

Tracing a Timeline for Work and Family Research in India

This paper examines four time phases beginning with the period after independence up to mid-2000 in order to trace a timeline for work and family research in the Indian context. As compared to work-family research in Europe and the US that has evolved in to a distinct sub-area of cross-disciplinary study, in India it has followed two separate and disconnected paths. One is the route charted out by women's studies centres with a focus on underprivileged women that looks at structures of patriarchy and their contribution to subordination of women at work and home. The other path of psychosocial research conducted largely from a role theory perspective, has examined work family relations within urban settings. There has been little cross-pollination between these two streams and limited focus on organisational levels of analysis.

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Concern over work-family issues has been an enduring preoccupation of researchers across disciplines for over four decades. Interest in work and family matters has arisen on account of changes in the way in which work has been defined and it has been fuelled by mechanisation and modernisation of production processes, industrialisation and the entry of increasing numbers of women in to the world of paid work. Work and family study has become a well-defined area of research in its own right. Centres for work and family research have increasingly been set up in North America and Europe to study changing demographics and their impact on work-life balance and well-being of individuals.

Developing countries including India however seem to be characterised by a clear and distinct lack of focus on work and family research. Part of the reason for this is a gender egalitarian culture and the low status accorded to women and women's issues in the country. Traditionally the sex ratio in India has always been biased against women. The latest government report of the Census Survey of India of 2001 indicates that there are 935 women for every 1,000 men in the country, making the female population about 48 per cent of the total population. The working population constitutes around 36 per cent of the total population and women constitute about 32 per cent of the working population. Majority of working women are crowded in the unorganised sector. As per the Country Report presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 only 4 per cent of all women working are employed in the organised sector. This means that only about 0.005 per cent of India's population comprises of working women in the organised workforce. Not only do these statistics explain absence of research in the work-family area, but they also build a case for it, especially since redistribution of work and family roles is critical for empowerment of women.

This paper makes an effort to understand the treatment of work and family issues within the Indian context, by endeavouring to trace a timeline of work-family research in India. Tracing a timeline is not an easy venture especially since much of social science research in India has taken place simultaneously within narrow silos of independent disciplines. In an attempt to come

to grips with the state-of-the-art on work-family research within the country, we have had to review research work in the field of law, psychology, management, sociology, economics and women's studies. While reviewing literature it became apparent that while there was interdisciplinary research between sociology and economics, under the broad umbrella of women's studies, research within the fields of psychology and management appeared to be following its own trends.¹ Consequently while tracing a timeline, the paper focuses mainly on review of research in women's studies, psychology and management as a parsimonious way of getting around the problem. It identifies themes arising in the literature across four phases or decades – independent India, mid 1970s-mid 1980s, mid 1980s-mid 1990s and mid 1990s-mid 2000. The paper ends by identifying neglected areas of work-family research that could be addressed by future researchers.

Independent India: Laying Legal Foundations

India gained formal independence from British rule in 1947. The British government is said to have been largely responsible for initiating modernisation efforts within the country. Social reforms and access to education initiated by various Indian leaders and influenced and aided by the British government paved the path for increased participation of women on various platforms – political, social and economic.

The immediate concern for independent India was to build its economy and bring social order to various parts of the country. India grappled with problems of unifying separate states and initial years went into bringing peace and stability to the nation. In keeping with its nation-building activities, India adopted its comprehensive Constitution in 1950. The Indian Constitution is the largest written Constitution and provides the guideline for India's future development mainly through its Directive Principles of State Policy. By making a number of welfare activities mandatory for state and private organisations either by legislation or through trade practices, this influential document could be considered to be India's first formal attempt to address work and family matters.

Notable legislations² were passed around the times that have had a special bearing on working women's ability to handle work and family responsibilities. These include the Maternity Benefits Act of 1961; the Factories Act of 1948 and the Right to protection from sexual harassment at the workplace that had existed even before independence (passed in 1869) and revised again in 1997.

