



**Exploring Gender Equations:  
Colonial and Post Colonial India**

# **Exploring Gender Equations: Colonial and Post Colonial India**

*Editors*

**Shakti Kak  
Biswamoy Pati**



**NEHRU MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY  
2005**

305-4 0954

P5

Y15.2 N9  
P5

© Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

First published 2005

Nehru Memorial Museum  
and Library

Published by:

Acc. No. GI 9500...  
Date ..... 6 APR 2005...

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
Teen Murti House  
New Delhi-110 011  
India

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN : 81-87614-32-3

Price: Rs. 600/-

---

Typesetting by Velan Computers & Typesetters, Ghaziabad and printed at Nutech Photolithographers, C-74, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-110 020.



## CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Introduction	ix
✓ The <i>Pativrata</i> and Domestic Ideologies in Early Twentieth Century Punjab <i>Anshu Malhotra</i>	1
✓ Gains, Losses and/or Potential Possibilities: Gender and Social Reforms in the United Provinces <i>Charu Gupta</i>	29
✓ Feminising Madness – Feminising the Orient: Madness, Gender and Colonialism in British India, 1860-1940 <i>Waltraud Ernst</i>	57
✓ Gender, Medicine and Empire: Early Initiatives in Institution-building and Professionalisation, (1890s – 1940s) <i>Maina Chawla Singh</i>	93
The Foundation of the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital for Women at Delhi: Issues in Women's Medical Education and Imperial Governance <i>Samiksha Sehrawat</i>	117
Women in Colonial and Post Colonial Kashmir: Identity, Patriarchal Hegemony and Possibilities of Intervention <i>Shakti Kak</i>	147
Adivasi Women in Transition: Revisiting Jharkhand, (1880s to 1980s) <i>Shashank Shekhar Sinha</i>	175
✓ Migration and Marriage: Labouring Women in Bengal in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries <i>Samita Sen</i>	203

Women and the Workplace <i>Shobhana Warrier</i>	231
Being a Middle Class Housewife: A Comparative Analysis of India and Japan <i>Fumiko Oshikawa</i>	267
• Gender and Social Characteristics of the Labour Force in Health Services <i>Rama V. Baru</i>	281
Gender and Theatre: Looking Beyond the 'Mainstream' Canon <i>Lata Singh</i>	301
Exploring Daily Life Experiences Through Cinema-mediated Reflections of Marginalised Women: Challenging the Patriarchal Violence of the 'Kerala Development Model' <i>Brigitte Schulze</i>	329
✓ Contemporary Patriarchies: Reconfigurations in Bihar <i>Papiya Ghosh</i>	355
✓ 'Living' with Dowry: Contemporary Oral Testimonies ✓ from Orissa <i>Biswamoy Pati</i>	389
More Marginal than the Marginalised? Tribal Women as Breadwinners in Central India <i>Archana Prasad</i>	405
Women, Development and Local Governance in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh: Emerging Linkages <i>Amit Prakash</i>	433
✓ Globalisation with a Female Face: Issues from South Asia <i>Miriam Sharma</i>	463
About the Contributors	491

## PREFACE

It gives me great pleasure to place before the scholarly community this book published under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). This volume flows out of an international conference organised by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi in October 2003. This conference brought together a group of young scholars from across disciplines and countries to explore the complexities of the issues which confront Indian society in general and gender in particular while negotiating the phenomenon of 'development'. Conceived as a dialogue with both the past and the present, this volume examines some of the key issues woven around society and its changing cultural and social practices; work places and spaces for women in them; cultural representations; and aspects of health, education and empowerment.

I am thankful to Dr. Shakti Kak and Dr. Biswamoy Pati for the initiative they took in conceiving the conference as well as in editing this volume. My thanks also go to my colleagues in the Research and Publications Division and particularly Dr. N. Balakrishnan for seeing the book through the press.

5 February, 2005

**K. Jayakumar**  
Director, NMML



## Introduction

**T**he present volume incorporates the proceedings of a conference held in the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi, in October 2003\*. It explores the intricate connections between gender, society and 'development' from the colonial period up to contemporary times. The trajectory of colonial 'development' began with the disruption of the material life of the population, through the land settlements introduced by the British. Aimed primarily at securing an assured inflow of revenue, these agrarian interventions transformed the power structure in rural areas and wrenched India into the world capitalist system. The needs of metropolitan industrialisation created an unequal relationship that facilitated imports of cheap industrial goods and contributed significantly towards destroying artisanal communities and village-level industries. As the village population moved out of their habitat to seek employment in emerging urban areas or were transported to far-off colonies, new equations developed into which women were drawn in. Women from poor social backgrounds became active wage earners in view of the rising economic insecurity.

---

\* This editorial note draws upon some of the arguments of Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997; Karin Kapadia, *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender & Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002; and, All India Democratic Women's Association, *Expanding Dimension of Dowry*, New Delhi, 2003.

Colonial rule enforced dislocations in society and this included controls over women. A lot of research has been done on the question of the re-invention of patriarchy and its distinct association with the Brahminical order in nineteenth-century India. Some of the issues highlighted include the process of devaluation of women through features that involved changes in marriage customs. In fact, one witnesses a shift from bride price to dowry. Thus, whereas a section retained it to maintain their social dominance, some others emulated this practice in order to assert their status.

The colonial rulers' efforts to introduce legislation against practices like *sati*, female infanticide, ban on widow remarriage, etc. is a rather nuanced process that is riddled with contradictions. In fact, it is important to note that the rigidity of class/caste distinctions was clearly maintained in the 'civilising' project of the colonial rulers. The essentially upper caste/class and patriarchal practices and norms were re-invented, incorporated and textualised. In this sense colonialism contributed and reinforced the process that further marginalised women.

A closely related issue has been the question of social reform. The social reform project harped upon a linearised projection of history and 'modernity'. It legitimised both colonialism and the Brahminical order. In fact, it was through the social reform project that the old exploiters re-negotiated with those whom they had exploited, without seriously altering anything. Consequently, it needs to be highlighted that the social reformers who were from the upper castes defended the Brahminical order and patriarchy over the nineteenth century. It is equally vital to note that the order of Brahminical patriarchy cut across religious divides. These features illustrate how colonialism and the Brahminical order converged harmoniously to dominate and exercise power over women through the agency of social reforms/reformers. In fact, the social reformers and the colonial state highlighted the importance of the Brahminical order in debates related to the 'present' and the 'future'. Moreover, social practices affecting women were rarely located as features that were cruel and therefore had to be fought.

Interestingly, it needs to be emphasised that most of the violent and oppressive upper caste practices — ranging from female infanticide and an insistence on the chastity of widows to dowry and seclusion of women associated with the purdah — seem to have been easily accommodated by the distinctly patriarchal colonial state. At the same time, the reformatory content of Christianity needs to be acknowledged. This contributed significantly by facilitating the access to education and health services for women and left its footprints on the social reform movement.

While discussing the shifts and changes in the nineteenth-century one needs to also grasp how Brahmanical patriarchy 'purified' popular culture of features that could be subverted by women. Aspects of popular culture that saw women outside their homes and in groups were attacked. These included visiting holy men, *pirs* and pilgrimages (associated with the idea of begetting children), festivities marking fertility rites and even the ritual of mourning associated with women. It also included features associated with female entertainment, an increasing seclusion of women (*viz.*, purdah), a fear of the 'reading women' and the discouragement of modern healthcare systems for women (which included the medical examination of women), which was spurned as an invasion of female privacy and 'honour'.

This process straightjacketed women into distinguishable caste and religious identities and distanced women along lines of different castes, while otherising low/outcaste women. Moreover, this process assumed distinct communal overtones if one keeps in mind the way it targeted some *pirs* who were very popular.

What emerged along with the development of the national movement was a sharp communalising of gender paradigms. Oppressive practices within Hindu society (e.g., purdah, sati, child marriage) came to be attributed to the Muslim interregnum and there was a proliferation of popular inflammatory stories centred around sexuality, e.g., Muslim atrocities against Hindu women in the form of abductions, conversions and forced marriages. Hence, sexual fantasies about Hindu females/Muslim males served to further

sanction the increased patriarchal control of Hindu males over their women. Even reformist debates on widow remarriage came to be entangled with Hindu fears about the widow's sexuality and Muslim designs upon it. Also voiced were typical communal anxieties about Hindu-Muslim population ratios and the fears of being outnumbered.

The nationalist movement and political participation of women in the freedom struggle was mostly under the hegemony of men and male-dominated organizations, which retained the gender hierarchies. Although this was contested by women's organization of the period, its success was limited owing to the narrow support base that it could build up. Hence, the moments when women were treated as equal partners during the freedom struggle were shortlived and eventually women were relegated to their 'feminine' role. Barring a few women from the urban elite who rose to positions of leadership, women in general were relegated to a subordinate position. This was predicated upon images of the sacrificing mother and wife, based on Hindu religious mythology. Consequently, the nationalist movement legitimised the mother/wife/goddess constructs of woman through literature, theatre and other art forms.

In more recent times newer and at times more coercive forms of patriarchy have been recast and reconstructed with liberalisation and globalisation. Rapid advances in communication technologies over the past two centuries have facilitated the process of globalisation, with adverse implications for the majority of the world population. Globalisation, with an ever-increasing need for surplus extraction by the multinationals, has led to the mobility of capital across countries. Technology has facilitated the spread of consumerism, restructuring of labour force and the spread of capitalist ideology with the worst elements of patriarchal control. It has led to massive changes in the distribution of resources and incomes between and within countries. There have also been changes in institutions at every level, which has changed the lives of people in these countries. In India in particular, an analysis of the condition of people from the colonial period to more recent times indicates that large sections of the population have not gained from what is termed as 'development' in mainstream literature.



It needs to be noted that two-third of the Indian population lives in rural areas and is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for survival. The problem is extremely acute for women. Most of them have no access to health services, education, the local power structure and suffer from starvation and other deprivations. In fact, over the past decade, their chances of getting a decent job have also been minimised. Indeed, for these sections the integration with world capitalism is visible through reduced food security, a shift to commercial crops and technologies which require lower human-power, a lack of access to village 'commons' which is taken over by the rich (mostly the upper castes), subsistence wages, a decline in social sector expenditure by the government (which has made a fetish of balancing budgets), and a decline in real wages, as expenditure on food and health services keep increasing.

Many researchers and policy makers argue that the current phase of globalisation has improved the condition of the vast majority of women. This is being asserted on the basis of increased access to education and also to paid employment. A mechanical interpretation of this or similar statistical evidence overlooks structures of exploitation, inequalities and oppressive arrangements in social and economic spheres, which are continuously being recast and reconstructed. Thus, it ignores the fact that the increase in paid employment of women is in the low-paid, low-skilled sectors of the economy, with no guarantees of the quality of services and job security. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that it is the men in the family who control the earning of these women. Worse still, the money earned from this hard labour by young women is saved to be paid as dowry for their marriage, matched with correct caste and class backgrounds which is fixed by their parents. Alongside the changing material conditions of vast sections, one witnesses the battle for survival and an implicit and explicit violence against the disadvantaged sections. Consequently, the interconnection of these social practices and patriarchal arrangements with globalisation — that marginalizes women and tightens the grip of the patriarchal order — needs to be grasped.

The processes unleashed by globalisation have increased unemployment, created inhuman working conditions in 'sweat shops' (a major source of employment), and increased inequalities in incomes and ownership of assets. The impact of globalisation is also evident in terms of continuing dislocation of local industry. A jobless growth of the past two decades has reduced the chances of employment in secure jobs. At another level, jobs in export processing, free trade zones and other segments of the unorganised sector have provided women with employment and with a rudimentary level of 'empowerment'. However, this 'empowerment' can only be transient as men in the family are rendered unemployed. Consequently, the emerging labour process has highly oppressive characteristics when it comes specifically to women, viz. work in the unorganised sector, low wages, long hours of work, no job security, part-time work, home-based work, piece-rated work, no social security.

The insatiable thirst for profits of the multinational corporations leads them to employ cheap labour in the countries of the Third World. This cheap labour is most often found amongst women of these countries. Terms like 'feminisation of labour' and 'feminisation of poverty' are frequently used to explain the increasing trend of employing women in these countries on low wages and under extremely exploitative conditions. Thus, an increasing number of women are employed in the low-wage and labour-intensive textile and garment industry, electronics and pharmaceutical industry and lately in the IT-enabled service industries (viz. call-centres, etc.).

Globalisation has also led to the growth of reactive movements that stress on a 'golden' and 'ideal past' for women that propagates restoration of traditional systems of control over women. A new kind of 'modernity' has unsettled previous structures of oppression and exploitation, with its consequent emphasis on rituals, a stress on the domestic sphere, and valorising woman as religious icons and even sati. The role of the state has oscillated from being ambiguous to contribute towards legitimising gender hierarchies. This context has seen the offensive of Hindutva and an increasing assertion of caste identities, which together target women. One

also witnesses how the structure of oppression gets reinforced, at times to 'defend local culture', while at other times aiming to follow 'metropolitan culture'. Nevertheless, in both situations women have to be 'traditional' or 'modern' or, worse still, be 'traditional' and 'modern' at the same time. These are metaphors that illustrate deeper complexities affecting women.

Contemporary India sees women as important wage earners for the family. In fact, the number of female-headed households where women have to work to feed their families is on the rise. At the same time, in most situations it is neither empowering nor enriching for these women to be employed as daily-wage workers, who are at the mercy of local contractors and moneylenders. Male migration to centres of employment has put women directly in charge of the young and the old in the family.

This so-called globalised order coexists harmoniously with the patriarchal notions that continue to devalue work done by women. This legitimises the discriminatory wages received by women, who are paid wages that are much lower than men. Women are considered subsidiary and not the main wage earners in the family — this in spite of a large number of female-headed households in the country. In many industries women are relegated to tasks that are hard but are paid low wages. In fact, one witnesses the phenomenon of an increasing migration of women wage-workers to other rural areas and food processing centres during the peak season to earn meagre wages for the family. The increase in employment of women has not led to a redistribution of the work women done by women in the domestic sphere.

The economic crisis represented by joblessness is sought to be met by increased demands on women to bring in more dowry. Indeed, dowry demands have taken newer forms, which make it a lifelong liability for the natal family of a woman. The net result of this has been a further devaluation of women. The insidious practice of dowry is a reflection of existing and intensifying inequalities and oppression centred around gender, class and caste. While it is a fallout of gender inequalities, dowry reinforces gender inequalities and women's oppression.

Increased inequality has led to the emergence of a culture of conspicuous consumption. The cascading effect of this on poor segments of the population has been to partake in this 'celebration of consumption' by borrowing. This creates a situation of indebtedness and lifelong bondage to the moneylender or the landlord in the village. In fact, large sections of rural population are forever borrowing for consumption and production purposes at exorbitant rates of interest as the official channels of credit at cheaper rates are denied to them. In short, globalisation has led to increased consumerism, devaluation of women and their labour and has considerably impacted upon areas like demands for dowry, male control over women's wages and control over women's sexuality. Women have been devalued to an extent that their very 'being' is threatened with use of advanced technology for this purpose, viz. female foeticide. Female foeticide has become widespread in spite of a legislation against it. This has hastened the process of elimination of girls (practised in some communities as infanticide in the nineteenth century). The resulting adverse sex ratio for women has far-reaching consequences. At one level, it has increased the need for keeping women within the fold of caste boundaries, and getting them married at an early age. At another level, it has led to trafficking of brides as is seen in some regions like Haryana.

More than ever before, the 'modern' twenty-first century denies women any agency, as their decisions regarding work, marriage, migration, inheritance, living on their own — or even the right to be born — are controlled by patriarchal norms. In fact, there is evidence to indicate an increase in violence against women both at home and outside. And it is through these controls that the majority of women are coerced and terrorised to submit.

To conclude, the process of 'development', from colonialism to the recent phase of globalisation, has coexisted with a semi-feudal economic order. It is this 'harmonious' coexistence that has led to the emergence of oppressive and backward-looking ideologies. The valorisation of woman as a goddess, housewife, a family person on the one hand and wage earner, provider in terms of dowry, head of a household, single parent on the other, has put women in conflicting

situations. The legitimisation of the former through a section of women ideologues of Hindutva leads to diversion of women's agencies for emancipation and demands for equal rights. The recent emphasis on 'empowerment' of women is visualised by the state within the limits of patriarchal control, thus limiting the arena of self-actualisation for women. In the absence of an overthrow of the old structures of exploitation and patriarchal oppression, the project of 'modernity' through the spread of capitalism (during periods of colonialism and globalisation) has resulted in the emergence of harsher and inhuman patriarchal norms, even when the economic contribution of women to the survival of family has increased. The implicit and explicit hold of patriarchal ideologies — adapted and reconstructed — is visible in both public and private spheres.

Significantly, the basic point that emerges from this collection of essays is the structure of continuities. Thus, the essays highlight the dialectics of continuities in gender equations within the order of change, between the colonial past and the 'globalised' present.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants for their sustained interest and cooperation that has made this book possible. We would also like to thank Dr. O.P. Kejariwal, Dr. N. Balakrishnan, Ms. Deepa Bhatnagar and Mrs. Aruna Tandan of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, for their help and encouragement to make the conference and this book possible. Last but not least, we are grateful to Shri K. Jayakumar, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library for agreeing to bring out this volume under the auspices of the NMML.

Shakti Kak

Biswamoy Pati



## The *Pativrata* and Domestic Ideologies in Early Twentieth Century Punjab

Anshu Malhotra

This paper looks at the social reform movements among the high-caste Hindus and Sikhs, the middle classes<sup>1</sup> of early twentieth-century Punjab in the process of formulating an adequate and composite ideology to establish and advance social status, and their use of the notion of the *pativrata* to saddle and enlarge it with many new nuances. E.J. Hobsbawm in his introduction to *Inventing Traditions* aptly shows how the inculcation of certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition evoke a seamless continuity with the past, while they often are responses to novel situations.<sup>2</sup> One may say that the notion of the ideal wife is one such consistently invented tradition, recourse of changing patriarchies in periods of change and challenges.

Perhaps there is a need to put in a further word here about ideology — in this case of the dominant male group — high-caste Khatri/Arora. The term ideology is used both in the sense of buttressing the power of these men over their women, and as involving the mystification and distortion of reality. But ideology also develops in a discursive realm, evolving out of the matrix of material conditions, which involve negotiating caste, class, and race relations. Thus women, as active participants in writing and enacting such relations, are deeply imbricated in the process of ideology formation. They are not only its victims, but also its contributors, perpetuators, and sometimes its beneficiaries. I also wish to emphasise the relationship of ideology to lived experience. After

all, no ideology would be successful unless it can borrow from, and reflect, in howsoever partial a way, a lived reality. The idea of the ideal wife was important not only because it set norms of behaviour for women of a high social category and therefore a role model for others, but also because that norm contributed to shaping experiences, emotions, and helped in making sense of one's circumstances. The process of demystification, the chafing against the norms takes place simultaneously, and ideologies are disaggregated through various means; but here I seek to analyze the modes of functioning of the ideology of the perfect wife and wish to explore the ways through which it is assembled and disseminated, and the weight of authority and expectations that it carries with it.<sup>3</sup> The gaps in the ideological constructs themselves point to the friction within apparently smooth patriarchal structures, and give an inkling of its possible breakdown when faced with persistent blows, or subtle leakages.

The focus in this paper will be on two areas — aspects of women's lives over which control and appropriation is crucial for a successful functioning of a patriarchal social group — and the naturalizing and normalizing of that control is the role of an ideology. These are questions regarding the utilization of women's labour, and their complex relationship with property, in the context of a class attempting to strategize the economic and social elevation of its members.

By referring to some of the literature emanating from the Singh Sabha movement in the Punjab — primarily early novels and the semi-fictional didactic pamphlet — I hope to show how the idea of the ubiquitous *pativrata* penetrated the psyche of the social reformers of the Punjab, and became conceptually linked to a 'middle classness' that an upper-caste, Hindu/Sikh elite coveted for itself. The *pativrata* (the devoted wife) and her many clones, the *gharwali* or the *suchaji grihini* (invoking housewifeliness), the *lachchmi* or the more fulsome *grihalachchmi* (evocative of devotion and abundance), linked up a mythologised devotion to the husband and his family along with qualities of housewifely plenitude and prosperity, to a contemporary demand for achieving a middle-class status, often



a question of upward mobility sustained through the person of the wife and a subservient daughter-in-law. By discussing how women's labour was sought to be appropriated, controlled and its output maximised, as well as the manner in which the joint properties of the family were to be maintained and augmented, I wish to place the ideology of the *pativrata* as the central node around which the high caste strategised its ambitions for a middle-class persona and status maintenance and enhancement in the context of a colonial economy and polity.

The household and the family that resided therein — the *grihastha* and the *kutumb/parivaar* — defined by one substantive pamphlet as composed of the parents-in-law, married brothers, their wives and widowed or unmarried daughters/sisters,<sup>4</sup> has been seen by historians as a spiritual domain, the control over which allowed the nationalist imagination an arena of autonomy, empowerment, indeed 'difference' from claustrophobic colonial cultural forms and political dominance.<sup>5</sup> In this analysis, based primarily on the reading of nationalist/reformist oeuvre of Bengal, the home emerges ultimately as a harmonious unit, where the women's question is resolved as women re-enter public domain having imbibed conditions laid out by the reforming men. In Tanika Sarkar's writing, however, the harmony in this spiritualized domain is shattered as she unveils the intense conflict and violence towards women, especially young wives, that undergirded the rhetoric of the cultural nationalists. Through her study of the debates around the Age of Consent controversy for instance, she shows the enormous gap that existed between a fulsome language that described home and rituals and the violence that could be resorted to in order to maintain patriarchal power over it.<sup>6</sup> Kumkum Sangari, on the other hand, has seen in the domestic ideologies that mushroomed in north India, more specifically the present U.P., the 'dynamics of embourgeoisment', and in the domestic arrangement these envisaged, the 'domestic sphere as an indispensable adjunct of the public domain'.<sup>7</sup>

The literature that I discuss here is extremely sensitive to the fragility of the putative harmony of the family, and the implications of this incessant wallowing between the desire to maintain the family

as a unit and the fears of its splintering inform my analysis here. I also tried to study the myriad ways through which the push towards embourgeoisment was to be accomplished in the specific context of caste and religious identities emerging in colonial Punjab. The quest for a middle-class status required a restructuring of homes and the roles of women within it, hierarchizing relationships between women, and between women and men. It also entailed the 'othering' of women who did not fit into the role models being created, the willful and quarrelsome woman of this reformist literature, for example, who was unwilling to forego her cultural power and inheritance, the bad woman whose company is forbidden to good wives. The question of control — of men over women — was a central issue that surfaced repeatedly. A good wife, averred Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a Sikh reformer of enormous standing in Punjab, did not try to 'control' her husband through dubious magical chants and potions, but instead by surrendering her sense of the self, came under his control.<sup>8</sup> The question of control, and of reorganizing relationships within the family became the course through which home could be turned into a refuge, a place where men could seek 'happiness and peace', to quote Vaid again, after encountering 'hard work and tribulations' (*kashī*) outside.<sup>9</sup> Yet on the familial agenda was much more than the question of female subservience to male authority. It was also a question of female compliance to new forms of labour organization within the domestic sphere, of reimagining relations with low castes, especially the customary service providers; of ways of property preservation when the colonial economy provided both new opportunities, but also threatened old networks of support; and of a new complex of relationships with the wife's natal family in providing augmented material support while using some old notions of honour to build new relations and expectations.

The upper castes under consideration here, engaged in making a precarious bid for a middle-class status were castes like the Khatri, sometimes the Aroras and the Banias, traditionally following occupations such as that of traders, merchants, and moneylenders, the Khatri especially also tended to be the educated and literate service gentry in Ranjit Singh's Punjab.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of the

British Raj in the Punjab opened many new professional opportunities for these people, while it also made them mobile and unsettled their rooted parochialism, evocatively described by Prakash Tandon in his *Punjabi Century*.<sup>11</sup> But there were also those on the lower end of the scale within this caste elite, stuck in the unglamorous and constricted world of *naukri*, struggling to enter the status of the respectable middle class.<sup>12</sup> Also, as the British established themselves in the Punjab, the state came to be seen by the upper castes as one favouring the Jat 'agriculturists', whether Hindu or Sikh (though Sikhs tended to be idealised) who were the significant source of revenue collection for the state, and were recruited in the army in large numbers.<sup>13</sup> The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901, that debarred these 'non-agricultural' classes from buying land that was seen as belonging to the agricultural tribes, primarily Jats, underscored the attitude of the state.<sup>14</sup> In time the advantages gained from turning to education that this upper-caste group had experienced in the early years of the Raj, seemed to get nullified, and disillusionment began to set in as the jejune nature of clerkdom sunk in, with few chances of reaching the higher notches of the jobs they occupied. We will see that the desire to establish businesses, both as a way out of the suffocating world of *babudom*, and as a savvy way of taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the expanding colonial economy, began to be expressed as an alternative to *naukri* by these groups. The ever-malleable world of the family, where ideal wives and daughters-in-law were to be groomed, became the fulcrum for inching towards the coveted class status. Domestic ideologies were thus meant to produce the apparently age-old ideal of benevolent and bountiful wives, sutured now to the bourgeois values of thrift and hard work as well. And so the politics of domesticity became as much a basis for achieving social enhancement in a churning colonial situation, as did the public world of debate and discussion, service and business, community and nation-building.

The Singh Sabha movement, from whose highly prolific use of the print medium the examples discussed here have been taken, has been seen as primarily concerned with providing Sikhs with a

distinct identity. Harjot Oberoi has observed the growth of two streams within this movement, viz. the Sanatan Sikhs, more comfortable with the old ways and accommodating with Hinduism and its social and ritual practices, including caste; and the Tat Khalsa, more adamant, and ultimately more successful in building a separate Sikh identity.<sup>15</sup> However, even within the latter group, concerns over questions of preserving caste, closely linked to a class status, were not uncommon, especially as inter-marriages (if these can be called as such) within the high-caste Khatri groups among the Hindus and the Sikhs were commonplace.<sup>16</sup> The literature discussed here reflects this complexity of maintaining a caste-based class status, while at the same time uttering new concerns about a more egalitarian Sikh identity that would apply to Sikhs from other castes including the dominant Jats and the lower castes. Yet the association with the world of the high castes is obvious in the literary output of the Singh Sabha sympathisers discussed here who insisted on the maintenance of distance from the low castes. Bhai Amar Singh's novels discussed below are a case in point. In *Ghar Da Nirbah*, the two friends studying in that cradle of Sikh reformism, the Khalsa College in Amritsar, Ranbir Singh and Jasvant Singh explain the unseemly behaviour of Ranbir's brothers as a consequence of their keeping company of uneducated, low and ordinary men (*manuli, halke-halke aadmi, nichan di sangat*), clearly disapproving of such conduct.<sup>17</sup>

The question of religious identity was equally tangled, and I wish to bring forth this complexity as well. The foreword to Amar Singh's novel, *Ghar Da Nirbah* cited above, roughly translated as the 'pulling on' or the 'sustenance' of a home, implying also the maintenance of harmonious familial relations, solicited the opinion of leading professional and educated Sikhs on its content, values and language, in order to make a bid for inclusion in the syllabi for girls' schools (to this end it was also dedicated to the Director of Public Instruction in the Punjab, and the preface to a later novel of Amar Singh noted that the government awarded him a *sanad* or a certificate and Rs. 400 for making a contribution towards vernacular literature). Sardar Niranjan Singh, the vice-principal of Khalsa

College, described the novel as a '...life-like picture of a joint Hindu-Sikh family, where want of education and proper culture disturbs the peace and destroys the happiness of a household'.<sup>18</sup> The very articulation of a 'Hindu-Sikh' identity posits the sameness between them while simultaneously displaying an awareness of their difference. In the novel itself the author uses the epithet 'Singh' with the names of all male characters, clearly a nomenclature older in usage and acceptability, but the names of the relatively older female characters had a distinct 'Hindu-Punjabi' flavour to them — Gunvanti, Deuki, Radhi, Sursati (the last being the heroine of the book), while the female children, the youngest generation in the book, have names with the more novel 'Kaur' suffixed to them, Kishan Kaur, Hem Kaur and Khem Kaur. Doris Jakobsh has discussed the novelty and the controversy regarding the nomenclature 'Kaur' to Sikh female names, also noting its mandatory use among the Sikhs by the 1950s,<sup>19</sup> though some sections of the Sikhs, mostly Khatri, may still bypass its usage just as they may still inter-marry with Hindu Khatri. Indeed the insertion of 'correct' (newly sanctified by the Tat Khalsa) Sikh rituals and specific concerns enter Amar Singh's novels at various points, which included issues like the use of Punjabi language by the Sikhs, initiation into the Khalsa for girls,<sup>20</sup> and the structuring of daily rituals for the Sikhs. Yet the ambience of his novels was distinctly framed in the social ethos of the Khatri, shared by Hindus and Sikhs, and though he frequently used quotations from the Sikh religious text, the Guru Granth Sahib, he was equally at ease giving examples from the immensely popular *Ramayan*.<sup>21</sup> Amar Singh's novel *Chhoti Nunh* was primarily concerned with the fate of two 'Hindu' families, even though the idealized Lala Hari Chand seemed to follow the prescribed daily rituals of the Sikhs.<sup>22</sup> So even though religious identities were becoming significant in the period under discussion, it is this caste-based class quest that is the salient concern of the reformist writings studied here, and the focus of this paper.

One further point needs to be made about the Singh Sabha movement, i.e. the loyalism that it bred towards the British Raj. The Sikhs had much to gain by professions of loyalty to the colonial

state, as in the Punjab it encouraged a separate Sikh identity, looking at the Sikhs as inheritors of the admirable martial Khalsa tradition. The Sikhs were considered the ideal denizens of the Punjab, especially the Jat-Sikhs, and the Sikhs manouvred for a favourable position, especially when the colonial bureaucracy and army came to increasingly resemble a communally composed pie. It is for this reason that the Akali movement that grew among the Jat-Sikhs in the 1920s came as a shock to the British, used to the more amiable loyalism of the Singh Sabhas.<sup>23</sup> The Arya Samaj movement, popular among the parallel high caste 'Hindu' groups in Punjab, had a more suspect loyalty, and was often seen as the instigator of trouble.<sup>24</sup> Yet the point that needs to be emphasised here is that the two movements, as indeed some others including the Sanatan Sabhas, and the Khatri or Arora caste movements, had a fairly similar agenda regarding female reforms, shared the domestic ideologies that they shaped in this period, and tried equally to emulate the respectability associated with the middle class. In that sense many of the issues discussed in this paper will have a resonance among a wider 'Hindu-Sikh' upper caste middle classes of the Punjab.

### **Naukri, Hatti, Vyapar: Occupational Concerns and Domestic Agendas**

By focusing on the occupations and the professional options available to the castes under consideration, the relationship between the perceived precariousness of their world to the managing of domestic politics will be elucidated. It may be reiterated that the social picture introduced in the novels and tracts explored here was often one on the edge of economic, and therefore social comfort, seeking an elevation of status — the achievable or elusive 'middle classness' — even though the people portrayed may be confident of their caste status. The concern over the appropriateness of joint families and properties was expressed in this literature, even as the inevitability of an ultimate split was expected and sometimes awaited. The complications and tensions this introduced in the familial relations (mostly depicted as the inability of men to control unruly and quarrelsome women) were sought to be resolved through voicing a

need for educated and *pativrata* women and obedient and hard-working daughters-in-law. The associations of the ideal wife, the mythologised *grihalachhmi*, with auspicious bounty, was on the one hand the framing of a desire for a magical status elevation, but on the other was a matter of grit, labour, wit and cunning on the part of the wife/daughter-in-law to ensure a solid class gain. The welding of class aspirations with the person of the *pativrata* made the ideology of the *pativrata* the agency through which newer forms of domestic labour, class relations, and the interpersonal familial relations of these caste groups were negotiated.

Three social novels of Bhai Amar Singh<sup>25</sup> and a few Singh Sabha tracts will be discussed here to focus on issues at hand. Amar Singh has already been cited as a sympathizer of the Singh Sabha movement, who was also a prolific writer on subjects as diverse as Sikh historical personalities, humourous anecdotes, to detective novels (though with an edifying intention). Amar Singh was also the owner of a shop called 'Amar Singh & Sons' in Sutarmandi in Lahore, and ran Khalsa Agency for printing and distributing books in Lahore and Amritsar.<sup>26</sup> His agency dealt with books on themes ranging from *ayurvedic*, *yunani*, and even the maligned charms (*totke*), as well as allopathic (*daktari*) cures for plague, to books that fore-grounded the use of Punjabi language, spoke about child rearing, or indulged in the highly polemical debates with its reformist rival the Arya Samaj, while the common fare of the popular *ghazals* and the like was also available. Amar Singh, it seems, also started managing the Model Press in Anarkali in Lahore around 1912, after encountering some problems with Lala Dunichand's Bombay Machine Press, whom he accused of not only taking money for sub-standard work, but who additionally hurt the sentiments of the Sikhs by printing an offensive book called *Punjabi Surma*. Amar Singh was also a trader and a 'general supplier' of commodities such as soaps, oils, clothes, bangles, blankets and the like, while he also specialized in bringing commodities from Kashmir to the Punjab, to sending parcels from the Punjab to places as far away as China and Burma.<sup>27</sup>

Besides the content and the themes of the novels under discussion, what is interesting about Amar Singh is that he seemed to inhabit the social world he described in his books. His male characters tended to be shopkeepers (owners of *hattis*), traders (*vyaparis*), merchants and moneylenders (*sahukars*), contractors (taking up *theka*), and those tied to service (*naukri*), either with bigger merchants or with the government. The professions that appear in his books included the ubiquitous lawyers, police personnel and teachers. And like some of his characters, Amar Singh sought personal favours from the state by a display of loyalty and by associating with approved reformist activity like the promotion of Punjabi; and pursued the middle-class proclivity of indulging in reformism, both as a marker of status and as a novel philanthropic activity. In the earlier mentioned *Ghar Da Nirbah*, for instance, college friends Ranbir Singh and Jasvant Singh read books like *Angrezi Riti Deepika*, in order to pick up social manners necessary to deal with the British, something that stands the two friends in good stead as they later encounter the *sahibs* in their respective careers, Jasvant Singh as a lawyer, and Ranbir Singh as an assistant manager of a large store in Moulmein, Burma, owned by a rather large-hearted Britisher.<sup>28</sup> Once established in their professions, some of his characters routinely donated money and scholarships for orphans to institutions like the Khalsa College in Amritsar, clearly an approved and lauded activity for Sikh reformers.<sup>29</sup>

In all the three novels of Amar Singh discussed here, families of substantial means are shown to turn penurious, either because of quarrelsome women demanding a separation from a joint family to set up on their own, or because a son destroys property as he acquires expensive or undesirable habits as a result of keeping degenerate company. This insecurity, in one sense, may seem to mimic the insecurity perceived as a caste group in what was seen as a pro-Jat colonial state, as explained earlier. In *Sulakhi Nunh* (*The Auspicious Daughter-in-Law*), for example, the son Sohan Singh destroys his handsome bequeathal of chests full of cash, *hundis* (bills of exchange), and jewels, to maintain his bad habits; and in *Chhoti Nunh* (*The Younger Daughter-in-Law*), the character of



Madho inherits a huge wealth from his *sahukar* and contractor father, but begins dissipating it in profligate living, which included setting up a 'contract' of Rs. 250/- per month with the courtesan Noor Mahal. Amar Singh, as even a cursory perusal of his novels will show, noted the monetary transactions of the households in his books in unabashed detail, an obsession with salutary use of money to maintain/enhance status that is underscored repeatedly, but which is perhaps also reflective of Singh's own occupational and middle class predilections. Money was a resource that had to be expended with care for its judicious use would lead to the pursuit for embourgeoisement. This attitude towards material wealth distinguished the middle-class and its aspirants from a former aristocratic and, one may imagine, a more improvident elite. The accumulation of resources, whether through *vyapar* or *naukri*, (and the advantage of one over the other was often an issue)<sup>30</sup>; domestic economies and deployment of women's labour at home; or through marriage arrangements for sons that brought in handsome dowries; worked towards upward mobility and emulation of a higher class status group. This is seen, for example, in one reformist pamphlet where women's careful and incessant domestic labour is commented on by the author who praises their housewifeliness by saying that their home resembled that of the rich.<sup>31</sup>

The plots of the novels that revolved around the educated *pativratas* rescuing their husbands and marital families from loss of property, status or both, because of circumstantial predicament or faulty behaviour on the part of some character, of course, required the initial downfall of the family as essential to movement in an otherwise hackneyed storyline. In this sense Amar Singh's novels suffered from all the shortcomings of the early novel form — simple and uncomplicated plots, lack of the complex growth of characters, and tedious, laboured and unconvincing narratives;<sup>32</sup> and as R.S. McGregor put it in his study of the early novels in Hindi, it was necessarily the didactic intention of the novelist that bound the story together.<sup>33</sup> However, it is in the social ethos created by Amar Singh — whether in the occupations of his characters, their customs, rituals, or familial norms — that we see glimpses of the familiar

that his readers could identify with, and despite the artificial and thin plots, 'an understanding of a section of Indian society' is gained, as noted by McGregor for his Hindi novels. Indeed it is on the palimpsest of such social familiarity that the ideological trope of the *pativrata* could be placed, pushing for a subtle and an inchmeal move towards emulation and desirability.

The educated *pativrata* as the lynchpin holding together the property, status and the joint nature of the family has already been noted. In *Ghar Da Nirbah*, to elucidate the point, the patriarch Ram Singh's family of three sons and daughters-in-law (and grandchildren) found itself divided because of the machinations of the eldest son Kishan Singh, who worked towards the splitting of the family through egging on his uneducated wife Deuki to quarrel in the household. Not only did he manage to split the household, but deviously took over most of its property, leaving especially the third son Ranbir Singh, his wife, Sursati, and their mother in a state of penury. Ranbir Singh's education and his willingness to be mobile (he finds a job in Burma), turns the fortunes around for them in due course. However, this is not achieved before enormous suffering, brought on mostly by the jealous and vindictive behaviour of Kishan Singh. Ironically, it was Sursati's ability to suffer but still seek to help her family that finally drew both her estranged sisters-in-law to her (who had in the mean time gone through the fate reserved for the evil), and through her ideal behaviour Sursati was ultimately able to bring her family together.

Two points need to be made here. The first is the role of education in this reformist construction of the *pativrata*, and the second, the need to explore the insurance attached to maintaining joint families and properties. Education emerged as the crucial ingredient in apparently making a woman amenable to the onerous demands of domestic upkeep. Education in Amar Singh's novels (but this was also the generic role of female education in reformist literature), made a woman willing to undertake domestic labour in contrast to her uneducated sisters, while it also induced an ability to endure suffering and encouraged the spirit of sacrifice. Sometimes

it also allowed the use of intelligence and wit, though only temporarily and only for the good of the family.

It is remarkable that the education mentioned in Amar Singh's novels, and in reformist literature for women in general, tended to be of a highly rudimentary nature, even though by the 1890s some prominent high schools for girls had been established in the Punjab, and the debate on higher education for women was beginning to be sparked off.<sup>34</sup> Gunvant Kaur, the heroine of *Sulakhi Nunh*, is depicted married at the age of fifteen and thereafter spent her time in household chores. Her habit of reading books 'once in a while in her free time' is also put paid to by her widowed *ninan* (husband's sister), who burns her books.<sup>35</sup> Sursati in *Ghar Da Nirbah* is shown settled in her marital home by the age of sixteen, and read books occasionally and stealthily, that her husband, the only recipient of college education in the house, chose and brought for her, needless to say for the purpose of edification.<sup>36</sup> The few years of formal schooling, however, were portrayed as having wrought an enormous transformation in the woman, making her keen to take on domestic chores and generally please everyone. Interestingly, the illiterate women were not only pitched against the educated *pativrata*, but also concomitantly got away with far lesser amount of work, as for instance Sursati's sisters-in-law Deuki and Radhi. Education thus became the instrument not of individuation or self-fulfilment, but of moulding women, drilling into them the need to carry on their shoulders the demands of their households and the aspirations of their class.

Education, typically, was therefore not meant to be a bookish one, but rather a curriculum of practical household duties that ought to prepare the young woman in the ordeals that lay ahead for her in her marital home. This is visible in reformist literature of every hue, and one may begin with an example from *Sulakhi Nunh*. Though Gunvant Kaur was educated with her brothers for a few years, her mother was nevertheless conscious of the fact that '*sade sharike gharan vich nire likhan parran nal kam nahin chalda, ghar da sab kam dhanda vi changi taran sikhana chahida hai*' (among our kin it will not do for [a woman] to know only reading

and writing, she must be taught all the domestic chores properly), and so her mother made sure that she learnt cooking, stitching, embroidery and so on.<sup>37</sup> In the two-part, highly didactic fictionalized tract *Agyakar (The Obedient)*, produced by the Khalsa Tract Society (KTS), the printing press of the more radical Singh Sabhaïtes, the central character of Agya Kaur (referring to her obedience to her husband) educates her adopted daughter Balvant Kaur in the ideals of Sikh religion and domesticity, while giving her an idea about the wrong pursuits and customs of bad, and presumably disobedient women that she must avoid. After teaching her the Punjabi alphabet, that prods Balvant into reading the *Granth Sahib*, Agya Kaur teaches her to cook, spin, sew and stitch, all of which stand her in good stead in finding a suitable groom and adjusting to proper domesticity.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it was Mohan Singh Vaid who was the most deadpan about the amount of domestic work that was expected from a girl when she married and advised mothers to ensure that girls were taught all the heavy (*bhari*) chores required to be performed in homes.<sup>39</sup> The importance of cooking was especially underscored, iterating that women of all classes needed to cook on their own, tying the chore not only to notions of abundance and health of the family, but also releasing it from any association with a menial task by emphasizing its cross-class character.<sup>40</sup>

This insistence on education as an instrument of ensuring women's pliability to patriarchal demands is important as reformers grappled with women of the 'old kind' (Deuki, Radhi) who did not understand the needs of class elevation or scoffed at the markers of modernity (including education), while at the same time feared an over-educated woman who would shun labour-intensive domesticity. Education in the reformist literature emerged in its core therefore as a project of brainwashing, even at a time when professional opportunities in the teaching and medical fields began to be opened up for educated women. Only in Amar Singh's novel *Chhoti Nunh*, do the intelligence, education and literacy of the heroine Sushila emerge as positive attributes she could use outside of household chores. Having been married to a simpleton husband Kripa Ram, whose elder brother and the earning member of the

household found a job with his wife's brother Madho, Sushila is left to fend for her family. She sells her jewels to set up business in hoarding and selling grain, and gradually makes it flourish enough to bring back her erring brother-in-law to the family fold, and also pushes her husband to understand its mechanisms. Once the men are re-involved in their appropriate world of managing public and monetary affairs of the household, Sushila retreats to her domestic chores. Significantly, education and an exceptional display of sangfroid do not take Sushila into new professional openings for women, rather, she shows prowess in a traditional occupation of the men of her caste, easier to vacate when men realized their folly or acquired appropriate qualifications. Her deviance was therefore momentary, a means of bringing back men to their sphere and responsibilities, and underlined her *pativrata* character that stitched together the welfare of the family and its prosperity to maintenance of its class status.

It may be mentioned here as an aside, that educated men, unlike the heroines in Amar Singh's novels, did not necessarily have such ideal life trajectories. While for some characters education equipped them with skills to find jobs and professions in a colonial economy (Ranbir Singh, Jasvant Singh), others could fritter away their education by falling in bad company or being prone to bouts of bad behaviour (Madho, Sohan Singh). This underscores the pedagogic and moralist character of women's education that was meant to push them on the onerous path of domestic enormities, leaving no space for alternative behaviour. Deviance came to be defined as the uneducated woman, unaware and uncaring of the tasks of middle-class modernity.

The scenario of economic fragility created by Amar Singh in his novels, where even the rich could lose wherewithal, which was also the situation in the petty bourgeois world of most tracts emerging from the Singh Sabhas, the question of maintaining joint properties becomes a very important one. A property held jointly by the coparceners, and the pooling of resources of the family, was the ultimate insurance against slide from a class status. The simpleton Kripa Ram in *Chhoti Nunh* could be carried on the abler shoulders

of his brother (after his wife's initial intervention to set up business); in *Ghar Da Nirbah*, the middle brother Sundar Singh first went along with the devious Kishan Singh, but realized his folly when Kishan Singh kept all the cash and goods for himself, and ended up siding with Ranbir Singh when the latter began earning well in Burma. Ultimately Ranbir Singh's wife Sursati helped both her sisters-in-law to live a decent life. On the other hand, when the varied resources of the family could be utilized together, as in *Chhoti Nunh*, it became the basis of the family's prosperity. The role of women within the family, and their singular ability to hold it together or goad its division was therefore seen as crucial.<sup>41</sup> Even when men desired a separation (as Kishan Singh did) to set up independently or to move out of the shadow of the paterfamilias, they had to incite their wives (in this case Deuki) to initiate the process. It was, first, the attribution of this enormous and fearful power to women, and then its emasculation, so to speak, by imagining the subservient *pativrata*, which was reflected in the literary outpourings of the reformers. The *pativrata* women willing to suffer and sacrifice, efface themselves or even lead from the front when required to do so were envisaged, that is, women highly malleable and responsive to patriarchal pressures and familial needs. Women, in other words, were not only salient in this project of class construction, but in the imagination of men, metaphorically speaking, were the magic wands they could wield to keep things as desired.

Besides the roles assigned to submissive *pativrata* women, two further points need to be elaborated, both aspects impinging on quotidian life. The first of these was a greater, perhaps newer, expectation of labour from women. The intensity of labour was itself a product of two parallel movements: the social distancing from customary service castes as they came to be seen as consumers of hard-earned money of the higher castes; and as women's domestic labour came to be welded with economies that enhanced class status. The second was the beginning of expectations of larger dowry/material help from a girl's natal family. This emerged in a situation where the criteria for fixing matches was changing within the castes under discussion, and one result of such a reshaping

of some marriage rules was the changing relationship of women with their natal families.

The effort to sever relations with customary service providers on the part of the high castes, the essentials of the *jajmani* relations, was very clearly evident in the tract *Garib Kaur* produced by KTS. The petty bourgeois world of *Garib Kaur*, the poor missus, could only be transformed, she was informed, if she did without the service of sundry people who either worked for her, for instance a tailor, or gave her ritual advice like a *bahmani* (especially important for women's rituals and *vratas*/fasts, but now frowned upon by the Sikhs) and took on their chores herself or saved the money spent on them.<sup>42</sup> Through this double economy drive, working harder and spending less, *Garib Kaur* was urged to move towards a class status commensurate with her caste. In the already mentioned tract *Agyakar*, replete with all issues relating to women's reform close to the heart of Sikh reformers, the question of breaking relations with customary service castes too crops up. On the pretext of spending less on marriages, a favourite sumptuary practice encouraged by the colonial state, the father of Balvant Kaur spends a relatively smaller amount on her marriage feast, as he did not think it wise to blow up money on what he thought was the filling up the homes of *nais* (barbers who played an especially important ritual role in high castes' ceremonies) and *jhinvars* (water-carriers, a 'clean' caste who often cooked in high-caste homes).<sup>43</sup> The move to spend lesser amounts on marriages was, in fact, a response to high sums being expended on such occasions as a mark of status. It is interesting, however, that the reformist response to curtailing such expenditure should have been packaged in terms of doing away with relationships no longer considered important, and moreover seen as a drain on precious resources of high caste groups. Certainly the social and cultural practices of the higher castes were changing, and a more careful garnering and utilization of material reserves went along with other new domestic economies associated with the emerging middle class.

In Amar Singh's novels, servants as a class hardly make an appearance. Except for *Ghar Da Nirbah* where a maidservant

(*tehlan*) and a manservant intrude peripherally in the novel, it is the good and ideal women who deal with all household chores. This could, of course, be a reflection of the petty bourgeois world Amar Singh wrote about and was familiar with. But the marginal presence of servants even in substantial households depicted by Singh worked as a ploy that conjoined idealness in women with their ability to work hard, as I have already discussed earlier. Women were frequently advised not to laze in the afternoons, and never hesitate to, 'work with their hands', a recurring theme in a range of reformist literature, from the anonymous pamphlets of the KTS to the advice manuals of Mohan Singh Vaid. Cleanliness and hygiene as a marker of modernity, again became the norm and pushed to the same end, viz. hardworking *pativrata* women themselves ensured the cleanliness of the house, while the unsanitary lower classes and women who associated with them kept homes filthy and unhealthy.<sup>44</sup> In *Sulakhi Nunh* the ideal Gunvant Kaur, in sharp contrast to her husband's widowed and work-shirking sister-in-law Mangli is shown to keep the house clean and cook well.<sup>45</sup> In *Chhoti Nunh*, Sushila transforms the house of her in-laws when she arrives there, stopping her mother-in-law from doing any household chores, taking them on herself. She kept everything shining and clean like glass, the author tells us, so that in a few days their house resembled that of the rich.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, a brief look at the changing nature of dowry and the relations of a woman with her natal family as having a bearing upon the question of managing the material resources of this caste/class group. The desirability of a larger dowry and the stigmatization of bride price ('selling') and exchange marriages among the Khatri-Arora groups of Punjab have been noted by historians.<sup>47</sup> Dowry as a custom was not new, but the pressures for its scaling up and a general acceptability among wider sections of society for it were, especially when 'selling' young girls to old and rich men (*takka* or *mul* marriage as opposed to *kanyadaan*) was not unheard of among these caste groups, and was common among the Jats of Punjab. In the pamphlet *Agyakar*, the ideal upbringing of Balvant Kaur by her reformist Sikh parents is contrasted to the degenerate Sikh Arrab



Singh who 'sold' his ten-year old daughter Santo to the sixty-year old Ghasita Mal, making a windfall gain, rather than have her marry a lower-caste groom. Amar Singh again brings home the commonality of such a practice in the Punjab in his novel *Chhoti Nunh*. The rich *sahukar* and contractor father of Madho, Lala Lal Chand is said to have not remarried after the death of his wife, unlike most rich, old men, Amar Singh tells his readers, underscoring the difference of Lal Chand from ordinary men.<sup>48</sup> In this scenario in the Punjab, the fact that dowries were becoming the route to new respectability needs to be pointed out, along with emphasis on purer forms of marriages.

In *Sulakhi Nunh*, the author comments on the present hard times when a groom has to be bought in order to marry a daughter (*var vi aj kal mul hi kharidiya janda hai*). Gunvant Kaur's father Jetha Ram, who had no land, and earned a salary of Rs.100 a month, on which he fed and educated his family of a wife, daughter and five sons, has to take a loan for her marriage, the occasion on which he is said to have spent Rs. 1500. Yet Gunvant's in-laws are shown to be unhappy over the amount of jewellery she carried in her dowry, and use it as an excuse to treat her badly and not send her back to her natal house for a ritual visit when a brother comes to pick her up.<sup>49</sup> Humiliated by such an attitude of Gunvant's in-laws, her parents are shown to be helpless in this situation. The resemblance here to a modern-day 'dowry' problem is uncanny, both in terms of demands for larger dowries and the helplessness experienced by bride's parents on her ill-treatment, pointing to a fairly long genesis of a contemporary social evil. What is pertinent here is the author's comment on the novelty of such a situation — the necessity of 'buying' a groom 'these days' (*aj kal*), laying emphasis on the increase of the scale of dowry. It is important to note that the author puts this forth as a common practice on the rise, rather than take any reformist stand against it. Indeed the reformist writings against the growing size of dowry, emphasized its correctness in principle, speaking only against its too high a demand by the 1930s.<sup>50</sup> This fits in well with the new emphasis being put on *kanyadaan* marriages, with its ritualised hierarchy between the

wife-givers and wife-takers, the virgin being given away with gifts for her and her marital family.<sup>51</sup>

Once again in *Chhoti Nunh* Amar Singh brings forth the correctness of rendering material help to a daughter's parents-in-law, while at the same time pointing to the novelty of bestowing such largesse on a daughter. Sushila's father, Lala Hari Chand is depicted as a man of substantial means, moreover, a man of charity and reformist bent. In the novel, on three different occasions he offers financial or material help to her in-laws, including the jewellery given at the time of her marriage, in order to set them up, or get Sushila's business going. She, incidentally, begins her business of hoarding grain by selling her jewels for Rs. 3300, jewellery that she was presumably given a second time, for her in-laws have been shown to have sold her earlier jewels in order to sustain themselves.<sup>52</sup> When her husband Kripa Ram is comes to pick her up from her father's house, she leaves, the author tells us, with rations for six months, which included commodities like flour, rice, pulses, oil, ghee, salt, spices, etc. People in her natal village are surprised to see the generosity of this father towards his daughter, commenting that 'parents spend on daughters, but not so much'.<sup>53</sup> The adroit use of the figure of the saintly father (he is portrayed as highly respected in his village, settling disputes between villagers, very religious and charitable) to give a stamp of respectability to changing customs is significant. Equally important is the availability of her jewels, the *stridhan* normally a woman's personal property under her own control,<sup>54</sup> to her marital family, either through their dubious use of it, or its utilization through her consent. Amar Singh in his other novels, for instance, *Ghar Da Nirbah*, does depict women in control of their jewels, stored in small trunks (*peti, sandukrri*), but often shows them using it for the needs of the family, perhaps applying moral pressure on women to use their resources for familial needs.

An interesting point to speculate over is: why this insidious growth of dowry? Writing perhaps more for the agrarian context of the Punjab, Oldenburg has pointed to the radical changes introduced by the colonial state in terms of ownership of land in the hands of a male head of the household, time-bound revenue payments, along

with rising land prices, pushing even women's resources to be used for buying land or to meet the state's revenue demands. This perspicacious argument, however, may not be appropriate for the world of urban Punjab discussed here. Dowry, among the urban shop-keeping and job-hunting groups, emerged more as a compensation for the expenses and years invested in education and professional qualification, in a situation where educated boys came to be in demand. The fact that jobs in the colonial state made people mobile, or reduced the dependence on traditional occupations, was an additional reason for the insistence on the maintenance of joint families. The spectre of the break-up of the joint family, and the incipient emergence of nuclear establishments, may have been the reason for the obsessive celebration of the joint family in this reformist literature, especially as it allowed the not-so-educated too a modicum of decent life. In *Sulakhi Nunh*, Gunvant's parents look for an educated groom for her, settling for a boy in the process of completing his BA degree.<sup>55</sup> In *Agyakar*, Balvant Kaur's parents find her a groom who had spent a couple of years in an engineering college and was employed as an 'overseer with a good salary'.<sup>56</sup> When an educated salaried boy was not available, the number of incomes in the joint household was an important consideration for fixing matches. In a sense, the more the joint family came under threat, the more its cushioning need was appreciated.

By the early twentieth century, then, a number of upper-caste groups in the Punjab were delving into familial and domestic reserves of various kinds to endow themselves with a middle-class lifestyle and acquire different markers of modernity. The ideology of the perfect *pativrata* had the potential not only to mould women into the desired roles of wives and daughters-in-law, but could be deployed to garner the resources of the family and kin to augment its standing in a social world changing under the onslaught of colonial regime. The success of such an ideological endeavour was to a great extent dependent upon the subtle and insidious linkages that could be established with the idea of the hoary *pativrata*. The wife who surrendered all to please her husband and his family was an attractive trope that was used down the ages, but in each instance carried the weight of particular demands that were laid on it, to fulfill the ambitions and needs of particular patriarchies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'middle-classes' is used in plural to highlight the grades within it, in particular because the relatively lower end in the scale is discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> Hobsbawm, E.J., 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E.J. Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp.1-2.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the concept of ideology see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Verso, London, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Vaid, Bhai Mohan Singh. *Grihastha Nirbah Arthat Gharvaliyon de Kartavya (Faraz)*, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, 1920.

<sup>5</sup> Chatterjee, Partha, 'The Nationalist Resolution of Women's Question', in K. Sangari & S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, pp.233-53; Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and its Women', in his *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp.116-134 & Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Difference-Defferal of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in Colonial Bengal', *History Workshop Journal*, 36, 1993, pp.1-34.

<sup>6</sup> Sarkar, Tanika, 'The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Studies in History*, 8 (2), 1992, pp.213-35 and 'Rhetoric Against the Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and the Death of a Child Wife', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 4, 1993, pp.1869-78. Also see the essays in *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Sangari, Kumkum, 'Women Against Women', in her *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2001 (First published 1999), pp.184-278.

<sup>8</sup> Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid was a tireless reformer in Punjab actively engaged in a number of Singh Sabha activities including campaigning for 'women's reform', spread of Punjabi language, and as a foremost ayurvedic practitioner of Punjab deeply concerned with issues of health of women. See M.M. Amol, *Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969. See his *Grihastha Nirbah*, *op.cit.*, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Ibbetson, D.C.J., *Panjab Castes*, reprint by B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1974, pp.16–17. Also see on Khatri a discussion of Sir George Campbell's *Ethnology of India* in *Panjab Castes*, p.247; and J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga, (translated and edited), *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab From Ganesh Das' Char Bagh-I- Panjab*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Tandon, Prakash, *Punjab Century: 1857–1947*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> For the high-caste world of the *babus* see Sumit Sarkar, "‘Kaliyuga’, ‘Chakri’ and ‘Bhakti’: Ramakrishna and his Times", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 18, 1992, pp.1543–66.

<sup>13</sup> Malhotra, Anshu, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp.28–9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Also see N.G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900*, Duke University Monograph and Occasional Paper Series, No.2, 1966.

<sup>15</sup> Oberoi, Harjot, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Malhotra, Anshu, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities, op.cit.* On the question of caste within Sikhism also see W.H. McLeod, 'Caste in the Sikh Panth' in his *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996 (first published 1976), pp.83–104.

<sup>17</sup> Singh, Bhai Amar, *Ghar Da Nirbah*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, n.d., p.58.

<sup>18</sup> His later novel *Chhoti Nunh* noted the granting of a *sanad* and a monetary award for his earlier effort, *Chhoti Nunh*. Khalsa Agency, Amritsar, 1908.

<sup>19</sup> See the chapter 'Redfining the Ritual Drama: The Feminization of Ritual' in Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2003, pp.210–37.

<sup>20</sup> Jakobsh notes controversy among the Sikhs on this issue as well with a majority favouring the initiation of girls into Khalsa through the *amrit* ceremony, and some insisting upon the *khande ki pahul*. See Jakobsh, *op.cit.*

<sup>21</sup> The *Granth* and the *Ramayan* must be seen as common inheritance of the Punjabis, with 'Hindus' as much as 'Sikhs' familiar with both texts. Karuna Chanana's study among the Punjabi emigrants in Delhi noted how the *Granth* and 'Hindu' idols were often kept together in their villages. Karuna Chanana, 'Educational Attainment, Status Production and Women's Autonomy: A Study of Two Generations of Punjabi Women in New Delhi', in R. Jeffrey & A. Basu (eds.), *Girls' Schooling, Women's Autonomy, and Fertility Change in South Asia*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1996, pp. 107–32.

<sup>22</sup> Singh, Bhai Amar, *Chhoti Nunh*, Khalsa Agency, Amritsar, 1908, pp. 78–9.

<sup>23</sup> Fox, Richard G., *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985. Harnik Deol has a more deterministic take on Sikh identity. See her 'The Historical Roots of Sikh Communal Consciousness (1469–1974)', in her *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of Punjab*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 56–91.

<sup>24</sup> On the Arya Samaj see Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Manohar, Delhi, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> *Ghar Da Nirbah*, *op.cit.*; *Chhoti Nunh*, *op.cit.*; & *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912. He probably wrote more novels on social and familial themes including one called *Do Uttam Jivan*.

<sup>26</sup> This information has been collated from the advertisements and small write-ups that appeared on covers of his three books discussed here, as well as from the comments made in his prefatory notes.

<sup>27</sup> Punjabi emigration to countries in East and South-East Asia had probably started by this time and references to this phenomenon appear in some literature of the period.

<sup>28</sup> *Ghar Da Nirbah*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> One of the questions discussed by Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid in his *Sade Gharan di Dasha (The Condition of Our Homes)* was the relative monetary advantage of business over service, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ghar Viich Surag (Heaven At Home)*, Khalsa Tract Society, Amritsar, n.d., p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> See the Introduction in T.W. Clark (ed.), *The Novel in India: Its Birth and Development*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1970, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> McGregor, R.S., 'The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Press Fiction', in T.W. Clark (ed.), *The Novel in India*, *ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>34</sup> Malhotra, A., *Gender, Caste and Religious Identity*, *op. cit.*, pp.144–55.

<sup>35</sup> *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912, p.14 & 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Ghar Da Nirbah*, pp. 33–4.

<sup>37</sup> *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912, p.14.

<sup>38</sup> *Agyakar*, Parts I & II, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, 1911, p.15.

<sup>39</sup> Vaid, Bhai Mohan Singh, *Grahi Sikhya*, Amritsar, 1910, p.38.

<sup>40</sup> *idem.*, *Grihastha Nirbah*, *op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>41</sup> The wife as a source of tension in Punjabi cultural ethos is deep-seated. Veena Das has described the tensions in a joint Punjabi household due to the biological sexual ties between the man and his wife and the biological procreative ties between the man and his mother, with the latter seen as morally superior. There was nevertheless recognition that the sexual attractiveness of the wife could create tensions in the joint household. Veena Das, 'Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS), 10:1, 1976, pp. 3–30.

<sup>42</sup> *Garib Kaur*, Parts I & II, Wazir Hind Press, n.d. For a fuller discussion of this tract see A. Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, *op.cit.*, pp.135–38.

<sup>43</sup> *Agyakar*, *op.cit.*, p.40. For the sumptuary practices encouraged by the colonial state to put an end to female infanticide in Punjab see Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 41–72. On the ritual role of *nais* see H.Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Communities*, *op.cit.*, pp. 336–340.

<sup>44</sup> On using the idea of cleanliness and hygiene as a way of distancing from the lower castes see Anshu Malhotra, 'Of Dais and Midwives: 'Middle-Class' Interventions in the Management of Women's Reproductive Health — A Study From Colonial Punjab', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:2, May–August 2003, pp.229–259.

<sup>45</sup> *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912, p.34.

<sup>46</sup> *Chhoti Nunh*, p.90.

<sup>47</sup> Malhotra, Anshu, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, *op.cit.*, pp. 47–81 & 160–63; Also see Anshu Malhotra, 'The Emergence of Bazaar Literature: Jhagrras, Kissas and Reform in Early Twentieth Century Punjab', *Studies in History*, 8:2, July–December 2002, pp.297–321. Veena Oldenburg has especially noted the growth in size and composition of dowries in the context of changing property relations in colonial and primarily agricultural Punjab. See her *Dowry Murder*, *op.cit.*

<sup>48</sup> *Chhoti Nunh*, p.40.

<sup>49</sup> *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912, p.17.

<sup>50</sup> Malhotra, Anshu, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, *op.cit.*, p.70.

<sup>51</sup> Vatuk, Sylvia. 'Gifts and Affines in North India', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (NS), 9:2, 1975, pp.157–96.

<sup>52</sup> *Chhoti Nunh*, p.95.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>54</sup> See Oldenburg for a discussion of a girl's control over her *stridhan* in her *Dowry Murder*, *op.cit.*, p.20.

<sup>55</sup> *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912, p.16.

<sup>56</sup> *Agyakar*, p.28.

## References

Amol, M.M., *Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969.

Anon., *Agyakar*, Parts I & II, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, 1911.

Anon., *Garib Kaur*, Parts I & II, Wazir Hind Press, n.d.

Anon., *Ghar Viich Surag (Heaven At Home)*, Khalsa Tract Society, Amritsar, n.d., p.20.

Barrier, N.G., *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900*, Duke University Monograph and Occasional Paper Series, No.2, 1966.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 'The Difference-Defferal of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in Colonial Bengal', *History Workshop Journal*, 36, 1993, pp.1–34.

Chanana, Karuna, 'Educational Attainment, Status Production and Women's Autonomy: A Study of Two Generations of Punjabi Women in New Delhi', in R. Jeffrey & A. Basu (eds.), *Girls' Schooling, Women's*



*Autonomy, and Fertility Change in South Asia*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1996, pp.107–32.

Chatterjee, Partha, 'The Nation and its Women', in his *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp.116–134.

Chatterjee, Partha, 'The Nationalist Resolution of Women's Question', in K. Sangari & S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989, pp.233–53.

Clark, T.W., (ed.), *The Novel in India: Its Birth and Development*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1970.

Das, Veena, 'Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology (NS)*, 10:1, 1976, pp. 3–30.

Deol, Harnik, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of Punjab*, Routledge, London, 2000.

Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Verso, London, 1991.

Fox, Richard G., *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985.

Hobsbawm, E.J., 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions1', in E.J. Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp.1–2.

Ibbetson, D.C.J., *Panjab Castes*, reprint by B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1974, pp.16–17.

J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga, (translated and edited), *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab From Ganesh Das, Char Bagh-I- Panjab*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1975.

Jakobsh, Doris R., *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.

Jones, Kenneth W., *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Manohar, Delhi, 1989.

Malhotra, Anshu, 'Of Dais and Midwives: "Middle-Class" Interventions in the Management of Women's Reproductive Health-A Study From Colonial Punjab', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:2, May–August 2003, pp.229–259.

Malhotra, Anshu, 'The Emergence of Bazaar Literature: Jhaggras, Kissas and Reform in Early Twentieth Century Punjab', *Studies in History*, 8:2, July–December 2002, pp.297–321.

Malhotra, Anshu, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002.

Mc Gregor, R.S., 'The Rise of Standard Hindi and Early Hindi Press Fiction', in T.W. Clark (ed.), *The Novel in India*.

McLeod, W.H., 'Caste in the Sikh Panth', in his *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996 (first published 1976), pp.83–104.

Oberoi, Harjot, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

Oldenburg, Veena Talwar, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

Sangari, Kumkum, 'Women Against Women', in her *Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2001 (First published 1999), pp.184–278.

Sarkar, Sumit, "'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and his Times", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 18, 1992, pp.1543–66.

Sarkar, Tanika, 'The Hindu Wife and the Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Studies in History*, 8 (2), 1992, pp.213–35.

Sarkar, Tanika, *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001.

Sarkar, Tanika, 'Rhetoric Against the Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and the Death of a Child Wife', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 4, 1993, pp.1869–78.

Singh, Bhai Amar, *Chhoti Nunh*, Khalsa Agency, Amritsar, 1908.

Singh, Bhai Amar, *Ghar Da Nirbah*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, n.d., p.58.

Singh, Bhai Amar, *Sulakhi Nunh Ya Suchaji Gunwant Kaur*, Khalsa Agency, Lahore, 1912.

Tandon, Prakash, *Punjab Century: 1857–1947*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1963.

Vaid, Bhai Mohan Singh, *Grahi Sikhya*, Amritsar, 1910.

Vaid, Bhai Mohan Singh, *Grihastha Nirbah Arthat Gharvaliyon de Kartavya (Faraz)*, Wazir Hind Press, Amritsar, 1920.

Vatuk, Sylvia, 'Gifts and Affines in North India', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (NS), 9:2, 1975, pp.157–96.

# Gains, Losses and/or Potential Possibilities: Gender and Social Reforms in the United Provinces

Charu Gupta

**T**his paper examines the Hindu reformist and revivalist trends in colonial United Provinces (henceforth UP), and their contradictory and ambiguous relationship with the gender question. British colonial and missionary writings viewed the position of women in India before their advent as one of extreme degradation.<sup>1</sup> They broadly saw the social reforms as a result of their endeavours, which lead to the liberation of Indian women.

Traditional history writing, reformist rhetoric, and indeed all nationalist writings have viewed Hindu social reform movement as a relatively straightforward affair.<sup>2</sup> There has been an uncritical celebration of it in such writings, which claim that it led to the emancipation of Hindu women, and to their social and cultural progress from the stagnating condition in which they had been rotting, particularly from the medieval period onwards, and well into the eighteenth century. In this adulation, the social reform movement emerges as a truly liberating force, leading to the abolition of sati, to the introduction of female education, widow remarriage, raising of the age of consent, eradication of purdah, and end to 'obscene' representations of women in literature and art. To further glorify the enlightenment and liberating effect of reforms on and for women, it became imperative to paint the earlier period, particularly medieval times and the eighteenth century, as one of darkness and stagnation, and to vehemently critique it. Simultaneously, the ancient past was depicted as a 'golden-age', where women were valued and occupied

Y15.2 N9  
P5

Nehru Memorial Museum  
and Library

Acc No. GI 9500

positions of high status. To take an example, most Hindi writers, under the influence of social reforms, drew a straight line between the degenerate state of women and the sensuous poetry of late medieval times, and of *Riti Kal*. Wrote Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi:

Similar to Hindi, languages like Bengali, Marathi and Gujarati too have emerged from Sanskrit, but nowhere does the *nayika* dominate as much as in Hindi... Let us see what is written in these books: examples of dirty deeds of *parakiya* and prostitutes! Sinful conduct of unmarried girls!! Meaningless babble of shameless and lewd women, who corrupt the minds of men!!!!... Somewhere some *nayika* is running in the dark on the banks of the Yamuna, somewhere she is waiting in moonlight for her beloved... Can there be any greater power to destroy the moral conduct of our people?...I plead for an immediate stop to the composition of such works and the proscription of those already existing.<sup>3</sup>

Even Sumitranandan Pant could not resist remarking:

What was there for them to do? Stimulated by desire, their infinite power of imagination spread like Draupadi's veil and coiled itself around the *nayika*'s every limb... their vision rarefied and ever in search of *ras*, travelled only from the toe to the head.... What an all-embracing sensibility! What astute genius! To be able to see the whole universe in a single limb!... As a result, the image of the Indian woman — devoted, steadfast, chaste — became transformed into a riot of gaudy, sensual reflections, and caught up in this maze, we were unable to see our simple, modest Sati of old.<sup>4</sup>

## The Purdah Controversy

The discourse on purdah amongst the Hindu reformers first highlighted it as a problem that was a result of the Muslim rule and came in force largely due to two reasons: as an unhealthy impact of Muslim customs, and as a weapon to shield Hindu women from being attacked by bestial Muslim males. And social reforms were depicted as bringing light after a long tunnel of darkness, to end all such evils.

Some of the later historians however, pointed to various lacunae in the social reform movement. For example, that all the earlier initiatives on the women's question were taken largely by men; that the reformers belonged mostly to the upper castes and emerging elite classes; and that they mainly addressed problems of upper caste-middle class Hindu women.<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that with the growth of the national movement, the women's question was co-opted to a larger political project and put 'on hold' pending the achievement of other objectives.<sup>6</sup> Further, it is stated that the reformers too separated the home from the world.<sup>7</sup> Even the efficacy of the law has been questioned, for it is shown to have effected no significant changes in the existing nexus of gender relations.<sup>8</sup>

Subaltern historians, particularly in their search for a non-elite perspective for understanding historical processes, have pointed to the coercive power of modernity itself. They argue that the central question regarding women in the nineteenth century was not what women want but rather how to modernise them, which came with its own coercive package. This has sometimes led to a slippage, where there is a celebration of tradition and it is argued that there was increasing conformity and marginalisation of women's space and culture due to renaissance, enlightenment and modernity.

Most important feminists have attempted to present an alternative account of colonial social reforms from a gender-sensitive perspective. Even at the risk of appearing to condone the pernicious social practices and forms of violence against women that they had endeavoured to eliminate, they have sought to produce a more complex and textured view of the processes of social reform. Thus it has been pointed out that reforms tell us little about women's desires and emotions, their health and work. As Lata Mani has pointed out, the debates over social issues constructed women as victims or heroines, denying them complex personalities and agency. Women in fact, according to her, became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated, with an exclusion of the voices of women themselves.<sup>9</sup>

Through fragments and examples from colonial U.P., I have attempted to show how a close reading of some of the reformist debates reveals that things were not as they seemed, that supposedly philanthropic concerns for women were motivated by more than abstract principles of humanitarianism. At the same time, while examining the interrelationship between gender and social reforms through localised evidence from U.P., this paper implicitly questions some of the formulations made regarding Bengal, which have tended to provide much of the current theoretical framework for any discussion on gender, social reforms and nationalism in colonial India, and it has often been assumed that what was true of Bengal could be applied to the whole of India. In U.P., for example, the reformist endeavour and the 'woman's question' did not fade away with the emergence of the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement was not successful in situating the 'woman's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. In fact, the 1920s and 1930s in U.P. were marked by most extensive and intense public deliberations and reformist debates on women, in constant dialogue with the colonial state.

However, in U.P. too, as perhaps elsewhere, gender stereotypes continued to be evoked in various debates around women and reform. Moreover, many of the reforms expressly directed towards improving women's lot often benefited the men more than the women.

Take the example of removal of purdah, in relation to which Hindu reformers of U.P. — indeed, elsewhere too — moved on a pendulum. While opposing purdah in no unclear terms, they also supported it selectively as is clear from their celebration of *lajja* as the Hindu woman's best adornment. With greater access of women to public places, selective appearance of purdah was thought necessary at railway stations, public ghats and roads, in interactions with outside shopkeepers and other men.<sup>10</sup> The arguments betrayed anxieties about women's behaviour, movement and relationships outside the household. Particularly, women bathing semi-nude in public *ghats* were seen as signs of shame, of being uncivilised, and

a licensed misdoing in an open space.<sup>11</sup> This was an antithesis of purdah. An article in *Stri Darpan*, a women's magazine from Kanpur, said:

These days women have constructed completely opposite meanings of purdah. As soon as they enter their homes, they pull a yard-long veil, and when they go out to fairs, they have their face totally uncovered. Singing obscene songs, they walk on the streets at the time of marriages. In such situations can they be thought of as purdah-bearers just because their faces are covered?... Then again in the month of Kartik, they take bath in rivers, where thousands of people see them. Then they do not feel at all ashamed... True purdah is that which existed between Sita and Lakshman.<sup>12</sup>

The discourse on purdah thus revealed an ambiguity. It paralleled other attempts to control and isolate women, and at the same time to support reforms in order to appear civilised. Thus, a selective purdah was shown as being good for women themselves. Worries about modern developments, with markets, railways, pilgrimages, etc. increasingly becoming sites for the 'exposure' of respectable women, indicated the subversive potential of completely doing away with purdah. This led to simultaneous condemnation and endorsement.

## Education of Women

Education of women emerged high on the agenda of reformist thinkers. However, it is important to see the language in which education for women was camouflaged. The disastrous consequences of modern education on men were stressed, so as to ensure that the same did not happen to women, who had managed to retain many of the old ideals and their special nature:

In too many cases the Indian youth having gone through the course of instruction, emerges from his college or school with a pale face, a pair of sunken eyes, and a mass of unassimilated ideas in his head. If this is education, go on experimenting with the boys a little longer, but have mercy on the girls and leave them uneducated, until certain important

questions have been answered. What is the ideal of womanhood which Indian girls should be required to keep constantly in view? In what way is the ideal to be presented to their minds?<sup>13</sup>

This ideal of education for women was supposed to help build better wives and mothers. Education for women was a moral imperative for a middle-class Hindu identity and civilisation, and a national investment, designed to domesticate the woman and assign to her a more enlightened and companionable role, for greater compatibility in marriage. Wrote Bishan Narayan Dar, the famous lawyer of U.P.:

With female education will come not only domestic peace and harmony, but a new source of pleasures, pleasures which men derive from female society will be opened, ennobled and purified, and feminine tenderness and sympathy, under the guidance of enlightened reason, will become one of the most potent instruments of social amelioration.<sup>14</sup>

Religious and moral education was the most important pursuit for women and included the study of *Mahabharat*, *Ramayan* and the *Manusmriti*. This was to be combined with scientific education of a specific kind. Women were to be trained in domestic sciences, including sanitary laws, home nursing, value of food-stuffs, household management, keeping of basic accounts, hygiene, cooking and sewing.<sup>15</sup> It was remarked:

Our home is our school, and the mistress of the house is established there like a Saraswati, to impart us education... Home is a temple, in which various religious duties are performed. Home is like a small state, whose ruler is the woman and the subject are her children... Actually the mother can easily teach what big educationists of Oxford and Cambridge also cannot teach after years of education.<sup>16</sup>

Nowhere was education given such moral fervour, pure character and virtuous flavour, as in the case of women's education.<sup>17</sup>



## Obscenity and Sexuality

Contestations over obscenity and sexuality were at the heart of many reformist debates in U.P. — over the representation of women in images and words, of licit and illicit relations, of normal and abnormal sexuality — and these were linked to the maintenance of social order and the enhancement of civilisation, modernity and nationalism. Here again, I have observed that there was an intensification in the management and policing of sexuality and a sexual 'purity' emerged.<sup>18</sup> The Hindu social reforms were characterised by a defence of morality, both in literature and in popular cultural practices, with particular implications for women. Thus obscenity was redefined by many reformist literary writers, specifically to control certain sexual identities of women. In the new poetry, for example, Radha was transformed from being a figure of incomparable joy into an incomparable bore.

From a predominantly aesthetic category, the image of woman became a patently moral one. Sensuousness, passion and emotion gave way to concerns over social depravity, reform, chastity and morality. Prose and poetry acquired a new purpose. The reformist rhetoric of much of the literature on widow remarriage, women's education, chastity and sexual abstinence, was arguing for something like a bourgeois morality. Among the new images now being created, were the pathos of child marriage and widowhood, a glorification of motherhood and service to the nation. These became frequent motifs of prose and poetry, under considerable influence of the Arya Samaj. Virtuous women struggling to devote themselves to lord and husband against all pressures were the new carriers of cultural authenticity and integrity of the Hindu nation. Here women became the paradigms of marital duty; marriage itself became primarily a devotional hierarchical relationship. The integrity of the Hindu nation thus rested on a virtuous womanhood. Issues of social control became a serious concern and the Hindu reformers had to generate and enforce standards for expected gender behaviour, to assure gender conformity.

Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi highlighted this respectable, ideal woman — she wears a sari, puts on a *bindi* and decorates herself with flowers. She goes to the temple, prays for her husband, is educated, goes to *sabhya* (civilised) meetings and, on coming back, wins the heart of her husband.<sup>19</sup> Lyrically, wrote Maithilisharan Gupt,

*Arya kanya man leti svapn mein bhi pati jise,  
bhinn usse phir jagat mein aur bhaj sakti kise?*

(Even in her dreams if an Aryan woman recognises someone as her husband, she cannot ever think of worshipping anyone else but him.)<sup>20</sup>

To take another example, the description of women's breasts had erotic, playful meanings in the poetry of *Riti Kal*. However, in the potent lines composed by Jaishanker Prasad, it was said:

*Abla jeevan hai tumhari yahi kahani,  
Anchal mein hai dudh aur akhon mein pani.*

(The life of a woman is just this — milk in the bosom and tears in the eyes.)

The woman was invested with new values, at once nationalist and Hindu. On this rested the identity of the middle class and the exclusiveness of nationalist culture. The dominant image of women as sexual beings was reversed and transformed into an ideology of female 'passionlessness', framing an oppositional womanhood against colonial designations of derelict sexuality. The recast chaste wife was an emblem of femininity, purity and sublimated sexuality, which colonial discourse had denied Hindu society. She was a combination of femininity, *stitva* (virtue) and sublimated sexuality. The taboos on her behaviour were aimed to enclose and discipline female bodies, to ensure a new social and moral hierarchy of power, and to integrate chastity with middle-class identity. Sexual pleasure thus came to be regarded with extreme suspicion and the modern Hindu cultural discourse of reform, even from its diverse angles, seems to converge on the gender question, where there was a clear demarcation between aesthetic and obscene, ennobling and forbidden. However, it was not just that the feminine ideal involved

restraint and suppression of pleasure. Rather, respectable womanhood in the literary canon was actively defined around a notion of pleasure that encompassed notions of self-sacrifice, 'positive' missions and the wider good. Aesthetics became an exercise in ethics.

### Women and Hierarchy

Further, for most of the reformers, women were significant for a renewed emphasis on conservative hierarchical upper-caste domination. Caste and gender inequalities could reinforce each other in systematic ways, and women emerged as a powerful means of Brahmanical patriarchal attempts to hold its power, consolidate social hierarchies and express caste exclusivities, using reforms as well to aid the process.<sup>21</sup> The reordering of household and conjugality, images of an idealised *pativrata* (devoted wife) imbued with reformist endeavours, and increasing sexual disciplining and control over the social movements of women helped maintain social boundaries.<sup>22</sup> Gendered language and customs related to women became critical to counter claims of other castes for higher status. Kumar Cheda Singh Varma, a Rajput, and barrister-at-law in Agra and advocate of the Allahabad High Court, in an influential book<sup>23</sup> attacked the custom of *hansa tamasha* among Khatris in which masks were worn and 'obscene' songs sung on the death of a person. He highlighted the 'physical weakness' of Kayasthas, who he claimed were good only for inferior work as clerks. At another place he said, 'The use of the surname Das is common with the Kayasthas and their feminine names, without a single exception, terminate in Dasi'. The practice of widow remarriage (*dhrija* or *karao*) and polyandry among the Jats were cited main reasons for Jats not being Kshatriyas. Kurmis were attacked for their lack of purdah.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in U.P., as elsewhere, women's roles affected the status of a caste. Agarwals discriminated against the Agraharis because their women served in shops. Khatiks were degraded because their women peddled fruits on the street.<sup>25</sup> A certain section of Gujars

was looked down upon since their women sold butter and *ghee*.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, various intermediate and even lower castes, under considerable influence of the reformist rhetoric, started imposing restrictions on women to improve their social status and strengthen claims for upward mobility.<sup>27</sup> Some urban Chamars began putting their wives under seclusion, proclaiming a new role for the women of their community.<sup>28</sup> Khatiks of Lucknow asked their women to sell only at shops.<sup>29</sup> Ahir men stopped women from going out and selling milk.<sup>30</sup> Lower castes too drew upon the injunctions against all forms of 'obscenity'. Among them, women were also subject to control because of their economic roles.

