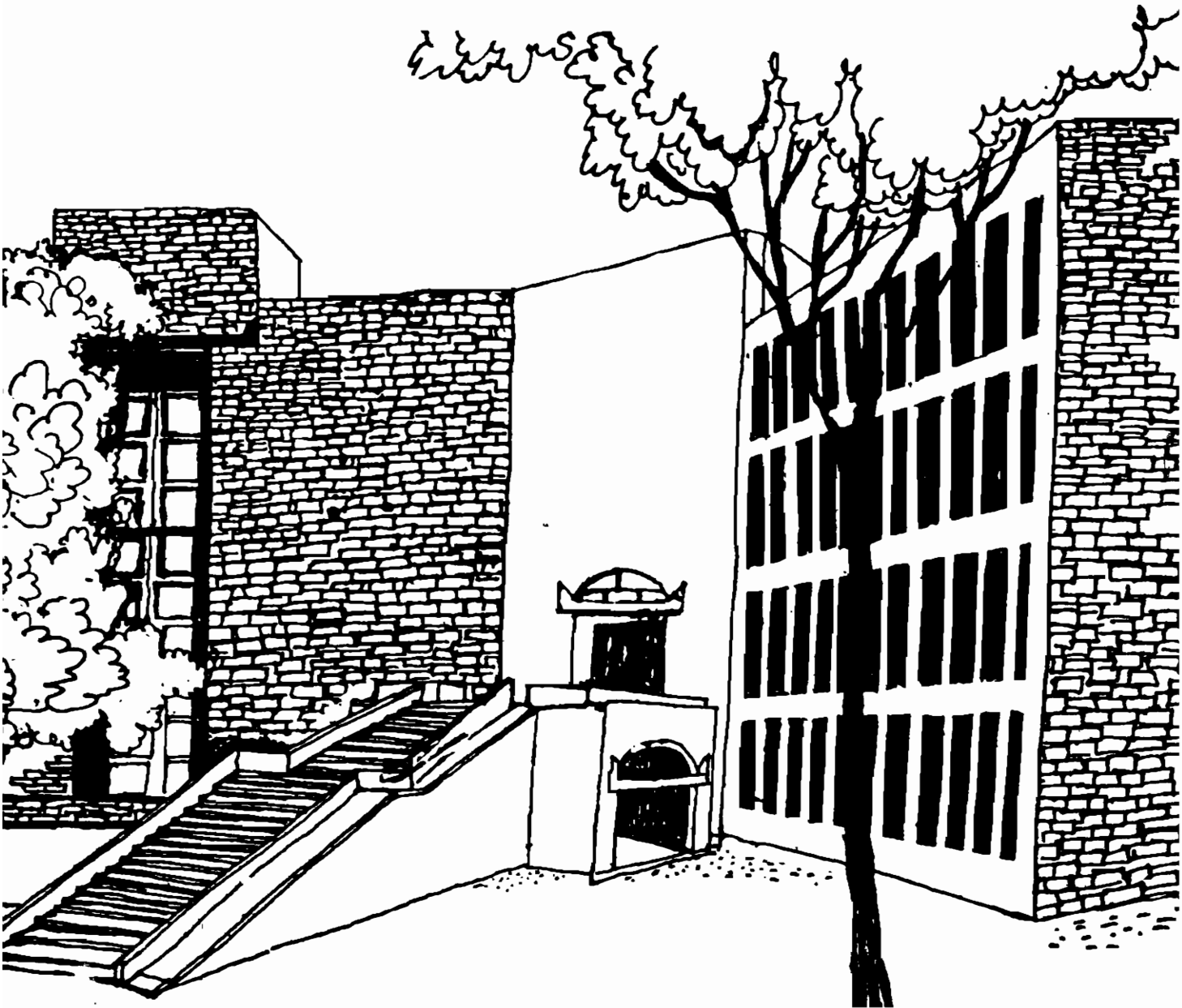




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PARADIGMS OF GENDER ISSUES IN INDIAN  
ORGANIZATIONS

By

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## Paradigms of Gender Issues in Indian Organisations

### Abstract

In this century of women's emancipation, the socio-cultural world is called upon to address the issues of gender. The culture, society, religion and family, the four core co-ordinates of human existence have located women and men in specific social contexts, defined their roles, designed their activities and created processes of centrality - marginalisation, visibility - invisibility and rooting - uprooting and rerooting.

This location of women, men and institution in the context of structural, critical and role hierarchy is so deeply embedded in the psyche that any redefining, redesigning, realignment and recalibrations have been most difficult. This frozen and deeply embedded state of role psyche in the collective psyche of the socio-cultural context meant that finding autonomy is a very difficult task for women, men and the institution.

This paper is based on the discussions with women, men and senior managers of ten organizations. The scope of this paper is to:

1. To assess how women experience their entry in various organisations.
2. How women visualise their career path in their expectations, ambitions and aspirations in organisations.
3. Women's interface with both women and men superiors, colleagues and subordinates.
4. Appraisal of women's managerial roles, tasks and performance by seniors in the organisations.
5. Organisational policies and facilities to address specific issues of women such as motherhood and break in career.
6. Women's management of work and home space.
7. Women's long term role and career path in organisations.

This paper explores woman's entry into organizations, task allocation, task relationships, organizational culture, men managers and working wives, organization policies regarding women and dilemmas confronted by women.

This paper is also talks about the directions and choices for women, men and organisations to create a new organization culture and new paradigms of work and relationships at work.

# Paradigms of Gender Issues in Indian Organisations

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April 1998

## Introduction:

The world stands at the threshold of a new millennium. The twenty first century is around the corner. This is the time for many countries and organisations to take a pause and review the past, the nature of the present and what lies ahead in the future. Standing at the threshold of the millennium we need to explore the socio-cultural world that we live in and the location and space of women and men in the society, family and organisations. We need to assess the nature of industrialisation and the world of work, the lives we live in today's times, the women and men relationships that are defined and shaped by the various institutions and whether we have the vision and the foresight to learn from the past millenniums, to give shape to our lives of tomorrow, and the organisations, the institutions and the socio-cultural universe of relationships which is yet to emerge.

