Women and Work-Family Interface: Indian Context

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Abstract: The social division of labour set the role of primary bread-earner for the man while ascribed the role of home-manager and caregiver to the woman. This arrangement has been questioned for having given rise to gender inequality and having generated gender role stereotypes for man and woman. The traditionally organized workplace is also predicated on the assumption that families with male bread winners and nonworking housewives constitute the predominant family form. This is no more true since the last few decades have seen a significant number of women coming out of the private sphere of domestic life to enter the public domain. The problem of balancing work and family together has given rise to what is called the ‘work-family conflict’, which has evoked serious scholarly concern in the last few years. The questions that have surfaced need a sincere rethinking over. The present paper seeks to study work-family conflict in the context of women entering the workforce. However, this does not imply that work-family conflict is a ‘women’s problem’. Studies in the US and elsewhere have amply borne out that men face as much work-family conflict as women do. However, even this phenomenon stands pronounced with women entering the workforce as in the earlier arrangement, men had to worry little for the household responsibilities. Resultantly, there was less negative spillover from the work to family domain and vice versa.

Keywords: Gender, Work, Family, Feminism, Social Division, Labour

Work-Family Conflict and the Spillover Theory

Kahn et al. (1964) have provided the following definition of work-family conflict: a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. This implies that

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participation in the work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role and vice versa. The competing, or even conflicting demands made by work and family interfere and thus, are the source of work-family conflict. Three major forms of work-family conflict have been identified (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p 77): (a) time-based conflict, (b) strain-based conflict, and (c) behaviour-based conflict. The model proposed by Kahn et al. also proposes that role pressures (and hence work-family conflict) are intensified when the work and family roles are salient or central to the person’s self-concept and when there are strong negative sanctions for non-compliance with role demands.

Kelly and Voydanoff (1985, p 368) propose an inductive model of work-family role strain that acknowledges “multiple levels of social structure and process”. According to the model, work-family role strain is the result of the combined influence of demands and coping resources derived from individual, family and work-related sources.

A work-family substantive theory called spillover theory was proposed by Zedeck (1992), among others. A strong work-family mesosystem is proposed and assumes that the work microsystem and the family microsystem significantly influence one another through a permeable boundary (Bromet, Dew & Parkinson, 1990). Spillover from work to family affects the family by impairing both individual and family functioning. Spillover from the family to work often takes the form of lower productivity, higher absenteeism, and greater turnover (Glass & Estes, 1997, p 294).

The Indian Context

The entry of women in the jobs is not accompanied with a simultaneous shift in the social division of labour. The sex role ideology emphasizing upon the separate spheres of activity for men and women still exerts considerable influence on the public psyche. Even most of the dual earner wives continue to view themselves primarily as homemakers, and their work status did little to alter their sex role orientation (Rajadhyakasha & Smita, 2004, p 1677). Thus,
women still consider it their primary duty to look after the household affairs and care for the family, while men find earning for the family as their primary, or may be, the sole responsibility. Women are thus confronted with the challenge of playing the dual-role, to excel at home, as well as at the workplace. In a bid to prove her competence on both the fronts, women are facing the problem of overwork and are often being stressed out or drained of their energy. Even then, they find themselves unable to match the expectations at any of the two places. Not only the women, but even men are confronted with a role-conflict in the present situation. Further, with both the spouses working, there is also the problem of what is called work to family spill-over and vice versa. Again, since the tasks done by women at home for the nurturing of family have been of great significance, their underfulfilment may lead to further problems in the society. While the women have themselves remained dissatisfied and overburdened, the children and elders of the family have remained undercared in a dual-earner set up. The problems have burgeoned with the coming of the MNC culture of work characterized by long working hours, deadlines, competition, lesser holidays, negligible number of leaves, frequent tours, job transfers, increasing work pressure and so on. This has further posed challenge to the marital quality of the dual-earner couples; sometimes even threatening the sustenance of a happy marriage. This stands true for the Western societies. Hughes and associates showed that non-specific job/family incompatibility decreased marital companionship and increased marital tension (Hughes, Galinsky & Morris, 1992). The problems have also multiplied with the breaking up of the joint family and the concomitant withdrawal of support system within the family; even though this may have accorded greater independence to many of the working couples. A rethinking over some issues of significance is imperative in this context.

