

Chapter 21

Western Work Worlds and Altering Approaches to Marriage: An Empirical Study of Women Employees of Call Centers in India¹

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ABSTRACT

Based on a qualitative empirical study of women call center employees in India, this chapter argues that approaches towards marriage are being altered due to the impact of Western work worlds. In-depth interviews were conducted with eighteen respondent located in Delhi, a metropolitan area, and Jaipur, a second tier city. Though, in terms of size, culture, and outlook of people there are great differences between Delhi and Jaipur, the work culture introduced by the call centers is similar in both cities. Consequently, the findings reveal certain similar as well as certain different opinions in the approaches towards marriage at both the cities. Women are negotiating with these approaches to continue with either employment in call center or marriage, or both. By doing a comparative analysis between the respondents of two cities about the decision of marriage, the study provides a range of approaches adopted by the women employees of call centers, while balancing work and the decision of marriage. The chapter also highlights the varying forms of women agency being exercised while dealing with the issue of marriage along with the unprecedented work culture of call centers in India.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0020-1.ch021

INTRODUCTION

After completing her schooling, Sapana² wanted to work and earn some money. When she got into call center job she found it pretty interesting. In the words of Sapana, a call center employee from Delhi,

[I]t was an absolutely new experience, so I decided to do graduation through correspondence, and to earn money for my future studies. Call centers are generally of two types, inbound and outbound. In inbound, you get calls from customers to solve their queries. And in outbound, you make calls to other countries and ask questions. Mine is an outbound call center. We make calls to America only. I work five days a week, from 5:30 in the evening till 4:00 a.m. [This is 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in New York City.] All night I work. In the morning I sleep from 5:00 or 5:30 a.m. and wake up at 2:00 p.m. I get ready for my office, and my cab arrives at 4:30 p.m. My parents don't have any problem, because they know the atmosphere and environment of my call center is pretty good. We get proper Indian meals there, free of cost, and snacks. Transport is available to us. We have tennis courts and basketball courts, where on Saturdays and Sundays we can recreate. Once or twice in a month we have a party, either in the call center or outside. Once in six or seven months, 24-hour tours are arranged, like to Agra or Jaipur. We get good incentives if our log-in time is proper, and if we get good leads and sales. All our holidays are to the American system—Thanksgiving Day, Easter, all those festivals which Americans celebrate. We don't get leave on Raksha Bandhan or Dipawali. My lifestyle has changed completely. I don't have time to listen to anyone, even my mom. I don't get time for any other thing, not even watching TV. I can't meet my friends or relatives. This is absolutely a foreign system. Americans work hard till Friday, and then they party hard on Saturdays and Sundays.

The above mentioned case provides a detailed description about the changes experienced by a woman employee of call centers in India. Such transformations in the lifestyle of women in India are certainly expected to leave their mark on the other aspects of their lives.

The rise of the global information technology (IT) and information and communication technology (ICT) industry have been inextricably linked with the process of globalization. In the earlier phase of globalization, manufacturing jobs moved from the industrialized economy to the low cost locations in the third world and now service jobs are moving in the same fashion. These changes have brought forth a global economy with the capacity to work in the real time with the help of infrastructure provided by the information and communication technologies and liberalization policies implemented by governments and international institutions (Castells, 2000).

In the era of globalization when the work time is getting more flexible and even disappearing, the work is speeding up with the increasing connect-edness of people across borders on the one hand and getting freed from the traditional temporal controls, on the other (Poster, 2007). Given the fact that workplace culture and temporalities are getting reshaped under globalization, there is a need to understand the impact of these changes on the lives of the employees of these workplaces.

The present study discusses the altering approach towards marriage in India, by focusing on the women employees of the growing transnational call center industry in two cities of India, Delhi (the National capital) and Jaipur, a second tier city.

The institution of marriage in India has always been affected by the socio-economic changes in the Indian society. Apart from gradual improvement in the status of women in India, due to spread of education and inclusion of women into work-force, the present study assumes that the modern workplaces also have the potential to alter the attitude of women employees towards marriage.

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