

**ROLE CONFLICT INTRODUCTION AND
CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK OF THE STUDY**

ROLE CONFLICT INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK OF THE STUDY

The present study is concerned with examining the relationship existing between the two roles of working mothers, i.e, the role of wife-mother and that of a worker outside home the conflict between these roles when performed by a single person and if it exists at all, what will be its impact on the effective management of one of the roles that of homemaker. It will be necessary to spell out some of the terms which are used in this study.

The term 'position' will be used to refer to the 'location of an actor or class of actors in a system of social relationships'. Newcomb (1950) says "since every person is a part of an inclusive system of positions, no one position has any meaning apart from the other position to which it is related". Positions can be fully understood only by examining the content of their inter-relationships. Two kinds of positions can be stated 1) relational and 2) situational. Relational specification relates to the description of all the other positions to which a particular position is related. Situational type of specification concerns the situational context in which the position will be studied. It is describing the time and place and the 'scope of the social system' in which position is to be examined.

It is impossible to examine the entire gamut of relational specification of a particular position in a single research. Hence for the given research problem it will suffice to take into account only a limited set of relationship of a particular position to other positions.

The idea of 'role' has been used to denote prescription, description, evaluation and action. It has referred to covert and overt processors, to the behaviour of the self and others, to the behaviour of an individual initiated versus that which is directed to him. The most common definition is that role is the set of prescriptions defining what the behaviour of a position member should be (Biddle and Thomas 1966).

As an aspect of social structure a role may be defined (Gould, J and Kolb, W.L 1967), as a named social position characterised by a set of 1) personal qualities and 2) activities, the set being normatively evaluated to some degree both by those in the situation and other.

To Linton, status is a 'a collection of rights and duties' and a role is 'the dynamic aspect of a status; to put rights and duties into effect is to perform a role(1936). Merton proposes that where a status entails more than one relationship we use 'role set' instead of role (1957).

According to Nadel a role is a category of persons distinguished by a normative set of personal behavioural attributes. He also points out that roles mark the distribution of activities and of socially recognised characteristics among members of a society. G.P Mitchell defines social roles as the "expected behaviour" associated with a 'social position' (1968).

The role consists of "the expectations that persons hold in common toward any person who falls in a particular category by virtue of his position in the social system (Secord & Backman 1964).

It is a "behaviour that is characteristic and expected of a person or persons who occupy a position in the group" (Jones and Gerard 1967). It is "an internally consistent series of conditioned responses by one member of a serial situation which represents the stimulus pattern for a similarly, internally consistent series of conditioned responses of the other in that situation" (Cottrell, 1942).

Role is a "pattern sequence of learned actions or deeds performed by a person in an interaction situation" (Sarbin, 1954). "A person's role is a pattern or type of social behaviour which seems situationally appropriate to him in terms of the demands and expectations of those in his group (Sargent, 1957).

Every individual role can be related with three aspects: the individual's own ideas about what is appropriate - role cognition; other people's ideas about what is appropriate- role expectation; and other people's ideas about what he/she should do - norms (Banton, 1968).

Role means certain expectations, duties and obligations applied to an incumbent of a particular position. In the present study it will be used in the normative rather than in the predictive sense. In a given role, the actor is expected to behave in a certain manner, in turn the actor has definite expectations concerning behaviour of the actor with whom he interacts. This is called role expectation. Apart from this anticipatory quality, role expectation includes normative feature, i.e, the actor is not only expected to behave in a certain way, but he has rather a binding on him to behave in that way.

A single position in a society involves not one role but a set of roles which related the incumbent to the various role players with whom the actor has to deal in fulfilling the obligation or expectations of actor position. Thus individuals are required to play not one role but a set of roles and fulfill different obligations at a time. They are forced into situations where they have to choose among alternative roles and where multiple role expectations encroach upon simultaneously on the role

performer or actor. The sheer demands which multiple roles impose on an individual's time, energy, effort and skill are likely to overburden and overwhelm the actor. To satisfy adequately and satisfactorily the demands of only one or two of (actors) his/her major roles an individual has to spend most of his or her time, energy, which would result in neglect of the obligations associated with other roles which have equally legitimate demand on his or her time and efforts. He or she cannot do justice to all those roles at a time. The consequences are a cognitive state of maladjustment, Dilemma anxiety and confusion in the individual. Good (1960) describes this as "role strain" while other role theorists call it "role conflict" or the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations. Whenever there have been multiple role demands on a single individual he or she has to face this conflict or strain to some extent.

