

# Empowering Women in Architecture: A Study in India

Akankshya

Managing Director and Chief Architect, Ashtitva Studio (OPC) Pvt. Ltd, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

**Abstract:** Council of Architecture, India data of 2018 shows clearly that the growth of number of registered architects is very slow till 2014 since 2003, we have marked a sudden spurt of the same from 2015 till 2017 again a sudden fall in the year 2018 in India. While women graduate from architecture schools at near parity with men, less than 20 percent become licensed practitioners. In the field of architecture women face a lot of gender discrimination in terms of retention, promotion, earnings, access to seniority, leadership opportunities or belief that their contribution has been taken seriously. One of the most peculiar things about architectural practice is the range of non-merit based factors that may determine the successful practice start up and expansion: access to the dominant socio-economic patronage group, access to capital, access to social networks, access to alternative income streams while the practice is being established, the social advantage of the old school tie or family connections, and even more personal factors – like physical attractiveness, charisma and romantic partners. Of course few women have broken this gendered barrier and come out successfully in their business. But in most of the cases enabling and motivational factors are not available. Marxist feminism weds theory to practice and encourages us to rethink the relationship between architecture schools and the larger professional world. By linking individuals to systems, feminism allows us to perceive structural limitations and to envision dissolving barriers.

**Keywords:** architects, gender discrimination, feminism, empowerment, women

## 1. Introduction

The fast changing face of India is partly due to the brilliant architects in the country. There are so many notable names who have achieved international fame and awards and are working towards a sustainable society. Here is a small description of five of the top women architects in India whose talents know no boundaries. They are Brinda Somaya an Architect and Conservationist, Sheila is an internationally acclaimed Architect, Urban Designer, and Sustainability Expert. Chitra Vishwanath's Biome Environmental Solutions is a Bangalore-based design firm focused on ecology, architecture and water. Shelia owns her architectural firm SKJ Architects in Mumbai with 15 women employees in her firm. She has diversified her activities to cover industrial buildings, educational institutions, bungalows and interior design of large spaces. Anupama Kundoo has her focus set on material research and experimentation towards an architecture that has low environmental impact and is appropriate to the socio-economic context (Achoriwala:2018). Status of these exceptionally brilliant architects can not be generalized while assessing the status or level of empowerment of women architects in India.

For empowerment of women in technological studies, India has adopted special policy and in 2001 it enumerates that, "Programmes will be strengthened to bring about a greater involvement of women in science and technology. These will include measures to motivate girls to take up science and technology for higher education and also ensure that development projects with scientific and technical inputs involve women fully. Efforts to develop a scientific temper and awareness will also be stepped up. Special measures would be taken for their training in areas where they have special skills like communication and information technology. Efforts to develop appropriate technologies

suited to women's needs as well as to reduce their drudgery will be given a special focus too (NPFWE:2001)".

Women architects represent a technical group but it is not a homogenous group so also the conditions of women who are in architecture ; they differ widely according to their qualification, talents, firms, work engagement and above all depending on their networking and capital investment. Women architects are group of entrepreneurs who have already selected their carrier for their creative business .Within the concept of empowerment they have already crossed the first step , they have wished and chosen their carrier in the path to become an women entrepreneur and thus to empower themselves. Next step is the motivational and enabling aspect which has remained skewed for which they are not able to reach their desired goal. Our following analysis will clearly reveal how empowerment of Indian women architects has remained stunted.

I have conducted this study on the basis of secondary data of world literature available in various websites, Council of Architects (COA), India. Apart from this I have adopted participatory observation method, a feminist methodology to collect first hand data. Myself as an architect in the form of experience sharing data were collected from various women architects in 2016-17.