The Maternity Benefits Act (1961) entitles a woman to six weeks of leave with full pay, both before and after delivery. If the woman wants, she can take the entire 12 weeks of leave after the delivery. Under this Act, it is unlawful for an employer to discharge or dismiss a woman during or on account of maternity leave, except for gross misconduct. Further, a woman worker must be permitted to take 2 nursing breaks in addition to normal breaks until the child is 15 months old.

As per the Factories Act of 1948, in a factory as defined under the Act, an employer must provide a crèche, where more than 30 women workers are employed for children below the age of six years.

As regards protection from sexual harassment in the workplace, the Indian Penal Code of 1869 (Section 509) defines sexual harassment as any word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman and which is heard or seen is an offence and is punishable with simple imprisonment and/or a fine. The meaning of sexual harassment at the workplace was expanded in 1997 to include unwelcome sexually determined behaviour such as physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature. Responsibilities were spelt out for the employer and employee. The employer's responsibilities included developing a sexual harassment policy, circulating it visibly, developing a confidential and time-bound complaints procedure, treating sexual harassment as a disciplinary offence, and amending service rules accordingly to incorporate these changes. Employees' responsibilities included talking about the issue of sexual harassment and holding meetings, compelling the employer to establish a complaints committee headed by a woman with at least half women members and involving local NGOs.

At the time of laying the legal foundations for the country no laws were passed that specifically covered the right to shared family responsibilities, rights of part-time workers and rights of home workers, nor was an effort made to subsequently address concerns in this matter despite Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (Convention nos 156 in 1981, 175 in 1994 and 177 in 1996 respectively) recommending that national governments undertake measures in these areas.

The period after independence was also a time of concern over labour reforms, and many Acts were passed that protected rights of workers. These laws did not directly address work and family issues, but were targeted at ensuring general welfare of workers. For example, the Employee's State Insurance Act of 1948, the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 and the Mines Act of 1952 provided for relief in case of medical problems for workers. The Factories Act of 1948 provided minimum and maximum working hours for workers along with lunch breaks and small breaks. In addition there was provision for annual leave with wages for workers, and conditions to regulate shift work, overtime and night shift work.

Despite the establishment of a reasonably progressive legal framework for the country, as India moved into the 1960s and the euphoria over independence died down, it started becoming

evident that laws were not benefiting all workers uniformly. Reviews on working women indicated that the plight of women workers had not improved substantively. Demographic data revealed an increasing marginalisation of the female workforce in the country [Krishna Raj 1983]. Redistribution of work and family responsibilities amongst men and women had not taken place to the degree desired.

Further, the translation of Directive Principles as laid down in the Constitution into trade practices at the level of private and public organisations was dismal. Except for a few public sector organisations that were set up as role models in the early years post-independence, most organisations sought ingenious ways to circumvent the laws rather than view them as guiding principles for organisational policies. For instance, employers by-passed the legislation requiring them to provide crèche facilities if 30 or more women were employed in the workplace by employing fewer than 30 women as permanent employees and the rest as part-time or contract labour. Since laws to control working conditions of the contingent workforce were weak, family friendly measures although provided for on paper did not reflect themselves in organisations.

Any benefits arising from the few governmental and/or organisational policies appeared to be in favour of working men rather than working women, and these benefits were more in the nature of welfare measures for the worker and his (sic) family. Once again the culprit for this was the manner in which laws affecting work (and family life thereof) had been framed and interpreted. For example, the Factories Act of 1948 prohibited women from being employed on the shop floor in heavy machinery industries during the night shift. Since heavy industry was the thrust area for economic development in India after independence, especially during the 1960s, employment of women in this sector was low and consequently, benefits deriving to women on account of these laws was poor.

