CHAPTER 1

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The role of women in the Indian society has undergone a social transformation. The rapid social change has ushered in a sea change in the status of women in the home and outer society, the relationships between husbands and wives, and between parents and children. A new social order has emerged marking a discernible shift in the age-old attitudes on the role of woman.

Until a few decades ago, economic equality between the sexes was a far cry for the average woman. Women who used to work were generally poor, immigrant, young, and unmarried, while middle class married women were confined at home. This situation reflected the societal view that the role of a woman was to perform domestic work, whereas a man was supposed to participate in outside competitive world to earn income to support his dependent wife and family. A woman's status and role were well-defined, and there was a very little scope of ambiguity and doubt. She was considered to be subordinate who was supposed to obey her husband, and be dependent on him for each and everything. Her own desires and feelings had to be suppressed to keep her husband happy, especially in middle class homes. She had to spend the whole day in taking care of the matters entirely related to home.

However, the turbulent 1970's changed these patterns. Inflation, changing life styles, and family stress affected women's participation in outside jobs. Such rapid changes also made the traditional roles of men and women dysfunctional to some extent. Many women are not satisfied with the traditional role in home and seclusion from the outside world. They have started rejecting the traditional views about woman's role and status.
Nowadays, a large number of women are coming out of their homes to join jobs. Some may start working outside the home due to the economic necessity or in order to supplement the family income while others may do so to attain economic independence or to satisfy their need for personal fulfillment. The reason may be any, but it has definitely redefined and changed the status of women in our society.

Kerbo (1989) stressed that the family is undergoing a change, and due to industrialization, extensive changes have come in the family system of modern societies, with many opportunities for alternative life styles, decreased importance of the extended family, decrease in birth rate, new technology into the home, thus changing traditional tasks for women.

Women in India are now trying to carve a new niche for themselves in society and the society at large has also accepted women's assuming of new roles. There is a growing awareness on the importance of women as 'reform' agents as well as their needs. Their perceptions are reflected in the enhanced representation of women in the decentralized administrative units of Panchyati Raj, in job reservations, services for the girl child, literacy programmes, and so on. The recent clamour for thirty three percent representation for women in the Parliament underscores the emerging aspirations of the Indian women to play a greater and decisive role in the society. Work participation of women in India is 16.43% (Census of India, 1991).

Breaking the traditional chains, however, is not an easy task. Wright (1995) in an article, "The Evolution of Despair" stated that working mothers suffer depression more often than working men. It is unnatural for a mother to get up each day, hand her child over to some one she barely knows and then go off to work, and this is likely to be a source of guilt and anxiety.
Enabling women to be workers as well as mothers is one of the great challenges of our day.

These days many young women experience conflicts and frustrations in their essential fulfillment of roles of wifehood and motherhood. Young women of today are educated and many are trained for various professions. No doubt, the concept of working women has been widely accepted but even in this emancipated era, when we are about to enter the twenty-first century, mothers continue to assume major responsibility for childcare. It is still thought that due to lack of time for her child she is depriving the child emotionally. Women are experiencing several types of frustrations and pressures of trying to maintain a balance between two important responsibilities, family and career. As a result, women are facing role conflict.

Kapur (1974) stated that in the Indian context, role conflict in women is due to unchanged basic set-up of the Indian family and social structure, and non-acceptance of the changing role and status of women.

Psychologists have stressed the expectations and perceptions of individual performing the role plus the personality characteristics as factors in role conflict. An individual may experience role conflict due to lack of ability to tackle with different roles; or he/she may have certain attitudes, values that may come in the way of fulfillment of a role. Thus, in other words, when a person experiences role conflict, it means that he/she is not able to cope up with the demands of different roles. A feeling that he/she has not been successful can also lead to role conflict or role strain (Nye, 1961).

The remarkable advancements and fluidity in sex roles, dual responsibilities of women have given birth to startling problems of stress and anxiety. The critical phase of transition from conventionalism to
unconventionalism and from traditionalism to modernization has led to frustrations, stresses, anxieties and various psychological problems. These have become a part and parcel of our lives.

Whenever the individual attempts to carry any possibility into action, anxiety is an inevitable accompaniment. In India, a conflict between traditionalism and modernization is still not fully resolved. Women, especially working ones, still experience anxiety and stress whenever such a moment comes that she has to choose between job and housework, for example, when she has to choose between an unwell child at home and an important office meeting on the same day. Such situations may act as an indicator that something is not going on well in the life of the affected woman, and thus may lead to anxiety.

