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Role Conflict: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract:

Women from the ages are sufferers. She has to play multiple roles through-out her life. Societies differentiate roles between men and women. Men had the role of bread earning and protection of women and children, and women had the role of reproduction of heirs and home making. For smooth functioning of family role, differentiation is necessary as per functionalist. Women in any profession or occupation have dual role to perform. On the one hand she is part of working force and on the other a mother-housewife. These two roles demand magnitude of worth stress, responses and adjustment. Acceptance of the goals of home and work simultaneously may lead to role conflict. The present paper discusses various role conflicts in women due to their multiple roles in the society. The present paper is based on secondary sources of data such as books, journals, research paper and newspaper articles, etc.

Keywords: Children, Family, Role, Society, Wife, Women.

Introduction

Every human society is invariably characterised by social differences. Among various forms of stratification, gender differentiation is one. This has been relatively more specific in past societies. Accordingly, men and women were strictly socialised and treated differently. They were assigned different roles and statues. The feminists argue that gender differentiation is not biological, rather it is cultural. It means assignment of domestic roles for women and non-domestic roles for men was not due to biological differences. However, it was due to cultural practices and consequent pattern of socialisation. Men had the role of bread earning and protection of women and children. Women had the role of reproduction of heirs and home making. In the opinion of functionalists in sociology, smooth functioning of the family and its continuity necessitates the assignment of different roles of men and women, and this result in social differentiation. As women bear children, they are given the

role of socialising the offspring in addition to home making and consequently, the role of bread wining for the family was given to men (Sudha).

The traditional pictures of women are very different than what it is today. Women have played a key and largely unrecognised role in the rapid economic and social development worldwide. The role of women in traditional societies has been characterised by dependency, inferior social status and suffering. They have faced systematic discrimination and institutionalised exploitation at the hands of male members of the societies. In some traditional, especially primitive and agricultural societies, though women participated equally in social and cultural fields and were economically more productive than men, they were secluded, denied important rights like decision-making in the family and inheritance rights and were not considered the proprietors of their property. The position of women in traditional societies continued to remain the same for centuries (Dabla: 1991). However, open challenges to improve the position of women due to exposure to broader perspectives and overall modernisation of societies have effect in changing the situation.

Today, rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and the rising cost of living have attracted middle class women to take up gainful employment. However, such percentage of women varies from country to country. The studies done by sociologists in different societies have provided sufficient evidence on the appreciable degree of qualitative as well as quantitative change among women. This change can be seen in terms of improvement in status, development, mobility and achievement-all of which point towards the emancipation of women. The general belief that the process of change among women towards emancipation started much before independence particularly during British rule through socio-religious movements in social, cultural and political fields. The socio-cultural movements of Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj are cited as relevant examples in this regard.

The twentieth century has witnessed changes more radical and irretrievable than any previous century in the history of the human species. With the change in the life style of the people, production lying outside the family unit and family becoming a major unit of consumption has gradually led to increased demands on the monetary factors in the family; industrialisation followed by westernisation resulted in the global change in the outlook of the people. The migration from villages and home-towns to large cities, the disintegration of joint family and emergence of nuclear family, increased demands to have comfortable and luxurious lifestyle and single man's inability to met the increased demands, led women to come as a paid worker and earner. Working outside home, in most of the cases increased the work pressure on women as she was working both inside and outside the home (Ratra: 2006).

The women of today have opted for new horizons and paths, to satisfy her quest for self-expression and creativity. She strives to be economically independent and attain a social status of her own, along with leading a harmonious family existence. These goals ultimately take her towards acquisition of everything that her male counterparts could think of achieving for themselves. This new life style and pattern acquired to accommodate the dreams and hopes of women are at variance with the conventional social norms of society and sometimes with her own psyche. The obstructions in achieving these internalized ambitions are from both inwards and outwards. The self-concept, social taboos, family responsibilities, traditional institutions create conflicting situations and anomalies. There is an ongoing struggle with the inner-self, created by these situations (Talwar: 2001), which needs to be addressed and understood at each step.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the role differentiation of women.
2. To study the various role conflict among women.
3. To give the suggestive measures for resolving role conflict situation among women.

Research Methodology:

The present research paper is entirely based on secondary sources of data which consists of journals, books, research papers and newspaper articles, etc.