Different role theorists have described and defined this situation in a variety of ways. Stouffer (1949) with regard to an illustration of an empirical procedure for studying role obligations, with particular reference to simultaneous role obligations and conflict said, "It need hardly be pointed out that conflict of role obligations are a common experience of all people".

Parsons (1951) who defined role conflict as ---
the exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of legiti-

mized role expectations such that complete fulfillment of both is realistically impossible'. He adds that there is a certain endemic potentiality of role conflict inherent in the fact that any actor has a plurality of roles, which involves differences of patterns.

Burchard(1954), studied the role conflict in military chaplains, observed that each person has a 'hierarchy or role obligations', the relative positions of which are determined by the strength of the claims made upon him by the various institutions which compete for his loyalty. His roles may not necessarily be in harmony with each other and when two or more institutions demand the primary loyalty of a person they may be directly antitheoretical.

Getzels and Guba (1954), studying role conflict between two highly organized roles, those of the officer and of the teacher in the military situation, found role conflict to occur in certain situations where they are so ordered that 'an actor is required to fill simultaneously two or more roles that present inconsistent, contradictory, or even mutually exclusive expectations. The actor cannot realistically conform to these expectations'.

Gullahorn (1956) used the phrase 'role conflict' to refer to the situation in which incompatible demands are placed upon an actor because of his role relationships

with two or more groups. Generally the person(s) involved feel internally the obligation to meet the competing demands, face the threat of possible sanctions if they fail to fulfil either demand, and find it impossible to comply fully with opposing obligations'.

Merton, who introduced the concept of 'role set' ('... each social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles', 1957) made it clear that the different role relationships that make up a role-set do not always fit together as well as they are supposed (according to the role-set theory there is always a 'potential' for differing expectations among those in the role-set as to what is appropriate conduct for a status occupant).

Goode (1960) considered the phenomenon as a product of social change. He observed that in a society experiencing multidimensional changes people may be unable to agree on just what are the obligations and rights of a particular role or position. Individuals who conceive a given role from different advantage points may from different expectations of the person who is to play it and it may not be possible or feasible for that person to meet all these expectations to the satisfaction of all persons who are part of his total role-network.

Sarbin and Allen(1968) said 'occupancy of many diverse social positions creates a major problem as a person tries to allocate these multiple roles in such a way as to make social life possible. Lack of effective co-ordination among roles would result in role conflict and other difficulties'.

It is obvious that in a changing society the individual is likely to face a wide, distracting and somewhat conflicting array of role expectations. If he conforms fully or adequately to one direction, fulfilment will be difficult for the other. In role behaviour, one has to suffer from anxiety, worry, strain and tension if he devotes more time and attention to one role obligation than he feels should, or than others feel he should. Role conflict arising out of non-fulfilment of incompatible expectations may be preserved by the 'observer' or by the 'actor'. An observer may find that certain situations are likely to pose some 'potential difficulties' for the actor. There is no implication here that the actor himself is necessarily aware of or feels the incompatibility of expectations. Some other Social scientists would suggest that role conflict situations are those in which the 'actor perceives' difficulties in fulfilling role obligations.

A major distinction in role conflict studies has been made by Deutsch(1969), inter-role conflict and intra-role conflict. The former is due to the simultaneous occupancy of two or more positions ('multiple roles' or status-sets as by Merton, 1957) having incompatible expectations, and second involves contradictory expectations held by two or more groups or relevant others regarding the same role.