Generally speaking, anxiety may be aroused by conditions which threaten the integrity of the organism and such conditions are denoted by the term 'stress'. Stress is a part of the normal fabric of human existence. It is concomitant with the challenges we undertake in developing new skills, abilities and competences. Sometimes the challenge exceeds our capacity to adapt, thus leading to the development of stress.

In an article, Wright (1995) quoted, "I attribute the social and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved..." (pp. 40-41).

In the recent years, attention is being paid to life events which may not be very detrimental to the growth of society but can play a havoc in life of the person affected. For instance, destruction of one's house in fire, death of someone in the family, difficulties in job, marriage, and various other threats or conflicts that many people face in their daily lives. Some of such events under certain conditions can act as powerful stressors that may
disrupt one's life, and may repeatedly interfere with the adequate performance of ordinary role-related activities.

When a life state changes very suddenly and brings about a total or major change in one's life, it can prove to be disastrous for a person. A slight change in life is welcomed and that too when the individual is ready to accept it. If an individual ignores his/her limit of stress tolerance and puts too much burden on himself/herself, it can affect his/her health, and the person may develop physical or psychological sickness. A dramatic discovery was made by Holmes (1967) that four-fifth of all those who have experienced major life changes during the year could expect to have a serious illness sometime during the next two years.

When a person is going through a phase of stressful life events and role conflicts, one is bound to have certain ill-effects. There may be emotional, cognitive or physiological disruption. When people are asked how they feel under stress, they usually respond with terms like anxious, irritable, angry, depressed or guilty. One can say that it affects the general well-being of the individual.

Quality of life has a solid bearing on mental health which in turn can give quality of life (SEARO, 1984; cf. Moudgil, Verma, and Kaur, 1986). Quality of life is essential for a person's healthy physical and mental profile. For attaining quality of life in marital relationship, it is necessary that there is a cordial relationship between spouses, and an understanding which can help both of them to deal with stressful situations. Quality of life of an individual is intertwined with that of his/her family, society, and so on.

Another related concept is general well-being. An individual has to maintain a balance between his/her expectations, and ability and resources to attain well-being. If a person is satisfied with life experiences and feels that he/she is performing his/her role satisfactorily, he/she will be high on
well-being. A person has to maintain a balance between the environmental demands and opportunities. If he/she is able to attain a gain in objective reality, he/she may become successful in achieving or increasing his/her well-being.

Apart from other factors, locus of control can also affect the well-being of an individual. An individual's belief about locus of control is an important variable which has been frequently studied as an antecedent to important social behaviours and psychological states. Rotter (1966) stated that in externals, an outcome is perceived by the subject as following some of his/her own action but not entirely dependent upon his action and he/she perceives it as dependent upon luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. In contrast, internals perceive that an event is dependent upon their own behaviour or their own relatively permanent characteristics.

In other words, the internal-external dimension is a generalized expectancy that occurs when individuals have learned that events are contingent or non-contingent on their behaviour. Internals, generally, take steps to change aversive life situations, and try to exert power and control over their environment as compared to externals, who trust fate or powers beyond their control, to affect their life. Most often, internality is found to be a more positive asset than externality. In social interactions, internals are more likely than externals to take steps to influence the outcome.

Long, Williams, Gaynor, and Clark (1988) found that people high on internality, and low on chance control obtained significantly higher work and health satisfaction scores.

Several studies have reported a greater tendency for externals to be influenced by social stimuli in their environment, to modify their behaviour in

Phares, Ritchie, and Davis (1965) found that externals recall more of the negative interpretations than did internals. It appeared as if the external orientation provided ready access to a defense, and thus relatively less need to invoke forgetting as a response. Being generally more expectant of failure, they might be more likely to utilize their external orientation and be less likely to accept responsibility for failure in a situation that itself offers no immediately apparent reasons for that failure. When failure occurs in the face of obvious distractions, an external may not feel compelled to be particularly defensive. Rather, it may provide a rare opportunity for him to be safely self-denigrating.

Since 1966, internality-externality (I-E) has been the subject of extensive research. While it is easy to use the terms internals and externals, it should be kept in mind that I-E is not a typology. Rather, it is a continuum and a person can fall anywhere along that continuum.

