

"WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN THE PHILIPPINES"

by Nelia R. Marquez *

This year is International Women's Year and, as women, we look upon this observance with justifiable pride for the world has at last seen fit to set aside a year — not just a day, a week, or a month — in recognition of our role in the progress of mankind. As Filipino women, we are doubly proud for it means that the world, though unknowingly, has come to accept the uniquely Filipino belief that woman sprung from the same bamboo as man and is, therefore, his co-equal and partner.

Unlike the biblical version of the Genesis which had the first woman coming from the rib of the first man, Philippine mythology has it that the woman Maganda and man Malakas were pecked into existence by a giant bird that split the bamboo cylinder which contained both of them. But sad to say, the Philippines at the dawn of civilization was non-existent and the powerful nations that then governed the civilized world propagated and perpetuated the dictum of woman's inferiority to man.

This unfortunate circumstance was given further credence and validity, if we may call it that, by religion which, through its many forms and myriad dogmas, has dictated the secondary role that women must play in the development of nations and societies. In the Christian world, the obvious implications of the biblical version has since relegated the descendants of Eve, but for very few exceptions, into mere instruments of men's pleasure, prestige and ambition.

Despite centuries of Christianization and perhaps because of the strength of Philippine culture during the pre-Spanish era, it is to the credit of the Filipino man that he has always treated his female counterpart with respect and, oftentimes, even looked up to her with adoration. History tells us that at that time, the various tribal laws that governed pre-Spanish

¹ Paper presented at the 1975 PSA Annual Conference, Sept. 5, 1975.

² Chief, Management and Planning Staff, National Census and Statistics Office.

societies placed the Filipino women on equal footing with the men. They enjoyed equal rights of succession. Moreover, they were protected by the laws and, as a result, were extended privileges which even the men did not have.

Even among the Aetas, Ifugaos and other minor tribes, the women had the right to choose their husband and shared in the leadership structure. Among the Ifugaos, the wife not only kept the money but also exercised equal control with the husband over the family lands and property.¹ Among the Visayans, the woman had the right to leave the husband should he fail to support her and she "shall have the freedom and permission to marry another man."²

Thus, as the societies of the then known civilized western world exploited the women, the Filipino woman was "already liberated" because she was never considered a subservient subject or a slave in the first place.

But the coming of the Spaniards and the introduction of western culture into the country changed all that. So that now, this International Women's Year, we are afforded the opportunity to take a look into the present status of the Filipino women after 400 years of Christianization and westernization. This is also in pursuance of the United Nations' objective of setting into "motion dynamic action programmes to advance the status of women," now recognizing as it does the women's contribution to the total development effort.

This paper, therefore, intends to draw a picture of the Filipino women in general and the professionals among them in particular in line with the project of the UN Commission on the Status of Women to find out to what extent do women, as compared with men, have access to knowledge, economic resources and political power and what degree of personal autonomy do these resources permit.

Let us first take a look at how the more prominent career Filipino women of today view the status of the present-day Filipina:

Associate Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma of the Supreme Court observed that because of the belief that "woman made only from a part of man's body," her only purpose of existence

¹ Gregorio Zaide, et. al, *The Community*, Social Studies Publications Inc., Manila, 1974, p. 117.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

was "to be his mate, to follow, obey and serve him." But with the avalanche of political, economic, social and legal changes, women rebelled. Justice Palma pointed out that woman's subjected spirit soared forth in search of freedom from the confines of traditional roles of child bearing, child rearing and homemaking. "Woman was created neither to be the master or slave of man but to be his partner in shaping the destiny of mankind," she stressed.

"In the Philippines, we are particularly fortunate in what we enjoy equal status with men, especially in the fields of education and government services, at least in theory, that is." Justice Palma added, "the main problem at present is how to make women an army of competent members of society."³

While Justice Palma thinks that women enjoy equal status with men, Dr. Liceria B. Soriano in a paper presented at the U.P. Law Center on March 15, 1975 entitled "Women and Education" asked the question: "Have women really arrived as equals of men? In many instances, we still find vestiges of the sex-role differentiation, if not female discrimination," she said. "In the whole history of the Philippine Government, there has been only one woman cabinet member and this was assigned to the portfolio which by its very nature has been associated with the traditional function of women — social welfare."

