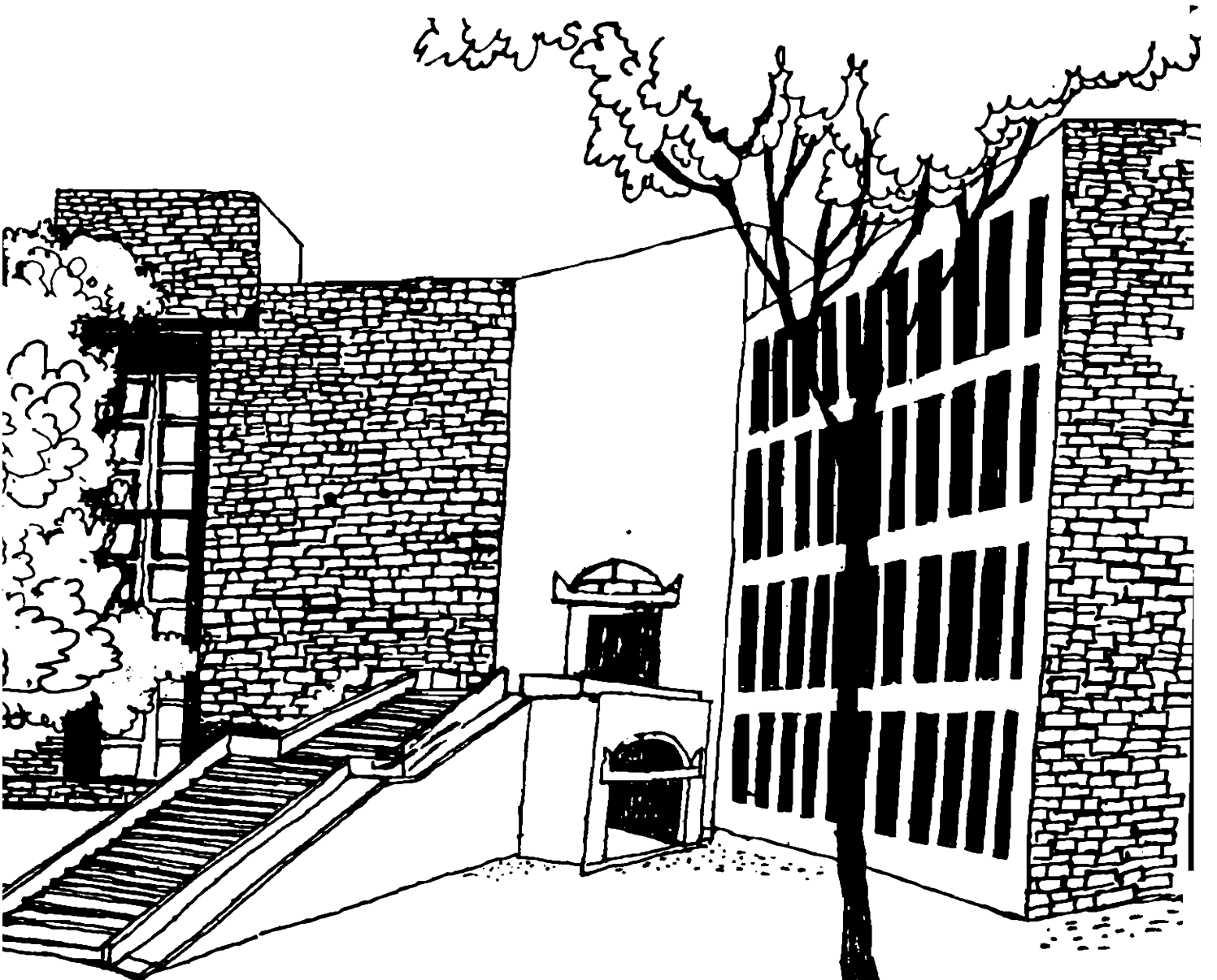




Working Paper



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WOMEN MANAGERS IN TRANSITION:
FROM HOMES TO CORPORATE OFFICES


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W P No. 941
June 1991

WP941

WP 1991 (941)