In conclusion, women are drawers of water, hewers of wood, labourers, preparers of food, bearers of children, educators, health-care providers, producers and decision-makers. Although they are central to caring for families and communities, to production and reproduction, they are accorded unequal status. They are overworked and undervalued. Their subordination makes it more difficult for them to cope with many demands made upon them; whether of a physical, social or emotional nature. It is now a well-recognized fact that the stresses imposed on women affect their physical, emotional and mental well-being. Significant changes are taking place in beliefs and expectations about women's roles and identities in the context of community, family, and work.
Need of the Study

Ever since women have entered the job market, the focus of researchers has been on studying various aspects of employment and their effects on women. Women have been found to report more undesirable life events as compared to men. One of the major reasons for this may be the male-dominated society. Every new environment which can prove stressful for a woman may not be so for a man, such as, marriage, pregnancy, birth of a child, lack of child, and so on. Besides, the women who have joined some job would be more prone to stress and may experience more role conflict leading to anxiety as compared to housewives. This may be because, in our society, though people accept a women working outside home, yet she is expected to manage the household chores single-handedly and efficiently. Husbands, though happy and willing to accept the wage packet, do not want to share the household work. They consider it to be below their dignity if the wife expects them to share the burden of housework. So, a woman alone has to shoulder the whole burden of home.

A number of factors such as low income, unpredictable income, lack of control over income, husband's working hours, husband's demanding nature, help extended by husband in household chores, exploitation as a weaker sex and so on, can lead to stress in women, can generate anxiety and can effect the general well-being of women. Considerable evidence has also suggested that life stress is related to the course of depressive disorders as well as to the etiology of these disturbances (Brown, and Harris, 1989; Monroe, and Depue, 1991). This problem may aggravate in women belonging to lower class where stress may be induced as well as exacerbated by such reasons as insufficient family income, insecurity of job, larger family size, lack of basic amenities, prevalence of common social evils like wife battering, alcoholism and illiteracy. Since the lower class...
people live mostly in unauthorized colonies, the insecurity of housing can be a stress causing factor among the lower class women as compared to women belonging to the middle class.

Though stressful life events, role conflict, locus of control, and quality of life have been studied in relation to anxiety and general well-being in the general population, yet not much research has been done on working women, especially of lower class. The results of the studies are also not conclusive.

Moreover, a large number of studies have been done to find out the effect of a number of variables, for instance, spousal support, number of children, and family income on role conflict, but very little work has been done to study role conflict in relation to anxiety and general well-being. It becomes very important to study these areas as, in India, a large number of women are victims of anxiety and depression, and suffer from stress and role conflict because of the dual burden of the outside job and the traditional household work.

Also, the effect of role conflict would be different in middle class and lower class women. Role conflict would be more in middle class women because they have more responsibilities as compared to lower class women. The former are more aware of child care, and are conscious of the fact that if the child is neglected, it can affect his/her development. The size of the house, maintenance of house, more social obligations, a wish to enhance social status, and maintaining it, and unchanged attitude of husbands (by and large) can lead to higher role conflict in middle class women. However, this may not be the case in lower class women. For, they have been engaged in outside work since long, while this is quite a new concept in the middle class. Lower class women are not much bothered that
the child is being neglected. Sometimes the husbands also share household responsibilities and the wives may experience lesser role conflict.

Regarding locus of control, some researchers have found that internals perceive less stress as compared to externals, while others have found that depressed persons attribute most of their upsetting events to their personal qualities.

Quality of life is also a relatively new concept as far as it is concerned with research on women. There can be a lot of difference in the quality of life of women belonging to middle class and those belonging to lower class. Generally speaking, women belonging to lower class are less exposed to modernity and changing status of working women and are less satisfied with life because of vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy and domestic tensions like inadequate food, substandard living conditions, unlimited family size and so on as compared to the working women of middle class. Lower class women are less aware of social and legal rights, and are more prone to victimization from the society in general and their family members (husbands, in-laws) in particular. Besides, they are more exposed to stress, anxiety and frustration because of the compulsion to work for economic reasons, and lack of job aspirations in matter of growth as compared to middle class women. Given that quality of life has been found to have a solid bearing on mental health and illness, this concept calls for more research.

There is a dearth of studies in the field of stressful life events, role conflict, locus of control and quality of life in relation to anxiety and general well-being in working women, especially those belonging to lower socio-economic status. Further research is needed to explicate the effect of contributing factors and their relationships. Studies have found stressful life events to affect anxiety (Johnson, and Sarson, 1979) and general well-being (Billings, Cronkite, and Moos, 1983; Nezu, and Ronan, 1985; Monroe,

While conceptualising this research, it was considered worthwhile to study the effect of role conflict, quality of life, and locus of control as moderators in the relationship of stressful life events with anxiety, and general well-being. The present study is an attempt to answer the query as to what kind of relationship occurs between stressful life events and anxiety; stressful life events and general well-being, under different levels of role conflict, quality of life, and locus of control.

It was also postulated that the research would prove useful to compare the working women belonging to middle class and those belonging to lower class. Therefore, the present investigation was designed to study the role of locus of control, role conflict, and quality of life in the relationship of stressful life events with anxiety, and general well-being in employed women, and housewives of middle and lower socio-economic status.