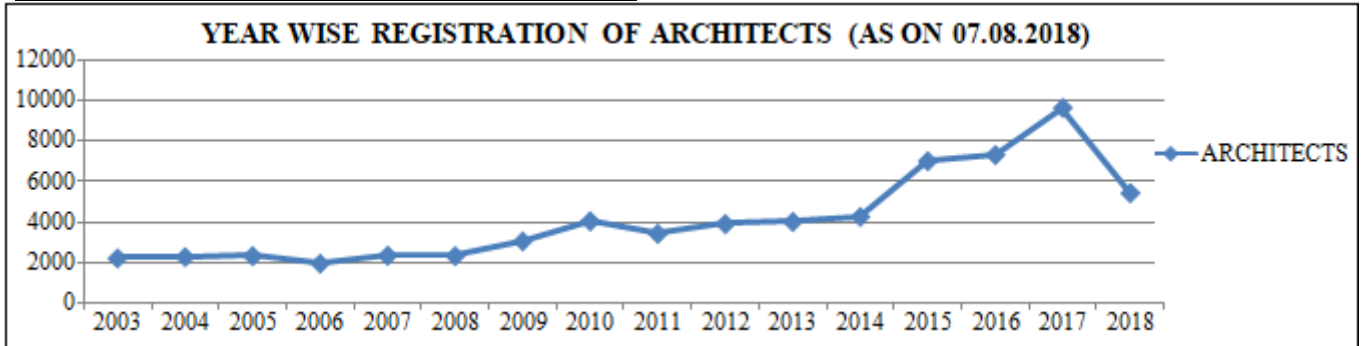
**Table 1:** Year Wise Registration of Architects (As on 07.08.2018)

S.No.	Year	Number of Architects	Percentage
1	2003	2200	3.36
2	2004	2265	3.46
3	2005	2311	3.54
4	2006	1943	2.97
5	2007	2333	3.56
6	2008	2316	3.54
7	2009	3042	4.65
8	2010	4034	6.17
9	2011	3412	5.21

10	2012	3898	5.96
11	2013	4001	6.12
12	2014	4251	6.5
13	2015	7001	10.71
14	2016	7306	11.17
15	2017	9631	14.73
16	2018	5421	8.29
Total:		65365	
Percentage		100	

Source;COA:2018,<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=31&lid=44>

As on 07.08.2018, there are a total 65365 i.e. approximately Sixty five thousand Architects in India. In the past 15 years the number has increased by forty two thousand.



**Figure 1**

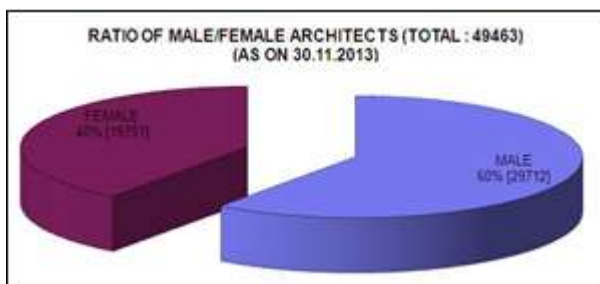
Source;COA:2018,<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=31&lid=44>

Table No-1 reflects number of registered architects since 2003 to 2018 in India(COA:2018).In the year 2003 they were only 2200 which has raised as high as 5421 in 2018.It was the highest in 2017 i.e 9631.We have observed many ups and down in this number within last one and half decade in the country. Figure no –1 shows clearly that the growth of number of registered architects is very slow till 2014 since 2003,wehave marked a sudden spurt of the same from 2015 till 2017 again a sudden fall in this in the year 2018 in India.

## 2. Ratio of Male and Female Architects in India

Out of these fifty thousand Architects, 60% (29,712) is male while 40% (19,751) is female. The number of women architects has increased in the past 5 years from 34% to 40%.

An interesting fact is that while 35% of the male architects are self employed, only about 22 % of female architects are self employed (COA: 2013). This could be because the general perception about women architects is that they are better suited to be the draftsmen, designers and so people hesitate to approach a woman architect for architectural services. Due to non availability of gender divide data for current year; this analysis is based on 2013.



An international source says “the crucial transition from school to practice is at the heart of the profession’s gender

