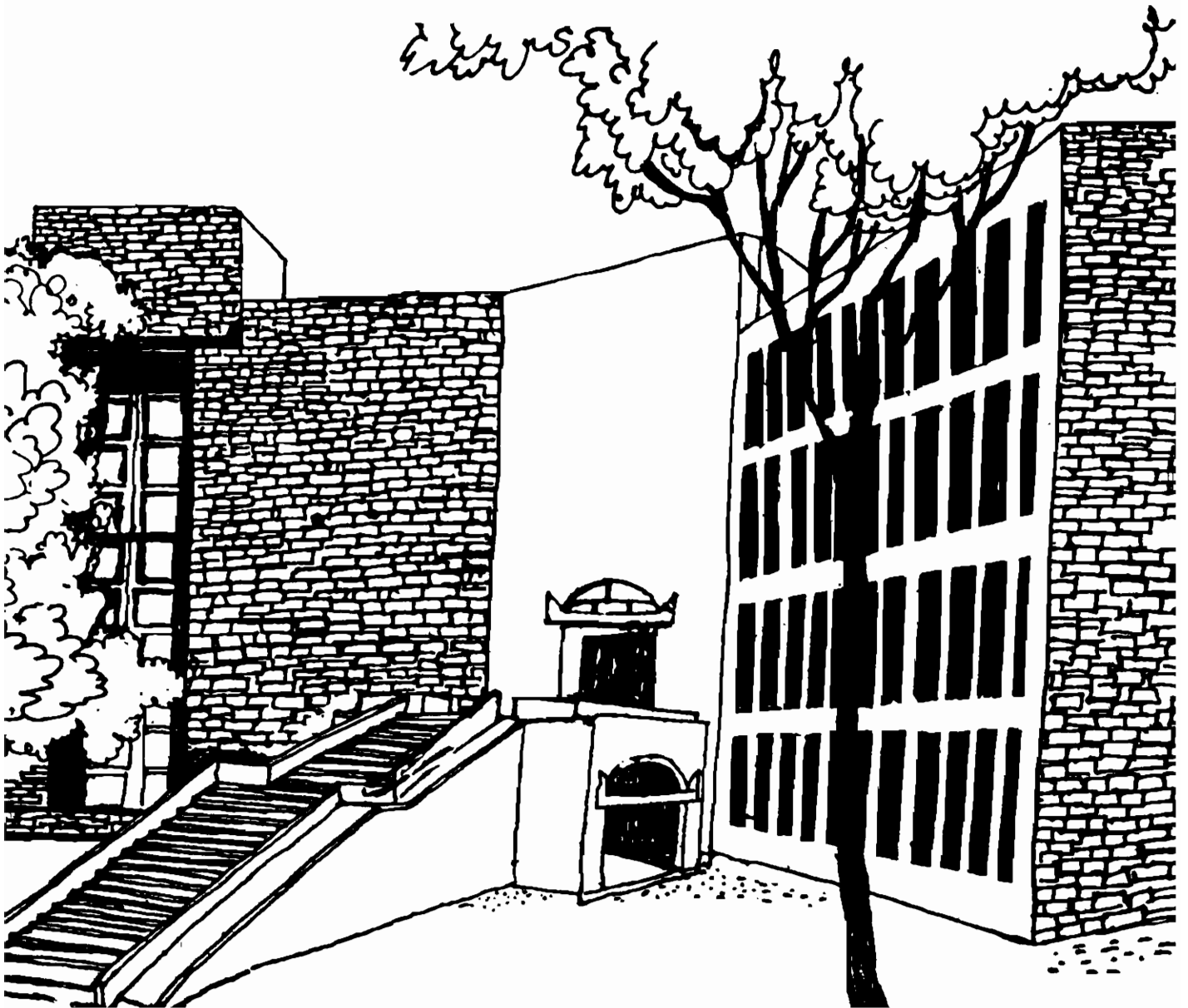




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# Working Paper



WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP ROLES

By

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**WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP ROLES**

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**DECEMBER 1999**

## **Women and Leadership Roles**

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### **Abstract**

Indian Women today carry the legacy of a civilisation thousands of years old ; this legacy is paradoxical, in that it can be both a burden and a source of inspiration. The challenge is to distill the best from the past, transform ancient wisdom into modern day paradigms and not be shackled by the bondage of age old dogmas and beliefs!

Indian Women and Indian society as a whole has moved from well-entrenched gender-centric roles, (where Man was considered the leader and provider and Woman the idealised deity, but submissive and subservient in day to day matters), to today's revolutionary thinking that is emerging, partly due to education and western influences, where roles are not stereotyped by gender and allow men to recognise their femininity and women their masculinity. This transformation is far from complete; however important beginnings have been made particularly in large metropolitan cities in tomorrow's industries where enabling technologies have brought dramatic changes in terms of creating virtual work spaces.

The objective of the four day workshop conducted at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad , for women managers/leaders in October 1999, was to explore the influence of the transformation of organisations on women's roles in the corporate world; to explore their leadership roles and also their life-spaces; to discover wholesome ways to actualise dreams and chart new career paths. The programme was divided into two modules, Conceptual and Experiential. The conceptual module explored the impact of transformation in organisations and on individual employees, particularly women. In the experiential module the exploration was around life-spaces and systems where processes of socialisation in both family and work settings were understood. How did women who are impacted by these diverse interfaces give shape to their roles?

The paper discusses the experiences of the participants at home and at work place. The shift in mindsets of people and society have contributed to a lot of positivity in terms of women's

acceptance as capable, hardworking and committed professionals and individuals. On the other hand they did feel that there was a constant pressure to perform and prove themselves at work place and simultaneously, a constant feeling of guilt and anger in coping up with expectations of children and in-laws respectively at the home-front. They were indeed successful in striking a balance between home and work and in doing so not many had managed to take leadership positions which was still very much considered a man's domain.

An important and interesting issue which the paper further discusses is the exploration of women's life spaces, their identity and the roles they take, especially in terms of leadership. The life-space of women vis-à-vis home/family and also vis-à-vis work place is analysed and discussed by the participants. At the home front the dynamics of in-laws, especially the interface of the women with their mother-in-law, their experience of motherhood and the dynamics of relationships with the husband—all contribute to dilemmas of marriage. The women shared some of their personal experiences related to their entry into the work space and their interfaces with the superiors, colleagues and subordinates of both genders. The dilemmas faced by women in terms of assuming leadership roles, climbing corporate ladder and contributing to decision-making processes in the organisation are, anchored in the socio-cultural context as well as in the maps and definitions they carry from the past.

A future scenario was painted by the participants. For the first time in recent history women have begun to assume leadership roles in the corporate world and are hopeful of blazing new trails for future generations, creating new role-models and cracking, if not, shattering the glass-ceiling. Women can look forward to the future with optimism. Women are experienced in managing one of the most complex organisation imaginable—the household, and therefore can apply their skills and experiences in terms of hard-work and sensitivity in managing relationships, at the work place. The authors have discussed how women could be successful leaders if they achieved a congruity between their inner-instincts and their career goals! The Indian Woman today is at a threshold where she is confronting not only herself and her own inner feelings, historical conditioning and fears, but also managing interfaces in the outside world both at home and work place. As recent role-models demonstrate, women tentatively are crossing this threshold, challenging themselves and blazing a new path for future generations.