Mid 1970s-Mid 1980s

By the time India entered the decade of the 1970s, it had become quite obvious that some of the laudable objectives embodied within the Constitution of general uplift of working conditions and equality for men and women, were being met only partially. There appeared to be an unmistakable long-term trend of decline in female employment. The number of women in agriculture was increasing while women's employment in modern organised industry was falling [Thorner 1962]. This trend was explained in terms of slow economic growth of the Indian economy and the nature of labour-displacing and especially women-displacing technology and practices in use in agriculture. As a result there was greater ruralisation of the population. Women were harder hit because the nature of division of labour within the family was such that women had recourse only to undefined occupations that had low or no recognisable returns [Acharya 1979; Jacob 1982; Murthy and Radhakrishna 1974].

The growing and appalling deterioration in the condition of women in India was highlighted by the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India ['Towards Equality', Government of India 1974]. The report officially recorded the subordination of women by summarising statistics of imbalanced child and adult sex ratios that were a testimony to significant differences in mortality rates of men and women. The report had a considerable influence on government policy nudging it further

in the direction of promoting women's empowerment and welfare. Simultaneous events such as the International Women's Year of 1975 and the International Women's Decade of the 1970s, the spread of women's and human rights movements that focused on 'histories from below' within India and abroad, national bodies like the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the University Grants Commission and passing of the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976 providing men and women doing the same and similar work the right to get equal wages – all played a decisive role in pushing to the forefront a gender dimension to the understanding of social reality. It culminated in the establishment of women's studies centres in India's university system [Desai, Majumdar and Bhansali 2003].

On account of the circumstances preceding their establishment, women studies centres within India from the beginning adopted a stance of critical inquiry that sought to expose the structures that upheld subordination of women. Accordingly a large number of studies were undertaken that described conditions of work for women in different sectors of the economy along side studies on the organisation of family relations. Studies on women and work brought out the hurdles posed by employer's attitudes to women workers; the relegation of women to low-paid, low-skilled jobs; the substantial contribution to family income made by women's earnings; and the almost universal flouting of statutory provision with regard to wage rates and welfare provisions to workers. In addition, long hours of work and sexual abuse of women workers were highlighted [Krishna Raj 1983]. On the other side, "women studies scholarship linked the family with the structure of unequal gender relations in the broader society. For example, violence within the family (being) replicated by violence against women as the target victims in any conflict situation" [Desai et al 2003].

Clearly, during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, research on Indian working women proliferated, and it included exploration of socio-economic impact of women's work on family, children, power relationships in the family and family marital quality. In fact, according to the First National Conference on Women's Studies (1981), of all research done on the Indian population during 1975-80 one-third was dedicated to women including working women. It can be said therefore that research directly addressing work and family issues in India started during this decade. However, much of this research was done within the traditions of economics and sociology, and due to ideological constraints, subjects of these predominantly exploratory studies remained rural women involved in the non-formal employment sector. Women's studies units catered comparatively less to psychosocial research on working women in the organised sector in urban areas.

Psychosocial studies focusing on work and family roles of urban working women in India were conducted almost at the same point in time by researchers working separately in departments of psychology and sociology in Indian universities. Since working women were new to Indian society, most of these studies were preoccupied with concerns of status and perceptions towards working women including working women's views about non-working women and vice versa, general societal views about working women and working women's views about husband's home role participation. They also covered the broad theme of stresses and strains of balancing work and home roles and its concomitant impact on the psychological well-being of women [Bharat 2000].³

One of the first systematic attempts to address work and family issues in India from a psychosocial perspective can be attributed to Promilla Kapur (1970). Kapur working in a department of sociology interviewed 300 educated working women to evaluate their degree of marital adjustment and to find out their motivations for taking up employment. Her findings revealed that it was not wife's employment per se that affected marital adjustment, but rather attitudinal compatibility between the spouses that determined it. Husbands were open to having working wives, but they were not as yet prepared to undertake all the changes in expectations and behaviour that a working wife called for.

Kapur (1970) set the trend for studies on urban working women. Her work was followed by many studies that made the examination of changing roles, values and expectations in urban middle class families an important preoccupation of sociologists and psychologists.