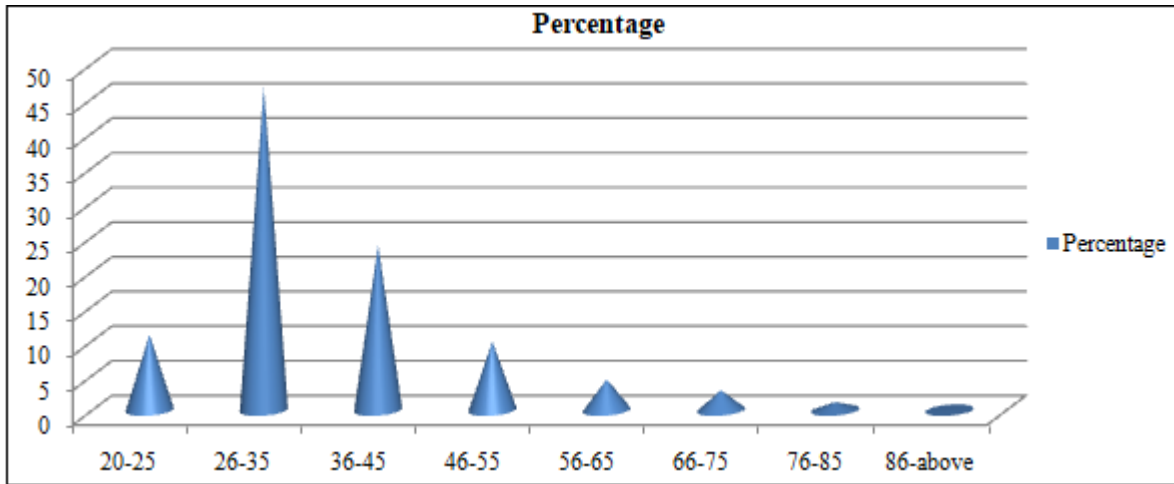
imbalances, for while women graduate from architecture schools at near parity with men, less than 20 percent become licensed practitioners( Stratigakos,D:2012)”. In the field of Architecture women face a lot of gender discrimination. Burns expressed, “I have experienced different treatment to male colleagues in terms of retention, promotion, earnings, access to seniority, leadership opportunities or belief that my contribution has been taken seriously. The AJ 2012 survey confirmed that nearly 50% of the women surveyed had experienced these forms of gendered patterns of behavior”

There is a gap between these two points of views, between belief in individual agency – our capacity to act in the world and control our destiny – and belief in the actions of culture in producing and supporting non-merit based patterns in workplace treatment. One of the most peculiar things about architectural practice is the range of non-merit based factors that may determine the successful practice start up and expansion: access to the dominant socio-economic patronage group, access to capital, access to social networks, access to alternative income streams while the practice is being established, the social advantage of the old school tie or family connections, and even more personal factors – like physical attractiveness, charisma and romantic partners. Burn commented “I have seen radically talented architects fail in practice due to psychopathic personality traits even while their design practice and design innovation were brilliant”(Burn:2012).

**Table 2:** Age Groups of Architects as on 1.04.2017

Srl No	Age Group	Number Of Architects	Percentage
1	20-25	5587	10.95
2	26-35	23828	46.70
3	36-45	12151	23.80
4	46-55	5050	09.90
5	56-65	2273	04.45
6	66-75	1471	02.88
7	76-85	589	01.15
8	86-above	49	0.09
	Total	50998	(100)

Source;<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=31&lid=44>



**Figure 2:** Age Groups of Architects

Table no.2 reveals the percentage of young architects between the age group of 26 to 35 years are the maximum i.e.; 46.7 percent ,next to it is the hub of middle aged group constituting 23.8 percent who belong to the age group of 36-45yrs. The youngest architects are between 20-25 years of age are constituting 10.95 percent of the total licensed architects in India.

The data also shows that the architects have started their carrier at the age of 20,after 35 years their number has decreased while going up the ladder of age groups and after 56 of age the graph has shown a total fall ( see fig- 2). At the older age after 56 their number has reduced abruptly, the reason might be that the architects are not available in this elderly age to take up hard and stressful work. It reflects while the architects are getting much experienced they don't get that much work demand from market and society .And other factor may be responsible for the explanation of this graph is that at young age they do a lot many work which are heavy and hard in nature.

But same table also shows surprisingly, there are 1471Architects in the age group 66-75 and 589 architects in 76 -85 age groups and believe it or not there are 49 Architects older than 85 who are still practicing. Architecture being a creative field, one can just not fix an age of retirement. So if you have the enthusiasm for it, you

could still be practicing at 90! At a roundtable meeting of women architects in America, a woman in her late thirties who works at a mid-sized firm spoke passionately during the Q-and-A about how hard she had struggled to “make it to the table,” meaning to the project management level, only to look around and discover she was the only woman there. ‘Younger audience members confirmed that they knew that professional survival would depend upon finding mentors and tapping into professional networks, but felt that their solo efforts were largely ineffective’( STRATIGAKOS,D DESPINA:2012)

**Table 3:** Qualification of Architects

QUALIFICATION	No. of Architects	Percentage
B.ARCH	41398	83.69
G.D.ARCH	3919	7.92
MEMBERSHIP OF IIA	1850	3.74
DIP.ARCH	1310	2.64
U/S 25(B)	311	0.62
N.D ARCH	219	0.44
OTHERS	456	0.92
TOTAL	49463	(100)