This century has been the century of dramatic transformations. These transformations have created a path for the awakening, conviction and courage of nations to free themselves from the bondage, oppression, indignities, dehumanisation and captivity of colonialisation and compulsive surrender of mind, body and the psyche of individuals and the collectivity. This century has also awakened women from the surrender and slumber of centuries to look at their own lives, their role as infrastructure and invisibility from the mainstream of transformations occurring in the society. The women have woken up to discover and experience their location in the socio-cultural context, the significance of their roles and relationships in the family and most important of all, women beginning to accept and own up the uniqueness of their existence, their legitimate space in the systems of family and work and their voice to articulate their ambitions, aspirations, expectations, and their own dreams for themselves. In the last five to eight decades women have acknowledged and proven that they too can perform, achieve and succeed, that they too can compete and excel, and that they can just about enter any profession, career and occupation and bring results.

This is the century of women's emancipation and a call to the socio-cultural world to address the issues of gender. Culture, society, religion and family, the four core coordinates of human existence have located women and men in a specific social context, defined their roles, designed their activities and created processes of centrality - marginalisation, visibility-invisibility and rooting - uprooting and rerooting. This location of women, men and institution in the context of structural, cultural and

role hierarchy is so deeply embedded in the psyche of women, men and institutions that any redefining, redesigning, realignments and recalibrations have been almost impossible. The role psyche in the larger collective psyche of the socio-cultural context has been so frozen and deeply embedded that finding freedom was indeed a difficult task if not an impossible one for them.

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 nurturance and fostering of their growth. 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 the owners, brave and strong to protect the women and children. Significance, centrality, the power and authority and providing direction were the domain of men.

This century - a century when countries have struggled for human dignity and freedom, struggled to walk their own land with heads held high and with the pride of belonging to their own soil and walk free. This is also a century where 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 winds 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 might of one half of the collective psyche i.e. the women has encountered the other half of the collective psyche i.e. the men to churn the ocean of centuries old traditions, beliefs, superstitious, rituals and social stereotypes to bring to surface the issue of gender equality, gender dignity, humanising the gender issues and equalising the role relationship processes. 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.

### **Acculturation Process of Indian Women**

Indian women have evoked myriad of images across centuries. Her most ancient images come from the mythology of India where she is in the form of a Goddess who represents strength, and power and who is a crusader wiping out and destroying all that is evil. In the epics of Ramayana as Sita, she is the symbol of all that is socially virtuous and ideal as wife. Her role is deeply woven into the social fabric which makes her larger than life but gives her little space or freedom to exercise her choices. She is part of the system and within that system she has to transcend the system without negating it and at all times maintaining her social dignity and courage. In the epic of Mahabharat, as Draupadi she is in the centre of a vortex, captive in the social and political system dominated by males where she has to protect herself from violations. Draupadi has the fire, courage and determination but works within the processes of the

existing social-political system. She challenges and questions the system about its traditions, norms and women's status and location. However, in the final analysis she plays out her role in the framework of the socio-political system. There are yet other spiritual images of Indian women as an ideal devotee steeped in faith and absorbed in her god. In this choice she has to pay a high price. The price is death and then be glorified. From the folklore and folktales Indian women portray the images of social relationships. The focus is on her role in a family system where she has to give proof of her devotion to the elders, commitment to the home and family, loyalty to her in-laws and her physical and emotional chastity in relationship to her husband. All in all the Indian woman is the epitome of social dignity, silent grace, upright in her values, chaste in her thoughts and emotions and an alluring mystery and an enigma of who she really is.

### **Social, Context and Role of Indian Women**

In the last two centuries the images of Indian women have undergone dramatic changes. She is experienced and seen as suffering, deprived, overburdened with responsibilities, deprived of equality, denied justice, marginalised in families, community, and other social institutions, disowned and psychologically discarded at birth for being born a girl child, weary from many childbirths, denied of a childhood, robbed of her adolescence and prematurely old. In the social system the woman is a pawn in the game of two families - one demanding money for creating a place in their home while the other heaving a sigh of relief having placed her in her rightful home, that of the husband and the in-laws.

There are other popular and living myths and images of Indian women being burnt at the altar of dowry, burnt at the funeral pyre of the husband, aborted as a foetus for bearing the wrong chromosome and many other such ugly images. Similarly and simultaneously in the last five decades there are other images of the Indian women of today who through education and achievements sit in the corporate board rooms, and travel around the world taking global decisions for mammoth organizations. All these images juxtaposed and intertwined are real and as alive as they were in the ancient times. For in the ancient times there have existed powerful women as well as weak women, assertive women as well as docile women, and women with independent minds as well as women who surrendered their identity and performed their social roles of a daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and a mother.

Some of these new images are partly true of a small segment of the society while others are largely true of a significantly large segment of women. However, whatever, be the images, these images reflect an image of women of a nation, a society and its culture.

### **Socialization of Indian Women**

Who are these Indian women who for centuries have lived with these images. They have been the anchors of the culture's continuities, maintained the consistency of

traditions and upheld the values of being ideal daughters, wives, daughters-in-law and mothers. Many have dignified their roles and withheld their personal dreams and aspirations. They have lived by action, deeds and behavior appropriate to the social roles and largely lived by the lore of the socio-cultural context. What is this socio-cultural context which for centuries has held women in its captivity, a captivity, which the women themselves have not only accepted but also glorified and deified.

Each culture and society as it unfolds in different centuries designs structures, roles, positions, status and role differentiations for its women and men. So has the Indian society designed roles, space and boundaries for its women. Indian women like its culture carry a rich heritage of role models from the cultural lore. However, the role models from the cultural lore are frozen into maps and definitions of social structures of the agrarian society of last twenty five hundred years.