Kala Rani in her study (1976) examined why working women took up a paid job (the assumption being that they were doing something that was traditionally against their nature and prescribed role, especially since they had very few role models being first generation working women themselves). Her study cited three reasons that motivated women to seek jobs outside their traditional roles: economic or monetary gain, social role enhancement and personal reasons. Rani's study also reported that working women felt stressed due to the inability to perform their traditional role (of homemaker and spouse) as there was not enough time or energy. This scarcity was the result of their working status. Support and a positive attitude from husbands towards wives' work helped reduce the strain. Working women employed paid help for two reasons: to reduce the demand from housework and because they could afford to pay for human help (servants or maids). Technology (household gadgets like food processors, refrigerators, etc) was reported to reduce strain of household work on women.

Unwalla (1977) studied 50 married women executives, 50 unmarried women executives and 50 housewives (N=150) from the banking, marketing and advertising industry in Mumbai. She made an attempt to assess if work interfered with the family lives of women executives. Sixty-five per cent of the women in her sample said that work remained at the back of their minds indicating psychological spillover of work to the family domain. However her study did not report or explore into spillover effects of family to work. Work did not directly affect marital relationships. Rather once again it appeared to be individual-specific attitudes that explained marital adjustment. Women who had had social adjustment problems before marriage continued to have adjustment problems later and thus reported marital disharmony. In general for all three categories of women, family roles were more important than their work role. Family factors such as ill health of family members or inability to perform household duties were seen as stressful or problematic by married as well as unmarried working women. However non-working wives were stronger in their opinion that children and family get neglected at the expense of work commitment by working women. In general, a large portion of working wives and mothers faced the dilemma of excelling at home without compromising on their working status.

Studies such as Narayana's (1982) conducted in the early 1980s continued to establish that Indian women still aspired not to compromise with the burden of their homemaker role. Women gave more priority to their family role rather than work role.

Hemlatha and Suryanarayana (1983) concluded through a study of role interventions of married working women that women's problems were greatly influenced by the age and socio-economic status of working women and husband's nature, children's age and number, family type and the nature of work and work timings. Husband's understanding and cooperation was very important to lessen working women's problems.

It appears from our review so far, that during the decade of mid-1970s to mid-1980s, there was a 'disconnect' between the various streams of research on work and family in India. On the one hand, one stream of research seemed to clearly indicate that as far as underprivileged sections of society were concerned, plight of working women was deteriorating, and nature of family organisation was contributing to their deprivation. On the other hand, there was a picture emerging of a modern urban educated women still steeped in her traditional role but bravely seeking to empower herself by stepping in to the world of work and coping with negative perceptions of society through a range of strategies that included hiring help, using household labour saving technology and soliciting support from her husband to the extent possible.

There were two things however that were in common across both streams of study. One was the observation of a dual burden borne by working women in India regardless of their class and status group that resulted in considerable stress and strain. The other was the absence of men from participant samples in these studies. It appeared during this decade as though the study of work and family in India was in fact the study of women, work and family.

Mid 1980s-Mid 1990s

Deficiency of male respondents in work and family studies in India appears to have been corrected during the mid-1980s onwards. As the number of urban educated women aspiring for jobs increased, and as the strength of marriage as a universal and ubiquitous institution within India continued unabated, there was a rise in the number of working couples in urban settings. This demographic change resulted in a slew of studies on working couples that explored for gender differences in attitudes towards and enactment of work and family roles. Focus on working couples allowed for the consideration of husbands' perspectives in addition to wives'.

Sekaran (1984, 1985) was the one of the first researchers to study dual-earner couples from the city of Bombay. Her study established the moderating role of gender in the relationship between work variables (such as income, discretionary time, job involvement, career salience and self-esteem from job) and outcomes of life satisfaction and job satisfaction. Subsequently, Ramu (1989) published *Women, Work and Marriage in Urban India: A Study of Dual and Single Career Couples* in which he compared 245 single and 245 dual earner couples (N=980) from Bangalore city working in three major public sector industries.

