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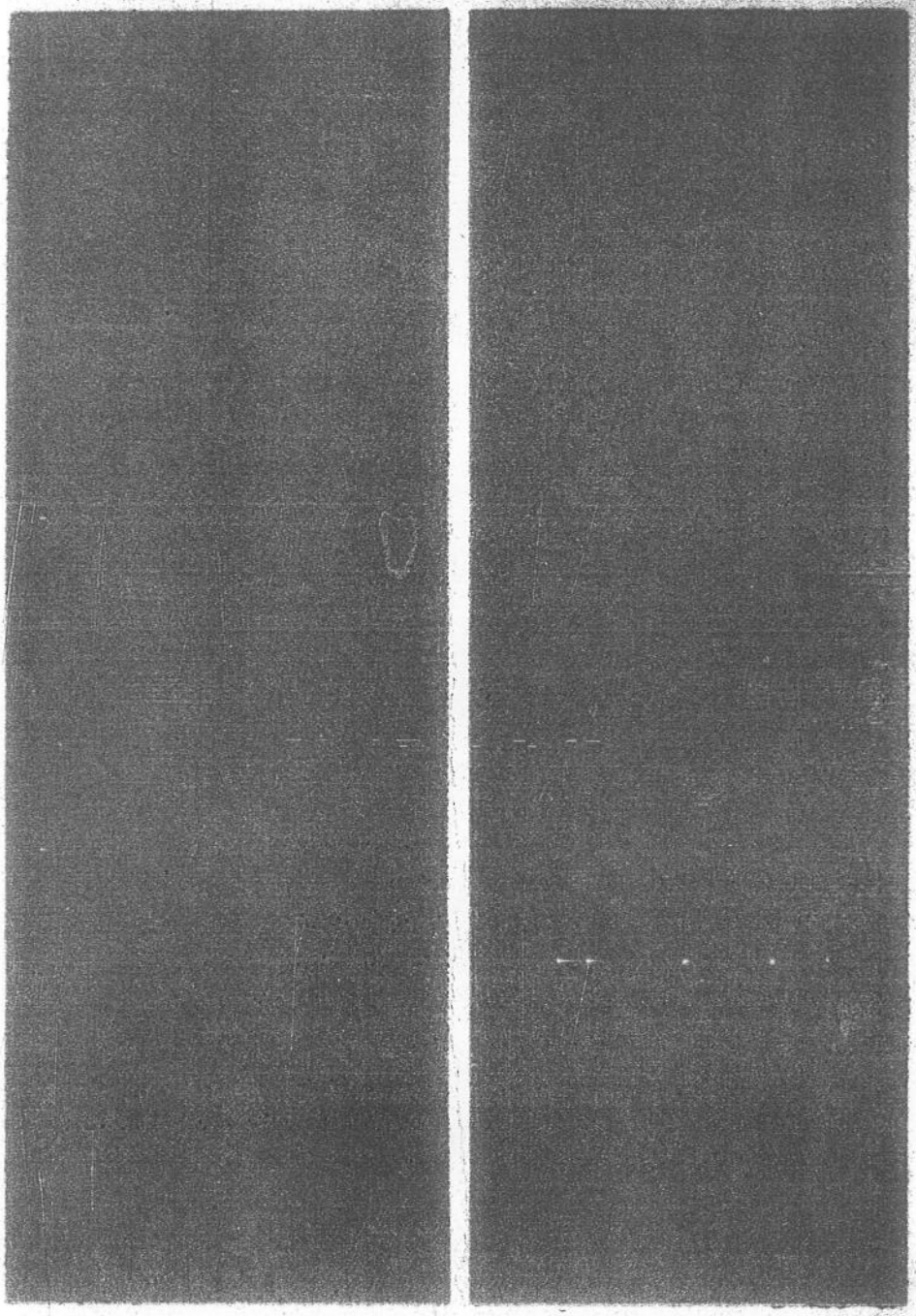

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WOMEN AND WORK : MOTIVATIONAL ISSUES

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As a particular social category, the status and employment participation of women deserve special concern in every society. All civilised communities tend to exhibit this as the symbol of their cultural heritage and social identity. The practice of status assignment to women can be explained in relation to many ideologies and traditional conceptions. It has an explicit association with the idea of sexual division of labour which was in prevalence from the very beginning of the evolutionary progress of human society. The overall social identity of woman as a member of the society and as an individual assumes great influence by this notion related to work which has a contemporary importance. The determinants of social status of women or any such other category of human grouping depends primarily on the avilability of employment opprotunities and their motivations towards work. It has a notable significance in a Third World society like ours which stands in the midst of many social inequalities, economic deprivations and cultural contradictions. It is in this context that the analysis of the important aspects of motivational issues of women's work becomes relevant.

