Chapter - III

Women in Indian culture

Introduction

Studies carried out in the area of the status of women in India during the ancient period shows that there was a widespread misconception regarding the true status of women in Indian society during the ancient times. The main cause sighted for this was due to deplorable ignorance of the original Sanskrit texts, both ‘Sruti’ and ‘Smriti’ in which one finds Laws, Customs and Traditions which define the true status of women in early times. The most authoritative text on the subject is the Rig-Veda.

The Rig-veda speaks of the following rishikas and brahmavadins. The Rig-veda speaks of the following rishikas, e.g., Romasa, Lopamudra, Apata, Kadru, Viswavara and several others mentioned in the mandala like Ghosha, Juhu, Vagambhrini, Paulomi, Jarita, Sraddha- Kamayani, Sarnga, Yami, Indrani, Savitri, Nodha [Purvarchchika], Akrishtabhasha, Sikatanjvavari [Uttaravchchika], Ganpayana [Mookherji,1957].

The Brahmavadinis were products of the educational discipline of brahmacharya, for which women were also eligible. The Rig-Veda referred to young maidens completing their education as brahmchararinis and then gaining husbands in whom they were merged like rivers in oceans. The Yajur- Veda sights that a daughter who has completed her brahmacharya should be married to one who is learned like her. The Atharvaveda also refers to maidens qualifying by brahmacharya the disciplined life of studentship for married life in the second asrama. It is therefore, no wonder that wife along with her husband enjoyed full social status, religious rights and practiced and participated in religious ceremonies which would be invalid without wife. Hence joining her husband as her full partner was a must in those days. Thus Rig-Veda accorded the highest social status to the qualified women of those days [Mookherji, 1957].
A Brief History of women Work force

In the pre-industrial family women and men both produced goods for the household and women also took care of the home. Work was then not regarded as separate from private life. People produced in small units what they needed for their existence.

Although women and men’s tasks overlapped in the pre-industrial era there were rather strict ideas about women’s work and men’s work within the specific community. What exactly is (and historically was) regarded as typically feminine or masculine to a considerable extent varied from country to country and even from one region to another.

Many middle-class women only had paid work until they married, when they were primarily expected to take care of the house and children and be dependent on their husbands’ wages. In working-class families women would often have to have paid work after marriage as well, in order to provide the family with what is needed. Married (middle-class) women’ withdrawal from the labour market was contingent upon the idea of woman’s proper place being in the home and a man’s in the world of commerce (away from home).

Reinforcing these beliefs were stereotypes of men as strong, aggressive, and competitive and of women as frail, virtuous, and women were channeled into service jobs, and many employers (in the USA) introduced marriage bars. Married women again became dependent on their husbands’ wages.

Status of Women

The status of women in the society at present could be analyzed in two dimensions. The positive achievements of women are in the various fields of development, staring from their landmark in education to ruling the country. The analysis on the negative dimension is on the increasing magnitude of atrocities and evils done to women, starting from female infanticide to the various exploitations in the name of discrimination, dowry, prostitution, destitution, and so on.
Different Roles of Women

The roles played by married working women can be distinguished based on the settings viz., the family, the work and the sociable setting. A familial setting is one in which the individual is accepted by the others and can be at ease in the sense of not having to prove himself or herself. A work setting is usually focused on the job to be done. A sociable setting is one in which the individual shares less formal social relationships but still tries to display his or her roles as a member of the society.

The married working women have roles both in and out of the family. Within the family they play the roles of a spouse, a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, an employee, an owner and other roles. Together with these primary roles, they also play the roles of a guide, friend, supervisor, advisor, counselor and so on, in times of need, with their family members.

In workplace, women play the roles of a worker, colleague, subordinate, supervisor, friend, leader, guide, and so on. In the society, women also play the role of a citizen; they may also be a member of the women’s organization, health-club member, recreation club member, and so on.

Married working women play a number of roles in the family, work and society. Lack of effective coordination among different roles sometimes leads to conflicts and tensions.

It is an accepted fact that in the family, women are responsible for a greater number of activities like cooking food, arranging clothes, monitory, scheduling and coordinating among family members.

