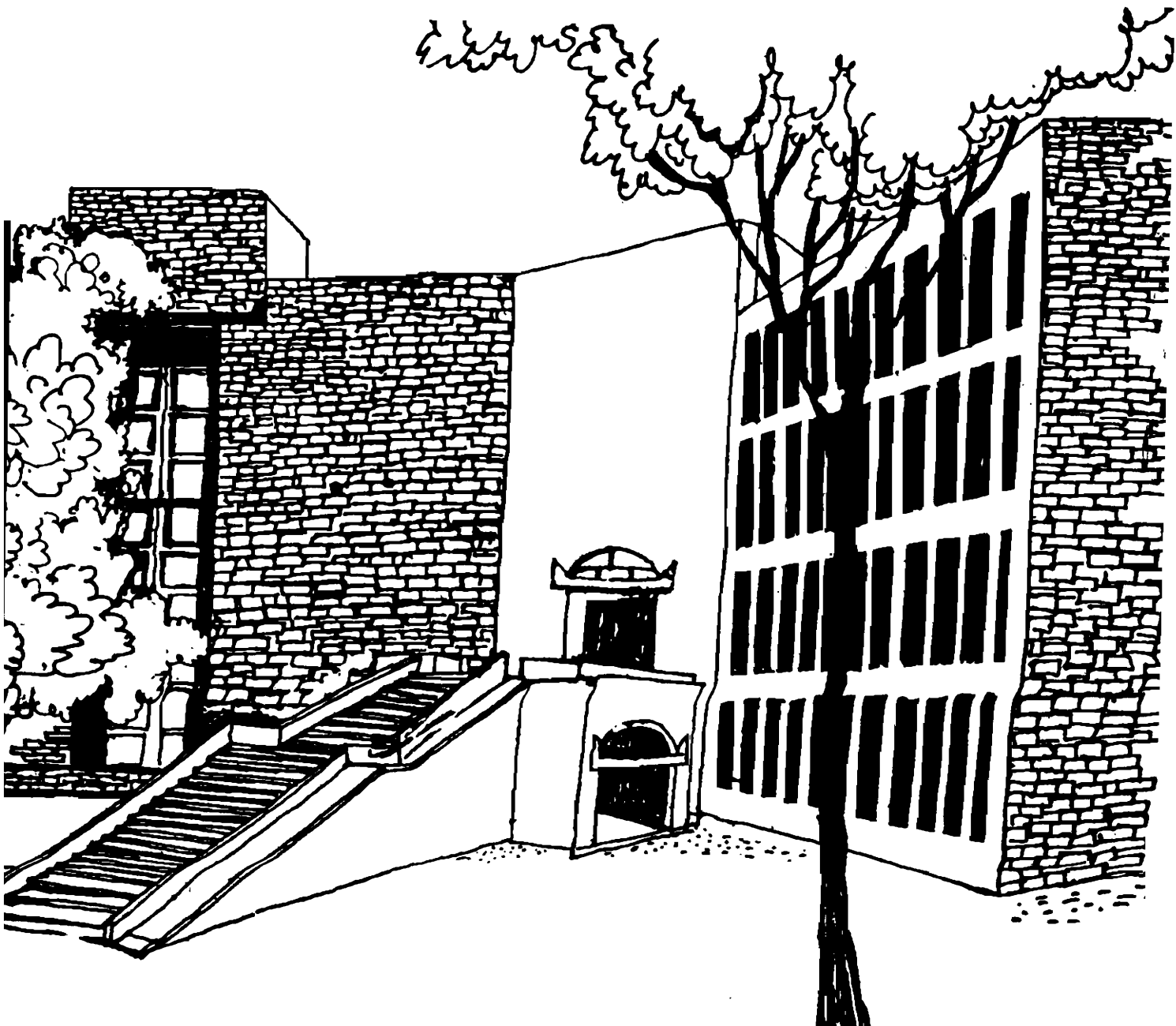




Working Paper



**Women in Management
Challenges and Opportunities**

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W.P.No. 2001-12-03

December 2001

116 83

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

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ON

**WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

OCTOBER 15, 2001

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TRANSITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN

Abstract

Women's roles and so also men's roles exist in the context of a society and culture, which allocates and defines roles for both. Society and culture provide myths and epics depicting the journey of a hero as he unfolds his life to seek the answers to the questions of who am I and what is the purpose of life. However, there are no epics or myths where women take a journey and an adventure to unfold their lives to discover who they are. Their stories and their life are always around relationships, search for meanings in relationships and sacrifice or investment in relationships. The women have lived contained within a narrow space, shrunken roles and frozen initiatives. After centuries of agrarian living technological revolution and industrialization opened the minds of women shattering the myths that they need to walk a few steps behind. Women journeyed into educational fields and then organizations and work outside home. This journey was undertaken in four stages over five decades. In this time women have found answers to questions about their identity. It is now time for all womankind it is their role to build a new heritage, new role models and give shape to the destiny of the girl child of tomorrow and in the centuries to come.

TRANSITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN

Across centuries and across time the role of women remains rooted in eternity. It remains the same and at the same time goes through many changes. It takes centuries for women's roles to unfold in different forms, shapes and sizes and to move in new directions. There are some locales where women live in a bygone century chained and shackled to the social structures and codings and wishes of others who carve a code of conduct on stone. Whereas there are other locales where women struggle to find freedom and space to define their roles in a new context with new occupations and forge a new path for themselves and their lives.

Women's roles and so also men's roles exist in the context of a society and culture, which allocates and defines roles for both. These definitions determine what each one will do and not do and how each will relate to the other. What is this society and culture. Society is that institution which creates and provides order, a rhythm for existence a structure for security and safety and a sense of belonging. Society as it exists, depicts the role and behaviour of women coded in ideal role models.

Culture is that space which provides unfolding, direction of growth and the potential to move forward and a heritage to be proud of. Culture also codes the psyche with values and beliefs anchored in institutions. Culture creates the burden of baggage for each individual and the collectivity. The socio-cultural context is both an equilibrium and a rhythm of flow for mankind to discover himself. Culture also provides myths and epics depicting the journey of a hero as he unfolds his life to seek the answers to the questions of who am I and what is the purpose of life. However, there are no epics or

myths where women take a journey and an adventure to unfold their lives to discover who they are. Their stories and their life are always around relationships, search for meanings in relationships and sacrifice or invest in relationships. This is what women are idealized, glorified or deified for.

What have been the life and the journey of women who walk the path of centuries and the millenniums of human existence?

The women of the traditional agrarian society have always lived within the homes and their community. However, they have lived and walked a lonely and isolated path of their inner being. They hid themselves behind the veil of mysticism and remained an enigma to the outer world. Their steps outside have largely been with their men folk and families. In this journey of relationship the women have the energy of fire and the resilience of the phoenix. However, at other times they surrender and encounter violations and humiliations of victimization and become prey to lust and violence. In encountering this with little support and protection women have found solace in their inner solitude.

The socio-cultural context of an agrarian society carries the moans and groans in the winds of time and rivers of tears of millions of women who have been violated and denied the uniqueness of their own life and existence. They have lived contained within a narrow space, shrunken roles and frozen initiatives. However, within each home, each family, each collectivity of the community some women have taken one step of enlarging the space of their existence. This has happened in times of the crisis. The crisis may be within a home, the crisis may be in the family, may be in the community, neighborhood or a country. It may be in times of peace or in time of war some women have risen to

the need of the hour to provide that courage and that sacrifice. This kind of women became the anchors to release and sustain energy. They tide the storm and the hurricane and remain steadfast. In such a step women make a small beginning. And sure enough they settle down for the next generation to move and take the next step.

After centuries of agrarian living and in the process of unfolding and turning of the centuries came the technological revolution and industrialization. With the historical cycle of ebb and flow of the culture and society there was an emergence of institutions of education. Slowly, but steadily this space got opened up for both women and men to enter the portals of primary education, higher education and still higher education. First in small numbers and then as masses, women entered and stayed in the academic institutions. They discovered they were intelligent, they could work hard, they could achieve, bring results, succeed, hold the ranks and stand next to others performing with excellence. The families and educational institutions discovered, that women not only preformed well but also excelled as compared to the men.

