Introduction

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India is a land of villages. "Four-Fifth of India's population lives in villages, and is socially and economically backward in comparison with the urban population. Ignorance, poverty and helpless resignation to a hostile environment have retarded rural progress. After Independence, the development of rural community became the primary concern of our national government." 1. It is this concern which led to the birth of such developmental schemes as Community Development Programme, National Extension Services, Panchayati Raj etc.

Initially emphasis was on agriculture in these developmental schemes. But gradually the scope of these schemes was extended to other fields. However, in the initial stages no serious attempts were made to bring the women folk in the villages into the fold of these programmes. But, later on, it was realised that the success of the programme often depended on the co-operation of the women in the rural community. Through this realisation, the idea of employing women for eliciting co-operation of rural women-folk in the task of nation-building, was mooted out.

As a part of the developmental schemes schools were opened, nutrition programmes were started, family planning schemes were undertaken, family and child welfare programmes were planned, health schemes for mother and child were introduced by the government in the villages. The introduction of these schemes created various kinds of employment opportunities for women. Many needy women sought these opportunities and took up the jobs as primary and secondary school teachers, gramsevikas of various categories, nurse-midwives, Auxiliary Nurse-midwives, health-visitors, family planning workers etc.

These various developmental schemes can be described sociologically as institutionalised changes introduced in a traditional Society. The change intended in these schemes is in the nature of modernizing peasant society in all possible directions. So these schemes are innovative in nature.
An analysis of the roles of these women employees reveals that they have to act as the agents of institutionalised change. The work assigned to these women is to persuade the women folk in the villages to accept the scientific outlook in all the matters of life and to discard the age-old habits and change their outlook which retard the intended progress. This shows that their role is to help the process of modernization through institutionalised change introduced in rural community, provided, modernization means acceptance of means and goals based on rational calculation.

Somehow or the other, innovations always disturb the established patterns of behaviour. So change is often resisted in every society, Much more in a tradition-bound society like India, where old ways of behaviour are regarded as sacrosanct. In such a society, it becomes difficult for an innovator to play his role. Indian village, even to-day, has retained its traditional outlook inspite of various forces of modernization impinging on it, in modern times. Dr. Margaret Cormack has succinctly pointed out this aspect of Indian rural community in the following manner. She observes, "The pattern of life in India is based upon the village, and urban life developed from this pattern. It is a safe generalization to say that village life tends to be more conservative—with more adherence to traditional patterns." 2

The traditional values and norms of behaviour even now, govern the attitudes and pattern of living of a large section of the rural community. Traditional inhibitions and stereotypes are still deeply embedded in the hard core of the ethic of Indian Society. Naturally, old values and notions regarding the status and role of woman have not undergone much change. The employment of woman in itself is viewed as an anachronism in the existing traditional structure.

By tradition and custom, the role of woman in the Indian society has been that of daughter, wife and mother. Dr. Margaret Cormack who has studied Hindu woman thoroughly through social psychological perspective, expresses the same view about the role of Hindu woman. In her book, 'The Hindu Woman' Dr. Cormack observes, "They are proud to be women, to be wives, to be mothers. Any new aspect of their role must come second to this primary function. " 3. It may be pertinent here to mention the point of view expressed by an Indian informant of Dr. Cormack about the function of Hindu woman. "C described the function of woman as three-fold to be an ideal daughter, an ideal wife, an ideal mother. These three concepts can't be separated. To obey the father, to worship the husband, and to take care of the children, they all go together. " 4

3 Ibid P. 185.

Dr. Pandharinath Prabhu's analysis of the Indian attitude towards women exposes the same point of view. He says, "Women's part was perhaps supposed to be in the conserving and propagation of the race; and these functions were probably thought to be naturally inherited by her." 5

Dr. K.M. Kapadia's discussion on the status of woman in India, contributes to the same view towards woman. He comments that "Educational, economic and political rights having been guaranteed, the social milieu is conducive to the attainment of social equality. At the same time the traditional ideal of Pativrata is strong, and trends are in evidence which work against the implementation of the ideal of Social Justice and indirectly lend support to the traditional values." 6. This shows the persistence of conservatism and traditionalism in India about the role of woman, both in rural as well as urban sectors.