Both put together emphasized for the girl child the social role of being an ideal daughter, wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother. The women were considered as the property owned and protected by a successive set of males viz. the father/brother, husband, and the son. The women never recognized their own potentials, aspirations or inner urges. Their role was to adjust, adapt and accommodate. They were expected to sacrifice and suffer for the well-being of their families. This agrarian design further encountered the invasion of the Moguls and then the colonisation. This further strengthened the social grip around the role of women. The culture designed the role space, the society codified it, the family socialized the girl child and the child internalized and accepted the conformity and surrender to her role. Whatever dreams and aspirations and romanticism she had at her parents home were quickly taken care of and stifled by the in-laws family.

**Transition, New Steps and New Space**

The turn of the century brought major shifts in the socio-cultural context of India. India started to move from a largely agrarian based and rural society to an industrial and urban society. Five decades back this industrialization started to acquire momentum. Education linked to career opportunities options and a different future than the parents has become the hall mark of these last five decades. Mass education has brought significant shift in the self and role concept of women both in the family settings as well as the external environment. Women slowly but steadily entered school, colleges and universities and equipped themselves with capabilities, competencies and achievements. They made a transition from homes to formal work organizations and in their role-taking, from social affiliative relations to formal functional organizational roles.

**Beginnings of a New Context**

With the entry of women in these new formal organizational settings (as distinct and different from traditional work roles as teachers, nurses and doctors) women, men organizations and social settings encountered deeply embedded social and cultural expectations of women's roles. These attitudes influenced the women's own role



taking in the organizations, their status, their job allocation, mobility across hierarchy as well as the geographical locations and most important their relations with women and men as superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

As the decades moved from the fifties to nineties Indian women took leaps and bounds to enter new domains and as such new roles for themselves. Three distinctive phases of this transition can be identified. (Parikh and Farell 1991)

### **Phases of the New Roles of Indian Women**

In the first phase women entered the organizations and took up marginal and infrastructural positions. The women who took up these positions did so exclusively for supporting themselves and their parental or their own families. A smaller segment belonged to business and professionally oriented families. The women were educated intelligent, capable and competent. However, these women brought and carried the baggage of social structures, roles and relationships to the organizations. The organization and the men also related with the women with the roles and attitudes of social structures and processes. Women, men, and organizations had little or no experiences of relating to and working with each other in formal settings. The formal work relationships were translated from social role models. Depending upon the age, the women took the role stance of daughters, sisters, mothers or aunts. Social hierarchy and authority were carried to the organizations. Women who took up the jobs accepted the responsibilities, were reliable and dependable and often became indispensable to the organizations. (Parikh and Shah, 1990 )

These women were the adjusters. They accepted the traditional roles and lived by them. They accepted the responsibilities of both the social and work systems and experienced no conflicts. Family was their focus and work was a privilege and they felt grateful that they had the space in both.

In the second phase around the seventies and eighties a significantly large number of women created a new path for themselves. Their entry into organizations was clearly with career aspirations. Work was an integral part of their life space. Educated and qualified they set out to create a different life for themselves from that of their grandmother and mothers. They accepted the challenges and responded to the opportunities available. They left their social roles in the social systems and aspired to climb the corporate ladder. (Parikh and Shah, 1990)

These women were educated and aspired for experiences of performance, achievement, and success. In schools and colleges many had done as well or better than their male peers or siblings. These women broke the barriers of outdated attitudes and many a myths about what women could or could not do. These women were the asserters. Although they were constantly pulled and pushed by the two social and work systems they knew the directions they wished to go. They were also aware of their potentials and also the dilemmas of choices between the prescriptive roles of the society and the vision of the new life space they would like to shape. Many in this category paid a price of their new choices in conflicts in relationships and being accused and labeled as aggressive and unfeminine. However, the pioneering spirit

and the unequivocal determination kept these women to their chosen paths. These were the women who broke many a new grounds and entered new domains of work. (Parikh and Shah, 1990)

In the third phase of women's education and entry into work the women opened up new frontiers. These were the professional women. They had their personal dreams and personal vision for themselves as well as the systems. They were seeking membership in the organization and actively took to shaping their home, work and personal spaces and designed relational interfaces to find fulfillment. They added the dimension of choice rather than compromise and actively participated to create well-being and togetherness.

These are the women who had gone through the attitudes of role taking similar to the women of phase I and II in their personal growth and life cycle. In this journey many women had fallen by the way side of the society before they had even begun to walk a path. Even today millions of women continue to walk the path set by the culture, society and the family. However, some women have responded to the call of their self to search for new maps, definitions and meanings of their role and the systems they are part of.

The women in this phase have clearly chosen to create new location and define a new meaning for themselves, their roles, the systems and relationships. They wish to add value to themselves, others and the system. These capable, competent, intelligent and persistent women act with courage and convictions. They create new spaces and give shape to their lives and as such little by little transform the culture, society, families and the organization.

The movement and transition from the deeply embedded socio-cultural and family codings are not easy. As women move from the frozenness of these codings there are often times when they become captives of the social milieu. Whatever their dreams they fail to create real and legitimate space for themselves. They are able to define new roles but not the new processes so that systems, structures, and interfaces in relationships changes.

The above three phases reflect a time span of forty years. The universe of attitudes held by women in each of this phase reflects distinct and unique characteristics. These attitudes are reflective of the life space of Indian women be they social or work systems Indian women of to-day live by and carry the universe of all the three phases. Indian women caught in the continuity and consistency of the cultural lore and the new dreams are today grappling with dilemmas of dependent and controlling relationships. There is fear of social stigma, isolation, loneliness and breaking up of relationships. Many women become victims of social and relational pressures and give up the new path and live with regrets.

With these role models as the socio-cultural heritage, and the socio-cultural institutions where women are worshipped as well as trodden upon, where women are paid homage as well as trampled upon, where women are deified but undignified, where the social code idealizes and glorifies their sacrifice and nurturing motherhood role yet violates their body and identity and calls upon them in the hour of need only to throw them aside when the need of the hour is over. The interplay of the socio-cultural heritage

and the role models, and the institutions of family, education and work in the socio-cultural landscape of the country have brought women and men of India at the threshold of the new millennium.