The new Millennium may well usher in an era, where not only women but the entire human race can more easily achieve self-actualisation and total fulfillment both professionally and personally. The leaders of tomorrow would be such that they would not be identified by their gender, but by their capability and meritocracy.

## INTRODUCTION

The Human Journey has witnessed 5000 years of civilisation. In this journey a great mass of cultural heritage and cultural baggage of the past is cumulatively carried by society and its people. Culture generally reflects the myths, epics, folklores, folktales and all other sagas of men and women who are epitomised as heroes and willians and gets carried as a cultural coding of life. The role models adopted by men and women in that specific time and era are also carried, which over time are idealised and which influence the shaping of the nature of relationships, and interfaces across roles. This in turn determines the roles to be taken by women and men. These relationships can be in the form of a wide variety of social roles and relationships, man-woman relationships and parenting. Social roles are governed by social structures (i.e. traditions in terms of events in which men, women, societies, systems come together) and social processes related to roles that men and women take in society. The cultural heritage includes the positive role models which provide us directions to lead life. Similarly, the cultural baggage of the past inhibits both women and men to take new initiatives, make departures, redefine and redesign newer roles and processes and also contributes to entrenchment in the past and also obsolete role models.

### Scope of the Paper

This paper focuses on Women and Leadership roles. Any understanding of Indian women, of their identity, and especially of their inner dialogue, will be incomplete without a walk down the corridors of Indian history where women have paused, lived and internalised various role models. Some have taken leadership roles while millions of others have taken the role of victims. The role of Indian women, as it has evolved, been experienced and understood over 4,000 years, has been intertwined with the history of the country which is primarily one of repeated impositions of an alien ethos on its culture necessitating a frequent restructuring of social systems and consequently, individual identity. The role of Indian women has ranged from that of a deity to that of a devdasi, from being pure to being vulgar, from being supreme to being downtrodden, and also as innumerable manifestations of virtue or vice. The role of Indian women has undergone dramatic and drastic changes from era to era, while within the eras themselves there have existed simultaneous contradictions. This in itself has created problems for contemporary women in experiencing a continuity of thier identity with society. What is introjected by a woman growing up in Indian society is perhaps a collage and a flux of attitudes, perceptions, roles and locations of their identity. It seems to be difficult to take a logical look at all this. To every "yes" there is a "no" and to every "no"

there is a “yes”. The introjected collage does not, therefore, make it easy for women to define their role and take leadership roles and to enunciate directions and goals for themselves. (Parikh, Indira. J., Garg, Pulin. K., 1989)

For centuries women lived the myth of no location and no space for themselves, shame of their body, of being born a girl child, marginalised in the institutions of family and denied access to basic dignity of health, hygiene, decent living conditions and/or growth opportunities. The women were denied, deprived, discriminated and were then idealised and glorified in their victimhood, martyrdom and surrendering of their own identity. The men lived the myth of providers, and as such they were regarded as owners, brave and strong to protect the women and children. Significance, centrality, the power and authority and providing direction were the domain of men. In this century however women have travelled a long distance. The journey has been arduous and uphill. The effort to push the women downhill into the abyss of middle ages and Victorian era have been many. The might and power of this effort has had the reinforcement of centuries old traditions embedded in the role definitions of women and men in the society. However, the women of this century have discovered the Herculean spirit of persistence, the phoenix like quality of resilience and an ability to grasp the straws of education, to have career options and to unfold their lives in a manner different from their mothers and grandmothers. The women have struggled to walk side by side with men and catch up the distance of centuries with the rest of their counterparts in the society. The effort is to give shape to a more human, dignified relatedness between the two—the man and the woman, the girl child and the boy child and the collectivity of women and men. (Parikh, Indira. J., WP.No.98-05-02, May, 1998). In this process women have entered the portals of work and organisations and have taken up leadership roles.

#### **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES:**

Organizations have transformed since their inception through industrialisation. Industrialisation in India is 100 years old. However, the conceptualisation and formalisation of organizations as we know them today is about five decades old. As part of Management Development, programmes for Women and Leadership Roles are designed and conducted at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA). From 1980 till date, programmes



on Women in Management are offered to women managers on issues of role and authority. The aim of the programmes is to assess where women are with themselves and the organization in leadership roles. Women have moved from managerial positions to managerial leadership and eventually to leadership roles.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM :**

- The Programmes aimed at providing a setting where women in senior leadership positions could explore the influence of the organization on their role and environment in which organisations operate.
- The programmes also aimed at providing an opportunity where women managers / leaders could explore their leadership role in organizations as well as discover their life space, in turn to discover wholesome ways of managing personal dreams and career paths.

#### **PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANISATIONS :**

The participants consisted of a cross-section of women managers from India and Srilanka holding positions from Creative Supervisors to Senior lecturers to Dy.Managers in Finance and Marketing to Managers in the field of HR and Marketing, to Asst . general managers in Banks and holding positions of General secretary, Collector and District magistrate in the government. They represented a diverse mix of public sector and private sector companies, banks and financial institutions. Women from organizations like Refineries, Product marketing companies, Automobile, Agriculture, Communications and Media, and Educational institutions or Universities of post graduate systems, also participated.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The programmes was divided into two parts (1) A conceptual module, (2) An experiential module. The conceptual module was discussed in the first part. Participants were provided with an overview of transformations occurring in the environment in organization, in its structure and management practices. Issues of policies and strategies; diversity of tasks and people; issues of authority and leadership; and organization processes which were also undergoing change. The module explored issues of commitment, managerial role, attitudes, excellence in performance, creativity in organization and approaches to problem solving.

The second part focussed on the experiential module where the exploration was around life spaces, processes of socialisation in both family and work settings and crystallisation of women's leadership role and identity. The exploration was around how women could take charge of their life space and systems and give shape and meaning to their own life.

#### **EXPERIENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION BY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES:**

The women shared their lives and experiences of growing up as well as their experiences in the organisation. The observations were:

- Women have entered various new professions which are not traditional like, teaching, nursing etc., Earlier women entered work not out of choice but due to economic reasons or some calamity befalling them and their family.
- Women's entry into formal work organisations has been a decade later than men. Women, like men carried social, cultural and personal maps from their traditional roles to the work places.
- Women are performing dual roles where priority needs to be given to the home-front as it is the women who manage the household. Although many felt that times are changing as increasingly the husband's role is supportive to both women and home. However, women continue to carry feelings of guilt when it comes to their interface with children and anger when it comes to their interface with in-laws. The social-coding and the cultural-coding, eventually becomes a personal coding resulting in dilemmas of marriage around relationships and specially motherhood.
- Women end up taking up more and more responsibilities at work and often work for 16 hours a day. However women take a step backward in taking leadership roles and positions. Not many have broken through the senior management cadre to reach the higher echelons of management.
- Increasingly there is a change of attitude amongst men in perceiving women who are working (Parikh, Indira J, November 1989). Earlier, if a woman was successful the assumption was "somebody else e.g a man was behind her success". There was invariably a postulation of a godfather. If a woman was friendly with a male colleague - it was always felt that she was having an affair. Platonic relationships were deemed to be

improbable. However, many women felt that there is definitely a shift in these perceptions. Today if a woman is succeeding it is perceived that she is hardworking and she has earned the position. Women experience a constant pressure to perform and prove themselves in their work place. They face a constant challenge to achieve and prove themselves that they are capable, competent and deserve the promotion and the position.