The first woman justice of the Supreme Court was appointed only in 1974. The public school system got its first woman director after 70 years. In the Court of Appeals, there are only two women. There is only one woman president of a state college and one woman president of a government university. While statistics show that the teaching profession in this country is predominantly female, the same statistics show that only a small percentage of women attain positions higher than teacher.⁴

True, the Filipino women have never been denied the right to education. It is in our educational system that we learn our role in the society we live in. But through the years, our curriculum has not changed much especially in social aspects. Boys and girls are still assigned their respective sex-role concepts in school — the boys are prepared for their role

³ Lynn F. Romero, "Blazing the Trail for Libbers", MOD Magazine, Vol. VII, No. 192: Manila, April 25, 1975, p. 8.

⁴ "The Filipina: A Humanizing Force in Philippine Development," National Media Production Center: Manila, 1975, p. 45.

as providers of the home while the girls are trained for their role as homemakers.⁵ This has perpetuated the impression that the woman is good only for the home. This is one reason why women libbers concertedly take a dim view at textbooks presenting women as good cooks, good housekeepers and nothing else. The men, on the other hand, are illustrated in "manly" poses, driving cars or doing carpentry, never while washing dishes and baby sitting.⁶

Ambassador Leticia Ramos-Shahani has expressed a modified view: "The change in the standing of our women must be within the context of marriage and family for these are strong points in our society. The emancipated Filipina must combine the highest professional standards without losing her feminine instincts or her motherly care."

Mrs. Pura Santillan Castrence has this to say: "If man, therefore, concedes woman's place in development, no matter if, in that concession, there is neglect of the former women chores attributed to her, then she takes that place and plays the role accordingly. What will be given high consideration is the Filipino woman's important place in education, in health, in government, in professions, in community development, in social and cultural progress and in national economic growth."

In her article, "Role of Asian Women in Development," Mrs. Castrence espoused Myrdal's advice in his book "Asian Drama" that we have decided to ready ourselves for a change of attitudes. "Who else except women-educators-leaders, women-writers of textbooks, women teachers of kindergarten, the grades, high school and college teachers, could better influence young minds to think not in the context of self only but in that also of neighbor, community, country? None better is the expected answer."⁷

All this is summed up by American writer Diane Trilling, who said in her article "Culture, Biology, and Sexual Roles" that "man has generally set the cultural pace of the world and this explains why women have not made even a small fraction of the intellectual, scientific, or artistic cultural contributions which men have made . . ." We may protest that women's small contribution to culture reflects the way that men have contrived things to be — that is, we can blame woman's minor

⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶ Alice C. Villadolid, "The Liberated Filipina Redefines a Difficult Role", *Horizons USA* No. 8: American Embassy, Manila, 1975, p. 37.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

place in culture on *culture* — except that this leaves unanswered the question of why it is that over the long years, women have been willing that culture should follow the male dictates.⁸

To elucidate further on the opinions heretofore expressed, let us now deal with actual available statistics on the status of women in education, occupation, employment and perhaps politics and government in the Philippines.

EDUCATION —

The 1970 Census of Population registered a total of 1,083,760 professionals,⁹ 55.65 per cent of whom were females. While there were more women professionals than men, most of them were concentrated in only three major fields of study, namely: education with 76.32 per cent females; natural sciences, 59.64 per cent females; and medical sciences, 71.50 per cent females. The fields of humanities, social sciences, engineering, and agriculture are still dominated by the males. (See Table 1.)

A look at Table 2 and 2a shows that the Department of Education and Culture had graduated more females than males at a ratio of 3:2. In other words, for the past eight years (1964-1972) out of a total of 664,902 students who finished a degree, about 61.3 per cent were women. Table 2a shows that out of the nine major fields of study, five of them are already dominated by females.