Simultaneously, upper-caste reformers attempted to 'improve' the popular cultural practices of the lower castes, especially related to women, ostensibly to uplift and cleanse them of their perceived evils and lax moral standards. This had the effect of maintaining upper-caste hegemony, as upper-caste norms and ideals were further embedded. An elitist, Brahmanical dimension, with shared hostility to a large part of socially and culturally popular practices of the masses, including those of women, also helped in creating unity between 'progressive' Hindu reformists and 'conservative' neo-traditionalists. While there were considerable tensions between them, where, for example, Sanatanists claimed that Arya Samajists were their inferiors, while the latter tried to portray them as putative equals, both shared a hostility over popular practices of women. Both Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma were against women singing 'obscene' songs, bathing semi-nude in public ghats, and their participation in Holi, melas and theatre. Both saw these as examples of Hindu degeneracy.<sup>31</sup> It is not insignificant that many of the leading members of Arya Samaj or orthodox Hindu bodies were also active members of various caste associations.<sup>32</sup> Several upper and lower-caste associations and Hindu religious bodies adopted similar resolutions, though for their own specific reasons and from diverse perspectives. Widow remarriage, cutting of marriage expenses, stopping women from 'obscene' activities, limited education and selective purdah were on the agenda of almost all. For some, these were ways to maintain their hierarchical dominance or a means for unity; for others

it signified material advancement or a medium to counter social marginalisation. There were uneasy oscillations between aggressive assertions of hierarchy and projects of limited and integrative reforms and co-options.

Thus from the late nineteenth century onwards, various forms of entertainment and the social space and territory of women attracted the attention of reformist thinkers in U.P. They started advocating reforms and changes in the social and customary behaviour of women. Such reformist endeavours had an affinity with a Hindu nationalist civilising rhetoric. *Garis*<sup>33</sup> sung in marriages were seen as particularly corrupting, indecent and unworthy, especially for 'proper' high-caste and middle-class Hindu women. They spoke that which should not be spoken by women, and made women seem uncontrollable. Hindu reformers and publicists therefore attempted to stifle these voices, by branding the songs as *bure* (bad) and *gande* (dirty), and their singers as loud, bawdy and frivolous.<sup>34</sup> Not only were women's songs to be regulated and sanitised, the proper and correct ones were now to be defined and prescribed by men. In the process, women's songs were converted into an advice manual, meant for national uplift. To claim serious intent and the authority of the national movement, it was necessary that trivial songs be replaced by *adarsh geet* (ideal songs),<sup>35</sup> sung by women in the service of the nation.<sup>36</sup>

One song went thus:

*Dekho lajja ke darpan mein tum mukhra...*

*pativrata ki orho chunariya, sheel ka nainon mein ho kajra.*

(See your face in the mirror of modesty. Wear the veil of chastity and mark your eyes with the kohl of decency.)<sup>37</sup>

Yet another song, written like a sermon, said:

*Nachna uchit na nachvana, na byahon mein gali gana...*

*kabhi mat dekho sajni ras, krishna sakhiyon ka vividh vilas*

(It is not right to dance or set others dancing, or to sing *galis* in marriages. Dear women-friends, never watch the dance-drama or the playful frolics of Krishna and *gopis*.)<sup>38</sup>

The festival of Holi too witnessed a similar rhetoric. These were attempts to reorder the daily life and recreation of women, largely by male Hindu reformers and publicists, according to their concerns for upward mobility, and family, caste and community honour. It was a response to the challenges of a Hindu civilising mission and nationalist agendas, posed by such assertions of women. There was thus a devaluation of women's entertainment for women were seen as allocating themselves against good taste, proper behaviour and sexual morality, perpetuating 'negative' aspects of culture. Women here were not perceived as preservers of the cultural and spiritual sphere; rather, they were seen as the main threat, due to their lack of loyalty to definitions of civilisation. Respectability could only be achieved by disciplining and cleansing this cultural world of women.<sup>39</sup> Hindu reformers had to move away not only from the obscene and the sexual, but also from the popular and the frivolous, as an index of civilisation and as a part of the serious business of the nationalist struggle. They sought to modify not only the leisure activities and social behaviour of women, but even the institutions that gave expression to that behaviour. The endeavours also reflected anxieties of the Hindu reformist agenda, where they attempted to extend their jurisdiction by entering into arenas of social life that were seen as beyond their pale.

Equally crucial, the rhetoric of Hindu social reform reworked and updated patriarchy in a different form and combined it with an assertion of a homogeneous Hindu cultural and political identity, whereby it became important to control Hindu women. The liberal premise of the reformist discourse was considerably overturned, when within it, the woman came to be viewed as a means to rework and recover an imagined glorious Hindu past, and her place in the home was valorised as the space of uncontaminated purity.

In certain reformist and revivalist rhetoric, the dismissal of anything 'Muslim' was carried out efficiently and ruthlessly. These included attacks on perceived Muslim ritual practices and myths, to constructed fears of increasing Muslim numbers or charged virility and sexuality of the Muslim male, to attacks on their occupations and jobs. These issues were interlinked in a complex tangle of ideas,

combining caste, class, community and gender. Their significance lay in the way they were able to compound and conflate images of Hindu masculinity and the lustful Muslim male, victimised and heroic Hindu woman, myths of Hindu homogeneity and anxiety over declining numbers.

I wish to elaborate this by pointing to the shifting debates on widow remarriage among the reformers in late colonial UP. In the 1920s especially, in the context of *shuddhi* and *sangathan* movements, the debates on widow remarriage were refurbished in new ways, linking them to supposed decline in Hindu population, anxieties about elopements and conversions of Hindu widows by Muslims, and suggestions that the reproductive capacities of widows could enhance Hindu numbers. A tract said that large numbers of widows were at present entering the homes of *yavanas* (barbarians) and *mlecchas* (non-Hindus), producing children for them and increasing their numbers.<sup>40</sup> Another said that Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya widows particularly were walking into Muslim hands and decreasing the number of Hindus.<sup>41</sup> The famous Hindi poet Ayodhyasingh Upadhyaya 'Hariaudh' penned these lines at this time:

*Gode mein isaiyat islam ki  
betiyan bahuein lita kar hum late!  
Ah ghate par humen ghata hua  
man bewaon ka ghata kar hum ghate!!*

(We have made our daughters and daughters-in-law lie in the lap of Islam and Christianity.<sup>42</sup> We have suffered loss after loss. By not respecting widows, we have dwindled in numbers.)<sup>43</sup>

It was plainly stated that the loss of a Hindu widow was not just the loss of one person, but also of many more. Moreover, these numbers were subtracted from the Hindu population, but added to the Muslims, doubling the loss to Hindus.<sup>44</sup> One tract, *Humara Bhishan Haas*, a collection of articles reprinted from the newspaper *Pratap*, dwelt on the catastrophic decline of Hindus due to increasing

conversions. A picture of terrible calamity was built up, quoting extensively from census reports. At one place it stated:

Our sexually unsatisfied widows especially are prone to Muslim hands and by producing Muslim children they increase their numbers and spell disaster for the Hindus.... Muslim *goondas* are especially seen outside the houses that have Hindu widows.... You yourselves say, would you like our Aryan widows to read *nikah* with a Muslim?<sup>45</sup>

Thus it was declared:

This is the period of *Kaliyug* for all Hindus.... The stage at which Hindu community proposed the ideal of no widow remarriage, and when this ideal became a practical reality, was the highest moral stage of Hindu community.... At that time there was only Hindu community, Hindu culture and Hindu religion in the country.... We ourselves severely oppose widow remarriage.... There can be nothing more tragic than the remarriage of widows. This is a clear proof of moral decline of the Hindu society. *But the acceptance and willingness of Hindu widows to live, reside and marry with Muslims is so appalling and fearful that in front of that widow remarriage appears very good indeed.*<sup>46</sup> (emphasis mine)

It was necessary to support widow remarriage and control the widows' reproductivity within the bounds of Hinduism. The liberal promise of widow-remarriage was overturned by a community need for a better economy of potential childbearing wombs. Hindu men were asked in this hour of crisis, as part of their religious duty, to marry Hindu widows or have them remarried within their religious community.<sup>47</sup> The protection of widows was seen as a compulsory step to prevent the decline of the Hindus.<sup>48</sup> Widow remarriage was thus to be advocated because widows were going into the homes of Muslims, they were increasing the Muslim numbers, they were producing *gau bhakshak* (cow killers), and because the Hindu religion was in danger.

While endorsing all that I have said above, is it enough to stop here? Are we still not presenting only one side of the picture? After



all, the period of Hindu reforms was also a period when caste hierarchies and Hindu patriarchies were qualified. Reforms did signal new opportunities for women, however limited they proved to be. Sexuality, love and pleasure came to be expressed in diverse ways. Reforms, often unintentionally, also paved the way for a rich variety of experiences and practices, indifferent to and sometimes even subverting the stated aims of reforms. For example, the spread of education among women, new ideals of companionate and monogamous marriages, and the increase in the number of households, which was also seen as undermining the joint family,<sup>49</sup> created a sense of disquiet and increased patriarchal insecurities. There was growing awareness of women's roles and rights.<sup>50</sup> The customary demarcation of gendered spaces was becoming untenable.

I wish to thus end this paper by exploring how disorder crept into the moral order of social reforms. The prescriptions of Hindu reformers and revivalists were often fragile, resulting in unintended consequences and contradictory and ambiguous situations. Once set in motion, the very same vocabulary and processes that were first employed by the reformers to control women acquired their own dynamic in education, literature and popular culture.

### **Impact of Reform Movements**

Reform movements often have a limited impact, and they are not identical with domination.<sup>51</sup> The need for constant reiteration of how women 'ought to behave', implied the potential or actual 'recalcitrance' of women. Whenever Holi drew near, similar arguments were made and numerous caste associations continued to adopt resolutions against women's songs, indicating that these practices continued. One can go a step further and argue that if anything, the tensions engendered in the reformist endeavour stimulated even greater need for popular cultural expression. These were areas which provided small daily evasions, beyond the reach of controlling forces. These call into question claims of marginalisation of women's popular culture in reality, and reveal contradictions between motivations and experiences. At the same

time, one must be careful not to exaggerate this space. Popular culture may contain elements of misogyny. It has an ambivalent potential where it can at once signify social protest and social control, perpetuation of dominant values and its critique, consent and resistance.<sup>52</sup> The vitality and resilience of popular culture lies in its ability to satisfy human need for leisure and sociability, transcending reformist endeavours. Sources of pleasure for women, regardless of politics, continue to operate as survival strategies.

Even in the field of education, it is not enough to emphasise only the limits of the educational avenues of women and the function of education in the subordination of women.<sup>53</sup> A study of education for women would be incomplete without drawing attention to levels other than that of the formal script. The reading habits of educated women in this period point to something else. One could limit and frame syllabi, one could order prescriptive texts, but once women were educated, it was difficult to control what they read, and the uses to which they put their knowledge. Education was conducted in relatively public spaces. However, reading by women was largely a private act, offering greater scope for negotiation.<sup>54</sup> Women could not be prevented from 'reading against the grain' or from gaining access to 'trash' material. They were most likely reading and enjoying erotic novels, detective fiction, love stories, plays, *svangs*, *nautankis* and books of songs — precisely the material the reformists were keen to keep away from women. Unmarried educated girls were even reading birth manuals. Such books were quite popular among educated women and had their own market.<sup>55</sup> Though educated women were less likely to buy such books in bazaars, which were mainly frequented by men, these works were accessible to them as well. Yashoda Devi, a leading ayurvedic doctor of Allahabad, and writer of more than forty prescriptive books, lamented:

I am fully aware that in the trunks of all educated women are kept at least one-two such novels... If I had written such novels, I would have gathered a lot of money... People say that it was these novels that encouraged Hindi reading, especially among women.... Every day women write letters

to me, demanding spicy novels... They returned my books on *nitishastra* and *dharmashastra*... No one asked for books on religious education or household management... For two–three years I sent my books on women's education to the Magh Mela on the banks of Triveni. The women who used to come to purchase books used to go away after seeing my stall. They used to take the names of many juicy novels and used to demand them specifically, as well as the likes of *Albela Gavaiya* and *Ghazal Sangraha*. Other shops that sold such useless novels reported brisk sales.<sup>56</sup>

These novels were perhaps less taxing and more readable, although they too may have often upheld patriarchal notions. Moral stigmas were less attached to women here and romances usually relied on sensation, sexual excitement and 'titillation'. However, here, more important than what women were making of these novels, was the very act of reading them, which itself had the potential of a subversive act.

The fear of women's reading led to it being persistently brought under the scrutiny of Hindu publicists and becoming a target of suspicions and inquisitions, as it suggested possible autonomy of the woman's mind. One paper condemned female education on the ground that once women could read and write there would be nothing to withhold them from reading novels, poetical works and other works of a demoralising nature. The editor apprehended that such books would tend to make them unchaste, and to contaminate society generally. He went on to suggest that the education of women had to be purely theological. He was especially opposed to placing works of Urdu and Persian literature in the hands of women, as they dealt mostly with love.<sup>57</sup> *Hindi Sahitya Samiti* of Indore organised an essay competition on the topic "*Striyon ke liye prithak sahitya ki avashyakta*" i.e., the need for the development of a separate literature for women. A Shyamkumar from Agra received the first prize. He stressed that women had to immediately stop reading such *ashlil* (obscene) and *gramin*<sup>58</sup> literature, and highlighted the need to develop separate, clean and pure literature for them.<sup>59</sup> When a new magazine called *Kanya Manoranjan* was started for girls

in U.P. in 1913, its need was justified by stating that a lot of entertaining material could not be given in the hands of young girls, and thus a clean magazine was needed.<sup>60</sup> There was a grave distrust of novels, as they were linked directly to the downfall of character and the birth of sleazy ideas and romantic intrigue. Just as women had to remain away from intoxicating drinks, so they were to avoid novels. Novels were seen as the most intoxicating among all books.<sup>61</sup> Thus it was imperative for reading to be selective, as otherwise it could be the antithesis of all that education was supposed to be. The reading of sexy, semi-pornographic literature by women was a direct challenge to the very purpose and nature of education for women.<sup>62</sup> Balkrishn Bhatt, founder of the monthly *Hindi Pradip* had to say this regarding woman's education, way back in 1893:

Educating them does not imply making them study destructive books such as *Premasagar*, *Brajvilas*... but the best books of mathematics, geography, history, philosophy, science, etc., so that they may open their eyes..., so that the influence of the fables and false fantasies of the Purana, with which their every vein is saturated, may be curtailed... and you will see that their interest will be averted naturally from that area.<sup>63</sup>

*Premasagar*, a book of love stories between Radha and Krishna, commissioned by the British as a text at Fort William College for the Company functionaries, was included as a destructive book,<sup>64</sup> pointing to the great alarm of any form of erotic literature reaching the hands of Hindu women. Arguments of progress were used to camouflage this concern. The fear of such books in the hands of women was so insidious that even English women appeared good in comparison:

The most audacious disparager of English woman's morality must admit that a society which can produce the prototypes of female characters depicted in Scott and Tennyson has a higher worthier conception of womanhood than that which takes delight in the *Arabian Nights*, in Urdu lyrics and in our popular love stories.<sup>65</sup>

Women's reading of such books was sexualised and eroticised by those who condemned them. There were moral, sexual, religious

and ideological dangers lurking in this action by women. Education for women thus raised both hopes and insecurities among Hindu reformers. It was aimed at making women good wives/good mothers/good Hindus, but had the potential to make them bad wives/bad mothers/bad Hindus as well. Education reinforced the power of the male over the female. But it also empowered its female beneficiaries in ways unanticipated by the reforming patriarchs. There was a constant concern at the unknown powers that education could give to women. This dual nature moved nationalists and reformists to emphasise the necessity of education and also to set its limits.

Further, while reforms may have worked to an extent for the upper-caste women, confining them more in the home, the story is perhaps different for lower-caste women. For many, there was a lack of genuine conviction or interest in reforms. Economic compulsions, more freedom of movement, and lesser importance of civilisational discourses may have led the lower-caste leaders to posit similar reformist questions and ideas at the level of rhetoric and values, but often not implemented at the level of action. Many low-caste women were full and active economic contributors in the household, and their loss could not be afforded.<sup>66</sup> Thus, some accorded more social room, though not necessarily equality, to women.<sup>67</sup> Because of the much more layered levels of oppression, the views, movements and linkages of different members of lower castes represented mixed voices, supporting contradictory readings.<sup>68</sup>

To recapitulate, it is true that the social reforms in colonial India signalled the ideological reworking of the *pativrata* and the ideal woman. However, there were a series of devices and techniques within the domestic field, which helped women in negotiating their pedagogical formation as *pativratas*. The model of reforms was far less convincing as an explanation for women's actual occupation and experiences. Despite being severely monitored, the domain of reforms remained imbued with unpredictable potential, offering tantalising possibilities and 'frightening' instabilities. There were exceptions and possibilities of transgressive forms of cultural consumptions, signifying a physical, moral and cultural 'impurity' in

contrast to the ideal. They did not result in an 'either' / 'or' situation. The identity of the Hindu woman was not fixed, but was diverse and open to constant negotiation. These uncertain identities were reflected in women travelling in trains, bathing in public *ghats*, relying on *dais*, sharing of moments of laughter and underlying sexual tensions with the younger brother-in-law, reading 'dirty' books and in many other situations. These were arenas of enjoyment, flirtation and sexual messages. Reforms also created certain fluid spaces, in which there were subversions through a recasting of certain idioms. It would be simplistic to view them just in terms of gains for women or losses for them. Rather, they had spaces for a variety of penetrations and negotiations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Classical here was the work of James Mill, *The History of British India*, 2 Vols, Chelsea House, New York, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Datta, K.K., *Renaissance, Nationalism and Social Changes in Modern India*, Bookland, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 105–15; Bipin Chandra, *Modern India: A History Textbook for Class XII*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, Chs. 5 & 10.

<sup>3</sup> Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi *Rachnavali*, Vol. 2, (ed.), and comp. Bharat Yayavar, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 55–58.

<sup>4</sup> Pant, Sumitranandan, *Pallav*, Allahabad, 1926, pp. 9–13.

<sup>5</sup> Heimsath, Charles H., *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1993, Chs. 6 & 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Nair, Janaki, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History*, New Delhi, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Mani, Lata, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> 'Saroj', Lakshmi Narayan, *Nari Shiksha Darpan*, Banaras, 1929, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Anon., 'Striyon ka Nagn Snan', *Madhuri*, 1, 2, 1, January 1923, pp. 53–54; *Kanauj Punch*, August 1, 1892, *Native Newspaper Reports of UP* (henceforth *NNR*), August 3, 1892, p. 284.

<sup>12</sup> Gupta, Shakuntala Devi, 'Purdah', *Stri Darpan*, 29:1, July 1923, pp. 346-47.

<sup>13</sup> Shargha, Ikbal Kishen, *The Moral Education of Indian*, Bareilly, 1908 [reprinted from the *Hindustan Review* for August and September 1905], p. 13. Also see Purshottam, *Stri Bhushan*, Banaras, 1932, pp. 216-18; Hari Ramchandra Diwakar, "Bhartiya Striyon ka Vishwavidyalaya", *Saraswati*, 17, 4, October 1916, p. 220; *Samrat*, September 2, 1909, *NNR*, September 10, 1909.

<sup>14</sup> Dar, Bishan Narayan, *Signs of the Times*, Lucknow, 1895, p. 62. Also see Ramdevi, 'Stri Shiksha', *Kayastha Mahila Hitaishi*, 1:9, 1918, pp. 15-19; *Maheshwari*, October 1898, *NNR*, October 12, 1898, p. 543.

<sup>15</sup> Garg, Mahendulal, *Kalavati Shiksha*, Allahabad, 1930, p. 122; Saroj, *Nari*, pp. 9-11; Anon., 'Stri Shiksha', *Gurukul Samachar*, 2, 9-10, April-May 1910, pp. 21-23; Sharkeshwari Agha, *Some Aspects of the Education of Women in U.P.* with a Foreword by C.Y. Chintamani, Allahabad, 1933, pp. 6-11; Annie Besant, *The Education of Indian Girls*, Banaras, 1923, pp. 3-4; Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Adarsh Patni*, Allahabad, 1935, pp. 7-8; Yashoda Devi, *Pativrata Dharma Mala*, Allahabad, 1926, p. 47; Udaynarayan Singh, 'Stri Shiksha', *Kurmi Kshatriya Diwakar*, 1, 7, September 1925, pp. 9-11; *Hindustan*, January 22, 1902, *NNR*, January 25, 1902, p. 55; *Hindustan Review*, June 1911, *NNR*, July 14, 1911, pp. 620-21.

<sup>16</sup> Prakash, Bishambhar, *Nari Updesh*, Meerut, 1912, pp. 14-17.

<sup>17</sup> Thakur, *Adarsh*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta, 'Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Bengal', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 130-32.

<sup>19</sup> Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi *Rachnavali*, Vol. 13, pp. 248-49. Also see Sridhar Pathak, *Manovinod*, Banaras, 1917, pp. 25-29.

<sup>20</sup> Gupt, Maithilisharan, *Rang Mein Bhang*, Jhansi, 1927, 9<sup>th</sup> edn, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> O'Hanlon, Rosalind (ed.), *A Comparison Between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Gupta, Sheo Dayal Sah, *Sri Vaishya Vamsha Vibhushan*, Sitapur, 1907, pp. 128-39. For example, Brahmins urged their women not to go 'begging' and singing songs in front of Baniya households. Gajadhar Prasad, *Brahmankul Parivartan*, Allahabad, 1911, pp. 3, 8; Lala Mangtoo Ram, *Brahman Sudhar*, Ramgarh, 1922, pp. 5, 8, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Varma, Kumar Cheda Singh, *Kshatriyas and Would-be Kshatriyas*, Allahabad, 1904. It was originally printed at the Pioneer Press and was translated in Hindi in 1907, published by the Rajput Anglo-Oriental Press Agra as *Kshatriya aur Kritram Kshatriya*. For more details, see William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, Delhi, 1996, p. 116. Similar trends were visible elsewhere. Pandit Chotelal Sharma, a Brahmin and General Secretary of the Hindu Dharma Varna Vyavastha Mandal, based in Jaipur, wrote many books like *Jati Anveshan*, Jaipur, 1928, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. and *Saptkhandi Jati Nirnaya*, Jaipur, 1923, ridiculing claims of various castes for higher status, again extensively focusing on women.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 84, 93-96, 98.

<sup>25</sup> Blunt, E.A.H., *The Caste System of Northern India: With Special Reference to U.P.*, Oxford University Press, London, 1931, p. 241.

<sup>26</sup> *Census of India, 1911, U.P., Vol. XV. Part I. Report*, Allahabad, 1902, p. 331.

<sup>27</sup> Gender has only recently emerged as an integral part of studies on intermediate and lower castes. Various scholars have emphasised how women were used to counter their social marginalisation. See Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969; Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987, pp. 255-98; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'From Alienation to Integration: Changes in the Politics of Caste in Bengal, 1937-47', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 31, 3, 1994, pp. 349-91; Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998. For views on how women in turn asserted themselves, see Mary Searle-Chatterjee, *Reversible Sex Roles: The Special Case of Banaras Sweepers*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1981; P. G. Jogdand (ed.), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995; P. C. Jain, Shashi Jain and Sudha Bhatnagar, *Scheduled Caste Women*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1997; Selvy Thiruchandran, *Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Raghuvanshi, U. B. S., *Chanvar Puran*, Aligarh, 1916; G. W. Briggs, *The Chamars*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1920, p. 47; Owen M. Lynch, *Politics*, pp. 174-81; Bernard S. Cohn, *Anthropologist*, p. 272.

<sup>29</sup> Blunt, *Caste*, pp. 55-56; *Census, 1911, U.P.*, p. 332.

<sup>30</sup> Singh, Baldev, *Ahir Jati Mein 31 Rog*, Shikohabad, 1924, p. 27.



<sup>31</sup> Jones, Kenneth W., 'Two *Sanatan Dharma* Leaders and Swami Vivekananda: A Comparison', in William Radice (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p. 234.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Baldeo Prasad, a leading Arya Samajist, was the Secretary of the Reception Committee of the Bareilly Kayastha Conference in 1891. Lucy Carroll, 'Caste, Community and Caste(s) Association: A Note on the Organization of the Kayastha Conference and the Definition of a Kayastha Community', *Contributions in Asian Studies*, 10, 1977, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Garis* means (abusive) songs sung by women, usually of the bride's side, at the time of marriage, playfully ridiculing various members of the groom's side.

<sup>34</sup> Anon., 'Gyavahan Adhyaya: Gane Bajane Adi Vyavaharon Ke Vishaya Mein', *Balabodhini*, 2, 8, August 1875, pp. 59–60.

<sup>35</sup> Chanchrik, Kavivar, *Gram Gitanjali*, Gorakhpur, 1938, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 154–73.

<sup>36</sup> Most song-books for women were filled with songs with strong nationalist fervour, especially from the 1920s. Many promoted charkha and khadi, Kavivar Chanchrik, *Gram Gitanjali*, Gorakhpur, 1938, Bhagwan Singh, *Mahila Git*, Allahabad, 1933; Brahmashankar Mathur 'Anand', *Stri Git Prakash*, Kanpur, 1927; Baburam Bajpei, *Stri Gayan Prakash*, Lucknow, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> Anand, *Stri*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Bajpei, *Stri*, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> It has been argued in a different context that civilisation is an ideological category that operates to maintain and legitimate social distinctions and the allocation of power in the name of 'taste'. The denial of lower, coarse, venal — in a word, natural enjoyment — which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated and refined pleasures for ever closed to the profane. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, London, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Achalram Maharaj, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya*, Agra, 1939, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. p. 172.

<sup>41</sup> Sharma, Bhumitra, *Niyoga Mardana ka Vimardana*, Meerut, 1917, p. 9. Also see Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya (ed.), *Humari Desh Sewa*, Allahabad, 1923, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. pp. 3–9.

<sup>42</sup> There were references made to Christians in early 20th century debates among Hindu publicists, but the central attack remained on the Muslims. It was in the late 19th century that Christianity was much mentioned in other contexts, but there is no space to deal with it here.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, *Vidhwa Vivah Mimansa*, Allahabad, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Upadhyaya (ed.), *Humari*, pp. 3-9; Sharma, Bhunindra, *Niyoga Mardana ka Vinardana*, Meerut, 1917, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Dwivedi, Mannan, *Humara Bhishan Haas*, Kanpur, 1924, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, pp. 1, 26, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Singh, Thakur Rajkishore, *Hindu Sangathan*, Ballia, 1924, pp. 94-97.

<sup>47</sup> Chaudhry, Gaurishankar Shukl, *Kya Swami Shraddhanand Apradhi The?*, Kanpur, 1928, p. 23. Also see Upadhyaya, *Vidhwa*.

<sup>48</sup> *Aaj*, NNR, March 27, 1923, p. 5; *Aaj*, NNR, September 15, 1923.

<sup>49</sup> *Census, 1911, U.P.*, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> A number of studies provide insights into this change in U.P., and not merely at the level of participation. See Uma Rao and Meera Devi, 'Glimpses: U.P. Women's Response to Gandhi', *Samya Shakti*, 1, 2, 1984, pp. 21-32; Poonam Saxena, 'Women's Participation in the National Movement in U.P.', *Manushi*, 46, 1988, pp. 2-10. Hindi women's journals like *Grihalakshmi*, *Stri Darpan*, *Prabha* and *Chand* supported the increasing women's presence in public spheres, Vir Bharat Talwar, 'Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi: 1910-20', in Sangari and Vaid (eds), *Recasting*, pp. 204-32.

<sup>51</sup> There is an assumption in some of the writings mentioned earlier, that women's popular cultural spaces were relegated to the peripheries, and in fact ultimately banished from the domain of modernity. Specially see Banerjee, 'Marginalisation'.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, Steven L., (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Mouton, New York, 1984; John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1996.

<sup>53</sup> Most works tend to highlight this aspect, see Karuna Chanana (ed.), *Socialisation, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1988.

<sup>54</sup> Chartier, Roger, 'General Introduction', in R. Chartier (ed.), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989, pp. 1-5, 156. Chartier shows how festive, ritual, cultic and pedagogic uses of

print literature were by definition collective. At the same time, he argues that books were often read in private within the home, and could portray erotic scenes unimaginable in public art or publicly displayed liturgical texts.

<sup>55</sup> For reading habits of women, Jyotirmayi, see Thakur, *Adarsh Patni*, Allahabad, 1935, p. 9; Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, *Mahila Vyavahar Chandrika*, Allahabad, 1928, p. 27; Purshottam, *Stri Bhushan*, Banaras, 1932, pp. 218–19; G. P. Khanna, 'Stri Shiksha', *Stri Darpan*, 33:4, April 1925, p. 84.

<sup>56</sup> Devi, Yashoda, *Dampati Arogyatu Jivanshastra*, Allahabad, 1927, pp. 5–7.

<sup>57</sup> *Sahifa*, July 26, 1907, *NNR*, August 3, 1907.

<sup>58</sup> Literally means 'rural', but here it means that which is produced by the low.

<sup>59</sup> Shyamkumar, *Striyon ke Liye Prithak Sahitya ki Avashyukta*, Agra, 1935, pp. 98–99.

<sup>60</sup> Vajpayee, Onkarnath, "Editorial", *Kanya Manoranjan*, 1, 1, 1913, p. 30.

<sup>61</sup> Upadhyaya, Ganga Prasad, *Mahila Vyavahar Chandrika*, Prayag, 1928, p. 27; Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Adarsh Patni*, Allahabad, 1935, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Ramkrishna, *Stri Shiksha*, Allahabad, 1874, pp 31–32; Ratna Devi, "Pustakein parhne se laabh", *Stri Darpan*, 29, 4, October 1923, pp. 507–09; Rampiyari, "Sabhyata", *Kanya Sarvasva*, 1:10, 1914, pp. 315–17.

<sup>63</sup> Offredi, Mariola, "The Search for National Identity as Reflected in the Hindi Press", in Mariola Offredi (ed.), *Literature, Language and the Media in India: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Conference on South Asian Studies, Amsterdam 1990, Panel 13*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 226, quoting from Balkrishna Bhatt, "Chalan ki gulami" [the slavery of customs], July 1893, in Dhananjay Bhatt 'Sara' (ed.), *Bhatt Nibandhmala, Vol. I*, Benaras, 1947, pp. 75–76.

<sup>64</sup> Offredi, 'Search', p. 227.

<sup>65</sup> Dar, Bishan Narayan, *Signs of the Times*, Lucknow, 1895, pp. 60–61.

<sup>66</sup> Searle-Chatterjee, Mary, *Reversible*, p. 46; Cohn, *Anthropologist*, pp. 315–16; G.W. Briggs, *The Chamars*, Calcutta, 1920, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Khare, R. S., *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism Among the Lucknow Chamars*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 112.

<sup>68</sup> Parish, Steven M., *Hierarchy and Its Discontents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1997, pp. ix–xxii, 2–17.

## References

- Agha, Sharkeshwari, *Some Aspects of the Education of Women in UP with a Foreword by C.Y. Chintamani*, Allahabad, 1933.
- 'Anand', Brahmashankar Mathur, *Stri Git Prakash*, Kanpur, 1927.
- Bajpei, Baburam, *Stri Gayan Prakash*, Lucknow, 1933.
- Baldevsingh, *Ahir Jati Mein 31 Rog*, Shikohabad, 1924.
- Besant, Annie, *The Education of Indian Girls*, Banaras, 1923.
- Blunt, E.A.H., *The Caste System of Northern India: With Special Reference to UP*, Oxford University Press, London, 1931.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984.
- Briggs, G. W., *The Chamars*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1920.
- Carroll, Lucy, 'Caste, Community and Caste(s) Association: A Note on the Organization of the Kayastha Conference and the Definition of a Kayastha Community', *Contributions in Asian Studies*, 10, 1977.
- Census of India, 1911, UP, Vol. XV, Part I, Report*, Allahabad, 1902.
- Chanana, Karuna (ed.), *Socialisation, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1988.
- Chanchrik, Kavivar, *Gram Gitanjali*, Gorakhpur, 1938.
- Chandra, Bipin, *Modern India: A History Textbook for Class XII*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990.
- Chartier, Roger (ed.), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989.
- Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.
- Chaudhry, Gaurishankar Shukl, *Kya Swami Shraddhanand Apradhi The?*, Kanpur, 1928.
- Cohn, Bernard S., *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and other Essays*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987.
- Dar, Bishan Narayan, *Signs of the Times*, Lucknow, 1895.
- Datta, K. K., *Renaissance, Nationalism and Social Changes in Modern India*, Bookland, Calcutta, 1965.
- Devi, Yashoda, *Dampati Arogyata Jivanshastra*, Allahabad, 1927.

Dube, Saurabh, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998.

Dwivedi, Mannan, *Humara Bhishan Haas*, Kanpur, 1924.

Garg, Mahendulal, *Kalavati Shiksha*, Allahabad, 1930.

Gupt, Maithilisharan, *Rang Mein Bhang*, Jhansi, 1927, 9<sup>th</sup> edn.

Gupta, Sheo Dayal Sah, *Sri Vaishya Vamsa Vibhushan*, Sitapur, 1907.

Heimsath, Charles H., *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1964.

Jogdand, P. G. (ed.), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995.

Kaplan, Steven L. (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Mouton, New York, 1984.

Khare, R. S., *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism Among the Lucknow Chamars*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

Lynch, Owen M., *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969.

Maharaj, Achalram, *Hindu Dharma Rahasya*, Agra, 1939, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.

Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi *Rachnavali*, Vol. 2, ed. and comp., Bharat Yayavar, New Delhi, 1995.

Mani, Lata, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998.

Mill, James, *The History of British India*, 2 Vols, Chelsea House, New York, 1968.

Nair, Janaki, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996.

*Native Newspaper Reports of UP, 1870-1940.*

O'Hanlon, Rosalind (ed.), *A Comparison Between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1994.

Offredi, Mariola (ed.), *Literature, Language and the Media in India: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> European Conference on South Asian Studies. Amsterdam 1990, Panel 13*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

Pant, Sumitranandan, *Pallav*, Allahabad, 1926.

Parish, Steven M., *Hierarchy and Its Discontents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996.

Pathak, Sridhar, *Manovinod*, Banaras, 1917.

Pinch, William R., *Peasants and Monks in British India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996.

Prakash, Bishambhar, *Nari Updesh*, Meerut, 1912.

Prasad, Gajadhar, *Brahmankul Parivartan*, Allahabad, 1911.

Purshottam, *Stri Bhushan*, Banaras, 1932.

Radice, William (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

Raghuvanshi, U. B. S., *Chanvar Puran*, Aligarh, 1916.

Ramkrishna, *Stri Shiksha*, Allahabad, 1874.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

*Saraswati*, Allahabad, 1900-38.

'Saroj' Lakshmi Narayan, *Nari Shiksha Darpan*, Banaras, 1929.

Searle-Chatterjee, Mary, *Reversible Sex Roles: The Special Case of Banaras Sweepers*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1981.

Shargha, Ikbal Kishen, *The Moral Education of Indian*, Bareilly, 1908.

Sharma, Bhumiura, *Niyoga Mardana ka Vimardana*, Meerut, 1917.

Shyamkumar, *Striyon ke Liye Prithak Sahitya ki Avashyakta*, Agra, 1935.

Singh, Bhagwan, *Mahila Git*, Allahabad, 1933.

Singh, Thakur Rajkishore, *Hindu Sangathan*, Ballia, 1924.

Storey, John, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1996.

*Stri Darpan*, Allahabad, 1918-27.

Thakur, Jyotirmayi, *Adarsh Patni*, Allahabad, 1935.

Thiruchandran, Selvy, *Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997.

Upadhyaya, Ganga Prasad, *Vidhwa Vivah Mimansa*, Allahabad, 1927.

Varma, Kumar Cheda Singh, *Kshatriyas and Would-be Kshatriyas*, Allahabad, 1904.

# Feminising Madness — Feminising the Orient: Madness, Gender and Colonialism in British India, 1860–1940

Waltraud Ernst

The phenomenon that women are more likely than men to be diagnosed as mentally unstable<sup>1</sup> has become part of feminist orthodoxy in the West<sup>2</sup>. It has also been suggested that madness itself has become feminised since the nineteenth century, so that illness, 'even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady'<sup>3</sup>. This article explores if the empirical data available from historical records substantiates this assumption in regard to British India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will further investigate if the similarly popular suggestion of the 'feminisation' of the Orient (in contrast to the equation of the West with 'reason', 'culture' and 'civilisation') had a bearing on the ways in which gender issues impacted on mentally ill Indians during the Raj<sup>4</sup>. One important question is of course how mental illness, if indeed it was seen as a 'female malady' and equated with the 'irrational', 'emotional', 'feminine' or 'effeminate', could be recognised within a colonial context where whole populations were already, even in their 'normal', 'sane' condition, conceived of as deviant from the 'rational' norm. In other words, if whole communities, like the people of Bengal, for example, were seen to be 'effeminate', how would the British have been able to identify signs of mental illness, if madness, too, was conceived of as bearing female features?

In the first instance this article presents an outline of the situation prevalent in the 'Native Lunatic Asylums' — later renamed 'Indian Mental Hospitals'. The sources are mainly hospital reports and

statistics, minutes of medical board meetings, and doctors' correspondence, and emphasis is on analysis of the institutions in terms of social demographic and descriptive statistical tendencies (such as patients' sex, social background; admission, cure and discharge rates, diagnoses and treatment categories). In the second part of the analysis, it is intended to explore further the ways in which madness was identified, represented and 'imagined' by doctors and colonial officials in particular and, to a limited extent only, by patients and their families. On account of the lack of first-hand reports from patients and/or their relations, the 'patients' view' and that of their families can be recovered in approximation only — from European and Indian doctors' case books, their publications and semi-official correspondence. The lack of first-hand patients' and relatives' narratives poses the usual conceptual restrictions and interpretative limitations with which medical historians are so familiar. This issue will be addressed briefly in the concluding section of the article.

### **Gender Confined**

When the East India Company handed over the colonial administration of India to the British Crown in 1858, there existed a network of colonial mental institutions for both European and Indian lunatics throughout the Indian subcontinent. Three mental hospitals, at Madras (Chennai), Bombay (Mumbai), and Calcutta (Kolkata) (from 1918 onwards at Ranchi)<sup>5</sup>, were specially designated for Europeans, while up to Indian Independence in 1947 on an average about 20 or so asylums provided for 'Native lunatics'. The number of patients contained in these institutions had reached 13,506 in 1934, when 19 mental hospitals existed.<sup>6</sup> (These may sound like large numbers — however, if set against overall population figures, they amount to but small percentage rates. On average only a fraction of one hundredth of one per cent, namely 0.021%, of Indians was confined in mental institutions throughout the period of the British Raj<sup>7</sup>.)

It is of course important to be aware of the limited extent to which institution-based findings can be taken as generally



representative of how mental illness was dealt with during any one period or at any one place. An almost exclusive focus on ideas, policies and representations emanating from within the context of British colonial institutions does not cover the various other ways in which the mentally ill were treated (or mistreated, as the case may be) within the different cultural and social communities in British India. A wide range of more or less formalised ways of treating those seen to be afflicted by what we would now call 'mental illness' prevailed before lunatic asylums were introduced to India by the British from the late eighteenth century onwards<sup>8</sup> — and it is of course even nowadays the case that people in India choose from, or have variously limited access to, a plurality of approaches in the mental health care market<sup>9</sup>. Ayurvedic and Unani practitioners would deal then as now with what is referred to as *unmada*; Sufi *dargahs* (shrines) would be visited by the afflicted and their families; itinerant healers, *shamans* and wise-women would be consulted within the local area; herbal and mineral concoctions would be administered on an 'old family remedy' basis; violently inclined or distractingly hyperactive people would be tethered to a tree and the harmlessly senile or demented left to act the part of the Indian equivalent of the Western 'village idiots'. An institution-based approach such as the one pursued here, especially if focused exclusively on Western colonial institutions, necessarily produces a select if not distorted picture of the overall situation in regard to mental illness.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this caveat concerning the limited scope of institution-based histories, one particular feature of institutional statistics is highly relevant within the context of a discussion on women's and men's chances of being diagnosed and institutionalised as 'mad': institutionalisation rates in British India show the reverse pattern from those in England and Wales. In the latter, about a half per cent of the population could be found within mental institutions in 1911 for example<sup>11</sup>, while in India it was only a fraction of a per cent. What is more, institutionalisation rates in England and Wales had risen immensely during what has been called the period of 'the great confinement', from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards<sup>12</sup> — so much so that commentators lamented that '[i]f

lunacy continues to increase as at present, the insane will be in the majority, and freeing themselves, will put the sane in asylums'<sup>13</sup>.

Quite clearly on the basis of this evidence British India did not share the major feature that has been at the centre of analysis and conceptual preoccupation of a Foucaultian reading of developments in Western countries — the 'great confinement' and the concomitant subjugation of unreason by reason in the wake of the Enlightenment discourse of rationality exerting its powerful hegemony over irrationality. Yet, as argued in regard to mental hospitals for Europeans in colonial India, statistical preponderance (or the lack of it) should not obscure the ideological weight and symbolic significance that psychiatric confinement possessed. Despite statistical insignificance, colonial psychiatry ranked high among officialdom and in the public's awareness, and the madhouse for a time became one of the markers of socio-economic and scientific progress and of the allegedly superior qualities of Western civilisation.<sup>14</sup> This important symbolic dimension of institutionalisation will need to be addressed, but, putting it aside at this point, let us first focus on an analysis of the composition by sex of asylum populations in the Indian context.

Take the case of the Ranchi Indian Mental Hospital. When it was opened in 1925, provision had been made for the reception of 1,106 men and 272 women.<sup>15</sup> In due course, patients from the by then dilapidated and overcrowded institutions in Patna, Berhampore and Dacca were transferred to Ranchi. There were 271 men and 53 women from the Patna Asylum; 591 men and 99 women from Berhampore; and 212 men from Dacca.<sup>16</sup> These figures show that men greatly outnumbered women. In Patna and Berhampore the ratio was roughly 6:1; and Dacca seems to have contained not a single female at the time of its closure, in 1925. The situation changed considerably when, just six years after its inauguration, in 1931, 1,014 men and 272 women were present in the Ranchi Indian Mental Hospital, raising the proportion of men to women to the ratio originally envisaged by its architects, of about 5:1.<sup>17</sup> Figures were less drastically skewed towards men in the province of Bombay, where the ratio of men to women in the Yeravda Mental Hospital

was merely 2:1 in 1931.<sup>18</sup> In Madras Asylum the ratio of male to female patients was 3:1, about half a century earlier in 1873.<sup>19</sup>

Despite such considerable regional and temporal variation, the figures indicate that in almost all the institutions designated for the admission of Indians, male patients quite clearly outnumbered female patients. In numerical terms therefore, the situation in India in regard to sex-specific institutionalisation rates, is reversed to the one that prevailed in Britain, where women are supposed to have had a greater chance than men of finding themselves inside a mental institution.<sup>20</sup> Without going into a detailed discussion of the situation in England, the data collected for England and Wales by the Royal Commissioners in Lunacy suggest that institutionalised women outnumbered men in 1880, for example, by about 7,000 (confined men: 32,164; confined women: 39,027).<sup>21</sup>

The fact that overall asylum population number and sex-specific statistics in British India show the opposite tendency of those in England and Wales is somewhat disconcerting — not least because it has become part of the accepted wisdom of colonial histories that the British behaved more British in India than at home. As with many other things British that were reproduced in spades in the colony in pursuit of the civilising mission, we could well have expected that the 'female malady', if indeed it was characteristic of Victorian psychiatry in England, would have a high-profile presence in British India, too. In short, it would have fitted in more conveniently with the postulate of the feminisation of madness if the British had managed to produce statistics for their institutions in India that were similarly skewed towards women rather than, as they were, towards male patients.

Apart from the wider issue of the limitation of the extent to which Macaulay's class of persons, Indian in colour and blood, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect could be 'raised up' to uncritically submit to colonial rule,<sup>22</sup> and Europe-bred policies simply be transplanted to and imposed upon colonial people, as Foucaultian histories would suggest, the question arises as to whether there is indeed any evidence of the 'feminisation of madness'. After all, the suggestion of madness becoming increasingly

defined as female and referred to in feminised terms, is based not least on the increase of the asylum population in general and the numerical over-representation of women inmates in particular. Does the idea of the feminisation of madness hold true in India even if overall institutionalisation rates were low and the majority of asylum inmates were men? To answer this question adequately it is important to explore how Indian men and women respectively came to be admitted to psychiatric institutions.

For those familiar with the highly gendered social and cultural conditions prevalent in the subcontinent, the Indian data might perhaps come as no surprise. Given the limited range of activities performed by women in close proximity of Europeans and at any great distance from their family compounds, they can be assumed to have been less likely to draw adverse attention from colonial officials authorised to send those to specialised institutions who were seen to disturb the peace and order of public places and European enclaves. The majority of asylum patients until the 1920s and 1930s, when greatly improved facilities were made available for Indians (in Yeravda and Ranchi), consisted mainly of people sent in by the police, via the magistrates, rather than those admitted by relatives seeking care and medical treatment for their beloved ones. As Surgeon Sutcliffe of Dacca put it in 1871, the asylum population was predominantly made up of 'idiots, imbeciles and demented' or 'paupers' sent in by magistrates, who would in England have been found in workhouses, while 'the educated classes scarcely' sent in members of their families.<sup>23</sup> Even by 1931 the new separate ward planned at Ranchi for private, paying patients was to provide for only 60 to 67 inmates — indeed a very small number out of a projected total of 1,600.<sup>24</sup>

As early as the 1850s (and in the wake of discussions about the Criminal Lunatics Act of 1851), local authorities had been instructed to restrict institutionalisation to those seen to constitute an immediate danger to the community at large, in practice in particular in the European quarters of towns and cantonments. The major aim was to save the high expenses otherwise incurred if a wider range of people were admitted on grounds of medical indication alone.

Restriction of admission eligibility to the violent mentally ill thus gave prominence to the controlling and disciplining aspect of lunatic asylums. This emphasis on violent and criminal lunatics was contested (and honoured in the breach) right up to the early decades of the twentieth century by colonial officials who argued that the 'harmless' and 'friendless' idiots, too, ought to be taken care of by the colonial state.<sup>25</sup>

As far as patients and their families were concerned, the prospect of a relative being confined in close proximity of violent criminals (and the occasional 'harmless idiot') picked up by the police, and therefore drawn from the lower and disadvantaged and marginalized orders of Indian communities, did not help much to encourage them to voluntarily seek out a mental institution. Admission patterns and the social composition of the asylum population were therefore determined largely — at the very least up to the early decades of the twentieth century — by the cost and social control-driven priorities of colonial government policies. On the basis of such narrowly defined criteria, men (such as the apparently ubiquitous 'violent Native stone-throwers', irritatingly naked fakirs and threateningly exalted religious proselytisers) clearly were to figure more prominently than women. It is only from the 1920s onwards, when more narrowly medical admission criteria came increasingly to the fore; ideas of social hygiene became popular; and parts of the local community in the vicinity of a mental hospital supported the provision of superior facilities for private patients through charitable donations, that voluntary admissions occurred on a larger scale, with more women being sent to institutions.

However, for most of the period, right up to Independence, asylum superintendents reported that relatives of mentally ill people were generally hesitant to send them to public asylums. Surgeon Sutcliffe of the old Dacca Asylum, for example, noted in 1871 that 'natives are very reluctant to have their relatives taken to a lunatic asylum'.<sup>26</sup> He also lamented that they tended to see the asylum merely as 'a place in which troublesome or helpless lunatics are taken care of', rather than as a specialised medical establishment

where 'diseases of the intellect were to be treated'. He failed to mention that families may have had good cause for doubting the alleged treatment-oriented nature of the asylum, as apart from regular hosing down of patients, diet, work and exercise, not much was actually done in terms of treatment inside some of the institutions.<sup>27</sup> Even once when patients benefited (or suffered) from a wide range of medical treatment from the 1920s onwards, when malaria therapy, hyoscine hydrobromide, mercury iodide pills, hypnosis, glandular therapy, ECT and the like were experimented with, psychiatrists such as Major J.E. Dhunjibhoy of the Ranchi Indian Mental Hospital would remark that 'a strong odium' was attached to mental illness in India.<sup>28</sup>

Cases such as the one reported by Sutcliffe's successor at Dacca, Dr James Wise, would also not have been altogether reassuring to those who preferred a more socially stratified institutional regime for their relatives. Wise commented on a case of 'religious exaltation' (apparently seen more commonly in the asylum than 'religious melancholia', which was considered rare 'among Bengalees, except among natives who have been converted to Christianity').<sup>29</sup> He pondered on the 'great self-complacency and vanity' by which this condition was characterised, reporting that 'two insane Brahmos' were kept under observation at the asylum. 'Both were inspired to proclaim a new religion, which was to embrace all races and creeds in one social brotherhood, while it left each individual to worship God according to his conscience. ... On finding Hindoos, Mahomedans, and Christians eating the same food on the same spot, [one of them] confessed that he had been anticipated, and that there was no further need for him to enlighten the world'.<sup>30</sup> This astute observation — whether meant earnestly or tongue-in-cheek — duly led the surgeon to release the patient who had apparently seen his mission realised. On the other hand, those Indian families who did not share the proselytiser's vision of close contact between the faiths and diminished social segregation would not have approved of their relatives being exposed to interaction with patients of different habits and caste backgrounds. As early as 1821, an asylum superintendent had observed, not

without some irony, that although Indian patients may be subject to insanity, they were usually 'perfectly sensible' in terms of the prejudice of caste.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from doubts about due consideration being paid to caste and other social proclivities among both male and female Indian patients, lack of attention to gender-specific sensitivities did not help to attract female patients to the institutions. Rumours about incidents, such as the one reported in 1870 by the superintendent of the old Patna Asylum, can be assumed to have had an adverse effect on local communities: Surgeon J. B. Allen had to remove 'Overseer Manson' on account of his 'criminal assault upon a female insane'.<sup>32</sup> The staffing situation at Patna appears to have been somewhat lacking generally, as another attendant, 'European Overseer Frawley', was considered an 'inefficient officer' and was therefore 'got rid of' by the superintendent (only to resurface at the Asylum in Moydapore the following year). Although there is no evidence of similarly extreme incidents in the records for subsequent decades, the prospect or fear of being looked after if not man-handled or perhaps even abused by male attendants would not have encouraged voluntary admission of female patients. Only towards the beginning of the twentieth century did it increasingly become routine in Indian institutions for special staffing arrangements for women patients to be made. For example, it was decreed in 1901 that 'Female and juvenile insanes [sic] of all classes' in the Punjab Asylum at Lahore were to be 'kept rigidly apart from the rest of the Asylum population, and [were] on no account to be attended by other than female attendants',<sup>33</sup> suggesting that this had not been the case previously.

It needs to be acknowledged though that under particular circumstances families were less reluctant to have their relatives admitted. For example, even at the time of the reported assault in Patna, the superintendent of Dullunda, Dr Payne, reported proudly that 'a member of a native family of very high position spent several months in the asylum, and left in highly improved condition'.<sup>34</sup> The sex of the high-ranking patient is unfortunately not mentioned, but it is clear that on this particular occasion, special arrangements were

made to accommodate a patient of superior social standing. Higher-class Indians, especially those with close European working connections and formally educated in the Western style, were not always disinclined to make use of mental institutions if superior accommodation and segregation from the rest of the asylum population could be ensured. Some were also keen on lending support to their local psychiatric hospital and joined in with a variety of philanthropic activities alongside members of the local British community.<sup>35</sup>

Quite in contrast to higher ranking Indian families and parts of the Parsi community, the lower orders of Indian society were reportedly more hesitant to send their women (or their men) to the mental hospital on a voluntary basis. This may have been because they simply could not afford it — rather than on account of 'ignorance', as suggested by several asylum superintendents. When, for example, the Bengal government introduced maintenance fees for voluntary boarders, a sudden drop in private admissions was the immediate result.<sup>36</sup> During periods of famine, too, figures for voluntary admissions fell drastically, while the number of 'pauper' patients rose.<sup>37</sup> Surgeon T. Hume argued in 1881 that the 'increase of lunatics in the asylums, private and public' in Hyderabad was not an 'indication of increased insanity in the nation', but 'merely a proof that the struggle for existence, evidenced by the great trade depression, has become much more severe of late, and that the toilers have been throwing over every bit of ballast and dead weight that they could to enable them to keep abreast in the race with their neighbours'.<sup>38</sup> Evidence such as this suggests that we need to be aware of families' financial situation and their social class background when we explore issues of admission rates, and sex-specific rates in particular.

Economic considerations figure also in terms of how officials at the time accounted for the under-representation of women inside colonial lunatic asylums, revealing awareness of gender-specific prejudice. In 1931, for example, when women patients in Bombay were outnumbered by men one by two, the imbalance was apparently due to 'relatives tolerat[ing] insane females to a greater extent than



they do insane males and to the greater economic value derived from recovery amongst males'.<sup>39</sup> Women, so it seems, were not considered economically valuable enough to warrant the expense of having them cured in an institution.

Gender prejudice, fluctuating economic prosperity, social-class background as well as the specific location of an institution and concomitant social demographic factors were clearly implicated in admission patterns and numbers. This is particularly apparent in the case of the Yeravda Asylum, which had a high intake of people from Bombay town and military personnel passing through the local depot. During the period of the First World War, for example, the number of Indian and European military patients admitted to the Yeravda Asylum increased dramatically. In 1916 the number of soldiers admitted to the asylum was 43; the following year it was as high as 144 on account of soldiers, who suffered from 'mental stress' and 'the strain of war conditions', being sent in from Mesopotamia.<sup>40</sup> However, not only the number of soldiers went up, by 1918 a drastic increase in the number of civilian town dwellers sent to the asylum was reported and explained by the impact of economic stress, which, so it was suggested, made the 'public less tolerant' of mentally deranged people.<sup>41</sup> The steadily rising number of 'domestic servants including House Wives' between 1921 and 1930 was also explained in reference to changing economic conditions in the conurbation<sup>42</sup> — although it was speculated on a more hopeful note that the 'stigma' previously attached to mental hospitals may have 'disappeared' and contributed to the high percentage of 'voluntary boarders brought by family' (i.e. 25% in 1926). The attraction of the greatly improved facilities and conditions at the hospital at Yeravda may have played a substantial role, too.

Despite the increase from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards in the number of patients referred by their families rather than by the police authorities, the superintendent in charge at Yeravda at the time still complained about 'public apathy' regarding early admission of patients. He put it down to 'prejudice' and, intriguingly, 'the influence of women'.<sup>43</sup> Although it was suggested that the 'Indian public' in general 'have no idea of what's ab-normal', Indian

women in particular were considered particularly ignorant and uncooperative when it came to handing over their beloved ones to treatment in a closed institution.<sup>44</sup> Indian women, so it seems, got a somewhat rough deal. Hospital superintendents on the one hand lamented the fact that they were under-represented in asylums, thereby missing out on the benefits institutionalisation was seen to offer — they were *victims* of Native ignorance and prejudice, on account of their perceived lower economic value. On the other hand they saw them as the major *culprits* who prevented family members from gaining access to psychiatric facilities. Either way, the power of gender prejudice worked against them.

One of the questions that arises at this point is whether admission to and treatment in colonial mental hospitals would have been a 'good thing' for Indian men and women alike. Were Indian women lucky that they were hugely under-represented among asylum populations? Was it better for them to 'be tolerated more' (for whatever benevolent or sinister reason) than men within their families and communities? After all, even some asylum superintendents, like Dr James Wise, admitted that when lunatics were kept at home, they were 'never designedly maltreated' — although it was common, so he continued, that they were 'bound with chains', that their 'feet [were] fastened to a heavy log of wood' and that 'during paroxysm', or a fit of violence, they were 'inconsiderately dealt with'.<sup>45</sup> Wise's predecessor, Dr Simpson, described a similar situation, saying that 'those who are able [to pay] prefer maintaining [their relatives] at home, using coercive measures' in case of violence and 'if harmless' there is 'no restraint, but neglect',<sup>46</sup> adding a spiteful remark aimed at 'Native' practitioners whose treatment was 'depletive' and, in his view, did 'more harm than good'.<sup>47</sup>

Superintendents were of course fully convinced that only carefully supervised treatment in one of the mental institutions or by a private Western-trained practitioner would ensure recovery from mental illness — provided treatment could be administered during the early stages of mental derangement, which, in many cases, it could not. Families usually admitted their relatives far too late, when the disease 'was far advanced', when they were 'not

able to perform their share of work', and when they were 'violent and uncontrollable' or 'incapable of caring for' themselves.<sup>48</sup> Major Dhunjibhoy of the Ranchi Indian Mental Hospital, for example, reported in 1938, that unless the 'strong odium' attached 'by the Indian public to mental disease' is removed, 'no progress in the treatment of early mental cases is possible in India'.<sup>49</sup>

The answer to the question of whether women were lucky to have a greater chance of escaping the debatable benefits of belated institutional treatment, depends of course not least on whether one is inclined to see psychiatric institutions in a Foucaultian vein as suppressive bastions of reason against unreason, and colonial psychiatric institutions in particular as devices of hegemonic control. If, on the other hand, one tends to believe in the ability of Western psychiatry to cure, heal and restore rather than control, subjugate and dominate, the conclusion would be quite different. In that case women would have been disadvantaged as they were less likely to be allowed to benefit from care and treatment on account of gendered role and behavioural prescriptions within their own communities.

### **Madness Imagined**

Two major issues emerge from the analysis above. First, it focuses mainly on characteristics of the *sexual* composition of asylum populations (for example, admission rates for men and women), rather than *gender* issues. Still, this is an important and illuminating exercise in so far as it deals also with other important contextual factors,<sup>50</sup> such as changing admission policies, demographic trends, economic conditions, financial considerations, prejudices of caste and social class, and last but not least disparities due to gendered power. Second, it could be argued that the emerging tendency of a statistical preponderance of male asylum patients does not necessarily impede a gender-focused argumentation, especially if gender is seen as a relational concept rather than one focused on the female sex and gender alone.

In the following analysis the aim is to ascertain if madness in British India was feminised, namely if madness was, even if suffered

by men, constructed in feminised terms. Sources primarily will be evidence available from doctors' medical case notes of individual patients and superintendents' random extensive reflections in hospital-related official correspondence during a period when a standardised format for hospital reports was prescribed by the colonial government, but rarely followed by medical doctors to any great extent until the 1930s. It will be argued that the face of madness in British India was not necessarily feminine, but that a number of different physiognomies can be discerned. In fact, for a time, a range of different types of madness among the peoples of India prevailed, which was akin to and developed in relation to typologies of race, such as those publicised most famously by Risley.<sup>51</sup>

*... 'religious mendicants and fanatics'... fakirs, sadhus and religious exaltation*

In an article of 1857 titled 'Contributions towards the pathology of insanity in India', Surgeon W.A. Green of Dacca told his colleagues that 'insanity amongst the natives of India and the East is probably as frequent if not more so, than in the temperate and colder climates of other parts of the world'.<sup>52</sup> Asylum inmates in India were 'almost entirely composed of the very poor and ignorant, and superstitious and fanatical, such as are easily worked upon by fraud, easily intimidated, and quickly prostrated by superstitious error and apprehension'.<sup>53</sup>

Green's first contention, of the high incidence of madness in India, was to be contested in the following decades, when the opposite suggestion held sway, namely that mental illness was less frequent in India on account of its 'backward' position in the wider scheme of civilisations and hence its lesser chance of exposure to the unsettling pace of progress — although Green had already implicitly hinted at this, when he mused that the 'mind of the Bengallee and Hindoostanee is not assailable in so many points as that of the lower orders of European countries, whose intelligence and range and grasp of apprehension, (and consequent

obnoxiousness to so many more stimulating and deranging influences) are so much greater'.<sup>54</sup> Even the lower classes in progressive and civilised countries were still superior in intellect to 'the Bengallee and Hindoostanee', and as such more sensitive to the stresses incumbent on the process of civilisation. Looking at the issue from a different vantage point, Surgeon Sutcliffe of the Dacca Asylum put it crisply in 1871, when remarking on the apparent absence of 'wandering Gypsy tribes such as Kooch, Boidega etc' in his institution: 'the nearer to savage life the less insanity'.<sup>55</sup>

Green's other suggestion, that Indians — even if less likely to be subject to the rages of civilisation — were still maddeningly prone to mental problems on account of 'festivals and national ceremonies' that were 'noisy, and exciting, and exhausting, and frequently upset the mind', was shared by a great number of his successors right up to the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> As the medical officer in charge of the three asylums in the Madras Presidency summarised in his report of 1873: 'Moral causes: religious excitement most fertile in producing mental aberrations'.<sup>57</sup> Even the plan to construct a new lunatic asylum in one particular part of Madras town had been challenged on account of the site's proximity to a 'noisy' temple: Indian religious customs and institutions clearly were a serious impediment to mental health for the insane and the still sane alike. Increasingly superintendents' jargon tended to draw on a seemingly more medicalised, scientific, terminology, such as Indians' allegedly 'less *sthenic*' temperament (which was seen to account for the lesser degree of patients' violence in Indian asylums).<sup>58</sup> Yet, the basic assumption remained: Indian religions and spiritual customs were to blame for the onset of mental derangement in a considerable number of asylum patients.

Decade after decade asylum superintendents remarked in their reports that they had to provide for 'wandering beggars', 'religious mendicants' and 'native stone-throwers' who had been picked up from public places and sent to the asylum by the police authorities despite governments' orders to restrict admission to the clearly dangerous. Doctors, such as J.M. Coates of Cuttack, who worked in institutions close to pilgrimage sites, quite clearly indicated that

those 'who have no regular or settled employment, and especially Fakirs, give most insanes [sic] in [the] Asylum'.<sup>59</sup> But even in cosmopolitan Bombay, the asylum superintendent reported in 1896 that 'Beggars and mendicants furnished, as usual, the largest number of admissions, viz. 71' (in comparison to 'cultivators and labourers': 30; soldiers: 29; merchants and traders: 31; domestic servants: 12; not ascertained: 8; no occupation: 35).<sup>60</sup>

It can of course be argued, that the British saw Indian religious observances as superstitious pursuits that were incommensurable with sober, rational and enlightened thinking of the kind characteristic of allegedly more civilised and superior Christian nations. As such a gendered division into a feminised/irrational/superstitious Indian religion and culture on the one hand and a masculine/rational/enlightened religious culture on the other could be postulated. In a more psychoanalytically inclined way, the representation of Indian religious custom as variously 'childish' or 'childlike'<sup>61</sup> could be interpreted in a more subliminally patronising and patriarchally father/child-focused vein, as suggested by Ashis Nandi.<sup>62</sup> Both of these interpretations could well be applied to the particular cases reported by asylum doctors to a greater or lesser extent — the common denominator being, in the case of female as well as male patients, the perceived close link between madness and Indian religion/superstition.

One of the images of a typical Indian madman was certainly for a while that of the 'Indian religious fanatic'. This image had a number of variations: the 'wandering beggar', the 'religious mendicant', the threateningly exotic fakir or sadhu, the 'exalted' proselytising prophet. People who fitted these descriptions could be found in large numbers in the Indian lunatic asylum reports and belonged to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh faiths alike. Most of these were men.

*... 'victims of superstition and abuse'.... women and their priests*

Insane women in mental hospitals were outnumbered by men on average one by four. Still, they, too, were easily linked by asylum

doctors with religious excess, debauchery, and suspicions of rape by Indian priests. The story of a woman admitted to the Cuttack Asylum is a good example here or, as the doctor treating her put it, 'interesting' and 'sad'.<sup>63</sup> Mussumut Rami had quarrelled with her husband and was abused by him. Consequently she 'started for Pooree with her uncle and father-in-law and their wives from their village near Burdwan. After arriving in Pooree (Puri), her uncle told her to go to the tank for water, and Gunesh Pundah would take care of her by the way. Mussumut Rami did as she was told, and found that Gunesh Pundah 'flattered her, promised her gold and garments instead of her shell ones, and persuaded her to go to a Sonar's. He [Gunesh Pundah] brought her to his house instead, and kept her there two and half years'. When the priest went to the temple one day, 'to collect more pilgrims', Rami escaped, 'making her way to Bengal and got as far as Balasore, where she was found naked, starving and quite mad'. She was duly picked up by the police and sent to the asylum at Cuttack.

Rami's case, as reported by the asylum superintendent, illustrates well how a considerable number of the women confined to the pauper wards of lunatic asylums had come to be there. In the asylum doctor's opinion her story was revealing, as it 'illustrate[d] some of the evil influences of the Juggernath Pundahs or Priests'.<sup>64</sup> Like many amongst his colleagues and the wider European community in India, the asylum superintendent hedged deep suspicions about priests at pilgrim sites such as Puri, where Indian families were known to seek out priests to look after sick relatives or those they wanted to be rid of.

We do not know if Rami was one of those unlucky wives who fell out with her husband and his family because of mutual dislike, a dowry dispute, the husband's brutality or the couple's inability to conceive a male heir, or whether she was indeed in need of spiritual support and treatment. At any rate, Rami's story lent support to Europeans' conviction that pilgrimage sites were dangerous places and that temple priests had evil designs on innocent women. This point was further substantiated by the case of 'a girl about twelve years of age, who was found by a Baboo wandering about Cuttack.

insane, naked, and sick'.<sup>65</sup> The girl was also sent to the Lunatic Asylum and, although she recovered from cholera there, she 'remained long insane afterwards'.<sup>66</sup> It seems that like Rami, she, too, had a family quarrel – but unlike the former, she was sent to Puri (Pooree) with her two sisters rather than with in-laws. 'She did not know the name of the town she came from, nor those she had passed through on her way to Pooree. She spoke Bengali and said she had lived in Lall Bazar'.<sup>67</sup> However, the superintendent failed to trace her family and as he was 'at a great loss to know what to do with her', he was relieved to find a 'benevolent lady in Cuttack' who 'took her and [was] educating and bringing her up properly'.<sup>68</sup>

Although the above narratives can easily be read as inherently gendered and indicative of the abuse of families', husbands' and in-laws' power over vulnerable female family members, asylum doctors interpreted them mainly as evidence of the corruptive power of Indian priests and Indian families' naivety or collaboration with them. And invariably the kind of madness women such as Rami and the young deserted girl suffered from was made sense of not so much as an intrinsically feminine affliction or one that had effeminate features, but as an understandable, nearly rational response to exploitation and ill-treatment by the religiously preposterous.

However, it needs to be conceded that the way women inmates' behaviour during their stay in the asylum was described, also owed something to the perception of women as more easily unsettled, prone to excitement and the expression of strong emotions, as when a medical officer remarked that women 'are longer in settling down into the quiet regular routine of the asylum, and they are liable to much fiercer excitements and more frequent and sudden paroxysms'.<sup>69</sup> This particular constitutional aspect of the female structure had detrimental effects also on asylum discipline as 'one woman giving way to her impulses, acts more injuriously on her fellows in similarly exciting them, than occurs among the male lunatics'.<sup>70</sup> The up-side of these disruptive behaviours was however that the low cure and discharge rates among women<sup>71</sup> (in



comparison to men) could easily be accounted for, thus nipping in the bud adverse comments by superior colonial officials on doctors' cure efficiency, as 'all this tends to make successful recoveries among the women much less frequent than among the males'.<sup>72</sup>

However revealing, or puzzling, the aforementioned cases of women patients may be, it has to be considered that these were rare, and they were discussed by asylum superintendents within a colonial context that nurtured beliefs in the depravity of priests attached to pilgrimage sites and the potential danger of particular Indian craft, built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind, [Hindus'] minds were enchained more intolerably than their bodies' encapsulated European prejudice and their feelings of superiority well,<sup>73</sup> seemingly receiving empirical substantiation in Risley's monumental attempt to categorise Indians on account of their 'racial', biological background and adherence to caste and religious custom.<sup>74</sup>

That the cases of women rather than men were referred to in order to expose the alleged abuses (after all, the 'number of women, both Hindoos and Mahomedans ... f[e]ll very far short of the number of men'<sup>75</sup> and male patients with a religious connection were in the majority), could well be explained by the hackneyed patriarchal doctrine that women lend themselves better to being in the role of 'victim' than men. What is more, some among the British community made it their mission to rescue poor Indian females from the clutches of superstitious and evil religious conjurors and fanatics.<sup>76</sup> It could be argued that it was far easier to summon sympathy for the fate of women held hostage by a priest than for male Indian 'religious fanatics' or fakirs and sadhus in pursuit of salvation, especially as the latter tended to have, particularly in the eyes of often prudishly Victorian Memsahibs, a frighteningly exotic and clearly underdressed appearance, in addition to indulging in such despicable habits as *ganja* smoking and opium eating.

That is not to say that women would never be referred to as active agents in pursuit of spiritual salvation. In fact, it was mentioned that 'a large proportion of the Hindoo females [were] "Boistubees"' <sup>77</sup>

(presumably followers of Bishnu, the Hindu God<sup>78</sup>). So it may well be concluded that on some occasions at least women were seen as actively engaged in religious observations, just as men were as fakirs or sadhus. The fact that in 'that comprehensive class Mahomedan females also enrol themselves when they leave their homes' may however indicate that women were limited in terms of the roles they could pursue and plausibly assign to themselves once they left family life — the role of 'boistubee' being one of few that was culturally acceptable and may have constituted an escape route to both Hindu and Muslim women. However, this role did not fail to draw the disapproving attention of the colonial police authorities if it was enacted in public spaces frequented by Europeans.

*... 'the most fruitful source of insanity'<sup>79</sup> ... domestic servants and debauchey*

There was another group among Indian asylum inmates that lent itself similarly well to exposing the detrimental impact of Indian superstition and vice on its alleged victims: young boys working as domestic servants. The number of these seemed to fluctuate from between about eight to nearly 28% of asylum inmates,<sup>80</sup> and although it is not clear from the statistics what the actual cause for such considerable fluctuation would have been, the phenomenon itself was at the time explained by asylum doctors by 'the irregular habits and debauched lives led by Mahomedan servants, more especially those serving in large towns'.<sup>81</sup> More evocatively, it was held to be due to 'the shameful practice followed by rich natives of keeping a servant, generally a boy, who is forced to intoxicate himself and perform indecent dances, not as a warning to others, like the helot of old, but as an entertainment for his master and his companions'.<sup>82</sup> Like the abused women, these boys were described as victims — as 'miserable creatures'.

Despite the well documented nineteenth-century European prejudice against *nautches*, and the ill-repute in which the young men and women performing artistes were held, this kind of entertainment was not completely beyond the pale in some carefully controlled circumstances. Some asylum superintendents remarked

proudly that *nautches* and Indian music performances had become part of the entertainment repertoire established within their institutions. Not every medical officer approved of this practice, as is documented in the copious correspondence between a number of asylum superintendents in Bengal and the medical and government authorities during the 1860s, for example. Dr Hutchinson of the Patna Asylum reported in 1866: 'I also introduced a bi-monthly natch to the great delight of the insanes; I always make a point of being present to insure order (which is quite unnecessary), and watch the physiognomies of the patients during the performance. The later is a most interesting study; for you see the restless eye of the maniac fixed in steady gaze, and the vacant expression of the imbecile lit up with evident delight; the crying and drivelling of the idiot are now still; and hands ever ready for mischief now beat time to the song and drum. On occasion of the first natch, an old patient, the character of the place, was quietly listening, his body swaying to and fro to the cadence of the music; the native air "hillee millee punnee ao" was commenced and the well known notes seemed to call up memories of the past, for the quiet listener started to his feet with active agility, and commenced dancing vigorously to the great astonishment of the professional. The infection spread, and a second insane sprang on to the dhurree, and joined in the dance and song. Now the natch is eagerly looked forward to, and I am often asked when the next is to take place'.<sup>83</sup> Although Hutchinson added that these 'innocent amusements do not interfere with the work of the patients', objections were raised to *nautch* performances by senior medical officers. However, the Government of Bengal felt bound to highlight the existing diversity of opinions and practices on *nautches* in 1868: 'It is noticed that the Deputy Inspector of General Hospitals [...], conceiving them to be injurious, has put a stop (altogether, it is presumed), to *nautches* in the Patna Asylum, which were allowed by Dr Hutchinson; on the contrary, Dr Wise at Dacca, and Dr Stewart at Cuttack, permit these entertainments in the Asylums of which they are in charge, and are of opinion that they are attended with benefit to the patients'.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the moralistic arguments and cultural prejudice of some medical officers, the provision of culturally appropriate entertainment alongside 'modern' pursuits, such as carriage and car rides, cinema visits and gramophone and radio sessions, was maintained in a number of mental hospitals. And despite widespread reservations amongst the European community against Indian religious superstitions and exaltation, religious observance within lunatic asylums gradually came to be encouraged — albeit in a highly regulated and controlled way. From the later decades of the nineteenth century onwards, non-violent and submissive Hindu patients were escorted to temples at times of religious festivals and Muslims were allowed prayer rugs in specially assigned areas of some asylums. Christian Indians of both Protestant and Catholic denominations benefited from regular church services, and had done so from an early period onwards. By the beginning of the twentieth century the larger Indian Mental Hospitals possessed designated *puja* and prayer areas, if not small temples, mosques, and Christian chapels within the asylums' precincts. At the Indian Mental Hospital at Ranchi, for example, 800 Hindu patients were taken to attend the Durga Puja outside the institution in 1831, and a 'small spare room was converted into a mosque'. On request of the 'Muhammadan Patients, a 'maulavi who happen[ed] to be on [the] staff conduct[ed] the usual Jumma', while the Roman Catholic Mission and the Chaplain of the Church of England provided regular divine service for Catholic and Protestant patients respectively.<sup>85</sup> The medical in charge at Ranchi, Dhunjibhoy, emphasised that 'patients' religious feelings and sentiments are respected as far as possible' and patients were 'encouraged to observe fasts'.<sup>86</sup>

### Images of madness

The foregoing evidence shows that a variety of representations of Indian madness emerged over the period under consideration: 'the religious mendicant', 'the religious zealot', 'the victim of religious superstition', 'the victim of debauchery'. Indian religious customs and cultural practices, and their — allegedly — intrinsically inferior racial and civilisational status, were seen to be at the core of these. It could therefore well be argued that whilst in the West

madness became construed as a 'female malady', with the thinking styles and behaviours perceived as characteristic of women (irrational, emotional, unstable) being seen as detrimental to mental health in general, in the East, in contrast, representations of Indians' mental illnesses were linked up with inferiorisation on account of the colonised's allegedly inferior, debauched and superstitious religious and cultural practices, which were considered symptomatic of a morally and constitutionally weak racial status and a lesser degree of civilisational development.

Such a binary of the racialisation/sacralisation of madness in the East on the one hand and its feminisation in the West on the other would however be all too simplistic for a number of reasons. First of all, the way in which some (but not all) Indian communities or 'races' and the allegedly inferior civilisations of Asia were imagined by the British was linked, in the last instance, also with stereotypes of effeminacy — hence the now so popular thesis of the 'feminisation of the Orient'. However, more importantly, the representation of mental illness cannot simply be reduced to one singular category such as 'feminisation', 'racialisation' or 'sacralisation' — neither in Britain nor in British India.

After all, there is evidence in regard to India<sup>87</sup> of a range of other representations of madness that are not exclusively and primarily linked with Indian religious and spiritual practices nor with an ultimately feminised culture or effeminate civilisation. 'Criminal lunatics', for example, figured frequently among doctors' characterisations and the public's perception of Indian asylum inmates. The majority of these were mentally deranged men who had committed murder or some violent attack. Among the British in India the category would have evoked some affinity with the newspaper headline fetching dacoits and *thugees*, and the infamous atrocities committed by them and by members of tribal groups who consequently became criminalised during the British colonial period.<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, migrant labourers drawn from tribal communities and employed in plantations far away from their ancestral homes and families, conjured up yet another trope of Europeans' ideas (and

fears) about their own and other peoples' fates during an age of accelerated progress and civilisation. Tribal migrant labourers' mental problems were equated with the sad but inevitable fate of the dislocated and uprooted who, once removed from their supposedly primitive but sheltered and innocent native jungle habitats, succumb to 'nostalgia', feeling bereft of their kin and exposed to the faster pace and ravages of modern working life and civilisation. In 1868, for example, the superintendent of the Dacca Lunatic Asylum, which saw a steady rise in admission from the pastoral Dhangar people who had been employed in the newly established tea plantations in the Cachar district, commented: 'From having passed a medical examination tea coolies may be considered as being healthy on their arrival in Cachar, and not in any way predisposed to mental diseases. The habits of the Dhangar coolies, their love of gunjah and ardent spirits, place them, however, in an exceptional position, and it is from among them that the majority come. The depressing effects of the Cachar climate, the frequent attacks of fever, the distance from their homes, must all contribute to produce despondency and unhappiness, emotions which prompt to indulgence in stimulants'.<sup>89</sup> Further, as mentioned above, the fact that at the Dacca Asylum no members 'of the wandering Gipsy tribes, such as Koonch, Boideya, &c.' had been admitted, was seen as supporting 'the generally received theory that the nearer we advance to savage life the less insanity do we find'.<sup>90</sup>

The connection between 'modern civilisation and mental strain' was explored further also in the 1930s when the Superintendent of the Indian Mental Hospital at Ranchi, Dhunjibhoy, suggested that although the majority of Indians lived 'under primitive conditions', the 'advent of education amongst the masses' and the 'accelerated tempo of living' would be 'productive eventually of greater mental strain and an increase of mental disorder'.<sup>91</sup>

Progress-related mental derangement was part of a long tradition of British ideas about madness and the cost of progress, and therefore struck a chord especially with those inclined towards more Romanticist images of the toll progress and civilisation exacted.<sup>92</sup> With a sense of foreboding, the famous eighteenth-century doctor

George Cheney had suggested in his widely read *The English Malady* that 'the humour of living in great populous and consequently unhealthy towns, [has] brought forth a class and set of distempers, with atrocious and frightful symptoms, scarce known to our ancestors, and never rising to such fatal heights, nor afflicting such numbers in any other known nation'. Cheney conceded that the English lived longer than other nationals, but pointed out, gloomily, that 'scarce anyone, especially those of the better sort, but becomes crazy, and suffers under some chronicle distemper or other, before they arrive at old age'<sup>93</sup> — they were doomed to succumb to the 'English malady' on account of their nation's fast development.

Back in India during the British Raj, the practices among Indians of opium eating and cannabis/*ganja* consumption in its various forms, too, captured Europeans' variously fascinated and disapproving imagination from the early and mid-nineteenth century onwards, when the Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars of 1839 to 1842 and 1858 to 1860 had raised the profile of Oriental drugs. The wars arguably drew more adverse and sensationalist attention among the British to the issue of drug addiction among 'Eastern races' than to a critical assessment of British commercial involvement and interest in the continuation of the drugs trade. The category of 'cannabis insanity' emerged as a seemingly clearly established diagnostic entity during a period when public opinion was directed into human-interest type reports rather than politically and economically all too challenging accounts about British military involvements in other regions of the world.<sup>94</sup> Although cannabis insanity was perceived as a highly contentious diagnostic label among asylum doctors right from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards,<sup>95</sup> it kept appearing in mental hospital reports alongside other allegedly drug-induced illnesses such as *datura* poisoning<sup>96</sup> up to the early decades of the twentieth century. The 'Hindu ganja smoker' and the 'Muslim opium eater' in particular consequently joined the various other prevalent European images of madness among Indians.

'Criminal lunacy', 'cannabis insanity', and 'idiots' and 'harmless imbeciles' — later known as the mentally deficient — were just

some of the categories that possessed a high public profile nearly ever since lunatic asylums for Indians were established by the British in the late eighteenth century. Those suffering from war-induced neuroses, or 'battle shock', in contrast, gained prominence only in the wake of the First World War, when soldiers so affected were returned to Bombay. The onset of derangement on account of 'political excitement' was a phenomenon reported from the early 1930s onwards. It may have been not as common within the setting of mental hospitals as, for example, 'cannabis indica psychosis',<sup>97</sup> however, from the British colonial government's perspective it was at the time prominent outside mental institutions. There derogatory terms were applied to Indians engaged in the anti-British movement — in quite a similar way to how radicals, reformers and members of the 'avant-garde' in Britain were declared suitable subjects for 'Bedlam'.

