A Prelude to the Study

- Role Conflict and Globalisation: An Insight
- Employed Women the Subject of Study
- Globalisation and the Female Work-Force
- Research Issues Raised
1.1 ROLE CONFLICT AND GLOBALISATION: AN INSIGHT

When we come across the term ‘role’ the first thing that comes to a common man’s mind is a part played by an actor in a movie or a drama. It also refers to a part played in life or a part played in any event, according to the Chambers dictionary. The sociological meaning of ‘role’ stands for “the expected behaviour of one who holds a certain status”. “Each person may hold a number of statuses and be expected to fill roles appropriate to them. In a sense, status and role are two aspects of the same phenomenon. A status is a set of privileges and duties; a role is the acting out of this set of duties and privileges.”

The term ‘role’ originally meant the ‘roll’ on which an actor’s part was written. Role as a concept was developed by Ralph Linton in Sociological Lexicon. According to Linton, individuals occupy positions in different aspects of social life. Some examples of this are being a father or mother in a family. A person can also be a teacher in a school. These positions are called statuses by Linton. In Linton’s words “statuses are the polar positions in patterns of reciprocal behaviour.” A polar position comprises ‘a collection of rights and duties.’ When a person is enacting these rights and duties he is said to be performing a role. For example when a lecturer gives a lecture, he is performing his duty or rather he is performing his role of a lecturer.

Every role is limited to a particular area of operation. For example a peon has a role in the workplace but at home he has the role of a father, a son, a husband, a brother and so on. His role as a peon ceases on reaching home. Due to the fact that one individual has so many roles to perform, he may not be able to give 100% justification to each role, in accordance to the expectations of others. At the same time while performing varied roles,
individuals give more priority to some roles and less priority to others.

One comes to know a role only when it is brought in relation to another role. Hence role is a relational term. For example a woman cannot be called a mother without a child. Similarly a doctor plays his role in relation to the patients’ role.

*Role behaviour* is the way in which an individual fulfills the expectations of his role. It depends on the efforts put in as an occupant of a status. Ones behaviour in a role also depends on the feeling of obligation towards a status. The fact that an individual holds various positions with *rights and obligations* attached to them, his role behaviour in these various positions is affected due to his inability to do ‘justice’ to either of the positions. It is by making a lot of compromises with their obligations that an individual may somehow try to lead a balanced life. For instance, an employee who is hard working, capable and efficient, would not perform well just because he is a trade union member and the union has declared to adopt a go-slow policy.

The difficulty to meet one’s role obligations leads to role strain. Such a strain is the result of “inadequate role preparation, role transitional difficulties, role conflict or role failure.”

An individual experiences role conflict while *role playing*. “There are atleast two kind of role conflicts: *Conflict between roles and conflict within a single role*. (1) Two or more roles (either independent roles or parts of a role set) may impose conflicting obligations upon a person. The employed wife finds that the demands of her job may conflict with home duties; the married student must reconcile student role demands with duties as husband or wife; the police officer must sometimes choose between duty and arresting a friend. Or, (2) within a single role there may be a
structured (built-in) conflict. The military chaplain, preaching a gospel of love, must sustain men in their readiness to kill, a role conflict which many chaplains find disturbing.\(^4\)

So briefly it may be understood that when an individual finds that there is a *vast difference* between how he should behave and how he actually behaves, he experiences an inner conflict. Another case in which role conflict may be experienced is when an individual finds *incompatibility* between the role-requirements of two or more roles. For example, a female beautician has to attend to clients during untimely hours as her service centre is attached to her house. So during the noon time when she should be having lunch with rest of the family members and is expected to attend to the needs of her husband and children, if the need arises she may have to attend to a customer requiring her services. The conflict over here arises due to the expectation of others regarding what should be her role.

"To summarise, the *causes of role conflict* are:

(i) Cultural heterogeneity and complexity of the social system;

(ii) Different roles of an individual in different groups;

(iii) The possibility of confusion over the appropriateness of a case;

(iv) When two or more persons are authorised to perform some functions;

(v) When the functions are below the status of the individual;

(vi) Differences in the expected behaviour from the person assigned a role and

(vii) Differences in the perception of one’s duties and responsibilities."\(^5\)
Each role-relationship demands various activities which may be inconsistent with each other. This too leads to role conflict. *Pressure of time* should also be seen as a source of role conflict. There is competition between the various roles of an individual to meet the expectations of the role. But time is limited and an individual is incapable of meeting the expectations of each role satisfactorily. This results in role conflict being experienced by the individual.

The consequences of role conflict can be seen in deviant and dysfunctional effects on an individual's personality. According to Talcott Parsons role conflict causes tension and disruption both for the role occupants and the organisation of which he is a member.

