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## Life as reflected in women's mirror

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### Abstract

The most cliché philosophical question ever asked is: *How do you perceive life...?* Every philosopher has a different idea what the meaning of life is. Life is not just pursuit of happiness on a physical level, which indeed if we are talking about chemical reactions of the brain can be stimulated or altered by a pill. It is very important to wonder what is beyond each waking day? For what do we live our lives in this universe? The way we perceive life, we try to live it. This is established fact which no one can deny.

Women, who are considered as a secondary living being, too have perception of life. With those ideas they try to step on the ways of this world. This paper aims at diving in to that tranquil water-pond like life. It tries to enumerate whether education plays any role in widening of the perception of life. Some women working at the higher education level were treated as to sample to find out what they perceive about religion, society, their freedom, their individuality, relationship, their professionalism and the aims of their lives. This was obtained as data through an inventory prepared by the researcher. The statistical and descriptive analysis enabled the researcher to draw certain conclusions on how women at higher education level perceive life. The major point in selecting women working at higher education level is to infer how their influence will be translated in their female students studying at higher education level. This research paper is exceptional in a way that it also strives to present how women at higher education level be oriented to develop their insights into how to come out of socio-psychocultural bondages to fabricate a unique identity as an individual.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, pedagogy, indianness

### 1. Introduction

Life is like as a weaving or collage wherein the quality of the fabric, the colors, thinness and texture contribute to the overall look of it. Someone's attire may look traditional, whereas someone happens to have an exclusive designer piece. It may be also possible that one continue to have such a cloth which loses its colour or has an outdated concept. Our reaction to such a variety in attires are similar to how we react to various brands of life. The variety in various brands in life is decided by looking into the way life is lived. How we live life has a kind of software-like perception (regarding life) in the backdrop. The life appears eloquent to some, whereas to some it is necessary to shield their eyes when dealing with some of the heated situations. The same way some people tend to look down when admitting they are wrong. Some chase happiness for the entirety of their life and eventually find that it does not want to be found. It gives you a glimpse, a slight cradle of hope that it would stick around. Such mobile feelings are like RADIO MUSIC which cannot be predicted beforehand but can be enjoyed when our perception is altered. But mind well in our own *life radio* we ourselves are the composer of the music as well as the singer. Others may listen to it, enjoy or criticize it. But the *effort* of singing the melody of life offers immense pleasure to us (Lourdes, Martha, P 84).

Women, in whom the affective dominance is said to be high-flying are mostly found to perceive life in variety of ways (Keith, p 34). The quality of their perception is based on their social milieu, cultural closeness and of course their education (Lalage, p 67). This paper is an effort in clicking a photogenic view of how women working at higher education perceive life.

### 2. Rational

To be intellectual is a good thing but not everything. This notion seems to be driving force of life led by women who are working at higher level. It is also chit chatted that women see the meaning of life to be achieved in their social life.

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This may very true in Indian context with a view that participation in intellectual life doesn't give her that much satisfaction which she feels in her other roles. This vista calls for a systematic attestation by undertaking a research to peep into what women believe about life and how they perceive life. The women working at higher level too are seen facing many personal and social problems. Their intellect and posteriori experience seem to in isolation when they have to deal with such issues. This state of affairs indicates that there is something which plays a vital role in making women happy/unhappy other than her intellectual participation. To publicize such issues is an attention-grabbing issue. This research is an attempt to find out testimony of this fact. Cultural influences are found more on women in India than man irrespective of what work they are engaged in. This research explores the perception of women working at higher education level and answers why this influence is strong in women.

**3. Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To be acquainted with how women working at higher education level perceive life in the context of religion:
- To be acquainted with how women working at higher education level perceive life in the context of society:
- To be acquainted with how women working at higher education level perceive life in the context of self awareness:
- To measure the difference in their perception of life in relation to their marital status:
- To identify the priorities in life of women working at higher education level.
- To infer the role of society, religion, culture and education in shaping the perception of life of women working at higher education level
- To inquire into how the women working at higher education level see themselves different from ordinary women

- To recommend a plan for widening of perception of life of women working at higher education level and those who are associated with them.