These researchers recognised the fact that Indian dual-worker couples faced an entirely different set of problems as compared to their western counterparts. In urban India, traditional large combined and extended families were giving way to nuclear families. This change was providing couples with more independence but was taking away the traditional support system from family members, especially for child care and household work and in case of illness. Another observation was that Indian

husbands maintained the provider's role, which was contrary to observations of western societies, "where there (was) a decline in the perception and performance of the role because of egalitarian values and the increasing importance of wives' co-provider roles" [Ramu 1987]. Kanungo and Misra's (1988) cross-cultural comparison of working men and women in Canada and India echoed similar findings that Indian females had higher level of family involvement than Indian males, whereas there was no significant difference for the Canadian sample.

Many studies made comparisons between dual earner and single earner families [e.g., Ramu 1987; Rani and Khandelwal 1992; Shukla 1987; Shukla and Kapoor 1990; Bharat 1995], and found that while dual earner wives had more decision-making power as compared to single earner wives, their work status gave them more power vis-a-vis their husbands in seemingly less important areas such as menu making or home decoration whereas decisions on matters involving finances were generally made by husbands. Most dual earner wives continued to view themselves primarily as homemakers, and their work status did little to alter their sex-role orientation. They bore primary responsibility for housework and child care. Ironically, women in dual earner families tended to perpetuate sex-role stereotypes by socialising their children, especially daughters to take up traditional roles [Rani and Khandelwal 1992]. A dual-earner lifestyle by itself therefore did not guarantee more egalitarian relationships; rather it depended on the personality and attitude of the wife. Families in which the wife was more androgynous in her sex-role identity were less husband-dominated.

Comparisons between dual earner and single earner families also focused on marital conflict and adjustment, and found that while perceived conflict was higher in dual earner families as compared to single earner families [Rani and Khandelwal 1992; Srivastava and Srivastava 1989], it was not wife's employment per se that determined marital adjustment but the extent of agreement between spouses on attitudes to work and family roles [Rao 1990]. This was resonant of similar findings in studies conducted in the previous decade.

Since study after study indicated that even if employed, wives continued to bear the lion's share of family responsibilities over and above work responsibilities, concern emerged about conflict, stress and strain experienced by working women especially in comparison to working men. Tarabardkar and Ghadially (1985) in their study found that work-family conflict was expressed in 63 per cent of Thematic Appreciation Test (TAT) stories written by women whereas men's stories did not reflect this conflict. Sources of stress in the lives of working women emerged from a lack of time to attend to multiple roles, presence of young children (6-12 years) in the family, and additional responsibility at work in the form of promotions [e.g., Surti and Sarupria 1983; Shukla and Verma 1986; Khanna 1992].

Most common outcomes of stress for the working woman were poor mental and physical health resulting in depression, anxiety, asthma, and colitis [Khanna 1992; Mukhopadhyay 1996; Sailaja and Swaminathan 1992a, 1992b; Srivastava 1995]. Most common coping strategies were individual-based and included expanding their knowledge base by reading and planning and goal setting, actively seeking social support and investing in developing a social support network. Interestingly, Indian working women did not indulge in alcoholism or smoking or rely on medication to relieve stress and cope with difficulties. This could be attributed to the traditional Indian stereotype in which women who smoke

or drink are considered deviant. Good counselling or psychotherapy was not available to most women experiencing stress.

In keeping with the trend set during this decade of examining for gender differences in attitudes between men and women, some studies [e.g., Das 1985; Bhatnagar 1987] examined male attitude towards working women and found that male employees generally felt that working women were breaking the norm and hogging jobs thus creating less job opportunities for other worthy males. Managerial women however showed a more positive attitude towards fellow working women.

Most of these studies on working couples were done from a psychosocial perspective. Meanwhile, women's studies centred continued their thrust of research on increasingly marginalised women and expanding it to include the most underprivileged segments of Indian society such as dalit women [Rege 2000]. During the 1980s, women studies also raised the problematic issue of the methodology of studying work and non-work in India by highlighting the invisibility of women's economic contribution in national income accounting [e.g., see Krishna Raj 1983].