This opened the minds of women shattering the myths that they need to walk a few steps behind, that they do not have the intellectual potentials and or need support and are dependent. Women discovered that not only were they intelligent, capable, competent and successful but is also creative and innovative. With this knowledge and awareness women made forays into the inner domain of their being and becoming and pushed the frontiers of their space to actually enter the once forbidden domain.

From the first footsteps into the educational institutions, to becoming teachers, nurses and doctors women went on to become engineers, scientists, pilots, astronauts and telecommunication experts. One by one they entered the portals of banks, insurance

companies, automobile plants, oil and gas industry, and politics to name a few. Not only did they enter these fields, they stayed in the forefront at significant managerial and leadership positions. From the turn of the last century standing side by side with men and walking amidst batons and guns of the police, Indian women joined the freedom struggle. This struggle was not only for the freedom of the country but was also for their own freedom of from the chains and shackles of past captivity. They broke out of the prisons made by themselves, others, systems and traditions. The Indian women have walked many a miles, stood by many a mileposts to pause and reflect on the steps they had taken and then walked again to create new landmarks. There are many women who have walked to their destinations through unknown paths.

However, in the unfolding of the culture, society and the given era many dimensions of women's life remain frozen in the times of the society gone by. Let us take a glimpse into the various thresholds of growing up of a girl child from childhood to adolescence to adulthood.

There was a time when women just glimpsed their childhood. The childhood just played hide-n-seek with the girl child. Before she could discover her childhood and bask in the freedom, the girl child became a women and entered the harsh realities of an adult social world into which she had no legitimate psychological space. She entered the world of hard core realities of being wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. The women of yesteryears became old even before their childhood could pause and share the magic and enchantment of fireflies shining at night or following the butterflies in the fields of wild sunflowers. And just as much the girl child did not experience her childhood she had no adolescence.

Across centuries and across the millennium the girl child knowingly or unknowingly crosses the threshold of childhood into adolescence in a similar manner. The adolescence of a girl child gets shrouded in doubts, guilts, discovery of ones body, and mysteries not to be unveiled. The enchanting world of discovery was forbidden, the melody of beckoning music and rhythm of music was forbidden to her and her own awakening and sunshine are all but closed to her. The threshold and entry into the world of adolescence, which is the core of magical discoveries of a togetherness and creation, is only romanticized to mask her with dreams. The realities of encounter confront her with conquest and the cumulative debris and ruins, oppressive and suppressive relationships and the old dictates of a bygone era and centuries.

The woman does not really have a childhood, nor adolescence and neither the blossoming of the womanhood. She is the reservoir of unending and infinite emotional resources, generously distributing her bounty to all those who are around her. Her strength and the spirit of survival are her solitude within, her silence within, and her voice within, which is only for herself. There is none to invite her to seek her out, to hear, to listen and to decode the anguish, the guilt, the burden, the frustration and the futility she life within.

Those who hear her are terrified of her silent anguish those who listen to her cannot bear the burden of the girl child on non-action and those who receive cannot grace the offerings. Despite this harsh reality, there are also rays of hope--a new dawn.

The ongoing march of time turned the centuries and millenniums around. As women made some forage and entered the new world of education and occupation some girls had glimpses of what childhood could be and what they would like it to be. Yet, for a

large majority of women in homes, families, communities and countries childhood was but a mirage of unfulfilled dreams and wishes. The girl child just turned into a woman without any celebrations of crossing the magical threshold. She was an unwelcome visitor in her own home and an unwelcome visitor in another home yet to be. All the social dramas of entry and living in the in-laws home as an unwelcome competition gets repeated in the lives of women over and over again.

The women's lives are captives of the traditional agrarian society and its ideal code of conduct. This idealism takes away their choices of being and becoming. The being surrenders to the voices of others and becoming is stifled, chained and shackled at the altar of dos and don'ts, shoulds and should nots and musts and must nots. These codings haunt women into surrender and sacrifice. The dreams may become nightmares, and the nightmares become a reality when for millions of women they face only dead ends and walls and clueless mazes from which there is no way out.

Let us take a glimpse into women's journey into organizations and work outside home.