*Strain, anxiety, dissatisfaction, reduced commitment to certain objectives, reduced competitive spirit, reduced efficiency and effectiveness are all some of the consequences of role conflict.* There are several processes by which role strain can be reduced. "These include rationalization, compartmentalization and adjudication. The first two are not conscious, intentional protective devices.

*Rationalization* is a defence process whereby one redefines a painful situation in terms which are socially and personally acceptable. It conceals the reality of role conflict, preventing awareness that any conflict exists.

*Compartmentalization* reduces role strain by fencing one's roles off into separate parts of one's life so that one responds to only one set of role demands at a time. Within each role are found the pressures and justifications which make the expected role behaviour seem necessary and good. Uniforms, judicial robes, surgical gowns and professional titles are aids in insulating roles from one another.
If one is successfully socialised, one develops a wardrobe of personalities, and slips into one or another as the situation demands. At the office, the woman treats men with a brisk formal efficiency; at home she is tender, responsive, and “feminine”. This process of switching role personalities creates the possibility of emotional strain whenever it is not entirely clear which of several sets of attitudes and guidelines should apply to a particular behaviour situation.

*Adjudication* differs from the protective devices just discussed in being conscious and intentional. It is a formal procedure for turning over to a third part a difficult decision on a possible role conflict, thereby relieving the individual of responsibility or guilt. Much of the work of professional associations and the codes of ethics which they develop is devoted to the solution of role conflicts. In any event, a decision on proper role behaviour by the professional association or labour union means that the individual is relieved of the duty of making his or her own decision.”

The system of behaviour, values and way of life varies from one social class to the other. Each social class in a subculture socialises its children to assume the class status of their parents. The role behaviour of members of each social class varies due to their varied experiences, education, ambition, life-style, life-chances and work habits.

“A social class may be defined as a stratum of people of similar position in the social status continuum.” Karl Marx divided the social classes into the *proletariats* i.e. the wage workers, *bourgeoisie* i.e. the capitalists and the petty bourgeoisie who are the middle group. Thorstein Veblen divided the society into the leisure class and a class of workers who struggle for subsistence. Earlier sociologists divided the classes into three i.e. the *upper, middle and lower*. Later studies by
Warner and Lunt in their study of a New England town have given a six-fold classification of the social classes. They are the Upper-Upper Class, the Lower-Upper Class, the Upper-Middle Class, the Lower-Middle Class, the Upper-Lower Class and the Lower-Lower Class.

The determinants of a class are birth, money, education and occupation. Members of the middle class refer to those people who treat each other as equals and are placed in the centre in a status scale, with the upper classes coming above and the lower classes coming below them.

The rate of growth of the middle classes has increased in the present economic scenario. Middle class jobs are expanding with urbanisation, changing economy, increased demand for technical and professional personnel, changing technology, changing work-force profile and content of jobs.

Each class assigns certain social responsibilities and privileges to its members. "The lower class functions as a store house of surplus unskilled labour. Middle-class parents seek to impress their children with the hope of advancement and the fear of dropping to a lower-class status. Thus, of all the social classes, the middle class is the one most noted for strenuous effort to 'get ahead'. The upper class need not 'make a living' or struggle for status, but may feel impelled to justify its status and income through some form of public service." 8

The desire to get ahead has propelled the members of the middle class to support the process of globalisation and also want their women to be active participants in the families economy. This as we may understand is to prevent dropping to a lower class and also to maintain a proper living standard.
“Middle class’ is the least satisfactory term which attempts in one phrase in defining a class sharing common work and market situation.

The middle stratum of industrial societies has expanded so much in the last 100 years that any category which embraces both company directors and their secretary must be considered somewhat inadequate.

In popular perception all “While Collar” work is middle class. But sociologically it is necessary to subdivide this class into distinct groups sharing similar market, work and status situation.”9

“Globalisation refers to growing economic interdependence among countries as reflected in increasing cross-border flows of three types of entities: goods and services, capital and know-how.”10

The world has become a global village due to the impact of globalisation. Technological development and satellite communication is shrinking the world. Companies, industries and organisation have unlimited potential to grow. Products prepared in one country has to meet the needs of not only the local market but also that of the international market. Organisations which fail to make a note of the changing trend in the global environment are likely to perish.

“Globalisation has three dimensions of manifestations: economic, cultural and political. The economic dimension is the expansion and transformation of capitalism into an integrated global economy. The most important change has been the expansion of world financial markets. Financial globalisation has been greatly assisted by the development of information technology, which makes possible global markets that operate in real time and the electronic transmission of funds. The other significant contribution to economic globalisation has been the continued development
Globalisation of culture is said to be the result of the rise of mass tourism, increased migration of people between societies, the commercialisation of cultural products and the global spread of an ideology of consumerism, which have the effects of replacing or supplementing more localised cultures. The marketing activities of MNC’s and the development of the mass media of communication contribute to cultural globalisation; *McDonaldization* is a frequently cited example.