**4. Research Methodology**

To tweet in to the perception of life of women working at higher education level and to achieve the aforesaid objectives 27 women working at higher education level at sardar Patel University were selected as a sample from the faculty of Arts. This was done using purposive sampling technique. An inventory titles Perception of Life Inventory (POLI) was constructed containing three parts and given. The first part having 45 statements were to be rated between agree to disagree in five point scale. The statements were related to perceptions to life in the context of religion, society, relations and self awareness. This part aimed at finding data for objectives no 1 and 2. The second part contained prioritization of ten fields in the lives of women. This was to find data for objective 3 and 4. The third part of it contained two open ended questions to make the respondent express about the role of education in their perception of life and the difference between them and ordinary women. The first two parts were statistically (chi square, T Test, F Ratio) analysed and the third part was analysed using content analysis method. The analysed data were interpreted to draw conclusions and recommendations.

**5. Analysis and Interpretation of the Data**

The analysis of the data received through the inventory has been done in following segments:

**5.1 Analysis of Perception of Life in Context of Religion of Women Working at Higher Education Level**

There were five statements related to women's perception of life in context of religion. The essence point of each statement along with the frequency and chi-square is given below.

**Table 1:** Religion and Perception of life

Sr no	Essence of the statement	Completely agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Completely disagree	Chi-square	significance
1	Not Following religious rules strictly/rigidly	4	15	2	3	3	21.70	*
2	Implementation of in-depth understanding of life	12	12	1	1	1	26.88	*
3	conflict to be invited by challenging religious rules	4	15	2	2	4	22.04	*
4	No identity gained through association with a religion	6	6	10	3	2	7.25	**
5	Not tolerating inhumane behavior of religious people	18	6	3	-	-	14.00	*

From the table above it is evident that except for statement no 4, the chi-square value is significant at .05 level in all the four statements. So it is derived that the distribution of the frequency for rest of the statements show significant difference. It further suggests that in context of not following the religious rules rigidly, implementing in-depth understanding of religion in life, and challenging rules of religion, the women working at higher education show notable favour. Regarding not having tolerance for the inhumane behavior of so called religious people, 18 women reacted their full agreement. This shows that the women working at higher education are largely not blind

followers of religion. They perceive that cognitive efforts are to be done to understand, follow and challenge religious practices.

**5.2 Analysis of Perception of Life in Context of Society of Women Working at Higher Education Level:**

There were eight statements related to women's perception of life in context of society. The essence point of each statement along with the frequency and chi-square is given below.

**Table 2:** Society and perception of life

Sr no	Essence of the statement	Completely agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Completely disagree	Chi-square	significance
1	Challenging development obstructive social traditions and rules	9	14	3	1	-	15.51	*
2	Not letting go one’s feelings for fulfilling the expectations of society	8	10	6	3	-	3.96	**
3	Not maintaining relations at the cost of personal wishes	3	7	7	5	5	2.07	**
4	Thinking of development in spite of socially unfavourable conditions	3	20	2	-	2	34.77	*
5	Thinking about what is desired by the self , not about the desirable	3	10	5	8	1	9.85	*
6	Priority is not social responsibilities	2	3	12	8	2	14.66	*
7	Acceptance of idea conflicts	3	9	6	9	-	3.66	**
8	Not maintaining relationships if it turns out as a drudgery	6	21	-	-	-	8.33	*

The table: 2 shows that except for statement no 2, 3, and 7 the chi-square value is significant at .05 level. So it is derived that the distribution of the frequency for rest of the statements show significant difference. 85% of women believe in challenging development obstructive rules. 20 women perceive to think about development even in socially unfavorable situations. 33% of women perceive to think about what is desired by them rather than what is desirable for them. In spite of such views almost 50% of women are neutral about social responsibilities as their priority. but the frequency in the last statement show that although the women consider social responsibilities to be

borne by them , yet a considerable majority of them perceive not like to continue with relationship if it becomes a kind of drudgery on their part.

**5.3 Analysis of Perception of Life in Context of Self Awareness of Women Working at Higher Education Level**

There were thirty two statements related to women’s perception of life in context of self awareness. The essence point of each statement along with the frequency and chi-square is given below.