### **Scope of the Paper**

This paper is based on the discussions with women and men of 10 organisations. The discussions were around women's recruitment, induction and integration in the mainstream of organisations. Many organisations in India have been recruiting women managers in the last few years. Some organisations recruit in small numbers while some recruit in large numbers. Very very few women are in senior positions. Many organisations are grappling with some of the specific issues which women encounter as employees as well as their social systems. This paper is a result of several discussions and workshops focusing on integrating women and men at work. The objectives of the workshop were the following.

1. To assess how women experience their entry in various organisations.
2. How women visualise their career path in their expectations, ambitions and aspirations in organisations.
3. Women's interface with both women and men superiors, colleagues and subordinates.
4. Appraisal of women's managerial roles, tasks and performance by seniors in the organisations.
5. Organisational policies and facilities to address specific issues of women such as motherhood and break in career.
6. Women's management of work and home space.
7. Women's long term role and career path in organisations.

### **Sample of Organisations**

The ten organisations reflected a diverse mix of public sector, private sector, family owned organisations, banks and financial institutions and multinational manufacturing organisations.

### **Sample of Participants**

There were 150 women and 50 men from these ten organisations representing women management trainees, and women in middle and senior level management positions. There were also 180 women from six workshops on " Women Managers : Issues of Role and Authority" , 30 women from one programme on Training for Trainers and 120 women from several incompany training programmes for women managers. As such there were total of 470 women and 50 men from different levels of management.

## **Methodology**

The methodology of the study was meetings with women and men managers in the ten organisations individually and in groups. The workshops focused with participative methodology and the incompany programmes focused largely on the life space of women and men managers, relationships at work with superiors, colleagues and subordinates and with roles and encounters across men and women both in the home and work space.

## **Women's Entry into Organisations**

Entry of women in management as distinct from women in infrastructural service roles confronts women with a role which is new to women, men and organisation. Women enter organisations equipped with education, academic achievement, performance and competencies. Their entry into managerial positions creates anxiety, doubts and apprehensions in women, men and organisations. Although organisation policy is to recruit women, organisations are very often not prepared to address the issues arising out of this policy and entry of women in the organisations. Logically women, men and organisation accept the fact that women like men can enter organisations, are capable of doing the job and there is no logical rational reasons for their not holding managerial positions. However, there is still a lurking belief in society as well as 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.

Historically, women entered the world of managerial roles in the late sixties and early seventies. Their numbers multiplied and their entry gained momentum in the early and late seventies. Today it is an unquestioned reality that women in management have come to stay. Each decade has strengthened women's entry and positions in the organisations. Each decade has generated a unique focus and characteristics of women in organisations.

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.

For women entry in to managerial positions in organisations is a culmination of academic performance, achievement and hard work. They have entered the

organisations with ambitions and aspirations of a career for themselves and a career path. The recruitment is at the entry i.e. management trainee level. The women are young, mostly unmarried and at a threshold to enter work as well as marriage. This implies that the social sectors of life for those women are going to be around the corner. Marriage and motherhood are bio-social phases of life which these women will encounter. This means they will have to manage and make choices with the ambitions and aspirations of a career as well as marriage, motherhood and social roles. Few organisations have initiated and designed some organisations policies to facilitate management of these multiple roles. But the dilemma continues to be encountered by women, men, organisations and the family. 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.

Organisations who employ women have to deal with issues of task allocation, performance evaluation, education, competition, mobility, promotions and social stereotypes about both women and men. Most women felt that expectations of organisations on the job from both men and women were similar. Organisations tend and attempt not to differentiate or discriminate in job allocation, evaluation of performance, mobility and tasks between men and women. However, the superiors', colleagues' and subordinates' perception about organisational policies on women are perceived and experienced differently. Most men managers believe there is difference in how organisations treat the women as compared to men in the same positions and levels. The senior managers accept the women have their own issues around work and home as well as when they are on out-of-town assignments. And as such some sensitivity needs to be extended to them as well. These issues need to be addressed by organisations designing relevant policies. The men colleagues resent some of these considerations extended to women. The men colleagues argue that if women are seeking equality and equity they ought not be demanding special privileges and considerations. The men colleagues believe this gives an added edge and an advantage to women on the other hand argue that given the social role and responsibilities the women take the caring, nurturing and nursing roles to the children as well as the larger social familial roles to relate with the extended family. The women believe as this is the social reality which they are not fighting but accepting then the organisations must design policies which facilitate. Then this is not a privilege or a special considerations but part of Indian social and familial living reality. The subordinate men see these considerations as a privilege to all seniors and specially to women.

### **Task Allocation**

In the initial phase of women's entry into management organisations tended to demarcate what roles and jobs could or could not be given to women. Women were largely given soft options like desk jobs which were regular, stable and did not require

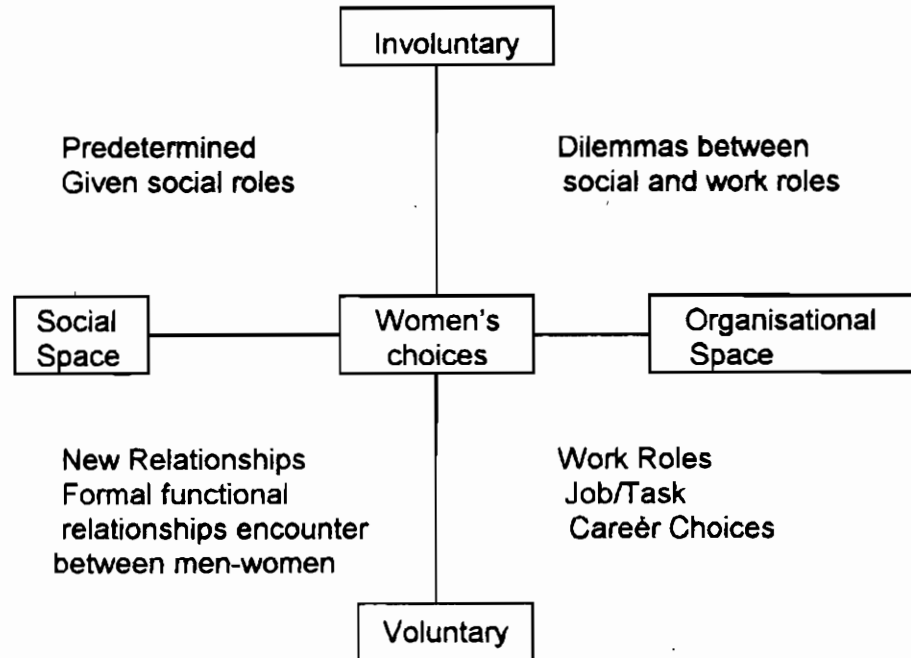
late hours or travel. Women themselves focused on their job and did not visualise a career path in the corporate ladder (Parikh and Shah, 1990). They doubted their legitimacy in the organisations and conformed to the structure hierarchy and allocation of jobs and accepted the denials and under-utilisation of their full potentials. Similarly, women found it difficult to accept their role in policy and strategy formulation. They attitudinally placed themselves in infrastructural and service roles. When women accepted their managerial positions they believed that they needed to work twice as hard to prove their capabilities and competence. (Parikh and Shah, 1990). Women enter the organisation on merit and as such are qualified for the jobs they recruited for. Yet the women themselves feel they need to prove their legitimacy through task performance. Organisations tend to over supervise, protect and control women more often than men.