During 1970's and 1980's especially after international women's year 1975, plethora of studies has been conducted on the role of women. In fact, role studies of women have culminated in a specialised breach of sociological research namely women studies. In the field of roles, numerous roles of women have been studied on intra-societal and inter-societal levels. Such roles as those of housewife, mother, working women, female labourers and female students have been subjected to fruitful analysis of various researchers of women studies.

Review of Literature

There is lot of literature available on different issues concerning working women both in India as well as in the west. A number of scholars have made attempts to analyse the problems of working women on the basis of empirical studies in different parts of the country. An attempt has been made to briefly present the review of literature available on this aspect. Some of the studies are as under:

Singh (1972) in her Study Career and Family Women's Two Roles (A study in Role conflict) pointed out that only 25 percent of the working women were fully satisfied with the time they were devoting to their children. 75 percent felt that they really could not devote proper attention to their children and home as the major part of their day was spent outside the house. Singh carried out her study on working women from Punjab.

Promilla Kapur (1974) focuses on the changing status of working women in India. The study tried to identify the sources of conflict, women's dual role i.e; the traditional role of housewife and mother as well as that of the worker who is gainfully engaged in employment outside the home. The author also highlights the adjustment of these working women in male dominated society. In addition, the book highlights the manifold aspects concerning the working conditions, strains and stresses as well as prospects of working women in India.

Kala Rani's (1976) book examines the situation of role conflict among working women of Patna to state that inability to reconcile the two roles, ill-health, inflexible attitude of family members, unfriendly behaviour of colleagues and lack of support from their husbands are the main cause of role conflict in working women. The study concludes that working women can successfully perform their dual roles if they get strong emotional support and help in the house hold tasks from their husbands and other family members.

Aneesha Shafi (2002) made an assessment of the factors which produce the role conflict among the working women in the Kashmir society and found that the determinants of role conflict experienced by working women are multi-dimensional. One of the factors is a set of conflicting role expectations arising out of two or more roles which working women are playing. The author finds another important determinant that is time constraint. Due to lack of time, the working women at times feel pressurised and cannot meet different expectations and obligations attached to different roles. One more determinant is self role conflict. The role conflict is understood to be largely psychological.

Tawseef Ahmad (2014) emphasized on the education for women as the need of the hour in order to empower them. The article revealed that Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. They are essential possessions of a lively humanity required for national improvement, so if we have to see a bright future of women in our country, giving education to them must be a pre-occupation. Efforts are being made to institute the significant role that a woman can play to fortify her family, society and nation at large. Many programmes have been launched for the empowerment of women in the development of the country as a whole which include Free

education to girl child, Political reservation through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, Domestic Violence Act 2005, Strict laws and punishments for female infanticide, Reservation for women in jobs and education to make them economically independent and so on. Furthermore the Government shall take steps in almost all parts of the country and launch such policies which will involve women to a greater extent in order to make their sure participation, that can boost the confidence under women and then they can prove much better for their families and for their nation as well. The changes in decision-making and providing education, which will come as a result of empowering women will have a direct impact on progress of the nation and they will raise the pride of the nation to the heights of the sky and we can move forward by maintaining justice. (Women Education in India: Need of the Hour, Human Rights International Research Journal Volume 2 Issue 1 (2014) ISSN 2320-6942)

Role: Conceptual Clarification

Role is a key concept in sociological thinking. A role or social role is a set of connected behaviour, rights and obligations as conceptualized by actors in social situation. Any social position carries with it different variety of roles and they are significant component of social structure. As an aspect of social structure, role may be defined as named social position characterised by a set of:

- (A) Personal qualities, and
- (B) Activities, the set being normatively evaluated to some degree both by those in the situation and other.

This definition does not preserve the distinction made by R. Linton between status and role (Gould, 1967). The sets of rights and obligations and expectations of attitudes and of behaviour which are attached to the incumbent of a given social position is perhaps the most common definition of role (Sarbin, 1954). Individuals have to perform two types of roles-one is ascribed to us by birth and another is achieved which is adopted by personal effort and are learned through experience. Role has been used in a number of ways often without clear meaning in social science. The two most common usages of role as a unit in society and ‘role playing’ as another name for social interaction. To Linton (1936), status is a collection of rights and duties and a role is the dynamic aspect of a status; to put rights and duties into effect are to perform a role. According to Nadel (1957), a role is a category of persons distinguished by a normative set personal behavioural attributes. He also points out that roles mark distribution of activities and of socially recognised characteristics among members of

society. G.D. Mitchel (1968) defines role as the expected behaviour associated with a social position.

