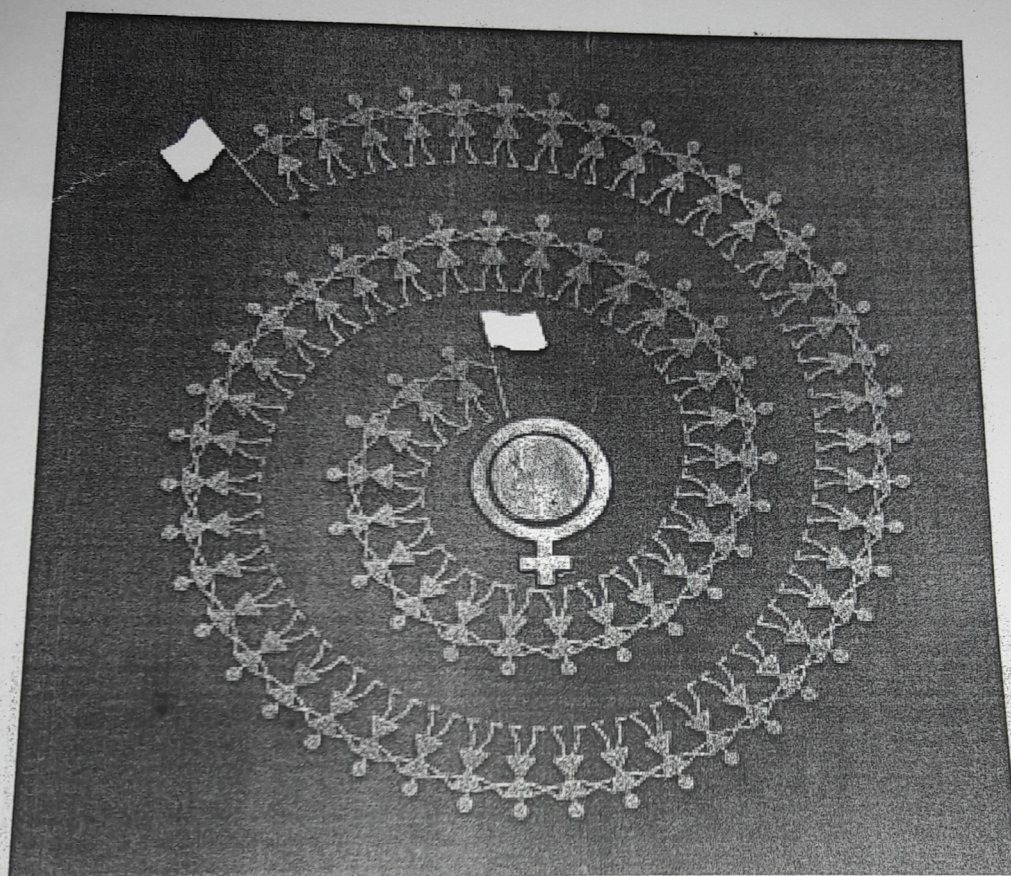


WOMAN POWER AND SOCIAL CHANGE



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WOMEN BREAD WINNERS—ARE THEY REALLY EMPOWERED?

Introduction

DR. M.Meena Kumari*

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women".
-Jawaharlal Nehru.

Indian families are undergoing rapid changes due to the increased pace of urbanization and modernization. Indian women belonging to all classes have entered into paid occupations. At the present time, Indian women's exposure to educational opportunities is substantially higher than it was some decades ago, especially in the urban setting. This has opened new vistas, increased awareness and raised aspirations of personal growth.

Women's access to jobs may once have been a political issue, but in today's tough economic climate, working is now a necessity for most families. The Indian women today have ventured beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother and have sought employment and career outside their homes, and are actively participating in the economic and social development of the nation. Economic, social and political development during the recent decades has resulted in improvement in the position of women, especially in the area of education and labour force participation. Generally, women's work profile in India was confined to certain traditional occupations such as nursing, teaching etc. However, women today are crossing all barriers and prejudices and are working in all sectors including the sectors traditionally received for men such as defense, engineering and even in night shifts for the IT sector.

Status of women in the society has been changing fast due to multiple factors such as urbanization, industrialization, increased level of education, awareness of rights, and media influence. More and more women prefer to be engaged in some kind of employment, so that they can contribute financially to their family. But the attitude towards women especially married women and their role in family has remained the same, as even today taking care of the family and children is considered as their primary responsibility. Thus carrying out duties and responsibilities both at home and workplace overstrains a married working woman, thereby leading to various psychological problems like role conflict, job strain, mental fatigue, stress, anxiety, frustration, depression, anger, phobias, and other social and emotional distress. All of these problems can interactively affect the mental well-being of working women and more so in married working women.

Challenges In Dual Role

There are contradictory role expectations from working women while she is at work and at home. On professional front she is expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straight forward, non-sentimental and act in a "business like" manner and at home, she is expected to be sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, unassertive and domesticated. As an ideal woman she wants to fulfill the duties of a faithful wife, sacrificing mother, obedient and respectful daughter in-law and an efficient and high placed career woman. These contradictory expectations cause the most confusion, tension and create many other problems for her. A woman employee finds it difficult to do justice to the two roles at the same time. An attempt to play one of the roles with perfection leads to an inadvertent sacrifice of the other.

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