In most organisations women believe that organisations are really not prepared for women's entry. In a factory or a plant women are treated in a somewhat protected manner. Seniors do not know how to relate to women in a formal functional relationship. However, in the decade of the nineties there is lot more acceptance of women in their senior roles in the corporate offices. Similarly, as compared to the seventies and eighties, today's professionally trained and educated women are ready to go in the rural interiors and are willing to rough it out. There is distinctly a shift in women's own attitudes about themselves and about what they can and cannot do. Women are also more prepared to deal with themselves in interface with others far more effectively than before. However, this does not mean that large number of organisations, men and women are supportive and understanding of women's constraints, safety and security. The point being made here is that in the decade of the nineties, professional women are more equipped to manage themselves in the interface with new settings, men and organisations. The women want to be treated at par with their men colleagues for tasks and performance and be evaluated on their performance and merit. The concern for special attention is around the issues is only some of the facilities like accommodation and toilets that they are willing to accept privileges.

In most organisations women's capabilities are under-utilised. Women are largely placed in metro cities and in large manufacturing units. Some women would like to go to a smaller plants and on a greenfield location. This is more so when they are unmarried and are not tied up with social roles and responsibilities. There are organisations where women have persisted and got allocated jobs which are tough even for women. The women have done well and earned the respect of women. There are examples about where women engineers have accepted jobs at the airports for aviation fuelling and similar other settings. However, there are some other organisations which do not allocate sales function job to women more so in rural areas or small towns. All these underlying beliefs and assumptions about women create a context of work where women experience a distantiation from the mainstream of managerial tasks in organisations. In the context of transformation occurring both in Indian society and organisations (Parikh and Shah, 1990 & Parikh and Farell, 1991) there are many positive and facilitating processes for women in managerial positions as well as inhibiting barriers from socio-cultural context as well as organisations. A large number of women find and experience that in reality there is distinctly a glass ceiling which women believe they cannot cross and which organisations find difficult to remove.

Essentially the issue revolves around legitimacy of women's entry into formal work organisations, her induction and orientation, her space and location in the organisation, her job and task allocation, her formal and functional interfaces with superiors, colleagues and subordinates, and finally here performance evaluation and rewards or non-rewards. Women's social space and social role defined by social structures and systems are involuntary whereas her entry into organisations space and role is voluntary. Today women accept their legitimacy in the organisation and are determined to be professionally oriented managers. (Parikh and Shah 1990, Parikh and Tamilselvan, 1989).

**Figure 1**  
**Women's Choices Between Social and Organisational Space**



Women aspire for new relationship and work roles with task responsibilities, career paths and corporate roles. Yet they experience and live with the burden and baggage of traditional social systems and role inhibiting their growth, choices and options. Organisations are equally caught between social meanings of women's role and new emerging occupational meanings of women's roles. In this context the women's dilemmas are around compromises or choices, surrender or autonomy dependence-independence or inter-dependence and guilt of non choice, non being or initiatives and new beginnings.

## **Task Relationships**

One of the most significant issues confronting women in management generally and specifically in organisations is their relationships in the organisations. The relationships and interfaces revolves around relating with superiors, colleagues and subordinates at task levels. Women find it difficult to make task demands or exercise task authority upwards with male superiors. Women find it most difficult to make demands on male colleagues. If they do the women are perceived as aggressive. The social processes make it very difficult for men to accept the authority of women even in functional or task situations.

Most women felt that relating with the superiors was easier. In many organisations, superiors tended to treat the women with concern, state the job expectations clearly, and were supportive. Most women believed that the seniors also wanted the women to succeed and as such encouraged them so that women and the organisation both experienced a sense of achievement. As to the relations with colleagues there existed lot more competitiveness. The men colleagues felt that the women were provided more consideration and privileges and often felt resentful and hostile towards the women colleagues. The subordinates accepted and respected the management trainees who were women. However those women who had risen from the secretarial ranks to managerial and administrative positions continue to be perceived in the earlier mode of infrastructure and service roles. The acceptance of role change and status of these women took lot more time before the women earned respect, status and equations with others in the system. The superiors, on the other hand, on women sincere, committed and hardworking. In crisis, when women were confronted with performance appraisal and task demands were made, some women tend to become emotional. These emotional responses of women were difficult to handle by men superiors. Most men said they become and feel helpless, resentful and uncomfortable. They were in a damned position. If they supported, the tasks would suffer, and if they did not, they were perceived as insensitive, callous and inhuman.

With women colleagues, the men find it difficult to handle what they call the aggressiveness of women. The subordinates both men and women respected the women especially in the managerial cadre where women were professionally educated and qualified. If the women performed and came through as capable and competent the women earned respect and were accepted quite well. Over time effective functioning teams emerged where men and women worked as partners.