Admittedly, women still have a long way to go to keep abreast with men in the fields of Fine Arts, Law, Engineering and Agriculture. But the mere fact that more than one third of Fine Arts graduates were females during this span of eight years, is a good indication that not far in the future this field shall eventually be another "woman's world". As Dr. Castrence had noted of recent developments: "now, one can almost say with exactness, name the career, and there would be a Filipino woman-example for it."

LABOR FORCE STATUS, OCCUPATION AND EMPLOYMENT —

The labor force participation rate of persons 10 years old and over has been declining for the past 18 years (1950-1974).

⁸ Pura S. Castrence, "The Role of Asian Women in Development," Impact Magazine: Manila, June 1971, Vol. VI, No. 6.

⁹ "Professionals" is defined as those persons finishing a college degree in the different fields of study.

During the survey rounds in May 1956,* the rate had been at 65.1 per cent for both males and females. The males had much higher participation rate of 80.3 per cent, while the females had 50.3 per cent. In May 1965, the participation rate of women suddenly declined to 38.7 per cent. The males during the same period also suffered a slight decline from 80.3 per cent to 76.4 per cent. After almost a decade, the latest survey in May 1974 registered further declines in the participation rates, 71.9 per cent and 34.2 per cent for males and females, respectively. (See Table 3.)

The survey rounds during the second quarter of the year (October or November) also showed the same downward trends and the participation rate for both sexes had declined to as low as less than 50 per cent. This means that less and less people, 10 years old and over, are seeking work or are working.

What could be the possible explanation to the declining proportion of women seeking employment or working? Can it be that the work at home is more demanding? Or, is it no longer necessary for the women to be employed as a result of the improved socio-economic condition of the family? Or, is it because women have given up hope of getting jobs because of discrimination so that during the survey rounds they were not considered in the labor force?

Due to the paucity of data, it is quite difficult to provide reliable answers to these questions. But it is really puzzling to note that while there are more female college graduates produced every year, both by our public and private schools, the proportion of women seeking work or working in relation to the total femal population is on the downward trend. One can only surmise that perhaps the course they have completed are not responsive to the needs of industry and the government service, or that it has not become necessary for them to work because their traditional work at home is more important. This again is a reflection of our culture as a people.

What is heartening to note though is the declining percentage of the unemployed females which could mean that those who are economically active now have better chances of getting employed than the males. (See Table 4.)

During the twelve-month period preceding May 6, 1970 (Census date), a total of 12,318,844 persons were reported to

* The labor force survey is conducted by the NCSO on a quarterly basis usually in February, May, August and October every year since 1956 to gather data on employment and unemployment in the Philippines.

have been engaged in an occupation or economic activity. Of this number, less than one third or 27.92 per cent were females. However, it cannot be directly implied that these females are all professionals by our definition. But considering that there are no data on the employment of women professionals (college graduates), let us just discuss the occupations where women are mostly found.

Of the eleven major occupational groups, there are only three areas where majority of the workers are females (see Table 5). These are professional, technical and related workers (60.02% females); sales workers (54.22 per cent females); and service, sport and related workers (61.91 per cent females). When we consider the ages of the economically active population, it can be noted that there had been a higher proportion of economically active women among the 10-19 years of age than the overall average, but declining as the age group became older (also Table 5). This same table reveals that, except for those 65 years old and over, the females between the ages of 30-39 yielded the lowest ratio of having engaged in economic activity during the reference year. This seems to indicate that the rest of the females in this age group were busy with non-economic activities, perhaps, household chores.

In the light of the inactive participation of women, Dr. Liceria Soriano has propounded a question: "Can this situation be attributed to the attitude of many Filipinas not really to care, not to try hard enough, not to demonstrate their capacity to perform at least equally with men because of the tradition that men are the leaders and women merely the followers?"