On the basis of the above analysis it seems reasonable to conclude that 'gender' was indeed quite an important but not the only relevant category in regard to the ways in which mental illness among Indians was perceived and represented during the British colonial period. Other, equally powerful organising images prevailed, which came to the fore in particular contexts: 'the exalted religious fanatic', 'the threatening mendicant', 'the friendless and mistreated idiot', 'the violent criminal', to name but few. It is also evident that a variety of categories intersected in these representations with those of gender, depending on the particularities of the context within which the images were produced. 'Race', social class and caste, religion, 'civilisational' status, were variously enunciated in intersection with those of gender (in the both male and female sense, rather than in an exclusively feminised way): the 'savage Indian criminal', the 'vile religious zealot', the 'debauched Indian servant', the 'poor and helpless idiot', the 'depraved cannabis addict'. Some of these images were redolent also with enunciations of the relationship between immature or innocent child and mature or wise adult. Focusing on one only of the various dimensions constitutes undue reductionism, as prevailing representations were too complex to be adequately captured in relation to such single-dimension



concepts as 'the female malady' and the 'feminised' or 'sacralised' Orient, for example. Just as Cheney's 'English malady' represented not only a number of nervous and physical ailments induced by progress, but was his expression for the general state of unease felt at societal, political and economic developments during the eighteenth century (a 'metaphor' in Susan Sontag's terminology), so currently fashionable gender-based concepts such as the 'feminisation of the Orient' and the 'female malady', too, could perhaps be seen more as an accurate representation of *our* dissatisfaction with the body politic of *our* postcolonial period, than generally and exclusively valid organising images for the colonial period. Just as we need to be careful not to take Cheney's construct too literally as a solely psychiatric category, concepts such as the 'feminised Orient' and mental illness as a 'female malady' may be more appropriately taken as challenging devices that highlight the social malaise and oppression of women in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In North-West Europe and North America about two to seven times more. For data on women and mental illness see the 'classic' by P. Chesler, *Women and Madness*, Harmondsworth, 1979. See also B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*, London, 1979; A. Miles, *Women, Health and Medicine*, Milton Keynes, 1991; E. Howell and M. Bayes (eds.) *Women and Mental Health*, New York, 1981; J. Archer and B. Lloyd, *Sex and Gender*, Harmondsworth, 1982; N. Tomes, 'Historical perspectives on women and mental illness', in R. Apple (ed.) *Women, Health, and Medicine in America: A Historical Handbook*, New York, 1990, pp. 157–66. B. V. Davar (ed.) *Women and Mental Health. A Select Bibliography*, Hyderabad, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Busfield, J., *Men, Women and Madness. Understanding Gender and Mental Disorder*, Houndsmill, 1996. Busfield's contention is that madness as a 'female malady' has 'become part of feminist orthodoxy, yet has little empirical support'. For an analysis of the 'female malady' in regard to European lunatics in British India, see W. Ernst, 'European Madness and Gender in Nineteenth-century British India', *Social History of Medicine*, 1996, 9, 3, pp. 357–82.

<sup>3</sup> Showalter, E., *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, London, 1987, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Sinha, M., *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester, University Press, 1995. R. O'Hanlon, 'Cultures of rule, communities of resistance. Gender, discourse and tradition in recent South Asian historiographies', *Social Analysis*, 1989, 23, 94-114.

<sup>5</sup> For details of the individual institutions see: W. Ernst, 'Asylums in Alien Places', in W. Bynum, R. Porter and W. Shepherd (eds.) *The Anatomy of Madness*, Vol. 2, London, 1985; W. Ernst, 'The rise of the European lunatic asylum in colonial India', *Bulletin of Indian Institute of the History of Medicine*, 1987, 17, pp.94-107; W. Ernst, 'The Madras Lunatic Asylum', *Bulletin of Indian Institute of the History of Medicine*, 1998, 28, pp.13-30; W. Ernst, 'Racial, Social and Cultural Factors in the Development of a Colonial Institution: The Bombay Lunatic Asylum', *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, 1992, 23, 1/2, pp.61-80. W. Ernst, 'Colonial/Medical Power', in S. Bhattacharya (ed.) *Imperialism, Medicine and South Asia*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library (OIOC): Annual Report on Mental Hospitals in the Bombay Presidency, 1936.

<sup>7</sup> In 1931: 2.1 per 10,000. OIOC: Triennial Report of the Mental Hospitals, Bihar and Orissa, pp.1930-1932.

<sup>8</sup> On lunatic asylums for Europeans in British India, from the late eighteenth century onwards, see W. Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj*, Routledge, London, 1991) and on asylums for Indians see W. Ernst, 'The establishment of "Native Lunatic Asylums" in early nineteenth-century British India', in G.J. Meulenbeld and D. Wujastyk (eds.) *Studies on Indian Medical History*, Delhi, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> On medical pluralism see W. Ernst (ed.) *Plural Medicine, Tradition and Modernity, 1800-2000*, London and New York, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> For an early appraisal of the limited scope of institution-based histories of psychiatry see David Wright, 'Getting Out of the Asylum', *Social History of Medicine*, 1997, 10, 1, pp.137-55. On the role of family networks in psychiatric treatment see L. Smith, 'The role of family networks', *Social History of Medicine*, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Referred to in OIOC: Triennial Report of the Mental Hospitals, Bihar and Orissa, pp.1930-1932.

<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps interesting to mention here that in India the rate of institutionalisation has remained roughly the same following Independence.

In fact, as recently as 2000, Indian psychiatrists based at the Institute of Mental Health at Hyderabad pointed out that 'the psychiatric bed ratio remained more or less constant at 1 bed for 5000 population' since Independence (K. Krishnamurthy, D. Venugopal, A.K. Alimchandani, 'Mental Hospitals in India', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2000, 42, 2). [Although the number of beds available increased to 21,000 during the last half century, the population in India had risen by nearly two and a half times (R. S. Murthy, *Integration of Mental Health with Primary Health Care*, 1992)].

<sup>13</sup> Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> W. Ernst, 'Idioms of Madness and Colonial Boundaries: The Case of the European and "Native" Mentally Ill in Early Nineteenth-Century British India'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1997, 39, 1, pp.153-81.

<sup>15</sup> OIOC: Report, Bihar and Orissa, 1925.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> OIOC: Triennial Report of the Mental Hospitals, Bihar and Orissa, 1930-1932.

<sup>18</sup> OIOC: Report Bombay, 1931.

<sup>19</sup> OIOC: Report Madras, 1873.

<sup>20</sup> Although there is not sufficient empirical evidence even for Britain to substantiate this assumption, as discussed by Busfield, *Men, Women and Madness*.

<sup>21</sup> Busfield, *Men, Women and Madness*, p 128, or my own report

<sup>22</sup> Macaulay, Minute on Education, 2.2.1835.

<sup>23</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>24</sup> OIOC: Report Bihar and Orissa, 1931.

<sup>25</sup> W. Ernst, *Mad Tales*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>26</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> OIOC: Report Bihar and Orissa, 1938.

<sup>29</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> OIOC: Medical Board to Bengal Government, 6.6.1821.

<sup>32</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Patna, 1870.

<sup>33</sup> OIOC: Manual containing rules for the management and superintendence of the Punjab Lunatic Asylum, Lahore, 1901, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dullunda, 1870.

<sup>35</sup> The Bombay Asylum, for instance, profited from a great number of substantial donations, such as the tidy sum of Rs 25,000 in 1889, collected by the Parsi community for poor Parsi patients in the asylum (OIOC: Annual Report Bombay, 1889). During the earlier decades such benevolence among the 'Natives of India' had not failed to raise government's suspicions, as when it expressed in 1874 its 'desire to know the circumstances under which contributions were made to the Workshop fund by His Highness Tookajee Holkar and the other Native Chiefs who subscribed Rs 465' (OIOC: Government Bombay, General Department, 5.1.1875). In the opinion of the Asylum Superintendent Indians' charity had 'no doubt' been led 'by philanthropic motives and a laudable desire to visit the institution, to gain information regarding their afflicted countrymen, and observe our mode of treating them' (OIOC: Annual Report Bombay, 1874). Clearly, the colonial government shared with the indigenous elites a certain level of concern, curiosity and feelings of mutual distrust and suspicion. By 1918 donations by Indian communities for hospitals in Bombay had become an almost vital feature in health provision for the public, enabling medical professionals to maintain hospitals in India that were 'designed, staffed and equipped suitably for the treatment of medical and surgical cases on the lines of Western medical science' (OIOC: Triennial Report Bombay, 25.6.1918). As it was apparently the case (during the period shortly before the construction of the new mental hospital at Yeravda) that 'our asylums are far behind our hospitals', the medical officer then in charge at the facility at Bombay 'hoped that wealthy and benevolent donors who do so much toward providing trained nurses in our hospitals and maternities will also assist in providing attendants training in caring for the mentally ill' (*Ibid.*).

<sup>36</sup> OIOC: Inspector-General Medical Department to Bengal Government, 30.4.1863.

<sup>37</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Madras, 1877.

<sup>38</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Amraoti, 1881.

<sup>39</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 15.4.1931.

<sup>40</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 9.5.1917.

<sup>41</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 25.6.1918.

<sup>42</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 3.5.1922.

<sup>43</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 14.6.1930.

<sup>44</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 21.7.1933.

<sup>45</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1868.

<sup>46</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1863.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>49</sup> OIOC: Report Bihar and Orissa, 1938.

<sup>50</sup> Another important point that has not been dealt with here concerns the fact that asylum superintendents' diagnostic and therapeutic frames of reference, not to speak of their skill at the compilation of statistics, varied considerably over the whole of the period referred to by the originator of the term 'female malady' in an unduly homogenising fashion as 'psychiatric Victorianism'. A multitude of medical paradigms co-existed and the standard of professional training among medicos in the East varied considerably. In the first volume of the path-breaking history of psychiatry, *The Anatomy of Madness*, the editors rightly reminded us to 'exercise extreme caution before we attribute collective voices or common intentions to the "psychiatric profession" ' during this period. W. Bynum, R. Porter and M. Shepherd (eds.), *Anatomy of Madness*, London and New York, 1985, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Risley, H.H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1892.

<sup>52</sup> Green, W.A., 'Contributions towards the pathology of insanity in India', *The Indian Annals of Medical Science*, 1857, 4, pp.374-435, p.375.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>55</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Madras, 1873.

<sup>58</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Patna, 1866.

<sup>59</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Cuttack, 1866.

<sup>60</sup> OIOC: Surgeon General to Bombay Government, 18.3.1896.

<sup>61</sup> Depending on the perceived challenge to the coloniser/colonised relationship of the wider political context within which these are situated at any one time.

<sup>62</sup> Nandi, A., 'The psychology of colonialism: sex, age and ideology in British India', *Psychiatry*, 1982, 45, pp.197-218.

<sup>63</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Cuttack, 1866.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Cuttack, 1865.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> At the Cuttack Asylum during the 1860s, for example, 'only an eighth of the females recovered ... while above a third of the males were discharged cured'. Similarly in Patna, the '[percentage of cures on admission] was 'much less among women than among men.... Larger ratio of deaths among women than in the male sex' (OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, 1865.) It was pointed out that 'these results differ greatly from those that obtain in European Asylums'. In order to assess these rates adequately, we would of course also need to know if women and men were equally likely to be discharge to the care of their friends and relations or whether superintendents had problems disposing of women, as was reported in the case of the young twelve-year old.

<sup>72</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Cuttack, 1865.

<sup>73</sup> Mill, James, *A History of British India*, 1820, pp. 166–7.

<sup>74</sup> Risley, H.H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 1892.

<sup>75</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Resolution Bengal Government, 8.8.1868.

<sup>76</sup> For an examination of literary evidence see Indrani Sen, *Women and Empire*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>78</sup> Thanks to Biswamoy Pati for pointing out the connection with 'Baishtavees' (derived from 'Baishnah').

<sup>79</sup> OIOC : Annual Report Bombay, 1874.

<sup>80</sup> It is not clear from the records what the reason for this fluctuation could be, but it is likely that it is related more to different classification systems rather than a fluctuating incidence of insanity among domestic servants. OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1868.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Patna, 1866.

<sup>84</sup> OIOC: Government Bengal Resolution, 8. 8. 1868, para 14.

<sup>85</sup> OIOC: Report Bihar and Orissa, 1933.

<sup>86</sup> OIOC: Report Bihar and Orissa, 1926.

<sup>87</sup> For Britain see Busfield, *Women, Men and Madness*.

<sup>88</sup> Nigam, Sanjay, 'Disciplining and policing the "criminals by birth". The making of a colonial stereotype — The criminal tribes and castes of North India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1990, 27, 2, pp. 132-4.

<sup>89</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1868.

<sup>90</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1871.

<sup>91</sup> OIOC: Triennial Report Bihar and Orissa, 1930-32.

<sup>92</sup> See for example Cheney and his *English Malady*

<sup>93</sup> Skultans, Vieda, *English Madness. Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 32, p. 51.

<sup>94</sup> Mills, James (ed.), *Cannabis Britannica*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>95</sup> The Superintendent of the Dacca Lunatic Asylum, for example, pointed out in 1868 that 'Indulgence in gunjah, however, is always associated with other vices, such as spirit drinking and debauchery. The outbreak of mental disease cannot, except in a few cases, be referred to this narcotic alone. The return is more correctly a record of the number of gunjah smokers among the lunatics'. OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Dacca, 1868.

<sup>96</sup> OIOC: Annual Report Bengal, Cuttack, 1868.

<sup>97</sup> OIOC : Annual Report Bihar and Orissa, 1934.

## References

Archer, J., and B. Lloyd, *Sex and Gender*, Penguin Harmondsworth, 1982.

Ballhatchet, K., *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj. Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1980.

Busfield, J., *Men, Women and Madness. Understanding Gender and Mental Disorder*, New York University Press, New York, 1996.

Chesler, P., *Women and Madness*, Allen Lane, London, 1974.

Davar, B. V., (ed.), *Women and Mental Health. A Select Bibliography*, Anveshi, Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, 1996.

Ehrenreich, B., and F. English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*, Avon Books, New York, 1973.

Ernst, W., 'Asylums in Alien Places', in W. Bynum, R. Porter and W. Shepherd (eds) *The Anatomy of Madness*, Vol. 2, Tavistock, London, 1985.

Ernst, W., 'The rise of the European lunatic asylum in colonial India', *Bulletin of Indian Institute of the History of Medicine*, 1987, 17, 94-107.

Ernst, W., 'The Madras Lunatic Asylum', *Bulletin of Indian Institute of the History of Medicine*, 1998, 28, 13-30.

Ernst, W., 'Colonial/Medical Power', in S. Bhattacharya (ed.) *Imperialism, Medicine and South Asia*, Hyderabad, (forthcoming).

Ernst, W., 'The establishment of "Native Lunatic Asylums" in early nineteenth-century British India', in G.J. Meulenbeld and D. Wujastyk (eds) *Studies on Indian Medical History*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2001.

Ernst, W., (ed.) *Plural Medicine, Tradition and Modernity, 1800-2000*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.

Ernst, W., 'European Madness and Gender in Nineteenth-century British India', *Social History of Medicine*, 1996, 9, 3, 357-82.

Ernst, W., 'Idioms of Madness and Colonial Boundaries: The Case of the European and "Native" Mentally Ill in Early Nineteenth-Century British India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1997, 39, 1, 153-81.

Finnane, M., *Insanity and the Insane in Post-Famine Ireland*, Croom Helm, London, 1981.

Green, W.A., 'Contributions towards the pathology of insanity in India', *The Indian Annals of Medical Science*, 1857, 4, 374-435, p.375.

Hobsbawn, E., and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

Howell, E., and M. Bayes (eds.), *Women and Mental Health*, Basic Books Inc., New York, 1981.

Kabbani, R., *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*, Pandora, London, 1994.

Krishnamurthy, K., D. Venugopal, A.K. Alimchandani, 'Mental Hospitals in India', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2000, 42, 2.

Malhotra, A., *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Re-constructing Class in Colonial Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

Micale, M., 'Hysteria Male/Hysteria Female. Reflections on Comparative Gender construction in Nineteenth-Century France and Britain', in M. Benjamin (ed.) *Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Enquiry, 1780-1945*, Cambridge, 1991.



Miles, A., *Women, Health and Medicine*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1991.

Mills, J., *Madness, Cannabis and Colonialism*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000.

Mills, S., 'Knowledge, Gender, and Empire', in A. Blunt and G. Rose (eds) *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, Guilford Press, New York, 1994.

Murthy, R.S., *Integration of mental health with primary health care*, in R.S. Murthy and B.J. Burns (eds) *Community Mental Health: Proceedings of the Indo-US Symposium*, Nimhans, Bangalore, 1992.

Nandi, A., 'The psychology of colonialism: Sex, age and ideology in British India', *Psychiatry*, 1982, 45, 197-218.

Nigam, S., 'Disciplining and policing the "criminals by birth" – the making of a colonial stereotype. The criminal tribes and castes of North India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1990, 27, 2, 131-61.

O'Hanlon, R., 'Cultures of rule, communities of resistance. Gender, discourse and tradition in recent South Asian historiographies', *Social Analysis*, 1989, 23, 94-114.

Sangari, K., and S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, Delhi, 1989.

Sen, I., *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India, 1858-1900*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2002.

Showalter, E., *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, Virago, London, 1987.

Sinha, M., *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995.

Skultans, V., *English madness. Ideas on Insanity, 1580-1890*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979. N. Tones, 'Historical perspectives on women and mental illness', in R. Apple (ed.) *Women, Health, and Medicine in America: A Historical Handbook*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992, 157-66. L. Smith, 'The role of family networks', *Social History of Medicine*, 2003.

Suleri, S., *The Rhetoric of English India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

Wright, D., 'Getting Out of the Asylum', *Social History of Medicine*, 1997, 10, 1, 137-55.



## Gender, Medicine and Empire: Early Initiatives in Institution-building and Professionalisation, (1890s – 1940s)<sup>1</sup>

Maina Chawla Singh

**H**undreds of Western women began medical work in India between 1871 and 1900. Some were inspired by the imperial mission to 'serve their Indian sisters' and others to 'save souls' for the kingdom of Christ. Yet others were simply searching for career opportunities away from home patriarchies where medicine was still a bastion of male control. They ranged from informally trained missionary wives or *zenana* workers, who practised midwifery and dispensed medicine for common ailments,<sup>2</sup> to highly qualified physicians from American and British medical schools, whose initiatives grew from make-shift veranda dispensaries to become first-rate women's medical colleges — the earliest in South Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Clara Swain (1834–1910), the first qualified Western woman physician to begin work in India was an American and preceded her British counterpart Dr. Fanny Butler by ten years.<sup>4</sup> Swain came to Bareilly (1870), Dr. Sara Seward to Allahabad (1871), Fanny Butler to Jabalpur (1880), and Anna Kugler (1856–1930) to Guntur, South India (1883). Edith Pechey came to Bombay (1883),<sup>5</sup> Edith Brown began her medical work in Ludhiana in 1891 and Ida Scudder at Vellore in 1900. These qualified physicians, among the earliest in their parent societies, worked for long years as gynaecologists, obstetricians and surgeons, heading full-fledged hospitals for Indian women. Most began their careers here launching ad-hoc dispensaries, which eventually grew into hospitals. By 1927, there were 181 hospitals in India staffed by women (93 by missionaries,

25 by members of the Women's Medical Service, and 63 by other medical women employed by the provincial government, and local committees). From these emerged the first training classes and medical schools for Indian women. Early informal classes for midwives grew into training graduates certified as LMP (Licensed Medical Practitioners) and eventually university grade classes for degrees in medicine.

This paper analyses some of these processes through which institutionalised medical education became accessible to Indian women. Within the broader terrain of recent scholarship on medicine and empire, which offers analyses of colonial health policies, the impact of Western medicine on indigenous systems of medicine and interrogates colonial interventions in public health,<sup>6</sup> this essay is positioned to draw a gendered perspective into our understanding of medicine in the colonies. Chronologically, this study is located at a moment when Western medical care for Indian women was becoming increasingly available in many parts of India, either through colonial institutions or missionary endeavours.<sup>7</sup> After the 1870s, such dispensaries and hospitals meant exclusively for women began to attract middle and upper class status-conscious, urban Indians—a development clearly linked to the furtherance of caste and class politics in society.<sup>8</sup> The last decades of the nineteenth century were also a phase when currents of social reform brought gender issues centre-stage, making female education and women's health into priority issues on most reform agendas.

Within this configuration, this essay seeks to understand the web between indigenous needs, local demand for Western style obstetric care and the incoming supply of white women physicians in search of professional opportunities. Although elsewhere I have discussed that the precursors of many prestigious medical schools were the early projects of non-medical missionary wives or women who did *zenana* work,<sup>9</sup> my focus here is not on the early experiments where women dispensed basic medicines or offered rudimentary hygiene classes to neighbourhood Indian women, but on those ventures that grew to become enduring institutions — fully-equipped hospitals and colleges graduating certified women practitioners. The

North India School of Medicine for Christian Women (begun 1894), with six pupils, became CMC, Ludhiana as we know it today.<sup>10</sup> In Vellore, a school for training women as sub-assistants or licentiates begun in 1918 grew to become CMC Vellore, which celebrated the centenary of its founder's work in 2000. Both evolved from the modestly begun initiatives of two single women missionary physicians, Dr. Edith Brown of Britain and Dr. Ida Scudder, an American who began practising medicine in India in 1891 and 1900 respectively. From uncertain beginnings, with resource constraints and slow community acceptance, they grew into successful full-fledged medical centres for women, offering high clinical and academic standards, and eventually opening their doors to male students and patients after the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> The histories of these institutions offer interesting examples of some key issues that shaped the early developments in women's medical education in India, which was initiated neither by the colonial government nor indigenous enterprise, but by missionary effort.

Although Lady Hardinge Medical College for Women (1916), was another such institution of distinction, its genesis and growth followed from a different axis. Emerging from the work of the Dufferin Fund (1883), Hardinge was backed by colonial support and blessed by vicereines.<sup>12</sup> Given that the Dufferin Fund garnered both colonial support and Indian philanthropy, Hardinge with its secure image of state-sponsorship, its location in the colonial capital and the patronage of the highest of the memsahibs, barely saw the struggles for survival that Ludhiana and Vellore did. In fact, it benefited from an altered cultural climate created over previous decades within which women's hospitals had gained much credibility and social acceptance. The expanding work at Ludhiana and Vellore contributed significantly to creating this altered climate. Thus, these two institutions form the basis of this study.

Drawing from the histories of Ludhiana and Vellore, I wish to comment on some key aspects of the processes of institutionalisation of these projects. Apart from a project in recovery from the perspective of women's history, in terms of historiography, this paper aims to suggest that a history of women and medicine in India must

make space to examine the complex collaborations between Western women physicians and the their indigenous constituencies including patients, students and staff that determined the success or closure of these ventures. Further, that the administration, institutional culture and even architectural construction of the early institutions, reflect these cross-cultural beginnings — blending Western therapeutics with the needs and mores of the receiving culture. Finally, I wish to argue that for these Western women, ‘transplanting’ their professional knowledge and skills on alien soil within communities, which were at best wary and often resistant to change, the most daunting challenges were social and cultural. Coping with issues of caste, gender and religion in the client communities was both difficult and critical to the survival of the projects. These strands undergird my discussion below.

I draw upon archival sources, government documents, institutional histories, biographies and personal papers of the individuals who were instrumental in initiating such medical projects. Methodologically, I follow a thematic approach. Rather than present comparative histories based on college reports and secondary material, I draw from the institutional histories within the larger context of women’s higher education during that period in colonial India, to comment on a range of themes that help to map key issues that marked the process by which institutionalised medical education became available to Indian women. This discussion then intersects issues of gender, culture, education and empire.

I analyse the process in three stages, each in a separate section of this essay. First, the early stages when Western women physicians had to make a space for their work in indigenous society, where women mostly consulted practitioners of traditional medicine and were assisted in childbirth by the local *dai* (midwife) in the privacy of their homes. This was followed by the efforts of Western women physicians at institution-building in the early decades of the twentieth century, when small-scale training classes for Indian girls were formalised to give certificates and diplomas that equipped them to launch their own dispensaries. Finally, by the middle of the twentieth century, these institutions were compelled to keep pace with the

times and match the best standards of medical education and clinical facilities available in the general non-segregated hospitals in India. I end with some comments on how these processes reveal cross-cultural negotiations and adaptations at various levels as institutionalised Western therapeutics and medical education was made available to Indian women. I conclude that in seeking to build viable institutions, Western women physicians were compelled to address and incorporate local preferences of class, caste, gender and religion, even where they clearly flouted prescribed rules of patient care and hospital administration as they had been taught at medical schools in Britain and America.

### Early Stages: Gaining Acceptance

Indian women needed to be wooed to seek the services of the Western physician and to be examined by one who was a racial and cultural 'other'. The first step was community outreach. Contrary to the norms of medical practice in Western societies, women physicians in India had to reach out and make themselves available to those who were sick, wherever they were. House visits were important confidence-building measures, before patients could be expected to visit the dispensary. When Edith Brown arrived in Ludhiana, she was the first qualified woman physician recruited to take-over the medical work begun in 1875 by the Scottish Rose Greenfield, a *zenana* missionary worker. Rose Greenfield, a Scottish missionary had arrived in India in 1874 (1875?), and set up the Ludhiana Zenana Mission supported by the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East.<sup>13</sup> Setting up children's schools, a dispensary in 1881 and finally, the 10-bed Charlotte Hospital, housed in the building of an erstwhile Presbyterian church, Greenfield was now ready to use the expertise of a qualified physician, who would also take over the newly initiated Ludhiana School of Nursing (1891).<sup>14</sup>

Despite this base provided by Rose Greenfield's previous initiatives in the region, Brown's early forays were about making interventions into existing medical and obstetric practices. Her brief stint at Palwal (near Delhi), prior to Ludhiana, had left her

discouraged that "so many of the local women preferred to go to the village 'hakim' for medicine".<sup>15</sup> At Ludhiana, she welcomed opportunities when called to attend complicated cases of childbirth, usually only after the local midwife had given up! Whenever such interventions were successful, her professional reputation was enhanced. In time, she evolved a two-pronged programme to reduce the hold of the *dais*: one, she offered them monetary incentives if they took her along, when summoned to assist in childbirth.<sup>16</sup> Second, she offered to train them in simple anatomy and obstetrics, for which she also offered small rewards. Even so, towards the end of her first year, Brown confessed not having made much headway in the local community:

The work here continues small and in many ways disappointing, the people are all so frightened. There are four patients, all of whom would probably be cured by a small operation, but none of them will consent to it. I hear that many of them have thrown away the medicines I gave them because they have either known or have suspected that they contained water and Hindus spread the report that we put dirty water in our mixtures. I have now commenced to make patients pay 1 pice for their medicine so that they will be less likely to throw it away.<sup>17</sup>

Brown's first experience with attempting surgery convinced her that "major operations simply cannot be done by one pair of hands alone". In 1892, a year after her arrival in India, she visited the medical schools at Agra and Lahore where some women students were studying along with men. Brown found "the moral climate in the two schools is insufferable for girls". She believed that the girls "do not get competent training in midwifery from their men teachers and etiquette forbids them asking questions." Also, that they were not permitted to hold posts as clinical clerks or dressers.<sup>18</sup> But when she conferred with the head of the Baptist mission work in Delhi about the practicability of having helpers trained, the mission reply was, "If you will train them yourself, you can have as many as you like".<sup>19</sup> Undeterred by this discouraging response from her missionary superiors, Brown garnered some



support from officials of the colonial medical establishment and in 1893, organized a conference of women medical missionaries working in the Punjab, the North-West Provinces and the erstwhile Rajputana area.<sup>20</sup>

"A doctor alone, without nurses, dispensers, and assistants, is like a captain without a crew, or an officer without a regiment. They must have trained assistants, for in cases of life and death an ignorant nurse, or an incapable compounder, or a careless assistant will undo all the best medical skill... A school to train assistants is essential...", asserted Edith Brown.<sup>21</sup>

Brown's rationale for a girls' institution clearly stressed the importance of conducting such classes under missionary supervision. She believed that "at seventeen or eighteen Indian girls face positive dangers by their withdrawal from direct Christian instruction and from influence of Christian home and life".<sup>22</sup> Fourteen missionaries signed a statement supporting Brown's case for "the crying need" for training Indian women as medical assistants, and asserting that "however humbly the school may begin its work, a full curriculum of five years and a government Diploma such as is open to men are steadily contemplated".<sup>23</sup> Finally, in January 1894 the North India School of Medicine for Christian Women started with 4 medical students and 2 trainee compounders, all Christian. The 30-bed Charlotte Hospital became the nucleus for training. In 1900, the four girls who completed the hospital assistants' course, were sent to Lahore to be examined. Their success became the springboard on which a bid for colonial funding was sought and secured.<sup>24</sup> Thus began the first medical school in the region, exclusively for women.

When Ida Scudder came to Vellore (1900), it was a small town of 40,000 people, with no dispensary or hospital.<sup>25</sup> Although the young Ida was in some ways, returning 'home' to Ranipet where she had grown up in her missionary father's bungalow, patients did not come streaming in at first.<sup>26</sup> Familiar with social mores and poverty levels in the region, Scudder was drawn to rural outreach work from the outset. Recognising the need for a hospital, while still in America, she had raised mission funds for a 40-bed hospital. However, she saw the institution as a base — not merely available

for visiting patients, but one from which physicians could go forth to the thousands of rural poor, who could not access institutionalized medical care, available mostly at urban centres. She was also convinced of a serious need to train medical assistants, nurses and compounders, to support the physician's work and extend her reach to treat larger numbers. Thus, Scudder began with a two-pronged strategy, the most visible being her rural outreach in her mobile 'Outpatient Clinic' in a Peugeot, which she drove two or three times a week to the nearby town, making many stops en-route to treat patients along the way. Although seeing her in the automobile for the first time, many would shrink away screaming, "The devil is coming", and in villages where upper castes were in greater numbers, people would refuse to be treated by one who was 'polluted'<sup>27</sup>; the numbers grew and patients lined up along the roadside stopovers, where, using makeshift facilities, Scudder treated common ailments and performed minor surgical procedures. In 1902, Scudder recorded treating 12,359 patients.<sup>28</sup>

Needless to say, early women doctors treated all manner of ailments — paediatric, gynaecological, dental, surgical as well as snakebites and broken bones! Surgeries were performed under basic conditions, often requiring surgical needles and instruments to be sterilized immediately for reuse. When operations were successful, their fame spread as women who were 'performing miracles with a knife'. If the patient died, word often spread in the local community about the 'evil ways' of the 'strange women' and numbers dwindled at the dispensaries.

### **Institution-building and Addressing Local Culture**

In time, dispensaries began attracting Indian women, although house visits remained an important trajectory of medical work — both as an avenue to build goodwill with well-connected local families, and as a source of revenue through visiting fees. Charlotte Hospital (Ludhiana) and the Schell Hospital (Vellore) soon acquired recognition and received colonial subsidies.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, missionary medical work was organised and institutionalised to a high degree,

with considerable networking and cooperation among the medical professionals. In 1911, at a missionary conference held at Kodaikanal (near Madras — now Chennai), when Scudder proposed the founding of a full-fledged union medical college for women in South India, most attendees thought her project to be a hundred years ahead of its times.<sup>29</sup> At this time, the only other women's medical school in India was at Ludhiana. From 1904, non-Christian students were admitted and in 1912, the institution had been renamed The Women's Christian Medical College Ludhiana. However, its success was not inspiring enough for the majority of parents living in South India, even Christian ones, to choose to send their daughters a thousand miles away, often involving a railway journey of four to five days, to study medicine in a region where the language, food and climate were all unfamiliar. There were indeed seven medical colleges for men in South India, but none exclusively for women. Thus, missionary rationale stressed gender issues and Ida Scudder espoused the cause of medical education for women within a Christian framework. Apart from stating that "the number of lady physicians from other countries is very insufficient for the great and pressing needs of the women of India", it was argued that government hospitals needed women of "strong Christian character who are trained in Christian institutions".<sup>30</sup> Vellore was envisaged to be a centre where women may obtain "on moderate terms a sound, liberal Christian medical education of the highest order".

Although by 1912, Scudder had managed to obtain the approval of the Medical Missionary Association, her huge project needed permissions, funding and the support of conservative mission boards as well as a highly skeptical colonial medical establishment. Colonel Bryson, head of the British Medical Department of the Madras Presidency, warned Scudder, "You will be fortunate if you get three applications, but if you get six, go ahead and start your school". Convinced that women students would not be able to compete with their male students from other medical colleges in South India, he cautioned Scudder not to be "disappointed", "if all your young women fail".<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding the discouragement from colonial patriarchies, Scudder continued lobbying for her institution at various levels.<sup>32</sup> Shrewdly realising that other locations in South India — Mysore, Guntur, Nellore, Madurai and Madras, all of which had established missionary hospitals for women — could stake a claim as 'suitable' for a women's medical college, Scudder took pains to remain in the mainstream of negotiations, despite health problems.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, in 1914 the Medical School for Women (affiliated to the Women's Christian College in Madras) was established. On August 12, 1918, the Missionary Medical College for Women was inaugurated by Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, and Ida Scudder became its first Principal. Scudder despatched prospectuses to government and mission schools throughout Madras Presidency and followed with personal visits to mission schools and colleges to gather students. Girls over eighteen "regardless of caste or creed", were eligible to be trained as Apothecaries and sub-Assistant Surgeons who would receive the L.M.P. (Licensed Medical Practitioner) diploma. The first year, 69 applications were received and only 18 could be admitted. The following year, there were 89 applications for 25 vacancies. In 1920, 178 women applied from which only 28 could be admitted.<sup>34</sup> From the first class, all Vellore students passed the entrance examination. The first class graduated in March 1922. Of the 18 women students from Vellore, 14 passed, with one of them at the head of the Madras Presidency list in Obstetrics and another receiving the gold medal in Anatomy.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, training classes for hospital assistants, compounders and nurses were a key focus at both institutions, with the hospital clientele providing the necessary clinical practice. In fact, the prioritizing of nurses' training at missionary institutions in general deserves mention. Even after Indian girls began to be attracted by medical practice, nursing was associated with 'low' social status. Many Hindus and Muslims considered hands-on care of the sick across caste, 'inappropriate' for girls from 'respectable' families. Thus nursing had few takers then, as now. However, missionary schools and colleges were clearly able to instill certain ideals of service, so that Christian girls from the mission schools and

orphanages often perceived nursing to be a convenient career option. This trend was responsible for producing a cadre of nursing staff, crucial for the successful functioning of women's hospitals. In 1922, at Ludhiana there were 77 students, 16 dispensers, 40 nurses, 20 *dais* under training. There was also a record of 108 students who had qualified as doctors, 150 nurses, 150 *dais* and 50 dispensers.<sup>36</sup>

### **Faculty, Funding and Institutional Culture**

At missionary institutions, as I have maintained elsewhere, education was always blended with a strong emphasis on inculcating 'values'.<sup>37</sup> At the medical colleges, these values — pride in the alma mater, commitment to rural health, and dedication to broadly 'Christian ideals' of 'service' above material gain — were integrated into the curricular and extra-curricular activities and reiterated through the sustained efforts of the faculty. Although daily prayers were held for students, staff and ward patients, these medical colleges promoted a broad sense of 'Christian fellowship', rather than formal religious worship. Considerable attention was paid to grooming and personality issues, given that many students were the first generation college-going women in their families. Missionary women felt responsible as teachers that Indian girls had to be trained and 'sheltered'. Texts about the colleges discussed the overall change in personality of the students during the years at College: "New students are sometimes rough in manner and untidy in dress, but it is remarkable how quickly they learn better ways when exposed to refining influences".<sup>38</sup> Such accounts were emphatic in underlining the idea that missionary institutions had a transformative role in the lives of the students. "See the girl of yesterday—see her now. Yesterday she strolled into the compound with a deliberate gait so characteristic of the East. Now she holds herself erect and walks briskly forward, keen earnestness shines in her eyes — she has caught the spirit. She means business; she is not merely going through, she is going to win..."<sup>39</sup>

Both "Dr Miss Sahib" and "Aunt Ida", (as Brown and Scudder respectively were fondly called), were key figures in the life and culture of their respective institutions. They were matriarchs and mentors. Alumnae often requested them to visit their little

dispensaries. After inaugurating the dispensary of Dr. Varkkey of Dharmapuram, a Vellore alumna, Scudder wrote with an almost 'maternal' pride "that Dr. Varkkey was following in the footsteps of the Alma Mater".<sup>40</sup> From the college magazines and newsletters, it is evident that alumni continued to correspond with their former mentors, and took pride in sharing news of their medical work. "I have started a private dispensary at Murukkumpuzha, and in doing so, I am glad to say that I am trying to carry out the mission", wrote a former graduate.<sup>41</sup>

Growing institutions especially for women attracted notice and patronage, both of which were also necessary for recognition, funding and expansion. Networking was key to all this and it was common to invite dignitaries for inaugurations and graduation ceremonies.<sup>42</sup> However, despite colonial grants, institutional documents reveal a constant pressure on resources. Private wards preferred by the wealthier patients, were important sources of revenue. By 1911, Ludhiana had 30 private wards and Brown's own practice among the elite Punjabi families brought in valuable additional funds, used for hospital maintenance. Brown's visits to women from neighbouring princely families were particularly lucrative. The 'Ranis' of Malerkotla (a princely state about an hour's journey from Ludhiana) and of Jind (about four hours away) often summoned her, sending a car to drive the physician to the palace.<sup>43</sup> In terms of finances, however, both Ludhiana and Vellore were privileged, being headed by assertive women like Brown and Scudder, who carried clout with their home churches. In 1919, a Building Campaign launched at Vellore, eventually managed to secure one million dollars pledged by John D. Rockefeller Jr., although women's missionary hospitals at Mysore, Guntur and Madras were also contenders.

Faculty was another issue. As women gained better access in the professions in Britain and America, there were fewer volunteers from overseas to 'heal' "heathen women". As interdenominational cooperation became widespread, by the late 1930s, Brown's work was supported by many British and American missionary societies and Ludhiana had a team of 12 qualified doctors, 2 lecturers, a superintendent and some Biblewomen. Of the 27 missionaries, there

were women from England, Scotland, Wales, America, Canada and New Zealand, representing 9 different denominations. Then there was the junior staff consisting of 28 Indian women, all of whom were Ludhiana alumnae.<sup>44</sup>

### **Adapting to Local Culture**

Even as institutions grew, there were important non-medical issues to be addressed. In a milieu where ailing women were treated by indigenous practitioners or helped in childbirth by a *dai* in the privacy of their homes, a hospital was an impersonal space, alien to local culture and lifestyle which maintained sharp, socially defining boundaries within a community. Thus, women's hospitals in India needed to be not only disease and bacteria-sensitive but also, highly class, caste and gender-sensitive. Depending on levels of personal orthodoxy and superstition, women would sometimes resist surgeries on days considered inauspicious or refuse to take medicine in the month of *Ramzan* (Ramadaan).

Even the most basic rules of hospital administration taught at Western medical schools, were put to test. For instance, Indian women, when they did agree to be admitted, came along with loved ones and children, all of whom camped in the hospital premises. Upper-class patients brought personal maids, and utensils to cook for them, mostly anxious not to defile caste. If the hospital had one well for all, the upper castes refused to drink water from it. Western women physicians were aware that notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' influenced patient preferences and the acceptability of the hospital. They were conscious of caste and race issues, and of their own complicated identities as care-givers who were also perceived as 'without caste' and therefore, 'polluted'. They knew that to appease their upper-caste clientele the hospital kitchen needed a Brahmin cook and that, "no doctor or nurse might venture where her shadow might fall across the food or on a cooking-pot". They knew that after being cured, many a patient returning from the 'contaminated' space of the hospital, performed elaborate cleansing rituals or bathed in the Ganges before mixing with her own caste folk.<sup>45</sup>

Within this paradigm, Western models of hospital administration and even principles of hospital design had to be relaxed and pruned to accommodate local cultural practices and mores. Private patients were clearly seen as important for hospital revenue and when premises were being enlarged, at Ludhiana in the 1910s, several private wards were added. These were small suites: a private room with a bathroom and kitchen, which, could be enlarged by the inclusion of a closed-in veranda. To suit local preferences for gender segregation and privacy among upper-class Punjabis, Hindus and Muslims), these suites were accessible from the hospital courtyard and also from a backdoor opening on to a narrow alley giving access to the men of the family visiting from outside. Thus, women patients were accessible to male family members at all times, without compromising the privacy of the other women. All rooms opened into the central hospital courtyard providing access to nurses and doctors at all times.<sup>46</sup>

In time, these campuses became self-sufficient units running individual small-scale economies, with on-campus facilities for water-supply through wells. Meagre resources compelled ingenuity and many Western physicians borrowed generously from indigenous techniques, often more economical and better suited to local conditions. Disinfecting at Ludhiana hospital was done using indigenous techniques—in a large receptacle built of mud and bricks, a charcoal fire was lit. The glowing mass would heat the container, over which clothes were piled and thus steamed.<sup>47</sup> In fact, women's hospitals in India still carry the legacy of some of these features. Lady Hardinge Hospitals, even till the 1980s, had an entire wing of small 'cottages', which provided residential and cooking facilities for attendant families of patients. Indeed, Indian hospitals even today, are more lax about food, attendants and family presence than medical institutions elsewhere offering comparable medical facilities!

### **Modernisation and Upgrading**

By the 1930s, hospitals and schools, were under pressure to upgrade. Widespread awareness about new technologies available in medicine made Indian patients more demanding. Sometimes when



their traditional Hindus patients demanded X-rays and 'advanced' diagnostic treatment, missionaries who were always irked by idol-worship felt it to be an 'anomaly' that people acquainted with "the marvels of science" could at the same time be "bowing down to a dirty doll".<sup>48</sup> In general however, medical work was growing. Scudder's diary entries for instance, reveal that the pace of medical work was brisk. Roadside clinic days at Vellore continued to be several hours long, combing through nearby villages and townships.<sup>49</sup> By 1935, Vellore had graduated 168 women and 105 were studying medicine.<sup>50</sup> During the 1930s, the Women's Medical School, Vellore grew in enrolments and gained in prestige both nationally and internationally. It attracted visiting faculty from United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Britain and sent its own for overseas training programmes, thus creating a centre for quality medical education for Indian women with cross-national linkages.

Towards the end of the 1930s however, Vellore was faced with a crisis that threatened closure. As an initiative in standardising medical education, the colonial government abolished the L.M.P. (Licensed Medical Practitioner) programme to new entrants from July 1938, making the M.B.B.S. degree programme a requirement for a medical college to be recognized. Following this, enrolments dropped and a gloom descended on Vellore.<sup>51</sup> Affiliation to Madras University became imperative. Yet, offering an M.B.B.S. course required a major upgrading effort — a 100-bed hospital for medical and surgical cases, capacity to handle 1000 maternity cases annually,<sup>52</sup> higher academic standards offering a five-year degree course, not a three-year diploma. The financial implications were overwhelming.<sup>53</sup> Providing qualified faculty with prior teaching experience at a university grade medical college was nearly impossible.<sup>54</sup> The ensuing campaign to "Save Vellore" involved students, faculty and overseas missions. Recognizing the need of changing times, Scudder's approach to professionalization and medical education was highly pragmatic. Challenging conservative women's missionary societies to expand beyond a limited 'female domain', she insisted that Vellore open its doors to male students and patients, so as to become a financially viable institution.<sup>55</sup> Scudder

maintained that unlike twenty years earlier, segregated classes for women were no longer socially necessary to attract them to professional education. With the rapid pace of social change, Indian women needed equality of opportunity and access to quality higher education more than they needed segregation. Scudder's efforts eventually convinced several missionary societies in Britain and America to build an All-India Christian Medical College at Vellore. The first M.B.B.S. students were admitted in 1942 and in 1944, the first male doctors opened the men's outpatient work. By July 1944, the new men's ward was overcrowded, even though the formal affiliation was still due. In October 1945, the Inspection Committee reported favourably and new laboratories, clinical wards and medical departments were added. Thus Vellore took on the shape of a huge 'modern' medical project, getting its University affiliation in 1947.

Institutions were variously affected by the political climate of nationalism and protests in the 1930s and 1940s. Those on colonial subsidies tried to keep their students disengaged from the nationalist struggles, although the impact remained uneven. "We long to see every young woman who passes through the Vellore Medical School, strong in character and with a great vision for the uplift of her country and following in the footsteps of the Great Physician...."<sup>56</sup>, stated Scudder. Yet, a newspaper reported that when Gandhi, who had previously met Scudder, sent bales of homespun asking her students wear it in honour of a visit he was making, she replied spiritedly, "Indeed no! My girls are not going back to homespun or spinning wheels. They wear modern uniforms".<sup>57</sup> Clearly, for Scudder, 'khadi' and what it symbolised to millions of Indians at the time, appeared to disrupt this discourse of 'modernity', Western medicine and college education for women. By implication, nationalist sentiments among students also threatened to disrupt the power structures and hegemony within missionary enclaves. Scudder then, viewed Indian women professionals as occupying an uncomplicated, apolitical space — a view anachronistic in itself.

However, Vellore was deep in the South and could keep itself more cocooned than cities in the North. Ludhiana, on the other hand, was on the route that millions of Hindus took to flee from

Pakistan and Muslims took to cross over to Pakistan, when violence broke out on eve of Partition in July 1947. As riots broke out in the Punjab, the huge number of casualties resulting from attacks on refugee trains, stretched the capacity of the local Civil Hospital and compelled Ludhiana staff and students to join in. Upgrading was due at Ludhiana, but political tension in the region had slowed it down. Ironically however, the vast numbers of casualties necessitated that the overflow of the injured from the local Civil Hospital be accommodated at Ludhiana. Thus the wards of Ludhiana were opened to men. Over the next several months, this provided the necessary clinical practice for trainee nurses in male nursing, which previously had to be done at a different institution. The riots greatly altered the hospital. But even as life normalised, the male wards opened in emergency were not closed.<sup>58</sup> This inclusion of male patients automatically 'raised' nursing training to 'grade A' requirements of the government, and the first four male students were admitted to Ludhiana in 1951. Two years later, 50 medical students — 21 men and 29 women — were admitted to the first year M.B.B.S. class.

Thus, the early medical schools grew out of women's hospitals and indeed shared a symbiotic relationship, being mutually dependent in providing the patients and the practitioners.

Reversing the order that medical education for women followed in Britain and America, Ludhiana and Vellore expanded to open their doors to male students and patients. Thus they survived the threat of female ghettoisation whereby women students may have had little exposure beyond obstetric and gynae work, and women-administrators would have struggled to compete for colonial grants with other medical institutions. In the process, they also widened community involvement and withstood the pressures of conservative evangelising ideologies which, measured 'success' purely in terms of conversions. Eventually, both Ludhiana and Vellore became institutions to reckon with, passing through many phases when closure seemed imminent. In both cases, the women who founded and headed these institutions for long years became assertive, almost 'cult' figures in the surrounding region. Indeed, the astuteness and

determination to keep their institutions in the limelight were qualities that both Brown and Scudder possessed. Women like Brown and Scudder were no supporters for the cause of Indian nationalism, yet their sympathies for the empire did not dilute their commitment to their medical work, all of which focused on Indian women — whether as students or as patients.

Finally, is noteworthy that in order to build viable medical institutions across cultures, Western women physicians had to understand the sociology and politics that shaped the lives of Indian women. Rigid local practices, mores, and contested paradigms in the local culture compelled them to reexamine their own tenets of hospital administration and patient care and to adapt. Caste and gender compulsions necessitated the evolution of models that were neither purely Western, nor had indigenous precedents. Indian women's hospitals acquired characteristics that were context and time-specific — models reflecting the cross-cultural influences which had engendered them.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Biswamoy Pati and Anshu Malhotra for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In 1877, a Miss Hewlitt of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society initiated medical work in Amritsar.

<sup>3</sup> Singh, Maina Chawla, *Gender, Religion and 'Heathen lands' : American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860–1940s)*. Garland, New York, 2000, Ch. 7. Henceforth, 'Singh (2000)'.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, Rev. Arthur Judson, D.D., *One Hundred Years: A History of the Foreign Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church in USA*, Revell, New York, 1936.

<sup>5</sup> Edith Pechey was hired by a Bombay-based private philanthropic trust, for the newly founded Cama Hospital for Women and Children. She lived and practised in Maharashtra for over two decades.

<sup>6</sup> For a variety of such studies see Biswamoy Pati and Mark Harrison (eds.), *Health, Medicine and Empire : Perspectives in Colonial India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Lal, Manisha, "The Politics of Gender and Medicine in Colonial India: The Countess of Dufferin Fund, 1885–1888", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 68, pp. 29–66.

<sup>8</sup> Malhotra, Anshu, "Of *Dais* and Midwives: 'Middle-class Interventions in the Management of Women's Reproductive Health—A Study from Colonial Punjab", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 2003, 10:2, Henceforth, 'Malhotra (2003)'.

<sup>9</sup> See my article "Women and Missionary Medical Practice in Colonial India: The Case of Clara Swain (1834–1910), Anna Kugler (1856–1930)". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> By the 1920s, it had over a hundred students as alumnae and as many enrolled in the medical and nursing courses.

<sup>11</sup> Both institutions were known by different names at different stages of their expansion. For instance Christian Medical College, Vellore before becoming co-educational and offering the M.B.B.S. degree, was called "Women's Medical School, Vellore" or "Vellore Medical College". Similarly, the "North India School of Medicine for Christian Women" (1894) became "The Women's Christian Medical College, Ludhiana" (1912). Since this paper comments on different stages I refer to them simply as 'Vellore' and 'Ludhiana'.

<sup>12</sup> Lady Hardinge, the British Vicerine had been a driving force in the fundraising, although she died before the institution was opened in 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Greenfield, M., *Five Years in Ludhiana; Or Work Amongst Our Indian Sisters*, Partridge, London, 1886.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, Charles, *Punjab Pioneer*, World Books Publisher.(n.p; n.d), p.47. Henceforth, 'Reynolds'.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>16</sup> For discussions of midwifery and the '*dais*' see Malhotra (2003); Dagmar Engels, "The Politics of Childbirth", in *Beyond Purdah ? Women in Bengal 1890–1939*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996; Geraldine Forbes, "Managing Midwifery in India", in D. Engels and S. Marks (eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India*, pp.152–72, British Academic Press, London, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Edith Brown quoted in Francesca French, *Miss Brown's Hospital: The Story of the Ludhiana Medical College and Dame Edith Brown*, D.B. E. Hodder and Stoughton, 1955, p.22, Henceforth, 'French'.

<sup>18</sup> Reynolds, Charles, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Tinling, p.28.

<sup>20</sup> During a visit to Simla, Edith Brown managed a personal interview with the Surgeon General of India and secured at least verbal support for her scheme of training medical professionals. See French, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Edith Brown, December 1893; quoted in Charles Reynolds, p.83.

<sup>22</sup> Edith Brown, address at the Conference of Medical Missionaries (1893), Ludhiana Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (USA).

<sup>23</sup> Conference Resolution December 1893, Ludhiana Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (USA).

<sup>24</sup> The government sanctioned a capitation grant and sum of Rs. 10,000 for equipment. See, Tinling, Christine I., *India's Womanhood: Forty Years Work at Ludhiana*, The Letterworth Press, London, 1935, p.290.

<sup>25</sup> *Glimpses of My Life: A Message from Dr. Ida Scudder*, Pamphlet, n.d., Scudder Papers (Box 3), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard.

<sup>26</sup> The Scudder family network was spread throughout missions of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. Ida's father Dr. John Scudder had long practised medicine in Ranipet, and died a few months after Ida's return to India. Her decision to join medical school was influenced by her experience of seeing local Indian women risk death rather than consult a male physician.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, Dorothy Clarke. *Dr. Ida: The Story of Dr. Ida Scudder of Vellore*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1959, pp. 128–131. Henceforth, 'Wilson, *Dr. Ida*.'

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *Dr. Ida*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> This was at the annual Interdenominational Conference of medical missionaries held at Kodaikanal (South India). For a fuller discussion of the growth of CMC, Vellore see Singh (2000), pp.281–311.

<sup>30</sup> Ida Scudder, handwritten notes for speeches; Ida Scudder Papers: Box 3. n.d.. All references to "Scudder Papers" henceforth are to the Collection of letters, personal diaries, family correspondence and newspaper clippings relating to Ida Sophia Scudder at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by Scudder in Pamphlet: *Missionary Medical College for Women, Vellore Incorporated in India "A Beautiful Gate"* (American Section of the Governing Board of the Women's Missionary Medical College, Vellore, Inc., 1935): 17. Henceforth, *A Beautiful Gate*.

<sup>32</sup> In 1913, Ida Scudder invited Ms. Peabody and Ms. Helen Barrett Montgomery to Vellore. Both women were influential in North American women's missionary boards. Hence, showcasing the work at 'Vellore' was strategic in garnering future support. Wilson, *Dr. Ida*, p. 144.

<sup>33</sup> In 1913, although Ida Scudder was advised to go to America on furlough owing to ill-health, she felt 'Vellore' as an institution was too precariously poised to leave unattended for several months. She chose instead to go to Kodaikanal (a nearby hill-station) for a three-month rest. Wilson, *Dr. Ida*: 139.

<sup>34</sup> See Chamberlain, Mary E.A. (Mrs. W. L.) 1925. *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields — China, Japan, India, Arabia. A History of Five Decades of the Women's Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in America*, New York, the Board. p. 237; (Henceforth, 'Chamberlain') Wilson, *Dr. Ida*: 185.

<sup>35</sup> Apparently, this success rate among women students was dramatically higher than the 20 % passing rate among the male students at Madras university that year. Chamberlain: 237.

<sup>36</sup> French, p.65.

<sup>37</sup> Singh, 2000, p.289.

<sup>38</sup> Tinling, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> French, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> Ida Scudder, letter to Dr. Kellog (1937), nd. Scudder Papers, Box 5, folder 130.

<sup>41</sup> Annie Beemer (alumnus of CMC), letter pub in the Vellore College magazine, *The Thermometer*, 9 (November 1929):23.

<sup>42</sup> Governor and Lady Willingdon gave the diplomas to the graduates at Vellore (1923); Lord and Lady Beatrix Stanley inaugurated Academic buildings (1932); Maharaja and Maharani of Bhavnagar were guests at the Jubilee celebrations (1950). See issues of *Madras Mail* December 21, 1923; January 8, 1950. At Ludhiana, Edith Brown used Christmas day to maintain an open house when the local wealthy and well-connected Indians visited her.

<sup>43</sup> Reynolds, p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> French, p.65–66.

<sup>45</sup> French, p.53.

<sup>46</sup> French, p.53.

<sup>47</sup> See Tinling, p.34.

<sup>48</sup> Tinling, p.23.

<sup>49</sup> Ida Scudder's Diary entries for September 25 and November 7, (1935) document how she worked long hours, returning from Roadside at 8:30p.m. "tired but happy", or worked hard in the wards at Vellore, including caring for several private patients. See Scudder Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff College (USA).

<sup>50</sup> Pamphlet, 'A Beautiful Gate' p.11.

<sup>51</sup> In 1941, only 30 students were enrolled. See Principal's Report, *The Thermometer* (June 1941): 24.

<sup>52</sup> The existing facilities at the time were for 268 beds. Pamphlet, 1940.

<sup>53</sup> The expenditure of the School and Hospital in 1940, was estimated to be Rs. 1,40,500. Additional resources of Rs. 7,62,000 were needed to provide for the building and equipment (over a period of 10 years). Also, Rs.1,50,000 would be needed for annual recurring expenditure — to be provided by an additional endowment of Rs. 50,00,000 or \$1,000,000 — a million dollars. See "Missionary Medical School for Women, Vellore. Incorporated" Pamphlet, 1940: ii. Henceforth, 'Pamphlet: 1940'.

<sup>54</sup> Since many among the Vellore staff and faculty had already availed of training programmes abroad, they were qualified. In addition, Vellore benefitted from inter-denominational cooperation as five missionary societies released qualified doctors and nurses to teach at Vellore. See J. C. McGilvray, "The Vellore Christian Medical College, India" *International Review Of Missions*, July 1945.

<sup>55</sup> For a fuller discussion see Singh, 2000, p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> Principal's speech to the Class of 1932. Scudder Papers, Box 5, Folder 128.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in *United Churchman*, February 24, 1960.

<sup>58</sup> French, p.97.

## References

Brown, Arthur Judson *One Hundred Years: A History of the Foreign Missionary Work of the Presbyterian Church in USA*, Revell, New York, 1936.

Chamberlain, Mary E.A. (Mrs. W. I.) *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields- China, Japan, India, Arabia. A History of Five Decades of the Women's Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in America*, The Board, N.Y., 1925.

Engels, Dagmar, "The Politics of Childbirth", in *Beyond Purdah ? Women in Bengal 1890-1939*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

Forbes, Geraldine. "Managing Midwifery in India", in D. Engels and S. Marks (eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India*, British Academic Press, London, 1994, pp.152-72.

French, Francesca, *Miss Brown's Hospital: The Story of the Ludhiana Medical College and Dame Edith Brown*, D.B. E., Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1955.



Greenfield, M., *Five Years in Ludhiana; Or Work Amongst Our Indian Sisters*. Partridge, London, 1886.

Lal, Manisha, "The Politics of Gender and Medicine in Colonial India: The Countess of Dufferin Fund, 1885–1888", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 68; pp. 29–66.

Malhotra, Anshu, "Of *Dais* and Midwives: 'Middle-class Interventions in the Management of Women's Reproductive Health — A Study from Colonial Punjab". In *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 10:2 (2003).

McGilvray, J.C., "The Vellore Christian Medical College, India". *International Review of Missions*, July 1945.

Pati, Biswamoy and Mark Harrison (eds.). *Health, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives in Colonial India*. Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2001.

Reynolds, Charles, *Punjab Pioneer*, World Books Publisher.(n.p; n.d)

Singh, Maina Chawla, *Gender, Religion and 'Heathen lands' : American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860-1940s)*, Garland, New York, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Women and Missionary Medical Practice in Colonial India: The Case of Clara Swain(1834-1910), Anna Kugler (1856–1930)", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. (Forthcoming 2005)

Wilson, Dorothy Clarke, *Dr. Ida: The Story of Dr. Ida Scudder of Vellore*. McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1959.

## Archival Documents

Brown, Edith, Address at the Conference of Medical Missionaries (1893), Ludhiana Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (USA).

Conference Resolution December 1893, Ludhiana Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (USA).

Papers of Ida Scudder, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff College (USA).

## Pamphlets/ Newsletters

"*Missionary Medical School for Women, Vellore, Incorporated*" Pamphlet (1940).

*Missionary Medical College for Women, Vellore Incorporated in India "A Beautiful Gate"* (American Section of the Governing Board of the Women's Missionary Medical College, Vellore, Inc., 1935).

Issues of the Vellore College Magazine: *The Thermometer*



# The Foundation of the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital for Women at Delhi: Issues in Women's Medical Education and Imperial Governance

Samiksha Sehrawat

One can conjure up a beautiful picture of the College Hall for lectures and assemblies, the tennis courts and shady lawns and groves for healthy out door exercise and the many small homes in which the various students reside, each under the guardianship of her own relatives, with facilities for the observation of her own religious duties and home customs.

— Annette Benson, 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges for Women in India'<sup>1</sup>

...it was realised that the best class of women, particularly from Hindu and Mahomedan families would not, especially in north India, come forward for training unless in a women's college.<sup>2</sup>

No one interested in the progress and education of women in general and in the uplift and succour of the women of India in particular, can visit the Lady Hardinge College without a thrill of pride and emotion. It is a noble conception, worthily carried out, with immense possibilities for India's women<sup>3</sup>

— Margaret I. Balfour and Ruth Young, *The Work of Medical Women in India*

Ever since I have been in India the knowledge of the high mortality amongst mothers and infants has been a veritable nightmare to me, and the development of medical instruction amongst women, which after all, is the highest and most altruistic form of female education that any of us can possibly

desire, seems to be to me one of the best means of coping with the evil....

I shall always think of this place and the work of those who are now, or in the future, in any way connected with it as a labour of love for our Indian sisters and their children and although the sowing time may be heavy with toil and care, may the holy flame of love may for ever burn bright and its harvest time be rich and plentiful.

— Lord Hardinge, in his inaugural speech for the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital for Women<sup>4</sup>

**T**he Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital (LHMCH) at Delhi, founded in 1916, was the first institution in India devoted exclusively to the higher medical education of women. This pioneering college was built on what was a grand scale in its time and could well compete with any other Indian college in terms of the standard of education offered. The three quotations cited above capture the sense that contemporaries involved in the establishment of the college were aware of the importance of their endeavour and consciously shaped the institution. In this essay, I seek to explore the process of the foundation of the college. Firstly, the essay seeks to look at the way in which the Association of Medical Women in India (AMWI) brought to life the issue of women's medical education and the manner in which the Dufferin Fund and the colonial government reacted to this by founding the LHMCH. As a part of this, I will discuss the way in which medical education for Indian women was visualized and the issues that were raised, revealing the social, gendered and professional implications of this vision. Second, an analysis of the financial basis of the institution, including support from the government and from different sections of Indian society would help to understand the rationale of such patronage.

### **The Impulse: the AMWI and medical education for Indian women**

In December 1910, a Memorial was presented to Lord Morley in London by the AMWI about the pressing need for a Women's

Medical Service in India (WMSI). The memorial also raised the question of women's medical education in India: 'the establishment of a Women's Medical School in India is an ideal we should be very glad to see realized'.<sup>5</sup> It is important to point out here that this was only one of the many issues raised by the Association since its foundation in 1907.<sup>6</sup> Over time, the AMWI had become a very vocal organization, seeking to represent the professional interests of female doctors in India and the medical needs of Indian women.<sup>7</sup> The activism of and lobbying by this organization, which used its mouthpiece, the *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India (JAMWI)*, for mobilising public opinion; led to a critical review of the functioning of the Dufferin Fund and the institution of the Women's Medical Service in India (WMSI) in 1913.

The demand for medical education of women was raised again in the Editorial for the August 1911 issue of the *JAMWI*, and an appeal was made for the foundation of a medical college for women alone, as a memorial to Queen Mary on her impending visit to India in December 1912.<sup>8</sup> By 1911, the arguments for the necessity of a good medical college for women in India — modelled on the best colleges of the kind in Britain, and yet, moulded to suit Indian needs — was well argued and articulated in the *Journal*.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai) were the two centres of women's higher medical education. In both provinces, women got their degrees from male-dominated universities which had opened their doors reluctantly to women. The North India School of Medicine for Christian Women in the Punjab<sup>9</sup> and Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore in Madras presidency<sup>10</sup> trained women for middle-rung medical qualifications. The AMWI argued that these facilities were inadequate. The question of the improvement of medical education for women was cast in terms of the 'great need of attracting into the medical profession in India higher class of women'.<sup>11</sup> This stance implied two things: one, that Indian women entering medical care at that time were undesirable because they came from lower sections of society, and two, that an attempt ought to be made to 'attract' women into the medical profession from the elite

strata of Indian society. An analysis of this position reveals the close interrelation between the female medical profession on the one hand and patriarchal norms that determined social status on the other.

From the beginning the concern of AMWI had been women doctors, even at the expense of the female assistants originally employed in *zenana* hospitals. The AMWI had been campaigning against giving hospital assistants and other women with lower medical qualifications independent charge of hospitals in Dufferin hospitals. Since *zenana* hospitals had to employ only *female* medical professionals and could not afford the high salaries sought by fully qualified doctors, they often compensated by employing Indian women who had obtained lower medical qualifications. The AMWI had campaigned extensively in the first five years of its existence against this practice, arguing that this provided sub-standard care for patients, and translated into indifferent conditions of service for those women doctors who continued to work for Dufferin hospitals. The demand for the WMSI had been motivated by a desire to redress this and introduce greater parity between the conditions of service of male and female doctors. The opinion of the AMWI about the kind of medical education required for Indian women too was coloured by this agenda.

This is evident in the resolutions passed in the general meeting of the AMWI held during the Delhi Durbar at St Stephen's Hospital, Delhi; on 13 December 1911, which included those on the 'great need' to attract 'a higher class' of Indian women into the medical profession and the need to ensure that sub-assistant surgeons and 'other such inadequately trained women' should not be allowed independent charge of a hospital. Educational institutions such as the Ludhiana Medical School, which trained women to be Sub-Assistant Surgeons or Hospital Assistants, were therefore criticised by the AMWI primarily on grounds of the shorter degree. This lowered the status of the qualification and made it more difficult to get women accepted as equals of men. In the recently established medical school at Lucknow, where women registered for medical degrees were to undergo a shorter course than men — justified on the grounds of the sex of the students — especially came in for

flak.<sup>12</sup> The links of such an argument with the professionalization concerns of the AMWI are evident from the editorial of the *JAMWI* of February 1912: 'The feeling was strong among the Doctors, especially those of some standing that the standard, of qualification for entry and for practice should be raised.'<sup>13</sup>

While such attempts to establish a hierarchy of practitioners, wherein the university and hospital-trained doctors were placed at the apex had been successful for the male medical profession in India, women doctors were still struggling to distinguish themselves from the female practitioners with lower qualifications. This drove the AMWI to promote collegiate education that would produce more doctors. Before investigating the form that the proposed college was desired to take, it will be useful to further probe the social roots of these attitudes towards female medical education.

The medical education of women at Agra and at Lahore in a mixed-education set up with men teachers was looked down upon in a patriarchal society that stressed the segregation of the sexes. I quote Balfour and Young at length here because they are unique in stating more explicitly the reasons that informed the rhetoric of educating women of a 'higher class' that led to the establishment of the LHMCH and influenced the form of education offered in it.

The conditions for the women students, at least in Agra and Lahore, were far from ideal. Generally speaking, the students in these centres were of a poorer type in education and character than in other places. Though provision was made for their stay in hostels, their working hours were spent with men, who were unaccustomed to freedom among women and whose social customs did not breed respect for those who emerged from seclusion... and the supervision in the hostels was not very adequate. The result was that many students were turned out poorly equipped, not merely in professional education, but lacking in personality and frequently even in moral character.<sup>14</sup>

What is significant here is the fear of female sexuality in a context where a loose causal connection is made between the lack of supervision of women students and their turning 'immoral'. This

line of reasoning, led to the demand of female supervision of all female medical students. Also, there is recognition of the possible threat perceived from men in a society where 'unprotected' single women were considered sexually available. This patriarchal logic dictated by north Indian society — which had often been criticized by the AMWI, composed of independent, pioneering women who were demanding equality and parity with their male peers — was ironically accepted by the AMWI. For medical women struggling to establish themselves professionally, any loss of status would be detrimental. In a society where a woman's reputation measured her status, it was highly dangerous to allow the female medical profession to be associated with 'immoral' women in the public mind. To win respect and a higher social and economic status for women, it was desirable to attract women with a high status in Indian society into the ranks of women doctors. Hence even the highly independent women active in the AMWI, who were a positive force in introducing and championing the notion of gender equality, ended up aligning themselves with conservative sections of Indian society in the context of women's medical education. A better educational standard, as well as the entry of 'better-class' women would increase the status of women doctors. These professionalization pressures compromised the positive aspects of this female activism, giving the medical education of Indian women a conservative cast from the outset.

Since the medical profession was associated with 'lower-class' women who entered the subordinate grades of the profession, within the realms of the patriarchal society it was not considered a respectable profession for women from higher social groups. It was contended that co-education jeopardised dominant social stipulations of feminine modesty which were tied with maintaining a certain level of sex-segregation. Hence, Indian families of high social status (other than those belonging to the more liberal groups such as the Parsis and Brahmos) rejected the medical profession as an alternative.<sup>13</sup> It was argued that 'suitable' conditions needed to be created to encourage this section. Although there was some ambiguity about the way in which this was to be accomplished, one



of the more popular ideas coined by the AMWI in this period was to urge for the provision of a women's college 'apart from the men',<sup>16</sup> and run by women. This idea was picked up later by Lady Hardinge (who had received a letter from the AMWI on the subject as the president of the Dufferin Fund) and eventually took the shape of the LHMCH at Delhi. Before discussing the way in which the LHMCH was founded, an analysis of the various ideas on how such an institute was to disseminate medical education to Indian women would help understand the wide social and government support that the LHMCH got when it was founded.

The obvious need for a special institution for *women's* medical education was articulated in terms of the needs of pernicious and restrictive Indian customs: 'If Indian etiquette anxious for caste preservation insists on girls of ...[higher] class always being chaperoned by relatives, why should this fact be a barrier to their higher education?'<sup>17</sup> The Raj Kumar colleges were mentioned as prototypes of a proposed college. These colleges provided a university education while moulding this in a way that would accommodate the peculiarities of Indian mores. This model emphasized the need to modify British educational structures to 'Indian customs and prejudices' so that the higher classes could be attracted to Western medical education.

However, it is important not to ignore the way in which these 'prejudices' (otherwise condemned by the AMWI as being responsible for many illnesses among Indian women), were supported by Western ideas of feminine decorum. Those discussing the shape that the new medical education college should take found the situation of the young women entering co-educational medical colleges, for instance in Bombay, who were without any female protection undesirable. Medical education was to also include schooling in gentility. The grave necessity for some sort of female guidance by a well educated and 'well bred' woman and all-women hostels was urged. British women's colleges — medical or non-medical — represented the other model suggested as possible prototypes for a medical college for Indian women. One of the

reasons for this was the parallels that the idea of 'caste preservation' had with contemporary Western ideas of the 'protection' of young women by chaperones.<sup>18</sup> It was therefore argued that 'women must be in charge of women's work'.<sup>19</sup> The history of women's education in England was cited to shore up claims that only highly educated genteel women who would use 'the utmost tact and sympathy' could effectively head and run educational institutions meant for women if women of a 'better class' were to be attracted into the medical profession in India.<sup>20</sup> Victorian ideas were echoed in the discussion about the specific topics that should not be taught in co-educational classes — it was felt that 'ailments specific to men and women' should be taught separately to men and women.<sup>21</sup> British women's colleges were also recommended because they represented the ideals of collegiate and university life — important since British women sought to reproduce their own educational experience in the hope of producing broad-minded physicians.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Establishment of the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital**

Gradually, the Dufferin Fund and the government both became involved in the issue of Indian women's medical education. J.R. Roberts, representing the viewpoint of the Dufferin Fund (officially the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India)<sup>23</sup> to the central government, pointed out that 'There has... been considerable difficulty in providing well educated and suitably trained medical women to fill the posts at the Dufferin hospitals. One great obstacle to inducing Indian women to enter the medical profession is the fact that... Indian parents are averse to sending their daughters to a mixed college.'<sup>24</sup>

Although the government's stated policy at this time was to support higher medical education in India, it seems not to have realized that gender imbalances existed in this field. The question raised in the Imperial Legislative Assembly by Sir Fazulbhoj Currimbhoy on this subject around the time when the plans for a Delhi college had already been introduced in the public sphere shows

Indian interest in the issue.<sup>25</sup> The data collected in response to this question from provincial governments shows that between 1903 and 1913, only 45 women had 'taken a degree in Medicine'. Of these, 44 were from Bombay presidency and 1 from Madras presidency even though neither of these provinces had 'special institutions' meant for women's medical education. The number of female sub-assistant surgeons trained was much larger, and the United Provinces alone had trained 118 women in the 1903–1913 decade. The Punjab had trained 31 in the same time. A lot of energy seems to have been concentrated on the training of midwives for which the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund had been founded as part of the Dufferin Fund. However, a lot of provinces did make provision for some kinds of scholarship for women going for higher education, with Bombay giving as much as Rs. 7078 in scholarships in the 1903–1913 period.<sup>26</sup>

In all, the investigation showed that while Indian women *were* being trained in medicine,<sup>27</sup> the efforts of the government in encouraging them were concentrated in the lower levels, and that the number of Indian women being trained as doctors was very small. In this context of limited opportunities for women wanting to educate to pursue higher medical education, the LHMCH — initially meant to train a hundred women every year — was a very important educational and medical institution for women in India.

These were the ideas in the air when Lady Hardinge proposed a medical college for women at Delhi. On 17 March 1914, she laid the foundation stone of what was by now being called the Women's Medical College and Nursing Institution, Delhi. The position of the AMWI at this juncture is very interesting. Although it was the discussions and resolutions of the AMWI,<sup>28</sup> and especially the letter written to Lady Hardinge on the subject of the great need for a women's medical college that may have started the process of the establishment of the college, the AMWI opposed the government on the way in which the programme was being executed. One of the first objections it made to the proposed college was regarding its location at Delhi.<sup>29</sup> Dr Annette Benson, the president of the

AMWI, declared to Royal Public Services Commission that:

We believe that there is a strong feeling amongst experienced people who know India that Delhi is not the most suitable site for the location of a woman's hospital and College and that they would have been more wisely planted in one of the larger cities where woman's education is more advanced and where there is already existing a large hospital-attending nucleus of women.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to understand why the AMWI objected to Delhi as the site for the proposed premier institution and why such objections were eventually overridden.

Delhi was undesirable in the eyes of the AMWI since it did not possess a large hospital with many patients, nor did it have highly qualified teaching staff, or an adequate supply of students.<sup>31</sup> In a later issue of the *Journal*, as plans for the Delhi college continued regardless, the editor of the *JAMWI*, Dr O'Brien wrote, 'We cannot but regret that Delhi is still regarded as the ideal place for the location of the new Institution in spite of the repeated protests as to its unsuitability offered by this Association'.<sup>32</sup> In a sarcastic comment, the editor tried to drive home the argument that the people in the area around Delhi did not understand or value the kind of collegiate-based higher education in medicine that was to be offered at the proposed medical college and that it was therefore wasted on this region. O'Brien pointed out that female education in the area was in a 'low state' and that religious and social prejudice made many of the subjects of the medical curriculum taboo for women in this area. On the other hand, the editor pointed out, were the Madras and Bombay provinces where Indian medical women had already done excellent work and where women medical students already existed.<sup>33</sup> The editor believed that it was unlikely that 'the women of these provinces [Madras and Bombay] will be attracted to the new College in the North, where they will have to live cut off from their relations and home ties....'<sup>34</sup>

It should be pointed out here that the objections made to situating the new capital at Delhi were not consistent with other ideas that

the AMWI propagated and indeed, used in arguments for their campaign to bring about changes in the Dufferin Fund or elsewhere. While the Association had argued time and again that more than one *zenana* hospital was not desirable in any one place, so that funds as well as medical relief may be distributed more evenly over the whole country, to the same logic did not apply for the Lady Hardinge Medical College. Bombay was already endowed with a big hospital for women and several co-educational medical colleges, and if a well-equipped women's hospital were to be built in conjunction with the college at Delhi, the benefit to women in the north would have been tremendous. Interestingly, contradicting the AMWI's line of reasoning, the viceroy in his speech at the inauguration of the LHMCH suggested that the site chosen for the college would well supply the big hospital required for a good medical college since it would be accessible to a considerable population, the buildings being situated between the old and the new cities of Delhi and near the railway station in case of patients coming from other parts of the country.<sup>35</sup> Also, by focusing on prejudices about women's education among some people of the United Provinces, the AMWI ignored both the spurt to women's education given in north India by the Ludhiana School for Women (located in the Punjab) as well as the possibility of facilitating medical education in a region where there weren't as many opportunities as in Bombay. As a matter of fact, such a college made more sense in north India, as Balfour and Young pointed out:

It is naturally in north India, where the seclusion of women is almost universal, that circumstances led to the evolution of [the LHMCH]. ... In north India too the need for Indian women doctors was most acutely felt owing to the fact that very few women cared to attend the general hospitals, even for ordinary complaints.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the argument about the unavailability of academic staff for the new college due to it being away from the centres of medical relief for women were proved non-starters by the ease with which these prestigious posts were filled from the newly inaugurated Women's Medical Service in India.

The bias for Bombay and Madras has perhaps to be understood in the social roots of AMWI. The AMWI began from the initiative of some medical women from Bombay (most notably, the president Dr. A. Benson who was the doctor in charge of the prestigious Cama women's hospital of Bombay) and continued to be one of the most active centres of its activities. Bombay had indeed been a pioneer in the field of medical care for women and, as noted above, in higher medical education for women. There would then have been a natural affinity for Bombay and other more established centres — if not an actual calculation of personal benefit — and a consequent attempt to maintain the status quo. In this context, it is important to state here that the establishment of the LHMCH in Delhi because it was the imperial capital marked the beginning of a shift in this respect. The LHMCH was the first one in a series of medical institutions that were inaugurated in successive years in the capital, making it one of the leading centres of medical care in British India for both men as well as women. This is supported by Balfour and Young's observations on the choice of Delhi as a site for the hospital:

Delhi had recently become once more the capital of India, so that there were *strong sentimental reasons* for its selection; moreover, Delhi occupied a central position; there was no existing college in the place, and the largeness of the city gave a guarantee of an ample number of patients. [emphasis mine]<sup>37</sup>

As articulated here, the 'strong sentimental reasons' were the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, making it an important city for imperial ideology.

However, the unsuitability of Delhi as a site was not the only objection that the AMWI had to the plans related to the Lady Hardinge Medical College. As mentioned above, the position of the AMWI regarding the best kind of medical education institutions changed considerably over time. While it had initially favoured a medical college for women as mentioned above, in a letter written in late 1911 to Lady Hardinge, A. Benson ventured to put forward

the Association's conclusions on the subject thus:

There will always be a large majority who on account of custom and prejudice cannot be expected to avail themselves even under the most favourable circumstances of mixed education, and we deprecate any endeavour being made to induce them to do so. For them there are separate women's institutions, including various Arts Colleges, and the Ludhiana School of Medicine for Christian Women.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, once the Delhi College took shape, the AMWI — the very body which had initially pressed the case for making higher medical education favourable to 'Indian' communities — was criticizing the idea of accommodating these prejudices too much to 'attract the upper class of Indian purdah women'<sup>39</sup> in an attempt to provide education to them on their own terms. While admitting to the need for a 'residential college' for women, the Editorial of the February 1913 issue of *JAMWI* suggested a cheaper way of providing education for 'better class' Indian women: by building special hospital blocks/wards where 'patients suffering from diseases peculiar to either sex' would be examined only by women students, male students being 'rigidly' excluded.<sup>40</sup> The AMWI was now arguing against a medical college for a women's college which was considered to be too expensive, and was propagating special hostels under adequate female supervision in cities where women medical students already existed.

In the evidence given by Benson before the Royal Public Services Commission,<sup>41</sup> she stated that the Delhi college was not what the AMWI had asked for. She emphasised the greater need for house surgeoncies and junior appointments in good hospitals — ostensibly for the post-graduate training of freshly qualified women doctors. Hostels were also demanded for female students. Though the virtues of mixed education of women — under female guardianship — were extolled, it was admitted that, 'There was also scope for a medical college restricted to women, because a certain number of women in India might come into the medical profession in that way, who would not enter the common colleges and mix with men'.<sup>42</sup> A similar position of the co-existence of both

mixed as well as single-sex education had been taken earlier by 'a woman Educator' who pointed out that only women's colleges too were useful although there was the danger of

loss of status by divorcing men and women's studies, because there are so many Anglo-Indian men in the Education Departments who believe, that women are as women, a class of inferior human beings, and these men will seize upon and emphasize any line of demarcation between the sexes. I would therefore keep certain men's Colleges open to women, others should be for men only and new ones opened for women only (not purdah).<sup>43</sup>

This brings us to the other part of the criticism which pertained to objection to an all-women's college (originally a demand for which was made in the pages of the *JAMWI* itself). It was felt that a hospital meant only for women would not provide as good a medical training as would a general hospital, even if the women in training intended to specialise in gynaecology.<sup>44</sup> It was felt that co-education would maintain a higher academic standard since it did not allow for concessions to women students that lowered their academic level: 'The standard of a woman's knowledge would necessarily be higher if she is capable of competing in an open examination with the cleverest men students in a presidency.'<sup>45</sup> Another advantage cited over single-sex female education was: 'Working with men, women would get a broader outlook on life which would benefit them greatly in their after-career'.<sup>46</sup>

The AMWI continued to debate the relative advantages of these systems, apprehensive of women's status as medical professionals being depleted by the latter arrangement. However, as the programme advanced, the fact that a real effort had been made to make the best possible arrangements for the education of the women entering LHMCH, made a favourable impression on these critics and their disapproval was abandoned.

Thus, the AMWI played an important role in forming and then invoking public opinion which created a favourable atmosphere in determining the nature of educational facilities available to women aspiring to be medical professionals. The AMWI took on the mantle



of expert authorities regarding medical matters related to Indian women and consequently their views on the form that Indian women's medical education ought to take had an important bearing on the eventual shape of the LHMCH. The AMWI urged for a greater level of investment in the *higher* levels of (college-based) medical education to encourage women from elite sections of society to enter the medical profession. This was in contrast to earlier attempts which had concentrated mainly on training hospital assistants (or sub-assistant surgeons) and *dais*; and had catered to those women who came from economically disadvantaged sections of society. The earlier attempts had been dominated by missionary efforts (with the exception of the Victoria Memorial Scholarships instituted by the Dufferin Fund) and had appealed to the traditional constituency of such organisations: Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians, as well as women from lower castes and class. The AMWI also urged for a supervision of women students, a principle accepted and implemented in the LHMCH. Thus while such education for the 'modern' women opened up new possibilities: economic independence, higher degrees of freedom, and possibilities of greater intellectual development, it also sought to rigidly circumscribe that freedom. The attempts to ensure that women did not use their new opportunities for making sexual choices that violated dominant social codes ultimately implied the imposition of certain strictures under the garb of protection and security, hence a buttressing of the extant patriarchal social structures. Not only were women educated under this threat of sexual aggression, they later found themselves working in and serving a society that was yet to come to terms with their newly acquired status of independent women professionals.

This shows that the progressive initiative of the AMWI for Indian women was held back due to professional concerns. Another important reason for this limited 'reform' was the fact that the AMWI accepted the patriarchal limitations on women in the shape of chaperones in Western culture which they took for a model. In spite of the criticism of the 'inveterate custom[s]'<sup>47</sup> of India, when it came to concrete action such as instituting the LHMCH, not only

the AMWI but also the government and the semi-official Dufferin Fund took a conservative stance. It is important to emphasize here that this was done not merely due to political compulsions and limitations due to the unacceptability of more radical aims by Indian society but also due to their own agendas. For the AMWI, this consisted of its drive to raise the professional status of women doctors in India so as to achieve parity with their male colleagues, whereas for the government it consisted of the desire to avoid open commitment to curative care for Indian women and men.

### **Funding for the College and the Hospital**

An analysis of the sources of funding for as grand a project as the LHMCH, especially since it was considered the first big step forward in terms of women's education, would reveal the relation between society (from which funding came) had with the college in particular and medical institutions in general. Why did specific groups contribute financially to the medical institution? What limitations did it put on the college/hospital? What political and economic interests did these institutions serve for the lay groups involved?

