CHAPTER - IV

MAJOR DYNAMICS IN HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIPS—CHANGING ROLES

In most of the industrialized western nations two-thirds of married women are employed outside home. As a result the dual-earner family has replaced the single-earner family as modal family. No wonder, therefore, that the attention of the family sociologists and other scholars has been drawn to the study of the impact of wife’s employment on the structure and functions of family and domestic relations. They are mainly interested in knowing whether the employment of wives has helped or hindered the normative pattern of family life that western societies had adopted.

Opinion on the impact of the employment of women on the structure and function of the family in particular and the dynamics of husband-wife relations in general, is divided. There are writers who believe that employment of wives has brought about disorganization of families. For example, Havemann and West (1952) write that employed women have a higher rate of divorce than non-employed ones. Nye (1959) observes that the unhappiness and dissatisfaction mark the families of the employed wives. For in such families the working wives experience role conflict, role overload, and marital stress due to the reluctance of husbands to alter their domestic roles. But others like Bowman (1954) have found contradictory trends. He points out that the
wife's employment makes for a closer relationship between husband and wife. In such dual-earning families the wife is enabled to understand her husband and his problems better. Jephcott, Seear and Smith (1962) also seem to have similar opinions. They observe that wife's employment, far from threatening good relations, helped to improve them. There is a third category of writers who think that employment of wives has a null impact on the happiness or unhappiness of the family life. For instance, Locke and MacKeprang (1949) found that there was no significant difference between the marital adjustment of wives who were employed and that of those who were full-time housewives.

The impact of wife's employment on the balance of power and division of labour in the family has also come under close scrutiny. Here again the findings do not concur. There are some who opine that the wife's employment has not drastically altered the gender-based distribution of power and domestic division of labour. Others feel that the out-of-home work of mothers has adversely affected the division of domestic labour to the detriment of socialization of children in the sense that employed mothers are hardly able to devote much time to the proper care of children. There are yet others who maintain that wife's employment has brought about only marginal changes in the balance of power and division of labour. The dual-earner families are more egalitarian both in sharing of power and domestic work, than the single-earner families.
Family sociologists in India have given some reasons why the subject of working wives has not come under the close scrutiny of scholars. Kapur (1970, p.7) writes: "In India marital adjustment studies, on the whole, are rare. One of the probable explanations for the absence of these studies in India may be that social science studies, as such, started very late in the country and have been focused mostly on the problems considered more important, that is, those which involve the majority of the population of the country". The second reason is that this problem had remained in the background, rather suppressed, on account of well-established social norms and traditional pattern of Indian social organization. Another reason is that men and women probably sought accommodation for their conflicts within the traditional framework of married life. Marriage was considered to be an eternal and indissoluble union. Therefore the partners accepted their marital situations ungrudgingly and did not consider adjustment a problem. Moreover, according to the traditional norms, marriage was hardly meant for gratification of individual interests and aspirations. Indeed, it was enjoined that the partners in the marriage should subordinate their personal happiness, likes and dislikes for the well-being of the family and the community. What was upper most was one's social obligation and duty towards the family. Hence there was hardly any room for marital friction and still less for its public expression. "When little happiness was expected in marriage, there was hardly any question of recognising any marriage as unhappy and the problem of marital adjustment, therefore, never came to the forefront".
Also the roles, statuses and obligations of the husband and wife were so well marked that there was no possibility of conflicts. Some other roles were complementary and not competitive in nature. This lack of competition also facilitated achievement of marital harmony.

Family pride and honour were also responsible for not allowing the marital adjustment to become a problem. A wife would rather suffer in silence than rebel against the injustice done to her for fear that any such action may hurt the pride and honour of the family.

For any social phenomenon to become a social problem the subjective definition is as important as the objective condition. The culture of inequality inherent in the age-old tradition of India did not make the wives conscious enough to articulate their sense of inequality and discontent in an organized manner. Also it did not make them feel the need and urgency to fight against the deprivation through collective efforts and it did not help them to identify with any group including institutional practices to blame and to hold responsible for the unjust practices. Finally the culture of inequality of sexes was a way of life. And one can attack a way of life only by offering a better alternative. In the past, in the absence of any such alternative, a tacit acceptance of the harsh realities of life was the only way of survival.