On the contrary, the 1973 Constitution of the Philippines has taken a strong positive step towards women's equality in terms of employment opportunities. While the provision for equal opportunities in employment, regardless of sex is not self-executory the constitution has declared the equality of the sexes as a basic policy of the State. This forges one more direct link of Philippine law to kindred principles embodied in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁰

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT —

One of the foremost advocates of the improvement of the status of women in politics and government is President Marcos

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20, *The Filipina*.

who has encouraged the increased participation of women in national development. His administration can boast of more women administrators, ambassadors, judges and bureau directors at any time in our history. Before martial law, among elective political posts won by women were those of 3 senators, 6 congresswomen, 4 governors, 15 mayors, several vice mayors and numerous members of municipal councils.

While it is true that as early as 1937, Filipino women had been granted the right of suffrage, the very small percentage of women holding public office indicates that the women in general have not attained equal status with men in politics.

In other fields, like the judiciary and the foreign service which were formerly totally dominated by men, it is encouraging to note though that more and more women are now making some headway. We have the distinction of having in Justice Palma the first woman member of the Supreme Court, aside from two women justices in the Court of Appeals, five judges of the Court of First Instance, and a good number of municipal judges.

In the foreign service, we had Ambassador Trinidad Fernandez Legarda blazing the trail for women in the foreign service, followed by Ambassador Rafaelita Hilario for Israel, and Ambassador Shahani for Romania. We also have two female consul generals, three career ministers and 13 foreign service officers.

In education, we have a woman director of public schools in the person of Dr. Liceria Soriano. We have women presidents for Pamantasan ng Maynila, Centro Escolar University, Philippine Women's University, and all religious schools for girls. At the University of the Philippines System, we have women deans like Dr. Cristina Parel of the Statistical Center, Dr. Mercedes Concepcion of the Population Institute, Dean Irene Cortes of the College of Law, Dean Paz Ramos of the College of Education and Dean Gloria Feliciano of the Inst. of Mass Communication.

We have numerous women professionals who have attained successes in their fields of endeavor, like in medicine, music, arts, etc., and because of their growing number, it would be difficult to research on all of them. For lack of material time, we have not cited the significant roles women had played in our history as a nation, but I am sure you have heard of Teo-

dora Alonzo, Princes Urduja, Gabriela Silang, Melchora Aquino, and many others. Suffice it to say that during the early days of the American Regime, one American jurist wrote in a tone of astonishment that the Filipino woman was the "best man in the Philippines."¹¹

The role of professional women in the government service in shaping the destiny of our nation can best be gleaned from the manpower survey conducted by the Civil Service Commission which was released sometime in 1974.¹² This survey revealed that out of 427,222 government personnel, almost 55 per cent or 234,118 were women.

Over half of those covered by the survey occupied positions in the public school system and as expected, there were more women than men. This study also revealed that education appears to be the most popular field of study by government personnel, followed by commerce, law, and liberal arts. There were more female than male employees in the national government, but in the local governments, the males outnumbered the females. The overall supervisory ratio is 1 to 8. There were approximately two male supervisors to every female supervisor. However, in the non-supervisory positions, there were three females to every two male non-supervisors.

All the statistics so far presented tends to show that women in general have not yet attained equality in status with men despite their superiority in number in certain fields of endeavor. In this sense, they could not even be categorized as "partners" in nation building but at most back stoppers and technicians recommending courses of action but never make the decisions themselves. Judging from the data themselves, it behooves us women to take a more determined action to change prevailing social and cultural attitudes, if we are to give reality to the Filipino myth of man and woman being created equal.

But going deeper into the nature of things, we cannot escape the unalterable fact that women are different from men in many ways. Being physically weak, the Filipino women since pre-Spanish times have been the object of protection by the men who would not like to expose them to the "dangers of the wilderness and the forest," so to speak. Perhaps, it is this protective attitude that restrains men from giving the women a freer hand in management and operations.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13 Filipina.