The project was a huge one, envisaging a college for 100 students and roughly estimated<sup>48</sup> in 1912 to cost about 15 lakh rupees. The financial contribution thus came from very different sources which providing an opportunity to understand the different motivations with which contributions were made for hospitals and other medical institutions.

In August 1912, Lady Hardinge contacted the central government for help in the foundation of the college. The money had been donated on the condition that the central government would provide funds for all the 'recurring charges', provide a site for the college and institute an association to manage the institution in which the subscribers would be represented.<sup>49</sup> For this, the donors were willing to accept full government control of the institution.

A women's hospital and medical college in Delhi became the site of politics. The government, the princely states, and other individuals were all keen to participate in this moment of philanthropy, munificence, patronage, and the show of liberalism. The cause of

Indian women was a convenient pretext. The politics of funding exposes how the question of women, tradition, as well as setting up institutions for welfare had become important constituencies for both the British government and Indians in the early twentieth century.

The government provided whole-hearted support to the proposal of financial and administrative assistance for the college. R.H. Craddock, one of the civil officials involved, went as far as to accept some governmental responsibility for the aims of the project, and his note on the government file (not meant for the public, these were deliberations about administrative decisions) about the college is worth quoting at some length:

We can cordially support this scheme.... The medical education of Indian women (including Anglo-Indian) and the education in nursing, are two most important branches of improved administration which, when the circumstances and prejudices of India are considered, have been most unwarrantably (and I might say almost unaccountably) neglected...

So far as the women are concerned in a country where women doctors are so particularly a necessity, there has hitherto been no institution where they can be separately trained. It may be argued in excuse that there were no women to come forward; this has been true, but it never applied to Anglo-Indian women, and it is now coming to be true of Indian women also.

The money for the proposed institution [at this stage, just an annual grant from the government of Rs.1,00,000] should be provided as part of the improvement of education in this country. Hospitals being inseparable from medical education, the expenditure on the hospital part of the institution proposed is not, so much the medical treatment of the patients who may be treated, but the creation of an agency which can extend medical relief to women, far and wide over India. An annual expenditure of a lakh on so great an essential an object is a mere flea bite compared to the sums to be spent on education generally.<sup>50</sup>

The government provided a 56-acre site for the college, hospital, hostel and staff buildings<sup>51</sup> and made a recurring grant of one lakh rupees to the expenses of the upkeep of the institution.<sup>52</sup> The semi-official Dufferin Fund agreed to defray the salaries of the three women doctors who were to be appointed to the college for teaching and to provide 18 scholarships worth Rs. 25 per month for students at the college. These came to a recurring annual donation of Rs. 20,000.<sup>53</sup> If one takes into account the fact that the WMSI and the Dufferin Fund itself were partially funded by the government, and that the involvement of the vicerine in the Dufferin Fund specifically and medical relief for women more generally generated political capital for the British government, the significance of these donations becomes evident.

This government support needs to be seen in an overall context of developments in the field of medicine in India. The issues of medical registration and medical education were linked and government policy sought to promote Western biomedicine by supporting the formation of an 'independent medical profession' in India. The general medical policy formulated by the director general of the IMS in September 1912 was an attempt to further these aims by aiding the move for medical registration, extending it to all provinces and encouraging private efforts to provide medical education.<sup>54</sup> One of the factors motivating the government in its support for the LHMCH may have been its policy to encourage more private medical colleges. The LHCMH was expected to swell the ranks of Indian female doctors who would further the reach of Western biomedicine — in this case, right into the heart of the *zenanas* — a project with special attractions for imperial ideology as pointed out by Janaki Nair.<sup>55</sup>

Although the government realised the necessity of provision of better curative care for Indian women and consequently of institutions of higher medical education for Indian women, it shied away from accepting publicly official responsibility for curative care, even though credit was earned for governmental participation and support to initiatives in the field. The mechanism through which the government was associated with the LHMCH was semi-official —

the vicerine's patronage of the Dufferin Fund, representation of government officials on these institutions and the informal links thus fostered.

The informal administrative and very limited financial support given by the government in the foundation of the LHMCH seems to have been motivated by a desire to avoid commitment to provision for curative care for Indians. This was entirely in line with the domination of medical policy and resources by the concern for the military which provided security in the last resort for a state that maintained its colony against the wishes of subjects who were becoming increasingly and rapidly politically active. Women's status in Indian society had been used not only to justify India's status as a subject nation, but also to bolster British claims for ruling and reforming India, the image of the benevolent Raj. To that extent, involvement with the LHMCH gave it a halo of paternalistic rule. It is deeply ironical that the government actually gave measured and entirely piecemeal financial support to the LHMCH — an institution entirely in accord with the restrictive patriarchal norms of caste and religion. Both class and caste considerations influenced the form that the college took — down to its very architecture and the hospital attached to it. The post-1857 policy of respecting Indian customs, which meant that the state was often complicit in upholding caste and other taboos made possible the continuation of patriarchal control over the lives and sexuality of women entering 'progressive' institutions like LHMCH. The government had sacrificed the 'progressive' role for which it sought to rule India since it was politically more expedient to align its self with Indian patriarchies.

The reasons for the philanthropy of the rulers of princely states, who supplied most of the 15 lakh initially considered necessary for the college, differed from those of the government, fitting in at the other end of Imperial ideology. In 1912, the ruler of Kotah made a one lakh rupee donation to be used for 'the benefit of the women of India, [and to thus commemorate] the visit of Her Imperial Majesty the Queen-Empress to his state during the course of her tour in Rajputana [post-Independence Rajasthan] after the Delhi Durbar'.

When Lady Hardinge suggested the founding of a college, he proposed that the college be named the Queen Mary Medical College and Hospital.<sup>56</sup> Hence, the college was conceived by its donor as a sign of the acknowledgement of British sovereignty over his state and as a celebration of it, to be realized by one of the most prominent representatives of the British government. What is also worth pointing out is that the ruler saw no objections to his donation being used to found a healthcare-welfare project in a city far away from his state where his own people were unlikely to benefit from it. The significance of Delhi in these scheme of things was two-fold — and perhaps the reason why the Dufferin Fund stuck to its guns over the site of the hospital being in Delhi. The grant was inspired as a memorial to a visit paid as a part of the Royal visit on the occasion of the Delhi Durbar, in itself an occasion to display to the people of India the splendour and stability of the British Indian Empire. The Durbar was an event when the princely rulers of India had to ceremonially acknowledge their subservience to the British. This is especially evident from the fact that the British rapped the Gaekwar of Baroda for turning his back on the British Emperor when he should have backed out of the podium with his face towards him as a sign of deference. Moreover, Delhi was chosen as the site due to its being the Imperial capital of the British in India — the very site chosen eventually was in the heart of the New Delhi, a city that was an architectural commemoration of the British Empire. On an appeal by Lady Hardinge, other princely rulers promised donations that came to an amount of approximately 15½ lakh rupees. The biggest of these came from the ruler of Jaipur (3 lakh rupees) and it is significant that the ruler of Patiala (part of the state lay in what is modern-day Haryana) also made a contribution of Rs. 1,25,000.<sup>57</sup> One wonders if this beneficence on the part of the rulers where they were so little concerned with having the object of their donation in a place where their subjects could benefit from it also drew upon the traditional Indian concept of patronising works that would benefit the public, irrespective of ideas of citizenship and corporation. The rationale behind Indian philanthropy was to perpetuate the name of the donor and the belief that such acts earned a better after-life for the person in whose name the donation was made.

It is a moot point whether the princely rulers who derived their power from a traditional order were also attracted by the fact that the entire institution was to be a bastion of hide-bound Indian social customs. As the Viceroy proudly declared in his inaugural speech:

It should be clearly understood that the college, hospital and training school are to be conducted on strictly purdah lines, and that every possible attention will be paid to religious and caste rules. The hostels, which have been already completed, will have separate blocks for Christian, Hindu, Mahomedan, Sikh and Parsee students, with special dining rooms and all else that may be desirable, and a general recreation room has been built for the use of all.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the hospital was meant to cater to every sense of proprietary restriction on account of Indian custom. This close attention to caste was reminiscent not only of the preoccupation with the *zenana* underlying the curative care supplied by the Dufferin Fund but also of the hospitals meant for Indian soldiers in England where a similar occupation with caste rules was fetishised.

Other, smaller donors to the LHMCH funds included local merchants and other well-to-do persons. One of the subscribers was the firm of Sadiram Gokulchand Johri Jewellers. An analysis of the motivations behind their contribution to the college gives important insights into reasons behind the patronage of medical institutions such as the LHMCH by Indians. The Chandni Chowk firm specialised in manufacturing jewellery and embroidery and also traded in emeralds. They made a donation of Rs. 100. In return, they expected their name to be entered in the list of subscribers to the said institution

as we like very much good act of benevolence to the public and loyalty to the British Government and we consider to obey your esteemed command paramount to everything. Further we most respectfully beg to state that we are one of your obedient well wishers. Therefore kindly favour us with your esteemed order to always enter in the *julsas* etc. whenever they take place in the Delhi province [sic].<sup>59</sup>

In a rather lengthy postscript, the subscribers further added:

Further we beg to state you that we have a garden situated in 'Sidhore Kalan' in front of the Wilson Mills... consisting kothi, rooms and halls etc. comfortable and suitable to Rajas and Rahises.

This garden can be given on rent. Please remember us about the garden when you require it for the guests to the British Government who will come on the occasion of jalsa. Herewith we beg to hand you one map of the said garden which please note. Let us know of your requirements [sic].<sup>60</sup>

This firm seems to have contributed to the college to exhibit its support for the colonial government as well as to convert the political capital arising from it into economic gain. Lala Babu Ram, the proprietor of a firm of pickle preserve merchants who sent Rs. 51 in aid of the LHMCH<sup>61</sup> and Lala Salig Ram, a pleader, who contributed Rs. 25 do not reveal the reasons behind their contribution.<sup>62</sup>

Others may have been motivated by ideas of the betterment of one's community. The donations made by Rai Bahadur Sardar Narain Singh to the LHMCH are a case in point. Narain Singh was the government contractor and a businessman in his own right. He had links with the ruler of Patiala state in his capacity as 'general contractor' to the prince and also owned cotton and flour mills and was a 'banker'.<sup>63</sup> His interest in female education within his own community is evident from the donation he made to build a hostel for Sikh girls and confirmed further by the endowment he made in 1916 for scholarships worth Rs. 25 per month for students of this community specifically.<sup>64</sup> Narain Singh also collected donations for this purpose from Sikh 'notables'<sup>65</sup> on his own initiative from people in his business circles.

Another letter, from sub-assistant surgeon Hari Shanker, famous for his expertise in conducting eye operations at the Civil Hospital of Delhi, simply declared:

Madam,

My wife asked me to send you Rs. 50/- as a donation



for the Lady Hardinge Medical College for which you sent her an appeal sometime ago.

I wish we could afford more.<sup>66</sup>

One wonders if this was a contribution inspired by identification with the aims for which the LHMC was set up. An especially teasing aspect of the letter is the possibility of female agency, even though it was not a donation from a woman.

The death of Lady Hardinge during her recovery from an operation for which she had gone to England brought forth the usual memorial fund that was formed after the passing away of an important Imperial dignitary. A sum of one lakh rupees collected in the Punjab for a memorial was contributed to the project and utilised in constructing an out-patients department that was to be the best of its kind at the time in India.<sup>67</sup> Bihar and Orissa also sent a sum of Rs. 30,000 for a memorial — this was used for the construction of the cottage wards.<sup>68</sup> These included a contribution of Rs. 7,500 by the rulers of Bharatpur, a princely state near Delhi, to the flooring of the entrance hall to the college in marble in the memory of Lady Hardinge — a scroll to this effect was inserted in the flooring, thus commemorating this donation.<sup>69</sup> A Lady Hardinge Memorial Scholarship was founded by another ruler, whereas a gold medal award was instituted by another as a memorial to her.<sup>70</sup> Such memorials were usual expressions of loyalty to the imperial government by prominent Indians.

The range of Indian responses and financial support that the LHMCH garnered reveals a picture of diffuse intentions towards providing medical facilities. Non-governmental sources of support such as native princes, businesses like the Sadiram Gokulchand Johri Jewellers as well as that from the Memorial fund, arose to some degree, from the desire of some prominent Indians to ingratiate themselves with the imperial authorities. Other contributors, even when they did not contribute to the LHMCH with the intention of currying favour with the government, were 'collaborators' of the imperial government — the contractor Narain Singh and sub-assistant Hari Shanker fall in this category — even though it is important to

remember that they seem to have had a commitment to the larger aims of the institution. Imperial power was an important factor in garnering these sources. The later experience of the LHMCH was to show that while public enthusiasm could be relied on to begin a medical institution — often due to compulsions of imperial patronage — it could not necessarily sustain it.<sup>71</sup>

It is possible to look at the foundation of the LHMCH in terms of the product of the interaction of three different forces. One was the activist AMWI, a social organization constituted entirely of women, but representing the female medical profession rather than the interests of women alone. The second fraction in the equation was the colonial government working in conjunction with the semi-official Dufferin Fund which was tied to it informally, and the third was Indian society. The impulse for the institution of the LHMCH came from the female medical profession which moulded its ideas of the kind of medical education required according to the prevalent social norms. Since these patriarchal social norms of sex-segregation were yet to be challenged from within Indian society, they were accommodated by the AMWI so as to further its professional interests even though it was critical of them. The Indian government being a colonial government was responsible to the British parliament in the last event, not to the Indian people and hence did not feel any commitment towards a positive initiative in the field of medical education of women, or indeed, any curative care for Indian people. The extent of its initiative went/ lasted only as far as supporting independent initiatives where its financial contribution was low. Whatever little effort was made by the government was due to the need of justifying its claims to paternalistic governance. Indian society itself had not yet evolved at a point where the importance of investing in or demanding investment in healthcare facilities was realised. Besides, in a dominantly patriarchal society concern for medical education or even curative care for women was too low a priority to be given too much primacy.

Charles Rosenberg has argued that in the absence of 'a strong commitment to government intervention in health matters — a commitment impossible without an appropriate change in general

social values — factors inherent to the world of medicine have determined most forcefully the specific forms in which medical care has been provided'.<sup>72</sup> The factors inherent to the medical world included the 'needs of the medical profession, needs expressed in the career decisions of particular physicians'.<sup>73</sup> One can find parallels to this formulation in the case of the foundation of the LHMCH where the government commitment to intervention was practically absent while the needs of the female medical profession, as represented by the AMWI, were very important in shaping the institution. Although the AMWI's vision and efforts were necessarily subscribed by both the society within which this initiative was taken as well as the political structure that existed in India at the time.

Yet, despite these limitations to the LHMCH, the constant campaigning by the AMWI did ensure that an agenda that aimed at providing better cure for Indian women was addressed. The government's association with the LHMCH marked the beginning of a shift that became steadily more manifest during the first quarter of the twentieth century. This was a trend of growing government involvement in curative care for Indian women, expressed primarily through greater government funding and administrative support for the Dufferin Fund — a largely independent association in the nineteenth century.<sup>74</sup>

## Notes

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to the Felix Scholarship and the Beit Fund, University of Oxford for support provided for the research of this essay. I also want to thank Dr Mark Harrison and Dr Biswamoy Pati who read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper and for the criticism and suggestions offered during the 'Gender, Society and 'Development' in India, 1860–2000' Conference organised by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

<sup>1</sup> Benson, A.M., 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges for Women in India', (henceforth 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges') *JAMWI*, November 1911, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Balfour, Margaret I., and Ruth Young, *The Work of Medical Women in India*, (henceforth *Work of Medical Women*), Humphrey Milford, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1929, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> 'Lady Hardinge Hospital, Opening by the Viceroy: The Viceroy's Speech', (hereafter, 'The Viceroy's Speech'), *JAMWI*, February 1916, Vol. 5, No. 9, pp. 40-1.

<sup>5</sup> 'Memorial from the United Kingdom Branch of the Association of Medical Women in India', (henceforth, 'Memorial') *JAMWI*, February 1911, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the issues for which the AMWI campaigned forcefully and persuasively were: the reform of the *dai* training system, improvements with regard to nurses' training, and, the high infant and maternal mortality in India.

<sup>7</sup> The AMWI had been founded 'to promote professional fellowship among its members and to further the interests of Women's Medical work in India,' 'Memorial', p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *JAMWI*, February 1911, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Also known as the Ludhiana Medical School.

<sup>10</sup> For a history of these institutions, see Maina Chawla's contribution in this book.

<sup>11</sup> Resolution at a meeting of the AMWI on 13 December 1911, 'General Meeting', *JAMWI*, February 1912, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> One of the resolutions made by the AMWI in 1911 general meeting read: 'The standard of the Preliminary Examination should be raised. We strongly deprecate requiring a shorter period of training or lower standard of examination from women than from men.' *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Editorial, *JAMWI*, February 1912, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Work of Medical Women*, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> A.M. Benson wrote: 'The Government Colleges open their doors to women it is true, but except Christians, Parsis and the few Brahmins, how few enter? Practically all Mahomedans and orthodox Hindoos, however strongly they may be attracted by their desire for knowledge are yet more powerfully held back by their home customs.' 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges', p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *JAMWI*, August 1911, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 3; also see, 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges', pp. 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> 'Some Thoughts on the Higher Education of Women in India', (hereafter, 'Higher Education of Women'), *JAMWI*, November 1911, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> 'Thoughts on Residential Colleges', p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Dr A. Benson, as president of the AMWI, to Lady Hardinge, dated 26 December 1911, (hereafter, 'Letter to Lady Hardinge'), *JAMWI*, February 1912, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> 'Editorial', *JAMWI*, February 1913, Vol. 4, No. 9, (hereafter, Editorial, February 1913).

<sup>22</sup> 'Medical Training at Home', *JAMWI*, May 1912, Vol 3, No. 6, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> The Dufferin Fund was the main organisation dealing with women's healthcare since the late nineteenth century and throughout the early twentieth century. It aimed at providing Indian women with *female* medical care by providing for hospitals with female medical practitioners in the 'Dufferin hospitals' and training 'low-level' medical practitioners such as *dais*. For the beginnings of the Fund see Maneesha Lal, 'The Politics of Gender and Medicine in Colonial India: The Countess of Dufferin's Fund, 1885-1888', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1994, Vol. 68, No.1, Anne Witz, ' "Colonising Women": Female Medical Practice in Colonial India, 1880-1890', (henceforth 'Female Medical Practice in Colonial India') in Lawrence Conrad and Anne Hardy (eds.) *Women and Modern Medicine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> National Archives of India (NAI), Home (H), Medical (M), April 1914, 11-12A, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> He asked about the extent to which Indian women had been educated and trained as medical practitioners, facilities existing for this purpose, and the extent of government's contribution for it. NAI, H, M, September 1914, 124-48A.

<sup>26</sup> NAI, H, M, September 1914, 124-48A, pp. 9-11.

<sup>27</sup> Medical education is discussed briefly in the context of the larger women's movement in India in G. Forbes, *Women in Modern India, The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV.2 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996). One of the articles on medical education of women links the efforts to improve medical education with the wider women's education movement within India: 'Higher Education of Women', p.10-11.

<sup>28</sup> 'Resolved to send a letter to H.E. Lady Hardinge representing the need for Hostels under highly educated women as Principals, for women students of Arts, Science, Education and Medicine in all University centres where there is mixed education,' 'Council Meeting', February 1912, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> 'On College-planning Experts for Women's College', *JAMWI*, May 1912, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Royal Commission on Public Services', *JAMWI*, November 1913, Vol. 4, No. 12, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> 'Editorial', *JAMWI*, November 1912, Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Women's Medical College, Delhi', (henceforth, 'Medical College, Delhi'), *JAMWI*, February 1914, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Viceroy's Speech', p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Work of Medical Women*, p. 106. For instance, Prem Chowdhary argues that the social mores of the Haryana region had always given *purdah* great importance even though rural society did not seclude them from outer spaces, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana, 1880-1990*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> *Work of Medical Women*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>38</sup> 'Letter to Lady Hardinge', p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Medical College for Women, Delhi', *JAMWI*, November 1912, Vol. 4, No. 8, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Editorial, February 1913, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> This was published in the May 1914 issue of the *JAMWI*.

<sup>42</sup> 'Report of the Evidence given before the Royal Commission of Public Services by Dr Benson on behalf of the AMWI', (henceforth, 'Report of Evidence'), *JAMWI*, May 1914, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> 'Extract from a letter from a woman Educator now in England who has had considerable experience in India', (letter dated February 17, 1912, from London), *JAMWI*, May 1912, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Editorial Feb 1913, p. 14 and 'Report of Evidence', p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Editorial Feb 1913, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial Feb 1913, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> 'Letter to Lady Hardinge', p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> 'Lady Hardinge Hospital, Opening by the Viceroy: Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis', (henceforth, 'Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis'), *JAMWI*, February 1916, Vol. 5, No. 9, p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> NAI, H, M, April 1914, 11-12A, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> NAI, H, M, April 1914, 11-12A, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Newspaper report quoted in the *JAMWI*, 'Women's Medical College at Delhi', p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> NAI, H, M, April 1914, 11-12A.

<sup>53</sup> 'Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis', p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> NAI, H, M, July 1914, 106-7A.

<sup>55</sup> Nair, Janaki. 'Uncovering the zenana: visions of Indian womanhood in Englishwomen's writings, 1813-1940', *Journal of Women's History*, Spring 1990, Vol. 2, No.1.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Delhi College Project', p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> 'Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis', p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Viceroy's Speech', p.39.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Sadiram Gokulchand Johri Jewellers to the Chief Commissioner, Delhi, dated 9 November 1916, from Delhi, Delhi State Archives (hereafter DSA), H, 1916, F.no.43 B, pp 40-1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Rai Bahadur Sardar Narain Singh to personal assistant to Chief Commissioner, Delhi, dated February 7, 1916, *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>67</sup> 'Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis', p. 35. Punjab's contribution was mentioned twice by the viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who was evidently touched by the huge sum collected for a memorial to his deceased wife. 'The Viceroy's Speech', pp. 39-40.

<sup>68</sup> 'Statement by Sir Pardey Lukis', p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>71</sup> In 1922, the college had to request the government to fund the expansion of its hospital. The college stood to lose its affiliation to the Punjab University if it failed to do so. Yet, due to a change in policy, and greater financial stringency, the central government refused to sanction a grant for this, leaving the LHMCH in the lurch. See NAI, H, M, January 1922, 3-4A and NAI, H, M, April 1922, 1-3A.

<sup>72</sup> The argument was made in the context of the dispensary movement in America. Charles E Rosenberg, 'Social Class and Medical Care in Nineteenth-century America: The Rise and the Fall of the Dispensary', in his *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Victoria, 1992, p. 177.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>74</sup> See 'Female Medical Practice in Colonial India'.

## References

National Archives of India, Home, Medical, 1900-1924.

Delhi State Archives

— Deputy Commissioner's Office, 1900-1936.

— Chief Commissioner's Office, 1913-1925.

*The Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India*, Vols. 1-8, years 1909-1920.

Balfour, Margaret L., and Ruth Young, *The Work of Medical Women in India*, Humphrey Milford, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1929.

Chowdhary, Prem, *The Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana, 1880-1990*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

Forbes, Geraldine, *Women in Modern India, The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV.2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Lal, Maneesha, 'The Politics of Gender and Medicine in Colonial India: The Countess of Dufferin's Fund, 1885-1888', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 1994, Vol. 68, No.1.

Nair, Janaki, 'Uncovering the zenana: visions of Indian womanhood in Englishwomen's writings, 1813-1940', *Journal of Women's History*, Spring 1990, Vol. 2, No.1.

Rosenberg, Charles E., *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Victoria, 1992.

Witz, Anne, ' "Colonising Women": Female Medical Practice in Colonial India, 1880-1890' (henceforth 'Female Medical Practice in Colonial India') in Lawrence Conrad and Anne Hardy (eds.) *Women and Modern Medicine*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2001.



# Women in Colonial and Post Colonial Kashmir: Identity, Patriarchal Hegemony and Possibilities of Intervention

Shakti Kak

**T**his paper traces the changes in the status of women that took place in the state of Jammu and Kashmir from the middle of the 19th century to contemporary times. At the time of the first forays of the British into the Indian subcontinent, Kashmir had been under Afghan rule from 1753 to 1819 and the Sikhs from 1819 to 1846. During these ninety-three years, the British established their control over the political and economic structures of the subcontinent, including settling firmly, at the end of the Sikh rule, the issue of succession in Kashmir. The British preferred Gulab Singh, a Dogra in the Sikh army and sold the state along with its people for seventy-five lakh rupees, a paltry sum even by 19th century standards.<sup>1</sup> The Dogra kings<sup>2</sup> ruled the state for nearly hundred years and during this period, the state was increasingly dominated by the colonial policies of the British who were determined to keep a strict vigil over developments in the northern parts of the subcontinent. The British interest played up their sympathy for the downtrodden, if only to make the Dogra rulers feel insecure and therefore, dependent on the British goodwill. The policies of modernisation pursued by the British were designed to suit their own interests more than what they were perceived to do for the people of Kashmir. The British policies dealing with education, health and equality for women were implemented in a retrogressive and iniquitous society. Hence, there were only cosmetic changes where a small section of women from the urban elite took to education and employment. The British made no attempt to change the state's

oppressive feudal base or its patriarchal social structure. It was the democratic struggle led by the National Conference since the early decades of the 20th century that addressed the issue of women's rights based on the concept of a just society by implementing land reforms and other progressive policies.

It is argued that colonial intervention in education and health in the state of Jammu and Kashmir was slow, and its consequences limited. As for women's emancipation, it was the democratic struggle started in the 1930s that brought women into the public sphere and gave impetus to the movement. Even so, patriarchal hegemony was neither debated nor contested. The process of emancipation was based on fundamental shifts in ownership of assets, particularly land, to make the programme more broad-based and acceptable to all segments of society. Colonial intervention in education and health undoubtedly opened up opportunities for women but it was equal rights for women including access to education, that facilitated after 1950, the entry of women into the public sphere. Women in Kashmir made use of institutional facilities to contribute to the process of development circumventing and even contesting patriarchal ideology. However, there has been a setback to the process of empowerment of women though this may have been flawed in the initial stages, due to decades of violence. The people of the state of Jammu and Kashmir have been caught in recent years in the crossfire of national and international political games and so are living dangerously. Daily violence, diktats of the state and of the militants and a non-functioning political and economic system have introduced living experiences to the people of the state that are beyond imagination. The nascent state of women's organisations and the grip of the patriarchal system, have forced a large number of women to retreat behind the four walls of their homes. However, recent evidence seems to indicate that Kashmiri women of late in the state have got together to resist the onslaught on their right to be equal citizens and as a result, women are in the forefront of struggles to take charge of their destiny. This paper starts with a historical background of the position of women in Kashmir before the arrival of the British, the colonial intervention and the ensuing democratic struggle. It

also details the notion of Naya Kashmir with emphasis on equality and justice for all, the developments in the state from 1947 onwards, the ongoing violence and the strategies adopted by women to deal with it.

### Historical Background

Historical events in Kashmir have been recorded in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* written in AD 1148-49 and carried forward by Jonaraja up to the 14th century. Though these chronicles focused on court intrigues, battles over succession and the affairs of kings and queens, they give an idea of the economic and social conditions prevailing then.<sup>3</sup> Private ownership of land during this period was increasing and Brahmins were also given land grants for their temples. Tax collection for the king was carried out by granting *jagirs* to individuals [feudatories], which created a class of rich *jagirdars*. During Dogra rule, 'land, the principal source of income, was held by two classes of landlords: *jagirdars* and *muafidars*. The *jagirdars* owned an entire village or several villages from which they extracted revenue. Their *jagirs* were granted them by the monarch, sometimes in perpetuity. The *muafidars* were individuals, such as pandits and *faquirs*, who were not required to pay taxes on lands assigned to them by the monarch. These groups of landlords further leased out most of the cultivable land within the state under conditions resembling medieval exploitation'.<sup>4</sup>

As the people of Kashmir often faced invasion by neighbouring kings and ordinary marauders, their economic conditions increasingly worsened and ordinary men and women had to work harder to pay mounting taxes. From 1339, though the reign of Sultans, Chaks, and Mughals had resulted in a few decades of peace and tranquility for the Kashmiri people, they were otherwise subject to rampant exploitation, corruption and mismanagement especially as Kashmir was governed by the Mughals from Delhi. The takeover of Kashmir by the Afghans in 1752 only accelerated this misrule. All kinds of taxes were imposed and looting and stealing were common. In this general deterioration, the entire population suffered but there is no specific account of women trying to resist their exploitation.

Seclusion, squalor, hard labour, early marriage, malnutrition and low status of women in society were recurring feature in these years.<sup>5</sup> The Sikh and the Dogra rulers did nothing to improve the material and social conditions prevailing in the state.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the continuous economic decline of Kashmir from the mid-sixteenth century led to increased poverty, disease and illiteracy and its feudal structure became increasingly oppressive as the rulers sought to extract increased surplus from the peasantry. The people of Kashmir were subjected frequently to epidemics and disasters such as ruinous fires that would engulf them because their houses were made of wood and flooding such as in 1893 which swept away most of the bridges in Srinagar. Famine was another calamity and in 1877–79 it took a heavy toll of shawl weavers and other artisan communities<sup>7</sup> because the majority of them were poor and their possessions meagre.

### **Status of women in the colonial period**

In the mid-nineteenth century, such customs as child marriage, female infanticide, sati, prostitution and a ban on widow-remarriage existed in the state. Child marriage prevailed among Muslims and Pandits. Muslims did not traditionally give dowry to their daughters and allowed widow-remarriage but amongst Pandit households, the practice of dowry prevailed in a very oppressive manner. Kashmiri Pandit widows were not permitted to remarry and had to abide by extremely harsh rules imposed on them. As young Pandit girls were often married to old men, when widowed, they lived in miserable conditions for several years. These widows were not allowed to remarry and depended on their husband's family for survival. They had to live in their father-in-law's house, and "do as they were told". Bazaz mentions the cruelties — physical and mental — that these young widows had to face at the hands of relatives and Brahmin priests, "who were often the fathers of [illegitimate] babies. The infants were thrown either in the river or to the pariah dogs at night".<sup>8</sup> Sati prevailed in both Kashmir and Jammu and widows were made to sit on the pyre of their dead husbands.<sup>9</sup> Maharaja Gulab Singh issued the following proclamation against the practice

of sati sometime in 1840s:

Be it known to all our officers, jagheerdars and subject Hindus and Mussalmans of all trades and caste

Whereas a proclamation prohibiting Infanticide, Suttee and slavery, hateful to God and man has previously been issued in under that it may be better known to everyone, we hereby, for the second time declare suttee, slavery and infanticide unlawful and any person connected of these crimes, the whole of their property shall be confiscated and they themselves be imprisoned.<sup>10</sup>

The practice of sati, however, continued in Jammu until much later because the Dogra rulers considered it as a part of their tradition<sup>11</sup> as also did the practice of female infanticide.<sup>12</sup> "The sect of Rajputs to which the ruling class belonged used to bury alive the girls at their birth and took pride in doing so, because with the disappearance of girls they were, they thought, spared the humiliation of being father-in-law and brother-in-law. This custom lingered on till the twenties of the [20th] century, when the Maharaja [tried] to stop it by granting special privileges to his clansmen who had the 'misfortune' to [have] daughters".<sup>13</sup> The Maharaja constituted committees in 1925 and 1929 to suggest measures to eradicate the practice of female infanticide. Some of the measures taken were setting up of a Special Trust called Dhandevi Memorial Fund to provide relief to girls from poor and deprived segments. 'Besides, a provision was made under which a Rajput father was to get an acre of land for each daughter'.<sup>14</sup>

As far as power structures in the domestic sphere were concerned, the tyrant mother-in-law stories, so common throughout India, existed equally in Kashmir — an indication of complex hierarchical relations existing within the household. A popular refrain amongst the women of Kashmir has been the following verse from the famous 14th Century mystic Lalleshwari:

*hund martan kinah kath, noshi nalvat tsalih nah zanh*<sup>15</sup>  
(Whether a lamb or a sheep is killed at her house, the daughter-in-law will always get scraps)

This verse illustrates the patriarchal-gendered existence that women led during the earlier recorded history of Kashmir. Lalleshwari, popularly known as Lalla, might have found a way out of this oppressive arrangement by disassociating herself completely from the social arrangement passed on to her, but a majority of women lived and suffered through it. Along with hierarchies in the domestic sphere, women had to live with inequalities based on caste and class.<sup>16</sup> These hierarchies based on gender, caste and class stayed intact over centuries and at times took new forms.

Prostitution was rampant in most of the state. There were two large brothels in Srinagar known as Tashwan and Maisuma. "The sale of young girls in Kashmir to 'established centres of ill-fame' in Srinagar and India was both protected and encouraged by the Dogra rulers. These prostitutes were not permitted to marry and settle down as 'respectable' women."<sup>17</sup> In Jammu, trafficking in women was called *Barda-Faroshi* and women from the upper regions of Reasi, Ramnagar, Basohli, Kishtwar and Bhaderwah were taken to Punjab, Sindh, Rajputana and other places in eastern India.<sup>18</sup> There was also a practice of buying and selling girls for marriage.

A letter published in the *London Times* in April 1880, pointed out that the Maharaja received 15 to 25 % of the entire revenue of his State from the gains of licensed prostitutes who numbered 18,715 in the Kashmir territory alone. They paid a fixed sum to the government regularly. The letter to *The Times* accused the British representatives in Kashmir of hiding this information. In response the British representative in the state said the following:

"The prostitutes who are registered and taxed as such, are principally of the Wattal, the lowest, caste. They are sold at a tender age by their parents to brothel keepers for Rs. 200 or Rs. 100 per child. The sale is recognised and recorded on stamped paper<sup>19</sup> .... The prostitutes are divided into three classes according to their 'gratification' and taxed –

First Class.... Company's	Rs. 40 per annum;
Second Class ..."	Rs. 20 per annum
Third Class        "	Rs. 10 per annum" <sup>20</sup>

The Officer on Special Duty (OSD) representing the British in Srinagar was concerned more about the health of British officers than about the plight of the prostitutes. Hundreds of English visitors to the valley would frequent these brothels, often ending up, as we are told, with diseases. The OSD observed that 'the bearing of this on the health of these hundreds of young military officers who come every year to Kashmir is important. I hardly know two out of ten that have escaped. The consequence is that syphilitic disease is spreading throughout the country'.<sup>21</sup>

There were also instances of abduction of women to be sent to brothels in other parts of British India. This practice continued until much later in British India. 'Abduction of women from this State is a very common offence and there appears to be a large and powerful organisation which undertakes to fill the brothels of India with women from Kashmir territories...'.<sup>22</sup> Women were abducted or 'enticed away' and sent to far off places like Bombay and Calcutta. A communication from the Foreign Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir, states that the Maharaja was aware of the 'gravity of this illicit traffic' and a need was felt to take drastic steps to end this practice. However, in reality, it was difficult to convict the offenders as the law was lax and not sufficient effort was made to book the culprits. In any case, most of the offenders would be acquitted finally.<sup>23</sup>

### Women and Work

While poor women from 'low' castes were made to endure a painful existence, the women in general performed all kinds of hard labour. It was often observed that "men stand idle, and watch the women toiling up and down the *ghats* with heavy water pots, believing that their wives were born to be the burden-bearers".<sup>24</sup> Women worked hard performing household chores such as preparing, husking and grinding grain, washing clothes, preparing food and taking care of the young and the sick. Women from artisan families worked with their husbands on traditional crafts. Women from boatmen families worked hard fishing, selling vegetables from the floating gardens and performing various other types of hard work to sustain the family. A number of women worked in the shawl industry receiving 'pashm' from traders to be woven into

fine thread.<sup>25</sup> The silk factory also employed a large number of women. Women from the lower classes worked for wages as artisans, factory and agricultural labour. During famine years women were employed in public works at wages lower than that paid to men. Men were paid 2 *annas* per day while women were paid 1 *anna* 6 *paise*. The wages paid for relief works were far below the prevailing wage. Women also formed a large part of the unskilled manual labour such as weeding in agriculture. While there was no *purdah* among the women from these sections, women from upper castes and classes rarely ventured out of their houses, observed strict *purdah* and lived within the areas bound by latticed windows. They were primarily engaged in household chores.

### Women and Education

Women from upper castes and classes were educated mostly at home by *mullahs* and *purohits* and they were taught only religious texts.<sup>26</sup> There was no school for girls in the state till 1893. The education system was geared to produce functionaries for the court, an arena reserved solely for men. Restrained by *purdah*, these women did not feel they needed to acquire formal knowledge or master a craft. Poor women, on the other hand, worked in low-skill, low-wage jobs where the need was to acquire hereditary skills. In fact, feudal and the patriarchal ideology kept women out of even the existing rudimentary education system.

### Colonial intervention

Although Maharaja Gulab Singh had readily helped the British to fight the Sikhs, he did not want them to intervene directly in Kashmir. British entry into the valley was monitored and they were not allowed to rent houses in the city. Guest-houses were built outside the city and put under the care of agents charged with taking care of the needs of the British visitors. The Maharaja was continuously fending off interference from the British and conspiracies inspired by them. Their meddling in the internal administration of the state was forbidden by the Treaty of Amritsar.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this, the British established the Residency in Kashmir in 1885, much against the wishes of Maharaja Pratap Singh.<sup>28</sup> But British missionaries



had begun proselytizing in Kashmir as early as the middle of the nineteenth century and had offered to set up small hospitals to tend to the sick after noting the devastation caused by epidemics and the total lack of medical facilities. *Hakims* and *vaidys*, though popular, were unable to treat large numbers of the sick. The state, however, set up hurdles in the way of the missionaries making it difficult for them to carry on with their work.<sup>29</sup> Missionary doctors were permitted to stay on in Kashmir during the summer months only. In Srinagar, they worked under *chinar* trees and conducted surgical operations in the open.<sup>30</sup> Only persistent and at times confrontational efforts by the missionaries resulted in a small dispensary being allowed to be opened in Srinagar in 1864. The following year, a dispensary for women was started in Nawa Kadal in Srinagar. The popularity of medical missionaries and allopathic treatment was such that the Maharaja opened a dispensary in Srinagar in 1870 and allowed the Christian Mission to set up a proper hospital. Another hospital for women was set up in Rainawari. The acceptance of the Christian Mission through their work on health related issues did not, however, hasten the process of setting up of schools. The Christian Missionary Society took another seventeen years to start a school for boys in Srinagar (1881) and a school for girls was started in 1893.<sup>31</sup> Initially, schools were opened in Hindu areas as they were supposed to be relatively more open to education. However, the initial response was not encouraging as Brahmin women continued to observe seclusion. Only a few girls joined these schools due to resentment from the people.<sup>32</sup> 'Slander and calumny were the common lot' of the women who took up the work of teaching in the initial years.<sup>33</sup> The first Kashmiri woman teacher, Tekri, was tauntingly called "Tekri Master" — transforming her gender. Another teacher, Padmavati, a young widow, had to override social criticism to continue teaching in the school in Fateh Kadal. The girls were taught reading, writing and some arithmetic and trained in tailoring and embroidery. After a few years of setting up schools in areas where the target population was Hindu, a few schools were started in Muslim areas as well. These also provoked the kind of resentment experienced by the missionaries in Hindu

areas. The medium of instruction was Hindi in Hindu schools and Urdu in Muslim schools. No attempt was made to provide education in the local languages — Kashmiri and Dogri.

A number of schools were set up by the Maharaja in response to arguments that the government should meet the state's educational demand. A committee of officials and non-officials was set up in 1912 to study the requirements of the education system as well as to report on the opening of schools for girls in the state. 'After many months of deliberations and consultations, the committee submitted an unanimous report to the Maharaja strongly recommending that schools should be started in the cities of Srinagar and Jammu to bring the state in line with the rest of India in the sphere of girls' education.<sup>34</sup> In starting a widespread programme of education, the shortage of teachers was a serious concern. In a couple of decades, more schools came up in other smaller towns of the state. Bazaz points out that the setting up of schools and hospitals brought about "an astonishing change in the physical appearance and the mental outlook of womenfolk".<sup>35</sup> Similarly, easier access to medical services directly helped to improve the condition of Kashmiri women. The house visits made by the women missionary doctors increased the exposure of Kashmiri women to new ideas on health, child care, hygiene and education as they received advice and suggestions on improving their living conditions. Bazaz observes that the interaction of these women helped them to realize that "women were not born to be goods and chattels; it was not their fore-ordained destiny to undergo lifelong suffering".<sup>36</sup>

An attempt was also made by the Kashmiri theosophists in 1926 to start schools for girls.<sup>37</sup> The Women's Welfare Trust was set up for 'advancing the welfare of Kashmiri women by imparting to them knowledge, by stimulating home industry among them and by promoting their physical health and well-being'.<sup>38</sup> The Trust began by setting up schools along religious lines. The first few schools were set up for Hindu girls and after three or four years, the first Muslim school was started. In 1930, nearly nine schools had been set up for girls of which six were for Hindus. The theosophists chose Kashmiri as the medium of elementary school instruction.

Devanagari script was used meanwhile to develop a few elementary texts in Kashmiri to be used for teaching. Initially, Hindu teachers taught in Hindu schools and Muslims in Muslim schools but shortages of qualified teachers soon led to an end to this practice and a provision was made only for a *purohit* as Hindi teacher in Hindu schools and a *mullah* as Arabic teacher in Muslim schools. 'Under the fostering wings of these religion- appareled men, modern education was imparted to young and old girls'.<sup>39</sup> In 1929, the Women's Welfare Association (WWA) was set up under the aegis of the Women Welfare Trust, with the objective of spreading literacy, providing recreation, alleviating the condition of destitute widows and providing health facilities to women. Maharani Taravati was the patron of the WWA and the Maharaja provided funds to conduct its activities. Subcommittees for various activities were set up and the recreation sub-committee created 'a *purdah* garden' in Srinagar and called it the 'zenana park' where women could assemble, relax and hold meetings. The work of the WWA, however, was disrupted after the political upheavals of 1931.

The Christian Missionary Society, the Theosophists and the state tried to graft the idea of modern education on an obscurantist and backward society without changing its basic economic structure or the patriarchal control over women. In spreading education, particularly for girls, religious differences were kept in mind and schools for girls were set up under the patronage of eminent males from both communities. A couple of decades after the first school was set up in Fateh Kadal, some denominational schools also were started and the State Education Department founded some schools for girls. However, overall progress in the education of girls was slow due to resentment and apprehension among the people. The drop-out rate was high and the learning was rudimentary. Girls were reported to have attended school for years but learnt little. It was argued at times that girls should receive only religious education and their exposure to other branches of knowledge should be limited and less than what was being imparted to boys. "Generally, it was believed that it would be sufficient for a girl to learn arithmetic and study some religious scriptures. It was believed that girls have to

assist mothers in domestic work and 'could not be spared for the 'luxury' of reading in schools".<sup>40</sup> Many small girls attended these schools simply because they could not help in household chores.

A note prepared in 1917 on the state of education in Jammu and Kashmir says that "the percentage of those at school to the school going female population is 0.83... The people are highly conservative regarding the *purdah* system and the problem of girls' education is here, more than elsewhere in India, a social question. The schools were mostly concentrated in cities as out of the existing 16 schools, 12 were in the city of Srinagar and Jammu".<sup>41</sup> However, the spread of education, though limited had some redeeming features. The British Resident and the missionaries did start a campaign against regressive social practices like sati and child marriage. A campaign against child marriage and sati and for widow-remarriage was launched with proclamations and orders being issued periodically by the Maharaja. There was a great debate amongst various sections of the Hindu and Muslim communities on these issues and though widow-remarriage amongst Kashmiri Brahmins was being propagated, it was not till 1928 that the first widow remarriage took place.

### **Women in the Democratic Struggle**

As the movement for democratic rights gained momentum in the 1930s, demands for universal adult suffrage began to be articulated. The Maharaja yielded by granting the right to vote with a number of qualifications based on recommendations made by the Franchise Committee of 1934. It was a limited franchise accompanied by preconditions like: (a) payment of Rs. 20 as land revenue; (b) ownership of Rs. 600 worth of residential property; (c) payment of Rs. 20 as Municipal Tax; (d) payment of Rs. 60 as rent; (e) education up to class 8; (f) holding of a title; (g) being a village headman, or holding any other such honorary office of distinction under the Crown; (h) being a pensioner.<sup>42</sup> This meant that only big landlords, traders, government pensioners and a few other privileged people could vote and they would elect one amongst them to the Legislative Council. As large sections of the population

lived in poverty and had low literacy rates, the majority of people could not vote. Women, in general, could not vote or participate in the polling process.

The real change in the position of women started with the democratic struggle during the 1930s in the state, which began initially with the poor demanding better living conditions. 'The spread of education and other social amenities over a few decades and the freedom struggle in India led the people of Kashmir to demand their basic rights. They wanted freedom from the oppressive rule of the Dogras and eradication of autocracy and despotism. For this, 1931 stands out as a year of profound significance'.<sup>43</sup> It was during this year, that the people of Kashmir initiated a large-scale struggle to 'fight for freedom from the exploiting classes, such as jagirdars, landlords, capitalists, mullahs and corrupt officials.... Every vestige of slavery, despotism and tyranny was to be destroyed'.<sup>44</sup> The struggle engaged vast sections of the poor and exploited. '[P]oor women (and men) of the working sections ... were infused with the new spirit and rose equal to the occasion. In the city of Srinagar and bigger towns such as Anantnag, Baramulla, Sopore, Handwara, Uri, Muzaffarabad, Shopian Pampore, Bijbehara and Bandapur, they participated by the hundreds in anti-government demonstrations soon after the disturbances broke out in July 1931 and continued to be in the vanguard of the fighting forces all through. During the early years of the movement [there were] processions composed entirely of women, some of them with suckling babies in their arms, passing through the streets, raising slogans, denouncing the suppressive policies of the Dogras ... or demanding the release of their imprisoned leaders and the establishment of a democratic set-up'.<sup>45</sup>

There was also a strong peasants' movement in Kashmir, which also engaged women. The All Jammu and Kashmir Kisan Conference was set up in 1945 with a base among peasants and within months, a large network of Kisan Committees was organised. Increasingly progressive and democratic forces in the valley realised the necessity of 'formation of alliances'.<sup>46</sup> There were a number of clashes with the nationalist forces represented by the National Conference, as the progressive political agenda of Kisan Conference

was at times at variance with the realities of political negotiations of the National Conference leaders. Peasant women played an active role in the political mobilisation of the Kisan Conference.

As a result of the democratic political movement, the National Conference in 1944 adopted a programme called 'Naya Kashmir Manifesto' which included equal rights and privileges for women in political, economic, social, legal, educational and cultural spheres. For the first time, women were considered for equal Constitutional rights. Some of the major rights detailed in the manifesto were the woman's right to vote and contest elections, right to employment, right to equal pay for equal work along with men, right to divorce and right to free education.<sup>47</sup> Measures like the establishment of a department to look into the grievances of women, starting district-wise institutes for training women, providing free legal advice and defence and participation of women in cultural and literary activities were sought to be introduced to especially help women to overcome their social and cultural handicaps.

### **Women and the Process of Development from 1947 onwards**

The positive programme for both political and economic rights of the people started in right earnest in the 1950s. There were elections, land reforms and the setting up of educational institutions, hospitals and other developmental projects. The Naya Kashmir manifesto began to be implemented without delay, with the biggest thrust given to land reforms, which set the maximum landholding at 22.75 acres with the excess going to tenants.<sup>48</sup> The implementation of land reforms and subsequent progressive policies followed by the state led, especially in the beginning, to a resurgence in society. Agricultural and industrial development, investment in education and health and development of rural and urban infrastructure — all had a positive repercussion on women.

A number of laws were adopted by the government favouring women including the Child Marriage Restraint Act, the Dowry Restraint Act, the J&K Muslim Marriage Registration Act, J&K Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, State Human Rights Commission Act and the State Women's Commission Act, besides

local laws like the Ranbir Penal Act. "Additional measures for the empowerment of women include the reservation of seats for women in state assemblies, district authority, tehsil authority and reservation of panchayats, free education of women up to university level, provision of scholarship of women, reservation of upto 50 percent in medical colleges (the only state in India to do so)".<sup>49</sup>

The setting-up of educational institutions and increasing enrolment of women students started the process of their emancipation. Between 1950–51 and 1959–60, the number of educational institutions for girls increased from 229 to 631 and the enrollment of girls from 15,030 to 60,799.<sup>50</sup> Female literacy rates increased from abysmal levels in 1947 to over 60 % in some regions of the state in 2001. Young women enrolled to study medicine, engineering, pure sciences and social sciences. Women started working as teachers, social workers, doctors and engineers starting a new era of women's participation in the process of development. However, the initial progress experienced must not draw a veil over the gender gap in the spread of education. In spite of the positive statements and commitments made regarding equal opportunity during and after the democratic movement, the spread of literacy among women was not as rapid as that of men. Women had to overcome strong patriarchal bias as their education was considered less important than that of men. As a result, the spread of government and private educational facilities for women has been extremely slow thus limiting access to such facilities. The initial lack of institutions for girls has not been made up in past fifty years. Over the years, there has been a decline in the growth of educational facilities made available for girls. The result of that is an extremely uneven spread of literacy in the districts of the state, with less than one-third of the women in some areas being reported as literate. In 2001, out of 14 districts, only four were above the state literacy average of 41 %. Female literacy in Badgam was as low as 26.60 %; Kupwara, 26.83 %; Doda, 28.35 %, and Srinagar, 48 %. Jammu district with 68 % reported the highest number of literate women.<sup>51</sup> The quality and quantity of the educational facilities for women has deteriorated drastically and their access to educational facilities in

the state is becoming increasingly limited. Higher and professional education is generally available only in big cities and for higher strata of women and the poor quality of educational facilities for women does not make them sufficiently skilled. The problem has accentuated due to a stagnation or decline in public expenditure on education, health and other development sectors. Expenditure on education, for example, was at 10.37% of total expenditure in 1980–81, it rose to 11.17% in 1990–91 declined again to 10.90% in 1998–99. Expenditure on other social sectors also declined from 3.72% in 1980–81 to 2.37% in 1998–99.<sup>52</sup> A decline in expenditure on the social sector, particularly health services and education, has resulted in a deterioration in the quality of services provided by the state. If the expenditure on salaries and the like were removed, actual developmental expenditure would be a very small proportion. As expenditure on the social sector has declined over the years, it has reduced the welfare of the affected people and employment opportunities in the sector.

The overall change in the composition of the public spending away from the social sector as well as from the manufacturing sector, has affected women's direct involvement in the economic process. Not only has there been a decline in the availability of educational facilities and other welfare programmes for women, the reduction in the number of jobs available has worsened their economic condition. This adverse situation has assumed enormous proportion in view of the industrial slowdown in the economy. "Industrial backwardness of the state can be judged from the fact that the registered manufacturing sector contributes an average of only 2.38% to the state income. It has been consistently falling from 1.6% in 1967–68 to 0.84% in 1970–71, with slight improvement to 2.10% in 1981–82".<sup>53</sup> The state has experienced a decline in per capita net domestic product and in per capita income at constant prices. The per capita net domestic product is far lower for the state as compared to the rest of the country. The per capita income at constant prices at Rs. 683 in 1985–86 has been declining over the years.



The employment situation and therefore, participation of women in the labour force, has declined over the years. Women's participation in the labour force in 1993-94 was estimated at 60 % in rural areas, but this has come down to nearly 48 % in 1999-2000. For urban women, it has come down from 20 % to nearly 10% over the same period.<sup>34</sup> The overall decline in the number of women in the labour force is the result of reduced public sector employment. Employment growth in the organised public sector has declined drastically in the last decade while in the private sector, it has remained stagnant. The growth in employment for rural women has declined from 5.8 % between 1983 and 1993-94 to -0.4% between 1993-94 and 1999-2000. In urban areas, the decline has been from 6.7 % to -9.8 % for the same period. There has been a sharp decline in the growth in female employment, whereas it has increased for men from 1.7 % to 2.2 % in the same period.

### **Contemporary Situation and the Role of Women**

The gains made by women as a result of the democratic movement were exemplified in greater participation since 1950 in the process of development. Women took to modern education and higher studies and joined a variety of professions. They overcame all types of difficult social and economic constraints to achieve emancipation but the opportunities available to them became limited over time and newer forms of patriarchal control denied them access to education and further achievements. Although medieval practices such as sati have been unheard of for decades in the state, practices like dowry and increased consumerism have brought new challenges to women. Dowry has even taken firm root among Muslims—a practice which did not exist before.

Women in the state have faced adverse economic and political conditions for the past fifteen years which has culminated in greater control over them. There are demands for women to stay indoors and take care of their families and their home. The continuing cycle of violence has halted developmental activity and has barred women from improving their living conditions. Lack of employment and lack of mobility because women fear the army and the militants

has tightened patriarchal control and made it more complex, more so, for those women whose men folk of the family are no more. The cycle of violence unleashed in the state has led to the existence of a large number of widows, of young women whose husbands are missing (called half widows as their husbands are not yet declared dead) and young orphans. In a large number of cases, the women must fend for the family. Various studies have established the extent of the constant fear in which people in the state live. "There has been a corresponding increase in the use of psychotropic drugs as a means of escape and dealing with the stress."<sup>55</sup> The involvement of women in the political process and as organised activists like Dukhtaran-e-millat as well as the Daughters of Vitasta, has been noticed. At another level, women are not only fighting the militants by repeatedly defying their calls for *purdah* and other restrictions, they are also organising themselves to resist the spread of violence by both the security agencies of the state and the militants. A number of studies and reports have brought out succinctly the initiatives taken by women to control their destinies.

A study done by Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) in 2002, pointed out that "in the last eleven years women have faced serious insecurities emanating from economic reasons. A stagnant economy, unemployment, lack of industrial development has made the society vulnerable. Women have to manage both the home front as well as outside work, often without cooperation from their husbands, adding to the tension and distress. Added to this vulnerability, following the changing pattern of educational, economic and social mores, the state has witnessed tremendous death and destruction because of the ongoing conflict. Women have been rendered destitute and widowed, thousands of children have been orphaned and property worth billions of rupees destroyed". A prominent educationist, Shamla Mufti, states that "before 1947, there ... was stiff opposition to sending girls to school, general illiteracy was common among women, the hold of the orthodox *ulema* was strong, *purdah* was strictly observed in upper and middle class families. Girls were [confined to] the four walls and married off at puberty to anyone selected by their guardian.

Psychologically trained to involve themselves only in household chores, they spent the day cooking and cleaning with social interaction confined to the premises of the home".<sup>56</sup> Shamla Mufti observes the condition of women started changing during the 1950s and by 1960, "considerable number of women had come out of *purdah*. Women started working as teachers, lecturers, doctors, lawyers as well as in the service sector".

It has to be noted that the contemporary situation in the state has adverse implications for women as the economy stagnates and strife continues at every level. The limits to the role of women in the public sphere are set by regional inequities, unemployment and increased consumerism while, at the same time, there is an increased preference for working women in marriage. "Where women don't have jobs, the loss of income for the bridegroom and his family has to be compensated by a larger dowry".<sup>57</sup> It has created social tensions because the girl's parents have to fulfill demands for cash and goods. This has further increased the grip of patriarchal control and has taken virulent forms at times.

### Conclusion

The colonial intervention in the extremely backward and oppressive feudal system that characterised Kashmir in the 18th century, began when the Christian Missionary Society started working in the health and education sectors. It was formalized with the establishment of the British Residency in Srinagar in 1885. The Resident formulated policies for revenue collection, road-building, urban planning, education and health. The setting up of small dispensaries in Srinagar gave the missionaries greater access to people. However, it took them many more years to set up schools in the city. The intervention in education was limited by its focus on the upper castes, in which women observed seclusion. As a result, the missionaries, Theosophists and the state were unable to spread education as the poor and the exploited did not feel the need to attend their schools. The emancipatory impact of education was limited by the lack of action by the colonial administration on changing the prevailing feudal structure. Large sections of the

population, especially in rural areas, lived in poverty, fear and oppression. The schools and colleges were established in large towns only. In the beginning, religious differences determined the location of schools and the medium of instruction. College education was initially not available to girls as they hesitated to join the co-educational colleges.

It was the democratic movement that started in the 1930s of the last century that gave a fillip to the process of emancipating women. The Naya Kashmir manifesto, adopted in 1944, had an elaborate programme for women to be treated as equal citizens. The democratic movement evolved into an all-inclusive struggle against the feudal system, focused on land reforms, social and economic justice as well as equal rights for women. The Naya Kashmir manifesto contained details of women's rights and the measures to be taken to achieve it. The idealism of the democratic struggle was implemented initially with a lot of zeal but over the decades, the programme was derailed and the economy started floundering. The gains made in the initial years began to be eroded and at present, the state is facing a crisis with women as the worst sufferers. Women are being subjected to new forms of patriarchal control and the decline in employment and educational facilities and the increase in violence have made it difficult for women to be active in the public sphere. They are being pushed again to the isolation imposed by domestic boundaries. However, several women, wishing to cope with the increasing number of tragic incidents in the past few years, have tried to come into the public sphere to protest and struggle against the various forms of violence and coercion targeted against them. Women have come out in huge numbers to protest violence and arbitrary searches of their homes, and to invoke the legal process to get their family members released, which is a public role that they have to pursue under extremely tragic conditions. Women are also active in the education sector making the optimum use of available opportunities. Women of the state realize that there is a need to rise above sectarian differences and develop women's organisations that will effectively exercise their agency.

## Notes

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Biswamoy Pati, Jaishree K. Odin, Kumkum Sangari, Sandra Oommen and T.K. Oommen for comments and suggestions on earlier drafts with usual disclaimers

<sup>1</sup> Kashmir was attached to Punjab after the Sikhs took control from the Afghans in 1819. After the British occupied Lahore in 1846, Kashmir was handed over to the British Government in lieu of indemnity. The British assigned the territory to Gulab Singh under the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 for the valuable services rendered by him to the British during the Anglo Sikh war. See M.I. Khan (1999), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Sufi, G.M.D., *Kashir: A History of Kashmir*, Vol. 1 & 2, Light a Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, p.752.

<sup>3</sup> Odin, Jaishree K., *To the Other Shore — Lalla's Life and Poetry*, Vitasta, New Delhi, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Ganguli, Sumit, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace*, Washington DC and Cambridge, 1997, p.30.

<sup>5</sup> Bazaz, Prem Nath, *Daughters of the Vitasta — A History of Kashmiri Women from Early Times to the Present Day*, Pamposh Publications, New Delhi, 1959, p.199.

<sup>6</sup> The Sikhs for a brief period of 27 years (1819–1846) were interested only in plundering the wealth of the state. Dogras too were primarily interested in advancing their control in frontier areas. See Prem Nath Bazaz, p.18.

<sup>7</sup> 'It is stated that the population of the city [of Srinagar] was reduced from 127400 to 60000... The corpses of those who had perished were left dying or hastily dragged to the nearest well or hole, until these became choked with dead bodies' Ernest Neve quoted in M.I.Khan p.24.

<sup>8</sup> See Bazaz, 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Although the tenets of Islam did not permit customs like sati, the evidence shows that '[c]uriously enough, in the beginning under the influence of the prevailing custom in the Hindu majority, upper class Muslim women too committed self immolation and hundreds destroyed themselves as satis; or even after the conversion to Islam, women were disallowed to live after the death of their husbands. Both the Shah Miri sultans and the Chak monarchs, who ruled the valley after them, were either indifferent to it or failed in their attempts to suppress the horrible practice. They no doubt disapproved of it but took no steps to end it.

Akbar had forbidden the practice of sati in India, but he too was unsuccessful to eradicate the practice in Kashmir after he annexed the valley in 1586 A.D. to his empire. Jahangir finally abolished it. ... A shiver passed through the Emperor's spine when he heard, while on his way to Kashmir through the often trodden route of Pir Panjal, that Muslim widows in Rajauri were consigned to the flames with the remains of their husbands. Royal commands were immediately issued prohibiting the noxious practice.... Dr Sufi states that the number of Muslim girls cremated/[buried] at one point was no fewer than 4000 in Rajauri and Bhimber'. Dr. Sufi in Prem Nath Bazaz, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> A communication dated September 23, 1847 by the Commissioner and Superintendent at Lahore, the text of the proclamation issued by Maharaja Gulab Singh was sent to the Secretary to the Government of India, Simla. (National Archives of India, New Delhi, File No. 1066 A, December 24, 1847)

<sup>11</sup> G.T.Vigne was witness to one such incident and he says, 'One morning my munshi came to me and told me that a sati ... was going to burn herself on the funeral pyre, was about to pass by the garden gate. I hastened to obtain a sight of her. She was dressed in her gayest attire; a large crowd of persons followed her, as she walked forward with a hurried and faltering step, like that of a person about to faint. A Brahmin supported her on either side, and these, as well as many around were calling loudly and almost fiercely upon the different Hindu deities.... Her countenance had assumed a sickly and a ghastly appearance, which was partly owing to internal agitation and partly, so I was informed, to the effect of opium and *bhang* and other narcotics, with which she had been previously drugged, in order to render her less awake to the misery of her situation. ... She was presented at intervals with a plate of moist red colour, in which saffron was no doubt an ingredient, and into this she dipped the ends of her fingers, and then impressed them on the shoulders of the persons who stopped before her in order to be thus marked. ... In about half an hour the preparations were completed. She was regularly thatched in, upon the top of the pile, whilst her husband's body yet lay outside. It was finally lifted upon her lap; the fire applied in different parts; and all was so quickly enveloped in a shroud of mingled flame and smoke, that I believe her sufferings to have been of very short duration, as she must almost immediately have been suffocated.' See Prem Nath Bazaz, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> The proportion of females per thousand males in 1931 was 825 in Jammu district and 827 in Kathua district. The ratio was lowest amongst

the Hindus as compared with Budhists, Muslims and Sikhs. See S.S. Sooden, *Jammu under the Reign of Maharaja Hari Singh*, Vinod Publishers & Distributors, Jammu, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See Bazaz, p.195.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from *Census of India 1931*, in S.S.Sooden, *ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>15</sup> Kaul in Odin, p.28.

<sup>16</sup> See Jaishree K. Odin, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Prostitution seems to have been rampant in Kashmir in earlier times as well. According to Robert Thorp, the license granting permission for the purchase of a girl for this purpose, cost about 100 *chilkee* rupees in Ranbir Singh's time. M.I.Khan, p.115.

<sup>18</sup> Sooden, Surjit Singh, *Jammu Under the Reign of Maharaja Hari Singh*, Vinod Publishers & Distributors, Jammu, 1999, p.81.

<sup>19</sup> The sale of these girls was registered both if they were being sold for marriage or for prostitution. There appears to have been a practice of marriages by purchasing girls. In Jammu, the practice was called *Ram Rasam*. The tax for the sale of a girl for marriage was Company's Rs. 3-8 whereas the tax for the sale of a girl for prostitution was Chilki Rs. 400 = Company's Rs. 250. Hence, most often these sale deeds were supposed to be done for the purpose of marriage to avoid paying higher taxes.

<sup>20</sup> National Archives, Foreign and Political Dept, Secret E Pros.; March 1883, No.86.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> National Archives, Foreign and Political Department, File no. 468-Internal of 1926, Serial Nos. 1-10.

<sup>23</sup> File no. 468-Internal, 1926, Foreign and Political Dept., National Archives, New Delhi.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in M.I. Khan, p.134.

<sup>25</sup> M.I. Khan, p.114.

<sup>26</sup> Bazaz, p.209.

<sup>27</sup> See Bazaz in M.I. Khan

<sup>28</sup> It was, however, believed by some that setting up of the Residency led to fast pace of developments in the fields of education and public health. See Prem Nath Bazaz, p.215.

<sup>29</sup> To emphasise this, Bazaz gives a detailed quote from Robert Mark recorded in 1864, 'the house was literally besieged with men and noisy

boys. They stood by hundreds on the bridge, and lined the river on both sides, shouting and one man striking a gong, to collect the people. Not a chaprausi, or police officer, or soldier or an official of any kind appeared. The tumult quickly increased, and no efforts were made to stop it. The people began to throw stones and some of them broke down the wall of the compound and stables. Our servants became greatly alarmed, for they threatened to burn the house down. The number present was between one thousand and one thousand five hundred. When I went to the Wazir to ask for protection, it was said that he was asleep. He kept me waiting for two hours and then did not even give me a chair. He promised to send a guard and never did so. The police also announced that if any one rented a house to the missionaries, all the skin will be taken off their backs.' See Prem Nath Bazaz, p.206.

<sup>30</sup> The opposition to the missionaries was engineered by the authorities as was brought out by Robert Clark in his journal. He felt that the people were friendly but the authorities were creating all the opposition against their work of opening schools and hospitals. M.I.Khan 1999, p.140.

<sup>31</sup> See Bazaz, p.211.

<sup>32</sup> An interesting incident is mentioned by Tyndale Biscoe 'It was in the Nineties that one of the Mission ladies started a school in the city; it was of course by no means popular, as it shocked the prejudices of all proper thinking folks in Srinagar. The girls who were brave enough to attend were very timid and their parents were somewhat on the shake, as public opinion was very much against them. The school continued until the first prize day. The Superintendent had invited some of the European ladies of the station to come to the function....All the girls were assembled in the school when, on the appearance of the English lady visitors, someone in the street shouted out that, the Europeans had come to kidnap the girls. Others took up the cry and ran to the school windows and told the girls to escape by jumping from the windows, the men below catching them as they fell. Before the visitors could enter the school, the scholars had literally flown...' Quoted in Prem Nath Bazaz, 1959, p.212.

<sup>33</sup> Bazaz, p.217.

<sup>34</sup> Bazaz, p.217.

<sup>35</sup> Bazaz, p.213.

<sup>36</sup> Bazaz, p.214.

<sup>37</sup> Annie Besant, after becoming President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, founded the Indian Women's Association in Madras,



which was replicated in other parts of the country. However, it must be pointed out that Annie Besant had a very limited vision for emancipation of Indian women. She believed 'that instead of sitting for Matriculation examinations, women should be trained in devotion and piety...Because any imitation of the West in the matter of educating women could break up the family system.' Amulya Ganguli, *The Hindustan Times*, December 1, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Bazaz, p.222.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.225.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.219.

<sup>41</sup> Sharp, H. Commissioner of Education to Government of India.

<sup>42</sup> Rekhi, Tara Singh, *Socio-economic Dimension in Jammu and Kashmir — A Critical Study*, Ideal Publications, Delhi, 1993.

<sup>43</sup> See Prem Nath Bazaz.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.246.

<sup>46</sup> Bamzai, P.N. Kaul, *A History of Kashmir – Political, Social and Cultural*, Metropolitan Books, 1962, p.222.

<sup>47</sup> Butalia, Urvashi, *Speaking Peace – Women's Voices from Kashmir*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002, p.314.

<sup>48</sup> Akbar M.J., *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, Viking, New Delhi, 1991, p.139.

<sup>49</sup> Dasgupta, Sumona, *Women and Kashmir: Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace*, New Delhi, 1993, p.36.

<sup>50</sup> Rekhi, p.95.

<sup>51</sup> *Census 2001 Provisional Population Tables*.

<sup>52</sup> *National Human Development Report, 2001*.

<sup>53</sup> Rekhi, 1993.

<sup>54</sup> *National Human Development Report, 2001*, p.158.

<sup>55</sup> Sahba Hussain in WISCOMP Study

<sup>56</sup> *Report by Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace*, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

## References

Archival Documents in National Archives in New Delhi

- a) Foreign Department Records
- b) Foreign and Political Dept Records

Government of India publications:

- a) *Census 2001 Provisional Population Tables*
- b) *National Human Development Report, 2001*

Books and articles:

Akbar, M.J., *Kashmir: Behind the Vale*, Viking, New Delhi, 1991.

Banzai, P.N. Kaul, *A History of Kashmir – Political, Social and Cultural*, Metropolitan Books, Delhi, 1962.

Bazaz, Prem Nath. *Daughters of the Vitasta - A History of Kashmiri Women from Early Times to the Present Day*, Pamposh Publications, New Delhi, 1959.

Butalia, Urvashi, (ed.), *Speaking Peace – Women's Voices from Kashmir*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

Dasgupta, Jyoti Bhushan, *Jammu and Kashmir*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1968.

Drabu, V.N., *Kashmir Polity—(600-1200 A.D.)*, Bahri Publications, New Delhi, 1986.

Fazili, Manzoor, *Socialist Ideas and Movements in Kashmir*, Delhi, 1980.

Ganguli, Sumit, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace*, Washington DC and Cambridge, 1997.

Khan, Mohammad Ishaq, *History of Srinagar 1846-1947, A Study in Socio-Cultural Change*, Cosmos Publications, 1999.

Misri, M.L., and Bhatt, M.S., *Poverty, Planning and Economic Change in Jammu and Kashmir*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1994.

Navlakha, Gautam, 1996, 'Invoking Union' Kashmir and Official Nationalism of 'Bharat' in T.V.Satyamurthy (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Vol.3, Odin, Jaishree K. (1999), *To the Other Shore—Lalla's Life and Poetry*, Vitasta, New Delhi.

Rekhi, Tara Singh. *Socio-economic Dimension in Jammu and Kashmir – A Critical Study*, Ideal Publications, Delhi, 1993.

Sangari, Kumkum, 'Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 1, 1993.

Sooden, Surjit Singh, *Jammu under the Reign of Maharaja Hari Singh*, Vinod Publishers & Distributors, Jammu, J&K, 1999.

Stein, Aurel, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini or the Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, Vol.1, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1961.

Sufi, G.M.D., *Kashir: A History of Kashmir*, Vol.1 & 2, Light & Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1974.

*Women of India*, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1958.



# Adivasi Women in Transition: Revisiting Jharkhand (1880s to 1980s)

Shashank Shekhar Sinha

**T**he tribal societies of Jharkhand have been exposed to a variety of changes over the last hundred years. In the wake of 'development' and industrialisation drives in colonial and post-colonial India, the adivasis have been exposed to alien capitalist relations, caste societies and religious doctrines, while their own traditions, reeling under the impact of changing socio-economic configurations, continue to haunt many aspects of socio-cultural existence. While there are many studies on the displacement of tribes and the resultant resistance movements, the women's component is conspicuously misplaced. Women's marginalisation was integral yet exclusive to the tribal societies. But they continue to be marginalised even in the occasional histories of tribes, not to speak of the mainstream history writing. Building over a largely fragmentary source base, this article attempts to situate and contextualise the changing nature of women's role and position over a period when Chhotanagpur<sup>1</sup> itself was in a great transitory flux.

## The Pre-colonial Background

Women experienced a double-marginalisation in the period under consideration: as integral members of the adivasi society and in their capacities as women. However, as far as the process was concerned, the much-vilified colonial rule was neither as complete a 'watershed' (as has been made out in the traditional accounts of marginality),<sup>2</sup> nor was it solely responsible for the same. Their marginalisation was consequential to the cumulative impact of the three systems; patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism; all

reinforcing, and on occasions, working in tandem with each other. Infiltration in Chhotanagpur had already begun during the Mughal period itself, when, the *Rajas* (tribal chiefs), started encouraging migration of Brahman priests, low-caste artisans, and other non-tribal retainers and granting them the right to collect 'subscriptions' from adivasi villages. These 'subscriptions' gradually converted themselves into encroachments. Like the development of complex agrarian relations, the process of Hinduisation/Sanskritisation of adivasi societies was also long at work in the seemingly harmonious societies. In fact, the tribal polities emerging in the pre-colonial period were active agents of Sanskritisation.<sup>2</sup>

The accounts of patriarchal structuring of adivasi societies borne out by many regional and colonial sources also make a serious dent into the unchanging stereotypical projections of adivasi societies as 'egalitarian' in the pre-colonial period.<sup>3</sup> Under the customary laws, women were not allowed to inherit land. Only as widows and unmarried daughters did they have a right to be maintained by it. The wide prevalence of witch-hunts, the veritable identification of the 'witches' with women, and the fact that witches of one village were/are not treated as witches in other or even outside the community, points to some distortions in the system.<sup>4</sup> Controls over women's sexuality operated in subtle yet entrenched ways. When the men went on a hunt there was an injunction on the wives to remain chaste so as not to jeopardise the success of the hunt.<sup>5</sup> Extra-marital sexual relations on the part of a woman were considered a violation of her husband's rights.<sup>6</sup> Similarly if a woman happened to deviate from the sexual 'norm', it was the father, husband or brother (as the case may be) who had to pay the fines that were to be imposed.<sup>7</sup> One may also mention the practice of *bitlaha*.<sup>8</sup> In addition, descriptions of traditions excluding women from political process and decision-making, a strict and discriminatory taboo regime do much to shatter the myth of comparatively 'better placed' adivasi women before the advent of colonial rule.

Likewise, a look at the traditional division of labour, generally strengthened by 'taboos' and beliefs, would also indicate similar

trends. In hunting and gathering societies, like Birhor, where there was no such strict division of labour as agriculture; hunting was the job of men while collecting fruits, tubers, timber, firewood and foliage was done by the women who also looked after the children and affairs of the household.<sup>9</sup> But in agriculture, with the exception of ploughing, all activities relating to production were carried out by women including clearing fields, removing pebbles, sowing, weeding, harvesting, transplanting, etc. Ploughing formed just one of the many taboos for women. Other main 'taboos' included roofing, levelling, weaving, using weapons, partaking of sacrificial meat offered to the family spirits (*Bonga*).<sup>10</sup> Thus, in spite of significant labour contributions, the much eulogised adivasi customs excluded women from some core production activities, while keeping them perennially dependent in relation to the 'prohibited' activities.

Enter the colonial rule. It introduced private property (Permanent Settlement) in land eroding the relative communality of the adivasi land holdings. The colonial administration also appropriated 'their' forests or drastically curtailed access to them while suppressing shifting cultivation and grazing. There is no denying the fact that women suffered from the distancing of forests in many ways: the income from forests and gathering, especially, where they were also marketing the forest produce, did accrue to them. While this may be true, what also needs to be mentioned at the same time is that, forest areas in Chhotanagpur under direct management of the Imperial Forest Department were very small, and, that as late as the 1930s, around 79% of forests remained under private ownership. Frantic attempts were made by the state to control denudation of private forests by introducing three bills in 1907, 1912 and 1931, all of which were met with massive resistance from influential landlords.<sup>11</sup> Having said that, one may qualify that the colonial rule did however create conditions of adivasi exploitation while lending space for consolidation of old ones. The new land, forest and judicial legislations, while impoverishing the adivasis as a whole, laid down 'legally' defined institutional parameters leading to diminution of women's economic role in the 'traditional' division of labour. The development of capitalism, with the aid of both the

'native' and foreign capital, during and after the colonial rule further contributed to their marginalisation.

### **Women under Changing Work Conditions**

Land alienation, restrictions on the use of forest resources and the absence of remunerative employment opportunities opened up migrations, first seasonal, (to temporary opportunities opened up by the expansion of roads and railways) and, then of longer, even permanent nature, to Assam and Bengal as the mines and tea gardens were opened up by the British, towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Some adivasis however also migrated to the neighbouring indigo plantations in Champaran or to far-off places like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Between 1853 and 1855, the construction of Santhal Parganas, part of the Calcutta-Delhi railway project gave employment to an estimated 100,000 people in the Santhal Parganas and adjoining areas. Mistreatment of women at the hands of railway staff was in fact one of the dominant underlying currents of the Santhal Rebellion (1855-56).<sup>12</sup> But tea plantations were a particularly lucrative destination during the colonial period. The successive Reports on the Census of Bengal (and later Orissa) between 1891 and 1921 show that family migration was the dominant mode of migration and the available figures on sex distribution indicate that, on an average, 45% of the total adult migrants were female.<sup>13</sup>

Once in the tea plantations, the prospects of better livelihood soon gave way to shattered dreams and nightmarish conditions.<sup>14</sup> Added to hostile habitats, were associated problems of overwork, insufficient nourishment, and unhygienic conditions of living such as bad housing, overcrowding, impure water and alien climatic conditions. All this took a heavy toll on the life of the labourers. In fact, as many as over 30,000 out of 84,915 labourers who landed between 1863 and 1866, had died just within the span of less than three years.<sup>15</sup> There were even cases of abduction of married women.<sup>16</sup> Women's recruitment to the Assam tea plantations has to be seen as doubly negative; not only harassing them to the exploitative contract regimes in common with men workers, but



also subjecting them to sexual violation by managers, supervisors and fellow male workers.<sup>17</sup> Yet, such legal disabilities and hardships were not compensated for by a remunerative wage structure. On the contrary, wages were lower than what was normally paid in agriculture or the non-plantation sectors. Empirical studies from tea gardens in Jalpaiguri, Bengal (where immigrations had started since 1873) also reveals similar trends.<sup>18</sup>

Like plantations, the opening of mills, industries and mines in Bengal also threw up huge potentialities for migrant labour. The Burdwan District Gazetteer points to the presence of a large number of Mundas, Santhals, Oraon, Kols and Bauris among the labourers migrating from the neighbouring districts of Bankura, Manbhum and Santhal Parganas to cater to the demands of labour in the mines and factories of Asansol and Raniganj.<sup>19</sup> The living conditions in the mines were particularly bad. Besides squalor, poverty, poor diet, malnutrition, sexual harassment, and waterborne diseases, there were problems of their husbands' drunkenness. On many occasions, for want of money, their men would surrender their vouchers to the moneylenders. To cope with conditions of unending miseries, Santhal women increasingly started taking jobs of loading coal on trucks while others (mainly the Bauris) allegedly started living as concubines to non-tribal workers.<sup>20</sup> The Royal Commission of Labour (1930) points out:

there is practically open prostitution near the workers' homes and most of the workers do not bring their womenfolk (to the work place, Bengal) — no privacy is possible under present conditions of housing. Among female workers, one out of four admits to being a prostitute.<sup>21</sup>

While the adivasis were migrating to other regions, industrial explosion was taking place in their own backyard. The development of capitalist enterprises (and later dams, river valley projects) put a heavy demand on the tribals as they began to be forcibly ousted from their land and villages.<sup>22</sup> Industrialisation and development of mines<sup>23</sup> were also accompanied by phenomenal growth in urbanisation and large-scale influx of outsiders to cater to the requirements of skilled and later unskilled labour.<sup>24</sup> According to

the 1921 Census, the adivasis accounted for only 10% in the total number of unskilled labourers in the coalmines of Hazaribagh and Manbhum districts.<sup>25</sup> Women's utility as cheap unskilled labourers however did contribute to their employment in industries, mines and plantations. By 1911, in Murhu and Bundu (around Ranchi), a total of eight lac factories were functional employing local Munda women. Women were preferentially employed in the lac factories because they were considered more skilled than male workers in lac cultivation and collection but, also on account of low wages.<sup>26</sup>

But one of the largest employers of women labour was the mining sector. In spite of the patriarchal character of adivasi societies (marked by an institutionalised sexual division of labour), it was the women who were often sent to the ore fields whenever the family was in need of some cash.<sup>27</sup> Keenan, the Irish-American general manager at TISCO (Jamshedpur) in the 1930s saw "endless streams of Kahl, Santhal and Ho women, the inhabitants of dirt walking in a steady line from the mining faces to the narrow gauge track with baskets of ores on their heads".<sup>28</sup> In what was an extension of the family system of production so characteristic of the coal mines, in the iron ore factories as well, the male workers arrogated to themselves the more interesting and better paid mining and drilling operations, while the womenfolk were more or less limited to loading the cut ores into baskets carrying them to waiting tubs or aerial ropeways baskets (or to the foot of the incline or in some cases to the surface).<sup>29</sup>

Physical exertion was not the only problem. With the ban on children work in mines after 1924, there was the added problem of lack of supervision of children. In the absence of crèche or nursery facilities, too many children would stay unattended in the mining compounds, always vulnerable to accidents and mishaps.<sup>30</sup> However, with the ban on women's work in underground mines in the late 1920s, there was a change in their work profile. They now worked on the surface mainly in the capacity of truck loaders (*dust-kamins*), which was a particularly useful occupation for women without support. Women's systematic marginalisation from the mines began in the mid-twenties after a governmental ban on

underground work by women and children. While banning women's work underground, the state had recommended that their removal might be phased out over a period of ten years. In 1928, 29% of the underground coal labour was female; each year three per cent of these were to be retired. But actually, within the next year, a quarter of the underground women were eased out of their jobs.<sup>31</sup> Further, following the technical upgradation of the coalmines in the 1920s and the introduction of new devices, many of the adivasi miners left the coalfields either because they were operating as family units and mechanised haulage made many women and children redundant or because they were unaccustomed to dynamite blasting but also because they found that their women were increasingly being subjected to molestation underground.<sup>32</sup> There was a general decline in women employment rates after the late 1920s. Women formed 37.5% of workforce in 1920, which declined to 25.4% in 1929, the year the central government ordered the gradual exclusion of females from underground work. This further declined to 13.8% in 1935 and 11.5% in 1938.<sup>33</sup> The contributory factors also included the post-depression (1931) recession in the tea industry also underwent and the decline in European demand for lac during the two world wars.