**Table 3:** Self awareness and perception of life

Sr no	Essence of the statement	Completely agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Completely disagree	Chi-square	significance
1	Developing as an individual rather than trying to create positive impression	4	17	2	2	2	31.70	*
2	Following one’s nature and choosing work	4	16	5	2	-	17.59	*
3	Rethinking over previous beliefs for development	20	4	1	1	1	50.59	**
4	Meaninglessness of material possession	4	18	5	-	-	13.55	*
5	Economical status giving identity	2	1	16	4	4	27.25	*
6	Finding options for achieving objectives	2	7	14	3	1	20.96	*
7	Knowledge about what can she become	7	13	3	2	2	16.51	*
8	Importance of cognitive understanding in problem solving	18	5	2	1	1	38.74	*
9	Accepting life as it comes	3	4	15	2	3	21.70	*
10	Working for eliminating one’s weaknesses	3	19	3	1	1	43.55	*
11	Not allowing others to use her in any ways	17	5	3	1	1	33.18	*
12	Plunging into adventures rather than living mechanically	2	4	15	3	3	21.70	*
13	Raising doubts or questions rather than blind acceptance	6	16	3	1	1	29.11	*
14	Craving for the having someone with her to solve problems	6	16	3	2	-	18.18	*
15	Living in present	19	4	2	1	1	43.92	*
16	Cognitive effort to understand people to establish relations	6	8	8	3	2	5.77	**
17	Breaking development obstructive rules/traditions	5	18	2	1	1	38.74	*
18	Sense of one’s continuously developing self	3	13	4	6	1	15.77	*
19	Logical thinking for understanding situations	3	12	8	3	1	15.03	*
20	No carving for security	5	7	11	3	1	10.96	*
21	Exercising the right to choose in spite of the fact that wrong path may be chosen	5	7	8	3	4	3.18	**
22	Least bothered about other’s appreciation	15	4	1	7	-	16.11	*
23	Not becoming unhappy if others do not take in to consideration her abilities and competencies	2	2	8	14	1	22.81	*
24	Loving one’s self	4	10	8	3	2	8.74	**
25	Developing identity though academic achievements only	4	5	10	5	3	5.40	**
26	Working for Internal joy	4	14	7	1	1	21.70	*
27	Not clinging to the memories of the past and expectations of future	5	6	11	4	1	9.85	*

28	Not imposing one's beliefs on others	5	17	3	1	1	33.18	*
29	Interpretation of situation for obtaining happiness	6	16	3	1	1	32.17	*
30	Reflection for developing futuristic insight	6	19	2	-	-	17.55	*
31	Source of happiness : the self, not others	3	14	6	3	1	19.48	*
32	No oversensitivity	6	17	2	1	1	34.29	*

The table: 3 shows that except for statement no 16, 21, 24, and 25 the chi-square value is significant at .05 level. So it is derived that the distribution of the frequency for rest of the statements show significant difference. More than 70-80 % of women strongly agree on the issues like rethinking over previous beliefs for development, importance of cognitive understanding in problem solving, not allowing others to use her in any ways, living in present, and no need or worry about other's appreciation. The same number of women agree to the perceptions regarding developing as an individual rather than trying to create positive impression, following one's nature and choosing work, meaninglessness of material possession, working for eliminating one's weaknesses, raising doubts or questions rather than blind acceptance, breaking development obstructive rules/traditions, not imposing one's beliefs on others, working for Internal joy, interpretation of situation for obtaining happiness, and no oversensitivity. A large number of women were found perceiving neutrally in matters of creating identity through economical status, finding options for achieving objectives, accepting life as it comes, plunging into adventures rather than living mechanically, no carving for security, not clinging to the memories of the past and expectations of future, and developing identity through academic achievements only. The interpretations show that women in their perception would like to challenge the obstructive rules but due to their craving for security they feel hesitant in plunging into risky adventures.

**5.4 Analysis of Women's Priority Areas in Life**

Ten areas given for the priority ordering are listed below. The priority in percentage is given in the following table.