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

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WOMEN MANAGERS IN TRANSITION: FROM HOMES TO CORPORATE OFFICES

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WOMEN MANAGERS IN TRANSITION: FROM HOMES TO CORPORATE OFFICES

Abstract

This paper discusses the shift of the Indian society from agrarian to industrial, and from rural to urban with reference to women in this process of transition. The career paths of women in management are classified in three distinct phases of about fifteen years each and the subsequent movement from being job-oriented to career-oriented to profession-oriented are discussed. In all the three phases women had distinct characteristics as far as their interface with home and work was concerned. They held a different corporate perspective in each of the three phases. They brought along the baggage of social structures, roles and relational processes of the previous phase and the role models of the preceding phase were identified with.

In the second half of the paper, the external and internal barriers to women's growth in management are discussed. External barriers range from culture, society, family to government policies and the economic factor. Internal barriers vary from mobility, socialization to duty at odd hours.

Recognizing the need for change at a broader level, subsequently, training issues are directed towards building a new ethos of management in the relevant socio-cultural context.

WOMEN MANAGERS IN TRANSITION: FROM HOMES TO CORPORATE OFFICES

Each society and culture as it unfolds into different eras and centuries designs structures, roles, positions and status for its men and women. Indian women like its culture and country carry a rich heritage of role models. However, their location seems to be frozen in the social structure of the agrarian era. Industrialization has created new opportunities and role spaces for both women and men of India. This new space is that of formal work organizations and managerial roles which is a unique dimension of today's time and age.

The shift of Indian society from agrarian to industrial and from rural to urban is characterized by two distinct features:

1. In the agrarian society men managed the external interface while the women managed the internal, social and relational interface of the environment. In the industrial society of today's times both men and women have to manage both the external and internal interfaces of the environment.
2. In the agrarian society men worked alone and in isolation. In the urban living and formal work structures men work in groups while women live alone during large part of the day.

As such, all the process of cultural, social and familial socialization anchored in the agrarian model of living and relationship come into direct confrontation with the experiences, expectations and aspirations of today's role require-

ments of women. This century and specifically in the last five decades women have made significant shifts in their location in the social structure, in their role taking in family settings and the external environment. One such significant shift has been their transition from homes to that of formal work organizations and their role taking from social affiliative relations to managerial roles.

Entry of women in formal work and managerial roles has to be seen in the larger context of India's industrialization, opportunities of formal education and growth of organizations. Since the turn of the century and more so around the forties, Indian organizations have evolved from finance and trade to production, marketing, systems and personnel [Garg 1980]. Similarly, organizations have grown from small to medium, large, mammoth and global [Parikh 1979, Garg and Parikh, 1986]. Women's entry into managerial roles in formal work organizations began around the fifties. They were almost a decade behind the men. In the initial phase of the women's entry men, women and organizations encountered deeply embedded structural and social locations and role expectations of women. These social attitudes influenced women's roles in organizations. It influenced their status, job allocation, participation in policy formulation, relational and functional linkages with members in family as well as superiors, colleagues and subordinates, their performance and evaluation and finally women's own concept of professionalism, membership in systems and identity [Parikh 1990].

Career Paths of Women in Management

A literature review on women's entry and subsequent movement in the hierarchy in the levels of management suggests three distinct phases (Parikh 1990). A summary of these findings are presented below.

Phase I: Nineteen Fifties

Two sets of women entered the organizations for two distinct reasons. One set took up jobs exclusively for economic and monetary reasons. The second set belonged to business and professionally oriented families. They were educated, were not engaged or compelled to do household chores, were intelligent and capable and wanted to utilise their education and or their time in gainful activities. Some women entered formal work organization or businesses due to the loss or death of a family member and the women took on the responsibilities. A large number of these women took on marginal and infrastructural service roles. In their attitudes they brought the baggage of social structures, roles and relational processes. The organizations and the men too related with the women locating them in social structures and social role expectations. These women, men and organizations were job oriented. They were dependable and reliable at one level and at another level they were pioneers forging a new role and a space for themselves.