The process of modernization set into action by the consolidation of the British rule in India. It seems to have triggered off a
A number of studies of the metropolitan cities have noted that the attitudes of educated women are changing with regard to marriage and their status and role in the family. The idea that marriage is a contract rather than a sacrament is gaining ground. Merchant (1930), for instance, found that personal conception of marriage is replacing the religious conception. Neera Desai (1957) records that an increasing number of women consider self-respect and the development of personality as the necessary goals of married life. Kapur (1960) found that women of Delhi showed a marked preference for marriage by choice, in which personal considerations were uppermost. A large number of educated women expected happiness in their married life and demanded personal gratification of their emotional, physiological, social and economic needs. They emphasized their privileges more than their obligations.

This shift in the emphasis is a sure indication that marital relationship has now become a social problem. And this problem hinges mainly on the husband-wife relationships. What is very clear about all these changes is that the objective conditions of family life are now being defined differently by the educated women. They are not only conscious of their rights and privileges but are also in a position to articulate their discontent when they are deprived of them. They feel...
the need and urgency to abolish their deprivations through collective efforts. They now have acquired the requisite economic, social and moral strength not only to identify the group and institutions that have been responsible for the injustice and their subjugation, but are also equipped to launch an attack on them. All this was possible mainly because of one important factor, that is, there was a better alternative. They have a choice.

Opinions on the impact of employment of middle class women on the family in India are similar to those drawn by studies of dual-earner families in the West. Some scholars opine that it has led to disorganization of families; some opine that it has brought about greater harmony; yet others feel that it has a null effect in the sense that no perceptible change is seen in the family as a result of employment of wives. However, Kapur's (1970) observations in this regard are noteworthy. She feels that the employment of married women is acting as a catalytic agent. That is, if the marital adjustment prior to employment is harmonious, employment of wife has no adverse effect. The harmony is continued and strengthened by the wife's employment. If, on the other hand, the marital adjustment prior to employment is disharmonious, employment of wife aggravates the situation making it all the more discordant.

There is no gainsaying the fact that employment of wives has changed the traditional normative pattern of family life in several ways.
Our respondents were unanimous and emphatic in their opinion that the traditional norms that guided the family life have drastically changed if not disappeared completely. Therefore, we commenced our investigation in this area with a straight and direct question whether the employment of wives had a (i) positive effect (ii) negative effect or (iii) no effect, on the harmonious relations in the family. In response to this question, 82 per cent of husbands and 86 per cent of wives said that it had a positive effect, 16 per cent of the husbands and 10 per cent of wives said that it had a negative effect and only 2 per cent of husbands and 2 per cent of wives said that it had neither a positive nor a negative effect.

When asked to explain in what respect it had a positive/negative/null effect, the respondents gave varied and sometimes contradictory reasons. Therefore to facilitate a more accurate response, we posed a more pointed question as to whether things would have been better if the wives had not taken up jobs (without adversely affecting the family income). The responses to this question brought to light certain divergent attitudes that husbands and wives have to this issue. 90 per cent of the husbands said that things would be much better if their wives gave up their jobs and stayed home as full-time householders. Justifying their contention they said that the main reason for sending their wives for jobs outside was economic. They candidly admitted that their life would not have been what it was then but for the fact that their wives took up employment and contributed substantially
for the maintenance of the family. Indeed, some of them remembered with gratitude the economic help that their wives rendered to the family. They said that their wives were mainly responsible for pulling the family through economic difficulties. For instance Mr. M, an officer in a nationalized bank, narrated the details of how his wife Mrs. S, helped him through financial difficulties by holding on to her job in the face of most adverse conditions:

When we got married I was a petty clerk and my wife a teacher in a local high school. I was ambitious. I had determined not to rot as a clerk but to rise to the position of an officer. This ambition could be fulfilled if I acquired a law degree and passed the competitive department examination. So I enrolled myself for the law course in a local law college which had started evening classes to facilitate employees. But, as luck would have it, within a few months of my enrolment tragedy struck our family. My old mother who was staying with us and who was a great help in taking care of our two young children, cooking and over-all management of the house died of heart attack. Her sudden departure rocked our family boat severely. With our small income we could not even dream of having a maid-servant. And my overriding ambition would not allow me to discontinue my studies to help out my wife in attending to the household chores and rearing the young ones. Things were very bleak. I was in great tension. I was pulled in two directions. Should I give up the studies and bid farewell to my ambition and help my wife to hold the family ship steady? When I was debating this question in my mind, tragedy struck our family once again. My daughter fell ill and our family doctor informed us that she was ailing from a rare disease
which, if not attended to expeditiously, would cause her permanent indebtedity. The treatment was both costly and involved careful nursing. I was panic-stricken. The waves of adversities threatened to drown me. But not my wife. She stood like a rock. Knowing fully well my dilemma, she rose to the occasion and faced the crisis valiantly. Even in the face of such an unnerving crisis, she never once mentioned that I should discontinue my studies and help her in the household work. Instead, she took upon herself the entire responsibility of running the family, taking care of the ailing daughter, attending to her job, leaving me all the time to concentrate on my studies. She even borrowed money from her colleagues to meet the costly medical expenditure. Her indomitable courage reinforced my determination. As a result I came out with flying colours both in the law and department examinations. I got the promotions too. I am now what I am mainly because of my wife and her support and encouragement. Now that I have a cosy and fairly well-paid job, we can certainly maintain our standard of life even if my wife gives up her job. But I wouldn't force her. I leave it to her to decide. Only I think that there is no more need for her to slog. She may resign and live a well-earned comfortable life at home.

There were quite a few similar cases where the husbands acknowledged the economic contribution of the wives for the maintenance of their families. They also mentioned that if the wives' economic contribution was ensured from other sources, they would be too happy to have their wives at home as full-time householders. The main reasons why they wanted their wives to give up jobs were:

1) They did not relish the idea of their wives staying away from
home. They were all the more averse to the idea of their wives working in the offices for long hours in the company of male colleagues: and

ii) Long and constant absence of wives from home will lead to the neglect of (a) children and their proper upbringing, (b) the overall upkeep of the house.

In contrast to the above mentioned general feeling among the white-collar husbands in our sample, 95 per cent of the wives did not share their views. They said that employment of married women had its own disadvantages, but it is not without its merits. In fact they said that apart from the economic considerations, their employment has a great psychological spin-off effect which far outweighed all other considerations. It has given them the all-important feeling of self-respect and self-confidence. In fact, a number of them mentioned that their employment was one of the main reasons for the family harmony. The other reasons given by the wives in justification of their employment were -

i) It has freed them from over-dependence on their husbands;

ii) Freed them from the boredom of being a full-time housewife;

iii) Helped them to negotiate with their husbands from a position of strength;

iv) Long and costly education which they had received is being properly utilised;
v) It has added to their social stature:

vi) Being a good wife, a good mother and a good housewife is not the be-all and end-all of a woman's life. She is a partner of man in all his endeavours whether it is within the four walls of the house or outside. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing wrong in women taking up jobs and contributing their own mite in all the fields.

It is significant to note that the remaining 5 per cent of wives who did not evince the same enthusiasm for employment outside home were all in the lowly paid jobs as clerks and office assistants. They felt that if their discontinuation in job did not adversely affect the financial position of the family, they would readily give up the job and be full-time house-wives. They thought that loss of their employment would not adversely affect their status in the family. In fact, a couple of them said that they could utilise their time, education and skill more usefully at home than at office, "pushing files".

Having noted the fact that an overwhelming majority of husbands and wives of the dual-earner families were in favour of employment of women, we were interested in knowing its impact on the husband-wife relations.
Sharing of house-hold work:

The employment of wives has brought changes in the division of household work. An increasing number of husbands of the dual-earner families now share the household work. In our sample 90 per cent of the husbands said that they shared the domestic duties such as shopping, coaching children in their studies, attending to various other duties connected with the education of children, their clothing, health, etc. But other household chores that are traditionally feminine in character such as cooking, washing, bathing children, cleaning utensils, upkeep of home were still attended to by the wives with the help of maidservants.