Overwhelmed by the enormity of these and such other problems, the advocates of traditional values have strongly questioned the new social reality where women wish to come out of the confines of the domestic lives to enter the public realm.
Should women work or remain stay-at-homes?

The strongest plea made in favour of women remaining stay-at-homes is the question of care-giving. Women have actually been the sustainers of the “Care-giving Institution” in Indian society. The most important component of care giving is rearing up of children. Caring for the diseased, disabled and the old is, though, considered to be of no less importance. The second argument posed while rejecting women’s entry into careers is the management of the household, without which it is believed, the healthy and happy family life is sure to meet its end very soon.

Getting into this domain of discussion, it has to be admitted that the ‘work’ women have been doing is of no lesser significance. Nurturing of children, care-giving to the elders or the diseased, as well as proper management of the household are vital to the health of a society. Also, once the children are brought into the world, the parents cannot shrink back from the responsibility of providing them with conditions healthy for the holistic development of their personality. It is the right of the children to be given due care and attention. The inclusion of women into the workforce, shall not be accompanied with the systematic ‘exclusion’ of children. Studies have demonstrated that lack of sensitive, responsive, and consistent care from overworked parents or substitute providers can lead to decreased cognitive and social skills (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994) and can promote attachment insecurity in children (Belsky, 1990).

In the same way, looking after the elders and the diseased in the family is of mighty importance from the perspective of preservation of human values. The right of individuals to be cared for when in need is of no less importance than the right to get opportunity to progress professionally. The rise of an atomistic individualism where every individual starts asserting one’s rights irrespective of one’s social and familial roles and responsibilities is bound to bring the same kind of problems in the Indian society which the West is struggling with today.
However, a question as big as those posed above is that **should the onus rest inequitably on the women?** It may be argued that men also bear the responsibility by earning for the family. This is true but it has to be admitted that somehow, the mechanism of responsibility sharing is such that it has left women with lesser degrees of independence, power and financial resourcefulness. These stand as strong arguments in favour of women to enter the domain of work. While independence, power and financial resourcefulness are all important in proportionate measures, **it can be systematically argued that the most important factor which goes in favour of women to move beyond the confines of domesticity is the question of the latent potential of women.** The works traditionally ascribed to the women, though require merit, do not offer sufficient scope for the full potential of women to be used in many cases. There is a lot of potential in some women which remains latent and awaits its complete expression and use. Such a potential is sure to give rise to inner frustration on remaining untapped and unrealized. The society today is under a flux. Perhaps this flux has arisen as the earlier arrangement, though having provided a very neat division of labour, remained unable to answer this one very significant question.

The following points can be made out of the above discussion-

Women are now rejecting the traditional roles ascribed to them and coming out to get into the domain of ‘paid work’ and thus are getting involved in what is called ‘productive labour’, is the contemporary social reality.

The **latent potential argument** establishes that women should work.

An alternative division of labour shall be established and other solutions shall be sought for in order to avoid the negligence of issues that are pertinent for the health of the family and society; while operating within the work-family interface. **A race against time without slowing down to answer significant questions shall result in chaos.**
Solutions

Change is the only constant in life. Creation evolves by making adaptations to change. Confronted with a stage of social change, adaptations are the demand of the day—adaptation at the level of individual, family, society, governmental policies and the workplace. More importantly, such adaptations need to be backed by a firm and clear understanding of the aim of life. The latent potential argument itself is based on the understanding that the aim of human life is to evolve. This also implies seeking solutions for the problem away from both- the alpha and the beta bias (Hare-Mustin, 1988). Relocation to the frame of values propagated by Indian philosophical systems can provide an alternative.