SOURCE:-  
<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=35&lid=48>

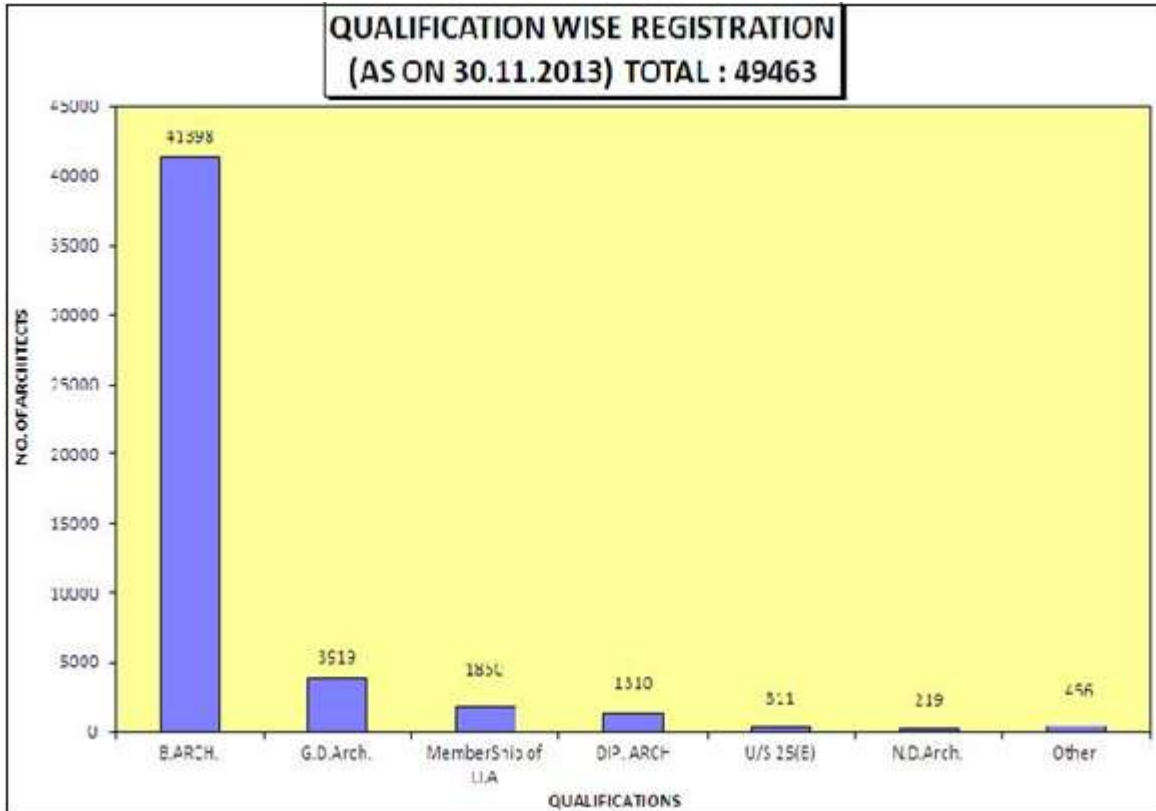


Figure 3

SOURCE:- <https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=35&lid=48>

Mostly the architects are having qualification of B.Arch (83.69%) degree holder than ground architecture(7.92%) member of IIA(3.74%) the diploma arch (2.64%) u/s25(e) (0.62%) ND Arch(0.44%) and 0.92 are other degree holders.

Table 4: Placement of Women Architects (AS ON 15.04.2017)

Sl. No.	Practice	No. of Architects	Percentage
1	Employment in Private Sector	13566	59.02
2	Others	3979	17.31
3	Practising Independently	3926	17.08
4	Employed	968	4.21
5	Employed in Government Sector	331	1.44
6	Practising as Partners	166	0.72
7	Teachers	53	0.23
	Total	(22985)	(100)

SOURCE:

<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=34&lid=47>

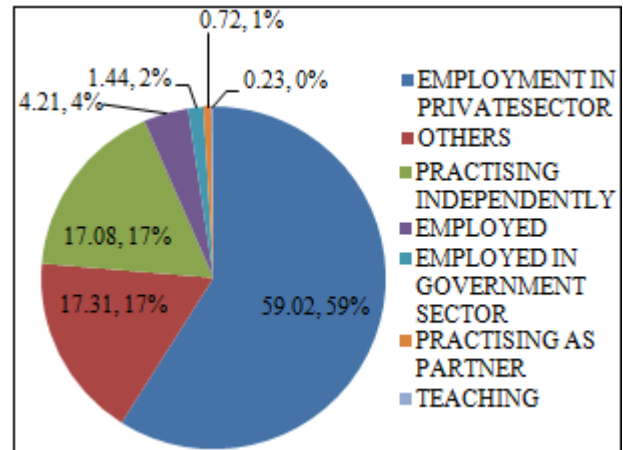


Figure 4: Placement of Women Architects

Table no -4 reflects placement of women architects in India .It shows maximum number of women are employed in private sector i.e.; 59.02 percentage(seeFig-4) .Women architects who are practicing independently in their field constitutes 17.08 percentage and a similar section (17.31 percentage) work on contractual basis as freelancers with contractors etc(see table 1 and table 2). Around 4.1 percentage are employed in other than government sectors and only 1.44 percentage are employed in government sectors .Women who are practicing as partner are less than even 1 percentage which is only 0.72 percentage and only 0.23 percentage women are engaged in teaching job in the field of architecture.

While analysing this data we observe that 59percent of women architects who are employed in private sector do the drafting, 3D visuals, of the design made by other architects



which is in general supposed to be the lowest rank of work in architecture field having minimum earnings. Design works are mostly done by chief architects and are rarely given to female architects who are mostly not willing to go for site visits and are more oriented to work inside office and the scope of site visits is also not given to them for security reasons in the plea of women specific vulnerability.

It reflects clear cut gender discrimination in work allocation in the field of architecture. Heavy concentration of women architects in private sector also leads to casualisation, marginalization, hiring and firing and misutilisation of cheap female labor of women architects in this field. ‘We all want to be valued for the quality of the work we do, not framed by the fact of our gender. But despite our best efforts we are not always in control of how others see us. Karen Burns reflects on the complex interactions between culture and individual agency’ (KAREN BURNS: May 1st, 2012).

Around 17.31 percentage of women architects are in the field of “other” which means they are doing personal work with or without payment, this is also a causal treatment of women architects in India. Women architect constitute a major portion 17.08 percentage women in this group get experience and training from renowned firm or degree from renowned institutes and have established their independent firm .They are mostly located in developed cities of India and generally having strong financial background. This is the most empowered group among the female architects who have established their carrier.

Only 4.21 percentage of women architects are employed in other than Government sector, having a good paycheck. In Government sector only 1.4 percentage of women architects are employed who are getting good salary of class one. If government could have created more job opportunity the condition of women architects would have developed. This is a challenge on the part of Government of India to create more job opportunities to empower women architects of our country.