Though a number of husbands did not see anything wrong or demeaning in participating in domestic duties, there was quite a substantial number among them who thought that these duties cut into their leisure-time "manly activities", such as going for a game or two of tennis/badminton or going to a club for a game or two of rummy over drinks.

There is also a notable change in the attitude of wives regarding their husbands' participation in the household work. In our sample, 70 per cent of the wives felt that their husbands must share the household chores with them. They firmly believed that it would be unfair if all the responsibility of running the house was left to wives only. However, the wives had their own reasons and justification for making the husbands share the household duties.
One Mrs. M, a college teacher, justified the participation of husbands in the household chores as follows:

The main reason why the husbands should participate in the household work is not to lighten the burden of their wives as much as to make them fully involved in the family life. Their non-participation tends to make them indifferent towards the family. For instance, before I was employed, my husband hardly spent any time in household work and much less for children. He never bothered to coach them or help them in homework. In fact, he was even unaware of the classes in which our children were studying. He would sometimes absent-mindedly ask me, "In which class is Seema studying, 1Ind or IIIrd?" I used to be aghast at his indifference. His favourite excuse for this indifference was that he was overworked at the office and that left him no energy or enthusiasm to attend to household work or to the studies of our children. And then he would say, "Thank God, you are there with all the time in the world to take care of the work and look after the education of our children". Such an attitude used to make me non-plussed. I had no way to tackle this situation. However, things changed when I landed a job. Circumstances forced my husband to share more and more household work, including the coaching of our children in their studies. Now my husband not only teaches the children regularly, but also keenly monitors their progress in the school. His keen interest in the studies of children has involved him in other responsibilities such as getting them good dresses, school uniform, and their general upkeep. As a result, he spends more time at home than he ever did when I was a fulltime housewife. In my view, what is more important about this transformation is not so much that some of the responsibility of managing the
domestic work is taken off my shoulder but that my husband has changed from a "privileged visitor" or "a paying guest" into a responsible fully involved husband and father. That is a matter of great satisfaction to me.

Mrs. K, a bank employee had this to say:

Being the only son to his parents, my husband must have grown up as a self-centred, pampered personality. When I came to this house (from a family of three brothers and two sisters) as a bride, I was in for some shocks. He was doting husband. He loved me and showed me much affection. But when it came to the question of sharing the household work, he was an entirely different person. He thought his duty as a husband and father of two children ended with the handing over of his salary to me on the first of every month. Whenever I pleased with him to attend to some of the household work, he seemed to be flabbergasted. He used to openly ask, "How can you expect me to go to the market with a bag in my hand? Is it a man's work? I do not know the difference between jirgi and sasvi (Zera and Asafoetida). Don't you ever ask me to help our children in their studies. I do not have the patience. I may lose my temper and beat them!"

Sickness is sometimes a blessing in disguise. At least it was so in my case. After the birth of our child, I fell seriously ill and was hospitalized for nearly three months. With me in the hospital and no one else at home to take care of the children, the entire burden of looking after the family fell on my husband. Since there was no relative who could come and stay with us, my husband hired a maid-servant and took upon himself the full responsibility of managing the house in my absence. When I returned home from the hospital after recovery, I found my
husband a fully changed man. He had not only shed his complexes but the pressing responsibilities seemed to have rubbed and rounded off some of his angularities and idiosyncrasies. Now it would be an understatement to say that he "shares" the household work with me. In fact, he now attends to a lion's share of the work leaving me some light chores under the plea that my illness has left in me just enough energy to attend to office work!

Not all the cases were as smooth sailing as the above mentioned two. One of our respondents, Mrs. P a college teacher and an activist of feminist movement in Dharwad, was emphatic that men must equally share the household work. If they do it willingly it is well and good, if not, they should be forced to share it. Outspoken and aggressive as she was, she narrated how she herself "broke", "tamed" and "domesticated" her husband!