**Table 4:** Priorities of Women

Sr no	Areas	percentage
1	Love for oneself	94%
2	Internal <i>ananda</i>	88%
3	Rethinking over established beliefs	88%
4	Room for independent decision making	86%
5	Craving for happiness	63%
6	Acceptance of others	61%
7	Significant Achievements	60%
8	Social recognition	43%
9	Following the religious rules	20%
10	Dutifulness in social transactions	18%

Table 4 indicates that the most preferred priority area is love for oneself which has received 94% of choice as a first priority. Closure to this are the areas: Internal happiness and rethinking over established beliefs. Room for independent decision making is chosen at the fourth rank with 86% of favour. It is thus collectively interpreted that women consider their individuality at foremost position. Religious and social roles are considered at the lower rung. Happiness, acceptance by others and achievement are placed at the middling choice. The priorities and the proportion suggest that individuality

overpowers any other external authority in women's perception of life.

**5.5 Analysis of Difference in Perception of Life of Women Working at Higher Education Level as Per Their Marital Status**

From the total sample of 27 women working at higher education, 12 were found married and 15 were found unmarried. The difference in their scores on life perception inventory is shown in the following table.

**Table 5:** Marital status and Perception of life

Comparison	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Level of Significance
Married	12	99.08	30.48	8.80	-	0.02
Unmarried	15	138.26	26.94	6.95	3.49	

Table 5: indicates that the mean score of married women working at higher education on life perception inventory is 99.08 and that of unmarried women is 138.26. The difference between the two in t value is -3.49. The probability value is 0.02 which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the null hypothesis: *There is no significant difference between the mean scores of married and unmarried women on life perception inventory* – is rejected. It is thus derived that the mean score of unmarried women on life perception inventory is significantly higher than that of married women.

**5.6 Analysis of Responses about the Role of Education in Widening Women's Perception of Life**

The Life perception inventory included a question on role of education in widening women's perception of life. The responses are tabulated below with their percentage.

**Table 6:** Role of Education and women's perception of life

Idea units	Education helped in ....	Percentage
Taking decisions through logical thinking		91%
Remaining steady in different situations		89%
Not getting distracted from external forces		82%
Knowing one's strength and weaknesses.		82%
Increasing Maturity in relationships		76%
Developing Wide spectrum of thinking, perceiving		73%
Increase in confidence		72%
Changing view of life as experiences are gained		70%
Applying wisdom gained from experiences in life situations		69%
Going beyond action-reactionary life cycle.		64%
Elimination of imaginary fear		62%
Creation of unique identity		47%
Increasing Practicality		43%
Increasing Positive attitude		40%
Doing what one wishes to do, without caring for what others think		40%
Professionalism		38%
Understanding the need for freedom for the self and room for giving freedom to others		27%
Perceiving reality as it is and thinking what can be done to enrich it		21%
Problem solving by cognitive efforts		20%

Updating oneself for achieving new heights	18%
Increasing Independence	18%
Challenging authority	16%
Discarding of negative feelings	12%
Remaining away from superficial attractions	8%

The above mentioned idea units and their proportion indicate that education has imparted a kind of insight to women working at higher education which made them more thinking centric , individualistic and developing. This has made them to create a different identity compared what culturally an socially an average woman is given.

**5.7 Analysis of the Responses about the Difference between Women Working at Higher Education Level and the Rest:**

The life perception inventory included an open ended question on how the women working at higher education see themselves different from rest of the women. The major idea units with their frequency in percentage is given below.

**Table 7: Women (at higher education level) VS women (the rest)**

Idea units The women working at higher education are different from the rest in.....	Percentage
Active participation in professional life	67%
Balancing work and household duties	53%
Engaging in lifelong learning for life	47%
Degree of expansions in different dimensions of life	35%
Interchanging thoughts,sharing, entering into constructive dialogues	32%
Availing scope for proving personal worth	30%
Openness in thoughts and practical life	30%
Effective way of solving problems	24%
Expansion of broader mentality	24%
Futuristic perspective in present life	12%
Performing other roles ore qualitatively	12%

The above mentioned idea units and their proportion indicates that women working at higher education see themselves active in their roles and their odyssey is more towards development. Their life doesn't become stagnant but thinking, sharing and participation makes them more rejuvenating.

**6. Findings**

Form the analysis and interpretation of data given in 5.1 to 5.7, the following findings have been derived.