According to Parsons, Getzels and Guba and Stauffer, in role conflict situations the expectations from the incumbent must be 'legitimate', whereas the other thinkers do not stress this concept of "legitimacy". A legitimate expectation, from the stand-point of the actor, is one in which the actor who participates in social behaviour, feels that others have a right to hold that expectation.

Cottrell(1942) writes, "Adjustment is usually indicated negatively as the degree of maladjustment. It may assume that the amount of tension, anxiety and frustration generated by the attempt to discover and play a given role is an index of the individual's adjustment to such a role". The existence of a cognitive strain due to conflict of roles forces the individual to find some solution which would help in the resolution of that conflict. Normally it is the nature of people to try to resolve or minimize their difficulties and problems by one way or another.

The person is then compelled to choose one of several alternatives. He may abandon one of the conflicting roles and cling to the other, or may attempt some compromise between the roles and rationalize and modify his behaviour, or may withdraw either physically or psychologically from the roles altogether.

The present study is concerned with role conflict perceived by the working mothers who have family responsibilities. Almost a revolution with far-reaching effects has come to affect recently the position and role of women. Women are moving towards a situation where they would assume the position of multifaced human beings. Inudustrialization has created the possibilities for the emancipation of women but has hardly created conditions necessary for its proper realization. Almost all situations which can create a conflict of roles and maladjustment for the actors, exist in the confusion and lack of clarity in the definition of roles, discrepancy and inconsistency between the legal condition and the actual practice regarding the rights of women, and the non-availability of various coping facilities, e.g modern labour and time-saving devices; creaches and day-nurseries for looking after young children in the mother's absence; facilities for married women employers in respect of leave, conveyance, quarters near the work place, scope for part-time job opportunity for retrenchment after an inter-

val, etc.,. These things could help in lessening the severity of conflict. In their absence employed women, especially housewives, have been the victims of conflicting and ambiguous role expectations in the professional and the domestic fields. One obvious result of the discrepancy has been the conflict of role cognitions, of expectations and of norms, described as role conflict perceived by working housewives accepting dual - role - the role of homemakers and of workers.

All over the world employed housewives have to face the problem of adjustment among their varied role expectations. They are required by their position to play a dual set of roles - one as homemakers, wives and mothers and the other as employees. Being simultaneously confronted with the dual demands of home and work, they are liable to face an adjustment problem. At home, in addition to biological functions, there are other duties which they have to perform because of the prevailing cultural norms and values with which they have to perform. They are subjected at the same time to the responsibilities duties and certain commitments connected with their employment.

These circumstances require a redefinition and reallocation of roles, duties and responsibilities for every member of the family. Unless and until it is achieved there is no chance of lessening the overload of working

housewives and therefore, mitigating the severity of their problem. No matter whether out of their own choice or out of economic necessity, they have taken up the dual roles, adjustment between them is not an easy task. Difficulty arises because often these two roles make a simultaneous demand on person whose physical capacity, energy, endurance and time have definite limits. Often the fulfilment of these two roles requires qualities of different and diverse kinds. Women's employment functions require such qualities as efficiency, courage, determination, intelligence, sense of reality, responsibility, independence, to be straight-forward and non-sentimental. In addition to these characteristics a woman who is a wife also, is expected to be pretty, sweet, soft, sensitive, submissive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive, good-humoured, domesticated, yielding and in most cases, not too intelligent. Hence a kind of conflict arising from a lack of adjustment between two competing roles is likely to be faced by those who have to comply with dual role obligations at a time.

The change in the position and role of women is still thoroughly ambiguous that the dual responsibilities of home and work are likely to create some difficulties for the actor in fulfilling the dual obligations and expectations which equal competence and satisfaction and that the persons performing the dual roles, therefore, are liable to experience a sort of strain and conflict between

dual obligations seemingly incompatible. That the two roles, the role of an employee and of a home-maker are distinct and different by nature, and that there is a wide possibility of role conflict and role strain being perceived by persons who want to reconcile them simultaneously, have been copiously proved by sociologists and social psychologists.