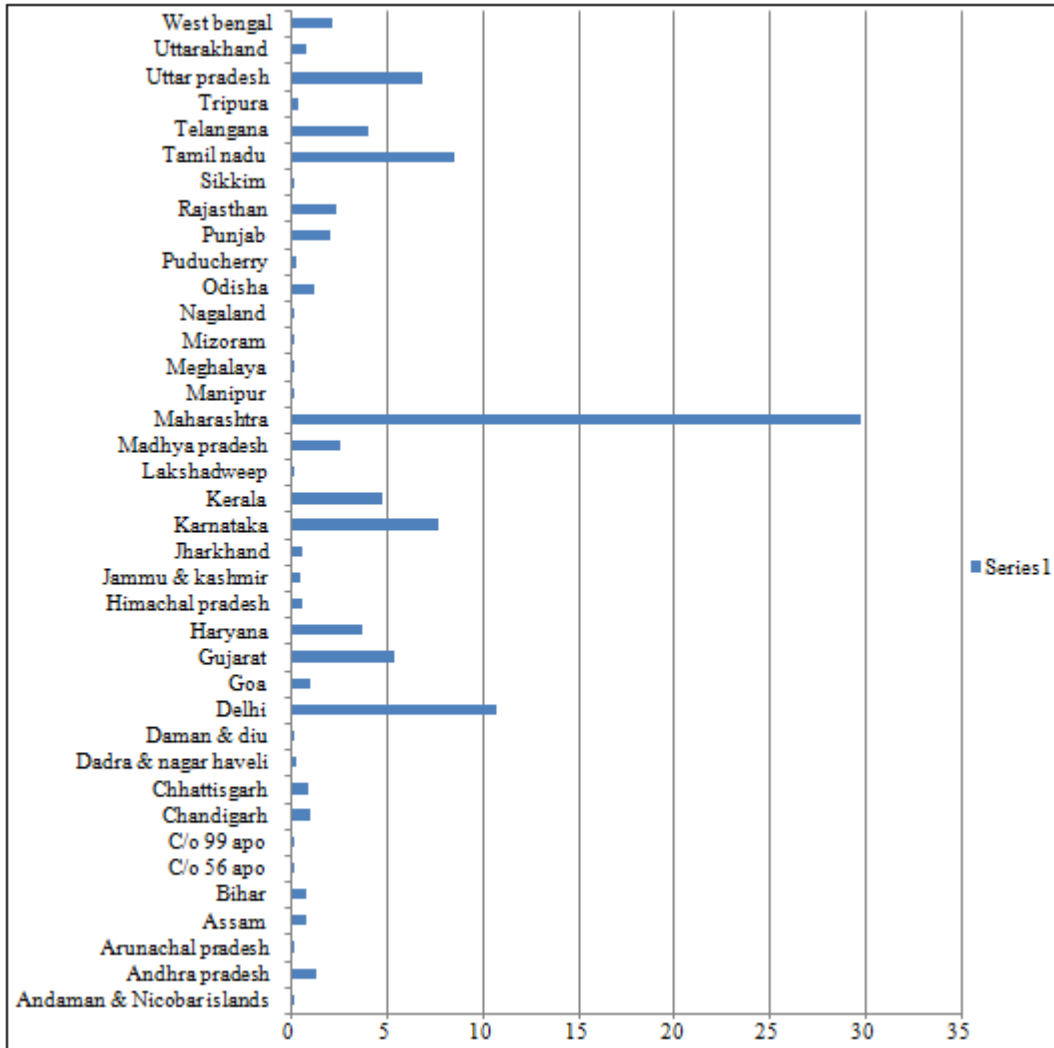
Women architects who are practicing as partner are very minimum constituting 0.72 percentage in India. Women architects who are capable enough are taken as partners and who are relatives or spouse are also considered as partners exempting their capability and are taken as sleeping partners too. But this is also a promising section where empowered women architects can become practicing partners except the spousal and relative entrepreneur. Here women architects are not considered as architects having independent human rights who can also flourish as their male counterparts.

**Table 5:** State Wise Architects (As On 15.04.2017)

S.No.	State Name	Number of Architects	Percentage of Architects
1	Andaman & Nicobar islands	20	0.034
2	Andhra Pradesh	708	1.21
3	Arunachal Pradesh	38	0.065
4	Assam	425	0.73
5	Bihar	421	0.72
6	C/o 56 apo	1	0.0017
7	C/o 99 apo	1	0.0017
8	Chandigarh	561	0.96
9	Chhattisgarh	507	0.87
10	Dadra & nagar haveli	14	0.24
11	Daman & diu	18	0.030
12	Delhi	6198	10.64
13	Goa	536	0.92
14	Gujarat	3112	5.34
15	Haryana	2156	3.70
16	Himachal pradesh	311	0.53
17	Jammu & kashmir	230	0.395
18	Jharkhand	321	0.55
19	Karnataka	4413	7.58
20	Kerala	2742	4.71
21	Lakshadweep	3	0.051
22	Madhya pradesh	1471	2.52
23	Maharashtra	17286	29.70
24	Manipur	71	0.12
25	Meghalaya	86	0.14
26	Mizoram	52	0.089
27	Nagaland	34	0.058
28	Odisha	658	1.13
29	Puducherry	108	0.18
30	Punjab	1130	1.94
31	Rajasthan	1320	2.26
32	Sikkim	54	0.092
33	Tamil nadu	4943	8.49
34	Telangana	2306	3.96
35	Tripura	21	0.36
36	Uttar pradesh	3980	6.83
37	Uttarakhand	426	0.73
38	West bengal	1519	2.06
	Total	58201	100

Source: <https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=376&lid=330>

Table no- 05 shows state wise distribution of architects in India. It shows 58201 number of architects are available in different states in India as on 15.04.2017. Maharashtra tops the list having 29.7% architects, next comes Delhi having 10.64%, Tamilnadu marks third in the 1<sup>st</sup> having 8.49% of concentration of architects. Karnataka has 7.58%, UP, 6.83%, Gujarat 5.34%, Kerala 4.71%, Telangana 3.96%, Kera, Haryana 3.70%, 2.61% West Bengal and all other states having less than 2% of architects in the country. Odisha has 1.18% of architects.



**Figure 5: State Wise Architects (As on 15.04.2017)**

This fig-5 of state wise distribution of architects reflects two things. Only in developed and comparatively richer states like: Maharastra, Delhi, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, U.P, Gujarat have somehow good demand for architects .But all other states are yet to develop an aptitudes for developing the entrepreneurship of architects.