Phase II: Sixties and Seventies

By the mid sixties women in significant numbers had entered the portals of formal education both at the primary and higher levels. In the realm of work, women opened up new frontiers. These women had grown up with education as a given reality and dreams of a different role and life for themselves. They entered organizations in large numbers and aspired for career growth in the organization.

In this phase education provided increased knowledge base and the organizations experienced unprecedented growth opportunities. This led to a faster pace of movement in the career paths. A significant number of women from the fifties and sixties broke the barrier of junior level of management and entered middle level of management. This breakthrough was also reinforced by women entering directly at the middle level of management based on their professional education. They came equipped with management skills, tools and techniques. They proved their capabilities and competence, achieved their tasks and targets and performed well. They earned respect from their superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

This new space and new role taking broke many a social stereotypes and myths about women and what they could or could not do. It brought reluctance to acceptance of their arrival, location and space in the organization.

Phase III: The Eighties

This was the era of professionals and professionalism. Women of the fifties, sixties and seventies had accepted 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. However, the women of the eighties were not satisfied with this fragmentation and differentiation. They were also feeling 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 organizations.

The distinct patterns which emerged can be summarized in the following manner [Parikh 1990].

Figure 1

Phase I
(Fifties)

Educated & waiting
for marriage

Good use of time &
education
till children

Give up job after
children

Be grateful to
in-laws for lett-
ing them work

Social codifica-
tion of relation-
ships

Pushes and pulls
of two systems

Did not rise
high in
hierarchy

Feelings of
guilt and
anxiety

Phase II
(Seventies)

Their entry was with
aspirations for career
and growth

Regarded work as an
integral part of life
space

Income and career
both were significant

Career was insurance
against maltreatment
by in-laws

Could walk alongside
with men

Home and Career both
were significant

Participated in
management and
decision-making

Income added to
social status

Phase III
(Eighties)

Career was an
accepted dimen-
sion of life
space

Created role &
space in the
larger social,
cultural and
external envi-
ronment

Dual career/
income created
role redefini-
tions

In-laws started
accepting and
taking pride in
daughter-in-
law's new role

Multiplicity of
roles in
multiple systems

Sought partner-
ship in managing
home/work inter-
face

Policy/strategy
& corporate
membership were
legitimately
seen as their
role

Traditional
culture/norms
was integrated
with new roles

**Phase I
(Fifties)**

**Phase II
(Seventies)**

**Phase III
(Eighties)**

Held on to what-
ever was available

Did not make choices.
Only compromises

Acquired a cor-
porate perspec-
tive

Difficulty in
exercising
authority

Became assertive and
aggressive

Integrated
social identity
with profes-
sional identity

Discrimination
and deprivation
at home and at
work

Pressure from families
continued

Transformed
barriers into
opportunities

No common role
models

Career oriented women
role models

They had role
models of the
previous 2
phases

Job oriented

Career oriented

Profession
oriented

Adapted from Parikh, Indira, J. "Career Paths of Women in Management in India", W.P. 884, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, 1990.

The above three phases reflect a time span of a decade and a half in each phase. The universe of attitudes held by women in each phase reflects distinct and unique characteristics. This universe of attitudes forms a part of a life space which includes social systems as well as formal work systems. Although the phases reflect the time span from fifties to eighties women in Indian organizations carry the universe of all three phases in the nineties.

Corporate Perspective: In a study [Parikh 1989, 1990] of women administrators and managers on managerial role taking, distinct social and work roles can be linked to the universe of attitudes held by women. The job oriented women anchors herself in social structures and affiliative relationships. She plays the role of a recipient and requires support from structures, systems and roles to perform her role. The job oriented women are serious and hard working but they can neither take decisions nor initiate tasks. They find it difficult to exercise task authority either upward or downward or with colleagues. They conform to the rules, regulations and instructions and need constant supervision and direction.