¹² "The Civil Service Reporter," Civil Service Commission, Quezon City, Vol. XVIII, No. 5.

However, as Dr. Jose Rizal said, "only women can give birth to men, and it is their mothers and their wives who will determine what kind of men they are." History is replete with women who, by their subtle ways, have influenced the minds of men and changed the destiny of nations. Such being the case, it is now up to us, women, to take the inferential cue and act as many other women before us had done. And the time will come surely, when an enlightened mankind will say of man and woman: "They are equal."

TABLE 1

Female Population Which Has Completed College Degree
by Major Field of Study, Philippines: 1970

<i>Fields of Study</i>	<i>Degree Holders</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>% Female</i>
Total Philippines	1,083,760	603,145	55.65
Humanities	39,826	15,135	38.00
Education	478,232	365,001	76.32
Fine Arts	12,240	3,608	29.48
Law	43,785	4,197	9.58
Social Sciences	260,957	116,161	44.51
Natural Sciences	6,672	3,979	59.64
Engineering	68,260	4,879	5.66
Medical Science	88,240	63,093	71.50
Agriculture	17,363	1,841	10.60

Source: 1970 Census of Population.

TABLE 2

College Graduates by Field of Study 1964-1972, Philippines

Fields of Study	TOTAL GRADUATES								
	1964-1965	1965-1966	1966-1967	1967-1968	1968-1969	1969-1970	1970-1971	1971-1972	Total
Total Philippines	67,359	81,622	86,555	83,635	83,628	97,336	83,059	81,708	664,902
Humanities	5,224	6,463	7,565	7,082	6,709	11,368	10,062	10,320	64,793
Education	34,724	45,017	47,069	47,067	39,730	41,346	28,170	20,193	303,316
Fine Arts	240	215	239	541	620	869	856	752	4,332
Law	1,051	1,278	1,366	1,265	1,151	1,476	1,930	1,468	10,985
Social Science	13,540	16,272	16,294	15,945	25,316	29,169	29,212	35,223	180,171
Natural Science	962	1,386	726	421	423	437	563	464	5,382
Engineering	5,077	5,061	6,281	4,986	5,105	6,171	4,277	5,545	42,503
Medical Science	5,785	5,462	6,458	5,595	4,038	5,889	7,377	7,292	47,896
Agriculture	756	468	557	733	536	611	612	451	4,724

Source of Data: Department of Education and Culture.

TABLE 2a

Percentage of Female Graduates from Total Graduates by
Field of Study, 1964-1972: Philippines

Fields of Study	% FEMALE GRADUATES								
	1964-1965	1965-1966	1966-1967	1967-1968	1968-1969	1969-1970	1970-1971	1971-1972	1964-1972
Total Philippines	51.01	48.87	65.49	64.60	65.29	63.87	66.09	62.15	61.27
Humanities	51.07	47.72	50.02	48.81	48.31	56.29	52.23	54.84	51.56
Education	55.14	50.59	78.99	77.41	82.70	80.22	83.78	70.43	72.33
Fine Arts	37.50	44.19	62.76	33.09	26.61	32.22	49.18	37.37	38.34
Law	8.85	8.69	11.86	11.30	9.90	9.69	7.31	6.47	9.12
Social Science	54.65	57.27	56.28	54.42	56.87	57.35	62.94	67.17	59.53
Natural Science	65.59	61.90	78.51	64.13	66.43	68.88	70.16	73.06	67.73
Engineering	6.74	13.79	7.96	7.64	4.76	5.14	6.27	5.21	7.15
Medical Science	68.45	53.28	79.24	81.38	81.10	81.37	85.81	85.04	77.54
Agriculture	3.57	8.55	8.98	10.78	5.78	6.38	15.85	7.54	8.40

Source of Data: Department of Education and Culture.

