CHAPTER IV

A PROFILE OF INDIAN WOMEN

The area of the present research is confined to Coimbatore and Bangalore cities. As India is a multilingual and cultural sub continent, the women in the two south Indian cities could not be recognized to represent the culture of Indian women as a whole. In view of this an attempt is made here to construct a Profile of Indian Women operationally defined as the women in Coimbatore and Bangalore. As revealed in the previous chapter the socio-cultural setting of the population should be understood in order to know the options available to individuals in the vocational choice. This Chapter is meant to focus on the typical role characteristics of women in Coimbatore and Bangalore.

Indian women especially in South-India present a relatively homogeneous picture of the role of women. A profile of a typical women in south Indian culture is constructed hereunder. The sources of the description are the informations available in classical literature and mass media and the field observations made by the present investigator visiting a large number of women in Coimbatore and Bangalore. Informal interviews with a number of individuals belonging to the region have
played a role in shaping and sharpening the profile. The profile is constructed to aid formulating research questions and hypotheses relating to the personality characteristics contributing to housewives, career women and women entrepreneurs.

A fairly well defined expectations of women—whether housewife or otherwise—have come to stay in the middle class socio-economic culture of the south Indian societies. The census data relating to work force in Coimbatore and Bangalore shows that more females are added to work force over a period of time. The urban centres of Coimbatore and Bangalore tend to assimilate social changes by modernization and Westernization at a faster rate, particularly with reference to female work force. The traditional Hindu culture is also preserved in these regions. The style of life of the middle class women shows a blend of traditional ideology with regard to family structure and Westernization with regard to formal education (Aram, 1983). Marriage is regarded essential to women, spinsterhood is not encouraged, monogamy is preserved by law and is reinforced by the culture. The women is expected to be committed to the interest of every member of her family. She is expected to be submissive, receptive, family oriented, religious, unselfish, sincere, faithful, tolerant and adjusting (Ramadevi, 1973).
The itinerary of daily chores of a middle class woman as follows. She wakes at dawn as dictated by the Hindu traditions and customs; after attending to nature’s call she engages herself sweeping and cleaning the front yard of the house and puts a Kolam or Rangoli*. The woman begins her feeder role then by preparing coffee or tea and serves every adolescent and adult member of the family. Usually the adult male members wake up only when bed coffee/tea is served. The children are offered milk, the women take bath after serving the coffee and attending to preliminaries of cooking like cutting vegetables, setting cookers etc. She worships God through a ritual. The chore of woman includes preparing breakfast, preparing and packing food to be used by husband and children as lunch at places of work and study, nurturing the children, helping them

* Kolam refers to pattern drawn in line. Traditionally the lines are drawn using flour made up of rice. It is implied that drawing a Kolam with the flour of rice stands as an offering to other small creatures like ant. It is also believed that the goddess Lakshmi, the embodiment of health, wealth and happiness enters every morning and has to be received with decoration in front of the house. Rangoli is the modern version of the Kolam, wherein different colour powders made of natural or synthetic chemical products are used for drawing lines of Kolam.
in bath and dressing up and assisting the husband to get prepared to go to the office.

After the children and husband have left the home in the morning, the woman turns to the management of the house. She cleans the house, organizes the articles putting them in proper places, provides instructions to the servant for upkeep of the house, attends to washing the daily wares, goes to the Bank or other institutions to transact and remit bills for consumption of cooking gas, Electricity and taxes. Often she skips her lunch due to monotony of eating all alone. To a Hindu woman eating is a social function and she enjoys it only in the company of her family members. She interacts with neighbours or takes a nap between noon and evening. Just before evening she prepares light refreshment for the children and husband returning home. All the members are served refreshments and coffee/tea/milk and the family spends some time together exchanging their experiences discussing local, national and international politics and topics of interest to them. The family goes for temple or a film or a social call to other families by evening. Late in the evening the woman reverses back to her cooking function and prepares supper. After serving supper she attends to preparing beds and help every member to retire to bed. In south
Indian homes beds are always not spread over the cot. They are rolled in the morning and are packed, and they are unfurled in the night.

The women in the home is expected to be responsible for the management of clothing; she has to wash the clothes herself or send them to the laundry, mend them whenever necessary; keep them in wardrobes and help the members of the family to use them properly. Stitching, sewing, washing and mending clothes are regarded women's responsibility. The responsibility in maintaining of foot wear also rests with a woman which requires a lot of time and effort. It takes considerable time and effort when a few children are going to school.