Many sociological investigations have succeeded in revealing the relationship between motivational aspects and the extend of work participation of women in various societies. All these studies project a defective motivational state of women as the major cause of their poor work participation. Laws and Acker (1978) points out that in the absence of a fuller understanding of the social construction of girl's seemingly limited occupational horizons, it has been all too easy to ascribe their attitudes to a motivational deficit in the female personality. An investigation conducted by Roberts and Brock (1964) amongst sixth form girls

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in London and the South East found that their subject choices at school had followed traditional lives and that there was a reluctance to enter in to certain types of science-based careers. The authors concluded that girls showed a great unwillingness to combat prejudice and a preference for work in which they would be welcome. Studies on the occupational plans of male and female graduates have also revealed similar patterns. A report produced by Sheffield University in 1970 (HMSO: 1975) showed that female graduates planned to take up a much narrower range of occupations than male graduates, and that some form of teaching was the chosen career of 60% of the women as compared with only 31% of the men. Occupational preferences of women as indicated in all these studies have been determined by the ascribed motivations in compliance with the expectations of the society rather than their inherent tendencies.

Historical prespective

A thorough analysis of the age-old social conceptions of our society depicts the real picture of work motivation of the women folk. It is all the more true in the case of Indian women whose motivational aspects are determined solely by the historic division of labour based on sex. In the initial stages of social life itself these evolved a powerful influence of gender difference more than any other differentiatingelement in their common endeavours of material subsistence. Men who are physically strong volunteered jobs which involved more physical exercion. On the other hand, women attempted less streneous works. Emerging from this instinctive role performance, women began to develop a preferential pattern of work motivation. In later stages, it became an accepted practice added up with many conceptions and societal expectations as trong imperatives. Besides, the biological capacity of the female. to reproduce the human species and ensure its survival has led to her being assigned roles which have progressively tied her down to the home and withdrawn from the wider economic, political and religious arenas of societal participation (Altekar: 1953).

As many scholars have pointed out, women were given an equal position with men in religious and educational spheres in Vedic Period and the Age of the Upanishads (2500-1500 B. C.). But it can be seen that there is no evidence regarding an equal participation of women in economic activities even though the

concept of joint ownership of family property was accepted. Women were not considered capable of sharing the burden of labour with men in the accumulation of wealth and property. Arthasasthra is considered a comparatively liberal authority and yet even according to it a woman was not allowed to do anything without the prior permission of the males. She was supposed to obey her parents if she was a girl, of her husband if she was a wife and of her sons if she was a widow.

Beginning from 1500—500 B. C., i. e., the Age of Brahmanas, society had attempted to ascribe inferior positions to women especially in matters of employment. Manu, the supreme law-giver of Hindu society also purports the view that women deserve no independence beyond the control of their 'male guardians'. In Manusmruthi we find the ideal womanhood only as 'helpers' or 'auxiliaries' to men. They were not entitled to have a satisfactory level of freedom of occupation. The undue importance given to the physiological features of women such as menstruation, pregnancy and lactation separated females from males in many societies. This ultimately resulted in them being alienated from productive work. Thus, only neglected and unrewarding employment avenues were left open to women. It was in this context that women had been compelled to accept a defective orientation towards work which is detrimental to her individuality. From 500 BC till the advent of the British regime, the position of women remained deteriorated. After 1800 AD, due to the efforts of foreign missionaries and legislative enactments by the British, more rights were gradually given to women. Even at that stage, the position of women in the occupational hierarchy was not satisfactory. An objective understanding of the current status of Indian women also seems to be more or less corresponding with the unprivileged status she occupied in the traditional period.

The 'Chathurvarnya Vyavasthiti', which is based on the conventional notion that only men are capable of taking part in the productive activities of the community, is a fundamental ideology of our system. Together with strict adherence of religion and culture, this ideology is getting more and more popular even in modern times. The traditional Indian society which divided individuals into different caste groups on the basis of their traditional job preference do not make any reference to

the employment participation of women. In the 'Ashrama Vyavasta' in early Hindu India, the woman would freely avail herself of the occupational spheres in the same way as man did, but later, women, along with the Sudras, began to be excluded. The 'Vanaprasthasrama' and 'Sanyasasrama' do not seem to be meant for women. They were expected to offer services to men who perform the tasks of the family and the community. This defective work culture which denies individuality and personal freedom to women still persists in one form or another. Gradually she unconsciously internalises a negative orientation towards work as part of her self-image and social identity and confines herself to certain neglected quarters of communal life.

Even in the present day, the areas which are considered accessible to women involve such unrewarding tasks as housekeeping, rearing of children, household works, etc., where males generally abstain from. Margery Spring Rice who conducted a study of British housewives portaits the excessive burden that women are forced to bear as housewives. In her opinion, in the large majority of homes, the woman is the slave without whose labour the whole structure of the family tends to collapse. In India, 63% of all adult women are engaged in house work which roughly includes eight years of their average life span of 50 years within the kitchen alone (Chatterji: 1988).