In the post-colonial period, adivasi women were being employed, though in drastically reduced numbers, largely as casual labourers or temporary wageworkers in the mines (surface work, particularly mineral extraction) or as agricultural or forest labourers but more comprehensively as *Rejas* (unskilled women labourers) in the growing construction industry. Women were/are attracted to such employments on account of ready cash, trinkets and daily outing.<sup>34</sup> A study on migrant women labourers conducted under the auspices of Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute is a useful reading in this context. The study was based on a survey in the districts of Palamau, Giridih, Ranchi and Dhanbad in the pre 1980-81 years. While the women generally migrated to nearby districts within the same state or the neighbouring states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, those from Ranchi migrated to areas as far as Assam, Gujarat, the Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Rajasthan

Orissa, and Karnataka. The study reveals that women's stay at the construction sites was nightmarish. Absence of proper accommodation and sanitary facilities, discriminatory work allotment, lengthy strenuous work hours, underpayment or irregularity in payment of the wages, restrictions on mobility (for the fear that they might join another contractor) only added to improper treatment. Many of them confessed that, at night, either the contractors, work supervisors or the *munshifs* (people who make payments) or their male counterparts would sneak inside their tents and on many occasions they had to be obliged. These women could not and did not protest for fear of losing their jobs. Further, they alone had to bear the trauma for they could not share such incidents with their men.<sup>35</sup> Over the years, there has in fact been a marked increase in incidents of rape and concubinage against women workers. For the non-*adivasis*, *adivasi* women represent an open sexuality in contradiction with their own more rigid code of sexual control and they have mistaken the freedom enjoyed by the latter in their respective social system for licence. Rape and concubinage not only constitute an attack on women's sexuality but at a different plane also establish power relations between two communities in which one dominates the other.<sup>36</sup> Economic marginalization and socio-psycho exploitation are thus interlinked one leading to or reinforcing the other and vice versa.

### Women and Cultural Transition

Economic subordination and relocation of traditional women's roles patterns; from self-supporting agricultural workers and forest-gatherers to migrant wage workers and casual labourers were accompanied by a corresponding change in women's position in social relations, property and income. The social composition of the tribal heartland, which started changing much before the establishment of the colonial rule, received a boost during the colonial period when, on account of introduction of new agrarian, industrial and capitalist relations, huge number of non-tribals started immigrating in the region. In 1872, while the total resident population of Chhotanagpur accounted for only 14% of Bihar's population, by 1951, the average density of population of the region had become

half of Bihar as a whole.<sup>37</sup> These immigrants were of various caste and religious groups (predominantly Hindus and to a lesser extent Christians<sup>38</sup>) who brought along with them new social systems, beliefs, customs and value systems. The interactions between the 'old' tribal traditions and 'new' social systems not only exposed the latent contradictions in the tribal societies but also created new structures of oppression and control. Anthropologists and sociologists study the socio-cultural changes permeating the tribal heartland under two heads; traditional and modern. The traditional processes, characterised by the impact of the neighbouring caste communities, have long been in operation and have been studied through concepts like 'Hinduisation', 'Sanskritisation', 'Tribe-Caste Continuum', 'Revitalisation', 'Bhagat Movements', etc.<sup>39</sup> Modern processes include factors like Christianity, urbanisation and industrialisation.

The industry-based urban explosion in the heart of middle India led to some kind of a 'cultural mutation' as the relatively isolated tribal communities were exposed and thrown open to the global network of urban-industrial civilisation.<sup>40</sup> Faced with the onslaught of a capitalist work regime, the tribal social structures started crumbling. While the entire adivasi population felt the pains of such a cultural mutation, women were particularly vulnerable. We have already discussed how, in the initial days of development of mines, plantations and industries in Bengal and Assam, migrant women workers were sexually harassed, abducted or even forced into prostitution and concubinage. Things hardly changed in the post-colonial Chhotanagpur. Socio-economic marginalisation and disruption of traditional patterns of livelihood brought many adivasi families to the urban-industrial centres. Anthropological studies conducted in certain industrial and construction areas provide the focal points for the study of adivasi-non-adivasi interface.

At the suggestion of The Dhebar Commission on Scheduled Tribes, a project was commissioned by the Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute to assess the impact of industrialisation on the tribes.<sup>41</sup> The study focused itself on the tribals living in and around the upcoming industrial areas like Ranchi, Noamundi and Jamshedpur. At Noamundi, near Ranchi, besides the added

problems of low wages and bad working conditions, there were also reports of operation of a secret traffic in flesh trade. Many women and men labourers working in the mines were also found suffering from venereal diseases. They would not go to the hospital for the fear of becoming publicly known in the event of which they might lose their jobs.<sup>42</sup> The evidence of prostitution at Noamundi and surrounding areas (Jhinkpani and Gua) is corroborated by other works. This was mainly due to the presence of single male workers having high disposable incomes.<sup>43</sup> At Jamshedpur, a huge influx of single male labourers in the city had disturbed the sex ratio; only 84.4% females for every 100 males. Rapid industrialisation, had in fact, upset the sex ratio of the Singbhum district as a whole. In 1911, there were 1035 females to 1000 males as against 968 women to every 1000 males in 1951. The simultaneous presence of a large number of unattached poor women labourers and single male workers having greater disposable incomes to "seek pleasures" was not found to be "helpful for the maintenance of a certain moral standard".<sup>44</sup> The links between industrialisation and prostitution could also be seen in the Bokaro region. Though prostitution among the Bauris in the Bokaro industrial region was occasioned by the presence of the British army during the wars, it developed more specifically on account of the emergence of Chas and Bokaro factories.<sup>45</sup> The male migrants did not bring their wives along because of expenditure and housing difficulties. There was a fundamental economic dimension in such sexual liaisons. The workers were decently paid and hence could afford this odious 'luxury' while the uprooted, displaced and poverty-stricken adivasi women found in this profession, an alternative source of livelihood.

Similarly, a study conducted at the post-industrialization Hatia (Ranchi)<sup>46</sup> reveals that there had been a functional change in the structure of family, which had begun to shed many of its functions; educational, religious, recreational and protective. Along with individualisation of the family, the traditional occupations and division of labour were also getting affected. Women were increasingly withdrawing from agriculture and fields and working independently in industrial units.<sup>47</sup> In many other cases however, like the Jhikpani

industrial region<sup>48</sup> of Chaibasa, in maintaining the agro-industrial economy, even the nuclear Ho family was breaking up into two households; the husband, an industrial worker living in the town with school-going sons, while the wife, with minor and unmarried daughters, staying back in the villages to take care of the agricultural operations. On many occasions, the husband had taken a second wife to manage his household in the township while his other wife was struggling with the pressures of agriculture in the countryside. In protecting the dual interests in agriculture as well as factory job, polygamy was an adoptive measure within the limits of social sanction.<sup>49</sup>

Though these studies are confined only to some industrial areas of Chhotanagpur, it can safely be stated that similar trends were observable elsewhere. Adivasi women were becoming exposed most ruthlessly to the operation of the market and other commercial forces and of unscrupulous elements that flocked into the tribal areas in the wave of exploitation of mines and establishment of industries.<sup>50</sup> With the entry of new market forces and creation of demand for new commodities triggered by the outsiders, the traditional adivasi *haats* started disintegrating or getting transformed into places of formal economic exchanges and activities. Inter-tribal *haats* traditionally had been not only places of economic transactions but, as Archer says, "the visit (to market) is important less for what the family buys than for whom it meets. Relatives mix at a market, weddings are often arranged, brides and grooms are subjected to scrutiny and occasionally boys secure new girls".<sup>51</sup> With the consequent erosion of elements of reciprocity, redistribution and cooperation, (and greater exposure to caste societies), the adivasis were heading towards the peasant/caste-stratified system. Markets were thus strengthening the role of Sanskritisation.<sup>52</sup> Withdrawal from marketing and market as a place for social interaction was very evident in the case of the Kherwars. The Kherwars had long been trying to model themselves on the lines of caste society. In fact, long and continuous contact with the caste societies resulted in many other changes in the social structure of the Kherwars: the free mixing of youth of both sexes started

disappearing and the marriages would invariably be arranged by the parents without any consideration for the consent of the girls. In most cases, the girls would be married before they reached puberty.<sup>53</sup> Pre-puberty marriages, "being followed by a large number of Hindu castes" and regarded as "more honourable" could also be seen among the Santhals and the Kurmis of the Dhanbad<sup>54</sup> and among the Manki-Munda clan in Singhbhum<sup>55</sup> and the Oraons.<sup>56</sup> Risley also gestures to the prevalence of child marriage among the Oraon:

When Colonel Dalton published his account sixteen years ago, infant marriage is said to have been entirely unknown among the tribe. A few of the wealthier men, who affect to Hindu customs have now taken to this practice and marry their daughters before they have attained puberty.<sup>57</sup>

The influence of Hinduism was more visible particularly amongst the tribes seeking to model themselves on the lines of caste societies. The earlier prevalence of different forms of marriage; marriage by exchange, capture, purchase, service, probation and by trial shows that the tribal girls and boys had enjoyed a considerable say in the choice of their life partners.<sup>58</sup> Hunter also points to the freedom of choice among the Santhals stating that as they attain "an age of discretion before they marry, a freedom of selection is allowed to them wholly unknown among the Hindus".<sup>59</sup> Writing in the first decade of the twentieth century however, Roy observes...

in earlier times, it is said, Munda young folk of both sexes had a freer hand than now in the choice of their partners in life from amongst members of marriageable *kilis* or septs. But, in modern days, the selection is ordinarily made for the boy as well as for the girl by the father or other guardian.<sup>60</sup>

Widespread use of rituals was also making its way in tribal societies as traditional marriage ceremonies were increasingly being blended with Hindu rituals. A research study in the 1950s found the prevalence of two forms of marriage in some Munda villages in Ranchi: there were two forms of marriages; *Arandi* and *Diku Arandi*. The first marriage was held in the traditional form and the



second was borrowed from the Hindus. In the '*Diku*' form, a Brahmin was called in to officiate at the marriage.<sup>61</sup> The marriage ceremonies were not only becoming ritualised but very expensive. The expenses incurred on such ritualised marriages fell on the family of the bride, which, together with dowry, were a heavy burden for the girls' father and family. It was observed that dowry was an important factor in raising the marriageable age of the girls among the Kharias and Mundas.<sup>62</sup> Bride-price was disappearing from among the agricultural tribes like the Oraons and Kharwars and being replaced by dowry.<sup>63</sup> According to the Hindu religious texts, bride-price was regarded as an 'asuric custom' (demonic custom).<sup>64</sup> Wherever bride-price survived — as among the Hos — the once 'customary payments' were swelling massively under the impact of money economy resulting in late marriages.<sup>65</sup> At times however, economic considerations also influenced late marriages. A study in Ranchi district revealed that 47.3% of the *Rejas* who remained unmarried also formed the primary earning members in their respective families. The high frequency of unmarried *Rejas* can be explained on account of parents delaying or avoiding getting their daughters married in time for the fear of losing a substantial source of income.<sup>66</sup>

Influences of caste societies could also be seen in the increasing desire for boy off-springs. Unlike Hindu Society, the birth of a daughter among the adivasis was seldom regarded as a curse, but the following Santhal prayer gives some idea of the direction of change. The birth of the daughter is placed in the same league as many other grave problems haunting the tribe.<sup>67</sup>

*May the storm snare my thatch;  
may the black not pass by my rice fields;  
let my wife not bear a daughter;  
may the usurer be eaten by wild beats*

The preference for son could however also be attributed to the fact that under the traditional systems of inheritance, only sons were entitled to inherit the land. With the disintegration of the communal mode of landholdings and the subsequent emphasis on

defined proprietary rights, the yearning for sons started gaining new grounds. In the case of some tribes, evidence also indicates the screening of women from the sight of men, other than their husbands and close relatives. The traditional uninhibited dressing of adivasi women was thus paving way to covered clothing. The *Singbhum District Gazetteer* points out:

For women, the upper garment is considered essential particularly in the presence of *Dikhus* or foreigners. The handloom *lehanga* has largely given way to mill made *sari*. One end of the *sari* covers the breasts. Formerly the lower end of the *sari* did not hang far below the knees but today it often stretches to meet the ankles in imitation of the Hindu neighbours. The Hinduised Bhumij women have gone a little further having adopted the custom of covering the head with a veil.<sup>68</sup>

The combined effects of Hinduism and Christianity in fact contributed to disintegration of institutions of women's sexual and cultural autonomy. Under the onslaught of the organised religions, both the youth dormitories (*dhumkuria* as it was called among the Oraons, or *giti ora* among the Mundas) and the *akhra* (place known for community dances) started disappearing. Roy points out:

thanks chiefly to the refining influences of education, Christianity and Hinduism, (the youth dormitory and the accompanying sexual liberty) is now on the wane. But in villages where the people have not been Hinduised or nor has the voice of Christian missionary been heard, traces of pre-marital communism may still be met with. It now longer exists, however, as a regular thing nor indeed as what has been called 'group-communism'. True, bachelors and maidens often find their way to each other's dormitories; but a Munda girl now-a-days, it is said, would preferably confine her favours to some bachelor of her own choice.<sup>69</sup>

Expressing similar views about the Oraons, he said, "except in the central parts of the Plateau, the *dhumkuria* is fast disappearing".<sup>70</sup> The dormitories, looked upon as a 'place promoting corruption among Christian boys and girls', were declared illegal

by the village council and heavy fines were imposed on the offenders.<sup>71</sup> For Hinduism, disapproval of the dormitory was part of a larger attempt to discourage pre-marital sexual relations.<sup>72</sup> The disintegration of the *akhra* was linked to the gradual disappearance of the youth dormitories. In fact, the decline of *akhra* itself reflected the decline of one of the important functions of the youth dormitory. Like *dhumkuria*, the traditional dancing ground was not just a physical space but were physical manifestations of women's socio-cultural space, a place of extended social interaction where there was an uninhibited and socially sanctified intermingling of sexes. The dancing grounds were known for greater presence of women; a place where they participated as equals in an otherwise asymmetric social order and where many of the established (exploitative) social norms would be symbolically and ritually inverted or subverted through the idiom of songs, dances and recitations of folklore. Adivasi dances in *Akhra* were abolished by the Lutheran and Anglican churches because they encouraged moral degradation leading to illicit sexual relations, while other Catholic missions allowed them under strict supervision and restrictions.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to see how religion can have mutually contradictory impacts; on one hand, the Christian missionaries were the earliest proponents of female education on other hand, they circumvented the very institutions, which formed the basis of women's cultural autonomy. Parallely, and at a more implicit level, what such instances of cultural repression also go on to show is how religion, like caste, can be used as a strategic instrument of social control and domination.

Changing situations of social existence have also had manifestations in women's access to property and resources. The development of forms of individual property in land, introduced during the colonial rule and significantly accelerated during the post-colonial period, intensified the trend towards destroying the residual land rights of women. The weakening of traditional institutions and collectivism of adivasi societies in the face of capitalist development only aided the process. Under customary tribal laws, the only females entitled to land rights were/are the widows and single

women. As outside values infiltrated the relatively closely-knit adivasis, the traditional social safeguards against the widows (particularly childless) and single women tended to break down, rendering them even more vulnerable.

Archer mentions a number of women recorded to be in possession of land in the 1906 Settlement in Santhal Parganas. The 1922 Revision Settlement Survey on the other hand, departing from the earlier principles recorded widows under two heads; those having life interest in land and those who were *khorphoshdars* for certain plots sufficient to maintain them till their deaths.<sup>74</sup> The rising value of land made the conditions of widows even more critical as they were being denied even the usufructory rights in land. The lands of widows having only daughters or baby sons were also being taken away by the male agnates through force or fraud. Similarly, unmarried daughters were increasingly being allocated only a portion of their paternal land for life maintenance, while the rest was divided equally among the brothers, irrespective of the total size.<sup>75</sup> Given the taboos against women ploughing, sowing and building roofs, they remained dependent on their male relatives both for cultivating the land and shelter. From life interest in land to right to maintenance and from that to living at the mercy of male relatives, has been the route traversed by the adivasi women. The destruction of all residual rights of women is the point where a full-fledged patriarchy is established, one that goes along with the establishment of full-fledged forms of private property.<sup>76</sup>

The desire to possess women's (especially widows') land could, at times, take violent shape. Social ostracism was a common form of violence.<sup>77</sup> Violence could also take the form of witch-hunt. Though similar incidents had been reported in the past, with the advent of Permanent Settlement regime and the consequent premium being attached to ownership of land, such 'hunts' were not entirely illogical. Taking into account the fact that under the traditional systems of land inheritance, land accrued to the male agnates of the deceased, incidents of women being labelled as witches and hounded out, occasionally even killed, were not without reason. The worst sufferers in this category however, have been

widowed women in the age group of fifty-five and above. They are physically helpless and easily fit into the conventional 'old hag' image of the witches. The clash between the residual usufructory right of women and the men's absolute right of ownership, is perhaps what is behind the transformation of witch hunting from a mere stigma or expulsion from village to a killing of women concerned.<sup>78</sup> According to a study conducted by the Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute, between January 1986 and December 1995, around 200 suspected women witches were killed in the district of West Singhbhum and that in West Singhbhum, out of 82 people killed on account of being suspected as witches, 64 were women.<sup>79</sup> The situation is quite similar in Ranchi, Palamau, and other districts.

Interactions with the caste and urban cultures over a period of time has led to the break-up of the family ties, socio-cultural displacement, unemployment, erosion in tribal collectivism with particularly disastrous consequences for women. Deterioration in position of widows, caste restrictions, increasing instances of pre-puberty marriages and dowry, infringement on sexual autonomy, decreasing choice in selection of life partners, erosion of land rights, increase in witch hunts, increase in flesh trade, receding role of markets and restriction of women's socio-cultural space are but some of the ways in which caste and religion have reshaped and redefined gender identities and social relationships in tribal societies. While simultaneously interacting with age-old traditions to produce new structures and processes of hegemonic domination, they have not only ensured perpetuation of patriarchal norms but have also added new dimensions to it. The developments on the political front either have also not been particularly encouraging. Though women had never been influential members of any political body, nor did they ever have decision-making powers, the decline of traditional political structures<sup>80</sup> has affected them in the sense that they have lost the opportunity to claim advice. They are neither in a position to move to court, since it involves heavy expenditure and there are a lot of problems. What is however important to note is that social offences (involving women) like ex-communication, elopement and other sexual offences still continue to be 'adjudicated' by the traditional panchayats.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The study area Chotanagpur is situated in the modern state of Jharkhand. It incorporates the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribag, Palamau, Singhbhum, Dhanbad and Santhal Parganas and is known as the 'Ruhr of India' on account of its mineral and industrial wealth. Some notable tribes of the region include the Mundas, Santhals, Oraon, Ho, Pahariya, Birhor and Asur. The adivasis of this region are generally patrilineal, patrinyimic, patriarchal and patrilocal and land ownership is defined in terms of descendents in the male line.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, K.S., 'Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India' in, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIII, No. 30, July 29, 1987, p. 1225.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of such traditions see Shashank S Sinha, 'Tribal Women in Twentieth Century Chhotanagpur: A Saga of Unending Woes', M Phil. Dissertation, University of Delhi, 1996, (unpublished).

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, J., *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, Government Printing Press, Patna, 1950, p.1003.

<sup>5</sup> Archer, W.G., *Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India; A Portrait of the Santals*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1974, p. 305. Also see S.C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation*, Man in India, Ranchi, 1915 (1984 reprint), pp. 135-36.

<sup>6</sup> Archer, W.G., *Tribal Laws and Justice, a Report on Santhal*, Allen and Unwin, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 128-29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> A custom whereby the Santhals restrict their women from having relations outside the tribe. A woman who has sexual relations with a non-tribal could not be readmitted into the tribe. The Santhals in fact have a very dangerous and inhuman custom of practising *Bitlaha* on persons committing social crime. "When a non-Santhal commits rape or adultery with a Santhal woman, the Santhals of the area armed with their traditional weapons of bows and arrows and axe attack and ravage, often burn house and may mercilessly beat him to death. Then they hold a community feast". P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *Dhanbad District Gazetteer*, Patna 1964, p. 153 (henceforth *Dhanbad District Gazetteer*).

<sup>9</sup> Sachchidananda, 'Social Structure, Status and Mobility patterns: The Case of Tribal Women', *Man In India*, Vol. 58, No 1, 1978, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> Archer, W.G., p.218.

<sup>11</sup> Sinha, Bipin Bihari, *Socio economic life in Chhotanagpur*; 1858–1935, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1979, pp.140–43.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, W.W., *Annals of Rural Bengal*, Indian Studies, Past and Present, Calcutta, 1883 (1965 sixth reprint), pp.124–25. In fact similar accusations were made by Mundas and Oraons during the Kol insurrection.

<sup>13</sup> Mohapatra, Prabhu Prasad, 'Coolies and Colliers: A Study of the Agrarian Context of Labour Migration from Chotanagpur, 1880–1920' in *Studies in History*, Vol.1 (2), 1985, p.259.

<sup>14</sup> The relations between planters and labourers in the tea were guided by the Act XIII of 1859 also known as the Workman's Breach of Contract Act. As per the provisions of this Act, the labourers were liable to prosecution and imprisonment for any breach of contract. Inertia, sluggishness, refusal to work, desertion etc. were thus treated as punishable offences. Invariably, therefore, labourers were punished with flogging, physical torture and even imprisonment on these counts.

<sup>15</sup> Guha, A., *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826–1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977, p.18.

<sup>16</sup> Fuller, Sir Bampfylde, *Some Personal Experiences*, London, 1930, p.117.

<sup>17</sup> Sen, Samita, 'Migration and Marriage: Labouring Women in Bengal in late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', paper presented at the International Conference on 'Gender, Society and Development', Teen Murti Bhawan, New Delhi, October 16–18, 2003 (unpublished).

<sup>18</sup> For the Bengal case study see Pranab Kumar Das Gupta, 'Tribal Women in Industrial Context' in *Tribal Women in India*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1978, pp.193–95.

<sup>19</sup> Peterson, J.C.K., *Bengal District Gazetteer: Burdwan*, Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1910, pp.134–35. The nature of women's employment is borne out by other records; H Coupland, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Manbhum*, Calcutta, 1911, p. 179; *Imperial Gazetteer of India: Provincial Series Bengal*, Vol. I, Usha Publications, New Delhi, 1909, (1984 reprint), pp.78–79.

<sup>20</sup> Banerjee, Sukumar, 'Tribal Women in Coalfield Area' in *Tribal Women in India*, Indian Anththropological Society, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 187–91.

<sup>21</sup> *The Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929–31*, Delhi, 1932, (Evidence Vol. 5, pt. 2, Oral Evidence-Bengal, 3 February, 1930, p.5E 55).

<sup>22</sup> Vidyarthi, L.P., *Socio-Economic Implications of Industrialization in India — A Case Study of Tribal Bihar*, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 1970, p.209.

<sup>23</sup> The first wake of industrialization hit Chotanagpur with the exploitation of coal mining industry in Jharia, Bokaro, Karanpura coalmines in Dhanbad district in 1856 and the installation of Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) in Jamshedpur in 1907.

<sup>24</sup> Greatest net immigration was witnessed by Dhanbad (part of former Manbhum). In Dhanbad, the attraction lay in the development of coalfields and the industries, the attraction of Singhbhum is explained by the iron mining and the rapidly growing city of Jamshedpur with its Tata Steel Works. The immigration to Palamau is the result of the colonisation in this rather thinly populated district.

<sup>25</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Madhumita, 'Demographic consequences of non-tribal incursion in Chotanagpur region during colonial period (1850–1950)', *Social Change*, September–December 1999, Vol. 29, Nos. 3 and 4, p.39–40.

<sup>26</sup> Prasad, N., *Ranchi District Gazetteer*, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1970, pp.185–237.

<sup>27</sup> Majumdar, D.N., *A Tribe in Transition*, Longman Greens and Co., Calcutta, 1937, p.136.

<sup>28</sup> Corbridge, Stuart, 'Industrial Development in Tribal India: The Case of Iron Ore Mining Industry in Singhbhum District, 1900–1960', in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.) *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, Delhi, 1982, p.48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Simeon, Dilip, 'Coal and Colonialism: An Exploratory Essay on the history of Indian Coal', *Research-in-Progress Papers, History and Society*, Third Series, No. XXXIII, NMML, May 1998, p.24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25. Contributory factors included a slump in the coal prices in the thirties and the resultant closure of several small and under-mechanised enterprises employing a large number of women. During the Second World War, labour shortages caused the government to lift the



ban in 1943 leading to the employment of some 19,000 women in pits in 1944. In 1946, the ban was re-imposed.

<sup>34</sup> Sen, Jyoti, 'Status of Women Among Tribes' in *Tribal Women in India*. Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1978, p.28.

<sup>35</sup> Ray, S.N., *Migrant Women Workers*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1982.

<sup>36</sup> Kumar, Radha, 'Will Feminist Standards Survive in Jharkhand' in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.) *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, Delhi, 1982, p.205.

<sup>37</sup> Corbridge, Stuart, 'The Ideology of Tribal Economy and Society: Politics in Jharkhand, 1950-1980', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.22, No.1, 1988, p.19.

<sup>38</sup> Many Christian missions were functional in Chotanagpur like the Lutheran Church, Roman Catholic Mission, Scottish Mission, Dublin University mission, The Methodist Church of South Asia, The United Church of North India, The American Baptist Bengal Orissa Mission, Seventh Day Adventists, etc. The various Christian missions were working hand in glove with the government; spread of Christianity and simultaneous dissemination of the colonial ideology. The initial conversions aimed at individuals and families proved to be an uphill task for the missionaries and the subsequent shift in emphasis to humanitarian services did find a fertile ground for propagation of the ideology among the poverty-stricken tribals.

<sup>39</sup> Though Sanskritisation and within that *Kshatriyaisation* continues to form the dominant mode of analysis, scholars have proposed other models as well. N.K. Bose talks about the 'Hindu Model of Tribal Absorption'. An interesting analysis however is provided by Martin Oraons who explains the phenomenon of emulation in terms of the 'Rank Concession Syndrome'. Adivasis coming in contact with caste societies not only learnt the art of cultivation but also adopted Hindu customs, traditions, beliefs, gods and goddesses, festivals and rituals and new taboos. D.D. Kosambi had talked about the Brahmanical influence to caste societies. According to him plough agriculture was an essential contribution of the Hindu agrarian society.

<sup>40</sup> Rao, V.K.R.V., 'Social Change and Tribal Society', *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. IX, No. 2, September 1966, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Prasad, Narmadeshwar and Arun Sahay, *Impact of Industrialization on Bihar Tribes, A Report*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1961.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Chaudhury, P.C. Roy, *Bihar District Gazetteer, Singbhum*, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1958, (henceforth Singbhum District Gazetteer), p.249.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.319–20. The reason for a huge percentage of unmarried adivasi *rejas* could also be explained by high incidence of bride price among the Hos of Singbhum.

<sup>45</sup> Sengupta, Nirmal, 'Three Women of Chas' in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.) *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, New Delhi, 1982, p.84.

<sup>46</sup> Hatia was known for the heavy engineering factories, particularly the Heavy Engineering Corporation.

<sup>47</sup> Vidyarthi, L.P., *Social Implication of Industrialization in Tribal Bihar*, Planning Commission, Delhi, 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Das Gupta, Pranab Kumar, *Impact of Industrialization on a Tribe in South Bihar*, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1978, p.30. The cement plant at Jhikpani was built during the Second World War and started production from 1947. The factory with its ancillary township was located in a rural setting surrounded by tribal villages. Bulk of the labour force for the factory came from the Ho tribes who were either unskilled or were having no prior experience of wage work. The study revealed that most of the tribals had some amount of land in the surrounding villages.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Singh, K.S., 'Tribal Women: An Anthropological Perspective' in J.P. Singh, N.N. Vyas and R. S. Mann (eds.) *Tribal Women in Development*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1988, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> Archer, W.G., *Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India; A Portrait of the Santals*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1974, pp.137–38.

<sup>52</sup> Hasnain, Nadeem, *Tribal India*, Palaka Prakashan, New Delhi, 1991 (2001 reprint), p.317.

<sup>53</sup> Nathan, Dev and Govind Kelkar, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests in Jharkhand*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, p.145.

<sup>54</sup> *Dhanbad District Gazetteer*, p.125.

<sup>55</sup> *Singbhum District Gazetteer*, p.247.

<sup>56</sup> Sunder, D.H.E., *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations of the Palamau Government Estate*, n.a., Calcutta, 1898.

<sup>57</sup> Risley, H.H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*, Vol. II, Firman Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1891 (1981 reprint), p.147.

<sup>58</sup> Chauhan, Abha, *Tribal Women and Social Change in India*, A.C. Brothers, New Delhi, 1990, pp.25–26.

<sup>59</sup> Hunter, W.W., *Annals of Rural Bengal*, p.111.

<sup>60</sup> Roy, S.C., *The Mundas and their Country*, Catholic Press, Calcutta, 1912, (1995 reprint), p.275.

<sup>61</sup> Sachchidananda, 'Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar', in *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Research Institute*, Vol. II, No.1, July 1960, p.54. Similarly, among the Christian Oraons, the girls' parents had to wait for the approach of the boys' parents. Some girls therefore remained unmarried even in the late twenties. Further, even though actual marriages were performed in the Church, negotiations between the prospective in-laws were completely in accordance with the traditional system of Oraon marriage. Also certain omens continued to be observed while negotiation process was on. Christianity in fact upheld many of the traditions for it condemned marriages within the same clan.

<sup>62</sup> Ivern, Father, *The Chotanagpur Survey: A Study of Socio Economic and Health Development*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1969, p.17.

<sup>63</sup> Nathan, Dev and Govind Kelkar, p.148. In modern times dowry has become common among many other tribes as well especially in the case of boys having jobs in modern sectors of government and industry.

<sup>64</sup> Talwar, V.B., 'Brahmanbad Aur Jharkhandi Sanskriti' in *Shalpatra* (Hindi monthly), No.5, 1978, p.10.

<sup>65</sup> Majumdar, D.N., *Affairs of a Tribe*, Universal Publications, Lucknow, 1950, pp.142–43.

<sup>66</sup> Sahay, Sushma Prasad, *Tribal Women Labourers: Aspects of Economic and Physical Exploitation*, Gyan Publishing House, Delhi, 1988, pp.152–53.

<sup>67</sup> Hunter, W.W., *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Indian Studies, Past and Present, Calcutta, 1883 (1965 sixth reprint), p.100.

<sup>68</sup> *Singbhum District Gazetteer*, pp.244–45.

<sup>69</sup> Roy, S.C., pp.353–54.

<sup>70</sup> Roy, S.C., *The Oraons of Chhotanagpur: Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation*, Man in India, Ranchi, 1915 (1984 reprint), p.102.

<sup>71</sup> Sahay, K.N., *Under the Shadow of the Cross*, Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Calcutta, 1976, p.482.

<sup>72</sup> Gupta, A.R., *Women in Hindu Society*, Jyotsna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1976, p.96. The concept of virginity enjoined upon the girls an

absolute prohibition of sexual relations before marriage and a girl deviating from the rule exposed herself to social contempt leading to loss of chance of marriage.

<sup>73</sup> Sachchidananda, *The Changing Munda*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1979, pp.321–22.

<sup>74</sup> Archer, W.G., pp 684–85.

<sup>75</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, 'Toiling Without Rights: Ho Women of Singhbhum' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, No.3, January 17, 1987, p.100.

<sup>76</sup> Nathan, Dev and Kelkar, Govind., p.103.

<sup>77</sup> Kishwar, Madhu, p.101.

<sup>78</sup> Nathan, Dev, 'Significance of Women's Position in Tribal Society', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 5, 1988, pp.1311–12.

<sup>79</sup> Oraon, P.C., *Janjatiya Kshetra Mein Dayan Pratha Ki Samasya Avom Samadhan*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 2000, p 11.

<sup>80</sup> The traditional panchayats disintegrated on account of many reasons; internal dissensions among the Rajas of Chhotanagpur, Maratha incursions into the region, encroachments of the alien assignors and later traders and other commercial elements who began to tried to take over the authority of the Mundas and Mankis all of which was aided by the establishment of colonial rule. The British penetration manifested itself in prolonged systematic intervention like the establishment of military collectorship (1780), Regulation XIII of 1833 (after the Kol uprising) and later with the passage of the Scheduled Districts Acts and various land tenures. With the establishment of the statutory panchayats in the tribal areas in the post-Independence period, disputes of general nature had to be brought to the court of the Panchayats, *Gram Katchery*.

## References

Archer, W.G., *Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India; A Portrait of the Santals*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1974.

Archer, W.G., *Tribal Laws and Justice, a Report on Santhal*, Allen and Unwin, New Delhi, 1984 (reprint).

Bandyopadhyay, Madhumita, 'Demographic consequences of non-tribal incursion in Chotanagpur region during colonial period (1850-1950)', *Social Change*, Vol. 29, Nos. 3 and 4, September–December 1999.

Banerjee, Sukumar, 'Tribal Women in Coalfield Area' in *Tribal Women in India*, Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1978.

Chauhan, Abha, *Tribal Women and Social Change in India*, A C Brothers, New Delhi, 1990.

Corbridge, Stuart, 'Industrial Development in Tribal India: The Case of Iron Ore Mining Industry in Singhbhum District, 1900-1960' in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.), *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, Delhi, 1982.

Corbridge, Stuart, 'The Ideology of Tribal Economy and Society: Politics in Jharkhand, 1950-1980', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1988.

Coupland, H., *Bengal District Gazetteer. Manbhum*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1911.

Das Gupta, Pranab Kumar, 'Tribal Women in Industrial Context' in *Tribal Women in India*, Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1978.

Das Gupta, Pranab Kumar, *Impact of Industrialization on a Tribe in South Bihar*, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1978.

Father Ivern, *The Chotanagpur Survey: A Study of Socio Economic and Health Development*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1969.

Fuller, Sir Bampfylde, *Some Personal Experiences*, n.a., London, 1930.

Guha, A., *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977.

Gupta, A. R., *Women in Hindu Society*, Jyotsna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1976.

Hasnain, Nadeem, *Tribal India*, Palaka Prakashan, New Delhi, 1991(2001 reprint).

Hoffman, J., *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, Government Printing Press, Patna, 1950.

Hunter, W.W., *Annals of Rural Bengal*, Indian Studies, Past and Present, Calcutta, 1883 (1965 reprint).

*Imperial Gazetteer of India: Provincial Series Bengal*, Vol. 1, Usha Publications, New Delhi, 1909.

Kishwar, Madhu, 'Toiling Without Rights: Ho Women of Singhbhum' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, No.3, January 17, 1987.

Kumar, Radha, 'Will Feminist Standards Survive in Jharkhand' in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.), *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, Delhi, 1982.

Majumdar, D.N., *A Tribe in Transition*, Longman Greens and Co., Calcutta, 1937.

Mohapatra, Prabhu Prasad, 'Coolies and Colliers: A Study of the Agrarian Context of Labour Migration from Chhotanagpur. 1880-1920' in *Studies in History*, Vol.1 (2), 1985.

Nathan, Dev and Kelkar Govind, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests in Jharkhand*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1991.

Nathan, Dev, 'Significance of Women's Position in Tribal Society', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxiii, June 5 1988.

Oraon, P.C., *Janjatiya Kshetra Mein Dayan Pratha Ki Samasya Avom Samadhan*, (Hindi), Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 2000.

Peterson, J.C.K., *Bengal District Gazetteer: Burdwan*, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1910.

Prasad, N., *Ranchi District Gazetteer*, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1970.

Prasad, Narmadeshwar and Sahay, Arun, *Impact of Industrialization on Bihar Tribes, A Report*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1961.

Prasad, Sushma Sahay, *Tribal Women Labourers: Aspects of Economic and Physical Exploitation*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988.

Rao, V.K.R.V., 'Social Change and Tribal Society', *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. IX, No. 2, September 1966.

Ray, S.N., *Migrant Women Workers*, Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1982.

Risley, H.H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*, Vol. II, Firman Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1891 (1981 reprint).

Roy Chaudhury, P.C., *Dhanbad District Gazetteer*, Secretariat Press, Patna 1964.

Roy Chaudhury, P.C., *Bihar District Gazetteer, Singhbhum*, Secretariat Press, Patna, 1958.

Roy, S.C., *The Mundas and their Country*, Catholic Press, Calcutta. 1912, (1995 reprint).

Roy, S.C., *The Oraons of Chotanagpur: Their History, Economic Life and Social Organisation*, Man in India, Ranchi, 1915 (1984 reprint).

Sachchidananda, 'Social Structure, Status and Mobility patterns: The Case of Tribal Women' *Man In India*, Vol. 58, No 1, 1978.

Sachchidananda, 'Cultural Change in Tribal Bihar', in *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Research Institute*, Vol. ii, No.1, July 1960.

Sachchidananda, *The Changing Munda*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1979.

Sahay, K.N., *Under the Shadow of the Cross*, Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Calcutta, 1976.

Sengupta, Nirmal, 'Three Women of Chas' in Nirmal Sengupta (ed.) *Fourth World Dynamics: Jharkhand*, Authors Guild Publications, New Delhi, 1982.

Sen, Jyoti, 'Status of Women Among Tribes' in *Tribal Women in India*, Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1978.

Sen, Samita, 'Migration and Marriage: Labouring Women in Bengal in late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', paper presented at the International Conference On 'Gender, Society and Development', Teen Murti Bhawan, New Delhi, October 16-18, 2003 (unpublished).

Simeon, Dilip, 'Coal and Colonialism: An Exploratory Essay on the history of Indian Coal', *Research-in-Progress Papers, History and Society*, Third Series, No. xxxiii, NMML, May 1998.

Singh, K.S., 'Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India' in, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xiii, No. 30, July 29, 1987.

Singh, K.S., 'Tribal Women: An Anthropological Perspective' in J.P. Singh, N.N. Vyas and R.S. Mann (eds.), *Tribal Women in Development*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1988.

Sinha, Bipin Bihari, *Socio economic life in Chotanagpur; 1858-1935*, B R Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1979.

Sinha, Shashank S., *Tribal Women in Twentieth Century Chotanagpur: A Saga of Unending Woes*, M Phil. Dissertation, University of Delhi, 1996, (unpublished).

Sinha, Shashank S., *Restless Mothers and Turbulent Daughters: Situating Tribes in Gender Studies*, Stree Calcutta, forthcoming.

Sunder, D H E., *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations of the Palamau Government Estate*, n.a., Calcutta, 1898.

Talwar, V.B., 'Brahmanbad Aur Jharkhandi Sanskriti' in *Shalpatra* (Hindi monthly), No.5, 1978.

*The Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929-31*, Delhi, 1932, (Evidence Vol 5, pt 2, Oral Evidence-Bengal, February 3, 1930).

Vidyarthi, L.P., *Social Implication of Industrialization in Tribal Bihar*, Planning Commission, Delhi, 1968.

Vidyarthi, L.P., *Socio-Economic Implications of Industrialization in India-A Case Study of Tribal Bihar*, Planning Commission, New Delhi, 1970.





# Migration and Marriage: Labouring Women in Bengal in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Samita Sen

**T**his paper examines various patterns of women's migration within and from northern India. The *first* section surveys forms of women's migration that did not challenge family control, but were often part of the household's strategy of flexible deployment of women's labour within the rural economy. The *second* section focuses on forms of migration in which women participated both as members of family units and as "single" migrants, as in migration to industrial and mining settlements. The *third* section briefly surveys women's recruitment for overseas indentured emigration, while the *fourth* discusses the case of women's migration to the Assam tea plantations, which evoked the most enduring images of coercive recruitment of women and provoked a debate over women's recruitment. This section discusses some cases instituted in the 1870s against recruiters on charges of kidnapping and abduction. The ensuing controversy led eventually to a legislative resolution in 1901. By a new Act, the Government of India made it illegal to recruit women — especially married women — without the consent of guardians and/or husbands. This Act signified, on the one hand, an implicit acceptance of the importance of women's labour to the family economy in the rural sector; and, on the other, an explicit endorsement of male claims on women's labour within the family. The family thus became a crucial agency in the deproletarianisation of women. Men — husbands, fathers and other 'guardians' — could now exert legal as well as extra-legal powers to deny women entry into plantations, the only nineteenth-century industry with a high demand for female workers.

In the Indian countryside, women were never just "peasants". Most women in small and marginal peasant households were engaged in a wide range of activities, including not only the actual work of cultivation or supervision but also petty commodity production, gathering and foraging, food processing, retail and even waged work.<sup>1</sup> Because the range of tasks they undertook required public appearances, *purdah* norms were negotiated in a variety of ways to allow circulation of women when household strategies so dictated. In the nineteenth century, the colonial state's revenue policy made women's labour even more critical to poor rural households. Faced with spiralling rent and revenue demands, heads of poor households passed some of the burden on to women and children. Moreover, since family labour was crucial to the state's economic calculations, state officials were committed to shoring up family authority, enhancing the power of the paterfamilias, and reinforcing female and juvenile dependency.<sup>2</sup> As it was, the state's new legal-judicial processes confirmed and entrenched male ownership of land and capital, sharpening gender inequity within households. Altogether, men were able to use their enhanced familial authority to access wage labour in new sites of capitalist production, while women and children were relegated to the less rewarding subsistence and reproductive sphere. From the 1860s, the unpaid component of women's and children's labour increased steeply, while its paid component declined.<sup>3</sup>

Marriage was the key to bringing women more firmly under familial control. In the nineteenth century, marriage was virtually universal. In 1911, only about 2 per cent of the female population above the age of fifteen and 0.8 per cent above the age of twenty were unmarried, and a significant proportion of this category comprised prostitutes who only claimed to be unmarried, believed the Census Commissioner. The "genuine spinster" was very rare in Indian society.<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth century, British policies increasingly denied women the right to escape unhappy marriages. Also, families resisted women's migration and incorporation into wage labour, preferring to deploy women's labour within the family economy and including women in family migration only when rural

resources were completely exhausted. Yet women did migrate, sometimes over long distances.

In northern India, most women were married away from the village where they were born and brought up. Thus nearly every rural woman migrated on her marriage.<sup>5</sup> A rich genre of folk songs, especially women's songs, revolves round this theme. Most north-Indian women experienced this traumatic separation first as a bride and again as a mother from daughter. The pervasive image of this final parting has obscured the circulation of married women between marital and conjugal families. The nature of such circulation varied across class, caste and region. Women returned to their natal home for their first childbirth and during annual festivals. In some cases, the circulation of married women and variations of *purdah* rules allowed a flexible deployment of women's labour. *Purdah* rules were negotiated to allow married women's work in the fields — either in the conjugal or her natal household — when the occasion demanded. When they worked at harvesting or transplanting, they were appropriately veiled to avoid elder male in-laws.<sup>6</sup> Women may also have worked in groups separate from the men and in different areas of the field. Maratha peasant women took part in agricultural operations with their faces covered.<sup>7</sup> Such negotiation of *purdah* rules extended to seasonal migration for agricultural wage labour.

Indeed, individual female migration over short distances often outstripped male migration, especially in rural-rural circulation where women figured in large numbers in casual and inter-district movements. Only some of this migration can be attributed to marriage.<sup>8</sup> Even in the early twentieth century, temporary and seasonal migration for agricultural labour accounted for a large number of immigrants in rural districts. In Saran, a district of northern Bihar, half the total immigrants were casual immigrants "and the majority of these are women", recorded the *District Gazetteer* in 1930.<sup>9</sup> Women from labouring families usually took part in such casual and seasonal migration during peak agricultural seasons, travelling alone or in groups. Such deployment of women's labour was part of the household's survival strategy and women's seasonal

migration neither revoked nor challenged family authority. Rather, a pattern of periodic migration of women became integral to the labour strategy of small and marginal peasant families. Thus the dominant values of seclusion and segregation did not preclude poor women's participation in field and other visible work, even when it involved travelling long distances.

### **Non-family Labour: Women in factories and mines**

The northern hinterland, Bihar and the United Provinces, provided labour to two urban centres from the mid-nineteenth century—Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay. Though the typical jute and cotton worker was the single male migrant, circulating between the city and the country, these industries also employed women. In Bombay and Calcutta (and surrounding mill towns), women comprised about 30 to 40 per cent of the adult population.<sup>10</sup> At the peak, one in four workers in the Bombay mills and one in five in Calcutta mills were female. Most of these women were also migrants, only a small proportion of labour being drawn from local sources. Some women migrants came as part of family units, others were single women who came to typify the female industrial worker.

The low participation of women in rural–urban migration has been variously explained. Some historians have pointed towards demand factors: adverse employment and housing conditions;<sup>11</sup> or a capitalist strategy requiring women's and children's "subsiding" function in the village.<sup>12</sup> Others have argued that women were less mobile due to cultural constraints. Men, who migrated to the city to supplement their household income, would not risk their foothold in the village by bringing their wives to the city. "Migrants did not bring their wife and family... because of traditional Indian cultural values", argues Dagmar Engels, in her study of women in Bengal. "Men from Bihar and UP said that they would lose their status in the village if they dared to bring their wives to mill areas in Calcutta".<sup>13</sup> Abdul Hakim told the Royal Commission in 1930, "People of my district do not bring family to industrial areas... if I brought my family people would laugh at me." Over decades, this statement has been widely quoted to "prove" that respectable women

did not migrate to the cities and therefore, by extension, that those who did migrate were prone to promiscuity.<sup>14</sup>

The oral evidence collected by various labour commissions points in a different direction. It appears that women who suffered impoverishment through inadequacy or loss of male earnings by desertion, barrenness or widowhood were the ones to opt for urban migration and factory work. The decline of their traditional occupations in the rural economy forced women who were denied family resources to seek employment opportunities in the city.<sup>15</sup> The same applied to women who wished to escape oppressive fathers and husbands. These are the women who figured prominently in the female workforce. Except one, all the women interviewed by the commission of 1891 were widows who held that widowhood alone drove them into millwork.<sup>16</sup> Even in the 1930s, the situation had not changed greatly.<sup>17</sup>

Women workers from the bottom of the social scale, the Muchis and the Chamars, took more readily to permanent settlements around the mills and were de-linked from their villages. "A large proportion of their women came to stay", observed R.N. Gilchrist, the Labour Officer of the Government of Bengal. Since many of these women migrated outside the family context, they were construed as aberrant. They became objects of elite derision and came to personify the breakdown of morality in the city's overcrowded tenements. The working class neighbourhoods became associated with the collapse of caste and gender hierarchies. Bengali women workers especially, were often described as prostitutes.<sup>18</sup>

Women who did migrate to the city and enter factory employment were denigrated by their very marginality. The first comprehensive statement of their situation was by Dr. Dagmar Curjel, appointed by the Government of India to investigate the possibility of applying the 1919 Maternity Benefit Convention of the International Labour Organisation. Her report was to become the most oft-quoted piece of evidence about the "non-family" character of jute mill workers. "Imported labour usually brings its womenfolk with them into jute and cotton mills but in the majority of cases are not the wives of the

men with whom they live", she wrote. "It is not possible for a women worker to live or in many cases work without male protection", she concluded, "practically all... Bengalee women found in the mills are degraded women or prostitutes".<sup>19</sup> It was from her report that the stereotype of women "who were not the wives" of the men with whom they lived was passed on to posterity. By the 1940s, such arguments, by force of repetition, had acquired great power. Radhakamal Mukherjee, author of the first major study of the "working class" in India, found that "all industrial towns show the preponderance of single male workers who have left their families behind" and argued on that basis that "a serious disparity between the proportions of sexes" was responsible "for prostitution and spread of venereal diseases".<sup>20</sup> The evidence from official documents and independent researchers suggests that it was the "single women" who could not return to their villages, and some male migrants in "entanglements with local women" who settled most readily in the mill towns.<sup>21</sup> They were more completely "proletarianised" and their "rural link" irrevocably broken.

In sharp contrast to mill labour, women workers in coalmines were considered to be part of 'family' units rather than individual workers. In the Raniganj-Jharia belt of Bengal and Bihar, which produced ninety per cent of India's total coal, and employed upward of 200,000 workers in 1921,<sup>22</sup> the high point of women's employment was reached in 1920, when they formed about 37.5 per cent of the total workforce. The bulk of labour in these areas was drawn from the immediate hinterland, involving weekend commuting or short-term circular migration.<sup>23</sup> Almost seventy per cent of the workforce came from the lowest rungs of north India's caste hierarchy classified by British colonial officers as "aboriginals" or "semi-aboriginals" (Bauris, Bhuiyans, Kurmis, Ghatwals and Turis) and the "depressed" castes (Chamars, Doms, Dosadh and Mushahars).<sup>24</sup> Women from these castes played critical roles in household production or service activities, a practice that was carried over to the mining industry.

Until the 1930s, coal procurement was undertaken in pairs and gangs with women and children included in work-groups. Men dug and cut coal, while women and children did the carrying. Their

wages were usually part of a composite gang or group wage. This labour arrangement was mistakenly regarded as a "family" mode of working. Nearly half the women migrating to coalfields were single as shown in the evidence collected by the Royal Commission of Labour (1930-31). Thirty per cent of the women working in so-called "family units" were not formally attached to the men. "Their relationship with the males in the work gang was based on carrying coal for them," writes Dagmar Engels. Some 10 per cent of the women had established informal liaisons with the men of their "family units" but on the whole 40 per cent of mining women were not in formal marital relationships and had taken the risk of migrating on their own.<sup>25</sup>

The misnomer of "family units" carried a high cost for mining women. In 1929, women were prohibited from underground work. The mining companies realized the advantage of enforcing the prohibition as the effects of the depression began to bite.<sup>26</sup> But the majority of the retrenched women were "single," and the primary breadwinner in their households, not just earning "supplementary" income as reformers had assumed. In the next round of retrenchments in 1937, sixty per cent of adult women in mining centres became unemployed.

As women's role in industries and mines became more marginal, these industries became the core of the "formal" sector in independent India. So male workers enjoyed increasing state regulation and organised themselves in federated trade unions. Having expelled self-supporting women from the workforce, an increasingly assertive and self-confident working class was able to claim and win demands for "family wage", reconstituting the working-class family on the basis of a single male breadwinner, a domesticated wife and dependent children. Such assumptions were often badly misplaced given the preponderance of widows and the difficulties of enforcing men's obligations to the "family". Nevertheless, the valorisation of the domesticated wife and mother — an ideology shared by employers, workers and officialdom — facilitated the exclusion of women and children from the "formal" sector.

## **"Liberty" or license? Women's recruitment for Overseas Plantations**

Gender relations in the plantations followed a different trajectory. For one, plantation labour was organized by contract from the very beginning and was, therefore, under intense state scrutiny and regulation throughout the colonial period. Two, women were greatly in demand in plantations for specific tasks constructed as feminine, and planters were willing to go to great lengths to recruit women, singly or as part of families. Three, women's share in the workforce endured political and economic restructuring. Unlike in industries and mines, they were not reconstituted as dependent and domesticated wives. But the plantations' attempts to recruit women from the north-Indian countryside, resettle them in new locations, and reconstitute them as wagedworkers provoked fierce resistance from many quarters. The debates over women's migration began in the 1830s with recruitment drives for indentured women workers by agents for overseas plantations, particularly for the West Indies. The issue escalated in the 1870s and 1880s, when the Assam tea plantations began their massive recruitment operations.

Export of indentured Indian workers to Australian and Caribbean colonies began in the 1830s in the wake of the abolition of slavery. Migration to the overseas colonies involved long-distance travel and long-term "indenture" for periods ranging between one and five years or longer. Nevertheless, single male migration rather than family migration became the mainstay of "coolie export". The first batch contained some 100 women to 6000 men, planters being unwilling to carry the cost of possible pregnancies and childbirth.<sup>27</sup>

Among the many criticisms levelled against the export of Indian workers, one was the plight of the family left behind by male emigrants. But the Government was not responsive to such complaints.<sup>28</sup> They were forced to consider, however, the problem of the complete absence of "family" in the male world of Indian workers in the receiving colonies. Colonial authorities in the receiving countries, concerned with "social instability", high crime rates and an epidemic of "wife-murder", gained the ear of the Home Government in Britain. Not all colonial authorities agreed that adverse



sex ratio led to more suicides and murders, but many others latched on to the 'family' as a ready solution. Sir A. Gordon, Governor of Mauritius, wrote against such assumptions showing that suicide rates bore no relationship to sex ratio.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1858 and 1860, emigration increased dramatically with 51,247 workers sailing from Calcutta.<sup>30</sup> In 1868, after several abortive policy initiatives, the Government of India statutorily fixed a minimum of 40 women to every 100 men (except to Mauritius which was allowed 33 women for every 100 men) per shipment.<sup>31</sup> There was immediate effect. By the 1870s, the proportions had evened out. In the 1876, the proportion of females to males among emigrants to Mauritius was 39 per cent. This was a considerable increase over the proportion the year before and was achieved because the Indian Government put pressure on the Emigration Agent at Calcutta to adjust the deficiencies in the number of women the previous year.<sup>32</sup>

But the British Government continued to press for creating settled communities of Indian workmen through "family" migration.<sup>33</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Caribbean planters too began to exhibit more interest in women immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Neither legislation nor incentives, however, brought forth the desired quantities of women migrants. Soon after introducing the system, the Government of Bengal was forced to open a special file entitled "Short Shipment of Females" permitting agents to dodge the quota. The shortage in one shipment was supposed to be met in the next, but disparity mounted.<sup>35</sup> Enquiries revealed that, "this proportion [of women] could not be readily obtained except at the expense of serious abuses".<sup>36</sup>

The government appointed Major Pitcher and Mr. Grierson to enquire into the question of women's recruitment. Against the tenor of official opinion, they suggested "that the system of enquiry through the police after missing relatives should be stopped; the single women should be either detained at the depot for week or ten days, or the enquiry should be made through the Civil Executive Agency".<sup>37</sup> Their sympathy lay with women emigrants rather than with the

families making the enquiries. They were not convinced that "kidnapping" was a serious problem since women were recruited not against their own will but against that of their families. They argued, therefore, that the only way to facilitate emigration of "respectable" women was to "generally concede women more liberty of independent action than is allowed them at present".<sup>38</sup> In this, Pitcher and Grierson represented a minority opinion. While they and the Emigration Agents sought to uphold the woman's right to sell her labour and enter emigration contracts, most local officials were alarmed by the threat such women's migration posed to family authority.<sup>39</sup> These controversies, initiated by Emigration Agents, reached formidable proportions by the 1870s, exacerbated by large-scale recruitment of women for Assam.

### **Abduction or Elopement: recruiting women for Assam tea plantations**

Tea planting in Assam took off in the late 1850s. From the beginning, labour was a major bottleneck, given the low population density in the area. Planters became dependent on imported workers, which was expensive but proffered long-term gains. The Government responded to the tea planters' demands with the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act (XIII) of 1859, which provided for penal contracts and a draconian labour regime.<sup>40</sup> The system worked. By the 1870s, there were some 900 gardens and 500,000 workers.<sup>41</sup>

To "settle" labour, planters encouraged family migration and recruited from communities where such migration was more established, notably the *adivasis*<sup>42</sup> of south Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and the Central Provinces. But there were also a high incidence of single male and female migrants. To encourage procreation, "single" migrants, both men and women, were forced into the infamous "depot marriages." Planters adopted a pro-natal policy, providing basic maternity benefits and special bonuses for live childbirths. Planters were doubly interested in women and children since they could be engaged for the highly intensive task of plucking leaves. Such use of cheap female and child labour grew to be crucial to the industry.

There was, therefore, a high demand for women migrants in the Assam tea industry. It was not easy to meet this demand. The task of recruiting women fell upon professional contractors, who emerged in response to the premium that planters paid for labour, which rose to between Rs.120 and Rs.150 per worker, an extraordinarily high amount in the late nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The high levels of profit encouraged irregularities, fraud and deception and, eventually, criminalisation.

In the case of women's recruitment, however, fraud and coercion were not the only issues. Assam employment offered long-term migration, even permanent relocation, which, in the case of married women and men, involved either "family" migration or dissolution of the marital unit. The overwhelming majority of women of migration age were already married. Family survival strategies did not, indeed could not, include married women's migration to Assam for an indefinite period. Women's migration to Assam, except as part of a family unit, posed an intractable problem from the very beginning. When married women went to Assam on their own or with their children, they did so in defiance of family authority, either without the knowledge of the husbands (and the conjugal family) or in the teeth of their opposition. Recruiting agents targeted dissatisfied women, including married women, and offered them an escape from oppressive family situations. Male heads of households were alarmed at the ease with which women could disappear in Assam, abrogating their families' claims on them.

The demand to protect the family economy by curtailing opportunities of women's mobility struck a sympathetic chord with the local governments, especially in Chhotnagpur, a major recruiting district. Not only were their own immediate revenue interests at stake, they also faced pressure from local land-owning elites to contain the depredation on their labour reserves and the unsettling of small and marginal peasant families. Moreover, competitors for labour in the region, primarily the North Bengal tea planters and the coal industry, attacked the special privileges enjoyed by Assam recruiters.

In the 1860s and early 1870s, the Government of Bengal faced with the problem of high mortality during the journey to Assam, gave some credence to the representations of Chhotnagpur officials. Greater surveillance of recruitment and transportation of workers was introduced in the Transport of Native Labourers Act of 1863. In the next decade, three legislative initiatives were taken in 1868, 1870s and 1873 to widen the regulative framework. In 1874, however, Government of Bengal lost jurisdiction when Assam was reconstituted as a Chief Commissioner's province. The tea planters, the chief commercial lobby in the new province, were now better able to influence policy. Till the end of the nineteenth century, the Government of India was pulled between the tea planters who demanded the abolition of all restraint on recruitment, and the district government of Chhotnagpur, with occasional backing of the provincial government of Bengal, demanding restrictions on women's recruitment. The tea lobby argued, like Grierson and Pitcher, that women, even married women, had to be allowed greater freedom in migration decisions. Women did not have to be abducted or kidnapped; they argued, they were eager to escape oppressive familial and social situations. Plantation work was depicted as an opportunity for "free" wage earning. Their opponents relied on a double argument. First, they questioned women's "freedom" to escape the family, drawing poignant portraits of abandoned homesteads and neglected children. Second, they underlined the sexual anarchy involved in women's repudiation of marriage, the vulnerability of women who undertook migration without the protection of husbands or male guardians. The issue of the family's prior claim to women's labour and sexuality lay behind these debates. Between 1880 and 1900 the tea lobby prevailed, but growing opposition to "free" recruitment, led in 1901 to a new regulatory regime with more stringent restrictions on women's recruitment.<sup>44</sup>

By the early 1870s, "kidnapping in Chhotnagpur" emerged as a major issue. In 1872 there were seven lawsuits in Manbhum in Chhotnagpur alleging illegal recruitment of minors. Three of these cases were registered against Juggo Mahto, a coolie recruiter, on 11 June 1872. Madhub Gorain charged him at Roghoonathpore

station, with kidnapping his son aged 12 or 13 years, with the intention of selling him as a coolie. On the same day, Chooni Baurine charged the same recruiter and a woman named Soroda Mahatin with kidnapping her daughter aged 13 years. Meetun Napit charged the same recruiter with kidnapping his son aged 11 years. These cases were tried by Captain Garbett, the Assistant Commissioner, who found that "though there had undoubtedly been great deceit practiced by the accused to induce the young people... the offence of kidnapping had not been established" in any of the cases, since the young people involved were aged respectively 18, 17 and 16. The record does not provide the names of the three who were allegedly 'kidnapped', but they appeared in person before Garbett and were examined. The test of their age was taken to be the 'Mutiny'. Madhub Gorain stated that his son was two or three years' old at the time of the 'Mutiny'; Meetun Napit stated that his son was at the breast at that time, and Choonee Bowrine stated that her daughter was a year older than Meetu Napit's son. On this basis Garbett concluded that the three were all above the age of 16. "In these three cases therefore the charge of kidnapping was manifestly unsustainable", wrote Colonel J.S. Davies, the Judicial Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore.<sup>45</sup>

In a fourth case, the accused was never brought to trial. Komal Mochi charged Gora Mochi, at Chirkunda, on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, with kidnapping his son aged 12 years in order to send him as a coolie to Assam. The case broke down as the boy was over the prescribed age. The police reported that the case was an entirely false one and the son not less than 17 or 18 years of age.<sup>46</sup>

Two other cases were not so clear-cut. On 23 March, Pershad Bhukut charged Giridhari Bhooyan with kidnapping his adopted daughter aged 11 or 12 years, with the intention of employing her as a prostitute. The Sub-Inspector of Gobindpore arrested and sent up the defendant, but he was released as it was proved that the girl left her adopted father of her own accord because her 'mistress' had beaten her. Almost all superior officers disagreed with the manner of this disposal. The Inspector General of Police dubbed the decision "contrary to law and morality".<sup>47</sup> The Judicial Commissioner, asked

to review the case, felt that there had been "a palpable failure of justice". The facts of the case had been established: the girl was aged 11 or 12; she was an orphan; her adoption was 'proved by her uncle'; and she had been enticed away by the accused, who promised to keep her. The grounds that the girl had 'left of her own accord' because 'her mistress had beaten her', on which the Assistant Commissioner of Govindpore discharged the accused, was not allowed in penal law. Quoting the Morgan and Macpherson's edition of the penal code, Davies held that "an adopted child would, after adoption, be deemed to be in the keeping of its adopted, and not of its natural, parents".<sup>48</sup>

On 20 August 1872, Shaikh Panchoo charged Nabin Mochi at the Jhalda Station, with kidnapping his wife. Nobin was sent up by the police, but was discharged by the Magistrate without a trial. There was in fact "no order in English, merely a vernacular one" to the effect that there was no case. The reason offered by the Magistrate was that the woman was in the first place 20 or 22 years of age, and in the second place "was not the wife even by Nika marriage, of the plaintiff".<sup>49</sup>

Only in one case the conviction obtained. A recruiter inveigled away a *dhobi's* nephew with the intention of sending him off to Cachar as a coolie, but he was followed by his uncle and the boy recovered. The recruiter arrested by the police was sentenced by the Deputy Commissioner to four years' rigorous imprisonment.<sup>50</sup>

Most of the cases hinged on determining the age of the recruits and this was a notoriously difficult problem. Colonel Pughe, the Inspector General of Police, expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the above cases. "It is not stated", he wrote, "how the actual age of the young people had been ascertained" and indeed "it is difficult to suppose" he argues "that girls whom the parents declare to be only 12 or 13 years of age can be over 16". Moreover, he argued, "at 14 or 15 most native girls are fully formed and it would be difficult to prove from appearance what the exact age might be between 14 and 18". Clearly, in cases where age could not be established with absolute certainty, magistrates were unwilling to convict for kidnapping. But, argued Pughe, it was certainly within

their powers to refuse registration, a course of action he recommended.<sup>51</sup>

The other issue was the precise meaning and definition of "kidnapping". Here the discussion moved beyond the purely practical. In the case of young women, was age to be the only criterion? The officials were almost unanimous in agreeing that the emigration of married women, adult or minor, without the husband's consent was unacceptable, and ought to be illegal. Pughe, the Inspector General, reporting the outcome of the cases set the tone of the argument. "It appears to me," he wrote, "that the deportation of wives against the will of their husbands should be absolutely prohibited." But on what grounds? In most cases, kidnapping could not be established. However, the "Magistrates would be justified in refusing to pass any woman so situated who is brought before him for registration".<sup>52</sup> The Deputy Commissioner reviewing the cases agreed with Pughe. Most cases reported were not of kidnapping 'according to law'. But, he argued, "something very similar to it [is] going on which is causing great hardship and distress in many families".<sup>53</sup>

I allude to the frequent practice of coolly recruiters inveigling away married women from their husbands and children which latter are in some cases of such tender age as to be exposed to great risk of dying from being deprived of their mother's milk and care. The inducements held out at the time, are presents of ornaments and clothes and the glowing accounts the recruiters give of the ease and luxury the women will enjoy in the tea districts, which contrasted by them with the hard fare and work to be done at home, often succeeds in inducing them to leave their families.<sup>54</sup>

The Judicial Commissioner, Davies, agreed that the legal definition of kidnapping did not quite cover the situation on the ground. "Magistrates," he wrote, "should be prohibited from registering as coolies wives who have husbands living without first obtaining the sanction of the husbands". On what grounds, however, could adult women be denied registration? All officers agreed that the existing provisions were inadequate to deal with such cases, even though

the registering officer had some discretionary powers. Most magistrates were inclined towards the path of least resistance. "As the law now stands" notes Davies, "it is not a penal offence for a coolie recruiter to entice away a married woman over 16 years of age, merely to send her as a coolie to the tea districts".<sup>55</sup> The Deputy Commissioner realized that the chief difficulty lay in young men's and women's willingness to accompany recruiters, making charges of kidnapping highly problematic. "[T]he women being recruited ostensibly to emigrate as coolies, and being willing to go, the law does not warrant the interference of the Magistrate to prevent them".<sup>56</sup>

The Indian Penal Code had framed the offence of "enticement" specifically within the context of a growing trade in prostitution and defined the offence as "inveigling away" a married woman for "immoral purposes". Some officers felt that recruiters could be automatically charged with "enticement" in case of married women. "The result of such emigration", the Deputy Commissioner argued, "is, that the women thus leaving their husbands, go into keeping with other men; and the act of enlistment, though not illegal at the time, eventually becomes tantamount to inducing a married woman to leave her husband for an immoral purpose, which the recruiter knows full well will be the result".<sup>57</sup>

The Judicial Commissioner, Davies, refused to accept this interpretation. "It would", he insisted, "be too great a stretch of the law" to convict recruiters under section 366, Indian Penal Code, "as the recruiter could hardly be supposed to know that a wife was likely to be seduced to illicit intercourse, though there would be every probability of such a result if she went without her husband." According to him, the commentators on the Penal Code had laid down that "abduction is made an offence only when it is committed with certain aggravating circumstances" and "to induce a person by deceitful means to go from any place, is ordinarily not an offence, but only a subject for a civil action".<sup>58</sup> If recruiters were to be charged with "enticement", emigration to Assam would have to be established as an "immoral purpose". Most officers agreed that so



it was for most married women, but it was impossible to establish this legally.

In Chhotnagpur, revenue and judicial officials agreed that a new law or regulation was needed to prevent married women from migrating to Assam under contract. "To protect husbands from the wiles of the coolie recruiter", the Judicial Commissioner urged, "there should be some such order... regarding the recruitment of married women".<sup>59</sup> The easiest solution within the framework of the Act of 1873, the Deputy Commissioner suggested, would be to insert a clause "in the recruiters' licenses, prohibiting their enlisting married women without the consent of their husbands".<sup>60</sup>

The cases in Chhotnagpur were neither the only ones nor the first. In 1871, a few cases in Midnapore had attracted the notice of the Government of Bengal. On 14 February 1871, Madhoo Kherya and three others complained to the Assistant Superintendent of Police that their sons and daughters had been enticed away from their homes by coolie recruiters and kept in confinement in a depot. An inquiry was immediately held and two recruiters were sent to trial the very next day charged with the kidnapping of two girls, Ujjala and Ahalya. The Deputy Magistrate of Midnapore, Jadunath Bose, examined nine witnesses including Dr. Matthew, the Civil Surgeon and the Sub-Inspector who undertook the inquiry. The Civil Surgeon believed that one of the girls was about 16 or 17 years, and the other 15 or 16 years old, but the Deputy Magistrate found sufficient evidence to prove that the girls were induced by deceitful means, and by vague promises of a comfortable life, to leave their husbands and homes. He held that the intention of the coolie recruiters was to abet the seduction of the girls. He argued that one of the recruiters, Nobin Singh, had that intention since "sending them, under the circumstances, to a distant and inaccessible country without their husbands, could not have been done but with the knowledge that it was likely that the girls would be forced or seduced to illicit intercourse". He therefore, committed Nobin to the sessions for enticement. As the girls were not detained against their will, the Magistrate did not charge Nobin for kidnapping. The Sessions Judge released Nobin on the ground that such "special intention (i.e. to

force or lead to illicit intercourse)" was "very far-fetched". The judge was unsure whether the case could be admitted as abduction under section 362, but ruled out kidnapping since there was some doubt as to the ages of the girls.<sup>61</sup>

In 1871, there were 10 cases in the Burdwan Division "mostly" of "recruiters enticing female coolies for sending them in Assam and Cachar". Of these, seven were abductions of women of under sixteen years. Three of these were dismissed for lack of evidence and the rest were settled out of court. In one case the recruiter was committed to the sessions, but acquitted. There were three cases of abductions of men but all of them failed for lack of proof. On the whole, concluded the Commissioner of Burdwan, "crime of abduction or kidnapping did not exist in this district in any other shape except in connection with the coolly recruiters".<sup>62</sup>

Faced with spiraling incidence of such "abductions and kidnapping", the Government of Bengal was inclined to agree with the Commissioners of Chotnagpur. The Lieutenant Governor suggested, "it should be made penal to recruit a married woman without the consent of her husband or an infant without the consent of the father, if the husband or the father is alive".<sup>63</sup>

Yet when a new Act was finally framed in 1882, these recommendations were rejected due to the protests of the tea lobby. Instead, the new act introduced "free" emigration, which meant migrants no longer had to register. Sir John Edgar underscored the chief drawbacks of "free" emigration: "opportunities have been given to married woman to elope from their husbands without leaving to the latter any reasonable hope of being able to trace them".<sup>64</sup> The Commissioner of the Chotnagpur Division, C.C. Stevens, agreed that "abuses that could not be prevented in the case of supervised emigration are more likely to occur" when there was no control or check. Recruiters worked for profit and were not averse to "decoying away ignorant and helpless women and children".<sup>65</sup>

Local officers agreed that the issue was not merely one of protecting recruits from being "cajoled", "enticed", "abducted" or "kidnapped" by professional contractors, but, more importantly,

upholding the claims of the family objecting to such recruitment. The professional recruiters' crime was not merely against the women and children they recruited but "against marriage" (the husband) or against the parents/guardians. Kaye, the Assistant Superintendent of Police (1884) cautioned, for example, that if "young people desire to leave home without or against the consent of their parents and guardians, they will find means to do so". But, he pointed out, "so-called "free emigration"... was a system of unlicensed recruiting exempt from all supervision" which "immensely facilitates" desertion by women and children.<sup>66</sup> As Edgar had argued from the very beginning, the absence of registration (and, therefore, records) gave "married women" the opportunity "to elope from their husbands".

The Commissioner too was disturbed by the ease with which young women (and sometimes men) could disappear in the gardens of Assam.<sup>67</sup> As Kaye had noted, young people found ways of getting away when they wanted. But the consequences for young women were often quite drastic. Bimola Kanduni of Jholda (married and 11 years) was persuaded into her house by an unlicensed female recruiter, drugged, and carried off towards Raniganj. A few days later, her family recovered her. The sequel was, nevertheless, tragic. The female kidnapper was a prostitute, and since the girl had remained a day and a night in her house, and had subsequently gone off in her company, she was outcasted by her family, and, "will probably end by becoming a prostitute herself".<sup>68</sup>

In the end, the Government of India was forced to agree that in the case of minors and women, "own free will" to migrate could not be admitted. In the hunting-ground of Assam recruiters, women were subject to family authority, their labour was owned by the family to be deployed for household subsistence. In general, the colonial state facilitated this process. The pressure of tea interests had to be denied in larger interests of revenue and stability. Sir John Edgar, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, initiated a searching enquiry into criminal cases involving emigrants, especially women and minors, in all the recruiting districts of Bengal to impress upon the Imperial government the urgent need to protect the family

"from the wiles of the cooly recruiter".<sup>69</sup> A new law or regulation was the result.

The 1901 Assam Labour and Emigration Act reduced the scope for "free" emigration introduced in 1882. The Act included a section dealing separately with women's emigration. In 1873, Inspector General of Police, Colonel Pughe, had urged restrictions on women's recruitment for Assam on the grounds that, '[a] married woman may be said to have entered into a contract with her husband which precludes her from engaging in services to another party for a term of years without his consent'.<sup>70</sup> It took the Government of India nearly three decades to accept this proposition but in the end Pughe's words were inserted into the preamble of the Act.<sup>71</sup> Several clauses were included in the Act to prevent the recruitment of women without the consent of husbands and guardians. The issue of voluntary migration of a married woman was settled against her.

Despite familial command over women's labour, husbands and fathers did not always control women's movements. Single, married and widowed women journeyed to mines and plantations overseas and in India without the express consent of the men who reputedly controlled them. Conflict arose in the 1860s when overseas and tea plantation employers, driven by state policy and by the productive and reproductive uses of female labour, directed their elaborate and expensive recruitment machinery towards the enlistment of women. Their aggressive campaigns included the whole range from seduction to abduction, provoking resistance from different quarters. Local elites, endorsing familial claims on women, persuaded local governments to take on two powerful interest groups, the agents of overseas plantations and the Assam tea planters. The ensuing controversy highlighted the contesting claims on women's labour, couched in the language of women's right to "consent" to labor contracts vis a vis the sanctity of marriage and family authority. Women's own motivations in consenting to migration may never be known, as fraud and misrepresentation must undoubtedly have played a part in persuading them to risk hazardous journeys to and back-breaking labour in the plantations. But there can be no doubt that narrowing economic opportunities in the countryside and the

closing of escape routes from oppressive marriages had reduced their options drastically. The opportunity for plantation work might, in these circumstances, have been a new, perhaps the only avenue of escaping from oppressive families or exercising alternative economic and sexual choices.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Government of India supported the tea lobby and promoted "free migration". In the end, however, the government could not ignore the combination of interests ranged against women's migration. The Act of 1901 sought to re-establish regulation of plantation migration and in particular women's recruitment. Women's consent was deferred to the family. Legislation was not always an effective deterrent. Nevertheless, an important principle had been put in place. In law, marriage was to be deemed a contract, which precluded women's entering into any contract for labor without the consent of husbands or male guardians.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more details of the nature and range of activities of women left behind in the villages, see Ranajit Dasgupta, "Migrant Workers, Rural Connections and Capitalism: The Calcutta Jute Industrial Labour, 1890s to 1940s", Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, Working Paper Series, April 1987, Mimeograph; and Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India. The Bengal Jute Industry, 1890-1940* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, Ch-2.

<sup>2</sup> Sangari, Kumkum, and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.) *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi: 1989, especially the Introduction. Also Michael Anderson, "Work Construed: Ideological Origins of Labour Law in British India to 1918" in Peter Robb (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New Delhi, 1993, pp. 87-120.

<sup>3</sup> Bose, Suagata, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital. Rural Bengal Since 1770*, New Cambridge History of India, III-2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 66-111.

<sup>4</sup> *Census of India*, 1911, Bengal, p.342.

<sup>5</sup> *Social and Economic Status of Women Workers in India*, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>7</sup> O'Hanlon, Rosalind, *For the Honour of my Sister Countrywomen: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Singh, A. Menefee, "Rural-to-Urban Migration of Women in India: Patterns and Implications" in *Women in the Cities of Asia: Migration and Urban Adaptation*, J.T. Fawcett *et. al.*, (eds.), Boulder, Colorado, Westview, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Middleton, A. P. *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer*, Saran (Patna, 1930), p.32.

<sup>10</sup> *Census of India*, 1921, pp.5, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Banerjee, Nirmala, "Working Women in Colonial Bengal: Modernization and Marginalization" in *Recasting Women*, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989, pp.269-301.

<sup>12</sup> Dasgupta, Ranajit, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Engels, D.A.E., *Beyond Purdah? Women In Bengal, 1890-1939*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p.209.

<sup>14</sup> Report of Dr. Dagmar Curjel on the conditions of employment of women before and after childbirth, 1923, unpublished. West Bengal State Archives [henceforth WBSA], Calcutta, Commerce Department, Commerce Branch, April 1923, B77 [henceforth Curjel Report], Main Report.

<sup>15</sup> Banerjee, Nirmala, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Indian Factory Commission*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1891.

<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission of Labour in India*, Government of India, London, 1931, pp.5, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Broughton, G.M., *Labour in Indian Industries*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1924.

<sup>19</sup> Curjel Report, Main Report, pp.1-2

<sup>20</sup> Mukherjee, Radhakamal, *Indian Working Class*, Hind Kitab, Bombay, 1945, pp.261-262.

<sup>21</sup> Curjel Report, Main Report.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* See also Nirmala Banerjee, p.275.

<sup>23</sup> Engels, D.A.E., *Beyond Purdah?*, p.209.

<sup>24</sup> *Census of India*, 1921, pp.7, 1, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Engels, D.A.E., p.211.

<sup>26</sup> Simeon, Dilip, *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism. Workers, Unions and the State in Chota Nagpur, 1928-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1995, p.24.

<sup>27</sup> Tinker, Hugh, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1974, Rhoda Reddock, 'Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20:43, 1985,

<sup>28</sup> McFarlen, D., *Memoranda of 48 Examinations of Mauritian Labourers returned to Bengal in the "Graham"*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1841.

<sup>29</sup> WBSA General, Emigration, April 1872, A 118.

<sup>30</sup> Tinker, Hugh, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1974, 100: for additional detail on trends see p.273.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>32</sup> WBSA, General Emigration, A135. 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Protector of Emigrants at Mauritius for 1876.

<sup>33</sup> Lord Salisbury to Governor-General of India in Council, 24 March 1875; *Report of the Indian Jute Manufacturers Association*, Calcutta, 1899.

<sup>34</sup> Reddock, Rhoda, 'Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1985, 20:43. Also see Madhavi Kale, '"Capital Spectacles in British Frames": Capital, Empire and Indian Indentured Migration to the British Caribbean', *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996) [special supplement, "Peripheral" Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianisation].

<sup>35</sup> *Report on the Emigration from the Port of Calcutta to British and Foreign Colonies, 1875-1880*.

<sup>36</sup> Bihar State Archives, General Department, Emigration Branch. May 1885, pp. 6-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> This section draws on a previously published article, Samita Sen, "Unsettling the Household: Act VI (of 1901) and the regulation of women migrants in colonial Bengal", *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996) [special supplement, "Peripheral" Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianisation].

<sup>40</sup> The following section draws heavily on two previously published papers. Samita Sen, "Questions of Consent: Women's recruitment for Assam Tea Gardens, 1859-1900", *Studies in History*, 18:2 (2002); and "Offences Against Marriage: Negotiating Custom in Colonial Bengal" in *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, Janaki Nair and Mary John, (eds.), Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> *The Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1906 [henceforth *Assam Report*, 1906].

<sup>42</sup> The literal meaning is original inhabitants. The British referred to them as 'aboriginals' or 'tribals'. In the Indian Constitutions most of these communities are included under the category 'Scheduled Tribes'. The term adivasi emerged out of self-assertion movements.

<sup>43</sup> *Assam Report*, 1906.

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Samita Sen.

<sup>45</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Statement of cases from Annual Police Report of Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore for the year 1872, Mannbhoom District. Opinion of the Judicial Commissioner in letter from Colonel J.S. Davies, Judicial Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore to the Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore, No. 132, July 26, 1873.

<sup>46</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Annual Police Report of Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore for the year 1872, Mannbhoom District.

<sup>47</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.6268, August 20, 1873.

<sup>48</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.S. Davies, Judicial Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore to the Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore, No. 132, July 26, 1873.

<sup>49</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Annual Police Report of Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore for the year 1872, Mannbhoom District.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>51</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.6268, August 20, 1873.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.S. Davies, Judicial Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore to the Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore, No. 132, July 26, 1873

<sup>56</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.6268, August 20, 1873.

<sup>57</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.6268, August 20, 1873.

<sup>58</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.S. Davies, Judicial Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore to the Commissioner of Chhota Nagpore, No. 132, July 26, 1873

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.6268, August 20, 1873.

<sup>61</sup> WBSA, Judicial Department, March 1873, A132-134. Letter from C.T. Buckland, Esq., Commissioner of the Burdwan Division to the Offg. Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No. 27, January 17, 1873.

<sup>62</sup> WBSA, Judicial Department, March 1873, A132-134. Letter from C.T. Buckland, Esq., Commissioner of the Burdwan Division to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.93, March 5, 1873.

<sup>63</sup> WBSA, Judicial Police, August 1873, A95-98. Letter from A. Mackenzie, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Legislative Department, No.3980, August 29, 1873.

<sup>64</sup> Sir John Edgar as Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal had put together a collection of papers on Assam tea in 1873. By 1882 he had become the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Sir Edgar's Report to the Government, No. 479 Cr., 3 November 1882. WBSA, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, August 1893, A65-66, paragraph 7.

<sup>65</sup> From C.C. Stevens, Commissioner of the Chota Nagpur Division to the Chief Secretary to the GOB, 28 February 1888. WBSA, Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, August 1893, A65-66.

<sup>66</sup> WBSA Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, August 1893, A65-66.

<sup>67</sup> From C.C. Stevens, Commissioner of the Chhota Nagpur Division to the Chief Secretary to the GOB, February 28, 1888. WBSA Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, August 1893, A65-66.

<sup>68</sup> WBSA Judicial Department, Judicial Branch, August 1893, A65-66.

<sup>69</sup> Sir John Edgar, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of the Patna Division, November 30, 1889.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> WBSA General Department, Emigration Branch, July 1904, A6-15.

## References

Anderson, Michael, "Work Construed: Ideological Origins of Labour Law in British India to 1918" in *Dalit Movements and the Meaning of Labour in India*, Peter Robb, (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford and New Delhi, 1993, pp. 87-120.

Banerjee, Nirmala. "Working Women in Colonial Bengal: Modernization and Marginalisation" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 269-301.

Bose, Sugata, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital. Rural Bengal Since 1770*, New Cambridge History of India, III-2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

Broughton, G.M., *Labour in Indian Industries*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1924.

Dasgupta, Ranajit, "Migrant Workers, Rural Connections and Capitalism: The Calcutta Jute Industrial Labour, 1890s to 1940s", Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, Working Paper Series, April 1987, Mimeograph.

Engels, D.A.E., *Beyond Purdah? Women In Bengal, 1890-1939*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

*Indian Factory Commission*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1891.

Kale, Madhavi, "'Capital Spectacles in British Frames': Capital, Empire and Indian Indentured Migration to the British Caribbean,' *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996) [special supplement, "Peripheral" Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianisation'].

McFarlen, D., *Memoranda of 48 Examinations of Mauritius Labourers returned to Bengal in the "Graham"*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1841.

Middleton, A. P., *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer*, Saran, Patna, 1930.

Mukherjee, Radhakamal, *Indian Working Class*, Hind Kitab, Bombay, 1945.

O'Hanlon, Rosalind, *For the Honour of my Sister Countrywomen: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

Reddock, Rhoda, 'Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20:43, 1985.