Besides the daily domestic duties and pressures on her time and temperament, a working woman has to face a number of other stresses like commuting long distances in over crowded buses and trains.

Enacting multiple roles mean that the person in some way should be able to allocate her time and resources among the roles and see that she performs effectively.
Women in Organizations

Until late 1970s, women were virtually invisible as managers. In each state, changing societal patterns have resulted in significant increase in the number of women managers. These patterns include favorable economic and demographic conditions, supportive government policies, changing family roles and emerging support systems.

Women at hierarchy

The enormous findings about the under representation of women in the top decision-making position may seem surprising given the existence of a women movement for over twenty years. The legislation aimed at providing equal opportunities for women in some countries. United Nations made improvement in the status of women an explicit one. In 1975 the United Nations launched the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (Richardson, 1999).

The experience of many women striving to hit the top levels in business is that they must work harder, often struggling with extraordinary demands on their personal lives, to earn the same recognition or success as men.

Socio-Economic Perspective of Women Managers

One of the most prominent themes to emerge is that of a women manager. Regardless of the country, in which they live and work, they have similar experiences derived from their assigned status as women and such a situation is prevalent till today irrespective of all other changes taking place this area has not seen much change in positive terms. Women face discrimination on basis of marital status and have to conform to masculine standards of behavior to progress through managerial rank and also have to balance societal responsibilities of parenthood and work. The organizational atmosphere has not yet changed to the level where they can accommodate women as members fully equal to men. The widely relevant obstacle to women in the management field is the stubborn assistance of most societies in recognizing housework and childcare as roles to be shared equally by women.
Working Women and Government Policy

The Constitution of India promises to secure all its citizens, justice, liberty, equality and to promote fraternity among all. To realize the goals, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights. Along with these, certain negative rights, prohibiting discrimination or denial of equal protection of law are also guaranteed. The Constitution recognized the unequal social position of women and a special clause empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children even in violation of the obligation not to discriminate among citizens.

Article 1(1) and 16(2) of the Constitution grant the right of equal opportunities in regard to employment to men and women without any distinction. The Directive Principles of state policy which has a bearing on this point is 39(a).

Article 43 of the Constitution says, “The State shall endeavor to secure by suitable legislation or economic organization or any other way to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, ensuring a decent standard of life, and full enjoyment of leisure and social, cultural opportunities.

Therefore, special laws have been enacted for the protection of women workers in factories, mines, and plantations, and to provide maternity relief to women workers in organized sector.

A number of laws are framed and enacted for the protection of working women which regulate the hours of work, provide measures for safety and well-being of female laborers especially in organized sector. The unorganized sector has not been able to implement any of these laws. The legislative measures are framed from time to time in order to ensure that women are not discriminated and exploited. These are the special Marriage and Divorce Act., 1954 Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, 1956, Hindu adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Maternity benefit Act, 1961, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. The Commission of Sati (prevention) Act, 1987. All these legal measures and Acts aimed at ameliorating the condition of women laborers and
safeguarding women from the tyrannies of age – old social customs, superstitious values and exploitation.

The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1976: The Act provides for establishment of crèches where 30 or more women are employed (including casual laborers or contact laborers) as against one for every 50 hitherto.

The Employees’ State Insurance Act, 1948: The benefits provided under this Act include sickness benefit, maternity benefit, disablement benefit and dependent benefit, medical and funeral benefit.

The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1976: The Act raises the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years and boys 18 years to 21 years. The offences under this Act have been made cognizable.

The Factories Act, 1948, Mines Act, 1952 and Plantation Labour Act, 1951: These Acts prohibit the employment of women between 7p.m. and 6 a.m. in factories, mines and plantations, regulate the working hours and contains provision for their safety and welfare. The Government is authorized to fix the maximum load that may be lifted by women and to open crèches etc.

The Contract Labour (Regulation and abolition) Act, 1978: The Act regulates the working conditions of contract labour (which includes women), payment of wages and provides for welfare facilities and crèches for the children of working women engaged in construction work.