18	Chandigarh	562	1.60
19	Vadodara	557	1.58
20	Surat	547	1.55
21	Kolapur	535	1.52
TOTAL		35096	

SOURCE:-  
<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=32&lid=45>

**Table 6: Cities Having More than 500 Architects (As On 15.04.2017)**

Cities Having more than 500 Architects (As On 15.04.2017)			
S. No.	City Name	Number of Architects	Percentage
1	Mumbai	5853	16.67
2	New Delhi	4996	14.23
3	Pune	3742	10.66
4	Bangalore	3176	9.04
5	Chennai	2926	8.33
6	Hyderabad	1838	5.23
7	Nagpur	1236	3.52
8	Thane	1197	3.41
9	Delhi	1161	3.30
10	Kolkata	1136	3.23
11	Gurgaon	951	2.70
12	Lucknow	889	2.53
13	Jaipur	830	2.36
14	Navi Mumbai	822	2.34
15	Nashik	792	2.25
16	Anantnag	759	2.16
17	Ghaziabad	591	1.68

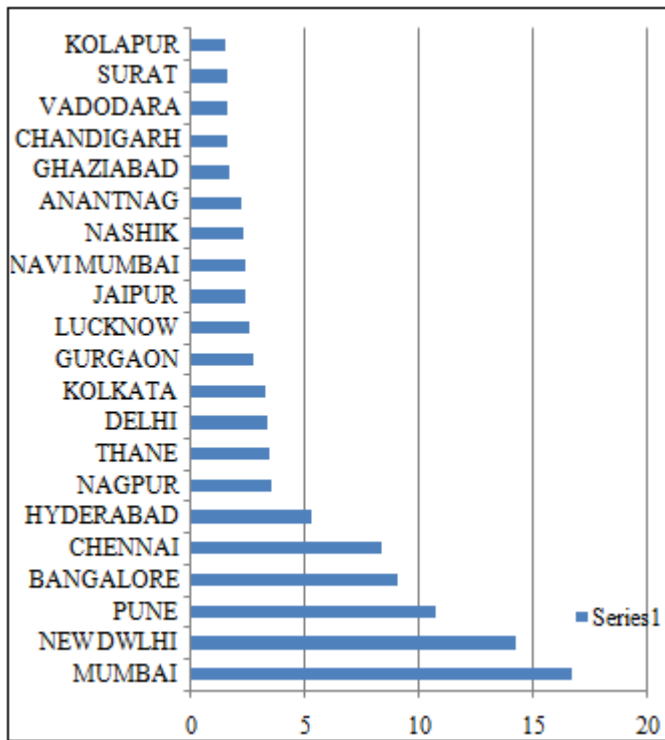


Figure- 6

#### Cities Having More Than 500 Architects (As On 15.04.2017)

Table no 6 shows the picture of availability of architects (more than 500) in Indian cities (see fig no -6). Mumbai having the highest percentage of architects at 16.67% and KOLAPUR having 1.52% as lowest. **Pune, Bangalore, Chennai** comes next to the previous cities (10.66 to 8.33%). Hyderabad Nagpur Thane, Delhi, Kolkata comes third in the rank considering the of architects between ( 5.32 to 3.23%). Gurgaon, Lucknow, Jaipur, Navi Mumbai, Nasik and Anatanag have the 4<sup>th</sup> group of architects consisting between (2.70 to 2.16%); while Gaziabad, Chandiguard, Vadadora, Surat Kolhapur have ( 1.68 to 1.52%).

Our observation from the above discussion shows maximum percentage of women architects are engaged in private sector i.e; 59% which opens very little scope for the growth of individual women's empowerment. Though 17% of women are practicing their entrepreneurship independently but 83% women architects are left behind due to various factors such as non-availability of funds, work, projects, training, patronage of government. Patriarchal society does not appreciate such independent business of women as it demands time and space beyond family hours of home. Working with male partners is neither well appreciated by family nor by society. For security reasons also women are not encouraged for site works which is hazardous, painstaking, and comes under so called male domain.

What is the need of the hour is to offer mentoring and coaching; but while their efforts are to be applauded, drop-out rate of women during the pivotal early years demands a broader and more systematic approach to leadership training. Professional survival would depend upon finding mentors and tapping into professional networks, but felt that their solo efforts were largely ineffective. State and Corporate

sector has to respond to their demands to address gender imbalances with various initiatives.