Encouraged by tradition the men and children confine themselves to studies and work done in their work place, and they hardly share any of the functions described above discharged by women. The women in South India also contribute to the sustenance of behavioral pattern described thus far.

Even when a women goes out for work outside her home she is expected to discharge all the functions described earlier. However, when a women earns by working outside her home she has a little more autonomy in terms of
increased Economy at home and she could utilize paid assistances or services in discharging the tasks considered to be her responsibility. For example; A working woman may engage her servant to sweep the yard in the morning; she might request her husband to take lunch in a resturant when she is not able to prepare his lunch before he leaves for his office. She might encourage the family to take supper in hotel when she finds it difficult to attend to preparation of supper; she might send the clothes to washing house and tailoring houses instead of washing and mending herself. However it is implicit that whether she discharges the functions by herself or by taking assistance of others she should accept them as her responsibility. In the processes a woman who is employed in an institution or self-employed is hardly relieved of any of the expectations of woman in general. Even when servants are employed to discharge certain functions the management of servants becomes her responsibility. These results a overload on the part of the women employed outside her home. Whether it is for women in the home or employed, the itinerary is the same though the mode of discharging the functions expected may have a flexibility.

ROLE PERCEPTION:

In a earlier study by the present investigator (Sunandini, 1981) 80 working women were asked how they
perceive themselves by responding to the question 'who am I'. The result: show only around 20% of the spontaneous responses of the group connote the role concepts like working women, teacher, doctor, and clerk. More than 43% of the total responses connote larger classes like 'Indian', 'Women' and personal name. The findings suggest that the working women give less emphasis to their occupational role in their self perception. When the working women were asked to respond to the concept 'mother' their responses are roughly equally divided into two category of responses: the first group of spontaneous responses emphasizes the ideal concept of mother, nurturing function, educating function and the function as disciplinarian. The second category of responses emphasize sentiments and love, patience, affection, tenderness, tolerance, devotion, flexibility in adjustments, carefulness and loyalty. This finding emphasizes that the working women give priority to the concept of ideal mother when they regard themselves as mother. The findings relating to their perception of their role as wife are similar to the one reported with regard to their perception of their role as mother.
ROLE DEMANDS:

The cultural setting plays restrictions on the possible choice of role behaviour from theoretical infinity to a few. In the Hindu middle class socio-economic status in South India, a woman as a rule gets married. This essentially leads every woman to take her role primarily as a wife in family. Further constraints on the choice of role behaviour are introduced by the traditional religions, economic occupational and educational background of the families. Various patterns of attitudes and values are prevalent among the families in South India. The Hindu family accepts the value of formal education to woman but this acceptance is not always extended to women taking up a career. Many families are prone to accept women in their family going for such jobs traditionally regarded as feminine, teacher or steno or a receptionist or nurse. Recently the police in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have accepted recruiting women into Police force. However, many families have reservations in sending their female members of their family to the police (the novelty of women police has created a sensation in the public and mass media exploits the phenomenon by introducing women police characters in their fiction). The possibility of a women entering into a self employment is also governed by the socio-economic and occupational background of the families.
The proportion of first generation entrepreneurs is relatively less compared to the second generation entrepreneurs even among men (Venkatapathy, 1984). The proportion of first generation entrepreneurs still reduced in the case of woman. In lower socio-economic status like setting up a petty shop, vending flowers, fruits, vegetables women are found to be predominant. But in the case of middle and upper class socio-economic strata society women entrepreneurs are rare.

The middle class southern Indian married woman is left with the option to remain in home discharging her producer role within the domestic sphere or to extend her producer function to the world of employed. In opting for the second alternative she has an option to either go as an employee or become a self employed.

One cannot lose sight of the various factors that ultimately decide the role assignment of the women. The socio-cultural factors, the economic factors, the occupational background, and the like facilitate taking up other roles. However it is possible to conceive personality of the actor conceptually independent of the number of variables that determine the validity of convincingness of certain roles assigned to or selected by, an individual.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

This Chapter has attempted describing the socio-cultural characteristics of women in Coimbatore and Bangalore. The role expectations, demands and perception of women in the region studied have been summarized in the previous pages. The profile provide one of the sources for formulating hypotheses in the present study.