Very often these are the first generation of women entering formal work organizations. They do not have a concept of functional and formal systems, tasks and roles. They carry a limited perspective of small organizations and find themselves lost in large and mammoth organizations. Their social roles are also

stressful and they have taken up jobs for economic security. They play their role in both the social and work systems as good daughters, wives and mothers. In organizations their role is that of a good employee who needs to be bestowed affirmation by sensitive superiors.

The career oriented women have a conceptual clarity about social and work systems. Organizationally, they differentiate between job tasks, policies and corporate structure. They have functional clarity and are task oriented but they get caught in social dynamics of relationships. They get caught in the pulls and pushes of social and work roles. They seek merit-based evaluation on performance yet they hanker for personal and emotional affirmation from superiors. They aspire to climb the corporate ladder and overload themselves with responsibilities.

The career oriented women have acquired a rational logical approach in thinking and use their analytical abilities. However, in their emotional relational orientation they get caught with social expectations and role attitudes. Caught with the rational logical stance on the one hand and emotional on the other, they tend to become defiant and rebellions. The career oriented women tend to become competitive and sometimes the social setting competes with the work setting.

Professionally oriented women have not only differentiated the social and work space and roles, they have integrated both their spaces and roles into a new identity pattern. At home and

at work they live by values, give significance to their life space and their struggle is to discover meaning in their lives. In work settings they have both a macro and a micro vision carry a systemic perspective and their role taking reflects commitment to tasks, responsibility for the system and effective functional linkages with superiors, colleagues and subordinates. They hold a corporate vision, reflect institutional qualities [Garg and Parikh, 1991] in their role taking and invest in the growth of the organization they are a part of. In the social settings of home and family they have accepted and added to the traditional role expectations. They have accepted relationships as given and then set about to redefine and redesign new parameters which add meaning and value to these relationships. There is an added dimension of choice rather than compromise and duty and an active effort and participation to create a new concept of family, well-being and togetherness.

Given the above three phases of women's career paths over the last four decades and their movement forward, the women at all levels and in all phases continue to encounter several internal and external barriers which inhibit and block their new steps. The external barriers restrict women's entry and participation in management while the internal barriers restrict the nature and quality of relations and upward movement in the organization.

a) External Barriers

1. Culture: Culture of the society and that of the organization is a critical and significant factor influencing the acceptance or rejection of women in management. Cultural heritage and institutions and religious beliefs define the rights and roles of women to enter or inhibit the public domain. They influence the status of women.

Indian women carry a rich cultural heritage of cultural lore and role models [Parikh and Garg, 1989]. These influence the women's role taking processes in the organization. In the Indian organizational context women's entry was delayed but once it began, it acquired significance. The momentum has remained steady. Culture creates both societal and organizational space for women's unfolding. It can be supportive and or inhibitive. The cultural lore provides women a whole range of role models. Over a period of time Indian women have, as reinforced by society, shrunk their roles. Organizationally, also women's managerial potentials and role taking were inhibited. Their effectiveness was doubted and men, women and organizations could not accept the idea of working with or under a woman. There was always a resistance to the emerging new definitions. Women's entry very much depended on the leadership of organizations. Leadership reflected values and introduced change and as such the culture of the organization.

2. Society: Indian society in its agrarian model of social design prescribed ideal models for women's role taking. These ideal role models represent the traditional society of India steeped in social hierarchical structure. Given the slow change, new role models anchored in the realities of today have not fully emerged. Indian women have attempted to borrow new role models from the west. These borrowed models are very often not acceptable in both the family as well as work settings. The borrowed models do not acquire emotive roots or responses. They have only acquired logical and rational acceptance. As such, no new actions emerge. Rational logical responses anchored in alien models create barriers and inhibitions. Women encounter in themselves the deeply embedded social role taking processes idealized by the society and experience the pushes and pulls of old and new responses. It makes it difficult for women to involve and commit to formal work ethos. They hold guilt toward other roles and anxieties of letting go the social ideals. This takes away a large part of their energy.