However, there is no point in denying the fact that in the rural sectors, by and large, women do work on farms and help other members of the family in their normal chores. But a close scrutiny reveals, that most of these women work on their own family farms and co-operate with their own family members in productive activities. The idea of woman working outside the family on wages, is not favourably received in India.


Stigma is attached to the woman and her family if she works outside the home for remuneration, even in villages. Women belonging to the lowest economic and social stratas only work outside the family orbit in rural areas. The following remark of Dr. D.R. Gadgil, points out the general aversion of Indian people, rural as well as urban, towards economic activities of woman outside the family. " Non-participation of women in any work and particularly manual work outdoor is everywhere considered as a value. " 7

Employment of women as is understood in the modern sense, is yet to be socially recognized in Indian Society. Especially, the rural people are not at all accustomed to this role of woman. The cadre of women employees in the rural sector is created only after the Independence. So it is not surprising that the domestic setting as the accepted framework of woman's life and work still underlies the pattern of woman's expected role, in rural India.

In such circumstances, the employed woman is bound to suffer from various kinds of difficulties which arise from conflicting demands put on her. She is likely to be torn between the two pressures working on her simultaneously, one to be a good housewife and another to be an efficient employee. Torn between these two incompatible loyalties, she is bound to suffer. In such a case the very purpose of employing her is likely to be defeated.

Lately, some of her problems have caught the attention of the people. Harassment of women employees in villages has been the topic of serious public discussion in recent times. A number of cases of harassment of women employees were reported in the newspapers and the same were discussed vehemently on the floor of Maharashtra Legislature. Such public issues are always discussed on the level of personal opinions and emotions rather than on the basis of Sociological facts. Such facts are however essential for a proper assessment of the situation and a sober evaluation of the different sides of the problem. Hence this study of the problems of employed women in rural community was undertaken.

Though all aspects of the problem of the employed woman are worth an analysis, it is not possible, singlehandedly, to study all of them and bring forth their ramifications scientifically. So the problems arising in her familial, occupational and rural conditions are selected here for investigation and analysis in the present dissertation.

The problems in the family are selected here for the study, in such a way as to see how far the working woman has been relieved of her burden in the family so as to strike a balance between her two roles, home and work. "Working women face problems in their work life. These problems, it is assumed, arise out of a conflict in their dual roles."
As a result, the job, the home of the woman herself suffers. "8. The genesis of her problems lies in the maladjustment of her roles. If a working woman is too much beset with her familial obligations, she is not able to do justice to her work-role outside. If changes in the family conducive to her role as an employee occur, then there is every likelihood that she would be able to reconcile her two roles.

In western countries, social change has emerged in such a way as to give fillip to the western woman to work out door. The following observation of Pearl Jephcott and others points out the nature of social change in the western society which helped the married woman to reconcile her both the roles. They comment, "Married Women's employment can be seen as one of the social changes resulting from smaller families, better health, improved services and lighter domestic chores."9. The Bermondsey Study, 10 which is one of the pioneering studies of its kind, of women workers with home responsibilities has put forward the facts about the women employees who have successfully evolved the technique of coping with the dual jobs. The study points out that the lighter domestic chores, husband's co-operation in the household duties, woman seeking employment after the children have reached the school age,

help from relatives, use of modern labour saving gadgets etc. combined with other factors, have lessened the burden of household duties of the employed woman, and have enabled her to reconcile her two roles.

Have Indian conditions changed as to allow the Indian working woman to carry on her double roles effectively like that in the Western Society? How far such changes have taken place in Indian family of the working woman is worth an analysis. In the present dissertation, an attempt has been made to gauge such changes in the family of employed women in villages as in the absence of such a change alluded above, the working woman has to carry out the whole domestic work load along with the work outside.

Such a situation may give rise to the theoretical possibility contemplated by Talcott Parsons in his analysis of the exposure of the actor to contradictory sets of role expectations. He expounds, "The exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of legitimized role expectations such that the complete fulfillment of both is realistically impossible. It is necessary to compromise, that is, to sacrifice some at least of both sets of expectations, or to choose one alternative and sacrifice the other. In any case the actor is exposed to negative sanctions." 11. In the case of employed woman, there is every possibility that both of her roles and herself would

suffer if she is equally exposed to both the role expectations, the complete fulfillment of which is impossible.