*Report of the Royal Commission of Labour in India*, Government of India, London, 1931, 5, 2.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

Sen, Samita, "Offences Against Marriage: Negotiating Custom in Colonial Bengal", in *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, Janaki Nair and Mary John, (eds.), Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999.

Sen, Samita, "Questions of Consent: Women's recruitment for Assam Tea Gardens, 1859-1900", *Studies in History*, 18:2, 2002.

Sen, Samita, "Unsettling the Household: Act VI (of 1901) and the regulation of women migrants in colonial Bengal", *International Review of Social History* 41, 1996 [special supplement, "Peripheral" Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianisation'].

Sen, Samita, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India. The Bengal Jute Industry, 1890-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

Simeon, Dilip, *The Politics of Labour Under Late Colonialism. Workers, Unions and the State in Chhota Nagpur, 1928-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1995.

Singh, A. Menefee Singh, "Rural-to-Urban Migration of Women in India: Patterns and Implications", in *Women in the Cities of Asia: Migration and Urban Adaptation*, J.T. Fawcett *et.al.*, (eds.), Westview, Boulder, Colorado, 1984.

*Social and Economic Status of Women Workers in India*, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 1953.

*The Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1906.

Tinker, Hugh, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1974.

# Women and the Workplace

Shobhana Warrier

**T**he making of modern industry brought with it new practices, new attitudes and questions about traditional norms and mores, for all participants in the enterprise — the worker, the manager, the owner and the state. This paper focuses on the culture as also the values that came up with the emergence of the new form of the workplace — the factory, in context of the textile mills of Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore in colonial South India. There are instances where prevalent cultural practices were reinforced and given further life to, for example, the demand by the union that the woman worker be given three days leave a month during the period of menstruation. Simultaneously, there are markers of break from tradition, such as women having to report to work at the factory as per the norms laid out by the industry, regardless of the time needed for her traditional domestic work. We look at the new configurations of values and practices emerging from such interplay of modernity and tradition in the locus of nascent industrialisation.

Women constituted a fair share of the working population in the cotton textile industry of colonial South India. Their needs were therefore crucial both to the workers' movement and the state institutional apparatus that made policies pertaining to labour. We explore the conditions at the workplace for women and the relations they establish there with the different elements of the factory system. The gendering of work lives and their consequences for women in re-organising their roles constitute yet another area of discussion. This we take up, by examining the various factors that helped

construct men's and women's identities — wages, the conditions of work and welfare legislation, especially that relating to maternity benefit.

In the inter-war period of mill expansion, women found easy access to work, mill managements having to woo people to become factory hands.<sup>1</sup> Women imbibed the work ethics and discipline of the mills and got used to the scheduling of their lives by the mill siren that signalled the time to go to work, the time for recess as also the conclusion of work hours for the day. The centrality of the reordering of time to the workers' life is brought out by the following joke: The mill manager asks the clerk where he should put up a notice for the workers, and gets the reply, "On the clock".<sup>2</sup> This constant monitoring of time 1,2,3,... by the workers was not a characteristic of pre-industrial work.

The factory constituted a cultural space entirely different from that of agrarian society. Many of the new cultural practices can only be described as unpleasant in the extreme. A folk song from Ambasamudram went: "In the distance the *dorai* is coming, keep three feet off or he will beat you for three days...".<sup>3</sup>

In Madurai, the workers never dared eat food at their new workplace, where the English *dorai* could see them, as it would mean trouble. It is said that if they were found eating inside the mill, sand was thrown on their faces by way of punishment. Considering the fact that most mills did not provide dining rooms till quite sometime later, it is conceivable how much difficulty they experienced.

Often, the workers faced ill treatment from one among themselves — the *maistri*, who abused them, shouted at them and fined them for the smallest of mistakes. The workers were made to adhere to various norms, not all of which directly related to work. A young, male worker of the Madura Mill was taunted by the *maistri* for wearing a clean white *veshti*, smearing sandalwood paste on his forehead and wearing a flower behind his ear.<sup>4</sup> The worker was transgressing dress codes, as workers were expected to be clothed in the cheaper, coloured *lungis* and not *veshtis*. The fact that there were different dress codes for different social strata in

the factory system has been noted by Janet Kelman, who writes, "a particularly bright saree-clad woman attracted my attention, who turned out to be a relation of the jobber".<sup>5</sup>

For the woman, the workplace was constraining more than in just physical terms. The constant fear of sexual advances from the "all powerful *maistri*" is an oft-repeated complaint from women workers to every authority. The Royal Commission on Labour received this complaint all over India. In Madurai and Coimbatore, there were many attempts to seek redressal from the management through the *maistri*'s suspension and the appointment of a female *maistri* in departments where women worked in large numbers.

There are many popular stories of the difficulties faced by women workers. A story by C. Rajagopalachari narrates the plight of a woman worker in Madras saddled with an unwanted pregnancy, castigated by her community and thrown out on the street. Notable among the genre of stories describing the miserable plight of the workers' lives are the short stories of Pudumaipithan, in which he particularly discusses the woman worker's world where 'morality' and 'decency' were at times sacrificed in order to survive. One of his women worker characters in the story Ponnagaram, literally meaning "City of gold," gives in to an amorous admirer, in order to light the hearth at home and cook gruel for her unwell, drunken husband. Implicit in both these stories is a perception, grounded in the middle-class morality of their authors, of the ultimate point of deprivation of womanhood being deviance from sexual rectitude. Highlighted, however, is also the extremely poor material life of the workers, especially of the women who became vulnerable to the desires of men with means during times of disruption to the normal flow of wage income, on account of strikes or personal reasons.

### Factory Legislation

The development of capitalism also brought in its wake a series of reforms relating to working hours, conditions of machines permitted and facilities for the workers. The legislation enacted in India, in the form of the Indian Factory Act, 1881, and its subsequent modifications, was influenced by pressure from industrial lobbies

of Lancashire and Dundee. They feared that the Indian entrepreneur would achieve greater competitiveness through overwork and underpayment of their workers. In 1896, the Dundee Chamber of Commerce sent a representation to the Government of India, seeking to restrict the employment of women at night in India. This measure was considered unnecessary for India by the colonial government.<sup>6</sup>

In India, the Factory Act of 1881 marked the beginning of the colonial government's endeavour to regulate Indian industry by British laws and practices.<sup>7</sup> This Act defined what a factory unit was, as also the obligations of an industrialist. It sought to prevent the overworking of children but little effort was made in the interest of women workers. The Indian Medical Department advised the inclusion of women also as a section to be protected from overwork, night work and long hours.<sup>8</sup> Acts that incorporated the recommendation followed in due course. The fact that India was a colony of the then most industrialised nation had great consequence not only for the course of industrialisation that took place but also for the pattern of legislation.

Such legislation operated, initially at least, only at the plane of paperwork. The stress was on the number of Factory Acts and Commissions that were instituted. Initially, the Commissioner of Labour played the role of a conciliation officer in disputes. Later a whole department was created to look after the working of the Factory Act, looking into the disputes between managements and labour for which a Trade Union Act of 1926 as also the Trade Disputes Act of 1929 were formulated.<sup>9</sup> There is a whole corpus of material on the regulation of even the unions in individual units by the government through rigorous enforcement of the Trade Unions Act, which required that unions file annual returns to gain official sanction. The degree of importance given to labour matters, post-World War I, may be gauged from this vigorous interventionist strategy of the government which, in a very formal sense, attempted to introduce contractual capitalist relations at the workplace.

By the Indian Factory Act of 1891, the limit on working hours for women was eleven and that for children, seven per day.<sup>10</sup> There



was an attempt by legislation to restrict hours of work in Madras Presidency too following the Act. Thus introduced was the one-and-a-half hours rest time for women. In an enquiry conducted in Madras as to whether the 1891 Act was in force, it was found that generally women and children were irregular workers given to taking breaks. However, poor health did not account for their absence at work as their working conditions were found to be suitable for their health. It was observed that women in factories were by no means overworked and that the absence of complaints was evidence of contentment.<sup>11</sup> The absence of protest is not viewed as the result of inability to protest, for fear of loss of work or the workers' general lack of empowerment.

In 1908, the Factory Commission advocated further measures to curb the "overexploitation" of women in industries. It was suggested that the working hours for women be identical with those for young persons.<sup>12</sup> The time limit for employing them was between 5 a.m. and 7 p.m. This was earlier 8 p.m. for women. The logic behind bringing forward the conclusion of the women's workday by one hour, as cited in the report of the Indian Factories Commission, was that if women left slightly earlier than men, they would be able to discharge their domestic duties.<sup>13</sup> However, women employed in the ginning mills were excluded from the bar on night work,<sup>14</sup> as if these women were devoid of domestic responsibility! The argument was that most of the women who worked in the ginning mills were middle aged and, therefore, did not have the "moral problems as younger women" and, in any case, most workers in these mills were women. Here again, operative was the concept that the morality of younger women engaged in night work was constantly at risk and, therefore, they needed to be controlled, unlike the older women who probably were already taken care of by social regimentation.

The Commission however opposed the employment of women as cotton openers as they felt that women's attire was not suitable, as it caught the cotton fluff, making the women workers more vulnerable to accidents.<sup>15</sup> Thus feminine attire was deemed to be the cause of accidents, rather than the inadequate safety measures

at the place of work. These recommendations were used in the enactment of the Factory Act of 1911 which reduced working hours to eleven and introduced rest-time of an hour-and-a-half for women.

The Factory Commission at Madras in 1908 found tacit acceptance from C.B. Simpson and Binny and Co. for the policy of clubbing together young persons and women in the same class.<sup>16</sup> The implicit notion that women's productive capacity was inferior to that of men workers provided a firm basis for differential wages. The provision of an early mid-day recess for women was rarely followed in practice, except during factory inspections.<sup>17</sup>

The next Act of consequence for women workers was the Act of 1922, whereby the government excluded women and children from all heavy work. Act II of 1922 also made provision for complete prohibition of night work for women workers.<sup>18</sup> It recommended fewer working hours, too, for them, as also the provision of more crèches and disbursal of maternity allowance. This had severe repercussion in heavy industries immediately in the form of replacement of female by male labour, but had different consequences in the cotton textile Industry. In Madurai, problems with employing women arising from the Act came to light during the 1937 strike, in which the legal bar on night work for women was cited by the management as the principal factor why it could not continue to employ some 613 women in the ring-frame department.<sup>19</sup>

That women workers had to be protected to ensure a supply of healthy workers in the future was very much part of policy 'common sense'. It is in the 1930s that we hear of a recommendation by the Chief Inspector of Factories to reduce working hours to 8 per day for women.<sup>20</sup> This was made in the light of the high incidence of infant mortality. Therefore this was seen as a measure to help bring it down.<sup>21</sup> By this time, in Madras, the B&C mills had gradually been eliminating women from the workforce, while in Choolai they were still employed at wages lower than men's.<sup>22</sup> However in Madurai and Coimbatore, women continued to find work in the new mills.

Legislation intended to better the women workers' lot, thus limited women's access to work. Exclusion from underground work, night work, hazardous and heavy work in some departments was built upon social valuation of womanhood as representing frailty, weakness, deserving of protection. It was the sexuality of women as perceived by the State that called for the prohibition of employment of women at night — on account of their essential domesticity and the need to protect women from the "dirty streets" at night.<sup>23</sup> Legislation sought to insulate women only from the immorality of the night, not from economic deprivation and whatever that led on to.

The official solution to women's problems at the workplace was to create separate spaces for women — canteens, rest rooms, toilets, etc. In the Radhakrishna Mills in Coimbatore, it was remarked that women were too shy to use a common canteen and the canteen was divided into two spheres — male and female.<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly in the light of prevalent social values, this was more acceptable and probably made the work environment less hostile to women but notions of segregation also came from the involvement of the middle class in factory reforms. Their perception is operative in the official-level discussions to increase maternity benefit leave from four to six weeks. A factory administration document reads as follows — nine weeks is a very long time for a class of women accustomed to work during child bearing.<sup>25</sup> Also attested here was the doubt of the Inspector if it was in the best financial interest of women workers. Note may also be taken of a debate between the chief inspector of factories and the commissioner of labour on the eligibility of an unwed woman worker for maternity benefit, as the relevant statutes offered no clarity on the matter. To the credit of the officials concerned, it must be noted that the benefit of doubt went in favour of the woman.<sup>26</sup>

### **Labour Welfare**

Very early on, the managements at Binny, Madras and Harveys at Madurai had built houses for the workers as also a variety of facilities at the workplace.<sup>27</sup> With the development of worker's unions, nationalists and other agencies took up the cause of welfare.

In 1937 there were suggestions coming from the District and Sessions Judge, Madurai, that the best way to get the workers to accept the night shift was by way of introducing some extra allowance. It was also his argument that if profit sharing were to be introduced by way of Diwali bonus, the management would handle the feeling of the worker that they were denied any share and thus muster loyalty.

The evolving practice of distributing Diwali bonus, Pongal clothes, holidays for Karthikai, etc., represented incorporation of popular Hindu cultural practices into the mill setup. At the same time, in areas of greater presence of other religious social groupings such as Christians in Coimbatore, workers demanded a holiday on Sunday. The workers also obtained maternity benefit, crèches, tiffin rooms, tea for night workers and other such schemes. The benefits were also an outcome of sustained pressure by the workers' unions through the period. In Madurai, the Madura Mill Housing Co-operative was gifted a couple of lakh rupees by the management. The scheme helped S.R. Varadarajulu Naidu enlist support for his union. Soon this encouraged such demands in other mills, with Rajah mills at Madurai as also some of the mills at Coimbatore providing houses.<sup>28</sup>

The workplace was accommodative of the reproductive role of women. At the same time, it reproduced the social values of the time. Labour reform laid special stress on women workers' issues. Conveniences such as rest rooms for women, creches with *ayahs* to care for the female workers' children and, most important, maternity benefit which was made mandatory from 1935, resulted from such concern. The Coimbatore Labour Union leader C. Basudev requested the Venkataramayya Enquiry Committee to introduce work cards, which would provide workers with documentary proof of their regularity of service. This, he felt, would be of particular assistance to women workers in claiming maternity benefit.<sup>29</sup> An instance of the accommodation of the cultural practice of taboo on physical contact during menstruation (owing to presumed impurity) was the demand raised by C. Basudev that the women workers be given three days' leave in the month if they so wished.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, gradually the workplace incorporated the ideology of impurity of women that called for their temporary exclusion from the workplace. At another level, the measure also provided women welcome relief from the drudgery of mill work.

In the course of accommodating women's role in industry emerged recommendations from even a Commissioner of Labour that working hours for women in all factories be reduced from nine to eight so as to give them ample time to attend to domestic responsibilities and care for their children.<sup>31</sup> It was a practice in many mills, especially the Madura mills, to let women off five minutes earlier than men.<sup>32</sup> Complaints of lack of security for women to move on their own after sunset lent strength to the argument that women be employed only during the day. But this promoted gender segregation. Such articulation in mill life of traditional notions of a 'proper time' for women reinforced social control of women, rather than signified progress.

The Madras Labour Union very early on involved women workers through special meetings and also mooted a proposal to start a baby welfare home and tried to secure maternity benefit for all deserving women.<sup>33</sup> Later, the Indian Factory Administration through various amendments of the IFA, especially in the forties, made it mandatory to provide creches, canteens and better health facilities.<sup>34</sup> In Coimbatore, the South Indian Mill Owners' Association (SIMOA) agreed to set up creches and employ a lady doctor for each group of mills only as late as 1943.<sup>35</sup> But even then, they either could not find women doctors or used it as an excuse to cover up not honouring the agreement.<sup>36</sup> Later, the post-war Reconstruction (Co-ordination) department sub-committee for women recommended that, "more persuasion be put on employers to provide canteens for supply of food to women workers".<sup>37</sup> In 1941, an Assistant Inspectress with medical qualifications to look after the interests of women was appointed. She was responsible for Coimbatore, Madurai, Tinnelvely, South Kanara and the Malabar region. Sure enough, she was successful in making contact with the women labourers and instructing them on their rights. This provided the impetus to the demand to appoint lady welfare officers.

It was argued that, "experience showed that women were reluctant to seek assistance from male labour officers".<sup>38</sup> This, of course, reinforced segregation of male and female space. The exclusivity of women's problems also opened up a whole range of avenues for middle-class women as Assistant Inspectress, lady doctor, etc. in the various mills.

SIMOA brought in changes most reluctantly. As late as 1950, of the fifteen mills employing more than three hundred women workers, only six had women welfare officers, nurses or compounders to care for women.<sup>39</sup> And even if the crèche came into being, women workers could not easily tend to their children's needs. In fact, in the dispute between Chandrakanthi and R.K. Mills management, the worker complained that she was not even allowed to look after the feed demands of her child and was accused of poor outturn.<sup>40</sup>

Gender bias occurred at times even in disbursal of welfare bonus. In Coimbatore, during the war years, workers were distributed dearness allowance (DA) in kind. Then there was a dispute on how much DA should be given to women reelers who were doing piece rate work.<sup>41</sup> An output of some 20 hanks per day was made mandatory to receive full DA.<sup>42</sup> Also, on the issue of bonus, when in 1943 at the Meenakshi Mills, Madurai, eligibility was fixed as taking leave or less than 43 days, only seven out of the three hundred odd women engaged as reelers qualified for bonus.<sup>43</sup> In such welfare matters, women and men who were constantly engaged as *badlis* who did not figure in the regular register were deprived of benefits.

Thus, through the piece-meal welfare measures in various mills, women workers did get some relief. For example, the appointment of a female *maistri* or welfare officer did help resolve some of their problems. Handling complaints of *maistri*'s sexual overtures to women, need for leave during the menstrual period, and facilities for nursing infants could best be understood by these women. This is not to suggest an "essentialist" argument of femininity. Rather, it is to suggest the social pressures where the women workers could best relate to a woman representative in the cultural context of a

deeply conservative society. Most important, women could not bear to think of discussing issues such as menstruation with a male stranger as sexuality was much suppressed, mystified and controlled (for women all the more so). Labour welfare, while improving the lot of workers, also renegotiated traditional values into the new ethos of the factory. And in that, the woman was identified most with her role as a mother of the future generation and in her centrality to the valued institution of the family. However, integration of women into the factory system and the focusing of politics on women's special needs enlarged her space.

### **Maternity Benefit**

In India, too, sometime after in Europe, during the third decade of the twentieth century, efforts were made to ensure the payment of maternity benefit mandatory through legislation in the legislative councils. It was championed by social reformers like N.M. Joshi, V.J. Patel and V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar in Madras.

The Madras Social Service League, in 1922, wrote to the Commissioner of Labour, Madras that "as infantile mortality among the children of working class is to a great extent due to women being employed almost upto the time of confinement", the league hoped the government would do its best to save children from premature death.<sup>44</sup> The AITUC bulletin of February–March 1925 also urged the government to "bring legislation prohibiting employment of women in factories, mines and other industries, at least six weeks before and six weeks after childbirth and providing adequate maternity allowance during the period".<sup>45</sup>

It has been observed that it was a custom with women to abstain from work after confinement. There was, however, differences in the period of confinement as practised in different parts of India. "The length of time that women abstained from work after confinement varies considerably in different parts of India. Religious and social customs prescribe periods varying from ten to forty days."<sup>46</sup> However, it was noted that women belonging to lower castes could ill-afford such customs owing to economic circumstances. According to G.M. Broughton, an interval of two to three weeks of

a month elapses before the women come back to work in Madras, while in Bombay, women leave a fortnight before and return a fortnight after child birth.<sup>47</sup> The women interviewed by the RCL in the various cotton mills of Madras Presidency stated that they would stay away for about 6 months in the course of childbirth.<sup>48</sup>

Maternity benefit was first proposed in the Draft Convention passed at the first International Labour Conference at Washington in 1919.<sup>49</sup> In Madras, maternity benefit was first introduced in the 1920s in the Basel mission. The RCL in India expressed the need to implement such a benefit scheme on the ground of social justice and humanitarianism — “the general standard of living being so low it was perceived that greater value be attached to the health of the woman worker and her child in a vulnerable period of life”.<sup>50</sup> This proved to be instrumental in V. Ramaswamy Mudaliar’s introduction of the maternity benefit bill in the Madras Legislative Council in 1932. The government soon enough legislated upon it and presented the Madras Maternity Bill of 1934.<sup>51</sup>

Initially, the government entrusted the task of providing maternity benefit to the various industrial managements. A whole Inspectorate of Factories was engaged to keep a check on them. However, a large number of managements evaded payment of the allowance.<sup>52</sup> In fact, initially one of the more conservative mill owners had stated clearly to the Chief Inspector of Factories that, if such legislation were to be introduced, women would be dispensed with in his mill.<sup>53</sup> The South Indian Chambers’ memorandum could not see any reason as to why “such compulsory internment” was asked for and wanted the penalty on employers not to exceed Rs.100 in place of the proposed Rs.500.<sup>54</sup> The chamber pointed out that the entire burden was on the employer. In Coimbatore, a union memorandum stated that the Rajalakshmi mill management coerced women workers at the point of entry to mill work to undertake that they would not bear children for five years.<sup>55</sup> A tall order indeed, if it is noted that most of the women employed were young and married. That such attempts were made to control reproduction at a time when maternity benefit was rarely disbursed is a significant indicator of the lengths to which managements could go, to avoid payment of benefit. In



the process, the management acquired control over their workers beyond the workplace and beyond the wage-contract that bound them. This condition on women workers served as a site of extra-economic coercion that discriminated between the genders. In Madras, the Choolai mill management dismissed two workers in an advanced stage of pregnancy, but had to reinstate them on account of pressure from the Madras Labour Union.<sup>56</sup> Despite being given legal permission to absent themselves for childbirth, women on coming back sometimes had to pay Rs.5 to Rs.10 as bribe to get back their job.<sup>57</sup>

There were plenty of problems with the bill. The labour union in Madras demanded that the allowance be higher, and be made before confinement, as the woman would need the money when out of work.<sup>58</sup> More importantly not many women actually received the benefit.<sup>59</sup> "Of 24 mills employing 6,000 women only 11 employing 4,000 paid any benefit in 1936 and 16 mills employing about 4,600 women paid any benefit in 1937. Therefore 13 mills with 2,000 women in 1936 and 9 mills with more than 1,500 women paid no benefit. Only 2 per cent of the female workers benefited in 1936 and 3 per cent in 1937".<sup>60</sup>

An enquiry into the immediate cause of a strike at Mahalakshmi Mill, Madurai, in 1938, found one of the grievances to have been the denial of maternity benefit. The manager removed from service women who had claimed maternity benefit or were likely to do so.<sup>61</sup> On enquiry by the District Magistrate, it was found that in 1937-38, 27 women who had otherwise been regular absented themselves from work for periods ranging from four to six months. On inspection of the factory records, it was found that from 1935 onwards, only about six women had been paid maternity benefit in a mill that employed more than 175 women. Therefore, to the District Magistrate, there was good reason to believe that the management was evading and systematically dispensing with services of women who claimed or were likely to claim maternity allowance.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter from the Commissioner of Labour, Mr. Rutherford, to the Secretary to Government, Henderson, it was stated that in

the textile mills of the Presidency, the maternity benefit claim worked out to be 35 out of 1,000 women and of them half were ineligible for having been absent for more than 14 days in the nine-month period.<sup>63</sup> Non-payment of maternity benefit or evasion by managements of MB was consistently a feature of the demand charters of the workers. In Madurai, S.R.V. Naidu convened a separate meeting of the women workers to communicate to them the details of the amendment to the Act. He specifically raised the amendment as being important in helping women regain employment after childbirth and hoped for legislation to give widows benefit as also unemployment insurance, for women at least, to begin with.<sup>64</sup>

The memorandum of grievances of the Coimbatore District textile workers, Singanallur, pointed out that four weeks' leave for women was insufficient.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it was suggested that provision be made for three months' leave without pay. They also demanded an end to the policy of terminating the services of women workers when they were too unwell to return to duty after delivery.<sup>66</sup> This was corroborated by the conciliation officer, Coimbatore, who too attested to the need for longer leave before women came back to work after childbirth.<sup>67</sup> And this was deemed necessary owing to the absence of creches and adequate welfare schemes. Hence it was demanded that a clause be introduced that "women workers be given the right to resume their old places when they turn up at any time within four months after the date of confinement".<sup>68</sup> At this point, women were engaged in supplying for war orders and soon also owing to labour shortage during the plague, they were even employed as spinners in some mills, and were therefore an important constituent of the workforce.<sup>69</sup>

In 1939, the factory inspectorate had received seventeen complaints on the evasion of maternity benefit.<sup>70</sup> Of these, fourteen were in respect to non-payment of benefits claimed by women workers and three for refusing to reinstate women workers after the expiry of maternity benefit granted to them.<sup>71</sup> It was found that the complainant for non-payment were not legally entitled to the benefit, and the complaints against not being reinstated were because

the women had overstayed the period of one month allowed under the Act without leave.<sup>72</sup> This is a clear instance of how the loopholes in the Act were availed of liberally by the managements by resorting to technical interpretations of questions of continuity of service, legal eligibility, absenteeism, etc. There were many limitations in the Act itself. Section V (1) of the Act demanded that women work at least nine months in the factory preceding pregnancy. Therefore, even if a woman was absent for a single day, she lost the right to benefit from the scheme. As observed by the Coimbatore Enquiry Committee, it was the natural order of things that women take a day or so off while pregnant. A number of such complaints were made by women workers. Though the women denied taking leave, the management constantly defended non-payment as being on account of absenteeism. Therefore, a personal card system was recommended in 1938.<sup>73</sup> But then, we have innumerable complaints of *maistris* tampering with the record of individual workers — of output of work, of being late for work, etc.<sup>74</sup> The number of women paid maternity benefit in the 1940s was by no means larger than the number of those paid the benefit in the 1930s. As late as 1950, non-payment of maternity benefit by mill owners was an issue. According to the notes of a Communist Party document seized by the police, "A large number of women are denied maternity benefit totally. And almost all women, the moment they take leave under the Act are dismissed. They are refused service after delivery".<sup>75</sup> On this score, the Madura Mill management was justly proud that it paid three times as much maternity benefit as paid in any other mill as benefit and that too not at the stipulated eight annas, but 12 annas.<sup>76</sup> In 1938, though the mill employed only one-sixth the number of women workers in the Presidency, it paid more than 50% of the total maternity benefit disbursed.<sup>77</sup>

Some mills, for example the B&C and Choolai, gradually excluded women from their workforce.<sup>78</sup> But we find from our figures on the composition of workforce that women continued to find place for themselves in a number of new mills that were coming up in Coimbatore, Madurai, Rajapalaiyam, etc. It was not as if the maternity benefit burden led to their exclusion uniformly. The number

of beneficiaries was as little as 2405 in 1949 — 15 per cent of the 16,124 women employed, on an average, in cotton spinning and weaving mills.<sup>79</sup>

## Wages

Wages have always been a contentious zone, the worker and the management always seeking to move wages in opposite directions. As regards women's wages, the rationale operative was the secondary nature of women's work. Well grounded in the patriarchal family structure was the enunciation of the male wage as primary and later the concept of the living /fair wage as accommodating the upkeep of the male labourer's entire family. This was the determining factor for the low wages of women. A male doffer earned more than did a woman doffer. That cannot be explained as being the result of lower skill. Wage levels varies across regions: in Madras, the wages were higher than in Madurai, which, however, rated better than Coimbatore in terms of the wages paid.

For the Coimbatore mill-owner, an incentive for expansion was a large supply of cheap labour. This was very much the case in the years immediately post-depression, when not only were rural wages at their lowest level, but sizeable numbers of handloom weavers, pushed out from their traditional craft by increasing competition from Japanese goods, were available as well.

In Madras Presidency, after an initial increase in wages towards the end of World War I, a number of mills introduced wage cuts after 1926.<sup>80</sup> Following it came the recession in the cotton textile industry in the face of lack of protection and stiff competition from the Japanese yarn and textiles in the market.<sup>81</sup> In one mill, the cut came in 1926, in another seven mills between 1926 and 1933. There was a decrease of wages by 12.5% in half the number of mills that responded to a government questionnaire on wages in cotton mills.<sup>82</sup> Thus, between September 1933 and 1934 there were massive cuts in the wages of workers and this continued into later years too.

During the Congress ministry period (1937–39), there were great expectations of relief. Though the Venkataramayya Award did come about in 1938 suggesting certain minimum wages for

various categories of work, there was no follow up in the individual mills in implementing the Award,<sup>83</sup> triggering off a number of protests and strikes.<sup>84</sup> Though the mills were making big profits from war orders, the SIMOA seeking more official support such as more wagons for transportation, workers were denied standardised wages. In some Coimbatore mills, there were attempts to slash the wages of doffing boys and women wastepickers.<sup>85</sup> Against a background of increasing cost of living and the war, a major agitation was launched by N.G. Ramaswamy in Coimbatore asking for a 25% increase in wages.

Women were mainly engaged in reeling and winding. Some also found place in the ring-frame department. Though their work was seen to be relatively light, a memorandum by the Madras Labour Union stated that women did the extremely heavy work of carrying big bales of cotton in the mixing department at Choolai mill.<sup>86</sup> In the Madura textile workers' union complaint register is lodged the moving detail of how even pregnant women reelers were forced to bring their quota of *cops* from a tank near the reeling department. This was not only an arduous but also a dangerous task, as they had to jump down to fetch their necessary *cops*. A demand of the Madura textile workers union was to eliminate the practice of women being asked to mind 9 to 12 spindles in one winding department and that there be a unit of 6 spindles.<sup>87</sup> This is indicative of the complexity of work for women winders in the cotton mills. As their wages were paid on piece rate, it meant that during lean periods, when there was sharing of work, e.g. if three women worked on a reel, it also meant lower wages.<sup>88</sup>

Very early on, in 1929 the Legislative Council advocated the fixing of a minimum wage for which an enquiry committee was set up.<sup>89</sup> It concluded that since standardisation was itself a difficult task, the fixing of a minimum wage was even more difficult if not impossible. Such was the opinion of the Commissioner of Labour. But workers' unions as for example the corporation workers in Madras, demanded the fixing of a minimum wage.<sup>90</sup> The Coimbatore mill strike committee demanded fixing a minimum of Rs.25 for men, Rs.20 for women and Rs.15 for boys.<sup>91</sup>

As early as in 1917, in Madras, a survey by G. Slater and others pointed out the inadequacy of wages.<sup>92</sup> In a discussion in which union leader B. Shiva Rao, the Chief Inspector of factories and the Commissioner of Labour participated, strife among the working class was ascribed to lower wages.<sup>93</sup> Thus was perceived the need for greater welfare measures to bring change in conditions of work for labourers.

A move to demand a minimum wage is significant from two angles. First, it could help change the absolutely depressed wage structure whose depressed status owed not a little to the low wages paid to certain categories of labour, women in particular.<sup>94</sup> Second, the raising of such a demand articulated worker's perception of how such differences worked to their disadvantage. A minimum lower limit fixed for all categories of work eroded the possibility of substitution of male labour by other categories of cheap labour.

Thus came into play the demand for equal wages.<sup>95</sup> The professed basis for wage discrimination by the mill managements was women's irregularity, fewer hours of work and lower productivity.<sup>96</sup> Hence the socially constructed valuation of the male as strong and capable and of the female as weak and less productive was co-opted into the wage structure to the detriment of the women.

Various unions did take up the issue of differential wages. The Coimbatore Strike Committee demanded, in 1936, that "men and women workers be assigned equal wages".<sup>97</sup> The Coimbatore Labour union memorandum also in 1937 protested against iniquitous wages.<sup>98</sup> In Madras Presidency too, as in Bombay, a very large section of women were reelers and winders.<sup>99</sup> There was a small fraction in the ring frame department engaged as spinners or doffers. The unions demanded equal wages for the doffers.<sup>100</sup> Though such demands were articulated in conferences and union discussions as also in the recommendation of the Award of 1938 and 1948, such difference persisted.<sup>101</sup>

Differential wages premised on distinctions between men and women, and between the urban and the rural, operated to the benefit of mill managements. In fact, as late as in 1942, the argument of

the Coimbatore rural mill owners for wages lower than in urban mills was that their workers were from the agricultural population — unskilled, raw, inefficient.<sup>102</sup> Besides, most women were engaged on piece-rate wages and, therefore, the payment for reeling created many problems. A demand of the Coimbatore mill workers' union was as follows, "In weighing yarn brought by the reeler no deduction more than 2 pounds be made for the gunny bag".<sup>103</sup> The complaint made by the union stated that 10 lbs of yarn was deducted from the weight of the gunny bag, which was more than the stipulated 2 lbs. It surely implies that the women perceived their work as being systematically undervalued.

In the Rajah Mill at Madurai, during the period when Dearness Allowances (DA) was given to workers to help them in times of increasing cost of living many women were not given the normally allocated DA. The union demanded that reelers be given a uniform rate of DA and that it also be disbursed to workshop employees and women cotton pickers.<sup>104</sup> The adjudication felt that 20 hanks per day be accepted as the criteria for eligibility to claim full DA. It was also suggested that it would be facilitated if the distribution method of the quantity and quality of yarn were well supervised.<sup>105</sup> Thus, strung on with DA was a minimum output requirement, a regulation of assignment. And if the workload was lower, women lost out on DA. Reeling being a woman's preserve, a reeler's loss was mainly the women worker's loss. Thus for women, earning losses resulted from factors such as underweighing, lower output and job sharing at points of crisis in the industry, apart from an ascriptive low wage status in the industry.

The issue of wages remained unresolved right up to 1951 when a plan for legislation on payment of wages was proposed.<sup>106</sup> During an enquiry in 1937, it was found that in the Madura Mills, the average wage of a reeler per month was Rs 14-8-0. However, it was noted that women of average ability could earn Rs 15-6-0, and even a maximum of Rs 19-6-9. It was also noted that men earned less than women in this department, because of lower output.<sup>107</sup> In 1946 the Adjudication of the dispute at Rajah Mills, Madurai, while discussing the issue of uniform rate of wages to be paid to male and

female doffers, concluded that the distinction was artificial.<sup>108</sup> The female doffers in fact were doing the more skilled work of spinning. Therefore, to the adjudicating officer, it was justified to give the female doffers who did the skilled work of spinning the same rate as applicable to a female spinner, that is Rs.12-2-0/month, which corresponded well to the male doffer's wage of Rs.12-4-0 rather than the prevalent Rs.9. The Tribunal in 1946 enquired why there were differences in wages. The answer from management was that women were employed purely on philanthropic humanitarian reasons, especially the women waste-pickers who were deemed old-age pensioners.<sup>109</sup> But it was found that women were engaged in as strenuous work as men and therefore the Tribunal Award of 1946 recommended parity in wages for men and women.

The question of equal wages was the jinx of the labour movement — one area that clearly reflected the social conditioning and ideological inheritance of the patriarchal institutions in which it germinated. Even though the Coimbatore mill workers union argued that "there is little difference in the quantity or quality of work between men and women",<sup>110</sup> they could not force such a settlement. Similarly, when it came to the question of taking up the issue of transfer of women from spinning to the reeling department, which was from a higher to a lower emoluments' department, there was no objection in principle except that women be paid wages as per their area of work.<sup>111</sup> That women were deemed secondary wage earning members inhered in current ideology. This was why the Madura Labour union leader S.R.V. Naidu supported the young male ring framers in their protest against two weeks' consecutive night work by promising them that future entry of women in this department would not be encouraged.<sup>112</sup>

By the 1930s a number of workers' unions represented the interests of the workers. There was the Coimbatore Labour union, Coimbatore District Textile Workers Union, Coimbatore mill workers union at Coimbatore, the Madras Labour union in Madras, the Madura Labour union and the Madura textile workers union by the end of the decade. At this juncture, representations for better working conditions in terms of hours of work, facilities at the workplace as



also wage-related changes had been made.<sup>113</sup> Some concessions like night workers being served tea, installation of humidifiers in the cotton mixing department, creches, tiffin rooms and disbursement of maternity benefit were obtained.<sup>114</sup> However, in the various mills implementation was not uniform. Many a management continued to evade paying maternity benefit, setting up creches or even providing clean drinking water.<sup>115</sup>

Appalling were the consequences of mill work on the health of the worker. The long hours of work were strenuous. Most mills made no provision against the high degree of humidification. Added to it was the poor lighting and ventilation.<sup>116</sup> In such circumstances, watching the electric spindles proved to be unbearably strenuous. In fact, in Puddumaippithan's story on Ponnagaram, it is said that the cotton fluff on the women workers' hair could easily be mistaken for grey hair.<sup>117</sup> Cotton dust was stated to be a reason for various health disorders among workers. Though provision for control in the form of artificial humidification was made in Madras by 1936, of the 68 mills investigated, only 17 had introduced any mechanical device even as late as 1942.<sup>118</sup> This meant that in the 51 mills, workers had to bear with symptoms such as fatigue, discomfort and weakness sometimes leading to mental disorder. Thus, generally, the health of workers was uncared for, despite a whole Inspectorate of Factories existing to monitor conditions and mill technology remained at its rudimentary level.

That there were a number of welfare measures introduced has been noted as being significant.<sup>119</sup> But, the question is whether such mandated welfare measures had been implemented. We find that though there were representations by unions, and discourse at the governmental level, seldom were such measures fully or even partially implemented in many mills. Despite coercion by unions through sit-in strikes demanding some facilities, most mill owners violated even the minimum norms laid down by the Factory Administration. Good drinking water, latrine facilities and tiffin rooms continued to figure in most demand charters.<sup>120</sup>

Women too had specific demands like crèche, separate rest rooms as also female *maistris*, which were rarely fulfilled by

managements.<sup>121</sup> However, an issue in which women suffered most was the denial of maternity benefit by managements. We do have evidence of how difficult work for women was. In the Mahalakshmi Mills at Madurai, shortage of reels for the wrougths, where women worked, was common. Hence women had to fetch their required quota from the tank and it was complained that even if women workers were pregnant they were made to go down into the tank to gather the reels.<sup>122</sup>

The parameter that defined the conditions of work for women had the added dimension of vulnerability to sexual assault, mental agony and sexual harassment by various officials at the workplace, especially the jobber or the *maistri*.<sup>123</sup> Very early on, a major strike at the Madura Mill was in protest against the harassment of women workers by the *maistri* for their involvement with union work.<sup>124</sup> However, no action was taken against him. Wage increments for women spinners at Rajah mills, Madurai were at the discretion of the management, which meant that it was imperative to be in the good books of the *maistri*.<sup>125</sup> What this entailed is clear from the number of protests lodged by women against the behaviour of *maistris* to members of the Royal Commission on Labour in 1929,<sup>126</sup> as well as from the ample instances of the *maistri* being the focus of women's ire in spontaneous strikes as well as charters of demands of trade unions.<sup>127</sup>

The domination of the women by the *maistri* was manifested in many control mechanisms that the *maistri* could use. On returning from leave after childbirth, they could gain re-entry only if the *maistri* ordained it. Sometimes, they bribed him Rs 4–5 to get their jobs back.<sup>128</sup> Besides, while working they took the women to task if their work was deemed below par, calling them names and accusing them of being immoral.<sup>129</sup> The *maistri*'s questioning of their social status as 'moral women' worked psychologically to create insecurity in the minds of these women. Oppression of this kind was in addition to physical punishment such as being made to stand in the sun. An instance of such disciplining is that of a section of the women workers of the Coimbatore Cotton Mill being made to stand in the sun for having the temerity to demand that they be allowed to inspect

the accounts book to verify the wages they were due.<sup>130</sup> These conditions were not unique to any particular centre of the industry in the Presidency.

It was in such a situation that S.R.V. Naidu at a public meeting at Madurai appealed to the management to appoint a public employment agency.<sup>131</sup> He alluded to a certain case of a woman falling prostrate at the feet of a *maistri* for a slight fault of hers. But then, we also find that the *maistri*'s wage was tied to the output he could obtain. In 1945, we get a mention of about 32 *maistris* who got low wages owing to a decline in production with absenteeism due to plague.<sup>132</sup> Thus, women workers at the workplace were harassed by the *maistri* through use of symbols of morality, violence, denial of work. But he, in turn, was also tied to the same system by being denied regular wages by the management if the output fell below what was considered acceptable. Thus even the power of the *maistri* was not unfettered.

Apart from direct sexual exploitation, overtures and invasion of the dignity of a woman by physical manhandling while taking her thumb-imprint,<sup>133</sup> other forms of exploitation are cited. There are even reports of a practice of taking commission by getting a day's work without payment.<sup>134</sup> A demand of the Coimbatore District Textile Workers' union was that "workers should not be compelled to work in their private capacity in the houses or fields of the mill owners".<sup>135</sup> Also cited is the favouritism of the *maistri* towards particular workers.<sup>136</sup> Kamalam, a reeler of CS & W mills, Coimbatore from 1945 told us that there were fights in the departments owing to such practices of the *maistri*.<sup>137</sup> Thus built into the factory system was also such patronage relationship that continued to be part of the institutional structure of power relations.

There were innumerable protests against indignities committed by *maistris*. Both in Coimbatore and Madura the woes narrated by women of the torture by a Rangasami, Mookaswami, Ponnaswami or Velu Pillai were grounds for demanding women *maistris*.<sup>138</sup> In departments like reeling and winding, which employed mostly women, it was perceived that the appointment of women instead of

men *maistris* would prevent malpractice. But it also gives us some idea as to how much violation of women's dignity occurred at the workplace. To the union, taking up of such a demand meant addressing the aspirations of a section of their constituency. For the women, it helped open up a variety of concerns ranging from acquiring representation in the structures of power through women to consciousness of their rights at a broad plane. Impressive indeed was the involvement of women in the trade unions. During 1936–37, official statistics point to an increase of about 2000 in female membership of trade unions.<sup>139</sup>

That women were employed for long hours between 5 a.m. and 8 p.m. had certain consequences. The hardship under this system was aggravated by the practice that children and women, not infrequently, remained in the mill until such a time when their relations were free to accompany them to their homes.<sup>140</sup> This was because popular sentiment was against women moving about alone at night.<sup>141</sup> Kamalam, a worker at CS & W mills from the 1940s told us that late in the night, if it were 8 p.m. or so, some seven women including her went back with the *maistri* amma.<sup>142</sup> Thus, there was some sort of protection in moving with an elderly person in a group. Circumscribed here is an ideology of womanhood which denied her freedom and safety to move about at night, unless in respectable, secure company.

To say that women workers were expected to balance housework with mill work is to state the obvious. But to add that the situation remained static on this front between 1914 and 1951 meant that there was hardly any change despite women's increased access to work. At the same time, we may also note that women who had been enticed to come to work in the early part of the twentieth century were no longer welcome five decades later as the ground level situation at the mill had changed. The work was more well paid, secure and sought after and the women were therefore elbowed out to make room for young men who (and not so much the women, according to gender ideology) had to fend for the family. Women were now struggling to survive as part of the workforce.

Though women's official work time began only at 7 a.m., they were at the machine at 5.45 a.m., working through the lunch interval to make sure that they did not lose their jobs as 'permanent workers'.<sup>143</sup> The late 1940s and early 1950s were a period when the trade union movement was banned and workers' morale was at its lowest, with declining job opportunities.<sup>144</sup> It was also a phase of keen competition to secure work. A complaint from a worker at Rajah mills, Mariappan to the union demanded that the "Madura textile workers' union should see to it that women are not worked overtime".<sup>145</sup> Overtime should be made a male preserve!

Various mills resorted to cutting down their heads of expenditure, dismissing workers for the most trivial reasons. The Kaleswarar management at Coimbatore declared a sudden, arbitrary lockout on 13-6-1949.<sup>146</sup> At Palaniandavar mills, Udamalpet, workers protested as the management did not give work to 42 reelers.<sup>147</sup> Similar forced leave was given to reelers at Ramalinga Choodambikai at Coimbatore.<sup>148</sup> Women would work even for ten hours to fulfil the quota assigned to them for fear of losing work.<sup>149</sup> The stage was set for the massive onslaught against labour in the 1950s when increased workload, mechanisation and consequent retrenchment led to the displacement of women from the workforce even in Coimbatore and Madurai. This is reflected in the declining proportion of women in the total workforce by the middle of the twentieth century. By the end of the 1960s, the very workers who had contributed to the making of the mill townships that grew into teeming industrial cities had become marginalised, reduced to seeking salvation in nationalisation of sick mills.

## Notes

Acknowledgement: I must thank Biswanoy Pati for encouraging me to finish the piece and Arun for helping me with the editing.

<sup>1</sup> Warriar, M.V. Shobhana, "Class and Gender: A Study of women workers in Cotton Textile Mills of Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, 1914-1951", Chapter II, unpublished thesis, JNU, New Delhi, 1993, pp.24-29.

<sup>2</sup> *Anandavikatan*, October 27, 1940, Madras. This is very beautifully brought out in the writings of E.P Thompson where he mentions the ethical ordering of time and life with industrialisation.

<sup>3</sup> Sivasubramaniam, A., "Folk songs of Textile Mill Workers", in *A.I.T.U.C. Souvenir*, Madras, 1985. The author asks if workers could be beaten up for walking in front of the Dorai, what would happen if they committed a mistake.

<sup>4</sup> Naidu, P. Muthiah, *Private Diaries, Harveypatti Colony, Madurai*. In the Madura mill, that day in the afternoon, all men came to work in white *veshti*, with sandalwood smeared on their forehead and flowers behind their ears, to protest against the insulting behaviour of the *maistri*, proving their point.

<sup>5</sup> Kelman, Janet Harvey, *Labour in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1923, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Commerce and Industry, F. no. 35, Factories [A], April, 1-4, 1906, N.A.I.

<sup>7</sup> Legislative Department Proceedings, A, No. 118-338, April 1881, N.A.I.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, F. Engels in *Conditions of working class in England* discusses problems for women employed as workers.

<sup>9</sup> Development Dept. (conf.) G.O.4085, 30-10-1946. A bill on labour dispute was introduced whose architect was Gulzarilal Nanda. It was sent to V.V. Giri, Minister of Labour, for his comments. It was introduced as a measure to curb political unrest created by Communists all over India. Recognition of a union in an industry was to be given only if it had at least 15 per cent membership. However, the bill was dropped.

<sup>10</sup> Home Judicial, A, No. 405-468, February 1896, N.A.I.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Indian Factory Commission Report*, 1908, London, p.48.

<sup>13</sup> *Indian Factory Commission Report*, 1908, London, p.46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.64, 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.304.

<sup>17</sup> *The Hindu*, June 28, 1918, Hindu Library Madras. This was the case at the Choolai mills in Madras.

<sup>18</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 263(MS), 19-2-1923, T.N.A.

<sup>19</sup> *The Hindu*, "Madura Mill Dispute viewpoint of workers", October, 6, 1937, Madras.

<sup>20</sup> Public Works and Labour (MS) G.O. 321 L, 1-2-1930, T.N.A.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour*, Vol. VII, Part II, London, 1931, p.186.

<sup>23</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2074, 24-5-1950, T.N.A.

<sup>24</sup> Public Works Dept. (Labour), G.O. 2092, 22-7-1944, T.N.A.

<sup>25</sup> Development Dept. G.O.4104, 1-11-1946, T.N.A.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Development Dept.1564, 4-7-1940, T.N.A. Also Dev. Dept. G.O. 1232, 28-8-1923, T.N.A.

<sup>28</sup> *Indian Factory Administration Report* 1942, 1946, T.N.A.

<sup>29</sup> Development Dept. G.O. 2711, 6-12-1937, T.N.A.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, No.10, 1921, Madras.

<sup>32</sup> PW&L Dept. (confidential) G.O.703, 27-2-1930, T.N.A.

<sup>33</sup> Law General Dept., G.O.2012, 17-6-1926, T.N.A.

<sup>34</sup> PW&L Dept., 2953, 19-8-1942, T.N.A. There is a suggestion made by the factory administration for appointing an Assistant Inspectress of Factories. Also PWD, G.O. 2650, 12-10-1945, T.N.A.

<sup>35</sup> PW&L Dept., G.O. 998, 9-6-1943, T.N.A.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Development Dept. G.O.4104, 1-11-1946, PW&L, 1126, 23-4-1945, T.N.A.

<sup>38</sup> PWD, Dept. G.O. 2650, 12-10-1945, T.N.A. Also PW&L, 1132, 23-4-1945, T.N.A.

<sup>39</sup> Development Dept. G.O. 3683, 14-9-1950, T.N.A.

<sup>40</sup> Coimbatore Mill Labour Union Records, Misc. C of 1955 R.K. Mills vs. Chandrakanti, P.C. Joshi Archives, J.N.U. New Delhi.

<sup>41</sup> Development Dept. G.O. 2416, 20-6-1946, T.N.A.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Janasakthi*, 23-8-1944, Karl Marx Library, Madras.

<sup>44</sup> *ILO Monthly Labour Review*, July–December 1933. Similar views are expressed in *Modern Review*, V–31, January–June, 1922, Calcutta. p. 211, N.M.M.L.

<sup>45</sup> Home Dept. [Public], F.no 31/15/1931, N.A.I. It was the opinion of the Labour Administration Department too. The need to bring about such changes is upheld by *Modern Review*, V.27, January–June, 1920 p.211, N.M.M.L.

<sup>46</sup> Law General, G.O. 846, 15-7-1921, T.N.A. Also *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, No.10, 1921.

<sup>47</sup> Broughton, G.M., "Maternity Benefits for Industrial Women", *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, February, 1921.

<sup>48</sup> R.C.L., Vol. VII Part II, London, 1931, p. 59.

<sup>49</sup> Dept. of Industry and Labour, L 1150(C), 1924, N.A.I.

<sup>50</sup> Department of Industry and Labour, L 1806(1), 1932, N.A.I.

<sup>51</sup> Warriar, M.V. Shobhana, "Condition of women workers in Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, 1914-1939", *Social Scientist*, Vol.19, No 5-6, June 1991. *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> P.W.Dept. (L), G.O.2493 L, 16-11-1934, T.N.A. In Madras Presidency, Section 4 (1) of the Act stated: "No employer shall knowingly employ a woman in any factory during the four weeks immediately following the day of her delivery." Section 5(1) specified: "The maximum period for which a woman shall be entitled to M.B. is seven weeks, three weeks before and four weeks after (delivery)".

<sup>53</sup> Public Works and Labour Dept. (MS), G.O.1101L, 3-4-1930, T.N.A. Also Development Dept. G.O.1052-53, 29-6-1936, T.N.A.

<sup>54</sup> *The Hindu*, "Maternity Bill, South India Chambers' Memorandum", 26-6-1934, Madras, 1934.

<sup>55</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2054, 23-8-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>56</sup> *The Hindu*, "Madras Labour Union", 21-4-1926, Madras.

<sup>57</sup> *The Hindu*, "Choolai Mill hands' grievances", 12-1-1927, Madras. Also R.C.L. Vol. VII, Part II, London, 1930, p. 148.

<sup>58</sup> PW&L (MS), G.O.-121 L, 15-1-1930, T.N.A.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.* Warriar, M.V. Shobhana, "Condition of women workers in Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, 1914-1939", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No 5-6, June 1991.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Coimbatore Textile Enquiry- Venkataramayya Committee Report*, Madras, 1938, p.159. T.N.L.C.L.

<sup>62</sup> Development Dept. 3044, 18-12-1938, T.N.A. Earlier, when the Act was initially introduced, some conservative mill owners had hinted that the services of pregnant women would be dispensed within their respective mills.

<sup>63</sup> Development Dept. G.O.335, 2-3-1936. Also P.W.Dept. G.O. 5387, 5-12-1935, T.N.A.



<sup>64</sup> *The Hindu*, Madura Labour Union Meeting for women, 31-5-1939, Madras.

<sup>65</sup> PWD (L), G.O. 4134, 12-11-1942, T.N.A.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 1564, 4-7-1940, T.N.A.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* In the Report of the working of the Factory Act, for 1946 thirteen prosecutions were made — 6 for failure to maintain registers under the Act and seven for not having exhibited the notices, fines were imposed therefore.

<sup>73</sup> *Venkataramayya Committee Report*, Madras, 1938, p.161. *Op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> *Janasakhti*, 21.11.1945, Madras. The union complained that entries made were not right: women were given Rs.9 per month as a doffer but were made to work as spinner, whereas spinning was a better-paid department.

<sup>75</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 13-5-1950, T.N.A.

<sup>76</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 4104, 1-11-1946, T.N.A.

<sup>77</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 1384, 30.5.1938, T.N.A.

<sup>78</sup> *RCL*, Vol. VII, Part II, London, 1931, p.186. *Op.cit.*

<sup>79</sup> *Working of the Indian Factory Administration Act*, 1949, T.N.L.C.L., Madras.

<sup>80</sup> Public Works and Labour (MS), G.O. 121L, 15-1-30, T.N.A.

<sup>81</sup> Development Dept. (Conf.), G.O. 1242(MS), 10-5-1939, T.N.A.

<sup>82</sup> Department of Industry and Labour, L-1823 (7), 1934, N.A.I.

<sup>83</sup> Soon there was disillusionment among sections of labour as V.V. Giri, Minister of Labour, let the Lakshmi Mill strike drag on for twenty days. See P. Jeevanandam, *Tamarai*, *Jeeva Shirrappu Malar*, Supplement, March 1963, Madras.

<sup>84</sup> *Janasakhti*, 25-3-1939, Karl Marx Library, Madras.

<sup>85</sup> P.W.Dept. ( Ms), G.O. 1041, 6-4-1942, T.N.A.

<sup>86</sup> P.W&L G.O. 1192 (L), 11-4-1930, T.N.A.

<sup>87</sup> Development Dept. G.O. 2610, 5-7-1946. Development Dept. G.O. 448, 21- 2-1938, T.N.A. Also mentioned is an attempt by the management,

during the Vysia Mill strike in Coimbatore, to compel workers of 1/2 and 3/4 side to do 3/4 and full side respectively, against which they protested.

<sup>88</sup> P.W.D., G.O.1041, 6-4-1942. Also Development Dept. G.O. 448, 21-2-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>89</sup> P.W&L Dept., G.O.2806, 5-1-1929, T.N.A.

<sup>90</sup> Dept. of Industry and Labour L878, 1931, N.A.I.

<sup>91</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2711, 6-12-1937, T.N.A.

<sup>92</sup> Law [General], G.O. 1846, 7-11-1921, T.N.A.

*The Hindu*, January 18, 1917. Hindu Library, Madras.

<sup>93</sup> P.W.L.Dept., G.O.1101, 3-4-1930, T.N.A.

<sup>94</sup> Public Works and Labour G.O.2806, 5-10-1929. A Committee was set up. Such a discussion of implications of wages is there in Maurice Dobb, *Wages*, 1928, London, pp.123, 126.

<sup>95</sup> *The Hindu*, Coimbatore Strike Committee Resolution, 3-1-1936, Hindu Library, Madras.

<sup>96</sup> *I.F.C.Report*, 1908, London, p.304, Home Judicial, February, A, 405-468, 1896, N.A.I.

<sup>97</sup> *The Hindu*, 3-1-1936, Hindu Library, Madras.

<sup>98</sup> Development Dept., G.O.2711, 6-12-1937, T.N.A.

<sup>99</sup> Kumar, Radha, "Factory Life: Women Workers in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry 1919-1939" in Sujatha Gothoskar (ed.), *Struggles of Women at Work*, Manohar, Delhi, 1992. A detailed discussion of the lives of women in the Bombay textile industry and the maternity benefit question is also available in her book.

<sup>100</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 3189, 20-8-1946, T.N.A. We discuss this at the end of the section.

<sup>101</sup> *The Hindu*, 18-4-1939, Madras, report on the textile workers' conference at Coimbatore.

<sup>102</sup> P.W.D. G.O.1041, 6-4-1942, T.N.A. The government press communique did not, however, accede to the demands of the rural mill owners, saying that workers' wages were a sheer 26 % of cost of production excluding the cost of raw material.

<sup>103</sup> Development Dept. G.O.448, 21-2-1938. P.W.Dept., G.O.283, 12-2-1943, P.W.D. G.O. 1973, 15-6-1942.T.N.A. Here also the union demanded that the mills pay workers as recommended by the Award of 1938, clearly signifying violation on part of the management of Kaleswarar mills Coimbatore.

<sup>104</sup> Development Dept. G.O.3189, 20-8-1946.T.N.A.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Development Dept. G.O.3370, 28-8-50, Minimum Wage Legislation. Equal wage for equal work is articulated. Development Dept. G.O.-4701, 20-11-1950. During the conference of the labour ministers there was discussion on the question of equal wages to men and women. Also stated was that the minimum wages in Madras textile Industry was Rs.30 for men, 26 for women.

<sup>107</sup> *Madras Labour, 1938*, Madras, 1938, p 220-221, T.N.L.C.L.

<sup>108</sup> Development Dept. G.O.3189, 20-8-1946, T.N.A. *Op.cit.*

<sup>109</sup> *Award of the Industrial Tribunal*, 1946, Madras, 1947, p.30.

<sup>110</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2711, 6-12-1937, T.N.A.

<sup>111</sup> *Janasakhti*, 25.3.1939, Karl Marx Library, Madras.

<sup>112</sup> Strathie Award for Madura, Dev. Dept G.O. 1384, 30-5-1938, T.N.A. Dev. Dept. G.O.2735, 7-12- 1937.T.N.A.

<sup>113</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2059, 23-8-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>114</sup> P.W&L. Dept., G.O.804, 16-3-1942, T.N.A.

<sup>115</sup> Dept. of Industry and Labour, L-878 (14), 1928, N.A.I. Also Development G.O.2059, 23-8-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>116</sup> Indian Factory Commission Report, London, 1908, p.46.

<sup>117</sup> *Pudumaippithan Padaipagal*, V.1, Madras 1988.

<sup>118</sup> P.W&L.Dept., G.O.804, 16-3-1942, T.N.A.

<sup>119</sup> Bhogendranath, N.C., *Development of the Cotton Textile Industry in Madras (up to 1950)*, Madras, 1957. In Chapter 2 of the book, he provides a comprehensive list of the kind of changes initiated by the various mills.

<sup>120</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour*, V.VII, Part II, London, 1931, p.60. Women breast-feeding their children were constantly asked, why they took so much time over it by the maistri.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.148, 61.

<sup>122</sup> Madura Textile Workers Unions' Complaint Book, approximately, dated 3-7-1952.

<sup>123</sup> Kooiman, Dick, *Bombay Textile Labour*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1989. He discusses how female maistris 'naickins' in Bombay had to please various officials, p.23.

<sup>124</sup> *Native Newspaper Report for Madras, Desabhaktan*, 14 April, 1920, N.A.I.

<sup>125</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour*, Vol. VII, Part II, London, 1931, p.61.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Warriar, M V Shobhana, "The woman worker: images of militancy in Coimbatore mills", in Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.) *Re-searching Indian Women*, Manohar, Delhi 2003.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>129</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 1384, 30-5-1938. Development Dept. G.O.733, 25-3-1939.T.N.A.

<sup>130</sup> Development Dept., G.O. 2059, 23-8-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>131</sup> *The Hindu*, 11-6-1930, Madura Labour Union Meeting, Madras.

<sup>132</sup> P.W&L(MS), G.O. 64, 6-1-1945, T.N.A.

<sup>133</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2532, 12-10-1938, T.N.A. The CLU complained to the management as to how Annammal was pushed by the breast by the *maistri*. Instead of taking note of the matter, the management reprimanded the union for taking up such 'non-issues' and warned the union leader that in future they would not take him seriously.

<sup>134</sup> Development Dept. G.O.2532, 12-10-1938, T.N.A.

<sup>135</sup> P.W.D.[L], G.O.4134, 14-11-1942, T.N.A.

<sup>136</sup> Oral Transcript, Interview with Kamalam, initially an activist of the CMWU, later joined the INTUC, Coimbatore, 1991.

<sup>137</sup> Oral transcript, Interview with Kamalam, reeler in Coimbatore Spinning & Weaving mill from 1945 in Coimbatore, 1991. This was also recorded in the complaints from other mills.

<sup>138</sup> Oral transcript, Interview with Kamalam, reeler in CS&W mill from 1945 in Coimbatore, 1991. This was also recorded in the complaints from other mills.

Development Dept. G.O.3044, 18-12-1938, T.N.A. Mookasami's taunts at Mahalakshmi Mills, Madurai. Velu Pillai, a *maistri* of Mahalakshmi mill against whom the women complained, to the union, cited in MTWU complaint Book, dt. 3-7-1952.

<sup>139</sup> *Janasakhti*, 18-2-1939, Karl Marx Library, Madras.

<sup>140</sup> *Indian Factory Commissioner Report*, 1908, London, p.46.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Oral transcript, Kamalam, CS&W mill reeler from 1945, Coimbatore, 1991.

<sup>143</sup> Development Dept. G.O. 1938, 13-5-1950, T.N.A.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Madura Textile Workers union complaint book, approximately dated 3-5-1952. Complaint of Mariappan of Rajah mills, Madurai.

<sup>146</sup> *Janasakthi*, 26-2-1947, Madras. Similar dismissal of reelers is stated as happening in the Shanmugam mills, Rajapalayam.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* Such was the dispute between women and management at Kamala mills, Coimbatore that the women workers came to be considered quarrelsome by nature as they were now fighting to protect their available jobs.

<sup>149</sup> Kalpagam, U., "Women and the Reserve Army", in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 13, No. 10-11, 1985, pp.112-113.

## References

*Anandavikatan*, October 27, 1940, Madras.

*Award of the Industrial Tribunal*, 1946, Madras, 1947.

Barrett, M., *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Verso, London, 1980.

Bhogendranath, N.C., *Development of the Textile Industry in Madras ( up to 1950)*, Madras University, Madras, 1957.

Broughton, G.M., 'Maternity Benefits for Industrial Women', *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, February, 1921.

*Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, 1919, 1921-1924, Connemera Museum Library, Chennai.

"Coimbatore Mill Labour Union Records", Misc. C of 1955 R.K. Mills vs. Chandrakanti, P.C. Joshi Archives. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Coimbatore Textile Enquiry-Venkataramayya Committee Report, Madras, 1938, p.159. T.N.L.C.L. (Tamil Nadu Labour Commission Library, Chennai).

Department of Commerce and Industry, 1906, N.A.I. (National Archives of India, Delhi).

Department of Industry and Labour, 1922-1934, N.A.I.

Development Department Files 1921-1951, Madras Government, T.N.A. (Tamil Nadu Archives).

Dobb, Maurice, *Wages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1928.

*The Hindu*, 1914-1951, Hindu Library, Chennai.

Home Dept. [Public] 1931, N.A.I.

Home Judicial, 1896, N.A.I.

*Indian Factory Commission Report*, London, 1908.

*Janasakthi*, 1939-1949, Karl Marx Library, Chennai.

Jeevanandam, P., *Tamarai, Jeeva Shirrappu Malar, Supplement*, Madras, March 1963.

Joshi, Chitra, "Bonds of community, ties of religion: Kanpur textile workers in the early twentieth century", in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.22, No 3, July-September 1985.

Joyce, P., *Language of Class: Studies in English Working Class History*, London, 1984.

Kalpagam, U., 'Women and the Reserve Army', in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 13, No. 10-11, 1985, pp.112-113.

Kamalam, an Interview, Oral Transcript, Interview with Kamalam, initially an activist of the CMWU, later joined the INTUC, Coimbatore, 1991.

Kelman, J. H., *Labour in India*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1923.

Kooiman, D., *Bombay Textile Labour*, 1989, Manohar, New Delhi.

Lambertz, J., "Sexual Harassment in the Nineteenth century English cotton Industry", *History Workshop*, Spring 1985.

Law General Dept., 1921-1926, T.N.A.

Leadbeater, S.R.B., *The Politics of Textiles: The Indian Cotton Mill Industry and the Legacy of Swadeshi, 1900-1985*, Sage, Delhi, 1993.

Legislative Department Proceedings, N.A.I.

Madras Labour, 1938, Madras, 1938, T.N.L.C.L.

Madura Textile Workers Unions' Complaint Book, 1951-1952.

*Modern Review*, 1920-1923, Calcutta, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

Morgan, C. E., "Women work and consciousness in the mid 19th century English cotton Industry", *Social History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1990.

Murphy, E., *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939*, Manohar, Delhi, 1981.

Naidu, P. M., Private Diaries, Harveypatti Colony, Madurai.

Native Newspaper Report for Madras, 1914-1925, N.A.I.

Public Works and Labour (MS) 1925-1946, T.N.A.

Public Works Dept. (Labour) and Confidential, 1929-1945, T.N.A.

*Puddmaippithan Padaipagal*, V.1, Madras, 1988.

Rose, S., "Gender at Work: Sex Class and Industrial Capitalism", *History Workshop*, No. 21, Spring, 1986.

Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VII, Part II, London, 1931.

Scott, J., "On Language, Gender and Working class History", *International Labour and Working Class History*, Spring, No 31, 1987.

Sivasubramaniam, A., 'Folk songs of Textile Mill Workers', in *A.I.T.U.C. Souvenir*, Madras, 1985.

*Textile Centres*, Manohar, Delhi, 1981.

Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980.

Walby, S., *Patriarchy at Work*, Polity, Cambridge, 1986.

Warrier, M. V. Shobhana, "Condition of women workers in Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, 1914-1939", *Social Scientist*, Vol 19, No 5-6, June 1991.

Warrier, M. V. Shobhana, "The woman worker: images of militancy in Coimbatore mills", in Vijaya Ramaswamy ed. *Re-searching Indian Women*, Manohar, Delhi, 2003.

*Working of the Indian Factory Administration Act, 1949*, T.N.L.C.L.





## Being a Middle Class Housewife: A Comparative Analysis of India and Japan

Fumiko Oshikawa

There has been much discussion regarding the emergence of the discourse of the middle-class housewife, which was closely connected to the concept of modernity in the nationalist framework. This holds true both in India and Japan, though there was considerable difference in their position in these respective societies. In short, middle-class housewives were deemed as loving caretakers of the family, the retainers of tradition, yet also as the modernisers and reformers of the society and nation.

In the case of Japan, a need to modernize the 'family' as a foundation of nation building was gradually recognized from the 1880s and *Ryosai Kenbo* (good wife and wise mother) became the slogan of women's education. With the emergence and development of the salaried class, the middle-class housewife became a visible model of womanhood in 'modern' Japan. Ironically, when the majority of women began to enjoy the housewives' lifestyle after World War II (as Ochiai correctly named 'the post-war regime of family'), the value of housewives began to be increasingly questioned.

On the contrary, the middle-class housewife model survived much longer in India, partly because of its resonance with the nation-building processes as the enlightened reformers. The contents of women's magazines targeted at the urban middle-class in the 1970s, such as *Woman's Era* and *Femina*, show vivid concerns over social and political matters combined with the roles of wife and mother. This 'progressive', yet 'Indian' and elitist discourse of Indian

housewife gradually disappeared from both magazines in the 1980s as they confronted consumerism and rise of the new rich as well as feminism. Like the case of Japan, it means the emergence of a new version of the housewife model rather than its disappearance.

This paper examines the nature of the transformation of the middle-class housewife discourses in both societies, focusing on their role and position in respective societies.

### **Japanese Experience: The modernising agents of the home and the state**

To understand the transformation of the housewife discourse after World War II, it is necessary to review briefly the development of the family, especially its relation to the state, in modern Japan.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the terms *kasei* (household) and *shuhu* (housewife) were translated into Japanese from English in the first year of Meiji Restoration (1868) [Koyama 1999:33] shows that the new Meiji administration recognised clearly the importance of the family as a basic unit to control the people. It was only four years after the restoration that the government introduced *Koseki* (family register) system, in which persons living together were registered as a unit and the elder male was given the title of *koshu* (head of the unit-family). It was a fundamental change in the sense that unlike the previous systems, such as the *shumon kaichou* (temple register) or *kamei/karoku* (feudal family) system of the samurai class, *koseki* was a unitary register system that directly combined the state and the people. People were obliged to submit an official copy (or a copy of its simplified form) of this *koseki* register at the time of birth registration, marriage, conscription, enrolment in schools, and so on. The other aspect of the introduction of *koseki* system was its role to make the family a 'private' unit. Even in Meiji Civil Law (1898) that was characterized by patriarchal ideology and regulated the rights of *koshu* over family (especially female) members, the ownership of property was admitted to individual *koshu*. The public character of the family in the feudal system was denied at least in the judicial sphere. The *Koseki* system has been modified several times, but is still being used.

The introduction of a new judicial framework of the family, however, does not mean the emergence of the 'modern family' in society. It was in the late 1880s that the discourse of the home and the housewife began to appear in leading journals, contesting the growing state-ism in which patriarchal ideology of the Confucian type was stressed. Following the series of editorials of *jogakuzassi* (Journal of Woman's Study) in 1888, a considerable number of journals and magazines with names relating to the home were started: *katei zassi* (Home Magazine 1892-1898), *nihon no katei* (Home in Japan 1895-1900), *katei no tomo* (Friends of Home 1903-1908), and so on. Muta points out that the issues relating to the home that were once deemed as an important aspect of social reform by leading opinion leaders such as Iwamoto Ganji and Tokutomi Soho, gradually lost this impact, and became a 'woman's issue' in the course of time [Muta 1996:71]. In many ways, the term *shufu* (housewife) became a familiar word in this period among urban intellectuals [Muta 1990:15]. According to Koyama, the characteristics of the discourse of the home and the housewife in this period can be summarized into three points: 1. The emergence of a clear notion of the gender, namely, the man for the work and the woman for the home (as mother and wife). 2. The emphasis on the emotional bonds of the family and the role of the housewife as 'a core of the family fireside'. 3. The introduction of scientific and rational attitudes and knowledge into the home [Koyama 1996]. In short, it is a well-known story of the family discourse which commonly appeared in most of societies.

If the family and the housewife discourse of Japan had its own peculiarity, it lay in its realisation by the emerging middle class that followed soon after. After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), and particularly after World War I, the economic structure of Japan gradually shifted and the urban middle class, namely, non-manual salaried workers who enjoyed the 'middle' status in society, was enlarged. The ratio of this class (including government employees, teachers of the primary schools, white-colour workers and military officers) according to Kadowaki's estimation [Kadowaki 1988:231-232] increased from 2-3% to 5-8% of the total population during

the 1910s. In Tokyo, in particular, their ratio was estimated to be as high as 21% in 1920.

The emergence of this urban middle class added a new aspect to the discourse of the family and the housewife that had been more an idea than a reality. As mentioned earlier, the concern over the home had already shifted to the 'woman's issue', the focus on the family issue from the 1920s onwards was strongly biased to more practical 'reforms', namely the rationalisation of the household and the eradication of 'bad customs'. Along with the women's magazines that emphasized the value of the modern home and targeted the upper portion of the middle class, such as *katei no tomo* (Friends of the Home, 1903) and *fujin no tomo* (Friends of Woman, 1908), a new genre of women's magazine filled with practical knowledge of domestic works and 'how to' remedies, such as *shuhu no tomo* (Friends of the Housewife, 1917) and *Fujin Gorakubu* (Woman's Club, 1920) were started and gained considerable popularity. The circulations of *shuhu no tomo* and *fujin gorakubu* were 200,000 and 120,000 respectively in 1927 [Koyama 1999:45]. It should be noted that the necessity to reform 'Japanese (bad) customs' was keenly recognised and emphasised repeatedly in these popular magazines. Their targets covered various matters, such as inconvenient and inactive *kimono* and hairstyle, traditional seasonal gift-giving customs, luxurious habits of keeping domestic servants, institutionalised prostitution, vanity shown at marriage parties or funeral ceremonies, and so on. At the same time, the role of the reformers or the modernising agents, given by the housewives themselves, brought a certain degree of their hegemony over domestic matters. Japanese housewives were confined to the home, but as far as domestic matters were concerned, they were not mere passive dependents.

Ironically, the expectation arose within middle-class housewives to modernise domesticity, which was consistent with the approaches of the government trying to project a modern powerful nation state at the time. Especially under the acute inflation after World War I, and the depression that hit the household economy directly, the rationalisation of household consumption became a

serious topic for the housewives as well as for the government that faced serious social/political instability. Numerous exhibitions and public lectures to promote a thrifty yet modern lifestyle, mainly targeted to middle-class housewives, were held by the government and semi-governmental organisations all over Japan. Along with the rationalisation of the household economy, the role of the woman as educator was another sphere that the government showed vivid concern for. Needless to say, the role of good mother, and woman's education that would support this role, was also the main concern of most of the middle-class housewives for whom education became the main asset they could leave to their children.

From the middle of the 1930s when the mobilization of every possible resource to the war became an acute issue, the intervention from the government to the family reached its peak. Towards the end of the war, the government also began to stress the Japan-ness in the virtue of a woman, especially that of the mother (a Japanese mother, unlike that of one in the West, should feel happy, or at least should be brave enough to pretend so, when her son dies on the battlefield as a soldier of the emperor!). If we see the process in which the needs and the expectations of middle-class families had coincided largely with those of the state in the previous decades, it is not surprising that many of the housewives responded positively to, and also participated as leaders, in the government propaganda to make their home *jugo no mamori* (the fort behind guns). Many of the opinion leaders who had propagated the modern and rational lifestyle emphasising the role of the woman or the emancipation of women based on their quality as mothers were recruited to various committees and organisations set up by the government to mobilise people as core members.

### **The Pre-War Period**

A brief and simplified sketch of Japanese middle-class housewives in the pre-war period shows some characteristics of the discourse of housewives: 1. The emphasis on the role of the modernizer/ reformer. 2. The clear norm of gender division that led to some degree of the woman's hegemony over domestic affairs.

3. The intervention of the state in family matters as part of its nation-building/ modernisation projects. It could be said that though the housewives in the pre-war period grew under the strong patriarchal framework and governmental control, there was also a possibility for the women to negotiate. Muta rightly called this possibility as 'family as a strategy' [Muta 1996]. Relating to 1, it should be noted that, as the middle-class population was still a minority at the end of the war, they were expected to be the reformers not only for their own homes, but also for the rest of society. Direct state intervention in family matters continued even after the war, though in different forms, such as the so-called 'life-style reform movements' in rural areas promoted by the ministry of agriculture in which the woman, not the agriculturalist, was expected to be the modernising agent of the village society [Amano 2001].

### **The Post-war period: Housewives looking for new meaning**

Under the rule of the US occupation army, a series of measures to democratise Japan was brought into effect. After some controversies and negotiations, the civil law was amended in 1948 and equal rights for men and women in property ownership, inheritance, marriage, and so on, were finally introduced legally. Universal suffrage was also introduced and welcomed by the people.

Along with these institutional changes, the transformation of the economic structure and demographic transition had tremendous impact on the discourse as well as the reality of Japanese families. By the 1970s, the first sector (agriculture, forestry and fishery) decreased to less than 20% of the total population, and a portion of the wives of salaried workers in the total married women exceeded 60%. Further, thanks to rapid economic growth, majority of the people shared a sense of belonging to the middle-class. Although the labour participation ratio of the wives of the salaried workers has been increasing continuously, the age-wise M curve became more visible among women born in 1946–50 than those born in the pre-war period. It means that the majority of the women of this generation retired from the labour market at marriage and childbirth, stayed at home for some years, and then returned when they regained some free time. Most of the private companies had separate and

subordinate career courses for the women workers with the excuse that 'the girls will quit the job in a few years'. Especially after marriage, women tended to take part-time jobs or jobs with less responsibility to make their home-centred lifestyle easier. They were primarily housewives even if they were working, both in their self-image as well as in recognition from others. Institutional systems such as taxation, insurance and pension were also designed with the assumption that the woman is to be married and supported by the husband.

Thus by the 1970s, there emerged a huge group of women called 'the middle class housewives'. There was both continuity and discontinuity between their pre-war predecessors and the post-war less-elite housewives. Instead of direct intervention of the state in family matters, the logic of capital came to support the gender division and the home became the sub-system of reproduction so that the men could devote all their time and energy to office. As long as she was satisfied with this role and lucky enough to have a husband who could support her, a housewife could enjoy a certain degree of freedom at home. 'Permanent job with three meals and a snap' was often used to describe their everyday life. However, the meaning of being a housewife was lost in this process. Unlike the pre-war housewives, for whom being a housewife meant taking a part in the modernisation of the society and nation building, the post-war housewives were left behind in the home. As they became the majority and the standardisation of lifestyle all over Japan rapidly took place, their self image as advanced women also lost its meaning.

The so-called 'housewives controversy' is a good example indicating the nature of the predicament they faced at that time. More than 70 papers and essays appeared in leading magazines in 1955-59, in 1960-61, and 1972 in this controversy.<sup>2</sup> Including the first essay by Ayako Ishigaki's 'The housewife as the second-class occupation', most of the essays in the first wave focused on the meaning of housewife. Some, including Ishigaki, questioned that being just a housewife would not be adequate for a woman and insisted on the necessity to participate in economic and/or social activities. Some others argued that housewives, who support the family and raise the next generation with

love, have the most valuable and sophisticated occupation. The essays appeared in magazines and provoked many readers to respond, both positively and negatively. The main issue of the second wave was the economic value of domestic work: if the gainful work of the husband is possible with the support of his (house)wife, the latter's work also should be deemed as part of the economic activities. The arguments tried to defend the stance of non-working housewives vis-à-vis working women, but strongly objected that domestic work does carry value by itself and would not be paid even if it could be evaluated in economic terms. The third wave was largely in response to the woman's liberation movement, focusing on patriarchal oppression within the family. The issues taken in each stage of the controversy show the range of concern of housewives of the post-war period. They had to find new value in being housewives, to confirm their status in comparison with working women, and to question the basic principle of the home, namely, the patriarchal arrangement.

After the third wave of the controversy, no serious public (other than academic) argument on this issue took place. It could be said that as practically all possible logic was presented in the course of the controversy and the difficulty in bridging these different stances became clear, the issue of the housewife was no more the topic of public discussion. The various indices, such as marriageable age, the labour participation rate and the fertility ratio, indicate that the housewife has become just one of the choices since the 1980s. *Shuhu no tomo* and *fujin gorakubu*, the popular woman's magazines started in the pre-war period, were stopped and *fujin kouron*, the main venue of the controversy, was radically renewed in the 1990s. The discourse on the housewife today seems to be split into two trends. One is the conservative pro-home group which insists that most social problems are rooted in the degradation of the family system and housewives should take the responsibility of loving caretaker once again. The other sees the home as a primary unit that functions as a kind of 'buffer zone' between the individual and the state or the market. The latter expects the non-profit and not-institutionalized initiatives of the housewives in various social activities.



**Indian Experiences: The elite reformer of the society***Colonial period to the 1970s*

Compared with the pre-war experiences in Japan, the development of the housewives in India before Independence was unique in several ways. First of all, the difference in the nature of state intervention is obvious. Under the colonial setting, the family was largely left to the 'native society', barring few legal interventions. Measures to grasp the people directly and to institutionalise the family, such as the family register system and civil law, were not introduced. In other words, the colonial regime intervened in the family negatively. Second, the stress on tradition was much stronger in India than in Japan. It has been thoroughly researched how the woman and the family were constructed as the 'inner' world where the virtue of Indian-ness would be maintained in the nationalist discourse. It is true that the tradition was repeatedly invented in the family discourse in Japan also, but the basic stance of the state, as well as the women's response to it, was to make the household a unit of modern nation building. Third, as a consequence of these two aspects, the form of modernity of both societies was designed keeping the housewives in mind. In Japan, their concern tended to focus on the practical and everyday management of the household. This is the reason why their motivation and effort to modernise the home were echoed by the needs of the government to modernise the nation. Though comparatively fewer researches have been undertaken on the nature of the modernity of housewives in India, it seems that their modernity was more visible in their participation in social and political movements/activities than domestic matters which were still governed to a considerable extent by the elder members of the family and kinship relations. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the national movement, and the women's movements closely associated with it, offered vast opportunities in which the women of the middle-class had experience of being members of the nation in making, on their own as well as of wives/daughters/sisters. Last, the difference in their positions in the respective societies should be noted. As mentioned earlier, the size of the middle-class was fairly large, especially in the urban areas, even in the pre-war period in Japan. In addition to this size, thanks to the spread of education and to the homogeneity of

culture, the social and cultural gap among the middle class, and between the middle class and the rest of the society, was less visible in Japan. The Indian middle-class before the Independence, on the other hand, was undoubtedly an elite group. The elitism combined with their association with the social and political activities made them the natural instructors, at least in their minds, who could guide the rest of society.

Unlike the middle-class housewives of Japan who experienced much discontinuity and upheaval between pre-war and post-war periods, the Indian counterpart took a path of gradual development in the 1950s and the 1960s. Though the majority of them chose to be non-working housewives, a considerable number of them, mostly those of the upper middle class, established themselves as professionals and participated in various social/political activities. The real challenge to the Indian middle-class housewives came in the late 1970s when feminism brought new thinking and consumerism and emergence of the new rich became visible. I would like to briefly sketch this process following the transformation of the two leading women's magazines, *Femina* and *Woman's Era*, from the 1970s to 1990s.

*From the 1980s: The transformation of the housewife in India*

*Femina* (1959–) and *Woman's Era* (1973–) are respectively the most widely and the second-most widely circulated English-medium women's magazines in India. According to the National Readership Survey of 1999, the circulation and estimated readers were 143,000 and 1,847,000 for *Femina*, and 88,000 and 1,125,000 for *Woman's Era* respectively. Most of the readers live in the urban centres: 8 urban centres with a population of 2 million and over counts 43.9% and 48.4%, the urban area in total counts 91.2% and 92.4%. There is not much difference in the occupation and the socio-economic status of the readers, but the readers of *Femina* are slightly younger (20.8% and 49.0% for ages 15–19 and ages 20–34 respectively) than those of *Woman's Era* (17.3% and 46.5% for ages 15–19 and age 20–34 respectively). The ratio of the students in the total readers is higher in *Femina* (32.1%) than *Woman's Era* (26.8%) while that of the housewives is higher in *Woman's Era* (36.6%) than *Femina* (28.5%) [National Readership Survey Council 1999].