Indian society emphasizes in a female child the social roles of being an ideal daughter, wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother. Achievements, ambitions and aspirations are for the male child. However, literature review [Parikh and Garg 1987] and studies suggest that though comparative frameworks exist between men and women in organizations and society's role in shaping these roles women have attempted to deal

with the inhibiting forces of the societal barriers. They have actually come up with new responses which are meaningful and relevant for the times. For these new responses they neither have had earlier role models or affirmation from societal structures.

3. The Family: Families with male and female role models shape the child's role taking. Indian family with its deeply embedded social design prepared a female child for conformity, surrender of her being and becoming to a duty bound role of a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Organizationally, there was a carry over of the familial structures and role models to formal work settings.

Although the Indian family setting provides eventual support to women working in organizations it also creates tremendous guilt and stress. Each new step the woman takes she is shown the prescriptive social ideal role model of an ever sacrificing woman -- a victim and a martyr. Her own ambition, achievement, involvement in work generates threats and anxieties in the significant role holders of the family, viz., the husband, the in-laws and the children. The husband puts her in the middle of two systems and questions her loyalty to the family setting. The in-laws demand the traditional ideal role model of a daughter-in-law; and the children demand her presence at all times. Indian women

executives in the name of exclusive responsibility of a dual career and belonging in two systems get pulled and pushed between two competing systems, multiple roles and expectations.

Women respond differently to these pressures. Some remain job oriented anchored in economic criteria and deny to themselves the unfolding of their potentials. They accept routine lower paid and lower status organizational positions. They give exclusive priority to the family demands and surrender their potentials at the altar of familial roles.

For these women, family was the major locus for ceremonial and other social events. The parenting role with its accompanying ideology of motherhood required the mother's presence to her children. These women were less likely to be able to afford the social and psychological costs of entering a time-greedy occupation such as management.

"However, the younger, more highly educated generation of women managers created greater rationality between family and work responsibilities than did their older peers" [Adler, Israeli, 1988]. Similarly, in the Indian context the generation of the eighties accepted their managerial and familial roles with ease. It was an acceptable social reality that women would work. Organizations would make

demands on their time and familial roles would be redesigned. Similarly, management of homes and children underwent dramatic changes. Role processes anchored in the agrarian model were inadequate and insufficient for the industrialized and urbanized living of today. However, with all the clarity of this the barriers created by social structures and familial roles tend to influence women's career growth and status in Indian organization.

4. The Economic Factor: With large scale economic development and technological innovation, the demand for professional managers has definitely increased. Education has equipped both men and women professionally and they compete to get into the right jobs and organizations. In India given all the opportunities it is still true that women end up taking breaks for motherhood and social preoccupations. Law demands that they be provided with additional infrastructural facilities and inspite of these there is no guarantee of their stay in the company. Career break is a reality of a large number of women. If the company invests in women in terms of training etc. it is frowned upon when she leaves the organization.

For whatever reasons women work, the economic factor is significant. For organizations, trained women employees leaving for whatever reasons is a cost. If the men, women and organizations accepted the fact that social structures, roles and processes are a reality and that women carry this

relational network, the stresses for both would be contained. However, a woman faces lesser negative effect than her male counterpart in case of career interruption due to the acceptance of her traditional role.

Economic resource generation has become a critical and significant role for women which contribute to the quality of life and upgrading of social status. Women do acquire some autonomy, participation in decision making, freedom to relate to parental side of the family, freedom to exchange gifts and it earns a location in the family space. Whether women are left at an advantage or at a disadvantage in their career if they take a break, a job, career and a profession adds to their lives and that of their family. Eventually, it leads to changes in the societal structures and patterns of role taking by both women and men.