The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961

This Act is applicable to every establishment, plantation, mine or factory and provides for payment of maternity benefit at the rate of average daily wage for the period of women’s actual absence. It has been amended in April, 1976 to cover women, who do not fall within the purview of the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948.
Economic Development and Women Representation in Organizations

Economic Development affects women’s opportunity structure in general and their access to managerial positions in particular (Adler and Izraeli, 1988). In the labour market, owing to the expansion of the economy and technological advancement, new job positions, including managerial positions, will be open up to women especially when there is a shortage of qualified men. Thus, in countries with developed economy more opportunities are available for women to job positions with authority.

Globalization and its Impact on Women and Work

The impact of globalization on women and work varies from one country to another, and in particular differs between industrialized and developing countries. There are certain generalizations, however, that can be made about how globalization and its impact on women and work suggests that globalization significantly expands opportunities for women in the workplace, but it does not remove barriers to advancement, cushion the impact of recessions, or ameliorate the predominance of low paying, menial jobs held by women.

Globalization plays a definite role in increasing opportunities for women in the workplace. It does not, however, automatically solve problems of advancement to executive positions (known as the “glass ceiling”) or the movement of women beyond low-paying and menial jobs. However there are many common beliefs held by companies about women in international management:

Promoting Women in Global Economy

Male-female differences may not be due to career track but “mommy track” (Schwartz, 1989). Support for this possibility was available in empirical studies that indicate that women with children reduce their working hours in countries like Sweden and Norway, which support such a coping mechanism (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990), their job involvement in countries where such support is lacking (Schwartz, 1989).
In general, marriage and parenting have negative effects (salary and promotion) on women in management and positive effects on men (Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy, 1994). Getting to top requires enormous commitment to work and also putting in extraordinary long hours. By having proper work-family management women managers were found working 51 or more hours per week (Brett and Stroh, 1997).

Just at a time where more and more women qualify for higher-level management positions, the job of balancing work-family becomes difficult because of the position and role played by women. The net result is that increasing number of women feel they must choose between making a commitment to their careers and spending more time with families. These choices pose problems for one’s own career development and also for the organization that have nurtured their careers. Enterprises struggling to retain high-tech talent are increasingly offering flexible work schedules and other benefits, in part to appeal to female workers.

**The Changing Pattern of Women in Indian Society**

The status of women in many parts of the world must have been one of mere bondage until the event of modern ideas of freedom and equality. Our attitude towards women has been ambivalent and full of contradiction. Because Hinduism is not a monolithic religion, it has evolved over the countries integrating the beliefs and attitudes of diverse racial and cultural groups. Manu summed up the ancient ideas about women in these words “where women are honoured there all rituals are fruitful. Manu has laid the rule that “the daughter is equal to the son”. But in spite of this dictum, the women of India have always been relegated to a secondary role vis – a vis men.

The practice of child marriage, sati, infanticide of new born girl to avoid payment of bride money, prohibition of female education and widow re-marriage, polygamous marriage, slavery, purdah system and the dowry system – all these practiced by society left the women weak and fragile and dependent on men from the time of their birth to death. By the turn of the century, many of these practices are abolished.
The Glass Ceiling

One of the most widely studied areas that examine the barriers to women’s career advancement is the consequences of discrimination in the workplace. The most well-known illustration of discrimination in the workplace is the concept of the “glass ceiling” which defines the invisible barrier that prevents many women and minorities from advancing into senior and executive management positions within organizations. A number of studies have explored discrimination at work across factors such as job type, organization size and composition, industry, and target group involved.

One explanation for the persistence of earnings discrimination that is frequently cited is the existence of what has been labeled as “dual labor markets.” A greater number of men are employed in the “primary labor market” compared to women. This primary market offers better jobs with higher pay rates. The “Secondary labor market” is dominated by women and minorities and contains low-paying and race is quite consistent with the notion of occupational segregation based on sex and race.

A significantly under researched area within the literature on the glass ceiling is the intersection of face and gender on career outcomes and advancement. In addition, these women are likely to experience job stress, dissatisfaction and interpersonal conflict that results from high visibility, performance pressure, and isolation.