Though there has been a considerable difference in the character of the two magazines, both showed vivid concern with the social and political issues of the 1970s. *Femina*, begun as a moderate magazine for the urban middle class, changed its line to a more radical stance in the early 1970s under the editorship of Vimla Patil. For example, in one issue of January 1975, the Editorial and the reports picked up topics like women's rights and uniform civil law, the international women's year, the prohibition movements of the adivasi women, women's movements among the Muslim population of Rajasthan, and so on along with the routine articles. The topics often described in the short stories then were violence and sexual oppression. Compared to *Femina*, *Woman's Era* was oriented to housewives from the beginning. The first issue of *Woman's Era* stated in the Editorial that as Indian women had already been recognised as liberated and equal citizens in independent India, they should contribute to society and the nation as good citizens along with their primary role of making sound homes. It also strongly opposed the women's liberation movement, saying that it brought a bad foreign idea into India. Most of the pages of *Woman's Era* in the 1970s were filled with essays and commentaries on this line [Oshikawa 2000].

If we compare with the housewives controversy in Japan that took place at almost same time, Indian magazines looked much more outward: they were concerned with the problems of society, i.e., the society other than themselves, while for the Japanese housewives they themselves were the very core of the problem.

After the Emergency of 1975–77 when political comments completely disappeared, the contents of both magazines began to change gradually: more cooking and fashion, more pictures and colour, and less editorial and political comments. The diversification of women's magazines and journals made these commercial publications more sensitive to the market strategy. *Femina* was completely renewed after Vimla Patil left the magazine in 1993 and switched its sales target from housewives to the younger generation.

In contrast, *Woman's Era* set its target on the housewives early. But the housewives of the magazines in the 1990s are not same as

those of 1970. In order to trace the housewives discourse in the *Woman's Era* toward the end of the 1990s, I once tried to analyse the short stories, a popular content of the magazine, which appeared in the issues from January to September 1999. These stories covered various issues concerning middle-class housewives today, such as marriage and love,<sup>3</sup> child-bearing and education, the wife-husband relationship, parents (or mother)-children relationship, working women/working housewives, younger generation/ generation gap, parents (mother/father) in law, international migration, aging/after-retirement and luxurious consumption/lifestyle.

One of the themes that repeatedly appeared in these stories was the happiness of the non-working housewives vis-à-vis working women. A typical story goes like this. A non-working housewife, tired of the monotonous life and dissatisfied with the love of her husband, envied a friend who worked as a journalist/executive and enjoyed an active and luxurious lifestyle. But she finally comes to understand how happy she is when she finds that her friend has been suffering from loneliness for a long time. The working woman, combined with the 'new rich lifestyle', is condemned repeatedly as the root cause of individual unhappiness, family disorder and social degradation. Praise for the decency, chastity and simplicity of Indian women vis-à-vis Western women is also one of the most popular themes of the stories: for example, the parents' agony when their son gets married with a pleasure-loving American girl who cannot make him happy. Interestingly enough, in spite of such emphasis on (Indian) family values, the heroines do not expect the children's help or cohabitation in the future. There are several stories written on the topic of aging, more than half of which end with a nursing home or a choice to live alone.

A few examples of the short stories of *Woman's Era* in the late 1990s mentioned above perhaps represent the unstable and uncertain feeling of housewives. The meaning of being a housewife is no longer unquestionable, and they need a kind of assurance, even from such stories, to depend on being confident housewives.

The developments of discourses of the housewives in the two societies show that they had a double-edged existence. In the case of

Japan, being a housewife has had a progressive role to resist and to think alternatively against patriarchal state-ism. On the other hand, it has also contributed to the modernizing project of the nation state from the grass-root level. In the case of India, it was meant for the leaders of social reform while retaining much of the Indian-ness. In both societies, being a housewife is a path of the 'nationalisation of woman', as Koyama rightly said.

When this unquestionable role of housewives was lost, in post-war Japan and in the 1990s in India, the defensive tone of the discourse strengthened. And if the excessive defensiveness often invites an aggressive attitude, the discourse of the housewives today has reached the most dangerous point. The repeated appeal to the 'traditional' family by the new conservative ideologues of Japan, and perhaps that by Hindu nationalists in India, must be the symptom for the same.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The issues of the growth of housewives, both in reality as well as in discourse, have been among the most fruitful areas of research for the last two decades in gender studies in Japan. These studies, depending on detailed analysis of women's writings, magazines and journals as well as government documents, have revealed the agency and modernity of the housewives and replaced the previous conventional arguments that characterized the housewives as passive dependents. Some of the best works are: Koyama 1991, Koyama 1999, Ueno 1994, Ochiai 1994, Muta 1996, and Nishikawa 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Main essays and papers were compiled into two volumes by Chizuko Ueno [Ueno 1982].

<sup>3</sup> Singh, Amrita Tyagi and Patricia Uberoi analysed the short stories of Woman's Era, focusing on the form of love in Indian middle-class settings [Singh and Uberoi 1994] [Uberoi 1998].

## References

Kadowaki, Atsushi, 'Shin chuukanso no ryouteiki henka to seikatu suiun no sui' (The quantitative change and the transformation of the living standard of the new middle class)', (ed.) by Sougou kennkyu kaihatsu kikou, *Sekai suiun no rekishiteki bunnseki (A Historical Analysis of the Living Standard)*, 1988.

Koyama, Shizuko, *Ryosai Kenbo to iu Shisou* (An ideology called good wife and wise mother), Keiso Shobou, 1991.

Koyama, Shizuko, *Katei no seisei to josei no kokuminka* (The emergence of the home and the nationalisation of women), Keiso Shobou, 1999.

Muta, Kazue, *Senryaku to shitenno kazoku: kindai nihon no kokumin kokka no keisei to josei* (Family as a Strategy: Nation Building and the Women in the Modern Japan), Shin-yosha, 1996.

Nishikawa, Yuko, 'Kindai kokka to kazoku: nihon-gata kindai kazoku no baai (The Modern Nation and the Family: A Case of the Japanese Modern Family)', Inoue Shunya, (ed.), *Kazoku no Shakaigaku* (Sociology of the Family), Iwanami Shoten, 1996.

National Readerhip Survey Council, *National Readership Survey, 1999, Round I*, 1999.

Ochiai, Emiko, *Kindai kazoku to feminizumu* (The modern family and the Feminism), 1989.

Keiso Shobou, *21 seiki kazoku he: kazoku no sengotaisei no mikata, koekata* (Towards the 21st Century Family: How to overcome the post-war regime of the family), Yuhikaku Sensho, 1994.

Oshikawa, Fumiko, *Indo eiji josei zassi wo yomu: 90 nendai toshi midoru kurasu no josei gensetu* (Reading the Woman's magazines of India: The discourse of Woman of the Urban Middle Class), *Chiiki Kenkyuu Ronshuu*, 3 (2), 2000.

Singh, Amita Tyagi and Patricia Uberoi, 'Learning to Adjust: Conjugal Relations in Indian Popular Fiction', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(1), 1994.

Uberoi, Patricia, A suitable Romance? Trajectories of Courtship in Indian Popular Fiction, *Studies in Humanities and Social Science*, 5(2), 1998.

Ueno, Chizuko, *Shuhu ronso wo yomu I* (Reading the housewives controversy), Keiso Shobou, 1982a.

Ueno, Chizuko, *Shuhu ronso wo yomu II*, Keiso Shobou, 1982b.

Ueno, Chizuko, *Kindai kazoku no seiritsu to shuen* (The emergence and the end of the modern family), Iwanami Shoten, 1994.

# Gender and Social Characteristics of the Labour Force in Health Services

Rama V. Baru

**T**his paper examines the gender and social characteristics of the labour force in the health services in India. The health services can best be described as a complex human organisation for it consists of several personnel with different skills and training at different levels of hierarchy. These categories of personnel have clearly defined sets of roles and functions in the work hierarchy. However, their roles are complementary and call for co-operation and co-ordination among the different categories of personnel to ensure effective patient care. It is hypothesised that the work hierarchy in the health services broadly replicates the social hierarchy in terms of social background of workers as regards caste, class and gender.

The paper is divided into three sections. The *first* section describes the structure of health services delivery in India and the personnel employed at different levels. The *second* section analyses the data on the number of personnel across different categories and their growth during the previous three decades. In addition it draws from published studies to provide insights into the social background of health personnel in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The *third* section analyses how the social background of these various personnel and their position in the work hierarchy have a bearing on their interactions within the health services and the community. It is hypothesised that the social dynamics affect the quality of teamwork, effectiveness of health services delivery and the quality of interaction between the health personnel and the community.

## An Overview of Indian Health Services

Health services in India are provided by the public, private and voluntary sectors. The public sector consists of a large network of services in both rural and urban areas with a number of institutional forms consisting of sub-centres, primary health centres, community health centres, and district and teaching hospitals. These institutions provide curative and preventive services. This large network of services is dependent on personnel possessing different levels of skills and functions. These services are arranged hierarchically both within institutions and across levels of care. The base consists of the sub-centre, primary health centres and dispensaries; the next level is the community health centres; at the district level are the district and general hospitals and at the tertiary level are the medical college hospitals and specialised institutions. According to the latest data available, there are 1,31,369 sub-centres, 22,975 primary health centres, 22,967 allopathic dispensaries, 2,935 community health centres and 15,501 hospitals at the secondary and tertiary levels. The institutions in the public sector employ a large number of health personnel. According to the latest estimates there are 70 nurses for 100,000 population and 53 doctors per 100,000 population, 1,34,086 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), 73,327 male health workers, 19,426 lady health assistants and 22,265 male health assistants. (Source: Central Bureau of Health Intelligence (CBHI):1999)

In the private sector the institutional forms include clinics, and small and medium hospitals that employ mostly doctors, paramedical workers and technicians. Females belonging to the Scheduled Caste category dominate the individually-owned enterprises in health in rural areas. (Enterprise Survey:1996) These would largely include both trained and untrained workers like *dais* who are the traditional birth attendants and other healers. A study conducted by the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare on *dais* from 41 districts of fifteen states in India provided information on the social background of the *dais* and showed that majority of the *dais* was above 45 years of age, married and illiterate. Most of them were Hindus, except in Tamilnadu where a small percentage were Christians.



They belonged mostly to the Scheduled Caste and backward communities. In states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra, the majority of the *dais* were from backward communities. In states like Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh the *dais* belonged to the Scheduled Tribes as well. The husbands of these *dais* were mostly small peasants, landless labourers and artisans.

In the voluntary sector, especially in the community-based programmes, there is a dependence on community-level workers to promote health-related activities. This has been well documented in studies on community-based programmes that depend on voluntary workers for their field-based activities. (Pachauri:1994) Majority of these workers are women belonging to the lower class/caste combine. An important reason for choosing women of this social background was that women belonging to upper castes would rarely participate outside their homes. Thus one sees that social hierarchy, both in terms of caste and gender, plays an important role in the choice of female health workers in community-based programmes. The working conditions and wages earned by community-level workers are poor. They are often paid only an honorarium that barely covers their travel costs. As Nanda points out: "this kind of volunteerism perpetuates the perceived low status of the women workers within the system, since an overwhelming majority of male staff (*in community-based organisations*) belong to the salaried group". (Nanda :1993)

Across the three sectors there is feminisation of the labour force in the health sector, especially at the intermediate and peripheral levels. While medical professionals are largely male, the other levels of paramedical staff and field workers are largely women who have less power, lower status and are paid less compared to the medical personnel. A cross-country study of the WHO observes: "As far as it now exists, primary health care in the formal system is being provided largely by poorly paid categories of health workers. Outside the formal system, it is generally provided by women as part of their unpaid labour as mothers, wives and daughters". (Pizurki et al:1987)

## **Social Background and Working Conditions of Health Personnel : A Review of Studies**

Doctors occupy the apex of the occupational and social hierarchy in terms of status, power and prestige. This is partly due to their social background and by virtue of the fact that during the latter part of the nineteenth century the rise of allopathic medicine gave primacy to curative care. With the rise of hospitals, doctors emerged as the main agents in the delivery of services. Across the world it is well known that doctors belong mainly to the upper and middle classes in society. In India the situation was similar and studies show that doctors were mainly upper-caste Hindus, Christians and Parsees. (Madan: 1980; Banerji: 1982). A study of the social background of doctors at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi in the late 1970s showed that 37% of the respondents belonged to upper castes of which 26% were Brahmins and 11% were Kshatriyas, 49% belonged to the middle castes of which 34% were Vaishyas and 15% were Kayasths. The remaining 16% belonged to the backward classes and Scheduled Caste. (Madan: 1980) Oomen's study of doctors and nurses across public hospitals in Delhi showed that out of the 337 Hindu doctors who were interviewed, only two belonged to the Scheduled Caste and none to the backward classes. Thus majority of the doctors were mainly from the three twice-born *varnas* viz. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. It is significant to point out that the presence of minorities, both Muslims and Christians, among doctors is very small. (Oomen:1978) While these studies do not give data on the female-male break-up, the data clearly shows that males dominate this level of personnel (Table 1).

In India there has been only a 10% increase in the number of female doctors to total doctors from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. Of the total number of qualified MBBS doctors, only 27% were women in the 1970s and this rose to 39.6% in 1992-93. (Govt of India:CBHI)

**Table 1**  
**Gender Distribution of Health Personnel in**  
**Indian Health Services During 1997 & 1998**

Health Personnel	Male	% to Total	Female	% to	Total Total
MBBS Passed out	5779	53.8	3243	30.2	10734*
PG Degree in Medicine					
Admitted	1451	61.7	902	38.3	2353
PG Diploma in Medicine					
Admitted	596	52.9	530	47.1	1126
Gen. Nursing Midwifery	13905	2.1	657436	97.9	671341
VHG's in Position	82823	54.4	69259	45.6	152082
Health Assistants in position	22187	53.3	19475	46.7	41662
Multi-Purpose Workers in Position	73266	35.4	133618	64.6	206884

Source: Health Information of India, 1997, 1998 & 1999.

Note: Data not received from 59 colleges in 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Nurses occupy the second rung in the occupational hierarchy in the health services. Nurses are seen as supplementing or assisting doctors and this kind of assignment of roles is rooted in the history of allopathic medicine itself. Across the world women belonging to the middle and lower middle classes of society dominate the nursing profession. The historical and ideological roots of the nursing profession are fairly extensively documented. In the UK, many middle-class women, inspired by Florence Nightingale, entered the

nursing profession. As Doyal points out: "It was assumed that women did not have the intellectual or emotional capacities to deal with scientific healing, and conversely, that it would be a waste of their undoubted organisational, mothering and nurturing capacities, were they to be employed in anything other than nursing role". (Doyal: 1979) Sathayamala also makes similar observations and states: "It was also not a mere accident that nursing emerged as a suitable profession for women or that it was subordinated to doctoring. By the time medical practice had become established as the domain of male regular doctors, women had been eliminated from health care for all practical purposes. The authority that doctors had in defining normality allowed them the power to advance pseudo-scientific theories and sexist arguments regarding the intellectual capabilities of women to prevent them from entering medical colleges". (Sathayamala:1985; p.53)

As in other countries, in the Indian context women dominate the nursing profession with the ratio of male:female nurses at 1:14 during the early 1990s. The proportion of nurses to doctors is very inadequate and despite the investments made in nursing education, the number of registered nurses was less than half (450,000) the required number (900,000) at the end of 1990. (VHAI:1994) The number of nurses registered with the state councils has shown a steady increase from 1,50,855 in 1985 to 3,67,425 in 1994. However after the mid-1990s there has been a stagnation and in some states even a decline in the output of nurses from the public sector. This may partly explain the growth of institutions for nurses' training in the private and voluntary sectors. With the growth of private hospitals, there is a demand for trained nurses and the decline in output of nurses from public sector is being filled by private and voluntary sectors. The growth in private training institutes for paramedical workers raises serious concerns about the quality of training and the competence of the trainers in these institutions. These institutions are unregulated and in some states are often not even registered.

### **Social Background and Working Conditions of Nurses**

In India studies show that nurses are drawn largely from urban, lower middle-class Christian families. (Mohan:1985; Raghavachari:1990; Oomen:1978; Mishra:1984) A study of nurses from north and south-Indian states showed that nurses belonged to the lower socio-economic strata where fathers were earning less than Rs 300 per month. They were predominantly Christian and were motivated by the need to serve humanity. The proportion of Muslims, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes among nurses was indeed very small. As far as working conditions are concerned, these studies provide insights into hours of work, remuneration, interaction with doctors, patients and sexual harassment faced at the workplace. Mohan's study highlights the lack of job mobility within the public and private sectors which leads to frustration in the long term. While the working conditions and wages in the public sector were better as compared to the private sector, they were subjected to very long hours of work in both. The shifts in government hospitals were for an eight-hour duration with a break of only three hours between shifts. Given the fact that patient care is physically and emotionally demanding, the nurses felt tired and were not able to give their best to the job. As Mohan observes: "As such, the number of hours of work, the shift pattern and work-load on nurses have a direct bearing on the quality of nursing services they render". (Mohan:1985; p. 49)

The scenario was much worse in private hospitals where nurses work for longer hours than in the public sector and with fewer breaks. In fact, Mohan's study shows that majority of the medium and smaller nursing homes employ nursing personnel on a 12-hour shift at a stretch. The long working hours of nurses and other paramedical staff has been well documented by researchers and some activist groups in Delhi and other major cities. (Workers Solidarity: 2000; also see Baru:2001)

Mohan's study showed that the nurse:bed ratio was adverse, ranging between 1:15 and 1:50 against the norms prescribed by the Central Council of Health at 1:3 and 1:5 for teaching and non-teaching hospitals respectively. Clearly this would increase the

workload and hours of work in hospital. Given the nature of their duties, which demanded close interaction with male doctors and patients, they reported that they were sexually harassed and even abused. Recent reports of nurses being sexually abused in hospitals in Delhi show the insecurity that women workers face in the health services.

Raghavachari's study of nurses in a Delhi government hospital also showed that they belonged to middle and lower middle-class families and were mostly women. The nurses were aware and conscious of the low status given to the nursing profession by society and this was further compounded by the fact that their salary structures were not at par with clerical staff or even middle-level school teachers. They also felt that there was stagnation in their career since mobility was restricted due to lack of opportunities. They reported the conflicts that occur in their interaction with colleagues, doctors and patients but they felt unable to resolve them because they did not have strong unions as the Class IV employees enjoyed. They were of the view that there was a polarization between doctors and nurses in terms of status, power and prestige. (Raghavachari:1990) This perception can be explained in terms of the complex interplay of several elements that define the status of a professional category. This would include the socio-economic background, access to network of resources, role structure, role relations and conflicts within society and its institutions. (Raghavachari:1990)

A study of doctors and nurses in several government hospitals in Delhi provided some insights into the perceptions of doctors and nurses regarding their status and its ranking. Majority of the doctors ranked themselves at the top and nurses as second in the hospital hierarchy. However, majority of the nurses ranked the hospital administrators and doctors on top of the hierarchy while they ranked themselves as very low in the occupational hierarchy. This is largely due to a very low self esteem owing to their poorer socio-economic background, poor perceptions by society regarding their occupation and gender. This, coupled with their secondary position to doctors in the occupational hierarchy, affects their perceptions of their status.

One would agree with Oomen's observation that "the perception of social status by occupation categories is not so much conditioned by their present occupational status as their historicity, and their sense of achievement in terms of their antecedent position in the social structure". (Oomen:1978;p.64)

While all the studies cited focus primarily on government hospitals, majority of the private nursing homes rely mostly on women workers for nursing and supportive care. As evident from Table 2, Kansal's study in Delhi shows the differentials in monthly earnings of nurses and other supportive staff in the public and private sectors. This study clearly shows that nursing staff are underpaid in the private sector and are often qualified as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives but perform the duties of a nurse. In addition, this study shows the wage differentials for the various categories of supporting staff between public and private institutions. The nurses and other staff in private hospitals earn very poorly compared to their counterparts in the public hospitals and they neither have job security nor other benefits that public sector employees are guaranteed in terms of leave and other welfare inputs.

Mohan's study shows that 88.40 % of Central and 83.40 % of State government employed nurses earn between Rs 501 and Rs 1000 per month respectively. However, in the private sector the picture is reversed, with 65.6 % of nurses in private hospitals earning in the range of less than Rs 150 to Rs 300 per month. In private nursing homes, 73 % of the nurses earn in the range of Rs 150 to Rs 300 per month. (Mohan:1985) This corroborates Kansal's study in wage differentials for nurses in the public and private sectors.

### **Nursing Personnel in Private Nursing Homes**

A survey of private nursing homes in Mumbai revealed: "Private hospitals and nursing homes fall very short of the requirement of trained personnel. Majority of them employ unqualified staff. In Bombay, out of 24 hospitals and nursing homes only one hospital had employed a postgraduate doctor, whereas 10 had doctors trained in other systems". (Nandraj: 1994; p.1682)

**Table 2**  
**Average Monthly Earnings of Supporting Staff in Delhi Nursing homes**

Categories	Private (average)	Clinic (range)	Private (average)	Nursing homes (range)	Government (Minimum)	Government (Maximum)
Nurse	830	400-1250	1000	600-1500	1730	4100
Receptionist	790	300-1000	1040	500-1800	1730	3600
Attendant	730	350-1500	850	500-2500	1730	3000
Dispenser	990	500-1500	1000	1000	1730	3600
Technical (lab; x-ray)	880	500-1200	1700	800-2500	2630	4100
Ayah/sweeper	--	--	530	350-750	1350	2150

Source: S.M. Kansal, 'Contribution of 'Other Services' Sector to Gross Domestic Product in India: An Evaluation; *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 19, 1992, P.2052.



In the case of nursing staff, the study showed that only 30 % of the nursing homes had employed qualified nurses while the remaining were unqualified. They were either trained by the doctor or had received short-term training from private institutes that have come up in Mumbai. Therefore, issues regarding the quality of training in these institutes and the competence of the staff being trained are not clear. (Nandaraj: 1994)

A similar trend was observed in Hyderabad where majority of the nursing homes employed only Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) as nurses or had been trained by doctors. The working conditions of this category of staff are poor, with long hours of work that involved doing both skilled and unskilled work. Often those who were appointed as nurses also doubled as *ayahs*. (Baru: 2001)

All the available studies on doctors and nurses have mostly been conducted in public hospitals in major cities in India. When we examine the social background and working conditions of personnel in institutions below the tertiary and secondary hospitals, one finds that at the primary health-centre and sub-centre levels, the presence of women workers is higher than male workers. Here again there is a clear gender division of labour as male workers are largely attached to the disease-control programmes while women workers like the Lady Health Visitor and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife are attached to the family planning and Maternal and Child health programmes. (see Table 1) It is indeed rare to find a female paramedical worker who is associated with the national disease-control programmes. The skills, training and responsibilities also vary because the male worker is often entrusted with activities like preparing and examining slides, distributing tablets, follow up, etc. Women workers are trained to motivate cases for family planning, offer advice and distribute iron and folic acid tablets. Their role is much more promotive and preventive with little clinical input when compared to that of male workers. This kind of division of labour tends to reinforce stereotyping of roles within the health services.

### **Social Background and Working Conditions of ANMs**

A study of the social background and working conditions of ANMs across selected districts of Maharashtra during the early 1990s, shows that they were in their early twenties and most were unmarried when they started working. Despite the fact that they had to work in rural areas, nearly a third of those interviewed for this study were from urban backgrounds but the percentage of women from rural backgrounds has been steadily increasing in Maharashtra. Two-third of all ANMs belonged to the middle and upper castes while the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes constituted only one-fifth of the workers. Similarly, there was only a small proportion of Muslims and Christians among the workers. The study observes that after 1980, the representation of lower castes and upper castes has shown an increase but the minorities and middle castes have declined among ANMs in Maharashtra. This kind of trend is bound to affect interaction within the cadre and also has implications for their involvement with the community. (Iyer et al:1995)

While majority of the ANMs belonged to the upper and middle-castes, they were not from the landed sections. The study showed that 63.6% of the ANMs belonged to landless and poor peasant families. Thus they belonged to families that were financially precarious, dependent largely on agriculture for their livelihoods. The motivation for them to join this service to continue was based on the economic vulnerability of their families. The ANMs were posted at the sub-centre under the direct supervision of the Primary Health Centre (PHC). Here it is the Medical Officer, a male doctor, who is supposed to advise and guide them in their day-to-day activities. Given the nature of duties of the ANM, which involve a great deal of interaction with the community, they needed far more inputs than information and technical inputs alone. What they really required was a lot of moral support and encouragement when they worked with communities. (Iyer et al:1995) Such inputs were rarely forthcoming from doctors and other supervisory staff and their interaction with the paramedical staff is defined by the position that they occupy in the social hierarchy.

While the health services may lay down guidelines about supervision of staff, the quality of the supervision is largely mediated by interpersonal relationships, which are determined by the socio-economic background, gender and position in the occupational hierarchy. Several examples of this were cited in the study. In one of the PHCs, ANMs belonging to the same caste as the Medical Officer were given preferential treatment. In another, the MO's wife, who was an ANM, got off lightly despite doing no work. (Iyer et al:1995) In this hierarchical relationship that exists between the medical officer and the ANM, there is very little space for raising questions and doubts, let alone challenging decisions of higher authorities. This clearly results in frustration and a sense of demotivation to work. This is especially the case when they have to work with inadequate transport facilities, physical facilities and unresponsive communities.

Since ANMs work very closely with communities, their interaction is once again defined by a number of factors like their status and power within the occupational and social hierarchy. As village health workers, they are exposed to politics and the socio-economic hierarchy of the villagers with whom they have to deal. As women, they face a number of problems when they deal with communities that are steeped in patriarchal values and are often viewed as having a loose character. This exposes them to situations where they have to deal with verbal and sexual harassment from their colleagues and the community. (Iyer et al:1995)

The caste background of the ANMs also affects their interaction with different sections of the community. If they belong to the upper and middle castes they are uncomfortable and sometimes even unwilling to deal with lower caste families. If they belong to lower castes then families from upper and middle-castes treat them with indifference and disrespect. The perceptions of dalits, minorities and other lower castes regarding health workers is that they do not come as often to their homes and are largely unconcerned about their 'felt needs'.<sup>1</sup> These social dynamics manifest themselves in the form of rude behaviour and general indifference on the part of health workers with these sections of the community.

As far as working conditions are concerned, ANMs' duties includes house-to-house contact for women and children. In most states the infrastructural input for subcentres in terms of buildings, living quarters and availability of the required supplies is far from adequate. This coupled with lack of support and supervision from the Medical Officer and other staff at the higher levels reduces the effectiveness of their work. Often, if anything goes wrong with a programme, they have to face the criticism and wrath of the communities.

Lady Health Visitors also work in the peripheral levels of the health services. A study of Lady Health Visitors from Rajasthan showed that majority of them were from the Southern states and faced a lot of difficulties in communicating and adjusting to a different cultural context. (Mishra:1997)

Another cadre of health workers created in the late 1970s at the village level was the Community Health Workers (CHW) scheme, which was modelled along the lines of the barefoot doctor scheme in China. These workers were paid an honorarium and given a kit of medicines to treat a variety of minor illnesses at the community level. These workers were selected by the community and provided services to its members. As was the case with the other rungs of professionals, these workers were largely drawn from the middle and upper castes and mostly male. A study of this scheme in Shadol district provides some very important issues regarding the social background of CHWs and their interaction with the community.(Qadeer: 1985) Although 60% of the block consisted of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, only 20 % of the CHWs belonged to adivasis and none to Scheduled Castes. Majority of the CHWs was Brahmins and Thakurs who were landed and had varied occupations. Most of them did farming, a few were contractors and professionals. The caste background of the workers influenced their interaction with the community. This study showed that the poor expressed mixed opinion regarding their satisfaction with the CHWs. As Qadeer observes: "In villages where the poor were divided in their opinions the population was generally mixed. Here the social group to which the CHW belonged invariably favoured

him, like in villages Medki, Dhawrai and Khickkiri. In Badhwahi the Brahmin CHW was unpopular among all the tribal poor except for the Baigas who expresses satisfaction. Baigas also happened to be a landless majority who worked for the Brahmins and were almost bonded to them as labourers". (Qadeer: 1985; p.79) The poor complained that the CHWs charged for the services and did not visit their houses and described them as '*bare log*'.

### **Implications of Stratification of the Labour Force for Team Work Within the Health Services and Effective Patient Care**

The data on health personnel clearly shows that the social hierarchy corresponds to the occupational hierarchy across the three sectors. There is a clear gender divide among both the medical and paramedical personnel. Data has shown that mostly male doctors who belong to the middle and upper middle classes occupy the top rungs of the occupational hierarchy while the middle and lower rungs of the hierarchy are dominated by women workers. In terms of power it is the doctors who are in supervisory and administrative positions. The issues of class, caste and gender mediate professional and social interactions across the different categories of personnel. The nature and the quality of these interactions is bound to have a bearing on the effectiveness of health services delivery and the national health programmes especially in the public sector.

The studies have also provided insights into the working conditions of women workers in terms of wages, number of hours of work and job security across the three sectors. The women health personnel in the public sector enjoy better wages, job security and hours of work as compared to those employed in the private and voluntary sectors. In the latter two categories, there is considerable evidence to suggest that there is a lot of exploitation, both economic and sexual in nature. However, women workers in all three sectors face varying degrees of sexual harassment at their workplace and in the community. There are no institutional mechanisms available for the redressal of grievances of sexual harassment in all the three sectors.

There have been several studies that have commented on the inadequacies of the public sector institutions and the unresponsive behaviour of its personnel. One cannot deny that the functioning of public sector institutions in health care is wanting in many respects. The reasons for the sub optimal functioning of the public sector is due to a number of factors and these include inadequate investments, drug supply, manpower and other infrastructural inputs. These inputs constitute what may be called the tangible component of any service, which is essential for providing quality care. While these are critical inputs for accessibility and availability of services, an important dimension that needs to be addressed is the responsiveness of medical and paramedical personnel. This broadly falls into the category of the 'intangibles' since it has to deal with issues of interpersonal interactions. Much of the assessment on perceptions of quality of care in health and services sector tends to study the tangible and intangible inputs separately. However we would argue that they should not be separated, it is important to recognise that they are interrelated and both play an important role in providing quality care. It would be meaningless to analyse the responsiveness of personnel in isolation of the availability of the required infrastructure, drugs, technology and personnel. The mere availability of all of the above does not automatically ensure empathetic interaction of personnel with patients. While the physical infrastructure is important, the issue of responsiveness of personnel is a complex one since it is mediated by the personnel's social background, gender and position in the occupational hierarchy and therefore the authority and power that he or she has within the health services.

The large number of personnel, their position in the occupational hierarchy, varying levels of skills and duties requires a great deal of coordination and cooperation within and across levels. This may seem simple but when the social hierarchy intervenes then the issues of inter and intra personal relationships among personnel and between personnel and the community becomes complex. This is an important area that needs to be explored and addressed if public systems have to become more responsive. This question has not been given much attention by sociologists, anthropologists and public health scientists.

It is important to recognise that health services are complex human organisations and are labour intensive, hence salaries would be an important item of expenditure. In the recent debates on health spending there is a view that too much is being spent on salaries of health personnel. The private sector is cited for more 'efficient' use of personnel. Some recent data on private institutions show that while high salaries are paid to doctors, the paramedical staff are not only poorly paid compared to the public sector but they also work very long hours without adequate breaks. This does have an effect on the quality of patient care since majority of the paramedical and other support staff must suffer from fatigue of overwork. Thus poor salaries and working conditions should not become the criteria for advocating cost effectiveness.

Based on available studies and data, this paper has shown that in order to enhance the effectiveness of health services it is not merely enough to address the financing and physical infrastructure aspects of provisioning. An important component is the human dimension of health services which has to address the nature and quality of relationships among professionals and between professionals and communities. This paper has shown that this is indeed a complex area for analysis. This is especially the case in highly stratified societies where the position of personnel in the social and occupational hierarchy plays a crucial role in determining the nature and quality of interactions both within and outside the health services.

A number of questions arise from this paper for future research, having policy implications:

- To what extent does the medical and paramedical curricula address some of the issues of values, attitudes, prejudice, discrimination in their training? A preliminary review of medical and paramedical curricula shows that this component is lacking.
- An important issue that is coming through many studies on utilisation is the indifferent and often rude behaviour of medical and paramedical staff with patients. How do public health

systems address these issues? This once again is a complex issue because how can health service systems mitigate larger socio-cultural constraints?

## Notes

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Dr. C. Sathyamala for sharing her writings and ideas on this subject and Dr. S. Vijaya who helped with the data analysis.

<sup>1</sup> In a study of nineteen villages conducted Dr D. Banerji he reports the perception of the poor who describe the ANM as a 'memsahib' who is reluctant to visit them other than for family planning activities.

## References

Baru, R., *Private Health Care in India: Social Characteristics and Trends*, Sage, Delhi, 1998.

Baru, R., and Kurien, C., *Towards an Expanded Conceptualisation of Quality in health care* (forthcoming volume edited by Ritu Priya and Shalina Mehta to be published by Sage).

Baru, R., (forthcoming) 'Privatisation of Health Care: Conditions of Workers in Private Hospitals', in an edited volume by M. Bhattacharya to be published by Tulika, New Delhi.

Doyal, L., *Political Economy of Health*, London, Pluto Press, 1979.

Government of India, Central Statistical Organisation, Department of Statistics, *Enterprise Survey 1983-84: Report on Service Sector*, New Delhi, 1987.

Iyer, A., et. al., *Women in Health Care: Auxiliary Nurse Midwives*, Pune, Foundation for Research in Community Health, 1995.

Madan, T.N., (ed.), *Doctors and Society: Three Asian Case Studies-India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.

Minocha, A., *Perceptions and Interactions in a Medical Setting: A Sociological Study of a Women's Hospital*, Hindustan Publishing, New Delhi, 1996.

Mishra, N., 'Socialization of Students in a Nursing Training Institution: A Case Study of Safdarjung Hospital Nursing School', Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1984.



Mishra, R., 'Female Health Workers: Problems and Implications', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

Mohan, S., *Status of Nurses in India*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985.

Oomen, T.K., *Doctors and Nurses: A Study in Occupational Role Structures*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1978.

Pachauri, S., *Reaching India's Poor: Non Governmental Approaches to Community Health*, Sage, New Delhi, 1994.

Pizurki, et. al., *Women as Providers of Health Care*, Geneva, WHO, 1987.

Qadeer, I., 'Social Dynamics of Health Care: The Community Health Workers Scheme in Shadol District' *Socialist Health Review*, Vol II, No.2, 1985, pp.74-83; 97-100.

Raghavachari, R., *Conflicts and Adjustments: Indian Nurses in an Urban Milieu*, Academic Foundation, Delhi, 1990.

Sathayamala, C., 'People in Health Care' in *Socialist Health Review*, Vol.II, No.2, 1985, pp.53-56.

\_\_\_\_\_. Public Health Care System: Threats and Options, Concept paper for the forthcoming Annual Meet of the Medico Friends Circle, 2004.

Voluntary Health Association of India, *State of India's Health*, New Delhi, 1999.

Workers Solidarity, *Critical Condition: A Report on Workers in Delhi's Private Hospitals*, New Delhi, February, 2000.



## Gender and Theatre: Looking Beyond the 'Mainstream' Canon

Lata Singh

Theatre has been valued as a space for alternative discourses to operate because of its sheer capacity for live interaction. It is a known fact that whenever there has been extreme repression imposed on people, theatre has provided a space to give voice to their protest. However, in the comprehensive analysis of the theatre, the contribution of women to theatre is marginalised. Hence, an important component of women's cultural tradition is missing. This paper looks at how colonial experience reconstituted gender and patriarchy, perpetuating the patriarchal control of not only the material female body but also its visual manifestations and representations. The paper also examines how theatre practice is getting gendered using not just protest but resistance as a way of addressing women's oppression. However, the need to rally around images of resistance on stage led to the difficult task of contending with conventions of performance and representation that were blatantly patriarchal. It has been a long and exhausting journey of exploration. One had to invade the spaces where women were not allowed to enter in the performance traditions. Efforts were directed towards getting women to perform the forms traditionally denied to them and also to impose the status of 'performance' on the forms performed by women. Folklorists deal with women's forms and expression as domestic and for the most part these retain only ritual value.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the invocation of the most natural art-historical criteria, those of excellence and talent can be rather insidious for it glosses over the many ways in which the argument about

'excellence' operated in history as one of the chief means of demotion and marginalisation of women's artistic career.

### **Victorian Culture: An Epitome of Civilised Culture**

Theatre has its own conventions of significance which in the Indian context continue to thrive in most traditional performing arts. Majority of these conventions still deny space to women as performers. Although antecedent attitudes may have contributed to the theatre's disrepute, the marginalisation of popular culture, where women were in the forefront, seems to have quickened in the colonial period. The reformist discourse and the emergence of middle class resulting from the colonial experience reconstituted gender and patriarchies. If the struggle to represent ideal female behaviour accompanied the struggle of an emergent middle class, then change in the representation of women would be expected to accompany more extensive historical changes.<sup>2</sup> The representation of woman as public entertainer and focus of male desire no longer served the interests of the English-educated elite, which put in her place the Indian equivalent of the Victorian domestic angel, the *sugrihini* or good housewife.<sup>3</sup>

Redefinition of the female was a crucial feature of the hegemony that brought the middle classes into power. As the middle class consolidated their position, they exerted increasing pressure on their womenfolk to conform to British standards of ideal womanly conduct. A new kind of segregation was imposed on women, whose identity was now to be defined in opposition to women from lower economic strata. The middle class emphasised the need to eradicate what they were trained to believe were the pernicious influences of certain prevailing literary and cultural forms on women, particularly on women belonging to their own homes. These forms emerged primarily from the lower economic social groups and represented a popular culture that ran parallel to what could be called the 'official culture' propagated by the middle class. In fact, popular culture had a wide female audience, ranging from the lower caste and lower class self-employed women of the market places, to the wives and daughters of the middle class in the sheltered *undarmahal* or

*zenana*. The middle class considered women's popular songs with their robust sense of humour and frank sensuality threatening to the new ideal of domestic order and heavily restricted elite women's association with female performers. They increasingly associated popular forms with the 'licentious' and voluptuous tastes of the 'vulgar' popular forms from which they were at pains to differentiate themselves.<sup>4</sup> The socio-religious reform movements like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj epitomised the trend toward puritanism. They uncompromisingly condemned gambling, going to prostitutes, smoking, drinking and the theatre.<sup>5</sup> Literary leaders like Bharatendu Harishchandra of Benaras declared most kinds of popular theatre 'depraved' and lacking in theatricality; championing a refined form of drama limited largely to drawing rooms and school auditoriums, whose purpose would be to assist in the moral regeneration of the nation.<sup>6</sup> Female performers too came under attack in the well-known Anti-Nautch campaign that culminated in 1947 in the outlying of temple dancing and the prohibition on dedicating women as *devadasis* in South India.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Victorian culture emerges as the epitome of civilised culture as against the 'licentious' and 'immoral' folk forms of the natives. In Maharashtra, the Marathi bourgeois theatre emerges in the emulation of Victorian while labelling the local popular form of *tamasha* as obscene. It also led to considerable reformulations in the content and form of the *tamasha* or the folk theatre.<sup>8</sup> The female performer, stigmatised in educated discourse as a 'prostitute' and denied access to former sources of support, sought opportunity in the secular theatre and carried her marginalisation with it. *Nautanki* owes its absence from the annals of literary history to its association with a prohibited category of womanhood. North Indian imagination unfailing links *Nautanki* with the alluring gestures of dancer-actress.<sup>9</sup>

'Respectable' women, because of the stigma connected to acting and the relegation of singing, dancing and other performance arts to a marginalised courtesan class were at an extreme social disadvantage with respect to the stage and were not only unwilling to become actresses but were ill-equipped for its rigours and lacking

in skills. The emergent elite theatre marked its distinction from the folk via a process of desexualisation, so that only men could perform on the stage. In fact, by asserting that female impersonators could do gender better than women, it led to the displacement of agency from the represented figure of the women, and perpetuated the patriarchal control of not only the material female body but its visual manifestations too.<sup>10</sup>

However, there was a debate in the early twentieth century in various theatre platforms, journals, conferences and newspapers whether women should join the theatre. These debates were conducted and participated in primarily by urban middle-class men. This was the period when more realism was coming in techniques of production. There was a growing dissatisfaction in society towards the male enactment of female roles and towards the obscenity, vulgarity and artificiality which followed in the script, in the acting, as well in the production in general. This was also the period when the whole issue of masculinity and effeminacy came into the nationalist discourse. It was being said that at a time when the nation required strong men, this tendency to look effeminate was to be discouraged. However, a large number of men were still opposed to the idea of women coming on stage. They felt that if women and men came together in the 'vulnerable' field of theatre, morals would be adversely affected. However, those who thought women necessary for the 'art of theatre' but who did not want *kulin* women to lose their morality, gave reluctant consent to the 'prostitutes' but with conditions that they should be '*neeteeman*' fit into the moral standard of the society, or else these 'prostitutes' would spoil the morality of the men in theatre companies. Those who were not very happy with the choice of 'prostitutes' suggested that widows take up acting in theatre craft. Some tried to put forth that the danger of any degradation of moral values was not so acute any more because the women joining theatre would be educated, cultured and *kulin*, unlike the women of the earlier period. However, the needs of the trade were greater than the number of *kulin* women available. Therefore a very clever move of expanding the definition of *kulin* to include more women was made after an elaborate,

intricate analysis of the concept of *kulin*. According to the traditional concept, *kulin* is linked with 'higher' birth whereas the modified version included women who were not necessarily *kulin* by birth, but by their moral behaviour. It had two expectations, one of being loyal to one man and two, of having an aspiration of giving birth to a new *kulin khundan*.

Thus the careful scrutiny of the debate highlights that the patriarchy initially justified the exclusion of women from mainstream theatre but later to retain the commercial viability within the changing society, the same system justified the inclusion of women but within narrow and restricted confines. It is clear that at this stage the supporters of women's entry into theatre did not visualise women as independent and responsible persons but as women who fit in the mould of the moral values put across by the reformer men with women only in supportive roles. Natural feminine qualities of women were romanticised to pave their entry into theatre. Besides, the debate only centred around the possibility of women as actresses to replace male actors enacting female roles. Women as playwrights, company owners and music composers were not considered. There is no mention of women's creativity or of their own inclinations.<sup>11</sup> However, despite such debate women remained invisible in theatre.

Theatre thus became increasingly a middle-class enterprise and sought for itself a middle class, 'respectable' image. The middle class saw itself as the sole representative of the nation, as its only 'legitimate' voice and theatre became one of the sites for this representation. The question of 'respectability' assumed its sharpest form when the issue concerned women. Through the theatre the middle-class taught its women how they should behave, how they should walk, talk, gesticulate, dress up, and so on. Most of these roles were brought alive on stage by the male actor. However, gender depiction in the play was along expected lines — all that is weak is feminine, all that is strong is masculine; female sexuality is dangerous because it weakens men, makes them effeminate, leads them astray and interferes with their work; female sexuality, moreover, is like a volcano, forever on the verge of bursting; the virtuous women not only keeps her own sexuality in check but she

also polices others; the virtuous woman never speaks in self-interest, she always speaks in the interest of a larger cause; the family is accorded primacy over all else; the reproductive role of women is privileged over any other social roles they can possibly play. Thus the modern theatre was implicated in the larger process of the formation of the middle-class itself, its links with the market, its self-perception, and its prescriptions for its women.<sup>12</sup>

### **End of the Colonial Tradition: IPTA and Group Theatre**

It was only with the emergence of people's theatre movement with Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), that a distinct radical trend in theatre emerged. This movement brought culture to the forefront of Indian politics as never before. IPTA was founded in 1943 and its context was World War II, famine and political violence. Anti-fascism and anti-imperialism was its leitmotif. It was an alternative cultural tradition of protest which looked at cultural traditions critically. It opened up several new possibilities, more specifically for the performing arts — rediscovering several folk forms and traditions driven to oblivion under the valorisation of colonial cultural norms and the consequent denigration of indigenous aesthetic values, and connecting them to the mainstream through fresh motivations into creativity; taking theatre beyond the histrionics of the actor-managerial tradition to the development of a more realistic mode locating itself in specific regional-dialectical cultures, with a passion for authenticity; making the 'great tradition' of the classical forms in music and dance accessible and available to the people, through open-air concerts to which people had free admission; critical analytical studies and agitational critiques of conditions and situations in several areas of the reality; and above everything else, a global understanding of political and economic forces at play. IPTA was looking for a new audience beyond the confines of the more traditional theatre-going public — the remnants and descendants of the comprador-bourgeois of the early colonial period, the surviving babus and *bhadralok*.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of IPTA for women could not be overlooked. A number of women performers, with talent and political



commitment, made the people's theatre movement the mission of their lives. In fact, middle-class women for the first time got associated with theatre. One cannot overlook the kind of unconventionality that was necessitated by women's participation. Urban middle classes were moving into spaces that had been completely unfamiliar to women of their class; they had to spend time continuously with male comrades and in peasant households in extremely unconventional circumstances. The fact that they found it possible to do so was introducing new dimensions in the existing structures of class-relationship and gender-relationship. It would be wrong to say that they were 'declassed', but they were certainly contributing to the evolution of a culture that was more open-ended and less hierarchical. This process had certain special features for them, partly because it was still so unusual for women from a 'respectable' background to appear on public stage.<sup>14</sup>

Besides, the spirit of collectivity, an important component of IPTA, replaced to some extent the structure of power to be found in professional theatre, and made it possible for the women performer to acquire skills at par with her male colleague. Within the organisation, hierarchies were much less evident than they were in families or in professional theatre. The professional stage had always been notorious for exploiting women performers; the situation made it impossible for ordinary middle class women to come to the professional stage. Thus being committed to people's theatre had meant breaking a certain boundary of patriarchal authoritarianism, a refusal to model themselves in roles prescribed for women by patriarchy.<sup>15</sup> However, the number of women in IPTA were still very few as theatre was not considered a respectable space for women. There was also absence of women in the general as organisers, script writers and in directorial venture.

By the 1950s IPTA had split up because of the difference between its 'political people' and the 'artists'. The splintering of the IPTA was a stimulus for the non-professional theatre movement in Bengal in the 1950s known as Group Theatre Movement. Such theatre had a conscious predilection for a non-commercial, voluntary,

democratic, self-motivated, freely creative and collaborative project.<sup>16</sup> Women in Group Theatre in Bengal have had a major role to play in the organisation as a whole even when they were not acting or directing, as distinct from theatre in other parts of India. But, despite their contribution, they were marginalised. They were not amongst the decision makers in the Group. Some of them were given an official position in the Group but soon found it to be ineffective. They were not assigned the role of direction. In fact, they did not have the power even to direct their own written plays which were taken by the group for production.<sup>17</sup> There was another discrimination that women actresses faced in the group. Only those actors and actresses were considered members of the group who worked voluntarily and were not paid. In fact, for women, despite their love for theatre and the desire for self-expression, there was in most cases the need to earn from theatre. In Bengal, in the post-Partition period certain sections of 'respectable' women were seeking employment for survival, which included many unconventional jobs like acting. There was a discrimination consequent on this, with the unpaid actor claiming the distinction of idealistic self-sacrifice and the actresses being treated as hired hands.<sup>18</sup>

By and large in the productions too the main protagonists were men. Playwrights used to be told not to create roles for more than two women. There were also problems in getting women in Group Theatre. The family continued to be the first priority of women. The family took an actress's work in theatre less seriously. Besides, the family's 'normal' expectations of a female member continued unabated in the Group Theatre too. The expectation was that since women are good housewives at home, they can keep accounts and run errands, because that is what they are supposed to do. Hence the respectability of Group Theatre had its own burdens for women. Women felt that their work in the Group Theatre was a long process of adjustment and compromises.<sup>19</sup>

Through the first decades of independent India some women dramatists had emerged — Vijaya Mehta, Shanta Gandhi, Dina

Gandhi, Sheila Bhatia and Rekha Jain, to name some. Many of them came from the IPTA background. The fight for such women was to make a place for themselves as artistes and equals of men. In fact, their task must have been very daunting. Their foremost challenge must have been to prove that they were as competent and imaginative as their male counterparts in the field. They had to largely operate within the parameters already set, and could not risk in any major way breaking away from the accepted language and mode of theatrical statement. For many women, establishing themselves as artistes often meant an erasure of the marks of gender difference.

### **Radical Traditions and Feminist Consciousness: Retracing their Cultural Space**

Two alternate trends affected theatre, impacting women's theatre too. One was the emergence of the radical theatre tradition, an impact of the radically charged climate of the 1960s, and the other the women's movement. There was a worldwide explosion of youthful revolutionary energy in the 1960s. Many groups of ardently committed young men and women were struggling for a radical and democratic reordering of the world and its social and moral institutions. The explosion of revolutionary energy was also a veritable explosion of creativity and of counter-culture. Revolutionary ideas and ideals also energised theatre by affecting a radical change in both its concept and practice. Among other things, theatre became bolder, more innovative, more flexible, more portable, more community based, and above all, more involved with the material and emotional life of its audience. Theatrical activity itself spilled out of the confines of the constructed, architecturally enclosed stage over to the streets, neighbourhoods, shop floors, fair grounds, parks, market places, and other such open public places. The new performance groups were looking for new kinds of audience groups of the underprivileged and/or disaffected people: women, proletariat, immigrants, youth. Radically altering the traditional performance — audience relationship, they worked towards making the spectators active — participants, collaborators, even co-authors who would help 'write' the performance text. The

new radical groups also tended to abolish the tyranny of the individually authored, already scripted and fixed scripts, resulting in gradual democratisation. Henceforth artistic decisions were made more collectively. Scripts and performances were evolved or developed collectively through discussions and exercises. The concept of theatre workshops, a method which is now universally used by theatre groups not only for preparing a production, but also for training actors, was developed. These radical groups usually functioned as a collective and tried to forge a strong and direct bond with the audience. There was an insistence on the immediacy and directness of concerns. Specific problems and issues impinging on the material and emotional life of the community were chosen as the main themes.<sup>20</sup>

The other landmark has been the growing women's movement which gained in India since the 1970s. Developments in theatre, one could argue, have kept pace with the rising centrality of women (as subject and object, agent and addressee) in a variety of fields ranging from academic research to public policy to social and cultural activism. With the emerging feminist consciousness, women are retracing their cultural space and history, not only concerned with women in distress, but trying to highlight the positive aspects of women's lives in India, particularly their forms of celebration and creativity. The women increasingly and more joyously express their solidarity and intimacy through non-verbal forms, especially theatre, music and dance, than through words. Theatre has been part of the women's movement in India, and groups had been using different kinds of theatre. In fact, there was a strong feeling in the women's movement that the creative expression of women should find a place in whatever women had to say. This was seen as a different way of putting women's issues forward, apart from seminars and discussions. It is strongly felt that many women in the movement from rural backgrounds are very articulate but not highly academic and this form was part of their expression in many ways.<sup>21</sup> Thus both these trends have impacted women's theatre.

### **Gender as an Alternative Term of Self-Location in Artistic Milieu**

Many women dramatists have gradually and quietly started asserting their individual identity through taking up themes that centre around women and seeing issues through the women's point of view. A great awareness of the several levels at which a woman lives her life is also visible in their works. Different concerns are emerging in their production, presented in a mode that varies from the established ones. However, admittedly, at this point in time the body of such work is too small and the expressions still at a formative stage to draw any definitive conclusions or pronounce it as an alternative genre, but it is enough to demand a close scrutiny as to the linkages of their creative idiom with their own lives and perceptions. In fact, many were not consciously striving to change the approach or the language, merely exploring the areas that they wished to.

Not all the women involved in the creation, production and (re)production of feminist theatre would recognise or label themselves as 'feminists'. They feel they are human, being capable of reaching out to another human being irrespective of being man or woman. Yet, on a subconscious level, the woman in them matters. They do not take on anything that degrades a woman. Usha Ganguly, an actress and director based in Calcutta (now Kolkata), denying that her choice of subjects and themes in her theatre is in any way related to her gender, says that 'it is the work in the play, the attitude towards the work that shapes the directors and not whether he is a man or a woman'.<sup>22</sup> In one interview she also stated, "I differ from the way people tend to use the term feminism. This term has nowadays become a fashionable one, and I don't believe in a particular brand of feminism. On the other hand, I believe in the liberation of women and their freedom, and I'm trying my best as person, as a teacher and as a theatre worker to work towards that".<sup>23</sup> Speaking in Tokyo in an international conference on Asian Women and Theatre, Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, a director based in Chandigarh, observed, 'I have always believed that acting is androgynous. What it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man are issues that get resolved in ways that are organic and

unselfconscious'.<sup>24</sup> However, there is a common thread in all her plays. She brings to her interpretations the touch of a woman. In fact, all her plays are women's plays — women-centred. This, she believes, is inevitable. 'I cannot negate my gender. Being a woman, it is easy for me to understand the women's mind, their passions and problems — the woman mystique'.<sup>25</sup> She further adds, 'Women are my protagonists not just because they are women, but essentially because they are human beings. In any case, my plays have the texture of group performances rather than individual heroism, male or female.'<sup>26</sup>

For the purpose of this paper, Goodman's argument for a flexible approach to feminist theatre seems pertinent and is therefore quoted at length:

Feminist theatre will be defined in a flexible way as that theatre which aims to achieve positive re-evaluation of women's roles and/or to effect social change, and which is informed in this project by broadly feminist ideas. Feminist theatre thus defined may include all the different schools of feminist thought and practice. It allows for a cultural emphasis on 'women's experience', yet it acknowledges that some feminists reject this idea as potentially reductive or essentialist. Crucially this definition allows for a diversity of approaches and perspectives among practitioners.<sup>27</sup>

Though many women dramatists work in a variety of style there are some striking 'commonalities' in their work from 'the selection of themes often centred around women's lives, to narratives that allow open ended exploration, from breaking the stereotypes of characters to exploration of their inner world, from approach to authority in actor-director relationship to emphasis on process than on the end product. Gender has come to provide a more conscious term for searching out alternative terms of self-location in their artistic milieu: They have worked towards dismantling the entrenched edifice of the voyeuristic, erotised or spiritualised feminine form, supplanting these with the issues of real life struggles and pains, with counter-images of a heroic, nurturing, female power, or with new explorations of women's desires and sexuality. They have

unquestionably added to the dramatic canon a set of important topics including the sexual division of labour, especially in domestic work and childcare, mothering, prescriptive roles and gender stereotypes, female friendship, female sexuality and the political importance of identity. Many of their works explore the internal landscape of a woman — motherhood, politics, jealousy, life, death and birth. Plays like *Yerma* and *Fida*<sup>28</sup> taken up for production by Neelam Man Singh explore the concept of womanhood, motherhood and female sexuality. *Yerma* deals with sterility, procreation, the yearning of the earth principle, a woman who loved life; a woman who celebrated her own sensuality and who only wanted to get married because she wanted to procreate. *Fida* had the voice of passion, yearning and voice of reason. In the play conventional love was juxtaposed with unconventional love. The protagonist in the play was in love with her stepson. According to Neelam, 'most myths have damned Phaedra as a woman lusting for her step son since love is the love accepted by the social parameters of the world you live in'.<sup>29</sup> But Neelam saw her as someone totally and completely innocent, because one has to be innocent to love beyond social and economic conditioning. Neelam highlights not the guilt of the protagonist but her suffering and passion for her stepson and her strength to fight and take the consequence of her unacceptable attraction.<sup>30</sup>

Women directors are also attempting to present the embodied nature of subjectivity, which is to say that the body is not beyond social prescription and social construction; that it is produced, performed, inhabited or animated according to rules. Hence many women dramatists are concerned to surface and make visible the process of gendering: the process of showing how bodies are 'materialised as sexed': how men and women are made. Many plays centre around how gender is constructed, and the notions of femininity and masculinity. Female impersonation and cross gender have also been major concerns. Anuradha Kapur, a director and professor at the National School of Drama, in her two productions, *The Job* and *Sundari*, has explored the idea of female impersonation or cross dressing. *The Job* is based on Brecht's story, where a woman is forced to dress up and behave like a man to secretly take

up the job that her husband had been offered but dies before taking it up.<sup>31</sup> *Sundari* is based on the autobiography of a legendary actor from Gujarat who was a rage in his roles of women, to the extent that the women of that time imitated his style and dress to come closer to the idea of the ideal woman.

Amal Allana, a director based in Delhi, too is engaging in her productions with characters of ambivalent gender. One of her interesting experiments has been to cast male actors in female roles. For example, she cast Manohar Singh, a male actor, as Himmat Mai (Mother Courage). Brecht's play *Mother Courage* has a chronicle of the 30-year war that ravaged Europe. It highlights how a female (Mother) if she has to survive, (in this case, the condition of war), requires a degree of maleness (Courage), to protect herself and her children. Since Amal's idea was to create an 'androgynous character', Manohar Singh was not to totally transform himself into a woman, rather Manohar should 'play' a woman, that is, 'demonstrate' one not to 'become' one. This being a conscious decision of the director, it became a comment on the practice of female impersonation. It allowed the performers and the director to explore the whole issue of how to portray a woman, what constitutes feminine, what are these stereotypes, and how to break them. The play also addressed the question of self-identity, perceived as a construct of shifting male and female aspects.<sup>32</sup>

Another play taken up by Amal is *Begum Barve*, written by Satish Alekar, which focuses directly on the shifting gender identities of its protagonist. The brutal, bleak, grey, dark world in which Barve resides, is a world devoid of sensitivity, colour, human warmth; devoid of music, of women, of the sweet aroma of the *gajra*. It is from this deadly sub-human uninspired present that Barve, an old actor, wishes to flee, into a world of light, colour, music — the world of theatre of a bygone era. It is here that Barve can imaginatively play out his deepest fantasy, of being the 'other', of being the woman. Barve's imagination is stirred by popular tunes from old musical plays, the Sangeet Nataks, where he once did smaller female roles while idolising the greatest female impersonator of the time, Balgandharva. As Barve wafts along the strains of a musical



composition, the sweet aroma of incense fills his nostrils and he is transported into the past where he re-enacts several well-known female roles. In doing so, he is able to transcend the bleakness, pettiness and prosaicness of his daily life and partake of a magical experience of being the 'other' — the woman in all her manifestations of beloved, bride, mother, wronged woman. Manohar Singh in Amal's production played the character of Begum Barve. Amal conceived the voice, the behaviour and the visual appearance of Barve as disparate and unrelated elements, as reminders of the deep sexual fissure that wracks his existence.<sup>33</sup>

Women directors have also been breaking away from the paradigm of victim or heroism. Many women dramatists do not merely want to expose the plight of victim, laying bare the oppressions unleashed on them and issuing a call to fight the situation in solidarity with the oppressed. According to V. Padma, a member of Voicing Silence,<sup>34</sup> 'without underestimating the value of such expressions of protest, feminist theatre is raising the following questions: Is that all the 'oppressed' have to say? Should the images of the oppressed be based on the suffering that the oppressors have inflicted on them? Is not there any other 'self' in the oppressed? Have the oppressed no life of their own beyond the structure built by the oppressor? If one believes that 'oppression' is a construct, then there should have been/must be a life outside its parameter'.<sup>35</sup> For instance, the play *Avvai* staged by Voicing Silence highlights some of these aspects. *Avvai* is set in the Sangam period which preceded the formation of the Tamil empires when chieftains ruled the provinces. *Avvai* belonged to the community of bards, a performer who had the freedom to move around and see the world. *Avvai* has been mystified as an old, pious, wise woman in Tamil culture. Myths of *Avvai* willingly opting out of marriage and choosing an old woman's appearance have been imprinted upon our consciousness. The play attempted to question the mythification and tried to construct the *Avvai* of our literary history from her poems that are extant. The play moves on to construct an alternative image of the Sangam *Avvai*. The Sangam *Avvai* is a sensuous, intelligent, politicised person. She is given to toddy (palm wine),

loves singing and dancing; travels constantly to faraway lands; forms a deep friendship with the chief Adhiyaman, inspires his soldiers to fight their enemies; gives him moral support whenever he needs it; serves as his political ambassador to Thondaiman; mourns his death on the battlefield as a personal and political loss; and ends up leading a quiet existence after Moovenders take over power in the Tamil region. The play challenges the image of old age imposed on Avvai; it speaks of a female voice which defies authority.<sup>36</sup> In one scene the performing artistes (*Panars*) discuss writing in general and its relation to experience in real life and the difference gender can bring about to writing. Avvai answers her friend in the group about being a woman writer as follows:

Doesn't a woman have feelings? You being a male, have you ever encountered the real feelings of a woman? In male writing a woman might remain quiet. In mine, she will roar. In male writing a woman might be caged. In mine, she will spread wings. My women will not accept the controls imposed by men. Deep within me, the fears of a 'woman' do not exist. I speak to the real heart of women. It cannot be reached by man whatever be the level of intimacy. It is the mind of a sparrow which did not know any restriction whatsoever. If she is oppressed, she says she'll hit, attack and shout. A woman who can't speak this way becomes dumb or mad ... they speak their emotions ... have you listened to that female voice?<sup>37</sup>

Thus the play retrieves this female voice and highlights the Sangam milieu in Tamil literature. According to *Voicing Silence*, *Avvai* enabled them to produce a stage version of a woman who did not conform to the authorised codes of conduct prescribed in a patriarchal world order. The play also helped in exploring the life of women in general and opened up the possibility of stating that another world view can exist. It dealt with the inner world of a woman, a poet and a performer, bringing to light the possibility that a personal world need not be the domestic world alone. All this was done along with her participation in the political scenario as well. For once, the woman on stage could be earthy and erotic; real and living on her own terms.<sup>38</sup>

Women dramatists have also been at the forefront of new experiments with forms and teachings, delving both into the rich reserves of India's historical and folk traditions. Attempts to appropriate symbols of women grew through reinterpretation of myths, epics and folktales and unearthing historical forms of women's resistance in India. They have also been addressing modes of performance, idioms of expression and representation of women in traditional art forms. In *Voicing Silence*, a major programme has been the work with a group of women performing artistes in Tamil traditional folk theatre genres, developing plays from their traditional repertoire, but examining them from a feminist perspective. These plays have been set in traditional forms and have enabled them to set up an all-woman company to perform and promote these plays. It has been exploring alternative images, symbols, metaphors and representation which help construct various forms of (female) subjectivity in Tamil theatre.<sup>39</sup> Tripurari Sharma, playwright, director and Professor at the National School of Drama, experiments within the confines of that form as it exists and where it exists, with the people who do it and for the audience that traditionally goes and sees that form. She did plays with the folk form, trying to highlight the portrayal of women in the popular folk medium. One of it was on Meera which was performed in *khayal* style. The way Meera was conceived was not as a legend but as a historical character. Tripurari's work brings out how Meera had a politics and the politics was a politics of equality and also of peace. According to Tripurari, Meera became popular because her idea of peace must have appealed to the people who were bearing the burden of the wasteful wars that they were taking place.<sup>40</sup>

### **Deconstruction of the 'Established' Canon: Literary and Structural**

Placing women's experience at the centre of their practice, some women dramatists have revised the concepts of plot, character, time, place and meaning to recreate theatre as an open-ended process rather than a finished product. This is a move from theatre as production to theatre as productivity. As performance is at the heart of the structure, so within a performance situation, the written text

is not necessarily the definitive one. Women practitioners highlight the polymorphous aspect of the text. Case argues, 'There is the text printed in a book and read as literature, the text the director reads preparing for rehearsal, the rehearsal text the actor uses and the production text the audience receives as it watches the play'.<sup>41</sup>

There are experiments with the process and form of dramatic writing and which has put in place a different set of authorial and professional relationships. Decentering the authority of the playwright is crucial to the development of the feminist theatre. The role of playwright is often collectively shared by the group. In fact, the notion of collective playwrighting has a special appeal for women dramatists. 'Sisterhood is Powerful' is an important slogan of the women's movement. Women directors have also worked in close collaboration with writers in selection of themes and in reinterpretation or reconstruction of different kinds of source material, which could range from well-known episodes from the epics, folklore and myths to classical and canonical texts.

A variety of approaches mark the work of women dramatists. Some of their undertakings are based on existing texts like novels, stories and earlier plays. Often a classic text become a base from which a radical performance text was created. Many have directed canonical plays of male dramatists but made radical interventions in them. One such example is the play *Umrao*, courtesan narrative, written by Ruswa, which was directed by Anuradha Kapur. She took up this production because she felt that everything that is said about *Umrao* and the courtesan narrative has been constructed by the male and she was not interested in the text as constructed by men. In fact, characters like *Umrao* are extremely iconic. There are fictions about them and they exist in the imagination in a certain kind of way. They seem to have acquired in their ordinariness and everydayness an archetypal image. However, Anuradha's concern was not only deconstruction of a narrative but to see each face of the character. *Umrao* sails through loves, rejections, many moments signalling failure but the novel does not dwell upon this or tell us what she feels, whether she is afraid or whether she failed or cracked. In some of the scenes in Anuradha's production, *Umrao*

is shown as failing, lonely and appallingly afraid of old age. The perfect courtesan is dismantled. The characterisation is not homogenous but broken down and inconsistent. Anuradha is not interested in making the different parts come together but rather sees the bundle of rough edges and contradictions in a character. The strongest critique which is often made of Anuradha's work is that the characters do not come together, one does not know whether they are sad or happy, the narrative does not converge and there is no closure. To which Anuradha says, 'In some senses we are happy with this criticism as character converging into a climax, to put it rather crudely in some senses, is a masculine way of telling the story, which has an ending.'<sup>42</sup>

The concluding scene of *Umrao* was changed in Anuradha's production. The original novel *Umrao* ends with a major speech by Umrao herself who is now old. It is didactic in content and it is one of the main statements that the novelist makes. Umrao of the novel warns other women not to follow her fallen path for though she had great moments in her life and extracted the most from it, she is now old and abandoned and has nobody to love; she advises other women to be honourable. Anuradha's production completely turned this speech around and introduced another, which gave a different construction of Umrao, where she does not see herself as a fallen woman, but is placed in mixed situation. She talks about the positive and negative things in her life and defines herself as an intelligent woman, not a 'prostitute'. She says '*mein ek zahin aurat hoon*'. (I am an intelligent woman), and claims that she had handled the vagaries of life as intelligently and creatively as she could. For the male writer Ruswa, Umrao's life is over, but the present-day woman writer looks at her and asks, 'What else?' Umrao pauses and then utters a greater line, '*lekin ab to hum karwat badalte hai*'. (But now I will turn over). This line spans the most ordinary action with a most momentous meaning, as the word *karwat* has both a literal and a metaphorical meaning. For Umrao, life is not over. As Umrao slowly turns around, the director wanted to show her not only as growing old but also as moving beyond it, as one who has a beginning and an end, so that as one phase has finished

another has started. The role of Umrao was played by Uttara Baokar. She was nearly fifty then. In fact, the aspect of ageing was very central to this play. Ageing was seen as positive, not something that closed possibilities, and Umrao's closing speech was about living, but not living according to prescription. Thus the woman dramatist was making quite a different statement.<sup>43</sup>

Many women dramatists involve their own texts and do not necessarily subscribe to the conventional play text. Often the text evolves through individual authorship, collaborative writing and workshops. Elaine Aston states, 'Devising offers woman a way of making theatre', that means that they do not have to work on a 'big daddy' script — or if constrained to do so may assist in making a radical intervention in a 'canonical' or 'conventional play text'.<sup>44</sup> In fact, devising a text is a very important aspect of women practitioners. One could devise an entire text or one could take a text as a germ and then devise upon it. Breaking the hold of the play script is a concern which runs across and has very much to do with performance, even when one is working with a given text. The text emerges therefore through devising, through improvisation, or by taking a base and then improvising on it. The importance of devising remains crucial to women's practice and has much to do with the deconstruction of the canon, both literary and structural.

In feminist theatre, workshops for devising a text have played an important role. In the workshop the text is in a state of continuous evolution. The most notable feature of a drama workshop is that it is not judgemental and provides space for divergent views and people. Structurally, the plays denoted sharing of experience, composed by exchanging notes — women talking to each other and the audience. Some women dramatists like Tripurari Sharma have developed conceptually the meaning of workshop extending it to social activism, as theatre for social change is her mission. She does not look at the workshop only from the production point of view. She has been conducting workshops with trade unions, college students, women groups and women based in slums or rural areas. She has also worked extensively with marginalised groups, workers, women, traditional artistes, in villages and tribal areas, evolving

plays on issues directly relating to them. Each evolved script was different — with different music, different style. Not all of these plays were staged but those that were performed were suited more to the space of school compounds, *basti* parks, courtyard lanes and terraces. An inextricable part of this experiment was audience participation.<sup>45</sup>

In the process of workshop with women's groups, Tripurari Sharma also discovered something beyond theatre in the sense that the very process of the workshop does so much for women. According to her, the process is an end in itself. To quote,

For women, who are not given to articulating their views, women who are not given to exploring their bodies in a creative way, for feeling good, for feeling fresh. Just doing physical and breathing exercises is a liberating experience for them. Then sharing experience with each other and discovering that they are not insane, you know, discovering that every woman has dissatisfaction and negative feelings, touching other lives...When you work together in a space, you are developing a trust, sharing with each other, enjoying just being in this space, enjoying singing and creating, out of your own experiences, your own plays. These experiences have become another way of looking at theatre, a totally different view. I think that they are in a non-threatening atmosphere, there are no questions asked, there is no probing about your past life, rather, there is a sharing. And you have garb of make-belief. The line is very thin between what you are and what your are enacting ... the process found a meaning and a special place in the lives of the woman who participated in it — as performers or as members and the audience. It did not compete with the market because of course it did not belong there.<sup>46</sup>

Workshop implies faith in the collective process. Women in theatre believe that there are layers of creativity within each person and that talent has no single form. Drama is born in the form that it is actually performed — a three-dimensional reality. It is closer to the oral rather than the written tradition of expression. It transcended the restriction of reading (hence writing) skills and this was not

bound by literacy. In fact, most folk performers do not use the written word as a base. There is blurring of lines between playwrights and directors.

Through workshop one learnt also how to develop structures. How structures can have a story line, how structures need not have a storyline, how structures could be based on images. The text would not exist on paper but be shaped as the actor builds upon her ideas and feelings or reactions. It is a reversal of an actor's conventional mode wherein she imbibes character from the text — here she builds the character and the text simultaneously. The structure is less binding. Such workshop is a blow to the conventional style of director, her authority/her being, the be and centre of all. In the traditional notion the task of direction involves authority. That authority lies in one person (the director), taking total control not only of all aspects of production but also of what each actor has to do, how and when she has to move, when and how she is to render the text, etc. The director, according to this approach, is the master puppeteer who controls all the strings. There is very little scope here for the experiences of the other members of the group to layer and enrich the performance. This negates the very concept of collectivity on which the art of theatre is based.

Anuradha Kapur has moved away from the model of the director to whom all others are subordinate towards more fluid boundaries with a non-single authorial tradition. Collaborative theatre emerges as central to her work as director. In fact, most of her work has been in collaboration with the writer, painter and visual artist and singer. There is not a hierarchy of one script over another. Scripts run parallel to each other and come together to make the play. At some point as the writer starts writing, the singer works on the music and the painter works on the sets. Very soon they exchange ideas with each other. Each of them has her own strong parallel scripts and they might be deliberately taking different directors. So in her productions there is coming together of people from different disciplines.<sup>47</sup>

Thus a different language of theatre is in the making. One can see a distinctly different approach to theatre — in its theme, structure,



aesthetics, characterisation and process. New dramatic structures which stress the collective and cooperative working process by giving precedence to performance rather than to the play-script have come into circulation. These are experiments with the process and form of dramatic writing and put in place a different set of authorial and professional relationships. From creating the script, on through visualisation and improvisation, right up to the performance and relating to the audiences, the emphasis has been on collective functioning, shared resources, mutual support and group criticism.

## Notes

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Anuradha Kapur, Neeraj Malik, Minoti Chatterjee and the participants of the Conference for their valuable comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Ramanujan, A.K., "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore", in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan, (eds.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, pp. 42–51; Ved Prakash Vatuk, (ed.), *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 38–47.

<sup>2</sup> Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Borthwick, Meredith, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, pp. 194–197.

<sup>4</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta, "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal", in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women*.

<sup>5</sup> Borthwick, Meredith, *Changing Role of Women*, pp. 18, 268–269; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, pp. 95, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Hansen, Kathryn, "The Birth of Hindi Drama in Banaras, 1868–1885", in Sandria Freitag, (ed.), *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance and Environment, 1800–1980*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit, "Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance", in *EPW*, November 2, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Rege, Sharmila, "Conceptualising Popular Culture, 'Lavani' and 'Powda' in Maharashtra", in *EPW*, March 16, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Hansen, Kathryn, *Grounds for Play, The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1992, p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Hansen, Kathryn, "Stri Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage" in *EPW*, August 29, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Adarkar, Neera, "In Search of Women in History of Marathi Theatre, 1843 to 1933" in *EPW*, October 26, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Deshpande, Sudhanva, "Excluding the Petty and Grotesque: Depicting Women in Early Twentieth Century Marathi Theatre", in Vijaya Ramaswamy, (ed.), *Re-Searching Indian Women*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Bandhopadhyay, Samik, "Bengali Theatre: The End of the Colonial Tradition", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, No. 12, 1996, pp. 53–57.

<sup>14</sup> Bharucha, Rustom, *In the Name of the Secular. Contemporary Cultural Activism in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p. 43; Malini Bhattacharya, "In Search of New Roles", in *Theatre India*, No. 2, November 2000, N.S.D, New Delhi, pp. 86–92.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90–92.

<sup>16</sup> Mukhopadhyay, Kunlal, *Theatre and Politics*, Bibhasa, Calcutta, 1999; Samik Bandhopadhyay, "Introduction" *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue, 27/28, December 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Chanda, Ipshtita, "Alternatives to the Established Modes" in *Theatre India*, November 2001, N.S.D., pp. 46–47; "Colloquium Two: Women in Group Theatre", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 27/28, December 2000.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*: Samik Bandhopadhyay, "Introduction" *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 27/28, December, p. 6; Himani Bannerji, *The Mirror of Class: Essays on Bengali Theatre*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1998, p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150–151; "Colloquim Two: Women in Group Theatre", pp. 146, 161.

<sup>20</sup> Malick, Javed, (ed.), *Dario Fo's Accidental Death of an Anarchist, A Critical Companion*, Worldview, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Kumar, Radha, *History of Doing*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, pp. 144–146; Playwright, Director, Activist — An Interview with Tripurari Sharma. *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 20/21, December 1998–March 1999, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> "Colloquium Two: Women in Group Theatre", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 27/28, December 2000, pp. 47–48.

<sup>23</sup> Katyal, Anjum, "The Metamorphosis of Rudali" in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices—Women in Modern Indian Theatre*, Har-Anand, New Delhi, 2002, p. 194.

<sup>24</sup> Ahuja, Chaman, "Theatrical Phulkari" in *Theatre India*, Number 4, November 2001, p. 45.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Goodman, Lizbeth, *Contemporary Feminist Theatre: To Each Her Own*, Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 36–37.

<sup>28</sup> Fida is adaptation of Phaedra written by Jean Racines.

<sup>29</sup> Chowdhry, Neelam Man Singh, 'Unpeeling the layers within yourself', *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 17, March, 1998, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>31</sup> Some critique that Brecht created conventionally gendered plays. Despite such criticism, one cannot overlook the techniques of his work which had great impact on feminist drama. His techniques: 'social gest', 'epic theatre' and the 'verfremdung-effect' enabled feminist dramatists to not only highlight gender inequalities within historical material conditions of existence, but also to move beyond social realism.

<sup>32</sup> Allana, Amal, "Gender Relations and Self Identity: A Personal Encounter" in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices*, pp. 173–180.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180–185.

<sup>34</sup> 'Voicing Silence' is a women's theatre group based in Chennai. The group has been functioning from 1993 onwards with the aim of being a link between women's consciousness and women's articulation. It conceives of theatre as a mode of self-expression and provocateur of examining self-conceptions and constructed images.

<sup>35</sup> Padma, V., "Re-presenting Protest and Resistance on Stage: *Avvai*", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 7.2, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.224.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.224–227.

<sup>39</sup> Devika, V.R., "Voicing Silence", in *Theatre India*, November 2001, N.S.D., p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> 'Playwright, Director, Activist-An Interview with Tripurari Sharma', *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 20/21, December 1998–March 1999, p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, Methuen, New York, 1988, p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> Subramanyam, Lakshmi, "In Their Own Voice: In Conversation with Anuradha Kapur, Geetanjali Shree and Vidya Rao", in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices*, p. 234.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234–236.

<sup>44</sup> Aston, Elaine, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp. 14–15.

<sup>45</sup> Sharma, Tripurari, "An Unfinished Journey", in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices*, pp. 138–144.

<sup>46</sup> 'Playwright, Director, Activist-An Interview with Tripurari Sharma', *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 20/21, Dec 1998-March 1999, pp. 112–114.

<sup>47</sup> Subramanyam, Lakshmi, "In Their Own Voice: In Conversation with Anuradha Kapur, Geetanjali Shree and Vidya Rao", in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices*.

## References

Adarkar, Neera, "In Search of Women in History of Marathi Theatre, 1843-1933", In *EPW*, Oct 26, 1991.

Abraham, Taisha, (ed.), *Feminist Theory and Modern Drama*, Pencraft International, New Delhi, 1998.

Ahuja, Chaman, "Theatrical Phulkari", *Theatre India*, Number 4, November 2001, N.S.D., New Delhi.

Allana, Amal, "Gender Relations and Self Identity: A Personal Encounter" in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voice-Women in Modern Indian Theatre*, Har-Anand, New Delhi 2002.

Aston, Elaine, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook*, Routledge, London, 1999.

Bandhopadhyay, Samik, "Bengali Theatre: The End of the Colonial Tradition", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, No 12, 1996.

Bandhopadhyay, Samik, "Introduction" *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 27/28, December 2000.

Banerjee, Sumanta, "Marginalisation of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal", in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, (eds.), *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

Bannerji, Himani, *The Mirror of Class: Essays on Bengali Theatre*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1998.

Bharucha, Rustom, *In the Name of the Secular, Contemporary Cultural Activism in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

Bhattacharya, Malini, "In Search of New Roles", in *Theatre India*, Number 2, November 2000, N.S.D., New Delhi.

Borthwick, Meredith, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

Case, Sue-Ellen, *Feminism and Theatre*, Methuen, New York, 1988.

Chanda, Ipshita, "Alternatives to the Established Modes" in *Theatre India*, Number 4, November 2001, N.S.D., New Delhi.

Chatterjee, Minoti, "Creatures of the Sub-world: Nineteen Century Actresses of the Bengali Stage" in Vijaya Ramaswamy, (ed.), *Re-Searching Indian Women*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003.

Chowdhry, Neelam Man Singh, "Unpeeling the layers within yourself", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue, 17, March, 1998.

"Colloquium Two: Women in Group Theatre", *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 27/28, December 2000, 7.2 (2000).

Deshpande, Sudhanwa, "Excluding the Petty and Grotesque: Depicting Women in Early Twentieth Century Marathi Theatre", in Vijaya Ramaswamy, (ed.), *Re-Searching Indian Women*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003.

Devika, V.R., "Voicing Silence", in *Theatre India*, N.S.D., November 2001.

Goodman, Lizbeth, *Contemporary Feminist Theatre: To Each Her Own*, Routledge, London, 1993.

Hansen, Kathryn, "Stri Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 29, 1998.

Hansen, Kathryn, "The Birth of Hindi Drama in Banaras, 1868-1885" in Sandria Freitag, (ed.), *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance and Environment, 1800-1980*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989.

Hansen, Kathryn, *Grounds of Play. The Nautanki Theatre of North India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1992.

Jones, Kenneth W., *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976.

Kapur, Anuradha, "A Wandering Word, An Unstable Subject..." *Theatre India*, Number 3, May 2001, NSD, New Delhi.

Katyal, Anjum, "The Metamorphosis of Rudali" in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voices-Women in Modern Indian Theatre*, Har-Anand, New Delhi, 2002,

Kumar, Radha, *History of Doing*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993.

Malick, Javed, (ed.), *Dario Fo's Accidental Death of an Anarchist, A Critical Companion*, Worldview, New Delhi, 2001.

Mukhopadhyay, Kunal, *Theatre and Politics*, Bibhasa, Calcutta, 1999.

Padma, V., "Re-presenting Protest and Resistance on Stage: Avvai", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*.

Playwright, Director. Activist-An Interview with Tripurari Sharma, *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, Issue 20/21, December 1998-March 1999.

Ramanujan, A.K., "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore", in Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan, (eds.), *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, (ed.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986.

Sangari, Kumkum and Vaid, Sudesh, (eds.), *Recasting Women, Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

Sharma, Tripurari, "An Unfinished Journey". in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voice-Women in Modern Indian Theatre*, Har-Anand, New Delhi 2002.

Srinivasan, Amrit, "Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and Her Dance", in *EPW*, November 2, 1985.

Subramanyam, Lakshmi, "In Their Own Voice: In Conversation with Anuradha Kapur, Geetanjali Shree and Vidya Rao", in Lakshmi Subramanyam, (ed.), *Muffled Voice-Women in Modern Indian Theatre*, Har-Anand, New Delhi, 2002.

Vatuk, Ved Prakash, (ed.), *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1979.