- The women at work experienced that the women peers were not supportive of women whereas their male counterparts accepted them and were more supportive.
- In a hard core male dominated society, women continue to deal with personal stereotypes and remarks around clothes, dressing and attire. "Silly questions" are asked in interviews which are generally aimed to dissuade women from taking the job or push her to gauge her resilience or dislocate her from her confidence. Women have learnt to survive and face the reality as a challenge. Women have learnt to deal with such situations logically and rationally or by being nonchalant under these circumstances.
- Women are perceived and related with differently than their male colleagues at the work place. If women present themselves as weak and mild, they are exploited. If they are assertive they are perceived as aggressive.
- The aggressiveness is reflected in women acquiring strong opinions, getting entrenched in arguments, losing flexibility and negotiability, insensitivity to others opinions and feelings, becoming closed, losing openness and empathy and overall acquiring an attitude of "I know better" (Parikh Indira .J, WP.no. 98-05-02, 1998).
- Some women shared that at higher levels there are generally men who occupy the significant positions. Women are fewer and far apart. Women experience discrimination in processes leading to promotion. Often the organization policies are different for male and female employees. For eg. in one of the organisation the policy of medical reimbursement for dependents favoured men. Men could claim medical expenses for their parents but a woman could not do so for her in-laws or her parents. However, there are changes in the organisation where some women shared that they did not face any such gender bias in their organizational policies.
- Most women believed that there is a shift in mindset of how women are experienced in the organizations. More and more men are accepting that women are competent, intelligent and capable. Women can generate resources. In some profession, women are even considered better than men and in some organizations women are appreciated in terms of being hard working and also in terms of the values and beliefs they carry.

The earlier myths which perpetuated in the organization that women's success has a sexual connotation or an impression that women's success is due to a god-father is definitely being replaced by women being regarded as competent, capable, hardworking and committed. Many women felt that though these are the first healthy signs, a large multitude of women still continue to live with stereotype images and expectations of women.

### **ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIETY IN AGRARIAN ERA**

Across the world the human civilisation went through a long period of agrarian beginning and consolidation in the social structures, processes and roles. The agrarian society in India can be traced back to about 2500 years. Today, India is a multi-diverse and multi-cultural nation and the society and people from rural and urban reality continue to have distinctiveness and uniqueness. The agrarian society operated with some basic assumptions. These assumptions then defined women and men's desirable roles in societies.

The shift of Indian society from agrarian to industrial and rural to urban is characterised by the following distinct features, which in turn shaped women and men's roles:

- The agrarian society clearly defined the roles of men and women. Men interfaced with the external environment while women interfaced with the internal environment of home, family and relationships.
- Social living and work were quite integrated in the agricultural social design through caste and community affiliations. The integrated life of social and work revolved around the seasons of nature. Events of social institutions like marriage, birth, death and festivals created and brought communities together or resulted in conflict.
- Men worked alone - women lived in groups / communities. Communities got together to give an expression to their togetherness. As industrialisation took place and external influences impacted the society, the above assumptions began to change. With the set-up of formal work organizations, women like men, got educated, interfaced with the external environment, left home and started working. The women began equipping themselves with occupational expertise. For the first time men and women in organizations encountered each other without their social roles / baggages, but with their competencies and capabilities. Initially most found it difficult to relate with each other. Moreover as more women entered and continued working, the acceptance of the fact that women can also contribute equally at work, began to emerge.

- Society / organization and families therefore encountered many new interfaces. For e.g. as contrast to the agrarian society where men worked alone, men in organizations are required to work in groups and the concept of team-work has acquired immense significance. In contrast to the earlier context where women lived in groups, in urban centres she lives alone. However, the wherewithals of managing the external interface of the environment as well as managing relationships at home, creates stress for women.
- For women in society, meaning in life has largely come from relationships, and for men it has also come from being a good son to his family.

Thus centuries of the agrarian ethos fostered values and attitudes, patterns of interpersonal relationships and meanings of life which became deeply embedded in the psyche of the culture and society. In fact, they became so absolute that they were assumed to be a part of the basic nature of human beings. The concepts of life, predisposition to action, and curtailed aspirations to which individuals adapted themselves came to be treated either as being God-given or as being essentially inherent qualities of human beings. Thus, individuals became the victims of their own natural, social and spiritual adaptations, which societies call heritage. With the emergence of the industrial era, which coincided with the independence of the country, a whole new process of work ethics, technology and, consequently, a new life-style got introduced. According to Parikh and Garg, girls in large numbers joined schools and colleges. For the first time, they glimpsed a world which was earlier the exclusive domain of men. A whole new vista opened up before the Indian woman. She discovered she could do well in her studies; that her intelligence was hers to shape and enhance. She discovered the magic of choices, options and alternatives. Women entered the portals of medicine, engineering, administrative services, politics, law, teaching, and the mushrooming business organizations and manufacturing industries. Slowly but steadily, they moved into skilled and semi-skilled jobs, and a small number even succeeded in joining what were considered 'elite' professions. Through education, women from the better off socio-economic strata became aware of the existing social disparities and of the condition of women in general, particularly of those belonging to socially and economically deprived groups. Some of these women joined clubs like the Lions to participate in voluntary social programs for the socially and economically deprived. It soon became a status symbol to join these organizations, to be involved in fund-raising or charitable activities, and be considered

part of the emancipated or "avant-garde" lot. Parents of educated girls also recognised their high economic potential. To them, their daughter's economic self-reliance was an asset in marriage and could, hopefully, lead to a reduction in the dowry demanded. Economic independence also served as an insurance against future uncertainties, and only education could provide opportunities for this independence. However, caught between the conflicting demands of achievement as both an instrument of autonomy and of insurance, many of these women became highly ambivalent. At one level, they welcomed the opportunities for enhancement and growth but, at another level, found that these opportunities did not provide them with the desired self-worth and respect. It became extremely difficult for these women to value themselves and their existence; the insecurity of their relationships filled them with guilt, anxiety, anger and resentment, and a sense of helplessness at being considered a burden in the community (Parikh, Indira. J., and Garg, Pulink. K., 1989).

As such, all the process of cultural, social and familial socialisation anchored in the agrarian model of living and relationship came into direct confrontation with the experiences, expectations and aspirations of today's role requirements 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 (Parikh, Indira. J., WP.No.941, June 1991).

### **WOMEN'S LIFE SPACE**

Many women have struggled with the system which has often attempted to deploy their potentials both at home and in the work setting. They have often confronted within themselves the pathos of the traditional past and the aspired ethos of the present times, but in doing so have overloaded themselves with the processes of both. Most of them have sustained themselves by over-engaging in both roles. Others have fallen either into the role of a daughter, or a wife, or a mother. Thus, they have found it difficult to evolve an integrated identity. (Parikh, Indira. J., and Garg, Pulink. K., 1989).