Relocating to the plane of Indian Philosophy

The problem of women and work-family conflict in the Indian context has been viewed in the context of two frames of reference. The first frame, adopted by the traditionalists and conservatives, suffers from an alpha bias. It re-emphasizes the sex role ideology and strives to maintain the status quo by rejecting the fact of women entering the domain of work, stepping out of the domestic life. The fundamentalists have resented the blurring of the ‘private-public divide’. The Mahila Morcha writes, for example:

“We conceptually differ from what is termed as the women’s liberation movement in the west. We require a sort of readjustment in the social and economic set-up. No fundamental change in the values is desirable. Women in India ever had a proud place within the household, and the society. That has only to be re-affirmed.” (Mahila Morcha, 1991)

The second frame seems to be the only other possible viewpoint to those who find it imperative and a matter of right for women to move out of the confines of domestic space to the domain of work. This frame of reference suffers from the beta bias in that it overemphasizes similarity and denies all gender differences, thus adopting a minimalist stance. Aggressive manifestation of atomistic individualism has
become the dominant feature of this frame of reference. The present paper proposes relocation to an alternative frame of reference perpetuated by the values enunciated by the Indian philosophical systems.

Redefining ‘success’ and ‘progress’: Moving from the pravritti marga (path of the pursuit of pleasure) to the nivritti marga (path of renunciation/detached active functioning)

It may be argued that work-family conflict in the Indian context today is actually a product of the materialist consciousness perpetuated by the globalizing consumer culture. This culture defines progress, growth and success in terms of material achievements/ gains. Consequently, it has given rise to a material centric, profit oriented individual, family, society, and the workplace. Market has permeated social relations and has hegemonized human consciousness. The ethics of the market impart value only to those things, relations and conditions which have an exchange value in the market. Accordingly progress implies more and more material accomplishment, growth implies more production and consumption of goods, and success implies acquiring ever-increasing degrees of exchange value in the market. This marginalizes all other realms of human endeavour. Accordingly, ‘work’, as it is defined by the market, has started taking precedence over family and everything else. This also accounts for the non-recognition of care giving (including child rearing, care giving to the elders and diseased) and home management as effective contributions to the society. Several women wish to enter the field of work as they seek for ‘social role enhancement’ and self esteem. The entire rhetoric seems to be misplaced as for both men and women, caregiving is indeed a meaningful social role. ‘Working’ seems to provide social role enhancement as it provides one with an exchange value. In fact, with paid work being valued above all else, unpaid care work by implication is increasingly devalued. But the emerging global crises of care are particularly challenging because while the demand for care is rising due to demographic factors, the supply of care is falling due to people’s financial desires and the
growing sense of identity and esteem people increasingly derive from paid work.

As noted above, the capital-based, liberal consumerist culture has defined all the concepts within the framework of the market. Insatiable greed for ‘profit’ and ‘pleasure’ is the force behind this culture. With such definitions of progress and success, the individual, couples, families, society and the workplace; all are running behind profit-making. ‘Earning’ more and more exchange value has become the motive behind human existence. Most of the companies in the private sector try to make their employees work maximum number of hours. There is cut-throat competition in the corporate world and all the companies are running after making maximum profit. Employees, on their turn, are trying to match the expectations of their employers and thus get quicker promotions and higher pay scales, and thus are running for progress. Many of the women are getting into jobs only because they want themselves and their families to be more comfortable financially and thus ‘progress’. This world view lacks the understanding that ‘pampering’ of the senses by providing them more and more pleasure and an attempt at satisfaction of unending desires of the senses actually results in bondage of the self. Real happiness is unattainable for a bonded self, who eventually becomes a slave of the market. A reversal from this path - the pravritti marga, i.e., the path of pursuit of pleasure, is imperative towards the nivritti marga, i.e., the path of detached active functioning. Progress and success as defined by the market do not ensure real inner happiness. Nor does it have the potential of taking humanity or human life to any better footing. Success and progress shall be redefined in order to find solutions for complications that have arisen out of a misinterpretation of these. All of us actually have to stop running for progress as we define it, at the expense of everything else. Ambition should certainly remain a motivating force and provide fuel to move on, but it should not burn the machinery out. Studies have proven that individuals considered to be successful are not the ones who are invariably happy or satisfied. Thus, either we have to assume that success and happiness are not compatible, or we shall look for another definition of success. Korman and
his colleagues have asked why so many “successful” managers are apparently alienated from themselves and/or others (Korman and Korman, 1980; Korman, Wittig-Berman, & Lang, 1981). Their data suggest the inability to meet personal needs (because of disconfirmed expectations and contradictory role demands) and the loss of affiliative satisfaction (perhaps due to an extensive commitment to work at the expense of family) produce social and personal alienation (Korman et al., 1981). Also, several studies have revealed positive relationships between an employee’s Type A behaviour and work-family conflict (Burke et al., 1979, 1980a; Werbel, 1978).