Clearly the 'disconnect' between research on work and family in different social science disciplines in India continued into this decade. What was becoming quite clear despite this however was that development was perversely contributing to the underdevelopment of women, and working status was no guarantee to more egalitarian relations within the family regardless of one's class and socio-background.

Mid 1990s to Mid 2000s

One of the most significant events of this decade was liberalisation and reform of the Indian economy in 1991. With this change in government policy, India became connected to a fast globalising world. Research on work and family evolved accordingly within this backdrop, however it did so along the separate trajectories that had been set so far.

Women's studies continued its research driven by an ideology of highlighting the norms of patriarchy and the structural constraints of increasing poverty, oppressive family life, growing fundamentalism and politicisation of religion underlying women's status in the country [Desai 1994]. It extended its focus to examining the impact of globalisation on female workforce participation [Sonpar and Kapur 2001] and on the study of women, work and health and women and ageing [e.g., Gothoskar 1997; Madhiwala and Jesani 1997; Swaminathan 1997].

Research from a psychosocial perspective continued its examination of gender differences in work and family roles. Given a small but noticeable presence of women in professional and high status jobs, research studies began to distinguish between career and job-oriented women [e.g., Parikh and Shah 1994; Rajadhyaksha 1997; Pande 2000]. Rajadhyaksha (1997) and Pande (2000) for instance studied dual career as opposed to dual-earner couples in two metropolitan cities in India, and found that in a dual career family where husbands and wives were presumably matched in terms of their career involvement, work-family role conflict and organisational role stress was not significantly different among husbands and wives. Sources of conflict and stress however differed along traditional lines. For instance women experienced more conflict between their job and home roles while men experienced more conflict between their job and spousal roles.

Results of 'no significant difference' hinted at changing attitudes in the midst of stability, especially for men. The possibility

of changing roles for men and the emergence of more supportive spouses and fathers appealed to the popular media that began talking about the 'joy in changing nappies', (*The Independent*, April 28, 1996) and other pleasures of fathering ('The leisure gap', *The Times of India*, March 6, 1994). Chopra (2002) however problematised the notion of support and concluded that the husband may not be the most supportive partner for a woman's reproductive health. An article in *The Telegraph* ('A Life of One's Own', November 7, 1999) reported a Mumbai based survey that indicated that although husbands were beginning to acknowledge their wives right to work, only 34 per cent of husbands extended help willingly to their wives. Twenty-two per cent of husbands sometimes helped out but a large proportion still subscribed to the traditional role and never extended help to their wives. Gupta and Sharma (2003) reported results of a dual burden for women even in high status jobs such as academic science in the IITs. Clearly, preponderance of long-established roles and attitudes was unmistakable.

During the period 1995-2000 India saw the information technology enables services (ITES) e.g., call centre and software sector boom. Many organisations in this sector adopted work styles and organisational practices from developed countries in the west. Workers were expected to work 24/7 × 365 days of the year. To prevent such a work style from affecting worker health and productivity, workplaces offered services traditionally associated with the family and non-work domain within their premises such as gymnasiums, day-care facilities, laundry facilities, canteen facilities, even futons to sleep on if you felt like a nap [Uma Devi 2002]. The IT sector was meant to have emancipatory potential for working women on account of the possibility of telecommuting and working flexible hours. However in reality IT workplaces turned out to give very little room for family time and therefore did not live up to this promise. Also, since family friendly measures were offered more as an imitation of western organisational practices rather than from a genuine concern to enable (women) workers handle work and family responsibilities, they have suffered casualties during the recent recession in the IT sector [Winfred 2003].

To summarise, research on work and family during this decade broadly followed the course of the previous two decades. Some studies gave a fleeting glimpse of changing roles in transition for men. Organisations in the new economy sectors offered family friendly measures to employees. However their motivation for doing so appeared to be more driven by a desire to ape western organisational practices rather than a felt need to help employees balance work and family responsibilities.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed literature in women's studies, and social sciences in India to trace a timeline for work and family research in the Indian context. Four time phases were examined – the period after independence, the decade of mid 1970s to mid 1980s, mid-1980s to mid-1990s and mid-1990s to mid-2000s.