TABLE 3

Labor Force Participation Rate of Persons,
10 Years Old and Over, Philippines

<i>Survey Month</i>	<i>Labor Force Participation Rates</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
May 1956	65.1	80.3	50.3
May 1965	57.5	76.4	38.7
May 1974	52.9	71.9	34.2
October 1960	53.8	71.9	36.0
October 1965	53.1	71.3	35.3
November 1974	49.7	67.7	31.8

Source: Household Surveys Division, NCSO.

TABLE 4

Labor Force: Status of Persons, 10 Years
Old and Over (in thousands)

Survey Month	Total 10 Yrs. Old and Over	In the Labor Force			Not in the Labor Force
		Total	Employed	Unemployed	
May 1956	14,587	9,497	8,315	1,182	5,062
May 1965	20,000	11,491	10,543	947	8,510
May 1974	28,752	15,204	14,479	725	13,549
October 1960	16,957	9,116	8,539	577	7,830
October 1965	20,261	10,764	10,101	663	9,492
November 1974	28,763	14,283	13,824	458	14,481

Percentage of Females to Total

Survey Month	Total 10 Yrs. Old and Over	In the Labor Force			Not in the Labor Force
		Total	Employed	Unemployed	
May 1956	50.75	39.23	35.94	62.44	72.26
May 1965	50.34	33.94	32.11	54.49	72.50
May 1974	50.46	32.65	32.32	39.17	70.43
October 1960	50.56	33.89	33.00	46.97	69.99
October 1965	50.44	33.52	32.63	47.06	69.62
November 1974	50.25	32.15	32.10	33.62	68.09

Source of Basic Data: Household Surveys Division, NCSO.

TABLE 5

Population 10 Years of Age and Over, by Usual Occupation or Activity
During the Twelve Months Preceding May 6, 1970 for the Philippines, 1970

Occupation	10 - 19		20 - 29		30 - 39		40 - 64		65 & Over		Total	
	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total	Both Sexes	% Fe- male to Total
TOTAL	2,015,125	35.34	3,599,162	28.39	2,732,886	24.76	3,403,323	26.88	568,348	19.95	12,318,844	27.92
Professional, technical and Related Workers	4,771	54.83	270,362	68.28	230,787	57.41	268,431	55.39	16,525	38.23	790,876	60.02
Administrative, Executive and Managerial Workers	1,336	68.41	24,781	36.82	38,097	25.90	64,305	21.97	5,883	18.82	134,402	26.15
Clerical Workers	10,326	63.87	155,869	49.46	115,909	32.19	92,028	19.74	4,081	9.02	378,213	36.89
Sales Workers	72,840	56.74	189,417	51.30	186,923	50.66	280,293	58.21	40,468	52.13	769,941	54.22
Farmers, fishermen, hunters, loggers and related workers	1,272,469	19.13	1,704,671	12.15	1,305,435	12.70	1,834,479	16.16	405,113	12.21	6,522,167	14.75
Miners, quarrymen and related workers	2,310	4.94	10,770	0.23	9,903	1.53	9,657	1.56	644	—	33,284	1.33
Workers in transport and communication	31,914	1.99	213,661	1.72	171,244	1.33	115,715	1.40	4,875	0.66	537,409	1.53
Craftsmen, production process workers and laborers, N.E.C.	176,570	58.48	588,070	40.49	427,217	36.88	467,754	39.51	60,636	39.70	1,720,247	41.11
Service sport and related workers	354,545	80.73	282,063	66.26	138,619	47.98	155,494	48.65	14,455	53.37	945,176	65.91
Stevedores and related freight handlers and laborers, N.E.C.	34,712	7.54	108,174	4.47	72,631	3.82	69,732	3.55	6,457	3.87	291,706	4.44
Occupation unidentifiable, AFP members	4,421	36.30	18,965	5.18	16,940	4.40	23,015	3.85	1,157	10.37	64,498	6.73
Not Stated	48,911	46.85	32,359	38.25	19,181	34.03	22,420	38.00	8,054	43.18	130,925	41.10

Source: National Summary Tables, 1970 Census on Population and Housing.