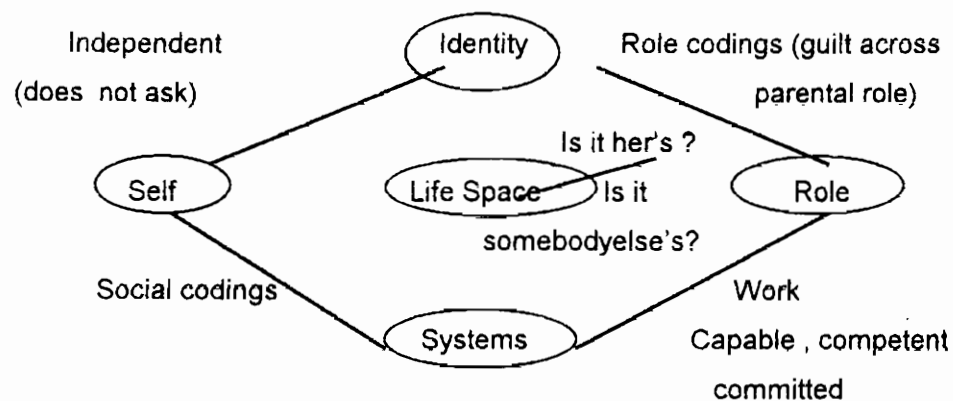
Although the Indian family setting provides eventual support to women working in organizations it also creates tremendous guilt and stress. Each new step the woman takes she is shown the prescriptive social ideal role model of an ever sacrificing woman -- a victim

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 executes in the name of exclusive responsibility of a dual career and belonging in two systems, gets pulled and pushed between two competing systems, multiple roles and expectations (Parikh, Indira. J., & Shah, Nayana. A., WP.No.941, June, 1991)

Given the above assumptions both of the agrarian and industrial society women's role in today's organizations can be put in the context of their present life space.

The key question explored and reflected upon was - to whom does the life space of a woman belong to? Do Women have their own identity? How do they play their roles? How do they take leadership roles? Figure 1, presents the key constituents of women's life space as experienced by them.

**Figure 1**  
**Life Space of Women**



- ? The 'Self' consists of all that is held within-- the emotions, feelings, wishes, dreams and aspirations.
- ? The 'Identity' of women consists of all the meanings, the multiple roles as they evolve over a period of time, the choices and actions initiated and withheld and the paths chosen consciously or unconsciously.
- ? The 'Role' refers to the location and space available in the system or not available, the opportunities aspired for and boundaries laid down.
- ? 'Systems' reflect a space of belonging. Women grapple with the feeling whether home

and work represent their own space, and whether they have ownership of these life-spaces. The perception is that the home space belongs to the father/husband and the work space belongs to male colleagues. They are largely operative in other peoples spaces and as such they have no personal belonging.

The women brought to the life space social-cultural codings of being a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and a mother. Women largely carried guilt around the role of the mother and resentment against the husband for not supporting their initial career aspirations. There were some husbands who were supportive as well as encouraging which made life easier for the women.

The complex interplay between Self, Role, Identity and Systems created the juxtaposition of life space of women which had many conflicting nuances of growth and opportunities or surrender of their dreams and aspirations in the name of being good daughters, wives and mothers. The themes which emerged from the discussions of the women reflected the following:

- Although the women accept that they are capable, competent, and committed, they grappled with issues of independence and autonomy. One participant identified a rebelliousness herself and claimed that she did not need to 'ask anyone' before she made her own choices. She did not want to be under any obligation and so directed herself towards a self-contained and self-reliant stance. However, this stance was not conducive to creating, building and fostering relationships.
- However, many grappled with this kind of unresolved coding. The participants had learnt how to balance it but it had resulted in their being overengaged and stretched.

What became clear was that social role codings from the social system and also personal aspirations are impacted by social, cultural and familial codings. Both women and men live with these deeply embedded social and cultural continuities. Continuities give us meanings, anchoring, belongingness, stability, security and code of conduct as we grow up in family settings and as we experience and carry these cumulative experiences. The question confronting women are the kind of departures the women would like to or wish to make. What new beginnings would they make? There are also discontinuities, which we experience as part of changes in the environment which provide new choices and opportunities. If women make departures from social codings, they have to choose to listen to their own



voices, choices and actions which they initiate. Unless, women start looking at these issues and deal with deeply embedded social codings of the past, it becomes very difficult for the women to achieve both social and psychological freedom for themselves. Moreover, unless women achieve this freedom they largely carry feelings of guilt which keeps haunting them and inhibits meaningful responses to the roles. They either surrender or rebel. Therefore there is a need to differentiate between action freedom and psychological freedom. Social and psychological freedom gives women many choices and alternatives to redefine and redesign their roles. Social freedom is given when the society transforms itself but the psychological freedom is experienced and acted upon with responsibility and commitment to self, others and the system simultaneously.

#### **Dilemmas of marriage:**

The socialisation process to shape women's role as a daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and mother is rooted in the social and cultural codings of the past. What becomes apparent is that though women are aware of the cultural codings, woman after woman continue to seek acceptance, affirmation and recognition as a good and acceptable daughter-in-law by surrendering to role conformity. Many voiced the anguish that their experience of the role of daughter-in-law and sister-in-law was that they were largely seen as an intruder, and an outsider, who took away the son or the brother. Even when the mother had a significant role in the selection of the person as the bride for the son, the entry of the young bride was seen as a competitor in the game of social power, control, centrality, marginality and the age. In this game the son was but a helpless spectator, a mute observer and caught between the mother and the wife. Most often the son, brother, husband psychologically disengaged and withdrew or fell back to traditional idealistic role of a son. The woman, the new bride, the young wife was not experienced as a person who would enter to bring joy and happiness to the son, rear a family and enlarge the space. She was seen as an usurper, carving out a space in the heart of the son for herself.

There were a few participants from Sri Lanka whose experiences were quite different. However, they did experience a lot of social pressure from their social roles. Moreover, like anywhere else they also experienced a lot of work pressure. Their jobs were very demanding. Their bosses were ruthless in their approach when it came to standards of performance. The pressure from in-laws was also experienced but mostly in those situations where the in-laws were less educated than the daughter-in-laws. In such situations even the

male-counter parts had more demands and were not very understanding. However, women who lived with their parents even after marriage found support in child rearing and freedom from parental anxiety towards their own children. This really freed them to engage with work settings as they did not go through the feelings of guilt and acceptance from the in-laws, and the parents came through as both caring and supportive.

In order to understand the dynamics of the In-laws, it is important to explore the social and cultural context and its underlying processes and the vice like grasp of deeply embedded codings of the relationship. In order to understand the dynamics of relationship and issues between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, it is important to explore and understand the Indian social dynamics of mother-son relationship. The cultural codings of Indian society is that to a son, mother is a Goddess to be worshipped. The social coding is that she is always good, caring and nurturing and always acts for the good of the son. The coding gets further strengthened by the socialisation process that "mothers can do no wrong". The personal experiences of the mother-son relationships are ignored and held in abeyance and the socialisation processes continues to reinforce the belief that the role of the son is to conform, obey and surrender to the wishes of the mother. Moreover, the feeling and the belief that the mother has sacrificed for the son, nurtured him in the womb, fed him from her own body, lived with the harshness of the husband to protect her son and denied and deprived herself to give the son and many other similar messages get carved in stone and etched for life. Over a period of time i.e, decades and centuries, reinforced by folklore and folktales and the cultural lore of myths and epics, the above codings get deeply embedded in the cultural psyche of the collectivity, the social psyche of the family and is finally internalised by the individual. The expectations from the son's behaviour to the mother then gets extended and super-imposed to the daughter-in-law.