In the political sphere, globalisation has seen the rise of international agencies, including the World Bank, the IMF and WTO which regulate the global economy and therefore, set limits on the freedom of nation state.

The challenges of globalisation include: managing across borders, capital generation, revolution in information technology, expansion of knowledge base, improvement in productivity, knowledge of competition, changing skills and techniques, changing profile of workforce e.g., educated workforce, increase in women’s employment, recruiting and training employees with a view to creating a global workforce, meeting customer requirements, tapping marketing networks, risk management and so on.

### 1.2 EMPLOYED WOMEN THE SUBJECT OF STUDY:

A woman is a daughter, a sister, a wife, a neighbour, a sex partner, a mother, a cook, a homemaker, an employed woman, a club member, a social worker and so on. All these roles are related to each other with minor variations from person to person. It is highly possible that women may fail to make proper adjustment between their varied roles. The two important roles that are constantly seeking attention of its beholder are her role as a family member and her role as an employed woman.
Women who are opting for a career are increasing. Earlier women achieved mobility through marriage. But today occupational involvement has given women another outlet for mobility. They feel satisfied and fulfilled only when they can be committed and efficient in their jobs just as their male counterparts. Women are taking up jobs for varied reasons. While, some women choose to be employed for purely economic reasons, some of them see it as a means of additional income for a better living and then there are those who are motivated by fulfillment of ambition, job satisfaction, self-sufficiency, raising ones status, families status and social service.

Middle class women who are employed are not employed due to economic compulsions usually. Rather it is the desire to maintain the prevailing standard of living that encourages them to be economically engaged. Inspite of their job, household work is also their responsibility. For they have been socialised to manage household activities since childhood. This activity continues to be a part of her personality as a daughter, sister, wife, mother etc.

*Sushila Ravindranath* says "besides a full-time career - two children, one in school and another in college, and a husband who had a travelling job. I coped. I didn’t have the time to think about concepts like multitasking. I just did what every mother does, such as taking time off during illnesses and crucial exams, attending most school functions and was also around when the husband needed me. All my employers have been quite understanding and have never forced me to come in when I couldn’t.

May be my commitments at home stood in the way of my career graph and at times I do feel upset. But at the end of the day, I have no
regrets. And this is not the story of my life alone. It is the story of most urban career women who've perfected the balancing act but who, in crucial moments, would sit home and attend to the sick child rather than go for that do-or-die business trip.

A lot of women, especially those from the lower middle class, are seeking the job market today because they have to augment the family income. They have to provide a better life for their families. They have to pay their children's tuition fees and plan a better future for them. And so on. So they toil away in mindless jobs, waking up at un-earthly hours, cooking and packing lunch for everybody, attending to their in-laws' needs and then setting out. You can see them every morning, at the bus stops or in suburban trains.

And divorce rates are not increasing in the country because more and more women have started working? Actually, nothing could be far from the truth. Except for some women in a very tiny section of the society, no one is really opting for divorce. Yes, what economic independence has given them is the courage to stand up against drunks, wife-beaters and adulterers. Why should women put up with all kinds of abuse?

These days the distinguishing line between a housewife and a career woman is very thin. The two roles are not mutually exclusive. So far, Indian women are handling both avatars with great aplomb.12

What Sushila Ravindranath says in her article 'Housewife Vs Career Woman' shows that the employed woman is burdened with dual responsibilities. She has a balancing act to perform. Her commitment to either of her roles can never be 100% as she has to make compromises sometimes at home and sometimes with her job to meet the urgent demands of either of these two roles. This leads to a situation of conflict.
Sometimes the conflict may be between the two independent roles of the women. And at times the conflict may be within a single role. For example an employed mother when she reaches home after her job, she has numerous responsibilities waiting for her. On the one hand she has to see what her children have been taught at school, on the other hand she may be having in-laws’ waiting for her to prepare tea for them. At the sametime she may be disturbed by the untidiness of the house. As such, within her familial roles of mother, daughter-in-law and housekeeper she may have to overlook either of the roles and meet only those roles that require her immediate attention. In another situation a woman employed as a sales girl may suffer from role conflict when she has to advertise a product as being the best in the world while she is fully aware of its lacunas. So there is conflict between her moral self and her professional self. In both the above cases the women suffer from guilt, anxiety, stress and tension.