Employment of woman in itself is a modern phenomenon in Indian Society. Especially, in rural areas it constitutes a part of modernization introduced deliberately. Successful performance of her occupational role, depends together with other factors, upon modernization of her family role too. If the traditional set up of the family remains the same, ' 

lag ' is bound to occur in her two roles, which in turn would create problems of adjustment for her, as all the aspects of social system are interconnected with one another. One of the purposes of the present study is to see how far changes conducive to the work-role outside have occured in the family of the working woman. As Dr. Iravati Karve observes about the two roles of women, " In the ultimate analysis everywhere Women have to move towards establishing harmony in the domestic as well as out-door role as in the interest of the family, nation and society. "

Another field explored in the present work is the occupational one. Efforts are made, in the thesis, to locate and analyse the employment problems of the woman. The problems of employed woman arising out of her occupational sphere are studied here. The nature of relationship between the woman worker and her employing agency, too, commands the attention of a researcher.

Dr. Karve Iravati, " The Indian Women in 1975". ( Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi. 1966) p. 27.
The impersonal bureaucratic structure itself creates certain problems for her as the Indian Woman is accustomed or rather socialised from her very childhood to the small primary group environment of family only. A study of her traditional roles, as a daughter, as a wife, and as a mother, clearly shows that these roles are confined to the four walls of the family group only. Hindu woman forms an integral part of her family. Her whole training and preparation for life is for this group only. This too is reflected in Dr. Cormack's observation about Hindu woman. "We have seen in the above material and indeed in the entire study that the whole purpose of the training and education of Hindu girls is preparation for marriage. But marriage is not the end in itself, but the means by which the family is perpetuated. It is the family that is important, that must be protected, that must be kept alive." She exists because of the family and for the family. Therefore it is not surprising that the Hindu woman feels a strong identification of self with the family. "13.

Taking into consideration the above observations it becomes clear that the role of employee is new one to Indian woman as her whole life is supposed to exhaust in the personal familial milieu. She is accustomed to warm, inclusive, non-utilitarian relationships of primary group only. Now, due to employment she is suddenly thrown into the matter-of-fact, exclusive,

rational, impersonal, formal and utilitarian world of employment without sufficient formal or informal orientation to her new role. In such a situation conflict is bound to ensue between primary group values and secondary group values.

In the terms of Parsons’ 'Pattern variables' we can say that the occupational structure rests on universalism, performance, affective-neutrality and specificity. But here the Hindu woman more or less, throughout her life is confined to the small family environment which embodies the values of particularism, diffuseness, affectivity and quality. These two types of group values stand in contradistinction to each other. The bureaucratic structure is bound to create stresses and strains for the employed woman.

Another thing to note in this connection is that the occupational role enlarges the status set of woman. At the same time it is a new role. In such a situation, as there exists no set patterns of behaviour to adhere to in her new role set, the interaction pattern between the actor and the alter would become blurred. Such a situation is likely to be favourable for the one who is already enjoying superior status and sometimes would lead to the exploitation of the one who is in a vis-vis inferior position in the existing social structure.

For generations, Indian women have been relegated to inferior positions. Their entry into the 'occupational world of man' is very recent.
They are not yet accepted as equals in this sphere of activity. Stereotyped notions about the sexes are still prevalent. Even to-day the inherent capacity of woman in handling the occupational role is always challenged. In such circumstances, the new occupational role might be weighing heavily on her. The study seeks to find out her problems in this context.

Thirdly, her problems arising out of rural conditions are studied in the present dissertation. These employed women have to live and work in rural environment. Some of their problems owe their origin to this particular type of setting in which they have to work. The present study seeks to find out and analyse the nature of these problems.

As seen earlier, her role is mainly of an innovator. She has to work as a carrier of new ideas and values to the rural people. As a community development worker she has to assist the women folk to accept modern ways of life, scientific outlook, new techniques, new ideas etc. She is expected to create in them urges and needs for modern patterns of life and thus help them to set aside the out-moded traditional patterns of life to which they are accustomed for years together.