5. Policies: Government policies and legislations to promote equal opportunities and remuneration to women play an important role. However, the legal policies and law are not sufficient. They have to be implemented and implementation is only done by people. Similarly, social policies like considerations for career breaks, maternity leaves, length of school day and working day and other variables that affect a woman's decision to take up a highly demanding job act as barriers to their entry in organizations. However, all these external barriers are resultant of Indian culture.

societal design and history. The government policies are also reactive in the sense that they are designed on lacunae, deprivations and discriminations. As such, in the absence of monitoring and concomitant determinants they do not change the tide. What the government can do is to design policies which facilitate new choices and directions. Education, infrastructures for women to feel respected and dignified and support systems so that they find freedom to leave oppressive people and situations. Similarly, the social stigma attached to divorce, separation and or widowhood need to be eroded so that men and women can live a life and redesign life and relationships if it becomes necessary. Policies are for living issues and not only for emergent problems. As such, policies need to be designed for people and today's relational, structural and systemic scenario of the society.

b) Internal Barriers:

All the above external factors affect the growth and career path of women within the organization. However, the most enduring are some of the internal barriers which influence women's role in organizations.

1. Mobility: Organizationally, women encounter dilemmas when they are asked to be physically mobile. Women's social membership and traditional attitudes restrict their mobility. Many women do not accept transfers which are linked to promotion and as such are bypassed. When the women accept

the organizational mobility as part of work they also carry the guilt of neglecting the family and children. Slowly, but certainly the pattern is changing. In the career and professionally oriented category of women, mobility does not remain a barrier. Women accept transfers, manage two homes, education of children and redesign their life space and roles. They withstand the accusation as well as admiration for such new action choices.

2. Socialization: Women live by socially desirable expectations of their behaviour. Often they refrain from informal gatherings for shop talk. Their counterparts are largely males and the women intentionally maintain a distance lest they are labelled or accused. This process takes an opportunity away where women could have access to soft information and messages transmitted during these informal chats. Often many important decisions are taken during these discussions and sessions. Women often remain uninformed and ignorant about the internal politics of the organization which becomes their handicap to some extent.

The whole issue revolve around man-woman relationship. It determines what kind of participation the women would engage with. In the initial phase of women's entry, the relationship at work revolved around social modality where age provided one kind of social status. Subsequently, as organizations grew more formal in their structure, functions and

tasks, organizational hierarchy and superior-subordinate relationship acquired significance. This was reinforced with man-woman component when the male was superior and woman the subordinate. Similarly, when women took up the mainstream organizational roles their participation and active involvement increased. However, their participation as equal colleagues was largely dependent on the maturity of the organization and the role holders involved.

3. Duty at Odd Hours: In certain functions, managers meet clients at odd hours or after office hours. Suppliers or buyers are to be entertained and many women refrain from all this. In some organizations, the top men stay back late in the office and expect their people to be around. Here also, women find it difficult to cope with the situation.

Initially, these expectations prevented women from aspiring to rise higher in the organization and were happy to remain where they were. However, as significant number of women become career oriented and professional these differentiation in the domain of men and women is changing. Some women are equally at ease with the task requirements and take it in their stride.

The Need for Change:

In the western literature (Adler and Izraeii), there are two models which exist. One model assumes similarity between men and women. Women are expected to act, dress and think like men who

currently hold the aspired-to-management positions. Effectiveness is measured against male norms. The second model assumes difference between the two sexes, but equal capability in making valuable contributions.

Between these two, the best way to manage is to recognize, value and combine the differences. Not to see women's uniqueness is to negate their identity and consequently, to negate their contributions to the organization.

"An aspiring woman in management has to bear in mind that becoming a manager in an organization is like going to a foreign country for an extended stay. In a foreign country one has to learn, or at least try to use a foreign language and understand different norms and standards. In the case of management, women are entering a well established male preserve with well established rules and language" (Hearn & Perkin, 1987).

Women are normally denied their due space on grounds of incapability and non commitment. But it is high time that organizations and society realize that women are born managers. They have been running their households, planning for the children and participating in social life. They have a capacity to adjust to and deal with any situation or level of people. They are trained to bargain, suffer, sacrifice and compromise. Thinking, reasoning and deciding are their daily acts. Hence they need compara-

tively less efforts to become managers without formal education (S. Daftary, 1976).