1. A large number of women working at higher education perceive religion not as a practice to be followed strictly. They emphasize its implementation in life. The so called religious people when indulge into inhuman behavior becomes intolerable for them. This implies that they understand religion in true sense of the term. They would also like to contribute in interpreting the principles of religions by challenging the anti-development elements into it. The cognitive antenna thus seems active in matters of religious perceptions of women working at higher education.
2. Perceiving life from social point of view by women working at higher education is noteworthy in the sense that they have considered society secondary to their individuality. More than 90 percent of the women hold on to developmental judgments in dealing with social affairs. It is derived that they would not hesitate to challenge

obstructive social traditions and rules. This proves that this attitude would transmit the society to a more open structure than before wherein women will play a vital role in creating their own identity. Their belief about thinking for development in spite of unfavourable situations points out that they are empowered enough to visualize the scope for their development.

3. The responses do not indicate that the women have discarded the importance of their social responsibilities in the name of development. They prefer to bring balance between their individual development and social responsibilities. This is again supported from their perceptions that economical soundness and academic achievements in isolation do not create identity of them. This finding marks difference between the women working at higher education and those of the western countries.
4. The empowered self concept of most of the women working at higher education is perceptible in their preference for discarding those relations which are almost drudgery like for them. It is thus proved that they do not deny to carryout their social responsibilities and at the same time they do not wish to forfeit their desires to be treated as an individual.
5. The self esteem of the women working at higher education is found advanced in their perception towards life. More than 85% of them like to have span for their escalation. They prefer to have freedom of choice and bear the responsibilities of their choice.
6. The women working at higher education level largely adhere to cognition rather than affectivity in dealing with the people around and social affairs.
7. The women working at higher education understands real meaning of happiness. For them material possession, relationship yearning and a submissive role are the negative elements in living authentic life as an individual.
8. Most of the women working at higher education have responded positively in matters to challenging the obstructive factors yet due to their preference for safety and security they perceive not to indulge in risks, thinking over mistakes for taking new decisions and having someone as a support in life. This indicates that they have not come out of their feminine psyche.
9. In their priorities love for oneself, internal happiness and rethinking over established beliefs are the most favoured areas where as social recognition, following religious rules and dutifulness in social transactions are least favoured areas.
10. The unmarried women are more individualistic in their perception of life compared to married women. This may be because the later have to bear structure given responsibilities.
11. The women working at higher education consider the role of education significant as their cognitive dimension is crystallized through education making them take thinking oriented decisions, become positive, practical and value freedom of self as well as others.
12. The women working at higher education perceive themselves different from other women in sense of openness, balancing duties, having futuristic perspective and performance of various roles qualitatively.

## 7. Recommendations:

From the findings broad-spectrum recommendations have been outlined to accelerate the speed of empowerment of women in general.

- Education plays a vital role in expansion of perception, and their implementation in life. More and more women should be exposed to higher education. This will enable them to defy what is obstructive in their lives.
- Empowerment is needed to break a number of real dichotomies affecting women: personal/collective, domestic/public, material/ideological. Women who are empowered should be able to stop the undesirable, to transform ongoing practices, and to create new visions.
- Formal higher education has substantial contributions to make to an improved gender identity through the removal of stereotypes, the fostering of positive gender identities through the curricula. This should be promoted.

## 8. Summing up

What matters is empowerment of women irrespective of where they work. Empowerment enables the person to gain insight and have an awareness of what is undesirable and unfavorable about her current situation, perceive a better situation, the possibilities of attaining it and realising what is within her reach and what she could do to get to a better situation. This characterisation of empowerment implies that the process could involve a change of perceptions about the self, the environment, and the relationship of the self and the environment (Margaret, p 121). It is a process that involves the creation of images, the generation of a "push" to act or what psychologists call motivation. Change of perceptions implies a change of attitude and a change in one's outlook in life. Empowerment enables women to generate choices and as an outcome of having such choices, she acquires leverage and bargaining power. Empowered, a woman would take steps to find and/or create options or find and link to the means to find the options. An external party could help women find and create such options. When one has options, one can a) choose not to follow the pressures and demands of the more powerful party; b) ask and negotiate with the other party to change the situation and make it more acceptable. Let this lesson be learnt to all women from this authentic document.

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