It did not take me long to realise that my husband, like all other male chauvenist husbands was trying to play the old trick on me. He would shirk the domestic work on the plea that he was not good at it at all. If I asked him to go for marketing, he would say "I cannot tell bangada from tarii, and the fish-monger will fleece me!" If I asked him to help the children in their home work, he would say, "Oh, the modern text books have changed so much I just cannot make head or tail of the new mathematics or science. If I try to teach them with my old methods, I will only end up making confusion worse confounded". I knew that there was an element of truth
in what he was saying, but then that should not be an excuse to shift the full responsibility of managing the household on me. Therefore, I had to do some plain talking with him. I told him in no uncertain terms that this could not go on forever. He had to do his share of the work. If he was not adept at doing it, I would teach him. So gradually I taught him the 'art' of teaching children and the 'skill' of marketing. Fortunately for both of us my husband was a quick learner. Now he shares the household work equally with me without any demur.

Power and Decision-Making:

In the context of the family milieu, the amount of power exercised by its members can be gauged by the role they play in decision-making on various family matters. In this section an attempt is made to assess the power exercised by the wife and husband in the dual-earner families as seen in the decision-making process.

Power is defined as the ability to carry out one's will in the face of opposition (Max Weber; 1964, p. 152). The description of decision-making process and power relations between husband and wife in the traditional Indian family portrays a situation where the husband enjoys power superior to that of the wife. He is the 'master', 'lord', and 'God', and it is the duty of the wife to 'obey', 'serve', and 'worship' him. Thus one gets the impression that the domination of the husband over the wife is absolute and total. But Georg Simmel, the German sociologist (1950), has cautioned us to be wary of such sweeping
generalizations. Enunciating his famous thesis that all the leaders are led and the master is a slave of his slaves, he has put forth his views that domination, in the ultimate analysis, is a form of interaction where there is mutual influencing between the superordinate and subordinate. Eliminations of all independent significance of one of the two interacting parties cuts at the very roots of sociation. He rightly observes that 'Societas lionina' that is, sociation with a lion where all the power is loaded on one side leaving the other with nothing, cannot be conceived as a form of interaction. Even in the most oppressive and cruel cases of subordination, there is still a considerable measure of personal freedom and hence scope for the exercise of power. We cannot, therefore, accept the widely popular notions of absolute domination of the husband and the abject servility of the wife in the traditional Indian family. A more realistic picture of the traditional Indian family would be that of the husband and wife as two interacting individuals influencing each other. However, the age-old norms, values had drawn clear cut lines of demarcation in the spheres of activity of the husband and wife. Therefore, there was hardly any question of one interfering with the affairs of the other. Hence there was no question of husband or wife imposing his or her views on the other and carrying out his/her will in the face of opposition. For instance, the woman had her own well defined sphere of activity as a wife, mother and housekeeper in which she had her own role to play, responsibility to shoulder and power to exercise. As the one who spent more time with the children
and looked after their upbringing, her influence over them was more than that of her husband's, at least in the early years of childhood. Similarly as the one who managed every day routines of running the house-hold, she had a greater say in taking decisions in these matters than her husband.

This was the situation in the 'ideal type' of traditional families. But in actual life there were innumerable occasions when the wives by sheer force of their personality (charisma) wielded power disproportionate to their traditional position in the power structure of the family. With the help of this personal charisma, they have managed to occupy extra-institutional seats of authority and wielded enormous power, albeit discreetly, at the times of taking crucial decisions on vital domestic matters. The folk-histories are replete with anecdotes where women—be they mothers, wives or even sisters—have been the power behind the throne. It is, therefore, not without reason that such stereotypes as "urigella sardara hendati munde pinjara" ("A warrior for the town but weaver before the wife"), "Ammavār Ganda" (Her excellency's husband) etc, are some of the hardest currencies in the rumour world.

Thus the wife in the traditional Indian family has exercised power in one form or the other. Therefore, it would be wrong to state that the power and authority that the working wives now have 'in the dual-earner families is solely the outcome of their newly acquired role
as co-earners. Our main focus of investigation in this area was to assess how the newly acquired rational-legal status as an employee in a bureaucratic set up outside the family has influenced the domestic power equations.