However, the mother instead of taking role of a senior women, finds it difficult to do so. She as a women lives in the home with the husband as a wife. She has often lived with oppression and compulsions and surrendered her own dreams and wishes in the role of a wife and a mother. As such, at the entry of the young bride and seeing the first flush of her youth and romance the envy, the anxiety of role erosion, the decreasing centrality and significance begin to surface in the relationship. Her wisdom from her experiences and the promises to herself are thrown to the winds. What happens to the relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law? There is a subtle competition and struggle for power to control

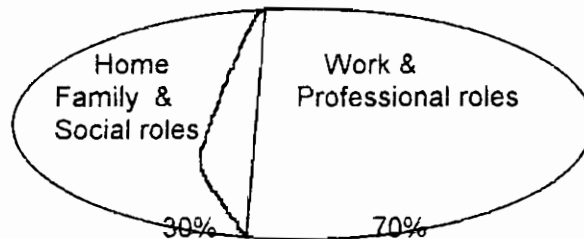
and possess the son.. The mother-in-law competes as the first wife of the house and craves for attention from her son. Basically the insecurities are translated into a very defensive and aggressive behaviour of ruthlessly crushing the blossoming of the bride and creating a space for herself in the home. The dynamics of the relationship is never really examined and the husband / son faces immense difficulty and stress. This happens perhaps due to the fact he has never really learnt how to be an adult. Socially a man has never to uproot himself. Whereas the women experiences a dramatic shift in behaviour and role taking as she leaves her home to enter another home and sets of relationships.. The daughter-in-law and mother-in-law syndrome thus replays the psycho-drama of deeply embedded relational coding and interface.. If the husband continues to be a son and does not add the role processes of a husband, the cultural and social codings of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law surface immediately and play havoc in the homes and with each other. The first few years of marriage are the most traumatic in the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and also sister-in-law if she is unmarried. The same processes are repeated for the new bride where she has to encounter the power struggle between the two women - viz the mother-in-law and the sister-in-law and her own entry and encounter with the two. For now the new bride is the intruder and the outsider. The whole social dynamics is further made complex when the sisters of the brother are significant and even not so significant in the house.

There are situations, for example, where some husbands wish for and expect from their wives open expressions of affection, social skills to relate to their friends, and participation in social life. The mother-in-law, on the other hand, wants a coy bride who is invisible but always at her beck and call. She needs essentially a traditional, ideal 'bahu' who would be obedient to her. Caught between the two, the woman lives in a state of anxiety and often in fear. She is torn between two conflicting sets of values and her own expectations and dreams. The introjects from her childhood and education, both emotive and cognitive, are also challenged by the experience of being married. Faced with all these, often contradictory pressures, the woman attempts to redefine what she as an individual would like her role and space to be. But she has very few options. When she comes with her own expectations, and joins her husband who is in turn, moving away from the traditional role of being a son, she incurs the wrath of her mother-in-law. Conversely, when she attempts to please and accommodate the mother-in-law, she faces her husband's resentment of being let down. Torn between the two, the woman ends up in a 'no role' situation and has to keep her own expectations in abeyance. (Parikh I,J and Garg, P,K , 1989)

### Dilemmas of personal and work life:

The group then explored and analysed their life spaces. The women felt that if they divided their life spaces between, work, and other roles, they would get the following distribution in terms of their psychological space as seen in fig. 2 :

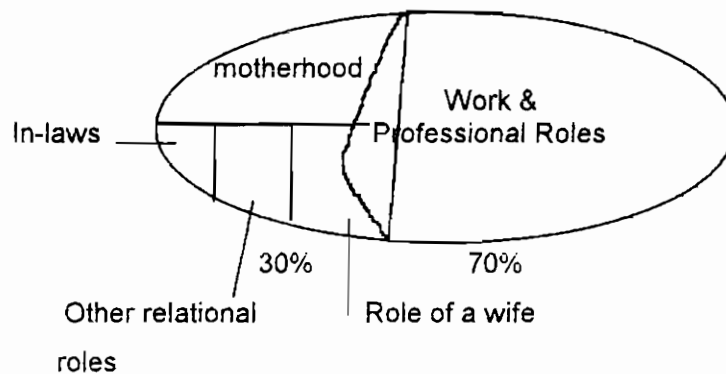
**Figure 2**  
**Life space of a working women vis-à-vis home/family**



- Work takes about 70% of the women's psychological and physical space and time.
- Home, family and social roles take about 30% of the space and time.

If the women further distributed their time and space , the role of mother demanded the largest psychological and social space as seen in fig. 3 :

**Figure 3**  
**Distribution of Social Roles and Spaces**



- In the social roles and spaces,  
80% of the space is for motherhood, 10% of the space is for the in-laws  
5% of the space is for other related roles, 5% of the remaining space is for the role of a wife.

This dynamics creates immense stress in the husband-wife relationship. Motherhood creates guilt at the deprivation the children voice for the expectations of a full time mother rather than a part time mother. The in-laws largely are not supportive but demanding, complaining and criticising. Moreover, they add to the guilt of motherhood by criticising and evaluating and judging her involvement in work negatively. The children feed on these pulls and pushes and further add to her guilt.

Other social roles from the woman's own parental family and the vast network of social relationships make further demands on her space and time. The more she is engaged and enjoys work the more discontent is voiced by the larger extended system.

At the professional level there are relational as well as systemic issues of responsibility, authority and accountability. Issues around travel, work-allocation, performance appraisal, promotions and similar other issues. Women get torn between being a professional and being a homemaker. The explorations and discussions highlighted the fact that for women although their mind worked as a professional, their heart worked as a traditional homemaker. The unfortunate part about the life spaces of women was the fact that while large part of the psychological world of women's life space is utilised in social role-taking, a key issue which rarely gets addressed is the issue of the encounter between man and woman. This is one encounter which has a very new dimension in the formal work settings. Women and men work and relate to each other without the baggage of their social roles.

Once the marriage has taken place, the encounter between wife and husband is socially romanticised around all the rituals before and after the marriage. At home when the first event of encounter and conflict between the wife and the in-laws takes place with no support from the husband, it remains as a hurt in a woman. Second episode, third episode, and a process of cumulative negative emotions start building up. The residue of each event or episode overtime acquires monolithic, undifferentiated mass of negative feelings. One more insignificant or significant event and the whole bubble of the past pent-up feelings bursts, resulting in crisis. This is experienced by each woman as she passes through and lives with the pre-conceived notion of traditional cultural social codings, where the expectation from marriage and the husband is very high. The women visualise entering a fairy-tale world of romance where only love flows, and where one finds the ultimate peace, joy and happiness. Very soon they discover the relational issues and experience

entrapment where action freedom may or may not be there. Moreover, they do not experience psychological freedom or space in their new home. What follows is either sacrifice, feelings of rejection, and non-appreciation, and/or a search to create their own space and home. The interface between husband and wife unfortunately never goes beyond looking at each other as husband and wife and never as experiencing each other as a man and a woman and as two different human beings.

The question therefore for women to ask themselves is, 'how long were they willing to see themselves get into a mode where they lived for social roles and work roles, and had no life space which they can call their own?' 'What would be the shared space, which they would create for themselves and with their husbands as an encounter between woman and a man preparing to create a home and a family relevant for the times?'