## **Organisational Culture**

The most dominant characteristics of some organisations' working culture was perceived by women as aggressive. The women found the men colleagues competitive and aggressive. If you are not aggressive you are not perceived as effective. Most women felt that over a period of time they have become more aggressive and have lost some feminine and softer aspect of themselves. According to many women the observation from family and friends is that these women have changed within six months of being in organisations which are in the forefront, successful and aggressive. The aggressiveness is reflected in women acquiring strong opinions, getting



entrenched in arguments, losing flexibility and negotiability, insensitive to others opinions and feelings, becoming closed and as such losing openness and empathy and overall acquiring an attitude of "I know better". Women have also become more competitive more so with men colleagues. The overall organisational culture of such organisations provided acceptance of women at certain levels of management. Crossing the invisible threshold of senior managerial levels impacting and influencing organisational policies was most difficult. Whether it was the women's membership in dual systems of family and work and as such break in the career, or the fewer number of women at entry level only a short time ago or an unconscious ambivalence from both women, men and the organisations, the fact remains that women are not in senior positions in many organisations. There were some organisations in this study where the contribution of women in performance, achievements and successes were well known and recorded. A very few women reached the senior and top management positions and at the board levels of financial institutions. These women can be counted finger tips, remembered by names and respected. However, for a larger number of competent, capable and professional women they arrived at the organisation threshold which they could not or were not allowed to cross. The barriers were high and deeply embedded in the social psyche of all women-men and the organisations.

Another distinctive feature of Indian organisations and perhaps most organisations is that there are clear boundaries between the women in the management cadre and women providing infrastructural services. There is a visible difference in terms of confidence, capabilities, attire, their presence and behaviour. There is a code of conduct, and an unarticulated code of behaviour which women in the management cadre follow. The organisational culture maintains the dignity and personal boundary of women. Women reflected that they felt safe and work in all these organisations and have not experienced and sexual harassment of any kind. This makes them appreciate the work and professional culture of organisations they were working in.

There are many organisations where there is a differentiation between technical, personnel and managerial positions. Though the technical people are essential for tasks, the status, significance and visibility in terms of promotions goes to the managerial cadre. This process of comparative evaluations creates a fragmentation in the organisation between technical and managerial staff. This becomes further enhanced with women who are part of the technical staff. The perceptions are that at some level of growth even the career paths, opportunities and growth acquire a differential pace and the managers are more at an advantage than the technical staff. As such the women in the technical cadre experienced a two layered disadvantage of being technical and of being women. However, this process helped the women understand that men were also discriminated, denied and deprived and that they too felt marginalised

### **Men Managers and Working Wives**

Most men and women felt that some organisations are more responsive and perhaps more sensitive to women managers than the men with working wives. Today's living reality is that it is becoming apparent that younger men managers have working wives, while a majority of senior manager have non working wives. As such the senior

managers often were not sensitive to the issues of dual career couples. While some senior managers were somewhat sensitive to the specific social issues about women manager's role in the family setting and as such were supportive in times of social crisis.

The men managers felt that when the social setting required that they give emphasis and respond as sons, fathers and husbands the organisation saw them as irresponsible for tasks and organisations. Some seniors however, were more open to the men managers playing good and ideal sons. The new life space requiring the partnership and supportive role between dual careered couples has a long distance to go before the organisations are responsive to working wives of their men managers. This created resentment in the men colleagues for the organisations and often the men turned hostile to women who had such support and understanding from the organisations.

### **Organisation Policies Regarding Women**

There are definitely some specific policies designed by the organisations keeping in mind women's entry and needs which are extended to women. Some organisations have designed training programmes and workshops on Life Goal Planning, Partnership at Home and Work, Integrating Women and Men at work and similar other inputs to understand the new paradigms of women and men working together in organisations. These are accepted by seniors but the male colleagues find it difficult to accept. For example

1. Accommodation and living facilities may be given to women earlier, nearer the work place and perhaps better facilities.
2. There are certain locations where women may not be posted. However, there are women who have initiated and asked to be sent, have been posted in rural and backward areas. They have gone, taken up the challenge, stayed and performed well.
3. Flexitime for women after child birth.
4. Career break for women after child birth.
5. Contact and negotiable working hours on career break.
6. Reemployment after career break.
7. Assisting in transfers after marriage when husband is transferred.

These are policy issues specifically related to women which are resented largely by men managers. However, there are other issues which women carry as their exclusive cross and burden.

### **Dilemmas confronted by Women**

1. At the entry level women feel that they need to work harder to prove their competence, capabilities in being as good as their male colleagues. The dilemma confronted by women is between earning respect or acceptability.
2. There are many organisations where the culture is to work late hours and on weekends and holidays. No one in such organisations states or demands that they

are required to stay late but the work culture is such. As such women has feel compelled to stay late hours. This adds to their stress in management of multiple roles and multiple systems. If the women live in joint families this process creates added stress for they are always at work and never for social duties and obligations.

3. After marriage management of dual systems, and multiple roles and memberships makes demands and creates stress.
4. Pregnancy, child birth and re-entry into work.
5. Managing the external interface of work and career, management of home, children and social roles.
6. Career break and the issue of seniority.
7. Rising the corporate ladder and entry into senior management positions.
8. Lack of formal social get-together makes it a lonely place for women in organisations specially when there are very few women. There are very few women in organisation and as such zero women friends/
9. For single women, lack of get to-gethers and stereotype images about single women makes it difficult to build relationships with male colleagues. .
10. Many organisations are good place to work but a difficult places to have friends.
11. Major cities add to the isolation, lack of time and preoccupations in managing the infrastructures for home.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