Myrdal and klan (1968) said, "the characteristics feminine dilemma of today is usually summarized. Today the conflict has become 'internationalized' and continues as a psychological problem which may assume many different variations and shades; and just because there is no longer and absolute 'either or' to be decided on at the beginning of adult life, the pull in two directions goes on practically throughout a women's life".

Viola klien wrote in her feminine character that the role conflict of working women is a product of a 'cultural lag' or a discrepancy or contrast between values and material conditions. The rates of change in different parts of a social system are unequal... She observed that though there is nominal equality of the sexes, there are still two different spheres of work as they existed in former times, the one connected with the home and the family which is exclusively women's domain, and the other one, the sphere of business and professions which today is

shared by men and women. And it is interesting and important to note that such a situation implies that women have acquired a multitude of new functions, while they have not been allowed to forsake their old ones (1971).

L.W. Hoffman reports that the sheer presence of trying to fill these two demanding roles can result in a state of stress that intrun, has a negative effect on the child... the working mother feels guilty about her work because of the prevailing admonishments against maternal employment (1974b).

Nye reported, a number of sociologists also expected conflict and negatvie effect in marriages in which the mother was employed fulltime. There are obvious conflicts between the child-care, socialisation and housekeeper roles of mothers and their enactment of the provider role (1974a).

Ray Killian agreed that the role obligations of a working wife are different both qualitatively and quantitatively from those of a working husband, and that often a working woman being torn between two contradictory loyalties, fails to devote the required time, energy, effort and commitment to her job which is only secondary to her. If she has to make a choice between the two she ususally

makes it in favour of the home (1971).

The fact that even when working, the working woman is expected to be committed to her family first, her place of work second. But her expected commitment to her family is a source of disruption in the occupational sphere because, those involved in the role-set of the individual in one of statuses have their own patterned activities disrupted when the status occupant does not live upto her role obligations (Merton, 1968).

Coser and Rokoff suggested that the conflict is one of allegiance, and it does not stem from the mere fact of involvement in more than one social systems. It is a conflict of normative priorities. The conflict becomes not merely one's own. It is between two activity system that have legitimate demands on the actor's allegiance. Career and family life are presented as mutually exclusive alternatives for women. It would seem as if modern women were not capable, as modern men are, to segment their various roles and statuses... those who choose permanent careers are expected to be likely to remain celibate like catholic priests (1974).

The writings of Kapur (1970,1974), Ross (1973), Rama Kupur (1969), Hate (1969), Joshi (1972) Sarkar (1965), Dube (1963), Mehta (1975), Cormack (1961), Padmini Sen

Gupta (1960), Singh (1972), Vimla (1972), and a few others have studied the status and role of women in India, it is clearly evident that the women who are found to perform dual roles mostly experience a role conflict or incompatibility of roles in various degree.

This is quite natural because in a society in transition such as the contemporary Indian society is the tradition undergoes continuous change but what is modern is not defined, established and accepted fully. Hence a great deal of ambiguity in social values, moral norms and cultural standards is only to be expected. As such the likelihood of conflicts becomes greater. In the report of the National Committee of Status of Women (1974) these points have been clearly mentioned.

The working mothers in our society are trying to bridge two gulfs running in opposite directions and in doing so they are most likely to face conflict of contradictory role expectations, that is role conflict. This conflict arises from the interplay of various factors. As the present day society is in a state of flux between tradition and modernity an element of ambiguity surrounds the role of its members, particularly female members. Though the quality and quantity of women's work and responsibility have greatly changed, the prevailing outlook of

the society has not changed to that extent. This has created cultural lag which brings about tension and conflicts for its members. If a woman undertakes dual roles, it is considered merely an additional responsibility on her, and her family fails to allow her necessary concessions and considerations on that account.