There is still a lurking belief in Indian society, Indian organisations as well as with men in the organisations, that women's entry into organisations takes away their attention from social and familial roles. As such, women, men and organisations are pulled and pushed between accepting women's entry into organisations and its simplifications on their multiple social roles. These dilemmas of women, men and organisations have arisen from the fact that the role of women and men were designed in the society anchored in the agrarian society. The new role definitions anchored in the industrialized society with formal work organisations and women's new roles in the society have not fully matured. The socialisation processes and the codings of women's and men's role are deeply embedded and new role definitions of women and men are held at the cognitive level. The internalization of these new role definitions as living processes is yet to emerge. Most organisations recruit very few women in managerial positions. At some level organisations want to recruit women but at another level the organisation's ambivalence comes through as whether women can cope up with the demands, challenges and pressures and whether they will be able to sustain their performance. This ambivalence is reinforced by the choices made by the women during the early years of their career path. Women experience dilemma of choices around whether they wish to continue with the career or respond to the social roles and social systems. In terms of knowledge, capabilities and skills the women who are recruited are of the same calibre as the men. Their performance also conveys their

commitment and involvement. However, the women also have to make certain choices around marriage and their social roles in homes and families. (Parikh, Indira. J., WP.No.98-05-02, May, 1998).

This would further be understood if one looks at the following historical perspective.

#### **A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

The faculty Dr. Indira Parikh provided a framework where she discussed –

- a). The evolution of women in terms of the attitudes/beliefs they carry , their role-taking and finally deriving meanings in life through career and growth, and also the change of concept of the society from the agrarian era to the present day.
- b). The thresholds of growth of women from birth to adulthood

#### **a). The evolution of women from the agrarian beliefs to the 90's:**

##### **1. Beginning—First steps from the family:**

Social beliefs / Categories of Role Taking by men and women in the society were reflective of the attitudes / beliefs which were operative when men / women encountered each other in organization. All these codings were from the society. However, newer voices with newer meanings were beginning to emerge. Women in senior positions and in leadership roles were going beyond the male models of leadership and emerging with their own branch of leadership

##### **2 . First experiences --from education:**

Personal meaning of role came forth . In agrarian society women had always been working. The equation earlier however was that age and experience would be equivalent to knowledge and wisdom. In educational institutions , the concept changed to having education, career and fresh minds equivalent to more information and more opportunities. The concept of hierarchy has become topsy-turvy.

##### **3 . Entry into Work ---Crossed threshold:**

Crossing of a very major threshold in terms of making departures from, what the social codings, family etc, would say, emerged. The women who entered the work set ups in 60's, 70's 80's 90;s--- there was a distinct shift but underlying processes had not dramatically changed.

4 . Settling down—Two kinds of experiences were being perceived— from entry to work, to acceptance for work, to absorption to work:

In terms of passage of time this movement was turbulent – a test of fire. If this was legitimised one would be prepared. But unfortunately organizations do not prepare men/women. The men carry the maps and definitions from the social structures, Therefore a lot of hostility, resentment between men and women in organization is experienced. The controversy that “If women claim to be equal why do they want more privileges”, prevails throughout organisations.

4 . Present Dilemmas- 90's changing the world upside down:

The kind of opportunities available, especially technology has made easy for women to work at home. But today the concept of work for majority of women is seen as income generation and to improve the quality of life and living. For many it is a career and for a very few it has become a professional role which they need to give meaning to themselves. Women have to interface with superiors, colleagues and subordinates, where the combinations are— superior as male, subordinate as female ; superior as female, subordinate as male ; or male and female as colleagues,— where there can be unmarried man and married woman ; married man and unmarried woman or both married or unmarried. Each of these dimensions contribute to a working relationship.

**b). Thresholds of growth of women from birth to adulthood:**

Let us examine the Pattern of Evolution:

1 . Birth to Infancy:

This determines the emotional responsiveness. Residues of what it means to be a female child are carried, swallowing everything especially the messages which are conveyed experientially.

2 . Infancy to childhood:

Education /institutions, give shape to re-inforce what we have absorbed from the family. What kind of psychological role will we play and live with? is determined in this stage.



### 3 . Childhood to Adolescence:

This is a stage where encounter between male and female is experienced.

What kind of conceptualisation do we have about relationships? comes forth during this stage.

### 4 . Adolescence to Adulthood:

Entering our own life-space, is what one experiences here. After which patterns follow, - unfolding of marriage / enduring relationships / parenting, is experienced.

## **WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO WORK: FIRST STEPS TO CLIMBING THE CORPORATE STRUCTURE**

Women have now been in work organizations for over four decades. They have played a significant and contributing role in the growth, culture and performance of organization. This reality makes it imperative that organizations explore the specific issues which confront women, men, and organizations by women's sustained presence and increasingly taking higher responsibilities, decision making roles and their rise in the corporate ladder.

As women have risen in the corporate ladder they have acquired leadership roles. Women in leadership roles encounter issues of handling power, exercise of authority, providing direction and new choices for organization strategies, participation in policy formulation and strategy implementation, and interface with the external environment. Simultaneously, women encounter the issues of interface with superiors, colleagues and subordinates. The women in their leadership roles are key role-holders both within and outside the systems. Women encounter dilemmas in taking leadership roles. Some of these dilemmas are anchored in the socio-cultural context, the organization culture of external business, environment, as well as in their own maps and definitions of role taking. Often the issues revolve around maintaining boundaries between personal and professional roles and relations, being both efficient and effective in performance, and achievement and managing finally all systems.

Organizations which design career path for women face issues of promotion, appraisal, competition between men and women colleagues, stereotypes about women in leadership

roles and positions, and the personality characteristics of women in leadership. Research findings ( Parikh I.J 1990, Parikh I.J and Shah. N 1992, Parikh I.J 1998, Parikh I.J and Engineer M.F 1999) suggest that women are capable and competent, are able to take decisions, are autonomous, and do exercise authority. They take significant responsibilities and aspire for positions which are appropriate to the tasks they are doing. More and more women opt for careers or profession, make hard choices, strive for performance and achievements and finally succeed to reach senior and leadership positions. In doing so, women also experience greater stress as they combine work, career, and roles at home, thus generating dynamics of push and pull from work and home settings and personal and professional roles.

Having explored the role and identity issues the women explored the issues around entry of women into work, stages / phases of work, and interface issues with superiors, colleagues and subordinates . The group then participated in an open discussion where they discussed about their entry into work, their experiences (both positive and negative) and how they had coped with emerging situations and how they managed in a male oriented work culture, to acquire leadership positions and roles. Some of the personal experiences shared by women reflected the following :

- One of the woman participants joined the organisation at a manager level. Her entry according to her was very smooth. She did not have much difficulties with male colleagues, except with one or two who reflected social expectations and stereotyped roles as at that time not many women had entered the organisation at the managerial level. There were and are many men even today who have never seen a woman working in a position of power and therefore are not skilled at handling such a role of women. With these mindsets, the participant had to face remarks like “ are you interested in such and such a person” or a “comparison with wife” was made. She remarked that many men felt, that the actual place of woman was at home and not work. To handle such mindsets she managed the situations very graciously. She interfaced with male colleagues as far as tasks were concerned, in case of meetings and during travel if flights were delayed when she was travelling with them.
- One of the participant, was in the sales department and was required to do a field job, where she faced a lot of discouragement from her male colleagues dissuading her to leave the job as they thought that she would not be able to do it. There was a lot of

pressure experienced and she felt she was under a microscope. Many of her male colleagues and seniors would comment and remark “she won’t tough it out”? “Wait and watch”. This attitude in fact made her more determined to take the assigned job as a challenge. She worked hard and undertook selling assignments and completed lengths and breadths of the states by merely slogging it out. Wherever she went she had to prove herself. There was no easy acceptance. She took bus journeys with men, sometimes, even at nights which surprised them. They thought that she must have joined sales department due to some financial difficulty otherwise why would and how could a woman do this job? She was rejected for many excellent job offers in the beginning but she would just go ahead re-apply and challenge them by remarking –“you have to see the horse and bet, if you don’t its your loss, not mine”. With this confidence and determination she would set aside all barriers. There was performance pressure even from the lowest rung of ladder. She had to face rough language spoken by sales representatives on tour, who would crack dirty jokes taking no cognisance of her presence. She would keep her cool and patience. Finally there came a day when she broke through the barrier and accomplished professional excellence. There were some male colleagues mainly MBA’s who had very exploitative mentality and would not hesitate to give open invitations to her to come for late night parties, movies etc and when she refused she was given threats about her appraisal during promotion. She felt as if her job was a kind of “Baptism by fire”. One could either swim or sink. The underlying message given to her was “If you want to work like a man, wear your pants and work”.