The historical factors that led women confined to housework would point to 11th century Europe. It became an established practice especially during the Industrial Revolution when women lost their economic independence. This practice has been in vogue for a long time and continues to be so. Housework is the only occupation of large majority of women in the village areas. They identify themselves only as wives and mothers inspite of the fact that some of them may be employed outside the home. We have created such an idea that 'job outside the home' is secondary and unimportant to women. As a result, the women become increasingly dependent on the men for subsistence.

Impact of Patriarchy

It is a sociological fact that the primary lessons of all ideology and social thinking originate from the elementary social unit of family. The orientation of women towards certain

areas of work also develops in relation with the structure of the households they belong to. The traditional form of family pattern in our society is the extended joint family system which is now being replaced by patriarchal nuclear families. It is to be admitted that under the present set up, women are left open to more changes of individual growth and employment preference. Now a days, she cannot remain passive in the day-to-day affairs of the family. The unnecessary interference of male members as existed in the traditional joint family system do not persist in its original form today.

Not withstanding the comparatively better position of women in modern families, one cannot deny the predominance of male interference in certain areas of family life. Patriarchal system, being the dominant family type in most of the societies, particularly in India, women are denied the privilege of being the head of the family. This opportunity is being thrust upon them only in certain painful situations such as death of husband, divorce, or separation which adversely affects her individual stability and motivations. The Eastern patriarchy is still reluctant to recognise women's ability in decision-making and employment participation. Women are defined largely in terms of their familial relationship and as subordinate beings compared to men. The inferiority attached to their familial existence automatically develops into the form of a self blaming. Thus, as Sudhir and Kakar (1988) point out, the women in a dramatically patriarchal society will turn the aggression against themselves and transform the cultural devaluation into feelings of worthlessness and inferiority. A very pitiful fact is that even in the event of giving birth to a female child, women have to suffer insult from their own dear and near ones. One the other hand if the child is a male, she will be praised, as if she contributes something valuable to the persistence of the ancestry. Cases of post-partum depression are much more commonly reported among mothers who gave birth to a daughter than among those who have a son (Gaitonde: 1958). In the present society, where women are given more opportunities of education and social conscientisation, denial of employment participation as part of traditional patriarchy can be regarded as the sole reason which degrade their position as secondary beings.

The Statute of the World's Women Report, 1985 says: Women are $\frac{1}{3}$ of the worlds' official labour force but are concen-

trated in the lowest paid occupations and are more vulnerable to unemployment. As per the Census Reports, the female population over the last 20 years 1961-1981 increased by 55% i.e., 1.2 million females, while the female participation in the labour force increased only by 15% or by 9 million. That is, upto 1982, the unemployment among the female work force was 8.2% against a percentage of 7.4 among men. The ILO has pointed out that though women have entered the global labour force at the rate of 10 million every year between 1975–1985–the International Women's Decade—their share in the world's employment has increased at a low rate—31% in 1951 to 35% only upto 1985. Even if the real situation of women's employment participation is as stated above, the very concept of unemployment is referred to in our society only as lack of gainful employment of menfolk. The existing social ideologies are not actually prepared to conceive women's unemployment as an equally important social problem. Thus, she is forcefully alienated from the work sphere and her resourcefulness is purposefully neglected. The social identity of women is measured not in terms of her economic participation but on the basis of certain conservative practices which reinforce male supremacy. The deal women is pictured as one who stands awaiting the return of her husband after work and offer herself as an obedient servant. According to the Worlds' Women Report, their responsibility for demestic work within the family makes it easier to them to forfeit, willingly, circumstantially as through coercion their jobs without ascertaining the economic loss, the loss of personal status, or loss of individual and independent identity.

Among the various aspects of social life, the pattern of dressing plays an important role in formulating one's aspirations. Based on this idea that certain religious sects prescribe particular modes of dressing to its males and females. This is very evident in the practice of purdah by the Muslim women. The traditional mode of dressing of women in other communities also, in many ways, hinder them from an active work participation with men. Many sociological observations have already proved the close relationship between the pattern of dreesing and the role performance of the individual. Despite the fact that climatic conditions influence dress patterns, social expectations predominate in most human groupings in the selection of dress patterns. It is quite understood that men in all societies enjoy

a better dressing which suits his work. On the contrary, the society has selected for women a dress which tend to exhibit her physical beauty as an object of attraction. Conseqnently, women are compelled to create a negative self–image and a related work culture instead of availing herself of in useful tasks of the community.