The period after independence saw the laying down of legal foundations for the country that formed the basis for legislation aimed at facilitating handling of work and home responsibilities. Since then India has seen very few new legislations to address the changing realities of work and workforce in the country, barring the revision of the definition of sexual harassment at the workplace.

The decade of the mid 1970s to mid 1980s saw a number of developments at the national and international levels pertaining to women's rights that culminated in the establishment of women's

studies centres in Indian universities. These centres gave a fillip to research studies on women and work, particularly to those belonging to rural and underprivileged segments of Indian society. Simultaneously within departments of sociology and psychology researchers examined the changing status of urban women and its impact on work and family. Largely however research on work and family within this decade was research on 'women', work and family.

The mid 1980s to mid 1990s saw the inclusion of samples of men and examination of gender differences in work and family research studies, especially for research work done within the psychosocial perspective in urban settings. This was the decade of the study of working couples in India. Women's studies centres on the other hand continued their focus on understanding structures of patriarchy and their role in subordinating women at work and in the family. Overall, research on work and family during this decade indicated that working status was not a guarantee of equitable relationships within the family.

The mid 1990s to present times has seen work and family research impacted by the event of liberalisation undertaken by India in 1991. Women's studies centres have been tracking the impact of structural adjustment on female labour participation rates. Other social science researchers have been differentiating between career women and working women and hinting at the possibility of men's roles being in transition in the midst of largely traditional division of work and family roles in society. Organisations in the new and young IT industry have been offering 'family friendly measures' albeit as an imitation of western organisational practices rather than on account of a genuine concern for the better handling of work and family responsibilities.

To conclude, work and family research in India appears to have followed two separate and disconnected paths. One is the route charted out by women's studies centres that has looked at structures of patriarchy within the country and how these contribute to the subordination of women at work and at home. Their focus has been on rural and underprivileged women. The other path of psychosocial research conducted from a role theory perspective has largely examined work and family relations within urban settings. There has been little cross-pollination between these two streams marked by lack of cross-references in published research studies.

The disconnect between researchers of work and family in India is rather unfortunate as it reduces the ability to address and resolve basic dilemmas such as the perpetuation of traditional sex-role stereotypes and behaviour even in the midst of modernity and change. It also limits the range of suggested interventions to the problems of balancing work and family. For instance, women's studies have worked tirelessly at bringing about policy change at the macro socio-economic level through the instrument of the state. Psychologists on the other hand have offered plethora of solutions at the level of the individual. However scant attention has been focused at the organisational level.

If we are to compare the evolution of work and family research in India with timelines developed for US and UK (http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork/timelines/2003.html), one commonality is the genesis of this research in feminist writings and concern for equality among men and women. Where it departs from the developed country timelines is its recurring obsession with female labour force participation rates and examination of sex-role attitudes and behaviour. Clearly there are very few research studies examining work and family from an organisational perspective.

No attempt has been made to answer the question, why in spite of three decades of research on women's studies and working women have Indian organisations not evolved family friendly measures for employees? Clearly to arrive at the answer will require more cross-disciplinary and perhaps even action research on work and family. This may necessitate setting up of centres for work and family research within the country. Recently, the ministry of human resource development in India appears to have attempted such a move through its renaming of women's studies centres as women and family studies centres [Desai et al 2003]. Whether the change will actually encourage multidisciplinary research or instead prove to be a retrograde step by further entrenching women's work into the domestic sphere of the family, as many women's studies scholars and activists fear, only the future will tell. ☐☐

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Notes

- 1 While this is an interesting observation in itself we do not reflect on it further as it is not the main focus of this paper.
- 2 For details on legislations please refer Bhargava (1996) and Jain and Agarwal (1995).
- 3 Studies on urban women as contrasted with urban working women pre-date the 1970s, with early works on the changing status of urban women dating back to Desai (1957). This paper restricts its focus to urban 'working' women. For a review on studies on urban women up to the decade of the 1970s, see Kapur (1976).

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