you face in your work and personal life?
6. What does work mean to you, and why is it important to you?
7. How do you feel about your work and the people who support you?
8. Does your partner and/or your family support your decision to work? Please elaborate.
9. How do you balance her work and family responsibilities?
10. What are your goals for your children, and why are they important to you?



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