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Sudarshan has a valid point on women  
by [S Gurumurthy](#)

Brinda Karat, a Left feminist, has criticised RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) chief K S Sudarshan for his views on the role of women. In Sudarshan's view, a woman who puts the family above her career is the role model for others. Brinda chided him for being anti-women. For her, a family woman is subordinated. Conversely, a career woman is liberated. Sudharsan's view and Brinda's are not just a conflict of the 'traditional' India with the 'modern'. Today, it involves the 'modern' West as well and a debate is on out there. Look at the facts and the thoughts on the role of women in the West, which our intellectuals of the Left and also of the rest generally benchmark.

Long before, the West had caught on to what the likes of Brinda now advocate for Indian women. The West, ideologically close to Brinda, moved even faster. In the Russian Federation, 65 percent of the marriages end in divorce. The divorce-to-marriage rate in the Ukraine is 63 percent, Czech 61 percent, the UK 51 percent, the US 49 percent, and Germany 41 percent. Swedish women are the most 'liberated' and 'empowered' with half and more of Swedish Parliamentarians and civil servants being women. Is it just a coincidence - or consequence - that 65 percent or more of Swedish women and men live together without marriage, any one with anyone for any length of time? In the end, over two-thirds of Swedish elders are bereft of family support. This has forced the Swedish Government to pass a law to provide caretakers, at its cost, for assisting the aged who are orphaned.

Look at the USA, which many look towards. The traditional arrangement where men go to work and women look after the house has fallen from 53 percent of married couples in 1972 to 21 percent in 1998. The divorce rate in the US has doubled between 1960 and 1998. Don't dismiss it as merely a cultural fall. It is economic as well. The state had to step in to fill the void in families. So the social security cost, that is the cost of caring for the aged and the infirm, unemployed and others, has skyrocketed. Many in the West are frightened of this time bomb ticking under their economies. Some of the best minds in the US fear that the

emerging 'Fatherless America', as one writer put it, will bankrupt the country.

In contrast, the entire social security cost is privatised in India through the traditional family mechanism. But for such traditional families the Indian state would have gone broke long ago. Now the West is realising the criticality of women who put home above career. A study made in 2003, covering over 1,00,000 families in the UK and the US, found all this: wherever men and women have competed and claimed arithmetical equality, families broke up; the happiness of families and their overall economic status stood eroded; wherever women had the full support of husbands and had been mothers taking care of the family, happiness in the family was complete; separation forcing women to remarry or remain single caused a drastic reduction in their overall happiness.

Look at the relatively more traditional Germany. An article in The Christian Science Monitor (March 25, 2005) reads: "In Germany, the idea that it's possible to combine family life and a career is rejected by society as a whole," argues Barbara Vinken, author of "The German Mother." German society, she says, is increasingly split into two camps: those who have children, and those who don't. "It's a society in which a growing segment isn't reproducing anymore." The article goes on: "Sending your child (to day-care in order) to work is seen as something that weakens the family rather than strengthens it," says Giscela Ehler, head of Familenservice, a childcare consultant based in Berlin. "Women," she says, "feel that they have to choose between family and career." Yet, only 16 percent of German women with children less than six go for work.

Now see the stunning decay in women's status in the relatively traditional Germany. Like in all West the German Government provides doles till employment is offered to the unemployed. An unemployed German girl receiving the dole was stunned when told by the employment office to either join a brothel that had jobs to offer her or, if she declined to, become disintitled to her dole! Why? As Germany had legalised prostitution as an industry, a job in a brothel was as good any other employment for women in market economics!

So the West is now debating what the ideal role of a woman should be. In the West, one abuses Barbara Vinken as anti-women or dismisses her as Biblical. Nor does anyone trivialise Giscela as medieval. What Sudarshan says in India is precisely what Barbaras and Giscelas say in Germany. So let us look at the debate in the West, developed and more than that, decaying - lest even as we replicate their development, we don't bring in their decay. Sudarshan has a valid point. He never said women should not opt for a career. He only cautioned against idolising career women and trivialising the family-bound. In an intellectually spineless atmosphere, he has had the guts to raise a point, a profound one. Let us discuss it without being dismissive or abusive.



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