Men hold the status giving role in the family and the primary status carrying role is in a sense that of the housewife. Her fundamental status is that she is the wife of her husband and the mother of their children; she is traditionally the person responsible for a complex of activities in connexion with the management of the household, care of children etc. As Parsons observed, "organization about the function of housewife however with the addition of strong affectional devotion to husband and children, is the primary focus of one of the principle patterns governing the adult feminine role what may be called the 'domestic' pattern". "It is notable that in spite of the very great progress of the emancipation of women from the traditional domestic pattern only a very small fraction have gone very far in this direction.... Hence it seems... there have appeared two important tendencies in the feminine role which are alternative to that of simple domesticity on the one hand, and to full fledged career on the other (1974). Mother assumes some

of the rights and obligations that traditionally belonged to the father, she most often does not give up her obligations for maintaining the 'internal system'. She may delegate some of her duties to other members of the family or to paid help, but she still remains in charge of 'running the home'.

As families are becoming nuclear, the task and responsibilities of the modern house wife have increased. Unlike the extended family, in which a division of labour is practised among the member of the kin, in the conjugal family the primary and possibly the role responsibility of managing the household falls on the wife. Under the present cultural understanding of the people, homemaking like child-rearing and child-bearing is identical with femininity. Whether she works in field, factory or mine, at a construction site or in white collar jobs, she is no less expected than a housewife to prove her 'femininity' in the traditional ways. The precise division of labour between men and women depends upon the locality, educational level and extent of modernization, but the real differentiation between their positions remains.

Urban life brings certain advantages and makes housework easier, she is expected to be more attentive to the children and their studies, to keep the home clean and decorated, to prepare varied menus and to play hostess to

guests and friends of the family. The content of her mother role also has been over whelmingly burdensome. She not only takes the physical care of the children but gives attention to their inner dispositions and their personality development. It is her task to supervise all the activities of children.

The difficulties and conflicts faced by working mothers are multi-dimensional. Their type and nature change with the change in the situation, environment and status of working mothers. The conflict may be of two types, physical and psychological. One is due to the practical difficulty of combining simultaneously two diverse types of commitments and two contradictory role expectations. Here the problem arise from the physical strain which the working mothers have to face while distributing their limited time, energy and physical capability between two full time roles which simultaneously put their demands on the incumbents. This type of conflict is faced by those women who work mainly for financial reasons, and not for their own emotional and for intellectual satisfaction. Another type of conflict experienced by working mothers arises from the inner conflict or feeling of guilt, anxiety or tension. Here the conflict is psychological. It is caused by the dual commitment and concern. This is a 'conflict within oneself' about whether one is being a good persons in leading a certain type of existence.

The problem of overload has been aggravated in India because of some peculiar factors part-time jobs are not available here and due to lack of employment potentialities, women, if they are to work, have to engage in full-time jobs which entail long working hours away from home, and also have to keep up the job by any means; in the absence of labour saving devices the household chores requires long hours of labour, the preparation of Indian foods entails a lot of time and energy and as Indians have not changed their food habits most of the time of a working wife at home is spent for this purpose. Though because of the education they receive, they are relatively 'liberal' in their ideas about male and female roles, when they marry and have children, they come to accept the traditional division of labour at home. The actual burden of chores remains for them substantially the same as in traditional settings. They do not like to see their husbands take charge of the kitchen, even partially, or perform other 'feminine' jobs like washing utensils or clothes, cleaning room's cutting vegetables etc.

The present study explores the degree and extent of conflict experienced by working mothers in Coimbatore city. The study deals with the inter-role conflict as the

author is concerned with incompatible expectations for working women resulting from their occupancy of dual sets of roles. The working women occupying two roles is liable to face conflict in two situations: at her home and at her place of work. At home she is likely to incur conflicts with as many counter positions as she has to interact. In her home front her worker role may interfere with or intrude upon each of her familial roles separately, her role as a wife, as a mother, as a homemaker, as a daughter-in-law, as a sister-in-law, as a daughter, as a sister, as friend and neighbour and so forth. In her place of work too, she has to interact with her boss, her colleagues, her subordinates etc, and there is a possibility of interference by her familial roles, in each case of interaction at her work place. The counter-positions with whom a particular role incumbent has to deal in a present-day complex society, are innumerable. The present study likes to deal with role conflict of working women at home only and that too in relation to their interaction with their husbands and children mainly.