MANAGING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

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Abstract:

The last four decades of the twentieth century have been remarkable for women. Attitude of women towards their own potentials, capabilities and roles have changed. Women have discovered new aspirations and hopes, the achievement of which requires making new and different choices. They have transformed themselves from social, home-bound and relationship-dependent roles to entry into occupational roles with job, career and professional orientations. They discovered their potential and capacity to excel in these fields. Society too discovered that women could play multiple roles and participate in areas which they did not think possible.

The entry of women into formal work organisations was a major breakthrough in India. This entry into occupational fields generated hopes, aspirations and ambitions. This also gave women a taste of success. It gave women for redefining women roles the much needed boost to their confidence and self-esteem and generated self-worth. Women managers, women entrepreneurs, women supervisors and women employees became a reality. Simultaneously, it created doubts, anxieties and apprehensions in men, women and organisations as none had experience in relating to each other vis-à-vis an organisational formal setup. This paper attempts to focus on the women empowerment in these four decades and various inconveniences they confronted along their path.

Introduction

During India's struggle for Independence, Indian women started to have access to participate in the freedom movement. They took active part and made their impact, gave some good references. Education opened doors for women to dare and dream, and weave a fabric of life in which they would play a role as significant as men. The journey of the women of India began towards the end of the first half of this century alongside the country's freedom movement, leading through the forties and fifties right into the end of the century and today entered into the twenty-first century.

Let us explore how the woman of today travelled this long path and created a niche for herself, both at the home-front and at the workplace. Let us examine the space she created for herself in the socio-cultural context and how she managed the new role and gave shape to new patterns of identity to meet the challenges in this century.

The women of the fifties fall into two categories. At this time, two sets of women entered the organizations for two distinct reasons. One set took up jobs exclusively for economic and monetary reasons. These women were educated and the family required the resources. The second set belonged to

business and professionally oriented families. The women were educated, were not compelled to do household chores, were intelligent and capable and wanted to utilize their education and their time in purposive activities.

"In the initial phases of entry into the jobs, women did not rise very high in the hierarchy of the organizations. Moreover, many women carried far greater responsibilities than that of their designation or status in the organization"[1]. These women managed the home and children and fulfilled all the social role obligations. For the women, it was unthinkable to state that they were often physically and emotionally extending and stretching themselves. However, they hoped for an understanding from persons or systems of their aspirations and support in their multiple roles, but in their social roles they would not ask for this help either from the husband, the in-laws or the children. Children continued to be brought up in the traditional way. The husband and the extended family expected from the women all social roles to be fulfilled in the traditional manner. Her work was a luxury and a privilege given by the husband and could be taken away if other roles were not fulfilled to the satisfaction of either him or other members of the home. The women however, had discovered that besides the social role, work provided a personal and a significant meaning to them. But they remained caught between the pulls and pushes of both systems. Women found it extremely difficult to exercise legitimate functional authority, either downward with their male subordinates, rarely upward with superiors for task purposes or laterally with colleagues for effective performance. They could only plead, cajole, persuade and or use social skills to get tasks done. Organizationally, it was difficult for women to have a similar career path and growth as that of their male counterparts.

By mid sixties and seventies women in significant numbers had entered the portals of formal education. These were the second generation of working women who had aspirations to perform and be rewarded, could walk alongside men and do as well or better, could deliver results without seeking privileges of being women or of social roles and were not complaining. They were willing to stay longer hours, and perform and prove their capabilities. The women also demanded that the organization needed to review their policies and take stock of women's contribution rather than just give responsibilities or keep them in infra-structural or marginal roles.

1.   Women regarded work as an integral aspect of their life space.

2.   A significant number of women broke the barrier of senior level of management and entered middle level of management.

3.   Income generation and a career choice, both were equally significant.

4.   Educated and qualified, the women aspired for a different role and life vis-à-vis their mothers and grandmothers. This education also enabled women to enter organizations directly at the middle management level.

5.   Women wanted homes, marriage and children as well as career.

6.   Women accepted the social traditional role behavior from the older generation but from their husbands, colleagues and children they expected understanding and support in their career paths. They looked for redefinition of roles through redesigning of systems.

7.   In managerial roles the women were willing to carry their share of the work responsibilities but also wanted participation in policy formulation and decision making. They wanted their voices to be heard as employees and managers of the tasks and not through social role relationships.

8.   They earned respect from their superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

Like society and culture, these women were part of a transition. These women were pioneers who were defining a role and space for themselves with new coordinates and new dimensions of role space and systems. The realities of the organization acquired significance. The social structure and processes however, did not keep pace with the emerging realities of women and their career aspirations. In this phase also the pressure on women from their families continued to be anchored in social roles and responsibilities.

Women carried the responsibilities of both the systems but, as yet, the privileges of both did not belong to them.