One has to go back to the ancient Indian wisdom which says that he is a winner (and so is successful) who has overcome his senses, rather than one who, being enslaved by the senses, remains constantly in the pursuit of pleasures. Perhaps both women and men need to understand that a successful life is one which is more balanced and integral in the sense that it offers scope for ‘everything else’ also, that, as McKenna has pointed out, which is found missing in a life running behind material success alone. Such changes can occur with gross changes in societal perceptions of success and progress. This brings us to the definition of success and progress as that of having mastered the senses and using them as instruments for human evolution rather than becoming slaves and instruments in their hands.

**Moving from the concept of ‘productive work’ to ‘karma’**

The material centric world view judges the productivity of work on the basis of the financial returns (and hence again, the purchasing power) it generates for the individual. Resourcefulness is defined in terms of power and money (purchasing power). Work is defined as instrumental activity intended to provide goods and services to support life (Piotrkowski, Rapoport & Rapoport, 1987). Work typically entails membership in a market or employing organization that compensate the worker for his or her contributions (Burke and Greenglass, 1987; Kabanoff, 1980). Work may provide intrinsic rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but its
primary goal is to obtain extrinsic rewards (Locke & Latham, 1990).

These definitions of productivity and resourcefulness effortlessly exclude women and what was traditionally considered to be ‘women’s work’ from their purview. Women have been really resourceful in terms of emotional and spiritual strength. Can a resourceless person impart care and support to others? Gaining ‘resourcefulness’ as defined by the market economics, women’s inherent resourcefulness should not be undermined or lost. This demands a moving ahead of the ‘modernist’ definition of productive work to the concept of *karma* provided by the ancient Indian scriptures which implies performance of ‘dutiful’ activity in a detached manner. This does not mean going on carrying out what is considered to be duty, thus making life ‘burdensome or boring’. To arrive at a correct definition of duty, away from the much romanticized (mis)definition prevalent among many Indians, detachment is the most essential pre-requisite. The path of duty or *dharma*, according to the ancient Indian scriptures, is that which provides nurturance to the self/soul. The evolution of the spirit/consciousness is the goal of human existence according to the Indian philosophy, and not the attainment of material pleasures. In fact, the unending pursuit of material pleasures is believed to result in ‘bondage of the self’. Such *karma* (or work) is to be performed which leads to a realization of one’s inherent potential, which results in the release of productive forces within one’s self, which nurtures one’s soul and results in the evolution of one’s spirit. In this light, the aim of women while entering the domain of the so-called productive work is not to attain only material resourcefulness, but the realization of their ‘latent potential’ and thus, an optimum use of their inner resourcefulness.

**From unregulated desire to Sanyam-Niyam**

*Desire* and *Indulgence* are the buzzwords of the consumer culture. And this culture desires individuals to *keep on desiring*. It preaches ‘indulgence’ and more and more ‘indulgence’, which means working tooth and nail towards the satisfaction of desires of the senses of one’s being. It
seeks to nurture a consciousness that is solely pleasure-oriented. Such pleasure is derived from the consumption of goods—both material as well as symbolic. Market commodifies everything and makes it available in abundance—food, sex, health. Mass media propagates to have these ‘more and more’. In the context of the globalization era, accelerated production can only deliver greater profits and growth if it is matched by accelerated consumption. For some products, this could be achieved by increasing the pace of product deterioration, thus shortening replacement time; but for most products and services it could only be brought about by engendering a perpetual state of dissatisfaction in the psyche of the consumer. The gratification yielded by one consumption experience had to give way in the shortest possible time to the desire for another. Indeed, the ideal consumer would forego satisfaction altogether— and desire only desire (Bennett, 2001, p 161). This is helpful in furthering the profit motive of the market. Mass media is also working towards giving rise to ‘dissatisfaction’ and insatiability of desire amongst the people. This is characteristically represented by Pepsi’s famous punch line—Yeh dil maange more (this heart always yearns for more…).