PHASE I: WOMEN IN THE FIFTIES

The women of the fifties fall into two categories. Two sets of women entered the organizations for two distinct reasons. One set took up jobs exclusively for economic and monetary reasons. These women were educated and the family required the resources. Some women entered formal work organization or businesses due to the loss or death of a family member and the women took on the role of income generation and home responsibilities. The second set belonged to business and professionally oriented families. The women were educated, were not compelled to do household chores, were

intelligent and capable and wanted to utilize their education and or their time in purposive activities.

As such, the women in the first phase of entry held on tenaciously to whatever was available, whatever was given and contributed their best to both the systems. They fulfilled social role responsibilities as their duty and sought a sense of fulfillment in their accomplishments. However, they remained caught between the pulls and pushes of both systems. Their attitudes as well as that of the organization's remained rooted in the traditional modality. The transformation of Indian women today is from an enigmatic figure clad and covered in meters of fabric to an educated, capable, competent, successful go-getter. This image is as real and alive as the arduous path she has travelled in 5000 years to arrive where she has, in the last fifty years.

These women have dared to walk an untraversed path, and have had the courage to make new beginning and pay the price of the choices they have made. Organizationally, it was difficult for women to have a similar career path and growth as their male counterparts. Existing cultural and societal patterns of discrimination and deprivation continued to make inroads even into the evaluation and promotion policies of organizations.

PHASE II: WOMEN IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES

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

and aspired for career growth in the organization. This was quite unlike their mothers who had stayed home or the women in organization before them who were satisfied with the responsibilities but did not actively seek career paths. This was the second generation of working women who had aspirations to perform and be rewarded, could walk alongside men and do as well or better, could deliver results without seeking privileges of social roles and were not complaining. They were willing to stay longer hours, and perform and prove their capabilities. They also demanded that the organization needed to review their policies and take stock of women's contribution rather than just give responsibilities or keep them in infrastructural or marginal roles.

In this phase of history and the movement of the country education provided increased knowledge base for both men and women and the organizations experienced unprecedented growth opportunities. This led to a faster pace of movement in the career paths of employees. Some of the new realities of women in management in India in Phase II of their career path reflect the following patterns:

1. Women regarded work as an integral aspect of their life space.
 2. Income generation and a career choice both were equally significant.
 3. Educated and qualified, women aspired for a different role and life than their mothers and grandmothers.
 4. They wanted homes, marriage and children as well as a career.
 5. They accepted the social traditional role behaviour from the older generation but from their husbands, colleagues and children they expected understanding and support in their career paths. They looked for redefinition of roles and redesigning of systems.
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6. In managerial roles the women were willing to carry their share of the work responsibilities but also wanted participation in policy formulation and decision making. They wanted their voices to be heard as employees and managers of the tasks and not through social role relationships.

A significant number of women from the fifties and sixties broke the barrier of junior levels of management and entered middle level of management. This breakthrough was also reinforced by women entering directly at the middle level of management based on their professional education. They became equipped with management knowledge, skills, tools and techniques. They successfully passed the examinations to enter the next level promotions. They proved their capabilities and competence, achieved their tasks and targets and performed well. Women began to earn respect from their superiors, colleagues and subordinates.

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

PHASE III: WOMEN IN THE EIGHTIES

This was the era of professionals and professionalism. Women of the fifties, sixties and seventies had accepted both their social and work roles. They played the social role in the traditional mode and to some extent carried that to the organization. They rode two horses and kept the spaces separate. The model of men in successful career paths meant women had to surrender their femininity and sacrifice personal lives and relationships. Some women experienced motherhood as a chore and a responsibility.

This created dilemmas of choice between one and the other role or system. Women ended up becoming more like men managers. For women, work and working in organization were necessary but for a large sector of women in management, marriage was equally important and so was motherhood and social relations. However, the women of the eighties were not satisfied with this fragmentation and differentiation. They were over competent and underutilized in their middle managerial positions. They had their personal vision of organization membership, their career paths, and their location in the structure of the organization based on their qualification and competence. The women of the eighties had invested in themselves, designed a role and life space where they could manage their home and work interfaces and respond to the challenges and opportunities in the formal work organization.

PHASE IV: WOMEN IN THE NINETIES

The decade of the nineties can be categorized in two distinct phases. One phase consists between 1991 and 1998 and the other phase consists from the years beginning 1998 leading into the next millennium.