Kanter (1977) argued that proportional representation affects the dynamics of social interactions at work. A workplace that is homogenous in terms of master statuses such as sex or race will differ qualitatively from environments that are “skewed” (those with a 15% or less minority populations) or “balanced” (those with a 40 to 50% minority population). Specifically she contended that in skewed work environments, token or solo status results in stereotypical assumptions about what those characteristics mean that advantage women and minorities in organizations, Kanter argued that women who enter male – dominated organizations are more visible to others due to their uniqueness, more likely to be viewed as different from the dominant gender group, and more likely to be stereotyped within the workplace.
Career strategies have changed substantially for women in organizations since the early studies on the glass ceiling. While organizations attempt to restructure career patterns of their employees, there has also been a corresponding change in individual career attitudes. Fortune magazine described college graduates of 1989 as having their eyes on “new realities” in reference to career mobility. Feldman (1985) has described the changing career values and goals as “the propensity to pursue career advancement through non–performance–based means.” These non–performance–based means include career mobility tactics (e.g., lateral transfers, downward movements, changing companies) and the instrumental use of social relationships with coworkers, supervisors or other organizational mentors, ironically, the careerist attitude is seen as a double edged sword. When individuals place a great deal of weight on career advancement, the desire for success is often at the expense of both relationships within organizations and coworkers who resent the instrumental and deceptive relationships maintained by careerists. The fact that career paths increasingly extend beyond organizational boundaries and span different organizations calls for a special consideration of the impact of these “boundary less careers” and key outcomes as obstacles.

This “new career” reality has unique consequences for the experience of women compared to men in organizations. A study by Murrell A. J. (1999) and her colleagues showed that gender has an important effect on whether career mobility has positive versus negative outcomes on earnings, satisfaction, and breaking through the glass ceiling. Thus, while career mobility factors may enhance flexibility for males, they often mobilize strategies (interruptions, job changes, part-time work) that may have a negative effect on career outcomes, particularly for women.

**Career Planning and Development Interventions**

Career planning and development have been receiving increased attention in organizations. Growing numbers of managers and professional staff are seeking more control over their work lives. Organization members are not willing to have their careers
“Just happen” and are taking an active role in planning and managing them. This is particularly true for women, midcareer employees, and college recruits, who are increasingly asking for career planning assistance. For example, a study by the Hay Group (1996) found that technology professionals were willing to leave their jobs for better career development opportunities. On the other hand, organizations are becoming more and more reliant on their “intellectual capital.” Providing career planning and development opportunities for organization members help to recruit and retain skilled and knowledgeable workers. Many talented job candidates, especially minorities and women, are showing a preference for employers who offer career advancement opportunities.

Many organizations – General Electric, Xerox, Intel, Ciba-Geigy, Cisco Systems, Quaker Oats, and Novotel among others – have adopted career planning and development programs. These programs have attempted to improve the quality of Work-life for managers and professionals, enhance their performance, increase employee retention, and respond to equal employment and affirmative action legislation. Companies have discovered that organizational growth and effectiveness require career development programs to ensure that needed talent will be available. Competent managers are often the scarcest resource. Many companies also have experienced the high costs of turnover among recent college graduates, including MBAs; the turnover can reach 50% after 5 years. Career planning and development help attract and hold such highly talented people and can increase the chances that their skills and knowledge will be used.

Work-Family Management

In light of the dramatic social transformations according in the nature of family and worker demands, nearly all employees today need to make decisions on how to manage work and family roles. Managing the integration of work and family demands is important in the management literature. Nearly half of managers in Fortune 500 companies are in dual career families (Brett, Stroh, Reilly, 1992).
The selection of personal strategies by the women managers to manage work-family roles is most of the time rooted in our socio-culture context. In societies, that are high on power – distance women have the major responsibility to look after family needs. It is the women who have to sacrifice promotions because of family obligations. Thus, the social role of men and women in society shapes their responsibilities and most of the time women managers experience a number of social constraints in order to successfully perform their structural role. Family responsibilities demand longer hours from women when compared to men. On the other hand men spend longer hours at workplace than in the family. This is likely to create lots of stress amongst career-oriented women managers who feel that family is the responsibility of both husband and wife and therefore there should be partnering and equal sharing of family obligations.

Managing Social and Structural Roles

Most of the times, the demands put forth by different roles are incompatible. This is likely to produce a good amount to understand the concept of role and the related concepts.