Indian wisdom taught freedom from desire. Various philosophical systems in India have experimented with and devised varied means of getting freedom from desire. In fact, desire is said to be the root of all miseries. As mentioned earlier, one who conquers desire is considered to be victorious, and hence successful, in the Indian scheme. Only such a truly ‘free and independent’ functioning can result in cultivation of human faculties, expansion of the horizons of human consciousness, and thus, it is only such an active functioning which is capable of resulting in true inner happiness.

Indian philosophy teaches the opposite of indulgence—sanyam and niyam, i.e., self-restraint and discipline. Human beings are distinguished from others in the creation because they have ‘choice’. They can choose to accept and also reject. They can choose to restrain their senses. However, again, ‘choice’ is also being attempted to be defined by the market.
In the consumerist jargon, choice is a function of purchasing power or exchange value. Women and men ‘work’ more and more as ‘earning’ more and more is tantamount to ‘acquiring’ more and more purchasing power, which they consider to be ‘enhancing their choices’. In the case of women, the entire rhetoric of ‘empowerment’ is built upon such choice and resourcefulness. Earning is important in proportions. However, going ‘excessive’ is tantamount to bondage rather than choice and freedom.

Few things need consideration regarding the rhetoric of choice in a consumption-oriented cultural setting. It is said that modernity gives us the choice: the freedom to select from diverse possibilities. In this sense it may also be seen as ‘imparting some agency’. However, is consumption really a human activity rife with agency? It needs to be understood that there is a limitation to these ‘diverse possibilities’ themselves. In the contemporary society, these diverse possibilities are generated by and for the market. Also, our choice is being constantly conditioned by the agent of capitalism and consumerism- the mass media. So we no more have the choice given by modernity (i.e. criticality of our own consciousness), but we have choice given to us by the commodity Market. Is such a choice, real choice? Choice and ‘diverse possibilities’, being hijacked by the market forces, no more remain choice and possibilities. In fact, choice cannot be given or taken, it is within oneself. People need to ‘choose’ to reject the false choice given by the market, to opt out of it, and thus ‘choose’ to reject the enslavement of their minds and spirits at the hands of the commodity market.

The philosophy of restraint shall motivate individuals, families and also the Workplace, to set limits to the desire for profits. Once this desire is brought under control, the work-family conflict arising out of lack of time, perpetual strain etc. is bound to dissipate. In the frenzy to acquire more and more exchange value, agency, choice and empowerment (as defined by market), Indian women shall not lose the hold of inherent Indian wisdom which defines all these in a different perspective, which alone has the potential to provide effective
solutions. In fact, on that plane, problems like work-family conflict do not exist per se.

**From acquisition to Aparigraha**

Market ethics dictate more and more ‘acquisition’ and ‘possession’, and equate resourcefulness and empowerment with these. However, Indian philosophy laid emphasis on *aparigraha*, i.e., abstinence from possession. This also accounts for the faith of Indian philosophy in flow, rather than stock. Everything that is stopped from flowing, gets stale, be it money or knowledge. The principle of *aparigraha* is thus, actually the principle of flow, which sustains life. On the contrary, the overemphasis on ‘productive work’ is directed towards possessing more and more. Once this principle of *aparigraha* is understood by individuals and the workplace, work-family conflict shall dissipate.

Possessing less also implies simplification of living, where much lesser time is required for tasks associated with maintenance of possessions. This is of mighty significance as a lot of time of the women in traditional societies goes in household maintenance activities. In a situation where both men and women wish to be engaged in higher realms of activity, mundane possessions have to be done away with in order to save time from being lapsed in mundane activities.

**From wants to needs**

Indian philosophy is deeply grounded in moral principles. The great Indian philosopher Gandhi said that there is enough in the world for everyone’s needs, but the whole world is not enough for one man’s greed. He considered one who consumes more than his/her needs as a thief. There is no end to desiring, and fulfillment of wants only multiplies them. Men, women and workplace; all have to understand this principle and make decisions in its backdrop. This is sure to provide effective solution to work-family conflict. Why should I work and how much should I work shall be guided by such wisdom.

**Ability to distinguish between means and ends**
Material world has been considered to be the means for the realization of reality in the Indian philosophy. Hence material world is not the end by itself. Money and material possessions thus become the facilitator. However, the consumerist culture has made money and material possession, an end in itself. As observed earlier, thus, all concepts are defined in material terms. This gross fallacy is the genesis for all sorts of conflict.