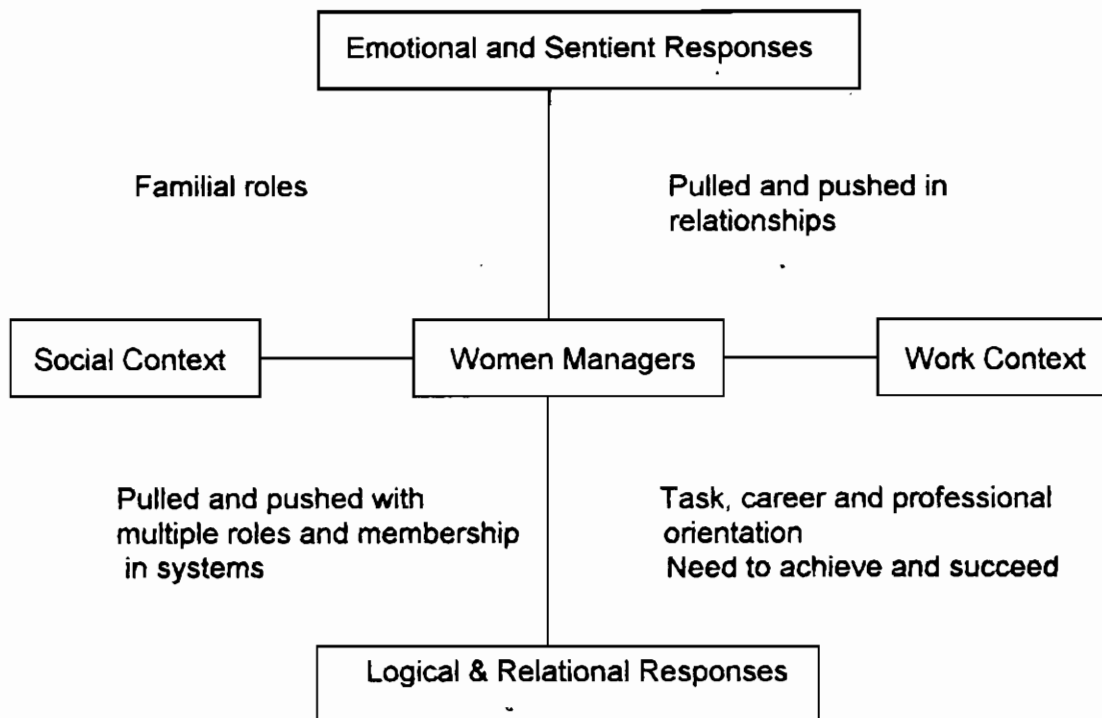
Discussions with many women and men of several organisations suggests the following:

1. The women recruits of the nineties as management trainees have been brought up in a social milieu where they have experienced women in formal organisations and managerial roles.
2. The women who have entered the organisations are career oriented women. However, one set of women feel that their significant priority is career and a profession while some others feel that home and family and moreso mother's role is significant enough to give up work for sometime.
3. Success and achievement in organisation gets carried over to social settings. They are respected and envied in social settings and criticised as well.
4. Organisations structures and roles are influenced by social structures and as such they can be constraining in work relationships or allocation of tasks. If attitudes of women, men and organisations are transformed to acceptance of achievement and success at work then the potentials of women can be actualised far more effectively.
5. Femininity and being a women is both a strength and a constraint in the organisation. However, women need to learn to acquire self respect and valuing of themselves. When women learn and accept their own dignity, their encounters with others and the system become easier.

Women with membership in multiple roles and multiple systems encounter specific dilemmas within themselves. These are

1. Women experience personal constraints on entering organisations. These are maternity leave, motherhood, demands from social relationships and systems and competition from colleagues both women and men.
2. The social demands such as births, deaths, marriages, illness and sickness of children and family members are responsibilities of women. They become major constraints on punctuality and effectiveness at work. Women experience and carry the stress.
3. Most women felt that they could handle more responsibility and are capable of rising to senior management positions.
4. Women believe they can relate more effectively with superiors, colleagues and subordinates if the organisation and social and work environment were more supportive.
5. Women are part of multiple contexts. The women get pulled and pushed between these two. They are emotional in one system and logical and rational in the other.

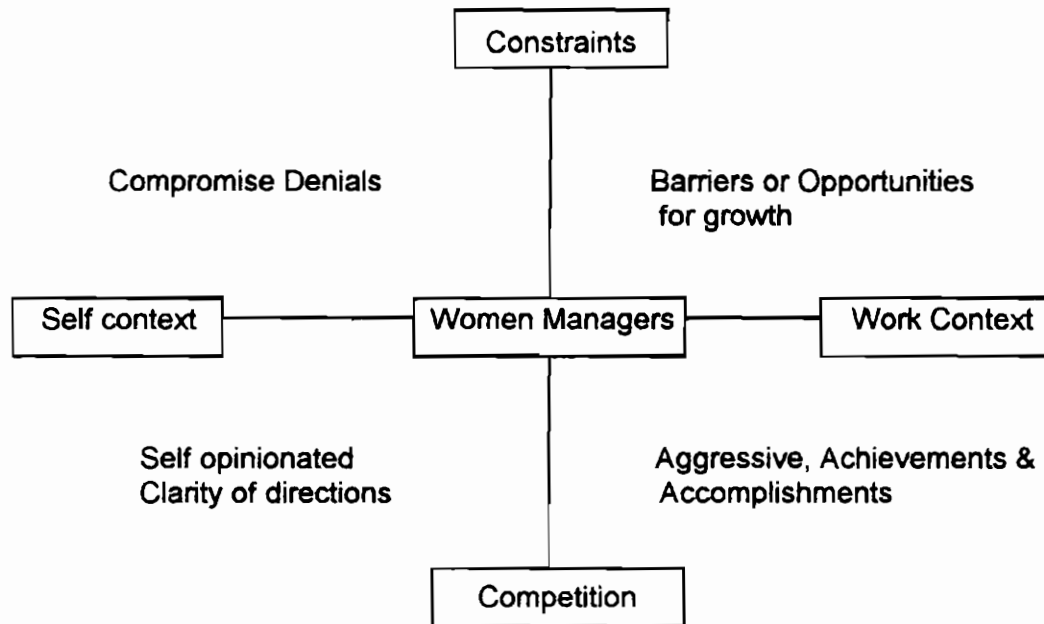
**Figure 2**  
**Emotive-Cognitive Interface with Social and Work Context**



The membership in organisation provides women with personal meaning, legitimacy, economic autonomy as well as self-reliance. However, in this the women loose out on the securities of traditional structures and social roles. They end up carrying the responsibility, baggage and burden of expectations and perfection.