It is through the role that the individual interacts with, and gets (or does not get) integrated with the system (Pareek, 1976.). From the point of view of an individual, two roles systems are important, the system of various roles an individual occupies and performs, and the system of various roles of which his role is a part and in which his role is also more susceptible to role stress due to the multiple role demands inherent in running a career and a home and family. It seems that time demands impose a tighter schedule on the personal lives of executive women than on men, the women being less able to relax at the end of the day. Moreover, Ritzer (1972) noted that it was the women in upper level of the organization who tended to experience significantly greater amounts of ‘Internal Strain’, due to conflicting role demands on their time and energy.

Personality and Stress: Two main variables in this regard: personality and sense of security / insecurity. The stereotyped behavior and personality attributes seemed to be a potential source of pressure on female managers. It is obvious that a great deal of sex-role
learning takes place among women during the early phases of their lives, and that this can translate into an attitude of mind that creates difficulties later in working life. A number of internal blocks that women experience are derived from early sex stereotyping.

As women are frequently socialized not to be assertive aggressive or to seek power or control, McClelland (1975), has suggested that the most successful male managers are the most assertive and have most highly developed desire for power whereas, women are grossly disadvantaged from the ‘pink’ cradle of birth.

On the one hand where men are socialized to be independent and career-oriented, women, on the other hand have been encouraged by their parents and peers (the toys and games they are given to play with as children, and the role-taking within the family) to be dependent and nurturing.

**Problems of Transport**

At times women have to wait for long hours at the bus-stop to board a bus. Buses are often overcrowded. In trains the position is not good. At present there is only one ladies compartment in local trains in cities like Bombay and Delhi, and that too is often occupied by men. During the peak hours one can hardly entrain and detrain without experiencing difficulty. In some metro-cities there is a “ladies special” during busy hours.

**Work-Life Balance Interventions**

This relatively new organizational development intervention helps employees better integrate and balance work and home life. Restructuring, downsizing, and increased global competition have contributed to longer work hours and more stressed. Baby-boomers approaching 50 years of age and others are rethinking their priorities and seeking to restore some balance in a work-dominated life.

The Container Store in retailing, and the law firm of Alston & Bird topped Fortune’s 2003 “100 Best Companies to Work For, “ and they are responding to these concerns so that they can attract, retain, and motivate to Work For, “ and identifying and publishing a “Best Companies” list. More balanced work and family lives can benefit both employees
and the company through increased creativity, morale, and effectiveness, and reduced absenteeism and turnover.

Early work-life balance programs serve men and women, all ages, and all family and life situations. Work-life program continues to focus on dependent care of both children and elders, but they also focus on job scheduling and flexibility, paid and unpaid leaves, employees wellness, concierge services, and others. Work-life balance planning helps members better manage the interface between work or paid employment and all the work and responsibilities associated with a person’s life.

A related issue in the work-life arena involves dual – career accommodation practices in situations where both the employee and their spouse are significant. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that more than 80% of all marriages involve dual careers, and dual – career households are more likely to give each individual’s career equal weightage in decisions than to give one career precedence over the other.

Because partners’ careers can affect the recruitment and advancement of employees, organizations are devising policies to accommodate dual –career employees. A survey of companies reported offering recognition of problems of dual careers, offering help with relocations, flexible working hours, counseling for dual-career employees, family day-care centers, improved career planning, and policies making it easier for two members of the same family to work in the same organization or department. Some companies have also established cooperative arrangements with other firms to provide sources of employment for the other partner. General Electric, for example, has created a network with other firms to share information about job opportunities for dual-career couples.

**Career Mobility Versus Job Interruptions**

A study by Schneer, J and Reitman F. (1990) examined the consequences of career choice and outcomes for females compared to males in managerial careers. They found that the impact of gender differences on the overall work environment for female compared to male MBAs was greater in later compared to earlier career stages. Many have argued that organizations are “gendered,” and thus judgments of career strategies,
regardless of type or reason, are likely to have more negative consequences for women compared to men. While flexibility is important for new career entrants, what matters most is perhaps not the quantity of work but the type and quality of that work, especially for women in organizations.

Thus, we see that several attempts were made by researchers and organizations to address the issue of work-life balance conceptually and functionally.