

Centre stage

A New Chapter

Whether to upgrade their skills to beat competition, or for the sheer quest of knowledge, an increasing number of working women are returning to the familiar confines of the classroom

>> SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Women today, are asserting themselves in every possible way – professionally and personally. Education has now become a tool for them to express their freedom. “There is a definite trend as more women are going back to academics. Younger women undertake part-time courses to fine-tune their skills. While with women in their 30s and 40s, it is seen in the changing context of time. An educated mother is usually considered better equipped to guide her children,” says Professor V. Rajaraman, Director, KJ Somaiya Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication. Explaining the changing psyche of contemporary women, Dr. Anjali Chhabria, psychiatrist, iterates, “Tremendous value is placed on education itself. Women choose to be independent and marriage is no longer a compulsion. They now pursue their personal ambitions of studying further, at any given point in time.”

Back to school

Neha Raykar, a postgraduate in Economics worked with a leading bank till she realised that education was her calling. She explains, “I joined work but there was a mismatch of interests. Yes, I felt slightly insecure when I left a high-paying job, and opted for a Ph.D but studying was more important to me.” Like her, many others often take the risk of letting go of comfortable work environments to head back to the forgotten grind of academia.

Front-benchers

Many women meet the challenge of studying while holding full-time jobs as well. Hetal Kotak, 27 years, Systems and Trade professional, who enrolled in a part-time MBA programme, explains, “I wanted to stay in touch with new practices in management, to have a professional edge since competition is cut-throat.” Prioritising is imperative and juggling work, home and studies can often be a challenge. One requires good time management skills, advises Salunkhe. There are also women whose prime focus is education and marriage takes a back-seat. Saumya Srivastava, 26 years, a research scholar at Pune University, shares, “My focus is to complete my Ph.D. And, I’m looking for a partner who will accept my priority.”

Homework

Presenting another dimension to this affirmative trend is Debanjana Ghosh, journalist and mother of a five-year-old. She points out, “I wanted a formal qualification, so I decided to study again.” Many women find it difficult to deal with the guilt of not being able to spend time with their families. But Dr. Chhabria recommends, that one should make the best of the time available at home and keep open communication with family and kids.

Beyond the syllabus

Some women continue studying purely because they enjoy learning. Shobha Sah, insurance professional, completed a diploma in Indian aesthetics and is now pursuing an online course, besides working full-time. She says, “A formal educational programme gives me a better

understanding of the subject. I intend to study as long as I can." Concur Suchitra Bhure, advocate, who has completed six educational degrees, three of which have been post-marriage, "Whether you get a formal degree in hand or not, education broadens your horizons."

So whatever your motivation may be, it's time to contemplate – Are you ready to return to the classroom?

Your check-list...

Be a risk-taker and maintain a positive attitude.

Set realistic, short-term goals.

Seek family help to set up a support network.

Look after your health, as balancing many responsibilities including studies can put pressure on your well-being.

Don't let finance be a constraint as special educational loans are now easily available.

Why are women going back to studies?

Women need intellectual stimulation, so they opt out of monotonous jobs.

Those who didn't have an opportunity to study earlier, now want to fulfill that ambition.

It is the tremendous self-belief to achieve more, that motivates women to study further.

- Swati Salunkhe, MD, Growth Centre India Pvt. Ltd.