- There were times when a participant had to appraise a male subordinate elder to her. She found it difficult as the male subordinate would remark, “your age and my experience age is the same”.
- Many organizations have a culture where to be qualified as an MBA is considered as having an edge above others. For one of the woman participant who was in such a situation it was a constant challenge for her to prove herself, build rapport and credibility for herself through excellence of performance.
- Many women felt that men also have a habit of putting the women colleagues into a slot - like personalising relationships and considering them as their daughter, sister, mother or similar social roles. Instead of a professional relationship they personalise through social relations and social interfaces.
- Another woman who had a field job had to face many insults but that did not discourage

her from performing well. Finally her potentials were realised by the authorities who shifted her to a more responsible job. She felt that once men realised the woman's working style, her approach to work, her commitment they accept her, but reluctantly. However, she has to confront a lot of challenges. But once in the leadership role the climb is smoother.

- Another element which most women strongly felt was that the most dangerous and threatful are their female counterparts who get into a mode of gossip, especially with their male bosses if the women colleague is successful and is performing well. Jealousy is tackled by pointing fingers, talking and enlarging minor matters and giving them larger than life shape.
- The Sri Lankan participants felt that earlier in their organisation there did exist an impression that female members cannot take responsibilities and therefore decision making roles and responsibilities were given only to men. However, they felt that gradually attitudes were changing, and women were empowered to take responsible jobs. Over the years women have proved themselves with their capabilities in the organization.

#### **FUTURE SCENARIO:**

As the world enters the next century and a new millenium, what is the future scenario in both the social and work settings and what are the new spaces to be designed for women?

Some of the themes reflected by many women are discussed below:

- There would be equality in salaries for both men and women. "Equal pay for equal work" would be more and more operative.
- The organizations would work on merit based promotions and not promotions based on gender.
- An attitudinal change which fosters in both women and men a sense of ownership of tasks, commitment to work as teams and, responsibility for organizational performance would emerge.
- A more work based and professional culture in an organization would emerge so that social strereo types would be minimised.
- Men would be educated to accept women at field work and in all spheres of work.

- While recruiting new candidates, rejection of a candidate on the basis of gender would be minimised.
- There could be campaign within the organization to sensitise people on gender friendly organization. Company policy could take care of women's protection in the form of an act which allows punitive action to be taken for the wrong committed. Even personal comments could be discouraged and objected.
- Organizations to become more family sensitive.
- Organizations to provide a gym or stress relieving mechanisms or run classes on meditation / yoga after or before starting work.
- Facilities like crèche, or nursery for small children of women attending office, would generally become the norm.
- Even facilities like a shopping mall within the organization which takes care of vegetables, fruits, medicines and other day to day requirements, which the men/ women can shop after office hours, would be provided.
- The flexibility in work hours both for men / women would be given. The choice of completion of task either at home / work place would be given ensuring that deadlines would be met. The focus would be on output or delivery of work rather than quantity of time spent in the work place.
- Women today rise to positions of being functional heads, but very few reach the position of a CEO. Hope was reflected that women would reach the top positions.
- Among the social changes, women are marrying late -( 28 years - 30 years), they are even deciding not to have kids, single parenting is an easy option considered by women. Today even many men prefer educated and working wives and take pride in their success. Men are supportive and the trend is changing where they are also prepared to look after kids, by working flexi-hours.
- Many women felt that a workshop of this kind where women issues were focused and dealt with could be undertaken more often as it would empower many other women to come up in their career and it could also be a useful eye-opener for men of this generation.
- The trend is changing. Earlier women seeked for a job. Then they aspired for satisfaction along with job. Later they aspired for recognition. Today some have reached leadership positions in the corporate structure and have proved they can do it.
- The organization's policy to recognise the fact that if men are transferred their wives, and their jobs could also be taken into consideration. Success of men due to transfers need

not result in uprootedness of women. There could be a balance. Organization policy could also focus on keeping families together.

- More and more women are reaching higher levels. However, the policies in majority of organizations are made keeping in mind only the men. That could change.
- There could be training programs formulated for men to handle the situation where women is their superior.
- Organizations could have internal counsellors to deal with employee problems.
- In organizations the decision making machinery still vests with men. Women could also be given the opportunity to make decisions as they have better perception and are better lateral thinkers.
- Sharing of work between men / women could take place. Due to social codings of the past, home is still seen as women's space. That could change. More and more men could join the women in managing the internal interface of the home environment:

At an address at the inaugural event in Leadership series, the president of the Penn University shared her experiences on 25th Feb. 1998, excerpts of which are presented below:

- She felt that success should not be measured in terms of polarities. i.e, either as fail or pass. The label-'success' or 'failure' has an impact on self-defination. Self-defination or Self-fulfillment could be sought by cherishing and searching for complexities, embracing ambiguities and risks and rejecting polarities.
- Leadership roles emerge when one follows the heart by doing what they love. Passion and vision are the hallmarks of leadership.
- Women are gifted with the skills that they can develop as professional strengths to become effective leaders. The ability to bring people together to encourage dialogue, build consensus, and share problems and most importantly understand the social and emotional needs of others –all these qualities can bring about a mind-boggling change in the organisation as all these are effective qualities needed to be a leader.
- Competitiveness is a quality essential for great leadership and many women tend to shy away from it. Healthy competition leads to internalised goal-setting and less fear of success. The willingness to share ideas, take risks, acquire new skills, learn new areas

and forge new kinds of relationships, having other people know what you think and how you feel , and getting out of shackles of self-doubt can go a long way in creating an environment which stimulates the release of Leadership potential in women.

- She felt that in raising a child, one understands and learns about one's self. The child rearing expands the definitions of success and commitment to leadership as it becomes a challenge for the parent to make the world a better place for his young one. It is a challenge for every mother of today's generation to offer to their children, especially a male child , the opportunity to see the gender gap closing. The children of tomorrow stand for a generation which is shaped by the changing roles, concerns and problems of women and men, where there is more equality at work and at home. A healthier and happier society will emerge if there is involvement of men in supporting their wives careers and parenting their children. It would also help evolve more women in leadership roles.
- Women in Leadership positions will emerge if they follow a mission to value and seek for achievement keeping the humanity, perspective, sense of humor and sense of proportion alive.

#### **CREATING NEW SPACES—The WORK AND THE HOME SPACE:**

##### **A). Transformation in the concept of work:**

Transformation in work and organizations also impact the role of women . As organisations increase the recruitment of women, some will enter the organizations to only become job oriented at work and homely at home. The concept of “minimum amount of time for optimum amount of returns”, is emerging. The other set of women will emerge where focus would be on career where home is important but marriage would be a choice. Becoming career-oriented will also give way to the issues of relating with subordinates, colleagues and superiors. In the Indian social reality, a working woman is an immense security and asset for the husband as together they can have a life style which otherwise would not be possible. Organizations and women in organization create space and opportunities for women and men to relate to each other.