In the absence of baseline studies in this regard, it was difficult to assess the impact of employment of wives on the domestic power structure. Also there was no way of assessing the impact in those cases where the wives were employed before they were married. For in such families trends of egalitarian sharing of domestic power are seen right from the time the couple set up their house and started living together as man and wife. In our sample there were 78 such cases. In the remaining 22 cases, the wives took up jobs after a lapse of some time after marriage. In 10 cases they took up jobs after a lapse of 5 years of marriage, in 8 cases after 8 years and in the remaining 4 cases after 10 years. We concentrated on these 22 cases for an assessment of the impact of wives' employment on the domestic power structure and decision-making. Because these women were in a position to provide us with the information regarding the nature and extent of domestic power that they enjoyed before and after their employment.

Before we take up these cases for detailed discussion, it would be desirable to have a look at the power structure and decision-making in the 78 cases of dual-earner families where the wives were employed before marriage.
We found that only on certain occasions in the family life call for conscious and deliberate strategies for asserting one's authority and power. Otherwise most of the functions of the family are the outcome of routine decisions made by the husband or wife with least regard to the notion of power and authority. Major issues that sometimes do not find total concurrence between the views of the husband and wife, and thereby necessitating exercise of power by one or the other, include purchase or sale of land or house, vehicles, major (costly) gadgets, settlement of marital alliances of their children or of very close relatives like younger brothers or sisters of either of the spouses, allowing a close relative either of the husband or wife to stay with the family, spending money on the close relatives of either the spouses, or the wife etc. Even in such cases, we were not in a position to weigh as to who exercised more power and authority—husband or wife. The opinion of the wife or the husband prevailed over the other depending on the talent, skill or experience suited to the situation. Decisions on such matters are taken after a series of discussions and debates by the couple. There are occasions when the wife has asserted herself, but this is seldom admitted. Conditioned as they were to the cultural norm that the husband was the head of the family and the decision-maker, the wives were unwilling to project themselves as the decision-makers. Therefore their stock answer to the question "who made the decision?", was invariably, "husband" or, at the most "we decided it together".
The dual-earning families are egalitarian in the sense that the incidence of reluctant acquiescence of the husband is more in such families than perhaps in the single-earner families. The following case illustrates this fact. Mr. R is a college teacher. He narrated:

Even before we were married, we had decided to set an independent house apart and away from the relatives on either side. Accordingly we set up our own establishment soon after our marriage. But after a couple of years of our marriage, my parents-in-law approached us with a proposal to keep their son (my wife's younger brother) with us so that he could continue his college studies in Dharwad. My wife, who all through had opposed the idea of keeping any relatives with us, changed her stand and pleaded with me for days to permit her brother to stay with us. She mustered all kinds of excuses in support of her plea. She said that the presence of her brother in the house would be a great help in attending to small chores around the house and that his presence at home, when I was away on duty tour, would be great help from the security point of view etc. This sudden volte face by my wife took me by surprise. However, I put up a strong opposition. I even mounted a counter argument stating that if attending to the domestic chores and providing security were the considerations, I could as well bring my younger brother to stay with us. Thus arguments and counter arguments continued for a long time. Tempers got frayed, harsh words were exchanged. So much so that we were not even on talking terms for a number of days. But this could not go on for ever. The tension at home was too much for me to bear. Therefore I had to yield and reluctantly agree to allow my wife's brother to stay with us. I am not happy with the decision. But you know marriage means compromise!
Now we come to the 22 cases where wives took up jobs after marriage which provide us a surer basis for the assessment of the impact of employment on the domestic power structure. In brief, it may be observed that the wives did exercise power commensurate with the duties they performed as wife, mother and care-taker. It would be totally wrong to say that full-fledged house-wives had no power at all. But the power that they exercised was more in the form of derived power and not intrinsic, secondary and not primary. Employment of wives seems to have the definite impact of transforming the power from derived to intrinsic and from secondary to primary. It seems to have crystalized their ephemeral power and given it a form and content. Formal power is now added to personal or charismatic power. The job has strengthened their hands to carry out their will in the face of opposition. But with all this, conditioned as they are to the traditional ethos, they would still prefer to wield their power discreetly from behind the screen rather than wield it openly.

All the 22 housewives who were employed after marriage were interviewed in depth on this issue and all of them agreed that their employment had a significant impact on the power equations in the family.

The following case histories seem to support this contention.
Mrs. R. is a bank employee. This is how she recounted the change.