To change the attitudes of people and organizations towards women, first of all women themselves need to portray a different picture of themselves. If they seek special considerations or concessions, it would eventually work to their detriment and may act against their interests. Wrong assumptions and stereotypes about the role of women may build up.

The assessments of women are largely the result of an interface between women and their environment, culture and society. As such, the external barriers are manageable and possible to redefine and redesign.

Issues of Training:

For the individual and organizations to be free from the captivity of the stereotypes, training directed for building a new ethos of management needs to be introduced. Training programmes designed to prepare curriculum relevant to the women managers within the socio-cultural context, the formal structures, policies, strategies and tasks of the organization as well as the relevant managerial roles of women are desired. Traditionally, the need assessment programmes, workshops and seminars focus on skill building. The conceptual inputs attempt to change the behavioural dimension of role-taking in organizations. However, often the conceptual focus on organization structures,

formal tasks, formal and functional task based inter-dependent relationships and dimensions of policy and strategy get ignored. The socio-cultural realities from where the women acquire role-taking processes are also largely ignored or a cursory mention is made.

Hence, training programmes need to include the following issues as basic inputs for role and attitude change for both men and women.

1. Understanding of the socio-cultural context in which the organizations exist.
2. Understanding the level of organization structures, task and technology.
3. The degree of complexity of the country's business environment in which the organizations do business.
4. The quality of individuals employed and their understanding and clarity of their own roles both in the family and work setting.
5. To discover the strengths of the socio-cultural context, the organizations and the women managers.
6. Finally to assess how much of the socio-cultural baggage and the role-taking processes not relevant in the organizations are being carried over to the organizations by both women and men (Parikh, 1989).

The issue of management training for women could be summed up as a question of men's attitudes toward women and women's attitudes towards themselves.

"In the seventies, women seemed less interested in management development skills and more interested in the sharing of problems unique to women in business. In 1980, an evolution has taken place. Women are beginning to ask for more. They now want different involved participation in learning the actual science and art of management. Self-awareness, while always interesting and exciting is no longer the question. What they need now is the actual skills to back up their self-confidence" (Carter, 1980).

What women are missing most is access to positions. Women are selected on the basis of their achievements and men on the basis of their potential. The possible training avenues for the advancement of women consist of:

- Technical knowledge of management skills
- Development of personal qualities like self-confidence, self-assertion, interpersonal relationships, team-building, etc.
- Development of support systems for women -- C. Desjurdins (1987).

Instead of reinforcing existing realities like discrimination, deprivation etc. actual sources of problems which can provide new directions are to be discovered. Programmes designed by people of different cultural backgrounds (western) may be absolutely useless in a country which is under transition. Hence the validity of a programme has to be examined in the cultural context of a country before implementing it blindly.

Conclusion

The issue of women in management should be an integrated approach whereby multiple issues converge into a coherent whole. The focus needs to be both on personal and professional growth converging into a wholesome identity which could bring congruence to the multiple roles and multiple systems of which the women are simultaneously a part. Men, society, culture and the environment cannot be attributed the villain's role and the source of all problems. A shared perspective between men and women needs to be evolved so that both men and women can belong to formal work organizations and familial social settings as a wholesome collectivity (Indira J. Parikh, 1989).

The most enduring and difficult internal barriers are women's own social stereotypes, their psychological feeling of martyrdom and victimhood, their recipient status and doubts about the legitimacy of their formal roles in work organizations. These are deeply embedded through the cultural lore and processes of socialization (Parikh and Garg, 1989). Evidence of achievement aspirations and success does not free the women to accept

their action choices, courage of convictions and their ownership of their own lives. Women end up mortgaging their life to significant relationships and disowning their potentials and creativity. It is encounter with these internal cultural, social, familial, psychological and personal barriers, and freedom from its annihilating impact as well as taking charge of their lives that women will shape their own destinies and those of the systems they are a part of.

A proactive rather than a reactive approach may work positively towards the betterment of women executives.

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