An example shall substantiate this contention. The positive aspect of technological advancement in the modern era is that “for the first time in human history, it is possible for man to be free from the necessities, and enter the domain of freedom. Indeed Marx could think of his whole man - a man cultivating all the faculties of his being- only in the modern age. Because science is power, and technology promises to rescue man from routinized and time-consuming manual labour” (Pathak, 2006, p 27). But instead of remaining a tool aiding the cultivation of the faculties of the being of man, technology is now becoming the end in itself. Resultantly, men and women have started loving the ‘comfort’ that technology brings, instead of the ‘freedom to cultivate one’s faculties’ that comes with it. Thus, the more modern we are, the more comfort-loving we become. In fact, it is also vice versa, modernity is now being judged by the degree of comfort (and thus the degree of technological usage) one has in his or her life. Thus, quality of life is equated with status of living which denotes the degree of material comforts and luxury one has. Increasing and rather seemingly irreversible dependence on technological advantage is rendering human existence at the mercy of technology, and hence the market. This situation is like “trapped in modernity”. In this sense, technology has rather gained an oppressive character and lost its liberating potential. It oppresses as in the sense that it causes excessive indulgence, makes us terribly dependent on the ever-changing needs it creates, and hence paralyzes many important human faculties (Pathak, 2006, p 43).

Freeing oneself from the consumerist consciousness and grounding in the aforementioned concepts has the potential to have profound influences on the society as far as work-
family conflict is concerned. At the first place, it shall prevent the ‘branding’ of some activities as inferior, e.g. housework, to others which are considered to be superior, like paid work. It thus saves women from a sense of inferiority, and prevents men to feel superior. This approach rather accords primary value to the emotional and spiritual realms of human endeavour, areas to which women’s contribution has been far more greater than men’s. However, this does not imply perpetuation of gender role segregation. A recognition of non-market ‘work’ as significant can motivate more men to undertake activities in the household realm. This approach also saves men and women from becoming aggressively and atomistically self-seeking, thereby limiting their involvement with paid work. Rewards shall no more be measured only in monetary/ material terms. Rather than seeking pleasure in aggressive rights-seeking, individuals may get an opportunity to taste the inner contentment that comes with due fulfilment of duties. Indian philosophy also teaches ‘measures’ and proportions. The principles of self-restraint and discipline- *sanyam and niyam*, can profoundly influence human course of action. Mastery over one’s senses and freedom from the fetters of desire incorporates the golden rule for both men and women to rise above conflicts. Also, this philosophy has the potential to direct the society as well as the workplace to ‘move slowly’ so as to not to disrupt the melody of life. The resolving of the work-family conflict demands gross changes at the workplace. The workplace cannot change until it keeps on functioning within the consumerist paradigm. It at least needs to take some cue from the aforementioned concepts, in order to become more family responsive.

Besides the grounding in Indian philosophy, some adaptations at the level of individuals, couples, society and the workplace seem imperative. They are discussed below.

**Adaptations at the Individual/ Couple level**

Changes at the level of the individual or the couple include changing ‘gendered perceptions’ of one’s familial and societal roles, scaling back, moving from the concept of ‘productive work’ to the concept of ‘karma’, and thus moving ahead of
consumerism (*pravritti marga*) to the path of detached active functioning (*nivritti marga*).

Care giving and home management are traditionally thought to be women’s work. Accordingly, girls are conditioned to play effective roles to carry out these responsibilities. However, with the changing scenario, the gendered perception of familial and societal roles needs to be changed. Care giving and home management shall be shared by both, the female as well as male members of the family. There is an indispensable need of grooming up the contemporary generation of sons to prove effective care-givers and home-managers along with carrying out other potential tasks. Also, the daughters need to be equipped well to be able to shoulder multiple responsibilities. Also, they need to be freed of the belief that care-giving and home-management is solely their responsibility.