Eighties was the era of professionals and professionalism. Women of the fifties, sixties and seventies had accepted both their social and work roles. They played the social role in the traditional mode and to some extent carried that to the organization. They rode two horses and kept the spaces separate. For women, work and working in organization were necessary but for a large number of women in management, marriage was equally important and so was motherhood and social relations. However, the women of the eighties were not satisfied with this fragmentation and differentiation. They were over competent and underutilized in their middle managerial positions. They had their personal vision, of organization membership, their career paths, and their location in the structure of the organization based on their qualification and competence. The women of the eighties had invested in themselves, designed a role and life space where they could manage their home and work interfaces and respond to the challenges and opportunities in the formal work organization.

However, one of the difficulties for women of the eighties was the "either-or" choice. When women in their attitudes of work moved from the location of a job orientation to career orientation they believed that their social roles and systems and existing relationships had to be sacrificed. They postulated and very often rightly, that the social roles and relationships anchored in the traditional culture became a barrier to their growth and choice-making in the organization. Confronted with this "either-or", many women opted for a limited job orientation and remained rooted in social systems, roles and relationships.

Women who chose the career path believed that this choice meant sacrificing a part of themselves and their identity. They either had troubled marriages or experienced upheaval in their traditional social personal lives and roles of wife and mother. They largely anchored themselves in their organization and work. This choice also left the women feeling incomplete and denied and deprived of their multiplicity. The generation of these women worked hard and struggled to keep pace with the changing times. They acquired some privileges of the modern role but lost out in the social roles and social systems.

The women of the nineties emerged as a qualitatively different breed of women. The upbringing and education of these women had been different from those of the prior generation. Women in the nineties increasingly had role models anchored in their own gender – mothers, aunts and teachers who themselves had successful careers and who inspired the young women of the nineties to take up new challenges, explore new vistas, find fulfillment, compete, and work with men in any assignment. The education system in India is both fair and encouraging to women. However, a large segment of the families were still seeped into the narrow role spaces for women. The generations of women growing up in some of the families in the nineties also had support from the males in the family, i.e., fathers as well as other males in the primary system. This attitude of openness had facilitated women, both in social and work settings. These men provided equal opportunities for both men and women and logically and rationally accepted career planning and growth for women. Financial self sufficiency leading to independence and self-reliance before marriage was encouraged in daughters. These were also the families who had fewer children boy one girl, only male or only female child, or, at best, two boys or two girls. Educated parents or aspiring parents accepted that education was a magic broom which could provide wings to the children to fly endless skies to beyond the horizon.

The men who nurtured the women for such autonomy were mature men, largely professional who had accepted women as their equals. These men opted to choose a capable, confident and an intelligent woman as a life partner, and accepted that women required their own space and pace for growth and unfolding. This did not mean that women successfully overcame the socio-cultural inhibition and barriers, which are so deeply embedded in the psyche of women. This statement only reflects that a transition and a transformation had begun to occur in Indian families, and more so in the urban centres of India.

In the emerging realities of globalization and liberal business environment, the challenges facing Indian women in the last decade of the twentieth century and the millennium were the complexity of life space and the competition of the business environment. This contributed to the syndrome of the survival of the fittest. In the organizational context it meant long working hours. Despite increasing acceptance of women in organization and opportunities available, it was still difficult for the women to reach the top at the pace at opportunities available, it was still difficult for the women to reach the top at the pace at which they wished and for which they were qualified. The women constantly juggled roles and responsibilities and attempted to maintain a balance between home and career. The women attempted to mix and matched the roles with the significance of the situation and priorities of the system. The path was immensely difficult and uphill. It was not made any easier by the many colleagues who were still caught in the traditionalism of their own roles as well as those who were using the social structures of role expectations for their own convenience. The organizations which attempted to provide facilities for women raised the reverse comparisons of working women, having a favored or privileged status as compared to the men who also had working wives.

Some women have preferred to remain single, leading happy and contended lives and are successful in their work. Many couples, today, opt for leading a life without children, due to increasing demands of work, relationships, and the joy of experiencing freedom. Many, and an increasing number of women in the nineties have made up their minds to have a single child in order to meet the demands of home and work and have very well been able to integrate their multiple roles in multiple systems.

"Essentially, the women of nineties have created niches of their own and are ready to perform the multiple roles of mother, wife and executive thus creating a space for themselves in family, society and workplace. As the women are heading towards the new millennium the convenience of telecommuting and flexi-time is a facilitator. With the advent of information technology, and the internet, and the concept of virtual classrooms, women of today have nothing to lose, but again, learn, unlearn and update themselves in the information age. They can use the opportunities for freelance assignments and succeed with full satisfaction of bridging the gap between the home and work place." [2]

The decade of the nineties witnessed a major paradigm shift in the business environment in the country. The employees with new energetic upstarts started working on their computer terminals from home. Here there are fewer barriers to overcome, less pre-conceived notions, fewer well-entrenched assumptions and rules and lesser gender agenda in the secondary environment. Women have the opportunity to virtually create working environments at home, avail of flexible working hours and, therefore, handle social and home responsibilities better.