'Today an increasing number of men insist that many traditional aspects of architectural practice the long hours, expectation of round-the-clock availability, lack of work/life balance, and glorification of the lone creator over collaborative work — are alienating to male as well as female professionals. Many would argue that being employed in architecture and the pursuit of happiness are irreconcilable. It can reasonably be argued that most architects, and almost all recent graduates, are working in conditions that are unhealthy, unsustainable and exploitative' (MAYNARD, A.: 2012).

Of course few women have broken this gendered barrier and came out successfully in their business. But in most of the cases enabling and motivational factors are not available. Opening up of enough placements of women in the job and availability of projects for business of the architects is the need of the time for empowerment of women architect. It is observed that percentage of experienced women architects have reduced in India. Along the ladder of age number of women architects have reduced may be due to non-availability of patronization and support from government and society.

It will not only develop human resource but will also increase the GNP of the country. Resourceful experiences of women architects are to be capitalized and utilized for the growth of the country. Another positive factor is found from our data that where there is a little more concentration of women architects; those states have developed a lot like Maharashtra etc, it may be otherwise true that rich states have afforded to the survival of women architects. For empowerment of women architect patronization of Government and corporate sector is needed. Patriarchal society needs to change its outlook to view women architect as women only. They should be treated as architects then as gender category. Women are essentially creative, when this is combined with architecture outcomes will excel. For empowerment of women architects security system of the society may be strengthened.

What feminism contributes to the architectural profession I'd like to explore some neglected issues that contribute to gender inequities in architecture and to suggest an expanded definition of feminism in the field. As theorist Karen Burns has noted, women in architecture may wish to be seen first and foremost as architects (not as *women* architects), but they cannot control the gendering gaze of society. Acting or dressing "like a man" — the advice women have received for decades as the means to blend into the workplace — only entrenches a masculine norm. Yet difference in itself is not the issue. Indeed, feminism encourages practices that accommodate differences among people and cultures. Difference that grades into discrimination, however, is something else (Burn, K: 2012). A recent survey of some 700 female architects published in *The Architects' Journal* shows that discrimination remains, if not a universal experience, then surprisingly commonplace. From lower pay and fewer promotions to stereotypes about their design skills, the survey documents how women architects continue

to struggle to be accepted as equal players. For example, 47 percent of the female respondents believed they would be paid more if they were male, while 22 percent experienced sexual discrimination at work on a weekly or monthly basis (Revathi Kamath :1955).

Whether “old” or “new,” feminism remains an inherently positive approach: it insists not only on the necessity but also on the *possibility* of change. Marxist feminism weds theory to practice and encourages us to rethink the relationship between architecture schools and the larger professional world. By linking individuals to systems, feminism allows us to perceive structural limitations and to envision dissolving barriers. Both relations of production and modes of production determine the situation of women in architecture field. And Marxist feminism’s attention to practice — and not just to practitioners — fosters new ways of understanding and experimenting with process.

## References

- [1] Achoriwala,R,2018,*Top women architects in India*,Realty NXT,file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Top%20Women%20Architects%20In%20India%20\_%20RealtyNXT.html)
- [2] AnupamaKundoo ,2018[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anupama\\_Kundoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anupama_Kundoo)
- [3] Brinda Somaya,2018,[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brinda\\_Somaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brinda_Somaya)
- [4] Burns ,K ,May1st,2012 Who wants to be a Woman Architect?file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Who%20wants%20to%20be%20a%20Woman%20Architect\_%20-%20Parlour.html , PARLOUR, Women Equity , Architechure
- [5] COA:2018,<https://www.coa.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=31&lid=44>
- [6] COA:2013,*Statistics of Architects in India*,file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Statistics%20Of%20Architects%20In%20India%20\_%20Architecture%20Ideas.html
- [7] Kamath , R,2018,[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revathi\\_Kamath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revathi_Kamath)
- [8] Maynard, A, 2012, Work/life/work balance <http://archi>
- [9] NPFWE,2001, National Policy for Empowerment of Women ,pdf reader
- [10] Stratigakos ,D,2012,*Why Architects Need Feminism, Places Journal*Accessed 20Jul2018. <https://doi.org/10.22269/120912>,file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Why%20Architects%20Need%20Feminism.html
- [11] Stratigakos,D,2012file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/Why%20Architects%20Need%20Feminism.html
- [12] Vishwanath, C, 2018,[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chitra\\_Vishwanath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chitra_Vishwanath)