**Scaling back** includes strategies that help reduce and restructure the couple’s commitment to paid work during life-course, and thereby buffer the family from work encroachments (Becker & Moen, 1999. Three separate scaling back strategies have been revealed in the study:

- Placing limits
- One job-one career marriage
- Trading off: readjusting from a one job one career marriage to a two carrier marriage

While a limit has to be placed on the work by both the man and the woman; in the case of the next two strategies, sex role ideology may dictate or at least partly influence the decisions made by couples regarding who will pursue job and who will pursue career and at what stages in the life-course. For a decision to be balanced, it should be free of both the alpha bias as well as the beta bias. Freedom from the alpha bias would prevent the decision from being governed by an overemphasis on the sex role ideology, which assumes separate spheres of work for men and women, and shall therefore, prompt decisions like ‘job for the woman and career for the man’, in case it fails to stop women from entering paid work. That the job versus career strategy tended to be gendered, is borne out by the study conducted by Becker and Moen (1999), which found that in case of over
two-thirds of the couples in their sample, the woman had the job and the man the career. Freedom from beta bias shall imply that women do not shrink back from adjustments when it is needed by virtue of being different from men, for example, if parenthood is opted for, it is the woman who needs to scale back till the child is born and is in the initial stages of her life when she needs mother’s feed and proximity.

In fact, the strategies used to make such adjustments can be renamed, as the term ‘scaling back’ seems to have some negative connotations attached to it. It is not regressive, as few may take it to be, rather, it is tantamount to drawing lines when and where necessary. Drawing lines is an important step in human decision making during the lifecourse. Lines have to be drawn not only in the case of career, but also in other significant activities like in case of decisions regarding limiting the number of children, reducing social commitments, setting limits to community work as well as leisure time etc. Measures and proportions are important for human life. When, how, what and how much; all these questions need balanced answers for ensuring the overall well being of an individual life. Scaling back, far from being regressive, is just finding out the exact proportions.

Adaptations at the level of the Family and Society

For adaptations to be made at the level of the family, firstly, the identification of family as a constant has to change to a locus of strategic actions that may shift and change during the life-course. Familial roles of different members need to be redefined while adopting a more gender neutral approach in the context of a changed familial structure and setting. In the new structure of the family, since every member would be carrying out multiple tasks and equitably shouldering multiple responsibilities, training for time management shall be imparted to all the family members. More practical ways and means of home management based on a more focused approach towards the purpose of life will have to be adopted. Parasitism needs to be countered at the level of the family. In every family, there are some members who have very less
or no sharing in the family duties, while there are others who are made to shoulder excess burden. In the Indian context, rest of the family members have been parasitic on the daughter-in-law. In fact, the romanticized version of the definition of duty defines it to be the duty of the woman (in roles of mother, wife, daughter-in-law, etc.) to carry out mundane tasks for every other member of the family. Such a ridiculous division of labour has to change to give equitable space to every member of the family. Adaptations at the level of family need to be carried ahead at the level of the society at large. Also, the society needs to gain a spiritual orientation moving away from the materialist, consumerist and market oriented approach of the present times.

Adaptations at the level of governmental policies

Some gender-friendly policies may be made mandatory like the provisions for child and elder care facilities close to the workplace, reduced number of work hours, maternity and parenting leaves etc. In fact, all the adaptations needed at the workplace (to be discussed subsequently) can be enforced by the governmental policy.

Adaptations at the Workplace

The most significant part of adaptation is to be carried out at the workplace. Various studies around the world have proposed that workplace can play an important role in assisting employees with the coordination of employment and family roles (Warren and Johnson, 1995; Bowen, 1988; Kamerman and Kahn, 1987; Voydanoff, 1987; McCroskey, 1982). The present day workplace is predicated on the assumption that families with male bread winners and nonworking housewives constitute the predominant family form. As Gitanjali Prasad (2006) has commented in her recent work, “The workplace functions on what I call the Buy One Get One Free Syndrome”. She further says, “Five years of reflection helped me understand that the real source of work-family conflict lay not in the ‘ambitious career women abandoning her traditional responsibilities’, nor in the ‘chauvinistic Indian male caught in a time warp’, but in the
workplace which has not adapted enough to a new reality where every adult member of the family would be working”. If women also want to work, the expectations and conditions at the workplace will have to be shaped in a way that they allow every individual to look after both his or her professional commitment and personal responsibility. With both women and the men playing multiple roles, ‘we need to invent a new clockwork that keeps time for families as well as careers’ (Christ, 2004). The types of family needs addressed through workplace initiatives fall into three general categories: (a) policies and benefits that reduce work hours to provide time for family caregiving through the provision of leave for vacation, illness, childbearing, and emergency child care or through reduction in average hours worked per week, (b) policies designed to give workers greater flexibility in the scheduling of work hours and the location of work hours, and (c) policies designed to provide workplace social support for parents, including forms of child-care assistance (Glass & Estes, 1997).