Roles of women and men are influenced by societal structures and processes. However, women carry both the positives and the pulls of the future. Women very often live with fears of acceptance or rejection issues and get caught up in dependent and exploitative relationships. This inhibits them from assertion and acquiring a professional orientation to their managerial roles. Women find it difficult to state their convictions as well as their vision and perspective of formal systems. They feel embarrassed to articulate what could be done and what needs to be done. In organizational settings, women take total responsibility and become Atlas or Hercules. They do not know how to share. They also do not know how to receive and accept support. They believe it is their role to take the total burden and feel like a victim and behave like a martyr. This happens both at home and work. "Single women encounter dilemmas associated to their single status in the social context. They are far more vulnerable in terms of relationships be it social or occupational. Social stereotypes and perceptions generate stigma and women either become defensive or over protective of themselves." [3] They do not trust and very often live with inner loneliness or isolation.

Many women today often enter organizations equipped with academic qualifications, competence, capabilities and career aspirations. Work experiences over the years provide women with an understanding of the structures and processes of the organization and its functions. Society designs and defines roles for

its women and men in family and home settings as well as occupational and work settings. These roles are influenced by the cultural, social, political and religious history of a country. Industrialization provides a thrust for economic development which in turn gives rise to a need for a definition of new occupational roles for both men and women. Women enter organizations equipped with formal education and occupy various managerial positions but their orientation to professionalism varies. Single, married and single parent women encounter different dilemmas. However, all of them encounter the dilemmas of managing social and work roles.

For women of developing countries, there have been three distinct phases of women's entry into organization and managerial positions. Parikh gives reference here. In the first phase of transition of societies into industrialisation, women took on marginal positions in the organisation. Women, men and organizations had little or no experience of relating to and working with one another in formal settings. Initially, the formal work relationships were translated from social models: depending upon their age, so that, women related as daughters, sisters or mothers even in the work settings. Similarly, men related to women as fathers, uncles and brothers so that social authority and its role-taking were carried over to formal organizations. In terms of doing their jobs women were reliable and dependable and often became indispensable to the organizations.

In the second phase of women's entry into organizations, a larger number of women accepted that work and career aspirations were an integral part of their life. Educated and qualified, they struggled to create roles different from that of their mothers and grandmothers. In organizations, women managers expected to carry their share of the work responsibilities and participate in policy formulation and decision making.

With the third phase of this process, the concept of professionalization of management, organisation and roles had begun. Some women slowly but steadily climbed the corporate ladder. They held important positions and participated in decisions and policy making. At this time, women discovered that they needed to have a professional orientation as managers and redefine their social roles. They accepted that they have to redefine and redesign their roles and systems relevant to the times.

The movement of women managers from phase one to phase three has implications for changes in role-taking. It emphasised the need for women to exercise functional authority with male superiors, colleagues and subordinates; the need to become assertive and effective in tasks in the organisations. It also emphasizes the need for women to manage multiple roles and systems and simultaneously define priorities and make choices.

Many women found it difficult to move from the concept of job and career towards professional orientation. Some remained rooted in the job, feeling secure in economic autonomy. Others held on to career paths but experienced stress of the multiple interactions between people and systems. This left much of their creative potential untapped or under-utilized. In the studies and various workshops conducted by Prof. Parikh, related to Indian women managers participants when asked to distribute and demarcate their life space into various systems and institutions of their life space, felt that if they divided their life spade between work, and other roles, they would get the following picture: 30% of the space was experienced with the family, 70% of the space was occupied by their work, out of the 30% with the family, motherhood takes up 80% of space, issues of in-laws takes up 10-15%, only 5% of was left to be with the husband and no space for themselves. Women get torn between being a professional and being a home maker. Although their mind works as a professional, their heart works as a traditional home maker. The unfortunate part about these life spaces which was explored was that almost the whole of women's space was utilized in role taking. There was no moment to pause and reflect on what it meant to be women in man's world and what it meant to be herself. Women go through the pre-conceived notions of traditional coding, where the expectations from marriage are very high. The women visualize that they are entering a fairy-tale world, where only love flows and one finds ultimate peace, joy and happiness. After sometime, they experience entrapment where

role freedom is present but they do not experience psychological or personal freedom and hence lose to location and space. What follows is sacrifice, feelings of rejection, non-appreciation and the interface between husband and wife never goes beyond looking at each other as two roles united to bring up children. There is need then to create a shared life space between the husband and wife and grow into woman and man with a rhythm of creating newer meanings of relationship.(Parikh, I .J and Engineer M.F. 1999) Women , who accept the demands of the new (professional)role, struggle to look at the old (personal)roles. They get caught between the pulls and pushes of the two. They get fragmented. Emotionally, the pull is towards the social dimensions of the known and familiar ways of relating, and the push is towards equality, performance and achievement-based task relationships. Women are truly at cross-roads where their pro-active choice will determine the path in society, family and organizations. Women are attempting to forge the new horizons of tomorrow.

References

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