Women of the nineties have performed exceedingly well in the organizations as they came through as determined, assertive and committed to work. They are also experienced as developing better relationships with their colleagues and add to the overall collectivity of the organization. In addition, the women are described as having inherent qualities of management such as patience, tolerance, honesty, loyalty and communication skills.

On the one side one can portray a sunrise and a sunshine scenario for the women of today but on the flip-side India is a traditional society and both women and men live by deeply embedded social codings. Change is visible due to the changing mindsets, but the processes which go into the transition of women from a traditional to a professional identity, needs to be enhanced, multiplied and available to larger masses. A critical mass is emerging with some awareness, some understanding and some support. However, the country and its citizens both women and men need to accelerate the pace.

Essentially, the women of nineties have created niches of their own and are ready to perform the multiple roles of mother, wife and executive thus creating a space for themselves in family, society and workplace.

From closely guarded prisons and captivity women have heard their own voices, heard their call and beckoning of a new world and new life and walked on. The transformation of childhood to womanhood has been done with mysteries of hidden pathways walked in silence and loneliness with destinations clear in their own sights. With clarity of path and direction the women have walked miles while standing still at the same place. They reached the magic worlds of freedom and painted a world beyond the prisons and captivity. They produced magical canvas and provided magical colours of many hues and shades and stood by as their girl child ran and then ran faster and painted wide strokes with confident colours of freedom.

Today at the dawn of a new century and the turn of the millennium there are women who play the role of managers and leaders in the world of work. Organizations choose women from their rigorous selection process. They are given and take responsibility of jobs, tasks, roles and performance. They travel everywhere and anywhere. They use

state of the art technology. They attend board meetings and walk with men, their heads held high. They travel countries and continents far and wide. Yet they worry about being good wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law. They carry the pangs of guilt about motherhood of an agrarian society, while today they live in an industrialized society. The winds of change touch them in their dreams of becoming and yet they remain untouched in their social roles. They carry the many discontinuities of transformations in society but also live the continuity of the millenniums. What is that future, what is that elixir which they can find to find themselves? They have lived in the barrenness of the emotionless desert and become their own oasis; they live in fear of the memories of haunted violations and do not find safety and security in the lands of the woods and forests. They cannot hide in caves as they have lived so long in their inner solitude and they cannot sail the oceans as they carry the debris of broken dreams.

So what is in store for the women of today and tomorrow. What is their role to cross the threshold of a world gone and a world to emerge? What baton would she hand over to the girl child born today to flower as a child blossom as an adolescent and grace herself as a woman tomorrow. What heritage do they provide for all those unborn who could say to themselves that our foremothers left us a world where we could celebrate our life and the uniqueness of other existence. When generations of children unborn could be born in a world where the girl child will hold her childhood in her palm and dance with the magic shoes. Where the girl child would unravel her adolescence with dignity, respect, trust and faith in her being and becoming and where the girl child will walk into the world of womanhood to discover herself and her magic. She will have the answers to the questions of

Who am I?

Why am I in this world?

What is the purpose of my life?

And discover that she like all other human beings will add to and offer, replenish and nurture a rich life. She will listen to the winds of change and the free-floating spirit the whispers of the world to create and give shape to a complete life for women.

Women of today truly have a transitional but a directional role to play. In the midst of turbulence it is the woman who can anchor, in the midst of storm it is the woman who can stay calm, and in the midst of furry it is the woman who can be tranquil.

The solitude, the silence has wisdom and voice of centuries and millenniums. In the world of technology and machines, in the world of isolation, aloneness and ennui and in the world of articles and juxtapositions she has a voice of power with which she can beckon. For all womankind it is their role to build a new heritage, new role models and give shape to the destiny of the girl child of tomorrow and in the centuries to come.

I remember as growing child my father used to say-- Any home will not prosper if a girl child is unhappy. Any community will not prosper if the girl child is not singing with happiness. This nation will not prosper if the girl child and woman are not respected.

The call for women of today of this ancient civilization and our nation is to ensure that each child has a childhood, crosses the threshold into a world of adolescence and graciously walk into the world of adulthood. In this lies the freedom and stability to discover the unfolding of the magic and mysteries of human existence.

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