Two things have brought about significant changes in my married life. The first is the birth of our son Avinash and the second is my employment. Even to this day I shudder to recall those five miserable years I spent with my husband and his parents before I got the job. At the time of the negotiations of our marriage I had attended an interview for a clerk's post in a bank and had been selected. I was awaiting my appointment order. This fact weighed a good deal in clinching the issue of marriage negotiations and the higgle-haggle of dowry. You know how it is. In our society a prospective husband looks at an employed girl as a "milch cow" who assures him a long and regular source of income. Since I was "a milch cow" my parents-in-law stepped down in their dowry demand, and the marriage was performed. But fate had something cruel in store for me. One fateful day instead of getting the much eagerly awaited appointment order, I received a letter stating that someone had gone to court challenging our appointment and that our appointment was stayed by the Court of Law. When my husband and parents-in-law came to know of this, my days of agony started. Not a single day passed without a sly comment either by my husband or parents-in-law. Their favourite barb was that "a milch cow had turned out to be a dry cow" I was reduced to a non-entity in the family. They made my life miserable and heaped abuses on my parents. To add to my agony, I did not conceive for nearly 4 years after our marriage. Our son Avinash was born only during the 5th year of our marriage. The arrival of my son into this world was a harbinger of good luck for me. It not only wiped out the stigma of barrenness but, more important, even when I was
in my parent's house undergoing post-natal recovery, I received the happy news that the stay against our appointment had been vacated and that I was posted in a local branch of the nationalised bank.

One should personally undergo the experience to gauge the phenomenal change that my employment brought about in our family. Gone were the days when I was treated as a maidservant. There was a total metamorphosis in the relations between me and my husband and his parents. My in-laws, who had almost driven me to suicide, all of a sudden became solicitous and tender. Gone was their taunt of calling me "a dry cow." Instead, they started praising me before all and sundry by calling me "Mane Tumbida Bhagya Laxmi" (A harbinger of prosperity).

But years of ill-treatment and the insults showered on my hapless parents had left great bitterness in me. I lost no time in retaliating. I launched a campaign for an independent household away from my money-minded parents-in-law. This was opposed by them and my husband. But I would not withdraw. Instead, I stepped up the struggle. As a result, our house turned into a battle-ground of intense struggle for power. At the behest of his parents my husband even threatened me with separation. But I would not budge. I knew him well. His was not an intrinsic power but a reflected one. I queerèd the pitch by saying that I would not care and that I would rather live separately than in the house with his parents. My husband got the message and agreed to set up an independent household. What is more, I even managed to get my mother, who was by then widowed, to come and stay with us. This is what my job has done for me.
In the course of our investigation, we came across three interesting cases where the husbands have, on their own volition and much against the wish and desire of their wives, subordinated themselves to their wives. The following are the details of the cases.

Mrs. La College Teacher had this to say -

I am astounded by the total transformation that has taken place in the attitude of my husband after the death of his mother. It did not take me long after our marriage to realize that I had married a "Mummy's boy". My husband's attachment to his mother bewildered me in the beginning. For everything he would run to his mother. His mother had to select him his dresses, she had to grant permission for us to go to a movie or party, she had to be consulted and her approval taken before we left for my mother's place during holidays etc. etc., This was exasperating. But soon I learnt from his brothers and sisters that he was greatly attached to their mother from his childhood. This information helped me to control my temper. Another reason why I took things in my stride was that neither my husband nor my mother-in-law bore any ill-will or animosity towards me.

When my mother-in-law passed away peacefully two years back, I thought my husband would now come into his own and that we would live like man and wife. Honestly I never wanted him to be a hen-pecked husband any more than I had wanted him to be a Mummy's boy. In fact, in my heart of hearts I secretly wished that he would exhibit such traits as "toughness", "aggressiveness" and even "high-handed bossism" that go with manliness. But to my great surprise my husband, after the death of his mother, shifted his "loyalty" from his mother
He seemed to place me on his mental pedestal and started treating me with the same deference and subservience as he had done to his mother. This sudden transformation had an unsettling impact on me. I had a different image of what my husband should be. Therefore I tried my best to dissuade him from this. But to no avail. Our life goes on— my husband relying on me for everything. I am not at all happy about this but that is how it is.