Historically, the concept of a role theory goes back to Pareto (1916) and Max Weber (1920). Role is a relational term as one plays a role, vis-a-vis another person's role which is attached to a counter position. For example, a woman plays her role as a mother towards her children, as a wife towards her husband and as an employee towards another employee. In other words, role is the characteristics and expected social behaviour in a given position (e.g., mother, employee, etc.) The person is composed of the combination of roles that he or she enacts. But sometimes performance of one role comes in conflict with another role. This situation is called "role conflict". All the different roles performed by individuals come in conflicting situation only when different expectations are attached to each role.

Role Conflict

When a person is required to perform two or more roles whose expectations are to some extent inconsistent. It is the type of stress arising from a condition which the player of focal role or role perceives that he or she is confronted with incompatible expectations which arise from two or more social positions held by the same person.

- With one's body of roles which would be due to ego's perception of actual behaviour.
- Secondly, at the level of one's own roles and those of others. This is when ego perceives her role differently from the definition of her roles by the occupants in counter position, i.e; lack of consensus in a given role by different role occupants.

Role conflict is the psychological stress created when persons do not fit their roles (person-role conflict), when relevant others disagree with the individual about his or her role (Intra-role conflict) or when several different roles make mutually exclusive demands on an individual (inter-role conflict). Perhaps the most common form of role conflict is inter-role conflict, the stress experienced when one person attempts to fulfil two or more competing roles on an occasion. Inter role conflict can also cause problems in personal relationship (Macionis, 1977).

Sociologists and social psychologists have generally used the term 'role conflict' to denote the problem situations which arise due to simultaneous occupancy of two positions by an actor. These situations may arise from a variety of circumstances and the contexts in which the role is performed will be important determinants (Sinha, 1976).

Role Conflict in Working Women

It is almost universally accepted that the women's primary role is that of a home maker and it is for the man to provide subsistence to his family. But women also participate sometimes in the gainful activity. Women in any profession or occupation have dual role to perform. On the one hand, she is part of working force and on the other, a mother and a housewife. These two roles demand magnitude of worth stress, responses and adjustment. In any professions it is expected of women, that they should be sincere to work assignment and must possess professional commitment, whereas the members of the family, elders, husband and children have their own demands and expectations. Even if women are employed her income is not given primary position and she may not have even control over the money she earns, though the money often plays an important role in the maintenance of the household. The problem of adjustment may become more difficult for working wives on account of husband's inability to change him in the light of new conditions. Working wives have to make efforts to achieve martial adjustment as men find it more difficult to adapt to changing functions of the family. Thus making adjustment between domestic work and official is not an easy task. It requires not only skill but also physical and psychological acceptance of an adjustment to changes brought about by this combination (Srivastava, 1978).

Acceptance of the goals of home and work simultaneously may lead to conflict for many, if not for all, educated women. The demands made by two situations not only add to their worry and fatigue, but may also create a problem in itself. Contradictory expectations at home and career roles lead to role conflict. The attitude of husbands regarding sharing of the household work is still largely conservative and non-participatory. Domestic work is considered to be the responsibility of women. Hence, there is role conflict. As pointed by Kumar (1990),

“If women work outside the home, must work a double day, bearing nearly the total responsibility for childcare and household chores regardless of their contribution to family income”.

Recommendations

Role conflict in case of working women to some extent can be solved by taking various steps:

- By providing helping hand to the females who are holding double burden in their lives.

- By changing the attitude of society towards the stereotypical images of women which are there from past centuries.
- By sharing the responsibility of women by husbands and other family members.
- By providing congenial atmosphere and attitudinal change at workplaces so that they can perform their duties smoothly without any stress.

Last but not the least their(women) own attitude needs to be changed so that they can adjust properly to both the situations without any stress as sometimes women themselves are responsible because they play with their health in order to come upto the expectations of both the fields-workplace as well as the home.

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