Another major factor which adversely affects the work aspirations of women is the ascribed 'lack of security feeling'. Our society do not dare to make use of the creativity inherent in women giving due respect to her physiological specialities. Many of the opportunities are denied to women purely on the basis of the 'fear of insecurity'. We find that there is a tendency of reluctance on the part of men not to consider women equal to him even if she proves her ability in fulfilling major tasks. In the result, women are constrained to internalise the right to employment which is denied to her. Even if certain spheres of employment are thrown open to them, most of them believe that they gain social status and security only through household duties, ignoring the role they can play in productive labour. The patriarchally motivated man who feels that economically independent women would be a threat to his existence, often encourages women to continue to the limits of housework. Studies show that men exhibit such a behaviour even withou considering his capacity for self–reliance and economic statust Even by taking extra effort and sacrifice, he provides economic protection to his wife or other female members of the family. He gains a kind of vicarious pleasure which he derives from the feeling that the wife is protected by him and she depends solely on him for her survival.

Ideological / Cultural Constraints

Ideological expectations and the attitude of women towards work are very closely related to each other since the cultural or ideological base of a society has its determining influence in formulating the attitude and work aspirations of the people. In the existing social set up, family, marriage, and male control of households ideologically define women as dependent and inferior bearers of labour. It has been proved in many research studies that the idea of 'selectivity' in the division of labour is very closely related to the phenomenon of unequal distribution of wealth. The constraints of women in their free occupational

choice is also influenced by such a situation in which the resources are distributed unequitably among different genders. This results in severe disparities of work capacity among females. This fact becomes evident in the study of Hilary Standing (1985) among the women in Bengali households. It shows that the differences in access to familial and societal resources between men and women are reflected in unequal capacities to compete in the labour market for better-paid employment.

The world today, and Indian society in particular, is rapidly moving towards a prominent capitalistic mode of society. The accumulation of wealth by all means and the utilization of resources to attain maximum efficiency is the basic tenet of this system. Of course, capitalism is very much conducive to speedy economic progress by the furtherance of the available resources. Inspite of the material benefits brought out by capitalistic system it has many adverse effects on personal as well as social life of the individuals. The negative effects become more evident when we think of its ultimate tendency to commercialise all related objects including individual personalities. Resources are not at all made available to women and other neglected and underprivileged sections. It is in this context that the denial of employment participation and property rights to women become a social problem. The study conducted by Haleh Afshar (1985) in Ghana, Java and Malaysia showed that elsewhere women are not enjoying their property rights either by staying on the land and sometimes also remaining married to the man through whom they gained their right to use it. Even ownership of what appeared to be personal property such as jewellery is seen, in the case of women, in terms of having a family asset than an individual ownership. This tendency is becoming more strong in many of the Third World Countries including ours. These societies miserably fail to develop a work culture which is beneficial to women and other weaker sections due to their hurry in finding out short cuts for more material accumulation. In spite of ensuring the economic participation of women, what actually happens in all these situations is that women become a cheap means for economic gains.

The tendency to make use of womanhood for commercial benefits is not at all strange in many areas of our social life. The emergence of such a practice is mainly due to the unprivileged

beings in comparison with men. No religious ideology is an exception to this. According to Christian belief, it is the woman who tempted the man out of paradise and this life of temptations and the pursuit of wordly pleasures are ascribed to her. In the Vedas we find woman at once a goddess and a slave. The unnecessary prescriptions and proscriptions regarding the everyday doings of women given in Muslim religious scripts itself are enough to prove the subordinate position it attaches to womanhood. All these directly or indirectly compel women to create an image conducive to place her in an inferior position deprived of even the elementary privileges of work participation.

It is purely absurd to believe that women have voluntarily made our occupational choice of this sort, which is detrimental to her. The prime reason for this selection is the conditioning of the girl child through psychological brain- washing at an earlier stage. This defective socialisation and prejudiced role expectations compel her to take up house work or any other unworthy task as the only occupation without having proper recognition or remuneration. The traditional ethos prevailing in the society strengthen this situation by offering full support to it. The result is the development of a basic drive in the female to see herself much inferior to male in work preference. Gradually it becomes part of her sociability and cultural existence due to her encounters with supporting instances to this at every walk of her life.

The problem can be effectively tackled only if the civilized societies of the world should strictly abandon all considerations based on gender differentiation. Societies must always be at a vigil to check the tendency to exploit the efforts of the weaker sections merely for commercial benefits. The theses 'maximisation of profit' and 'optimun use of resources' are to be confined to economic spheres instead of applying it to social life. The woman has to be properly conscientised with regard to her inherent capabilities and status in the family and society so as to make her aware that she is no more the inferior sex. Moreover she should be given proper chances of employment to facilitate her as equally contributing member of society. This can be materialised only through the concerted efforts of the administrative bodies and general public.

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