The employment of woman and her role are novelties to the villagers. Naturally well-defined norms and sanctions governing the interactions between the employed woman and the rural people have not yet emerged. How such situation leads to conflict can be
seen in the following observation of Crow and Crow. "In the absence of well defined social values, likelihood of conflict becomes greater. In the period of transition one is not very certain of what is socially right and wrong and conflict cannot be avoided." 14.

All these developmental programmes are institutionalized changes. The employed woman is supposed to act as the agent of this change. Talcott Parsons’ analysis of the institutionalization of science and its application can be profitably applied in this regard too. He says, "Obviously one fundamental feature of the institutionalization of science and its application is the introduction of a continual stream of factors of change into the social system." 15. He further says, "It is by no means to be taken for granted that because in terms of our dominant value system, scientific advance is a good thing, either the processes by which this is accomplished or the application of the results will be easily and automatically accepted. On the contrary there are many strains and resistances. Some of these are associated with the communication gap between the specialist and the 'laity', some with the special 'privileges' required by the investigator or the applied scientist, some with his interference with established ways of doing things or thinking, and some


with the fact that he introduces changes which if adopted require the abandonment of established ways in which there is a vested interest. " 16.

In the present context, the developmental schemes are institutionalized changes introduced in the rural community for its modernization. There is every possibility that such changes would produce continual stream of factors of change in the social system which will require readjustment of stabilized patterns of interaction. But, as people develop vested interests in the existing social system they will try to resist the deliberately introduced change.

As the agent of change the employed woman is liable to suffer from the resistance of the villagers, as the change may interfere with their established ways of doing or thinking or sometimes, it may require their abandonment of established ways in which they have vested interest. So, attempt is made here to find out the structural constraints present in the rural community which create difficulties for employed women and in turn block the process of externally stimulated and guided change. Dr. S.C. Dube's observation about the acceptance of agents of change by the community is worth mentioning here. He observes, "The acceptance of the agents of change as well as the effectiveness of the media through which they endeavour to communicate their innovations are largely governed by the cultural pre-dispositions, attitudes and social organization of 16. Ibid. P. 505.
the community in which they operate. " 17. So the problems of the employed woman in rural areas are also studied in the context of cultural pre-dispositions, attitudes and social organization of the rural community.

Theoretically the entire phenomenon of the problems of employed women in rural community can be viewed as an illustration of the repercussions of modernization on the traditional social structure. It seems to be an aspect of the conflict between traditional social system trying at its best not to lose the ground held for many generations and the pressure of modernization.

The present study was undertaken, though it makes no pretence to completeness, to reveal and analyse the problems of employed women working in rural areas, which stem from their familial, occupational and rural conditions. I hope the facts based on scientific inquiry would be of some value to our social policy makers and for further research.

Some basic queries:

After Independence, the development activities of the rural areas started working speedily. So as a part of the development programme, the cadre of women workers was created for bettering the conditions of rural women-folk. Many women were recruited as employees to work in the villages.

In this context some important questions arise. Has the working woman been able to make the necessary reconciliations and accommodations to the village conditions? Has she been prepared adequately to meet the challenge which her new position and conditions have imposed upon her? Has the employing agency thought over her problems while employing her? Has the Government given any considerations to the adverse effects of her problems on the achievement of the ultimate aims of these development activities?

If the woman is beset with insurmountable difficulties of her own, she is not able to do justice to her new role. Naturally, the very purpose for which she is sent to the village is likely to be defeated. The present study seeks to find out answers to above mentioned queries.

Motives and the objectives of the Present inquiry.

The problems of employed women in the urban area could catch the attention of quite a few sociologists in modern times. But the employed women in the rural areas were still neglected. So it was
thought essential to study her problems and hence this study.

A number of cases of harassment of women employees in rural areas, were reported in the newspapers and the same were discussed vehemently on the floor of Maharashtra Legislature. In the context of the various incidences of harassment of these women, the author felt that it was worthwhile to analyse their problems from a sociological perspective.

Another thing which induced the present researcher to undertake this study was that she felt the problems of employed woman would adversely affect the development programmes meant for the millions of people suffering from poverty, illiteracy, mal-nutrition and poor standard of public health and whose development is vitally linked with India's progress as a nation.

The objectives of the research in hand is to investigate into the problems of employed women in rural areas, analyse the factors responsible for her problems and to show how her problems affect her occupational role.