1.3 GLOBALISATION AND FEMALE WORK-FORCE:

"There are several brands of globalisation and each country may choose the one which suits it most. For an average Indian globalisation has come to mean privatisation within the constitutional framework. We have already privatised, telecom, electricity, cooking gas, private universities in higher education and let go private English-medium-high-fee schools erroneously known as public schools. The foreign experts in India are galore from American knob-specialists to Japanese flower-arrangement experts, from timber to traffic specialists advising us the global advantage of adopting or adapting a particular global model."13

The employed woman is liberated and empowered. She is liberated in the sense that she is ready to break away from the conventional mould in matters relating to her role. They are ready to explore life-styles that are
being offered to her due to changing attitudes and values, that is the result of the growing contact with the rest of the world. This contact is the result of improved means of communication, mass media, business relations, outsourcing of work, in one word we may say globalisation.

The impact of globalisation on the female gender has been postponing of marriage, increased educational opportunities, desire to be employed, delaying of child birth, taking up jobs that are conventionally male dominated, raising their voice against any discrimination and exploitation being faced by them, changing their priorities at home, making adjustments at home to include each member of the family in managing household affairs, taking decisions about their life, finance, friends and priorities, their leisure time activities are more of an outdoor affair whether it be with friends or family, so on and so forth.

While globalisation is being opposed by some sections of the workforce, it is also being supported by those who are aware of its advantages. A large section of the middle class population is supportive of globalisation as they see it as a means of becoming a part of a workforce that is educated, skilled and sophisticated.

The problem of globalisation is that every sector has to be technologically up-to-date so as to be compatible with the techno-economic scenario. The employers and employees both have to update themselves with the latest technology and trends. This would involve capital investment in training of employees by the employer. And frequent upgradation of their knowledge to keep up with the changes for the employees. Though women are getting jobs as they are being seen as a cheap, reliable, honest, efficient and hardworking workforce, they face the danger of losing their jobs because of the problem of getting educated with the latest skill. Even
labour saving technologies reduce the need for labour, leading to declining employment levels.

Other problems that the female workforce is likely to face is insecurity. This is possible due to women getting jobs that have untimely working hours, without any commitment to their personal security by their employers. At the same time the work environment has become casual and there is greater mixing between the male and female employees. This results in situations where women are more prone to miscreant male colleagues who are just waiting for a chance to misbehave with them.

Just because there has been technological advancement, one should not conclude that with decreased workforce there is also decrease in workload. Rather the existing workforce has to be more attentive and more concentrated in their role. Sometimes boredom and monotony has an impact on the psychological situation of the workforce. Women as employees have to face the problem of combating with workplace stress and then again the stress from household responsibilities, which requires as much attention and concentration as her job role. Professionalism and increasing competition are tough situations that any employed person has to tackle. Disinvestment, de-regularisation, de-industrialisation, de-nationalisation and de-unionisation are usually unaccepted by trade unions as they see it as a danger to employee’s job security. De-unionisation has meant that some of the jobs have become non-bargainable. As such women who are now an emerging force in the world of employment have to face the problem of being employed as a non-bargainable staff. Expecting promotions and pay rise in such situation is most unlikely, hence they have to change jobs frequently to be in well paid jobs. This has an impact on their mental situation. For sometimes it may encourage them to go in
search of better jobs and sometimes the confidence of these jobseekers could be lowered.

Health problems and family problems could be attributed to globalisation. Eating habits of the female workforce is affected due to their job timings. At the same time even the eating habits, food and nutrition of the family members are sometimes neglected due to the employed mothers in nuclear families finding it difficult to give sufficient time to cooking. Only when their male counterparts accept that they too should be partners in sharing the household roles with their wives will the situation change. A period of transition is in progress, in which the role of women who have opted to become ‘bread winners’ even while carrying on with their ‘home makers’ role is undergoing a change resulting from the tensions of the conflict between her dual roles.

1.4 RESEARCH ISSUES RAISED:

The study on the role and role conflicts of the employed middle class woman is rather vast. For this is an emerging area in the light of the changing economic scenario. More study on this problem would not only put light on the present scenario but would also be helpful in pinpointing problems that require further research.

Women are instinctively homemakers but should they stick to this role for ever? Can’t they manage both career and home without the help of their family members? Are they likely to be less efficient in their employed role due to their household responsibilities? Are we witnessing change in the attitude and values of the society in general and women in particular? Are women comfortable with their dual roles? How far is the family ready to accept these open minded, financially independent woman? Are women ready to make compromises with their life and living to meet
their job commitments? Is it money or personal satisfaction that women want through their job? What tensions are they facing due to their incompatible roles? Is conflict obvious due to the expectations ingrained in their dual roles? In what manner can we notice the tensions arising from role conflict? These are just a few of the questions that the researcher intends to seek answers for during the course of this study. How far the researcher would be successful in this effort is to be seen. Those questions for which the researcher fails to get satisfactory answers, would always be open to study by future researchers.

References:

4. Ibid., p. 118.
7. Ibid., p. 313.
8. Ibid., pp. 327-28.