Often the two worlds of home and work compete with each other.

**Figure 3**  
**Women's Dilemma in the Two Worlds**



Women have accepted work context and roles as an integral part of their life, meaning, aspirations and ambitions. They have to deal with both constraints and opportunities and keep giving shape to their roles, their selves and their lives.

#### **Directions and Choices for Women and Organisations**

1. Organisations and women carry maps and definitions of organisations which are logical and rational.
2. These maps and definitions of organisations determine their roles in the organisation and as such contribute to their location in organisation structures, systems and relationships.
3. Women require an understanding of structures of organisation and their functioning anchored in an organisation and management perspective.
4. Organisations can facilitate women exploring and acquiring clarity of their roles and identity so as to locate them in a professional identity which incorporates social identity.
5. This clarity of location in one's identity would facilitate women and organisation to make new and meaningful responses in relationships (superiors, colleagues and

- subordinates) encounters between women and men and relevant and dignified action choices.
6. Both women, men and organisation need to identify relevant characteristics of professionalism and accept the multiplicity of roles and membership in multiple systems simultaneously.
  7. Organisations need to be clear about their policies [and communicate it to all employees] about recruitment, induction, infrastructural facilities and support systems available to all concerned and to women.
  8. Working women and men with working wives to be provided with a basket of choices to facilitate families to evolve a new and relevant concept and definition of home family and work.

Essentially, women have found these organisations a good place and a safe place to work and overall a good set of people to work with. Formulating coherent policies keeping in mind that women have some specific issues and constraints most organisations could create a healthy work context for its women and men managers. Society need to socialise its members into new and very different role of daughters and sons, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, parenting experiences of home and family. Similarly new kinds of organisation models, systems, interfaces and processes need to be evolved keeping in tune with the transformation occurring in the roles of women and men and the global business environment. To shape a new organisation, to discover new meanings in relationships and transactions and evolve a healthy working interfaces between women and men organisations need to design new structures, leadership role models, healthy working environment and educate a critical mass of employees who are then sensitive to the gender realities.

The twenty-first century, the new millennium is at the threshold of unfolding. The new century will enhance the dignity of the human child, the maturing of the society will take place to provide space for growth and the maturing of the organisations where women and men work together to discover the fulfilment and expression of their creativity and involvement. There will be maturing of social relations when women and men will create a home and family where replenishment of life is experienced. Family, home, relationships both social and work, expression of responsiveness and emotions will be the anchors of living. The work settings will need to have a rhythm with the social setting and expression of achievements and experiences of success will be the new space where women and men's encounter with each other will create that energy to make healthy choices and take new directions.

### **Entry of Unfolding of the New Millennium**

Indian women and men are standing at a cross-road. What are the choices the women, men and institutions can create to step into the twenty-first century. For Indian women there are very few role models of modern times who can inspire them as ideals, and find courage to follow and make choices by them. They have discovered the limitations of Western role models as well as the role models of men from the Indian society. They do not wish to be echoes and shadows of men of the past and a bygone era and repeat the history and sagas of their mothers and grandmothers or the role

models of the cultural lore. So what are the choices the Indian women have. Discussions and dialogues with a representative of successful women have reflected and articulated some processes.

The leap into the twenty first century is an uphill path. First of all Indian women will have to sidestep or transcend the monolithic social structures and give birth to a concept of a new kind of a home, a new kind of a family and a new kind of relationships amongst the family members. Essentially, new traditions will have to be designed and a different kind of social context will have to be shaped.

Similarly the context of work will have to undergo significant transformation in their existing paradigms. Work places will have to be places of sensitivity to the gender differences as well as similarities of human beings. Organizations will have to recognize and translate the gender specific talents and create settings where these talents can flourish. Organizations have to encourage and reinforce creativity and innovativeness, performance and merit based appraisal, and dynamism and energy of both women and men. Women and men encounter at work spaces need to be redefined in the context of partnership at work context. Home, family and social work roles need to acquire a harmonious rhythm so that transfer of stress from one system to the other does not take place.

This means that Indian women of tomorrow will have to journey as heroines and take charge of their destiny as well as accept the legitimacy of their roles to give shape to the multiple systems they are in.

Indian women as they stand at the threshold of the end of the twentieth and the beginning twenty first century must bid farewell to the known and familiar path of glorified and idealized role models prescribed by the society. They must without fear and without looking back cross the threshold and enter an unknown land with a sense of openness to discovery. They have to be prepared to encounter the new landscapes and their threats and terrors from the new world as much as creating landmarks by their thoughts, deeds and actions. There are many a kindeed souls whom they will encounter who will join to create new traditions and institutions. The Indian women must find their voices which have been held in silence and in abeyance for centuries to sing the song of life and living, achievements and accomplishments and experience the wonders of the universe around them.

The women hold the destiny of the world of tomorrow as they will breathe life into the progeny of tomorrow. The Indian women will discover the magic of enlivening the space and people and the touch to heal the pathos and sorrows of centuries. The women will give shape to tomorrow and create tranquillity and harmony in relationships.

Just as the Indian culture and society is forever unfolding so are the paths of Indian women. The Indian women need to own up and accept their indomitable spirit and bring together their collective energy to create that space where movement and stability, sound and silence, dawn and dusk, light and darkness and chaos and order acquire a new rhythm. There is also a space beyond the horizon where there is hope and engagement with the world. With new dreams there are investments, with offerings there are boundaries and above all there is human grace as well as

encountering and destroying of the violations and oppressiveness. In essence Indian women will accept their wisdom like the sea, their softness and intensities like the wind, their rootings like the mountains and their dreams like the infiniteness of the sky. However, their strength lies in the solidness and resilience of rejuvenations of the earth to ever transform itself a new. In this lies the future and the hope of Indian women to transform the culture and society and to give birth to new organizations and institutions.

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