Work space is also a space where healthy work relationships get created. In an enduring ongoing social relationships of a husband and wife the partners search for fulfilment of multiple levels of relationships. Sometiems, one cannot find the multiplicity of expectations

from one relationship. There are elements of emotional, biological, intellectual and social role related dimensions involved in relationships. Organizations could focus on providing learning opportunities for men and women to relate with each other as human beings. As more and more women are becoming professionally oriented with increased self-esteem, and living by on their own values and beliefs, many of the traditional modes of differentiating home and work will come under review. Both women and men will arrive at mature ways of relating with each other without negating or threatening the social systems and social roles or denying the professional choices of growth.

An element of choice respecting each other's boundaries will emerge. The myths about the professional women as those who have given up femininity and are aggressive will also come under critical review. The work will become an integral part of women's growing up, where she educates herself and which will give her a meaningful dimension in life.

**B). Transformation in the concept of home and family:**

As more and more women work and grapple with issues of guilt of mother's role, the very nature of home is undergoing change. What is the meaning of home? What is a real home space? And whom does it belong to? These days with fewer children homes are dictated by children and not parents. Does the home belong to individuals/ or is it a shared space? If it is a shared space, then what roles will the mother, father or both play as individuals, what roles will the children play and what roles would each and every member play individually as well as collectively?

Concept of family is changing. From a joint family, the families are breaking up into nuclear family set-ups. Single parenting, week-end marriages, long distance marriages, international marriages, living-in arrangements, and similar new modes of enduring relationship are emerging. Both women, men and the children would have to respond to the expectations and reconfigurations of such relationships and their impact on their lives.

**CONCLUSION:**

Women need to ask themselves whether they are aspiring for a job, a career, or a 'higher calling' in life, since leaders are motivated from the inside-out. Their drive comes from within and is exhibited by their outward behaviour. Although a very few women may be privileged



to achieve congruity between the 'calling' and their career, since many economically deprived women are forced to earn their livelihood. Nonetheless, the point is well taken, if one follows one's heart, if one is flying with a tail-wind, propelled forward by inner urge and passion. We believe that counselling / career planning opportunities if available to young women at an early age could go along way towards incubating the leaders of tomorrow.

Women are experienced in managing one of the most complex organisations imaginable---the household, with its many human interfaces and interplay between the sexes, different age groups and different stake-holders. Women have learnt over the centuries the art of negotiation and reconciliation and qualities of patience and understanding, along with an inherent quality of emotional intelligence. All these transferable skills can be brought to bear upon the workplace making it the richer, from these valuable experiences.

Perhaps by addressing and answering the two questions below, one can conclude on a positive note about women becoming successful leaders in the next century!

*-What Leadership Roles will women play in future?*

The genesis of the answer lies in careful examination of the question itself! Perhaps in future as true meritocracy becomes manifest, the question itself will be unnecessary since leadership is in no way inherently constrained by 'gender' but only by 'gender-biases'. In the brave new world which we hope the next millenium will usher in, both men and women will play leadership roles in all aspects of life, become total and complete human beings fulfilling different facets of their inner being at home, at the workplace and in the society at large. Artificial fragmentation and divisive labels such as male and female professionals, housewives and working women etc. will melt away making way for a wholistic as well as wholesome approach to living. Only with this fundamental attitudinal shift, can the fullest potential of man and woman be realised leading to channelisation of human energy into productive and positive endeavours.

*-What concrete steps can the enlightened organisations take to maximise its human resources—both men and women?*

An excellent beginning would be to acknowledge the basic biological difference that exists

between the genders, viz., women conceive children and therefore need appropriate maternity leaves and arrangements built into their long-term career plan. Surprisingly, organisations do not plan for these basic differences, and do not work with their female employees to evolve common-sense approaches to these issues. Flexible work arrangements that emphasize outcomes and productivity supported by enabling technologies would also help both organisations and employed women to get the best out of each other.

The significant questions women also need to ask themselves are:

1. Are women really in charge of their own life spaces? Does the space belong to women?
2. Can women say “ this space is ours and we can invite others” and can women say “yes and No” to the self as well as others?
3. Are the women open to discovering a stranger in themselves?
4. Do women own up the uniqueness of their own existence? In other words, do women truly value and respect themselves?
5. Can women give shape to their own destiny?

Women in Leadership Role need to answer all these questions.

“One can invite others into their space but should not hand over the opportunity of pruning or trimming and shaping themselves to others in a manner that, others shape or make their destiny”, is a message one could reflect upon.

After a long psychological journey, some women do arrive at a new threshold beyond the horizon. The woman's soul is tensile and resilient, having journeyed through the endless and arid wastes of social and psychological space. In this process, she has attempted to discover the wholesomeness of the proactive (i.e, anchored in the self) spirit of human existence. Every society and culture has some women who have crossed this threshold and created a space beyond the horizon. These women are the pioneers who add something more to themselves and make life and the process of living a little more wholesome, dignified and gracious than before. Each step on this path requires a pause to reflect deeply on the elements of the past and the present - to shut the door of the past which has been lived out and exhausted itself and to take a step into the unknown. One of the anchors of the space beyond the horizon lies in the freedom to make a choice and to experience the present. To experience the present, women have to free themselves from the associative universe and the overwhelming symbols of past experiences. This is a necessary step, as

the present has one foot in the past and one in the future. The past contains many memories - some good, some bad; some happy, some sad; some creative, some destructive; some glowing with radiance, others with hate; some with guilt, and shame, others with pride and achievement; some with the touch of wholesomeness, others with repulsion. These bitter-sweet memories have added up, drop by drop and day by day, to make life a vast panorama of experiences imbued with the magic, colour, fragrance and enchantment. The other anchor of the present lies in the space beyond the horizon - where instead of hope there is engagement with the world, instead of dreams there is commitment, instead of aspirations there are choices, instead of ideals there are convictions, instead of bestowal and affirmation there is courage. Time and again, the social code of conduct imposed on women and the role-taking processes defined by the cultural lore, prevent the woman from experiencing the stranger in herself which unfolds in each moment. It tames and tempers her being which is otherwise boundless and bursting with energy. Many a woman experience terror - at crossing the threshold to a space beyond the horizon, as this space demands that she takes charge of her destiny and her life space around her. These women struggle to take a few steps forward since their vision of their own life propels them to make a choice. They struggle to confront human existence with resilience. They rise time and again from the ashes to respond to their commitments. They reach out to experience their human spirit and the essence of life. Woman after woman has abandoned the choice to make contact with the spirit of human existence within them. They mortgage themselves at various thresholds and rarely cross them to encounter the space beyond the horizon. At each new threshold they encounter the ghosts which haunt the inner space of their lives and return to being echoes and shadows. The confrontation with this threshold and the space beyond the horizon is really an encounter with the inner realities of the self, others and the system. It is a space to own up to the self and to unfold its resources. These psychological resources are designed for new role taking and making choices for action (Parikh, Indira. J., and Garg, Pulink. K., 1989).

The recent role-models do demonstrate women who have tentatively crossed this threshold and are carving a niche for themselves in various fields and are blazing a new path for the future generations. The new Millennium perhaps would witness leaders who would not be identified by their gender but by their capability, their vision and their competence!

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