The workplace needs to move from the ‘face time business culture’ to a ‘results-oriented business culture’, even if results to be measured in the form of profits are the sole motive towards which all business enterprises are directed. However, the workplace shall not incorporate adaptations until there is a certain degree of value orientation and a sense of social responsibility, while moving away from a total consumerist and market oriented approach. It is to be noted here that ‘corporate social responsibility’ is a rather fashionable term these days. However, the social responsibility of the corporate world is not over with making charities or maintaining quality standards of products. Social responsibility of the corporate world lies more in stop misguiding the humanity towards a raw materialist consciousness making them slaves of the market. The corporate world can play a more socially responsible role by being less aggressively profit-oriented and competitive, thereby also permitting some space for the workers’ emotional, social and spiritual lives.

It was found that the variable paid work hours was strongly and negatively correlated and perceived flexibility was
strongly and positively correlated with work-family balance (Hill et al., 2001). Excessive number of working hours may leave the employees as ‘money minting machines’. Flexibility in the timing (flextime) and location of work (flexplace) are two characteristics that are repeatedly seen as a way to achieve balance in work and family life in this challenging environment (Hill et al., 2001; Christensen & Staines, 1990; Galinsky, 1992; Galinsky & Johnson, 1998; Zedeck, 1992). Several studies indicate that the individual and family have a lot to gain from flexibility, the possible benefits including less marital conflict, better monitoring of children, increased period of breast feeding after the birth of an infant, less depression, and so forth (see Beatty, 1996; Bumpus et al., 1999; Crouter et al., 1999; Lindberg, 1996).

Flextime is broadly defined as the ability to rearrange one’s work hours within certain guidelines offered by the company, directed towards a better balancing at the level of work-family interface. Flexplace is broadly defined as giving employees varying degrees of control over where their work is done. Flexplace includes **telecommuting**, which is the option for employees to work from another, fixed location, usually the home. It also includes **virtual office**, where employees are given portable means to do their job whenever and wherever it makes sense. The individual, the society and the workplace- all have much to gain from flexibility. Flexibility in family processes diminishes potential family stresses, while flexibility in work processes helps manage contemporary stresses situated at the work-family interface. Workplace social support systems include on-site and near site child and elder care referral services, compressed work-weeks, meal-time flexibility, online and call-in parenting assistance, personal and parenting leave policies, domestic partner benefits etc.

To conclude, before we go ahead whole-heartedly towards revolutionizing the existing social order, all of us have lessons to learn and make adaptations- women, men, family, society and the workplace. Without these adaptations, the path ahead is sure to be fraught with difficulties, may be, even failures. Any change brought on the external plane, without a change on the **internal** plane, cannot be
successful. Life has to be a melody and not a perpetual struggle with conflicting situations. Life can be that only when one refuses to struggle! This is not to negate the need for working towards positive change, but that there is an art in resisting. Women have to work towards change but in the process do not have to disrupt the rhythm of the melody of life. Love and non-violence are the ways and means towards a melodious and artful resistance. Both of these have no space for atomistic individualism and constant self-seeking, however. So, women have to work, but not to an extent where it amounts to neglect of children or the elderly or the diseased. There is no gender dimension to it. It stands the same for men too. Men and women are not machines. The emotional and spiritual lives have to be lived as much as the material, even if not more. So measures are important, and so caution has to be exercised while making decisions. This is the only way to overcome all conflicts.

If women are all set to transcend the limitations external world has seemingly imposed on them, they have to transcend the limitations within too. They have to go inside themselves to search for the right direction and save themselves from any fallacies. The only final solutions lie in redefining progress, value orientation, and adoption of the path to ‘truth’. The only answer lies in ‘spirituality’. As a young reader of spiritual literature, I once read Sri Aurobindo answering someone’s question that for all the questions and problems of the world, there is only one answer, and that is spirituality. I could not understand it then. I have started coming to that conclusion now.

References:


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