Mrs. S. has this to narrate—

My relations with my mother-in-law were not so cordial. She was an officious and haughty lady who believed that she was the centre of the universe and that everything should be done according to her dictates. Born and brought up in a family of loving parents and affectionate brothers and sisters, I could not stand the over-bearing attitude of my mother-in-law. All my determination and resolve to make my mother-in-law give up her high-handedness and adopt more democratic ways came to naught when I realized that my husband was of a piece with his mother. He seemed to have no independent existence apart from her. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he was a puppet in the hands of his mother. All this happened when we were at Gulbarga— my husband's native place. Four years back we were transferred from Gulbarga to Dharwad. Having lived at Gulbarga all her life, my mother-in-law preferred to spend the rest of her life there and refused to come with us.

So for the first time in our married life of eight years we set up a home at Dharwad without our mother-in-law. I thought, indeed earnestly prayed, that my husband would now be
a changed man and that he would don the mantle of the head of the family and take the reins of managing the house firmly in his hands. Alas that was not to be! I was in for greater shocks. Instead of taking up the initiative of managing the house, my husband started seeking orders from me for everything in exactly the same way he had done from his mother. I tried all ways and methods of weaning him away from me but without any success. Taken aback by this unfortunate turn of events, I turned to my close friends and colleagues for advice. But they seemed to make light of the whole issue. In fact, they thought that this was something to rejoice on and be happy about! "What is there to be peeved about? on the contrary you should thank your stars. You are the 'boss' of your house and not a slave like me with a drunkard dictator as my husband", said a close friend of mine. But believe me, I never wanted this to happen. I never wanted my husband to shift his subservience from his mother to me.

The third case of Mrs. P was more or less of the same nature. The only difference was that unlike Mrs. L and Mrs. S of the previous two cases, Mrs. P seemed to welcome and relish the shift of subservience of her husband from his mother to her.

She said,

Ours was a joint family in the sense that after our marriage we stayed with our parents-in-law. My father-in-law was a democrat to the core but my mother-in-law was made of sterner stuff. She was the de facto boss of the family. Her words were the law. You can imagine my life with such a mother-in-law. However, my life was bearable so long as my father-in-
law was alive. With his inimitable affectionate manner, he diffused the tension caused by the dictatorial ways of my mother-in-law. But with his passing away three years ago and my husband turning into a full-fledged 'Mummy's boy' things came to a head and my life became really intolerable. My mother-in-law had her own perverse logic. She seemed to hold me mainly responsible for every mishap in the family. When I dropped my first child she heaped curse on me saying that I had nipped the family creeper (Manetanada Bally) in the bud. When my husband met with a minor scooter accident on his way to fetch me from the office, she put the blame squarely on me saying that I had brought Shani kate (bad luck) to the family.

But since last year things have changed dramatically in our family. They are improving. My mother-in-law is sick and ailing. She has completely lost her hold on my husband. He is no more a 'Mummy's boy'. He is totally changed. Now it is me who calls the tune and not his mother. Every one has his day and it is my day now.

It would be unscientific, if not hazardous, to generalize on the basis of just three cases. But this phenomenon of "transmigration of matronly image" from mother to wife seems to be quite frequent. Therefore we can only say that this area calls for a deeper psychological probe.

We noticed yet another important trait among the working wives of our sample. They were unwilling to take up the leadership role of the family even when it was offered to them. They were incl-
ined to exercise power and authority from behind the scene, and not overtly. As a result, though they did exercise considerable power in a number of matters related to family and outside it, they were reluctant to admit it.

There could be two reasons for this. First, in a male-dominated society like the Indian the concept that a woman is an 'Abale' (weak and gentle sex) is deeply entrenched in the psyche of the people. Therefore, every woman craves to live up to this role-model. And one of the ways of conforming to this image is to keep a low profile in all the matters including the domestic ones.

Another reason could be the deep-lying psychological factor pointed out by Georg Simmel (1950). He stated (p.193) "The majority of men not only cannot exist without leadership; they feel that they cannot; they seek the higher power which relieves them of responsibility; they seek a restrictive regulatory vigor which protects them not only against the outside world but also against themselves". This seems to be all the more true with regard to women.