# Exploring Daily Life Experiences Through Cinema-mediated Reflections of Marginalised Women: Challenging the Patriarchal Violence of the 'Kerala Development Model'<sup>1</sup>

Brigitte Schulze

*"Love is the fragrance of the flower of life  
All of us shall become that scent  
We shall make the world beautiful  
As love, as virtue".<sup>2</sup>*

With these poetic images the popular song "*Ammayum Nanmayum Onanu*" ('Mother and Virtue are One') from the Malayalam film *Narendran Makan Jayakandan Vaka* ('The rightful claim on land by Jayakandan, son of Narendran') comes to an end.

How do these film lyrics *resound* with 'marginalised' women's outlook on life in Kerala, and how do these women adjust the film song to the rhythm of their particular lives; how do their specific *responses* to a film — understood as a process in which a subject actively organises her sensory, emotional and intellectual impressions 'in dialogue' with the silver-screen — constitute 'meaning' in a particular historical and social context. How is it that, at a specific moment, these cinema-mediated experiences and meanings can amplify visions, to make "the world beautiful" which the 'marginalised' already reared before; how certain facets of cinema intersect with the 'marginalised' individual's notion of the Self and the Other, and finally, why only a few selected impressions from a film are adapted and productively transformed "as love, as virtue".

Questions like these, creative expressions of Self and her life-world, other than just the verbalised, are in the focus of my type of

a cinema-mediated *participatory action research*. In its course I enter my mini digital camera into a *process* dynamically driven forward by the respective 'marginalised' women in their striving for the "Good Life"/ "ethical community" (Bauman's term<sup>3</sup>) as they expressed it in manifold ways while in dialogue with me and my camera.

The mode(s) in which the women *adapt* cinema films, or how they *appropriate* cinematic culture by making their own (short video) films, is a creative learning process by means of which a 'marginalised' subject gains, self-awareness and confidence in her particular place in history and society. Consequently, while learning she turns marginalisation from a state of passive suffering into an actively promoted movement: Marginalisation. Marginalisation with a capital 'm' exists outside the 'centre(s)'; it happens in what I call *sinima*: 'cinema' appropriated by a Marginal woman; *sinima* is self-controlled 'cinema' and has spatial, historical, mental, sensuous, emotional, psychological and social dimensions. In the following I will frame Marginal voices and views by asterisk-lines; these guide the reader to the 'subjective' planes of how Marginalisation in the area of *sinima* is experienced and voiced by the women themselves. On another plane of my text the Marginal Good Life is compared to the powers that fuel Kerala's development politics; by *dialectically* relating the Marginal Good Life and the 'Kerala Development Model', I reach at the conclusion that to the latter the uprooting and destruction of even the most basic requirements of the Good Life such as respect towards the Marginal Self, self-control, co-operation in the organisation of social life and an ecologically balanced use of resources (land, water ...) is inherent.

During the many moments when, with different groups of Marginal women *sinimas* were created, this is how a group of Adivasi women made the above cited film song relevant to their lives. While dancing in a circle, looking into each other's eyes and clapping their hands the women sang:

*Love is the fragrance of the flower of life  
All of us shall become that scent*



*We shall sing to make this world beautiful  
As fragrance, as the sound of music.*

"We shall sing to make this world beautiful!", my camera frames the swift movements of the women's bodies, the satisfaction in their faces; the microphone catches the energy of their voices. Filling the air with "the sound of music" these women 'sow', and at the same time they are 'reaping' something precious to them: being in harmony with each other and their natural surroundings.

### **Sinima's visions of the Marginal Self and 'her world'**

My eyes and ears and all my other senses, my general aptitude to act as a 'medium' to Marginal women's outlook on life, got trained and sensitised in the course of my close interaction with *Adivasi* and *Dalit* women activists. Without any former plan, I had become the 'camera-woman' of the Marginal women who had spontaneously turned themselves into 'film directors'. I strive for an 'empathic camera' language, learning how to communicate on other than verbal levels, employing their songs, sounds; I try to become aware of the mood they create, interweave the auditory with visual perceptions, develop a feeling for their natural, social and 'inner' emotional landscapes and try to photographically reproduce them; insinuating the subtle interfacing spheres and also handling offensively intruding roadside-happenings. In this way I am receptor and re-creator of a dynamic and fruitfully erratic learning process in which for the first time *Dalit* and *Adivasi* women claim space and time for their secluded 'inner worlds' to be 'audio-visualised' and thus be given a Self-determined material shape instead of forcing them, as part of their marginalised self images, into an existence of a dependent variable governed by the priorities of a sociologically, psychologically and ideologically complex patriarchal, regionalist, and casteist society.

In spring 2002, a dalit woman activist reflected on her decade-old engagement in Kerala:

*"It is quite natural that we learn everyday, we change attitudes every day, we change beliefs everyday. And it is our experiences that bring in all these changes. And it is such experiences that motivated us to think and believe that dalits and*

*dalitwomen have issues and problems that are different from issues of other people. The mainstream society does not acknowledge this difference. The progressive community [...] does not acknowledge 'caste'. They see and analyse everything in the frame of 'class' only. [...] My working with dalit women for the last ten years gave me varied and mixed experiences. Some of them are encouraging while some are painful and more thought-provoking. Encouraging experiences are examples of how people who are denied rights and privileges yearn for it and are committed to fulfilment of their needs. And the painful experiences I see as the balance sheets of slavery and prevailing caste system. The encouraging factor is that once the women are convinced on what they need and want, what their rights are, they are ready to go any far to achieve their aim. They are sincere and committed to their cause."*

*Sinima* is an extremely productive site of reflections on Marginal identity, as defined by the Marginal (her)Self; if handled according to her own pace and perspective on 'tradition', language and history, it has the potential to show ways out of the generally existing social, economic and psychological bondage, even if they are as obscure and artful as they are in Kerala.

During our first two-days workshop in March 2002, a mixed group of 20 *Dalit* and poor women from different village backgrounds had gathered; most of them were engaged in our *sinima* project *Ente Lokam* — *Streekal Sankalpam*/ 'My world — a woman's vision' that we had launched in January of the same year and during which we had produced 12 short documentary-like *sinimas* and one 'docu-feature' enacted by the respective women themselves.

A, an active member of a *Dalit* women's group for ten years and in her sixties shared her first impressions on seeing all *ENTE LOKAM* films for the first time in their final, edited form:

*... We saw films of the women from M. ... now while I was watching 'my' film I found it really good. I am feeling happy. We accomplished something ... and I feel particularly happy about the fact that through the making of these films we*

*have moved from the kitchen to the "stage", to the scene of action...*

Other Dalit women comment. Their rightful pride in their achievements wouldn't make them lean back in satisfaction; to the contrary, they keenly discuss their failures and weaknesses, too:

E.: I might not be able to communicate properly what I have in mind, anyway: our world is dominated by men, also the film world; the popular films only show a world of consumption and riches, of the high castes, and men ruling it. Women's real problems have no place here...

*Our films highlight what all women do. But in the future we should not restrict ourselves to being a film director but we should also strive for the direction in our daily lives. There are many traditional role models for women ... like the woman as man's property. But instead of following these role patterns women should demonstrate what they can do on their own.*

S.: *We came to know two very different life-worlds (of the women from two different villages) during this workshop. We learnt by seeing. But what usually takes more time in the course of our daily routines, in the film is only a little moment. My day starts early in the morning...*

*We might state that we fight for a betterment in the women's lives and that we have to question traditions, but actually we have represented in our own films exactly these traditional role models: being in the kitchen ... In future we should cover in our films all our activities.*

### **GUDA — a feature film experiment on Adivasi life-worlds (Wayanad, Kerala)**

In the hilly areas of northern Kerala, K.J. Baby (1993), dramatist, multi-faceted activist, and the English teacher and translator Shirly M. Joseph, writer their two daughters have been living, learning and teaching for more than a decade in a close symbiosis with local *adivasis*; in a mutual effort they organised a 'co-operative school' that is holistically oriented and focuses the small community life

towards a self-determined, liberating learning called *Kanavu* ('dream'). It had started as a small alternative school project, but when I spent time with them in 2001 they were shooting their own film *Guda*, and all 50 children were involved in it. The self-built school and library, girls' and boys' hostels, the small clay houses of a few residing *adivasi* families, the fields and groves were turned into film locations. *Kanavu* had grown into a 'village' and also attracted adult *adivasis* from near and far; there are hundreds of sympathisers, friends, teachers, social activists, etc. who come and spend as much time as they wish to gift to *Kanavu* along with any of their special skills; they usually contribute something to perpetuate 'the dream' further. And they come to understand more about this open, self-organised experiment in community life-cum-learning which is unique to Kerala — as it is to many of our societies which accept the unlimited commodification of living beings and resources by using a distribution system of competitive markets which are supplied by capitalist industries, and which safeguard these exploitative structures by a nation-state ruled by the 'winners' of elections, i.e., they how vested interests get their share through party policies.

In sharp contrast to this, *Kanavu* creatively 're-appropriates' the *adivasis'* different and very particular cultures that had always been and still are maligned and marginalised by the mainstream Kerala society. In the context of *Kanavu* they joyfully sing their traditional songs, and new ones, too, with self-written lyrics combined with the old tunes; they travel and stage their songs and were also engaged in their own, acclaimed theatre projects. These are linked to a past that still stirs the memories of an *adivasi* resurrection which had greatly been brought to full maturity by K.J. Baby's play *Nadugadhika* (a ritual of exorcising evil spirits from the lands):

Highly potent and popular, it was performed close to 500 times in the early 1980s before the troupe was arrested by the government as a part of the anti-naxalite campaign. [...] The question asked during the course of the performance 'What is my crime, that I was born?' demands an answer, in

a State that criminalizes their life by usurping their lands, outlawing their traditional practices and right to natural resources." (Cheria etc. 1997, xlv-xlvi)

By May 2001, *Guda*, the first ever film script on an *adivasi* culture, an *adivasi* perspective on life and history and on the deadly myths produced by the dominant society was ready;<sup>4</sup> written in Nayaka, one of the local *adivasi* languages, *Guda* weaves together the individual story of Lechu, a young *adivasi* girl, whose impoverished family can't perform her puberty ritual (connected with the hut-like *guda*), into the larger history of the many-faceted enslavement and marginalisation into which the different *tribes* in this region have been forced to this day. Lechu had to spend one whole year in a special kind of isolation in the small space of the *guda* because her poor parents couldn't find a suitable groom for their matured daughter. First, the *guda* appears to her like a kafkaesque captivity leaving her without hope and with desperate questions about her identity as an *adivasi* girl and woman. However, her most intimate girl friend Nanaru — an orphan leading a nomadic life but with a mixed ancestry of *adivasi* and Malayali background — and the long periods of sharing their anxieties and views with each other, the *Guda* provided a space where reflection became possible, where nightmares of oppression could be turned into dreams of liberation, where she could realise her strength, become Self-aware, and finally break out of the *guda*.

My 'empathic camera' wanted to understand more about this 'feminine' Self: what was the *guda* to her? What was 'her culture', 'her language', 'her identity' to her Self? The answers of some of the girls from *Kanavu* involved in the cooperative making of *Guda* at its many stages, were actresses, too, and the reflections of the young man Sandeep who was the art designer and responsible for the costumes, sets, etc., made me understand that in *Kanavu*, unlike in the mainstream society, a young man, too, can take 'feminine' positions.

*Meena: [a young adivasi woman] ... even if my language is Paniya I learned the Nayaka language, and I can express myself in Nayaka... in the film I acted after I had studied the*

*Nayaka language with ease ... I liked the whole experience of studying this language, of acting ... being able to express myself in these new ways ... this sinima is very different from other films. In these the actors are professional actors, but here ... they are the 'living actors', those who are living [that kind of life] are acting ... while I am acting in our sinima I feel as if I experience life ...: Acting is living!!!*

*If I would be at the place of Lechu in GUDA, and I had to stay in the guda I would not like it ... but I would never disrespect or oppose my mother's wish ... the support of my friends would be the most important for me being in the guda ... there I would try to do something useful ... some job, or reading ...*

*Sandeep: [a young Adivasi man, very pensive] I am very happy with the way my designs, sets, the costumes etc. came out in the film ... also with the fact that I could slip into Maveli [legendary, very honest and good chieftain in the lands which today constitute Kerala] ... I feel a sort of desire to become Maveli, and I think that actually the present society is exactly as it had been once at Maveli's times. What had been done to him ... and I wanted this story of Maveli ... but now I also feel that I want to improve and then show a better performance even ... I feel like the real Maveli.*

Kerala's mainstream society's uninterrupted exploitation and displacement of *adivasis* who constitute 1% of the whole population, went along with the marginalisation of *adivasi* languages, mores, customs, rituals and self esteem and was accompanied by the installation of Malayalam as the dominant language. *Onam* today is regarded as Kerala's most typical feast, but it is an 'invented tradition', a highly ambiguous expression of the 'colonisation' of the marginalised cultures. The majority non-*adivasi* society celebrates the short period of time when legendary King Maveli can return to the earth once in a year; the irony is that the famed ideal *Asura* 'king' had been tricked and stamped in the underground by the upper castes — so goes the legend from an *adivasi* viewpoint.

The material, cultural and psychological deprivation of the *Adivasis* in Kerala, the disrespect and ignorance towards their complex socio-cultural cosmos, and their fundamentally different co-existence with land, water, individual and community, animals and plants, etc. reached a new climax after 2000. On February 19, 2003, the reckless shooting and following manhunt of *adivasis* who were agitating for leading a self-controlled life on self-controlled and self-organised forest lands at Muthanga (Wayanad), completes a long list of state-violence unleashed against *adivasis*.

A new disturbing facet — to my Gramscian outlook on 'organic intellectuals' whom I expect to leave the university campus and join marginal struggles — to this most recent 'civil war' against the *adivasis* and the *dalits* in Kerala, is, that since the last great agitation in the 1990s nothing has turned to the better in the quality of *adivasis*' lives here; but most of Kerala's intellectuals and women activists stayed away from Muthanga during the 46 days that the powerful experiment in a holistic restoration of *adivasi* life lasted in Wayanad — one of the most corrupt and mafia-infected districts of Kerala (cf. Cheria etc. 1997). C.K. Janu, energetic, resourceful and visionary *Adivasi* leader remembers those days at Muthanga after January 4<sup>th</sup>:

"In fact, we were aiming to restore *adivasi* lives in its original purity when we occupied the Muthanga forests. It was the beginning of integrating the diversity of the various tribes and commencement of a village life capable of self-rule. We nearly succeeded in recreating an *adivasi* village in Muthanga through collective willpower and labour. The rhythm that the tribal communities had lost was re-established. We set up our own huts and prepared the land for cultivation ... The settlement in Muthanga became totally liquor free; no one felt the need for liquor for all the 40 days we were in Muthanga. This was a lesson for all of us - a true lesson, a lived-in experience of *Adivasi* self-rule." (from: *Down to Earth*, 31/ 07/ 03).

### **Self-controlled spaces on the Margins of the elusive dominance of the 'public eye'**

*E.: In [our village] the living conditions in 14 wards ... are such that only 5% are rich people. The remaining 95% are the ordinary people, they are poor. And there are so many self help groups, it is too much! ... A real chaotic situation, its too much! Because [your village lies within] a town area you can sell more than we can.*

*P.: If we pose the question about unemployment, in which way it is a problem for us, it is not helpful to argue against each other. Anyway, it is not a question of being objectively right. It cannot be disputed that in both the places: M. and K. we are facing problems, though at different levels. But I wish to refer again to the question Suma Josson [empathic woman film-maker with films like Janmadinam and Saree] raised: Why did you represent your daily lives predominantly by scenes from the kitchen, why did you not address family problems which are plenty?...*

*S.: They do not show these because we deeply feel that the problems within the family should not be known by other people. It is this particular feeling you know...? But I want to say that before I had the impression that filmmaking was very difficult. Now I feel I understood a lot and that filmmaking is easy. ...*

*L.: There are two kinds of people: Those who have very little money but run around as if they had a lot. Second, those who are really rich but do not show it. Like this it is with our films. When we show something to the outside we have to be very careful. Otherwise you can imagine what will happen when we will be back home. ...*

*S.: Actually we have great problems to show our real problems ...*

During this workshop we also watched and vividly discussed the beautiful feature film *Saree* by committed filmmaker, poetess and activist Suma Josson. She was curious enough to watch our



Ente Lokam-films, to share with us and discuss on SAREE which left a deep impression on us.

**Parts of our discussions on Saree: "From darkness to light through love and compassion":**

*P.: You cannot interpret Suma Josson's film SAREE like the popular films that you see merely for entertainment. SAREE tries to say something indirectly. The film shows us the world through the eyes of these two girls, Radha and Gita. When we discussed the film here in the workshop the different women had different views about its meaning. For instance, Gita's story about the 'magic sari'. We see her mother spreading out that sari and its designs become birds singing, the sun is rising etc., such symbols are there.*

*As far as I understand this scene could be the girl's dream. In her house there is only darkness but her mother shows us that light is within us. And we, the spectators can "feel" this directly and strongly ...*

*When we are shown Gita's house we understand their (poor) condition, their life. When Gita tells the story of the magic sari she actually searches for a path towards light, she is expressing such a consciousness ...*

*My second observation is about the man with the cycle. I see him as a symbol of death and that is why the other girl Radha is so scared of him ... but this fear vanishes after the death scene ...*

*Then another important theme is the friendship between these two girls. When they climb up and from there throw stones into the sea, this scene again is connected to that idea of following the path towards the light. And when they play this game with their wishes ... later we realise they shared the same wish: to save Gita's mother from death and to move from darkness to light. And from this we can understand the real depth of their friendship.*

Zygmunt Bauman's "ethical community" (2001) in contradistinction to the capitalist consumer society, exists in Kerala,

in those spheres that are characterised by Marginalisation. However, the "ethical communities" are silenced by those structures of (media) communication that the 'Kerala Development Model' (henceforth referred to as KDM) necessitates and generates. A 'peaceful coexistence' between the *sinima* on the one side, and the dominant cinema on the other side is essentially impossible because of the expansive character of the KDM; at the same time *sinimas* — and other projects of life spheres appropriated by Marginalisation — can periodically exist, as long as the space that they occupy wouldn't interfere with concrete possibilities to make profit.

In spring 2003, five Dalit women out of our larger group of a dozen Marginal women scripted and enacted a docu-feature film structured in six episodes and titled Kudiyirakkappedunavar/ 'Displaced people' and of 32 minutes duration. It had been fuelled by their self-critique of the Ente Lokam-films they had made one year before, and certain inhibitions they had observed in themselves to express in their *sinimas* problems like dowry, casteist behaviour, alcoholism of the men and intoxicification of school-boys, etc. which are characterised by the extreme tensions in the family, and between family and society.

Impressions from our workshop on March 14th 2003, in the premises of Marginal Adivasi women who had invited the Dalit women, me and our film Kudiyirakkappedunavar/ 'Deprived People':

*P.: [referring to the problem that mounting demands of dowry also affect the Dalits ...] We lose our land, houses. The upper caste people experience [minor] problems ... but we are pushed out of everything.*

*B. [one of the adivasi women] said that we have no knowledge, that we are ignorant ... This is our problem, here we degrade ourselves. You could direct a drama, one of you could write a poem. How can we say we have no knowledge? Even the educated are not able to do these things. First, it is important that we understand and accept each other. We could direct a film by sharing our experiences. Our Ammachies also shared their experiences with us, it was a get-together of two generations also. Though they couldn't write, they shared their experiences.*

You could also direct a film better than us because you are facing very acute problems, more pressing than ours. We could also support you. Brigitte supported us. Last year we directed 13 small films ... that was our first experience. In those films each person tried to represent herself. When we got a second chance to direct a film we thought that we wanted to present our common problems. We were getting together every Sunday in our village. We wanted everyone's ideas. We had learnt to read films in a different way as compared to the first time. We had seen some Onam released films before that. We discussed and wrote some critical evaluation on these, our Ammachies also held good criticisms on those films. So, this is not a problem of having certain knowledge or skills ... it is a matter of one's experiences. A common media like cinema never raises our problems. They never want to address problems of indigenous people. Because of that we decided to make a film that should raise our own problems. So we could make a film like this [Kudiyirakkapedunavar].

### **Self and the 'Other' in competition: KDM and its profit-oriented, exclusivist rhetoric**

Communication in the context of the KDM is essentially rigid, frozen in the existing power structures, wordy, abstract, inflexible, non-dialogic, non-responsive to concrete needs of concrete men or women, or of the living nature.

However, even if not intended, the established media perpetuate the 'Kerala myth' because they function largely as a mere platform for the perspectives of the political classes. *The Hindu* of March 30, 2003, gives the following headline: "Women's Commissions meet, More powers sought, 'Adopt Kerala model to strengthen panels' ". Despite the positive tone in which the 'Kerala Model' comes across here, from the article itself we can understand that it had been the Kerala State Women's Commission, of all political institutions, that totally underplayed the state-violence unleashed against the agitating *adivasi* women at Muthanga on February 19. Merely six weeks after Muthanga, this news item appears under a heading that still draws its bold-letter-words, its catchwords, etc. from the hypocritical language of power!?

Development in the Kerala of today is clearly profit-oriented and the respective lobby groups are interested only in keeping a status quo that secures unhindered control; as in other parts of India, in Kerala 'corruption' is an appropriate instrument that serves this type of development. It systematically destroys life resources of the many while the growth of abstract wealth for a few is promoted; profit-oriented development and the hegemonic/ dominant 'mainstream' tend towards unrestricted exploitation of the natural and human resources.

Contrasting this, the *sinimas* of the marginal *dalit* and *adivasi* women seem to release and re-present formerly dormant energies that now cease to remain silent. I argue that the hundreds and hundreds of individual *adivasis*, (the social movements of *adivasis*) who were joined by *dalit* groups during the first two months of 2003 in Northern Kerala, are an example of these energies in marginalisation putting the visions of the Good Life into praxis — as it had happened during 46 days in Muthanga.

Kerala's influential urban middle classes and the majority of its intellectuals could not have cared less for these movements towards the Good Life. A few rushed to the scene *after* the fatal state-violence, but during all these last two years not even much concern was shown for saving the obviously threatened last niches of Kerala's civil society. One did not (re-)create platforms — independent of party structures - to raise one's own voice as a concerned citizen, or for the Marginal voices of the agitating *adivasis* and *dalits*; or for starting a dialogue on respective needs and perspectives.

Instead, some urban 'environmentalists' called for the establishment of 'law and order' against the agitating *adivasis* by the beginning of February. In general, the mounting structural violence in Kerala's public and domestic spaces (Krishnakumar, 2000), and against the oppressed castes and classes, and particularly against women (Sakhi, 2002), is tightly related to what I call 'mission globalisation 2000' propelled vigorously or tolerated silently by Kerala's propertied and educated élites.

### **The *Dalit* / 'Feminine' as the 'Other' of 'Malayali identity'**

During the Onam festive season 2001, only a few days before September 11, 2001, the above cited song *Ammayum Nanmayum* boosted to medium-scale popularity the Malayalam film Narendran Makan Jayakandan Vaka (*NMJV*, 'The rightful claim on land by Jayakandan, son of Narendran') directed by Sathyan Anthikkad. This parable-like film paints a dark picture of Kerala striking a satirical, at times even sarcastic note on the corruptness of its political and economic system. How the innocent and soft 'anti-hero' Jayakandan (Kunchakko Boban) falls prey to it is what the film is all about.

Despite 'artistic' weaknesses, *NMJV* with respect to its emotional-ethical orientation stands out before most of the recent commercial films. This is achieved by its overall wittiness, its balanced slapstick elements (and hilarious acting by Srinivasan opposite Boban, see below), and its fast-paced but thoughtful montage. Seemingly incessantly, one absurd encounter is followed by the next in which unassuming Jayakandan with his claim on a few acres has to face death more than once in "God's own country" (Kerala's label for being sold to the tourist industry). In a way I would call *NMJV* a post-modern and post-colonial Chaplinade: in the Kerala of the 2000s it is not the 'modern times' represented by machines that draw human beings into their unstoppable and relentless mechanisms, but here it is the political block of the local élites joining hands with global players and thus implementing a modernisation process to which poor Jayakandan falls prey. His fateful adventures ironically reverse the message of "God's own country", and a spectator-audience with similar experiences might well feel 'thoughtfully empathic' with this 'anti-hero'. The script and dialogues by Srinivasan<sup>5</sup> largely contributed to this; I therefore call *NMJV* a 'Srinivasan-Anthikkad film'; it creates something rare in Malayalam cinema and society: by means of a witty humour a *human space* emerges which the Marginal, the *dalit* (the *adivasi*, the woman) takes up.

Amongst the three Onam film releases: *NMJV*, Ravanaprabhu (by Renjith, a 'Mohanlal-film'), and Rakshasarajavu (by Vinayan, the competing 'Mammootty-film'), *NMJV* was the favourite film of the *dalit* women.

### **The myth of Kerala's 'strong women' and matrilineal power**

*NMJV* exposes the false friendliness and rhetoric of the respected Malayali patriarch of high caste background. Nair clans, like this, have a matrilineal tradition of passing on property; however, the Nair women of today are usually as deprived of veritable economic control over house, land and other resources as the women of other castes, communities or classes (Devika and Kodoth 2001, Eapen and Kodoth 2002). Bygone forms of matriliney are nonetheless favourite points of reference for academics and policy-makers who champion their credo in the positive character of the 'Kerala model' (Jeffrey 1993 and 2003).

Returning to the film *NMJV*, it is noteworthy, particularly in the context of the trend in the popular Malayalam cinema since the mid-1990s to celebrate upper caste/feudal lifestyles as if the exploitation attached to it and the inhuman treatment of the lower castes, the *dalits* or *adivasis* did not exist — that this Anthikkad-Srinivasan film focuses on the ruthless craving for land and wealth by the élites at the expense of the deprived. Kerala, the 'model state' is just a facade; behind it we find that the unparalleled casteism of the feudal past, the racism towards *adivasis*, the moral and economic pressures on women have never been tackled from the perspective of, and by the true empowerment of, the marginalised. Their concrete problems have been transformed to being 'issues' on the agendas of political parties and thus made into objects of competition between them. The new 'party-élites' who have sprung from the old élites, direct the streams of wealth into their own pockets; they are the 'modern feudal lords', the 'globalised consumers', and at times even 'global players'.

GIM, the 'General Investors Meet' was held at Cochin in January 2003. The State and the Central Governments' ambitious, socially and ecologically highly questionable 'sale' of Kerala's

resources was declared a fitting instrument to foster this sacrosanct type of development. Consequently, the few concerned citizens who went to Cochin's streets and protested against GIM's obviously harmful impact on humans and nature were branded as anti-regional/national and taken into custody. Kerala's reality is even richer in the systematically exercised violence in the name of region/nation and development than what poor Jayakandan, main character in the film *NMJV*, experiences when he arrives from Tamil Nadu and claims his father's land which, by then, had been turned into a pretext to misuse public money for building an airport that was, of course, never needed, and never built.

On this truth about the illusory nature of Kerala's much-hyped development, *NMJV* does not compromise by a placatory 'happy end': Jayakandan turns his back to Kerala (and even to the upright female *panchayat* president). He could not forget the gruesome attacks which his greedy male relatives had initiated against him.

Working its way through the system and its representational diversity, Srinivasan's films/characters struggle with such hegemonic, reductive notions by subverting and inverting its centers from within. In a way, Srinivasan represents the stubbornness of the margins — something that refuses to dissolve in the past or History, or to disappear beyond the pale of our vision. (Sanjeev and Venkiteswaran 2002, 29)

I follow S. Sanjeev's and C. S. Venkiteswaran's insightful analysis of the complex cinematic representation of 'Dalitness' by the Srinivasan persona which the film theoreticians set in the Kerala context; where aggressive casteism is painfully experienced by the *Dalits*, but where no 'place' exists for this anguish to be expressed, understood, shared and finally ended by healing *touches*.

T. M. Yesudasan (2000), Professor of English in Kerala, has analysed Malayalam literary works and identifies the same ambiguous representation of the *Dalit* existence in Kerala. The *Dalit* body is used in such a way that her/ his human particularity is destroyed; Yesudasan argues that this is no conscious or deliberate act of violence, but that it is inherent to the modern 'Malayali' identity.

'The' *dalit* is constructed as the "eternal Other" to 'the' Malayali and vice versa:

In spite of several social changes, Keralam is still a caste society. And patriarchic too. [...] But the progressive image of Keralam veils this fact. In her historiographic metafiction on modern Keralam, Arundhati Roy unveils this fact [...] The driving force of *The God of Small Things* stems from the wrath at the wrongs gender discrimination does to fundamental laws of love, family and true feeling. But this novel is acclaimed as their own by *dalits* on the assumption that its hero is Velutha, a *dalit*. This perception fails to notice the role of feminist poetics in ordering the literary equality between castes. Integration is a myth as is evidenced by the lay out of Kerala politics which continues largely to be structured castewise.

Following Yesudasan, I argue that in a cinema like that of the Anthikkad-Srinivasan type, the violation which the modernising Malayali identity inflicts on its Other, the *dalit*, is expressed. For a few moments in the cinema hall one can *feel* it; an experience similar to Walter Benjamin's idea of a cathartic effect initiated vis-à-vis the moving images and 'reflected' by the silverscreen (Benjamin 1968). Here the *dalit*/the 'broken body' is given a presence, an image and an 'aura' which, one who can see and feel, could interpret as a symbol of the pathetic 'human condition'. However, a mere spectator, or even a potential sympathiser can only turn her-/himself into an interfering activist who perceives the Other/*dalit* as an equal human being while conceding individuality to both: the Self and the Other. In Kerala even this has never happened. Social reform movements have widely stuck to caste and community *differences*; *dalits*, *adivasis*, or women figured according to their usability within the grand design of Kerala's modernity that was sketched respectively by the nationalist and the high-caste Malayali patriarch. (Cheria etc. 1997, Devika 1999, Chandrika 1998, Stephen 1998).

These analyses gain in strength if combined with the ideas that *Dalit* women hold, on the casteism they face in everyday life, as to



why and how they feel the desire to express these experiences in their *sinima* Kudiyrakkappedunavar/ 'Displaced people'.

**Voices from our workshop on March 14, 2003, when the adivasi women responded to Kudiyrakkappedunavar:**

*M. (Dalit woman): ... These are our experiences and what we tried to show by means of sinima. There are many problems we are facing. I am happy to know you [Adivasi women] because you face similar problems.*

*R. (Adivasi woman): Is there a public well [at your place]?*

*P. (Dalit): There is no public well. There is only a public tap, but this, too, creates problems. [At the end of our film] we showed a scene [in which it becomes evident that even while facing a] great scarcity of water the existing problems are [actually created] by caste discrimination. Other people (high caste) never use our water for drinking purposes. They only use it for cleaning, washing, and for the toilet. My own experiences are this ... [facing always shortage of water the high caste families take water from Dalits only for 'unclean' necessities; they behave according to the same logic when Dalits need to take water from them] ... they told us directly: "This water is not for your bathing, you should use it only for drinking. If you want water for bathing you should take it from your people's well." But most Dalit women have to leave the house for harvest work early and return late, and only then they can fetch water; but most people don't allow to take water after 5 p.m.*

*S. (Adivasi): Why didn't you react to this, do something against it? ...*

Our *sinima* is a powerful space where women who share the experiences of marginalisation get a boost in their sense of Self, in their belief in their own strength and creativity to mould their lives according to their concrete priorities and visions.

However 'successful' we might have been, in the future there are sufficient reasons to further move forward according to the rhythms of our lives. I see basically two tasks before us.

One, the *dalit* and *adivasi* women and myself, who, mediated by our *sinimas*, strengthened each other by being *in touch* and by having that 'symbiotic dialogue', want to expand and to fortify our '*sinima* network'.

Two, it remains a major task before us to find out whether the spell of *sinima* would work, too, on those 'Others' who neither experience marginalisation, nor Marginalisation: Kerala's urban middle classes.

The 'Marginal/ broken body' in Kerala has suffered many harsh injuries while navigating the rough waters of the sea called 'progressive development'. Now that the *dalits* and the *adivasis* of Kerala, during the 46 days at their Muthanga camp and in the ongoing struggle for *adivasi* self-rule experience their own Good Life with an upright, unscathed human body, and an "ethical community" with its own history and outlook, it is again Kerala's influential lobbies and parties (of any colour) that try to silence the Marginal subjectivity. The hostile reactions to Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (cf. *Malayalam Literary Survey* 1998) also pay vivid testimony to the fact that 'Malayali identity' excludes even love from its territory (Namboodiripad 1998). *dalits* and *adivasis* who aspire for liberation claiming their humanness and their spaces have to manage the dangerous passage between the Scylla of 'Kerala modernity' and the Charybdis of 'globalisation', both objectives pursued in a particularly rigid manner by Kerala's Left.

### Resuming thoughts

The Marginal women's dreams are given voice and vision in our *sinima(s)* in a mutual learning process. Our participatory '*sinima* research' is about living a respectable, balanced and ethical life properly distanced from mainstream society. Due to the latter's incompatibility with the Marginal Good Life I see no scope for a convergence between it and the KDM, and I also do not see overlapping spaces emerging. Something like democratisation cannot grow as long as the KDM and the myths it produces force their military rhythms on us.

The day after our Ente lokam, 'My world' workshop (March 2002), Suma Josson and I reflected as follows about the communicative energies which the Marginal women own, and which we understand as being tightly related as much to their *sinima*(s) that enhanced their dormant life-forces, as to life itself — and this brings back to me the words of one *adivasi* young woman to whom her acting in Guda had been "living".

*S.: ... what I say is that they formed their ideas like chain reactions which I thought was good, and ... I am very happy with that. I would prefer to show this film to this kind of people ...*

*B.: [I observed] that ... how people relate to film is linked to how they form inter-human relationships, inter-social relationships. With regard to the openness of the women I would relate it [to their] attitudes which are not part of the competing market and consumer society where [the only thing that] counts is how someone/ something HAS TO BE ... that is fixed, the mindset is fixed, ... these women are not like this, they are flexible, ... like children, but once in Kerala one 'matures' one loses these abilities ... but it is still [there] more in the women, the poor and deprived ... [who] sacrifice everything for the sake of their children ...*

*S.: [This connection to childhood is] interesting ] a lot of that is what happens in SAREE, and I took it also from my own childhood which largely I spent in Kerala ... I remember a poem which in memorising my childhood here I once wrote ... one line [went] "I ran with thornwings under my feet" [...] this is from my childhood when Kerala was more a rural kind of society ...*

*The second point I want to make ... is that this Kerala is a myth: always represented and quoted as a model of literacy, development, ... economists like Amartya Sen hail it ... but I say that women in Kerala are no[t] better [off] ...*

*So what you [B.S.] said about women in Kerala ... with reference to the suppressed women is true [that they are*

*comparatively more free in spirit than women of the middle-classes] the middle-classes ... they are alienated from nature ... they are at home, they watch these TV serials ... whereas these [poor] women with whom we interacted are workers, they go out, they work with their hands, so their relationship is also with nature, like she [Lucy, a participant in our sinima-project] said: early morning she is milking the cow, she is bringing the milk to her home, they consume the milk, she goes 3 km for the water, ... so always she is working with her hands and her feet ... always close to nature ... For such a woman, it is natural to relate to the cinema [...] ... also she is put in various roles ... however, she manages to be much more open ... in terms of cinema. That is why I was really happy, they would pick up something from the film and then they would really ... relate to it ... they would also disagree: 'No, no' ... [contrasting this open and receptive attitude again with that of the middle-classes].*

*B.: ... but even if they say: No, no, no, ... they are not fighting [against you as a filmmaker] for the 'proper' meaning, they are completing a set of meanings, they are not competing! ...*

*S.: I agree with you ... .*

(The full talk can be found in: Schulze and Stephen 2003, 32–37).

### **Concluding song to exorcise the evil spirits of the 'Kerala Development Model':**

*Torch to the hands — Heysa.  
Sense to the brains — Heysa.  
Our earth — unto us.  
Maveli's earth — we the heirs.  
Our forests — unto us.  
Can we not — live on here?  
Are we not — human selves?  
Stole our earth — cut our woods.  
Darkened ye — this our world.  
Deadened ye — life beyond.  
Robbed our sight — robbed our spirit.*

*Our hills — razed to dust.  
Built up walls — built up forts.  
Reigning over — land and lives.  
Lord of the past,  
Walk ye on,  
Let thy mob,  
Let thy guards,  
Watch ye walk  
Up to the hills,  
Up to the stream,  
Up to the platform there upon.*

(They head off Tampuran, the master evil spirit. The *Gadhika* rhythm accompanies them. They dance away in the same manner as they had entered the stage.)

Quoted from the end of K. J. Baby's *Nadugadhika* as translated from Malayalam into English by Shirly M. Joseph.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Discussions following my talk on "Globalization and divergence. Dynamics of dissensus in non-dominant Cinema Cultures of South India" at the conference "Media in Transition2: Convergence and Globalization", organised by the Centre for Comparative Media Studies, MIT Cambridge (Mass.), May 10-12, 2002 enabled me to gain insight for this paper. I gratefully acknowledge the response of Prof. Shree Mulay and the scholars and students at the Centre for Research and Teaching on Women at McGill University, Montreal, a week later, to my presentation "Touching experiences of 'untouchable' women in Kerala: cinema cultures as crucial moments in life biographies". This encouraged me to incorporate the relationship that women in particular establish between 'cinema' and the *feeling* of being alive, of non-verbalised 'lifeworld-concepts' critically with sociology, cultural and media studies. These are important locations for dynamics that greatly affect daily life in our societies but are often poorly understood. I am indebted to the people I interacted with during my fieldwork in Kerala over three years. Their help, love and respect have contributed seminally to this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I thank K. C. Priyamol and V. C. Harris for their translations from Malayalam into English.

<sup>3</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> It is now, in November 2003, that I could return to 'Kanavu' and see Guda; its final version makes my heart beat faster being carried away with the drums of its self-composed sound-track, its energetic images and captivating visions.

<sup>5</sup> Srinivasan, despite his dark complexion and short stature, assured his presence in Malayalam cinema as a prolific actor, an imaginative scriptwriter, and as a sensitive and intelligent director (Chintavishtayaya Shyamala, 'Pensive Shyamala', 1998).

## References

Baby, K. J., *Nadugadhika* (A Play), translated from Malayalam by Shirley M. Joseph, Visthar, Bangalore, 1993.

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Community. Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001.

Benjamin, Walter, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction", in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, Schochen Books, New York, 1968.

Chandrika, C.S., *Keralatthile sthreemunnnettangalute charithram (pathanam)*, 'A history of Feminism in Kerala', Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur, 1998.

Cheria, Anita, K. Narayan, C. R. Bijoy and Edwin, *A search for justice: a citizens report on the adivasi experience in South India*, Jose Sebastian, Nadavayal (Wayanad), 1997.

Devika, J., "En-gendering individuals. A study of gender and individualisation in reform-language in modern Keralam 1880s-1950s", unpublished Ph. D. thesis, M. G. University, Kottayam, 1999.

Devika, J., and Praveena Kodoth, "Sexual violence and predicament of feminist politics in Kerala", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 18, 2001, 3170-3177.

Eapen, Mridul and Praveena Kodoth, *Family structure, women's education and work: Re-examining the high status of women in Kerala*, working paper 341, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002.

Jeffrey, Robin, *Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala Became a 'Model'*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The legacy of matriliney", lecture organised by the Kerala Council for Historical Research and the Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at E.M.S. Town Hall, Ernakulam, on February 7, 2003.

Krishnakumar, R., "State of despair, Kerala is something of a role model in welfare-oriented development, and yet the State has been reporting one of the highest suicide rates in the country", in *Frontline*, April 28 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. "For land and livelihood", in *Frontline*, October 13, 2001.

Namboodiripad, E. M. S. , "The aesthetic concept of Arundhati Roy", translated by V. Sathi and Annamma T. Kuruvila, in *Malayalam Literary Survey*, 1998, pp. 11-14.

Roy, Arundhati, *The god of small things*, IndiaInk, New Delhi, 1997.

Sakhi, *Support services to counter violence against women in Kerala. A resource directory*, Thiruvananthapuram and New Delhi: Sakhi Resource Center for Women in collaboration with UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, 2002

Schulze, Brigitte, "The Cinematic *Pauranik Kathanak*", in Dalmia, Vasudha and Theo Damsteegt (1998), *Narrative strategies. Essays on South Asian literature and film*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, etc., 1998, pp.50-66.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Demystifying fascism and cinema. Reflections and perspectives", in *Neo-Fascism and cinema*, booklet to a workshop during the International Film Festival of Kerala, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Cinematic 'Discovery of India': Mehboob's re-invention of the nation in *Mother India*", in *Social Scientist*, New Delhi, Vol. 30, No. 9-10, September-October, 2002, pp. 72-87.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Reflections on cinema and split identities in modernising societies. From Janakikutty (Kerala 1997) to Caligari (Germany 1920)", in K. Gopinathan (ed.) (2003), *Film & Philosophy*, Publication Division, University of Calicut, 2003, pp. 144-170.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Humanist and emotional beginnings of a Nationalist Indian Cinema in Bombay. With Kracauer in the Footsteps of Phalke*, Avinus Verlag, Berlin, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. and Lovely Stephen, *Visions of life and love. The appropriation of cinema by marginalised women in Kerala*, unpublished, 2003.

S. Sanjeev and C. S. Venkiteswaran, "The Left and the Untouchability of Caste. Srinivasan and the Comic Order of Things", in *Deep Focus*, March, 2002.

Stephen, Lovely, "Book Review: Women's history of herstories of women notables?", in *Malayalam Literary Survey*, January/ March, 1999.

Yesudasan, T. M., *The poetics of integration and the politics of representation, and Ambedkarian reflection on fiction in Keralam*, unpublished; as told by the author he had presented a "crude form" of the paper at the seminar, "Socio-political fiction in South Indian languages", Dept. of Politics and Public Administration, University of Madras, May 8-9, 2000.



## Contemporary Patriarchies: Reconfigurations in Bihar

Papiya Ghosh

**W**riting on the under-theorisation of historical transitions from a feminist perspective, Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti made these observations some time back. Despite two decades of the institutionalization of women's studies, it is still difficult to draw either a spatial or a temporal map of patriarchal structures on the subcontinent. Nor are there systematic regional and period-based studies explaining the persistence of patriarchal structures. Their call was to confront the complexity of the questions of religious and caste identities in relation to their "different and complex interfaces with class and gender issues and their exacerbation by the political economy as a whole".<sup>1</sup> An earlier anthology that Sangari and Sudesh Vaid edited, "as observers and participants in women's protest movements of the seventies", had stressed the implications of the reconstitution of patriarchies in the colonial period and their bearing on the present. Focusing on the regulation and reproduction of patriarchy in the different class-caste formations within civil society and in the daily lives of women, they underlined the need for specific studies. This is seen as crucial, given the regional, class and caste variations of patriarchal practices and their diverse histories.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context, and along these lines, that this paper maps the contours of contemporary patriarchies around regional political trajectories. A recent summing up of the characteristics of the last decade by Sangari records a sharp acceleration of a long term and reciprocal relation between communalism and patriarchies. Making

a note of the centrality of gender in the production of the new political formation of the Hindu right, her prediction is that communalism and patriarchies will be seen in "an even more monstrous partnership".<sup>3</sup> My findings suggest that this needs to be seen together with an examination of how "minority" patriarchies are being interrogated and/or are reconfiguring at the intersection of Hindutva and Mandal politics in Bihar. I have explored this with a comparative focus on the *Tehreek-e-Niswan* (1994) of the CPI-ML (Liberation) and the *Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz* (1998), a backward and dalit formation, around the themes of personal law, reservation and electoral politics.

In the previous decade several studies and overviews have examined the reconfiguration of gender and community relations in the context of the appropriation of Hinduism and Islam by communal and fundamentalist organisations and their success in mobilising women in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>4</sup> During this period women have engaged in activism both "within and against" communal politics. As a result, "complicated forms of women's agency" emerged from the interplay of gender, class and religious identities.<sup>5</sup> A crucial lesson derived from the anti-sati agitation and the Shah Bano case was that women could be divided by the politics of their religious and caste identities and that they could be "complicit in and consent to the strengthening of patriarchy which worked against them". Also, in each of the three institutions of family, community and state, patriarchy worked in complex and often contradictory ways.<sup>6</sup> Two points were made sharply. One, that the debate about gender issues was "virtually indelibly overwritten by the agendas of politicised religion".<sup>7</sup> Two, that the communalist intensification of religious difference and primacy given to religion as an analytic category tended to veil the common reality of patriarchy across communities, thus displacing egalitarian struggles for equality.<sup>8</sup> But more on that later.

### **The Shah Bano Controversy**

The Shah Bano controversy was clearly the turning point in the Hindu Right's political growth,<sup>9</sup> a development which impacted

widely. It occasioned major changes and rethinking within the women's movement in India,<sup>10</sup> and the diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Class struggles got "pushed into the background" in the organized politics of the Left in India, because of an "exceptional concern" with taking on communalism.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, however, a "secularisation of Muslims" was going on in politics, marked by a "rapid change" in the political orientations of Muslims, "from security to dignity". Attributing this "important shift" to the "Mandal factor", Javeed Alam has pointed out that the politics of communities with which Muslims now align themselves is that of "communities which are adjacent to the Muslims". Thus, "whether as a peasant or an artisan or a guild worker, the Muslim finds himself as the social equal of an OBC or a Dalit". Alam adds that Muslims are, "much more a part of the empowerment process under way in Indian society than ever before". This "rupture" between the elites and masses within the Muslim community was facilitated by the OBC political formations becoming "enduring allies and props of Muslims". Basically, he notices "an altogether new kind of politics", in a context which is very different from that of the 1940s.<sup>13</sup> How this is getting played out in Bihar and its implications for the "competing majority and minority patriarchies"<sup>14</sup> is part of the story that will be filled in shortly.

It will be useful to recapitulate the range of recent mobilisations and interventions of / by women discussed by Tanika Sarkar in one of her essays. She places the enlistment of upper-caste women for composing and disseminating the post-1980s Hindu supremacist "new politics", at an interface with the following strands. The "much larger, dynamic" Left and radical, and militantly secular women's organisations that link patriarchy with larger patterns of social injustice. And the emergence of the upper-caste anti-Mandal woman, as an "integrated class-caste subject with an active, informed solidarity with her menfolk".<sup>15</sup> Before updating this spread, two points that inform this paper need to be mentioned. First, a reminder from Amrita Basu in a comparative volume on South Asia, against generalising about "the Muslim woman", given her diverse experiences in say, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> Second, while

"Muslims" have been unpacked according to class, regional and *biradari* variations (the last less frequently), the same needs to be done more attentively with "Muslim women" for an understanding of how patriarchies articulate with contemporary political formations.

It was in the mid-1980s that enumerated, denominational patriarchies came into focus around Shah Bano. Zoya Hasan's study found the government's approach to the case "flawed on several counts". One of these was that it was assumed that the ulema and the Muslim political leadership in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) were the sole arbiters of Muslim interests. Liberal and progressive opinion within the community were therefore ignored.<sup>17</sup> The crusade against the judgement was led by the AIMPLB and supported by Muslim politicians in centrist parties, including the Congress and the Janata Dal. A widespread movement was put together among Muslims in UP, Bihar, Kashmir, AP and Kerala, thus deflecting the issue of women's rights to the terrain of minority rights.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Muslim liberals, feminists and social reformers campaigned all over India to uphold the judgement and demanded improvements in the legal rights of Muslim women against polygamy and for maintenance. In August 1985, a Bill was introduced in Parliament to exclude women from the purview of Section 125. This was opposed by a loose coalition across India, between autonomous women's groups, socialists, Maoists and social reformers. The CPI and CPM influenced women's organisations formed a separate coalition and urged MPs to vote against the Bill.<sup>19</sup> It went through nonetheless.

### Gender-just Laws

In the mid-1990s, a working group on women's rights proposed that non-patriarchal, gender-just common laws would be the birthright of every citizen. They would also have the right at any point of time to be governed by personal laws with a provision to return to common laws at a moment of legal conflict. The concept was that by being born into gender-just laws, citizens do not end their religious affiliations but are no longer automatically subject to the personal law of their community. While reconciling with the continuation of personal laws, as a strategic compromise with existing political

realities, and not blocking reforms from within, the proposal was meant to correct the endless deferral of equal laws in anticipation of a politically conducive moment to introduce them.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), which grew out of the CPI (M) in 1981, adopted a resolution at its convention on a 'Equal Laws, Equal Rights' in December 1985, advocating a two-pronged strategy: common equal laws in priority areas like matrimonial property, registration of marriages and a simultaneous working for reform in different personal laws.<sup>21</sup> Of the one million signatures appended to an AIDWA memorandum to the prime minister against the Muslim Women's Protection of Rights on Divorce Bill, 200,000 were those of Muslim women.<sup>22</sup> Soon after the Shah Bano case large numbers of Muslim women, especially from the poorer sections, intellectuals and reform groups supported women's organizations. Later many Muslim women discussed their problems with some organizations and participated in other campaigns for women's rights.<sup>23</sup> Around this time several Muslim women's groups worked for changes within Muslim law. The *Awaaz-e-Niswan* (Voice of Women) was started by Shahnaaz Sheikh who had been unilaterally divorced by triple *talaq* in 1983. In 1991, this organization formally affiliated itself with the women's wing of the CPI, the National Federation of Indian Women.<sup>24</sup>

The CPI ML (Liberation)'s *Tehreek-e-Niswan* (TN) ranges itself both against the patriarchal structures (*mardana tasallut*) within the Muslim community and the politics of Hindutva, and is an affiliate of the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) that was started in 1994. Part of what Arvind N. Das described as the "new Naxalite" formation, the CPI ML (Liberation) was started in 1974.<sup>25</sup> In the mid 1990s about 10,000 of the total membership of 60,000 were women who comprised around ten per cent of its committees at various levels. The party has been addressing patriarchal attitudes in a "sizeable" number of its workers and urging its women members to sustain this focus.<sup>26</sup> While the participation of women in the movement has been central to its politics, some studies have commented on their involvement being viewed restrictively by the leadership, and

often getting reduced to the women's front;<sup>27</sup> or that the struggle against the feudal patriarchal system figures only "dimly".<sup>28</sup> Expanding its base in north and central Bihar, the CPI ML is opposed to the caste politics of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the BJP and private armies such as the Ranveer Sena.<sup>29</sup>

In the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, the CPI ML (Liberation) emphasised that neither the CPI nor the CPI M had distanced themselves from the Congress which faked its secularism.<sup>30</sup> Earlier that year its front organization the Indian People's Front reported that unlike other parties which deployed the fear of communalism to turn Muslims into a vote bank, it had been drawing Muslims into its mass movements and had also fought communal violence in Patna, Giridih, Darbhanga and Hazaribagh.<sup>31</sup> Six years later the CPI ML drew attention to the targeting and killing of Muslims by the Ranveer Sena in Baithani Tola.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1990s it advocated support for Muslim women campaigning for changes in the practice of *talaq*.<sup>33</sup> By the mid-1990s its position on the uniform civil code was that while it was indispensable in a democratic society, the plight of Muslim women also necessitated liberal reforms in the Muslim personal law. "We have to keep in mind the obvious apprehensions in the Muslim community aggravated by the mounting aggression of the Hindu Right. While resisting the majority communal attempts at appropriating and communalising the uniform civil code, we should do all we can to strengthen the voice of reforms within the Muslim community".<sup>34</sup> It has recently described the notion of a uniform civil code dedicated to the service of national unity and integration as reflecting a strong majoritarian and anti-democratic bias and decided on securing progressive personal laws.<sup>35</sup>

Four women's magazines, *Adhi Zameen* (Hindi), *Pratividhan* (Bengali), *Aider Jonaki Baat* (Assamese) and *Suryodaya* (Tamil) organised a national convention for women's liberation in Patna in August 1992 on the theme of the "rightist offensive" and decided to forge a cross-religious solidarity by bringing together Left and democratic organisations and autonomous movements to oppose attacks on ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>36</sup> Firming up earlier

efforts, in 1986, 1988 and 1990, a national platform was started to campaign for "security, equality and dignity" and an equal share in property and power.<sup>37</sup> When the AIPWA was started in February 1994, the six organisations initially affiliated to it were the Karbi Mimso Chingthur Asong (Karbi Anglong), the Boro Women's Justice Forum (Assam), the Samata (Karnataka), the Shramik Mahila Morcha (Maharashtra), the Mahila Punaruthan Sangh (Gujarat) and the Tehreek-e-Niswan (Bihar). "Providing protection to minority women at all costs", was at the top of its inaugural agenda. It also aimed at ending the exploitation of minor girls by Arab sheikhs and the practice of triple *talaq*.<sup>38</sup> In Bihar, the AIPWA initially organised women in Bhojpur, Patna, Purnun, Phulwari, Naubatpur, Bihta and Gaya.<sup>39</sup> In the 1990s its support among the middle class was limited to Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal were described as problem areas, and this was attributed to a lack of attention to issues concerning the middle class. On the TN front it made a note of the need for discussions and debates with other organisations of Muslim women.<sup>40</sup> When the third national conference of AIPWA was held in Patna in March 2001, its membership was "even less than 40,000", far short of its minimum primary target of 1,00,000, because of inadequate work among working women. It decided to continue focusing on developing ties with organisations active among women belonging to minority communities and ethnic groups, adding that its experience of ties with the TN in Patna and the KNCA in Karbi Anglong had been "quite positive" and needed to be strengthened. By then AIPWA had led the movement for the formation of the state women's commission in Bihar,<sup>41</sup> and here Muslim women comprised about ten to fifteen per cent of its members.<sup>42</sup>

The TN is part of an early 1990s' ensemble. Delegates from ten districts participated in a convention of Muslims organised in Patna on 15 February 1990. One viewpoint that emerged supported an autonomous organisation to take up issues concerning Muslims. The other was inclined to carry on such work under the Indian People's Front banner. However, nothing came out of it.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, the Inquilabi Muslim Conference (IMC) was started to

represent "the specific needs and demands of the Indian Muslim community". The organisation was described as the first ever instance of the importance of organizing Muslims as a community being recognised from a Left perspective. According to one of its founder members, the IMC came in for much discussion after it was started. Even within the CPI ML there was a lively two-year debate before members were convinced of the need for such an organisation. "It was finally decided, however, that religion, and the existence of religious communities, as well as their specific problems, was a ground reality... They would have to be encouraged to enter the democratic struggle as such groups. There was no contradiction involved in their retaining their identities, as well as fighting for a democratic, secular India, since the old methods of purely 'class' struggles had failed to achieve results".<sup>44</sup>

Then onwards the Indian People's Front focused on organizing Muslims of the labouring classes and middle-class intellectuals, through the IMC, but also through the efforts of its non-Muslim members. In November 1993, the IMC, which remains limited to Bihar, organised an all-India Muslim Convention to question the hold of community leaders of the *darbari-siyasat* sort. The corrective decided on was a mass politics that would draw on Bihar's repertoire of peasant movements, and socialist and communist politics.<sup>45</sup> The earlier community leaders needed to be dropped and grass roots secular forces supported,<sup>46</sup> and the CPI ML opted for consistently.<sup>47</sup> In the backdrop of the killings of Muslims in Baithani Tola and Narhi the IMC organised an Awam Majlis at Ara to establish the links between the BJP and the Ranveer Sena.<sup>48</sup> It also reached out to some Muslim intellectuals and floated the Muslim Intellectual Forum in Bihar in late 1993, with a membership of about fifty members, but unattached to any political party. It intended to put together a lawyers' task force to publish a manual for the use of riot victims and to compile statistics on the post-1947 riots in Bihar. Working for women's rights figured lower down in its agenda.

The TN was started in January 1994 and has branches in Patna, Gaya, Dhanbad and Delhi.<sup>49</sup> Its founder member, Shahida Hasan,



who was the CPI ML candidate for the state assembly from Jehanabad in 1995 [which she lost], based the organisation on the need to ensure Muslim women their rights, "both as Muslims and as women", and to connect them with movements led by AIPWA and the IMC. The community was to be the site of the struggle against patriarchal practices, by recuperating rights guaranteed by Islam. The role models invoked spanned 1400 years, from *rasul ka daur* to *Khilafat ka zamana*, from Hazrat Ayesha to Bi Amma. But they also included Sadaf Rizvi and other contemporary campaigners trying to get women to pray in mosques and women active in the CPI ML's agrarian struggles. The emphasis was on women's *ijtihad* [interpretation] to interrogate Muslim personal laws relating to *talaq*, polygamy and inheritance. It also underlined that Muslim laws had been reinterpreted and updated in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>50</sup>

The TN position on the uniform civil code is that it is "fraught with problems", because of legal and jurisprudential diversities and patriarchal opposition in the name of minority rights.<sup>51</sup> "We are left with the practical and possible solution of reforms from within the communities. Communities themselves will have to undertake to rationalise those aspects of their personal laws which go against the principles of justice and equality — particularly with women. 'Reform from within' has now become the acceptable and desirable solution to all but the parties of the extreme right. A reformed personal law can be brought so close to secular law that it becomes indistinguishable from it". Factoring in the slow pace of religious reform, the TN has outlined a two-pronged strategy. A campaign for debate with the active participation of liberal intellectuals from within the community, combined with a strong women's movement.

The Tehreek campaign centres on the un-Islamic aspect of the *talaq-e-bidat* [triple *talaq*]. It points out that though the AIMPLB admits this, it has not challenged it. It supports the draft of the Muslim Family Council Bill (1996) that was prepared by the Patna-based Muslim Intellectual Forum comprising lawyers, teachers, social scientists and professionals. The draft proposes

that all Muslim marriages must be registered with a registering authority and certificates issued to both parties within fifteen days. No man can contract another marriage without the consent of his existing wife and without the approval of the tribunal, which he must satisfy about the likelihood of his treating all wives with equal justice according to Quranic stipulations. In addition, the *talaq e ahsan* (which is spread over a period of three months and is revocable within that period) will be the only mode of *talaq* admissible for Muslim husbands and will be effective only if the tribunal approves of the divorce. The proposed tribunal will have the power to pass orders for the payment of all dues to the ex-wife, which will be recoverable under the Public Demand Recovery Act or the Code of Criminal Procedures. The wife is to be conferred equal rights of divorce through the *talaq-e-tafweez*, a mode by which a husband delegates his power of divorce to his wife, so that she can exercise it at will. Under the existing law of *khula* (wife seeking divorce) she stands to lose her dower money and other benefits. Every *nikanamah* (contract of marriage) will automatically confer this right on the woman, unless explicitly stated to the contrary. Contravention of these provisions will be punishable with a fine and/or imprisonment for one year. A childless widow will have the same rights of inheritance as will a widow with children.<sup>52</sup>

But the TN pointed out that the draft-bill left the question of women's inheritance untouched. A Muslim woman inherits half of what her brother inherits, according to the Quran. Its contention is that since there are several other things stated in the Quran, such as the cutting off of the hand of a thief that are not followed in Indian, Muslim women can demand "another similar waiving of rules as this will contribute to empowering Muslim women, which has undeniably been the aim of Islam from the beginning". It also wants to see the punishment for bigamy without the wife's consent and the tribunal's permission made stricter, meaning non-bailable arrest and imprisonment. The TN supports a minimum reservation of 33 per cent of the Family Court network posts for women. Once these changes are incorporated it suggested the AIPWA could present the bill in Parliament, preferably through a Muslim woman

MP.<sup>53</sup> While the bill, if passed would “not automatically correct gender-injustice”, and can in no way replace women’s struggles, the TN feels it will give Muslim women “a weapon to fight with” and create an atmosphere conducive to change, “without overstepping the boundaries of Islam”.<sup>54</sup>

The TN is committed to building up a consensus against triple *talaq*, and has the support of an NGO, the Women’s Welfare Society of Patna,<sup>55</sup> but has not been very active of late.<sup>56</sup> It did however, informally appeal to the AIMPLB in early 2003, “to acknowledge the need for change, and stop upholding anti-women, male dominated laws, in the name of protecting Muslim culture and religious identity”. It pointed out that on the one hand women were subjected to violence in genocides like the ones in Gujarat in 2002, and on the other, they had to put up with domestic violence, abandonment and destitution. It was therefore time to stop the practice of triple *talaq*. After all, several Muslim countries had done so and in any case, only the Hanafi school practices it. The *talaq-e-tawfeez* “would do very well”. Under the terms of the marriage contract, the wife is given the right to pronounce *talaq*, in a similar manner as the husband has in *talaq-e-ehsan*, that is monthly pronouncements, with intervening monthly counselling, by two arbiters, one from each side, failing which the marriage stands dissolved at the end of three months. The appeal stressed that Muslims need to invoke *ijtehad* and recognize that the *shariat* laws are not wholly divine and what exists as personal law was crafted in colonial times by jurists.<sup>57</sup>

When Mumbai university and the All India Muslim OBC Organisation hosted a seminar in early 2002 on the problems of the Muslim backward castes, several participants described the AIMPLB as dominated by upper class, upper caste Muslims. Among them was Ali Anwar,<sup>58</sup> a journalist, who heads the Pasmada Muslim Mahaz (PMM), on which the next part of this paper is focused. The term *pasmada* is of Persian origin: ‘*pas*’ meaning ‘back’ and ‘*manda*’, ‘left behind’. According to Anwar, backward Muslims must be Mandalised, like the Hindu backwards.<sup>59</sup> But more on that later.

Writing on the “silent revolution” which has transferred power from upper-caste elites “to various subaltern groups” and inscribed the rise to power of the lower castes, Christophe Jaffrelot locates “the most dramatic change” in the Hindi belt, in Bihar. Here the percentage of upper-caste MLAs in Bihar fell from 36.33 in 1985 to less than 19 in 1995 and the percentage of OBC MLAs increased from 33.33 to 45.9.<sup>60</sup> But, he argues, from the mid-1990s, “the very notion of OBCs has lost some of its relevance in understanding political behaviour”, because this broad category was in fact often manipulated by a Yadav elite. Jaffrelot suggests that the notion of the OBC as a ‘political community’ “needs to be questioned”. He also “wonders” whether the OBCs really constitute a social and political category.<sup>61</sup> With regard to Muslims in Bihar, this conclusion flows from his having approached them monolithically.<sup>62</sup> Though there is a cleavage among the OBCs, two trends are significant. Shaibal Gupta has tracked the 2001 panchayat election and found that it will go down as a turning point in the electoral empowerment of the lower backwards who comprise 33 per cent of the total population. Though they still have a long way to go, he discovered signs of a pan-lower backward class alliance. But his conclusion that the election saw another round of the consolidation of the Muslim-Yadav combination,<sup>63</sup> needs to be re-examined. And this is the second trend, which points to *pasmanda* [backward and dalit] Muslims, who add up to 80 % of the community, interrogating both the hegemony of forward Muslims [Syeds, Sheikhs, Pathans and Maliks] and their collective marginalization in the Muslim-Yadav combination of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

### **The Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz**

Elsewhere I have discussed the Backward Muslim Morcha (BMM) which had raised the slogan of “*barabari* (equality), not Babri” in 1994, and demanded Scheduled Caste status for dalit Muslims.<sup>64</sup> Here I focus on the PMM, which grew out of the now inactive Amarat Ahle Ansar (AAA) set up in 1997 by some professionals and businessmen to provide moral and financial support to weaker and deprived Muslims. Both the AAA and the PMM are equally opposed to Hindu and Muslim communalism. The AAA

published Ali Anwar's research in a 32-page booklet, *Sir Ke Bal Khari Muslim Siyasat* in 1998 and organized a seminar on "*Dalit Aur Pichre Musalmanon Ki Hukumat Mein Bhagidari*", around his findings. It is Ali Anwar's argument that all parties, including the RJD, have discriminated against backward and dalit Muslims. More specifically, that Laloo Yadav's governments have been based on an understanding between forward Muslims and Yadavs.<sup>65</sup> He set out to correct the claim that it was *ashraf* Muslims who were getting impoverished while backward Muslims were flourishing. Of the 245 Muslim legislators who had won elections to the Bihar Vidhan Sabha between 1952 and 1995, 197 were *ashraf*, which added up to 80.8% of the seats. Only 19.2% went to backwards, and dalit Muslims were no where in the picture. Though Ansaris form the bulk in the community, only 30 figured in this category and no Ansari was made a minister in either the cabinet of Laloo Yadav or Rabri Devi. Between 1952 and 1997, 73.6% of the 106 Muslim ministers had an *ashraf* background and only 26.4% were backwards. Likewise, between 1952 and 1996, 26 of the 37 Muslims elected to the Lok Sabha, i.e. 70.27% were Sheikhs and Syeds. Among the backwards, Ansaris and Kulhaiyas got 29.72% of the seats.<sup>66</sup>

Ali Anwar's conclusion is that even parties subscribing to social justice and Mandal have ignored backward and dalit Muslims and used them as a vote bank this shows in Laloo Yadav's ticket distribution, which, has been starkly unfair to them.<sup>67</sup> He has also documented the under-representation of *pasmanda* Muslims in institutions such as the Bihar Urdu Academy, the Sunni Waqf Board, the Minorities Commission and the Madarsa Education Board.<sup>68</sup> The PMM is therefore strongly opposed to the demand of reservation for all Muslims. When the Jamat-e-Islami Hind, Jamiyat-ul-Ulema-I-Hind, All India Milli Council, AIMPLB and the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mashwarat released their "Muslim Agenda'99" making such a call, the PMM countered it, by emphasizing its 'dangerous' implications: a repeat of Partition politics that left Muslims as the "worst sufferers" in the country. The PMM agenda underlined that Muslim society was not a monolithic bloc, nor was it

backward in its entirety. Its demand is that dalit Muslims be given dalit status and those in south Bihar [now Jharkhand], Scheduled Tribe status.<sup>69</sup> Laloo Yadav supported this at a meeting of the PMM in July 2000.<sup>70</sup> Later the state assembly passed on its recommendation to the centre,<sup>71</sup> causing much resentment among the upper-caste Muslims.<sup>72</sup> The PMM has repeated its stand in the backdrop of a possible give and take negotiation regarding Ayodhya. To Ali Anwar the notion of Muslim homogeneity is "a great myth", a result of the "minority psyche" and the demand for total reservation is both "divisive" and "unconstitutional".<sup>73</sup>

The PMM (1998) now has district committees in Patna, Gaya, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Rohtas, Kaimur, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Arrah and Buxar. It is partially active in Munger, Bhagapalur, Purvi Champaran, Siwan, Arwal, Saran, Madhubani and Jamui but has yet to make a beginning in Begusarai, Samastipur, Kishanganj, Katihar and Purnia. It floated its mass organizations: the Mahila Mahaz, Youth Mahaz and Danishwar Mahaz only in July 2002.<sup>74</sup> The PMM strategy is to reach back to the legacy of the Abdul Qaiyum Ansari led, pre-Partition backward Muslim politics in Bihar and recuperate that history to campaign for Islamic *masawat* (equality). This includes filling in the Islamic *haq* of *harabari* (the right to equality) for women and expanding it in social, economic and political realms.<sup>75</sup> Its inaugural agenda included taking up the gender inequality of wages among *biri* makers, most of whom are women and girls.<sup>76</sup> In anticipation of the 33% reservation for women in the state legislature and Parliament, women coming out of purdah and getting into *siyasat* (politics) is seen as crucial, if the *pasmanda* Muslims are not to get left behind by non-Muslim OBCs in terms of electoral empowerment.<sup>77</sup> The PMM conceptually supports a sub-quota demand in the Women's Reservation Bill, but has still to figure out the details of arithmetic.<sup>78</sup>

Safia Akhtar Ansari, who heads the Pasmanda Muslim Mahila Mahaz (PMMM), was initiated to backward-class politics when she used to accompany her father, Mohammad Shamsuddin Ansari, a Sasaram advocate and member of the Shoshit Samaj Dal, to his meetings in the 1980s. An M.A. in Hindi, she says that when she

got to know about the PMMM from her father-in-law, she shed her *purdah* and joined it. She has been active in Dehri, Sasaram and Aurangabad among agricultural workers, *biri* makers and bangle sellers. She recalls ferrying "hundreds" of women to Sasaram for a PMMM meeting in February 2003 at her own expense. Safia Ansari stood for the Zilla Parishad from Kochas in Rohtas in April 2001 and polled 3,300 votes, but lost to Usha Yadav by "about a hundred votes". In her meetings she explains the panchayati raj institutional structure and stresses the importance of *pasmanda* women making their political entry at this level, if a "*pasmanda* Muslim raj", akin to "Laloo raj", is to arrive. She reminds women that they should not give away their votes and get no raj in return. In her view, *purdah nashin* women are confined within the home like "*pangus*" (the physically challenged) and "*ghar ki bojh*" (a burden), when in fact there is a need for them to campaign: for work, against dowry and to better the status of women who are "worse off than dalits".<sup>79</sup> At PMM meetings Ansari dwells on how it is women who are traumatized most of all by "communalism and terrorism".<sup>80</sup>

The joint convenor of the PMM, Afshan Jabin, revealed that to begin with, she was not in the mood for politics ("*shuroo mein rajniti mein mera mood nahin tha*"). But when she got to know about the PMM from her husband, who works for the railways, she decided to join in. She attributes her participation to her childhood formation — the openness (*khullapan*) of her father Akhtar Madhupuri, a broad-minded *shayar*, whose Mumbai filmworld friends often dropped by. She also has relatives who are active in Congress politics. Jabin mentions the growing interest in the term *pasmanda*; that some Yadav women had expressed a keen interest in the PMM and some even wanted to join it. In her perception *ashraf* men are more supportive of women standing for elections and pursuing education than *pasmanda* men.<sup>81</sup> But while Afshan Jabin was unfamiliar with the PMM stand on the Shah Bano case, Safia Ansari was categorical about the line to be taken on the question of maintenance, "*hum adalat ka darwaza khat-khatayenge*" (we will approach the courts), she said.<sup>82</sup>

Ali Anwar stresses that secularists are often silent about Muslim *firqaparasti* (communalism) and that this feeds into and thickens Hindu communalism. Thus an outcome of the opposition of the Shah Bano verdict by the conservative Muslim leadership is that Hindu communalists are not willing to go by the court verdict on the Babri Masjid issue.<sup>83</sup> While he specifies that he had criticized the AIMPLB stand on the Shah Bano case even as a journalist,<sup>84</sup> his position is firmly within the parameters of the communalism-secularism debate and does not engage with gender rights. In the context of the Supreme Court's recent suggestion to Parliament to craft a uniform civil code, the PMMM has stated that personal law reform should come from within the community, more specifically, from a *pasmanda* perspective [his emphasis] and not that of the *ashraf*-dominated AIMPLB.<sup>85</sup> Unlike AIPWA,<sup>86</sup> the PMMM was until now unaware of the Muslim Women's Forum [2000].<sup>87</sup>

In addition to taking on the AIMPLB and other *ashraf*-dominated institutions on issues such as reservations and Shah Bano, the PMM does not miss an opportunity to draw attention to their un-Islamic track record. Ali Anwar has written about the silence of the ulema when dalit and backward Muslims were killed by the Ranvir Sena in Baithani Tola, Bhojpur in 1997.<sup>88</sup> The AAA, referred to earlier, had also made the same point about the All India Milli Council.<sup>89</sup> When the AIMPLB (of which the amir, Imarat-I-Shariah, Bihar and Orissa, Syed Nizamuddin, is general secretary) met in Munger in February 2003, there were three events, which according to Ali Anwar it should have, but characteristically, did not intervene in. Two of them happened in Vaishali district: the abduction and torture of a tailor's son held responsible for a Sheikh girl (he was involved with), going missing for a night [she had gone off to relative on her own after a domestic tiff], and what Anwar describes as a casteist and false implication of an Ansari imam for sexually assaulting a Sheikh girl. The third was about Kalals being denied burial space by the *ashraf* in Jehanabad, a confrontation which the AIMPLB quietly and hurriedly defused, "*andar-andar se*".<sup>90</sup>

Kumkum Sangari has recently examined the relationship between patriarchal, casteist and communal violence, and shown



that, "the caste order and patriarchies have generated transferable modalities of violence". She elaborates how violence and killings have been orchestrated by both caste and elected panchayats, often in collusion with each other, in many parts of the country. Caste panchayats have targeted not only women of "other" castes, usually dalits, but their own women as well. Sangari notices that caste panchayats of "largely middle and lower castes now comprise the bulk of non-formal jurisdiction". This she writes, points to emerging tensions between dalits and other backward classes and to caste councils functioning as "wider regional sites of patriarchal male bonding". She finds "the line between communal and caste group violence is thin as they display a similar arrogation of adjudicatory power". A case in point is the policing and prevention of inter-religious marriages by communal organizations like the VHP and the Bajrang Dal which seem to be "combining the role of family and caste panchayats in their regulation of female sexuality".<sup>91</sup>

In continuation of my opening remarks, it would be useful to contrast these trends with the PMM's take on love and marriages. It claims to be committed to opposing dowry and supporting inter-biradari marriages: "*mazhab-e-Islam ka bhi yehi paigham hai. Pyar-nikah par jaat ki pehredari nahi chalegi*".<sup>92</sup> In his book, *Masawat Ki Jung*, Ali Anwar has a chapter, "*Pyar Nikah Par Jaat Ki Pehredaari*",<sup>93</sup> in which he attributes the surveillance of inter-biradari marriages to "some ulema" and their *fatwas*. He documents some "*kamayab mohabbat ke qisse*". Between a Sheikh woman and a Julaha man, a Pathan and a Sheikh woman, an Ansari boy and a Churihara girl, and a Syed and an Ansari woman. All of them made it against all odds. The unsuccessful story is about a Hajjam engineer and a Sheikh woman. The catalogue is meant to be inspirational, in the "Laila-Majnu, Shirin-Frahad" mode. As was mentioned earlier, the PMM questioned the AIMPLB's silence when it was widely reported that Akbar, a Vaishali tailor's twenty year old son was tied upside down, beaten with hockey sticks and salt rubbed into his razor slashes, because of his involvement with a Sheikh girl. The PMM position on opposing the monitoring of biradari borders, in the name of *masawat*,

needs to be cross-checked with how patriarchal assumptions, arrangements and power operate in *pasmanda* domestic ideologies and caste arbitration circuits, in the context of a changing political terrain.<sup>94</sup> This also needs to be examined comparatively, by looking at the specifics of regional, non-Muslim OBC and dalit formations.

Some lines of enquiry will also emerge from the Muslim Women's Survey [MWS], convened by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon and administered by ORG-Marg in 2000-2001, and carried out in 12 Indian states and spread over 40 districts. The survey corrects several fictions, such as the rampant prevalence of polygamy and divorce among Muslims, with divorce rates being almost uniform across communities, at 0.4 per cent. According to Ritu Menon, "Hindu and Muslim women are equally enabled or disabled [in terms of decision-making and mobility] by patriarchal controls". She notes that the north/south divide, and religious differences seem to collapse in the private domain. "The mean age at marriage is 15.9, which is one of the most disempowering conditions". Therefore the real differences are a function of economic status and class. Zoya Hasan points out that Muslim women are perceived as "a monolithic category and the focus is entirely on religion or fixated on the trappings of personal law".<sup>95</sup> Yet in *biradari* terms, the MWS too, approaches Muslim women monolithically, though not the non-Muslims they are compared with [the survey included 9541 Muslim and Hindu women respondents—80% Muslim and 20% Hindu; and 60% urban, 40% rural]. Its summing up that fifty years after Independence, Muslims on the whole have an average standard of living which is less than even the OBCs, well below upper-caste Hindus, and only slightly better than the scheduled caste population,<sup>96</sup> will require a nuancing that factors in differentiations flowing from the *pasmanda* politics of the nineties.

The MWS reveals that 78% women endorsed reservations in state and national level legislatures, and a high proportion of women said that they aspire to contest local elections and hold positions in local and state governments. However, the average percentage of women elected to the Lok Sabha comprises between six to seven.

Within this figure, which is among the lowest in the world, only 7 Muslim women have been elected to the Lok Sabha in the last fifty years. The average percentage of women in the state assemblies in the same period was only four. All this adds up to a picture of gender bias at all levels of governance, until the reservation of 33% seats for women in the local government in 1992.<sup>97</sup> Around 69% of the women respondents in the MWS were unaware of reservations of seats for women in panchayats elections.<sup>98</sup> Yet 89 per cent would prefer to contest at the local level, with the proportion dropping progressively at the state and central levels.<sup>99</sup> In Bihar panchayats elections were held after a gap of 23 years in 2001, but without the mandatory reservation for women for the posts of *mukhiya*, *pramukh* and *zila-adhyaksh*. Both AIPWA and PMM candidates contested these elections and intend to expand their presence at this level.<sup>100</sup>

Some Muslim women are trying to get themselves a 33% reservation on the AIMPLB.<sup>101</sup> The Muslim Women's Forum has also been campaigning for women's rights in accordance with Quranic injunctions and Constitutional guarantees and it has been critical of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986.<sup>102</sup> Though there were some signs of changed thinking on drafting a model marriage contract and triple *talaq*, nothing came out of it.<sup>103</sup> The AIMPLB was put together in 1972, to oppose "organized efforts" to introduce a uniform civil code and believes that personal law guarantees the identity of the *umma*.<sup>104</sup> But as Mushirul Hasan has pointed out, "contrary to several exaggerated assessments", its political base is "strictly confined to the Urdu-speaking urban Muslims of UP and Bihar". Yet the strength and appeal of the liberal and secular-minded Muslims was "neither measured nor assessed" over the Shah Bano case. Marginalized by the government, they proposed composite nationalism as an alternative to emotive religious appeals, "to resolve minority issues outside the communitarian framework".<sup>105</sup> While the interrogation of the AIMPLB by the TN continues to be stone-walled, the undermining of the AIMPLB by the PMM, and its pasmanda insertion into dalit-Mandal politics are unfolding firmly and will

have to be watched. How democratic politics is going to play out for *pasmaṇḍa* women will have to be examined and documented during this decade. For example, will the leadership be as "stubbornly male",<sup>106</sup> as the non-Muslim lower-caste leadership has been, given the compulsions of catching up with their Mandalization time lag?

In Bihar the BMM (which preceded the PMM), refused to engage with the debate about gender relations and legal change. Its convenor, Ejaz Ali explained this as flowing from its swinging away from the "*ashraf* preoccupation with safeguarding personal law", to the exclusion of other issues. In its scheme of things, the emancipation of backward and dalit Muslim men takes precedence over that of women, who are primarily perceived as family makers.<sup>107</sup> But it demanded a sub-quota for backward Muslim women in the proposed 33% reservation for women in the legislatures.<sup>108</sup> Earlier the BMM ran into problems when its convenor is said to have made a speech at a meeting in Jehanabad that he would not get "*sukoon*" (peace) till he made some *ashraf* women dance in his courtyard. His father-in-law, Ghulam Sarwar, who was then electioneering in Keoti, reportedly spent several sleepless nights because of the large chunk of Syed and Sheikh voters.<sup>109</sup> The uproar was that this revenge-seeking for past oppressions smacked of the Sangh Parivar's Babri Masjid demolition rhetoric.<sup>110</sup>

For the PMM, which refuses to sing "the minority *raag*", the "*larai*" (fight) for *pasmaṇḍa* assertion hinges on enlisting the participation of women, because they comprise "half the population". As Ali Anwar points out, they are aware of the "*musahirin, chamain and domin*", "getting" their rights under various government schemes: "*uska bhi asar ho raha hai, jane-anjane mein*". In its "*shuruaati daur*", then, Shah Bano and personal law was not a concern.<sup>111</sup> Noor Hasan Azad, one of the PMM secretaries, who belongs to the "dalit", Pamaria *biradari*, stresses the sea-change after the "*Mandal lehar*" (wave). According to him the PMM focus was on "developing" women. "*Hum log chahte hain ki woh log bahar niklay, aur sehmi-sehmi nahi rahe. Hum log shariat-ur-iat mein zyade nahi jaate hain, kyunki uss se kuch milnay wala nahi hai, woh sab jazbati hai*". He said Pamaria women

were that much more oppressed because of toddy-drunkenness and battering and that he was addressing that as well.<sup>112</sup> When I accompanied him to a backward and dalit *mohalla* in Patna, some women remarked that while *ashraf* women went about with "bob cuts *aur* lipstick", it was *pasmanda* women who were expected to be in *purdah* by the *ashraf*. One of them added, "*Hum log Islam mein hain, aur rahenge, lekin binna purdah ke...Chehre pe purdah daal ke kya hoga? Purdah toh dil/aankh pe hona chahiye*". If the "Syed, Sheikh *log*" were the other, who had got past them in life, it was the "Hindu harijans", who drew their attention. Because the sarkar gave them *haqs* and *insaf*: *rain baseras, daal-chawal, ghar-dwar, bachchon ke liye copy-kitab*. While the *gwalins* who earlier sold dung-cakes were sitting at home, "*aaram se*", they still had to go around selling eggs and vegetables. Nasima Bharati put it like this, "...*main toh bahar hai. Jab bahar mein haq mill jayega toh ghar mein haq lene mein koi time nahi lagega. Iss liye soch rahein hain ki bahar ka cheez na bhaag jaye, bahar ka cheez pakar lein...*".<sup>113</sup> While this could be read as consent to *pasmanda* patriarchal priorities deflecting attention from hierarchical domestic ideologies, this sequencing of struggles will have to be mapped in a politics which is still unfurling. Equations in non-*ashraf* patriarchies could reconfigure through the enlistment of women to inscribe a definitive *pasmanda* space the Mandal terrain. Significantly, *pasmanda* women are taking the post-nineties shifts in the lives of non-Muslim lower caste women as their point of reference to rethink their politics.

In looking at the layers of politics in contemporary Bihar, my focus has been on examining Zoya Hasan's summing up of the "new lease of life" drawn from the post-eighties "communal conjuncture" by patriarchal practices within "minority patriarchies".<sup>114</sup> While the TN's left-communitarian feminism is monolithic, in that it ignores lower caste politics and caste patriarchies, the PMM [which has recently announced its all-India career] approaches Muslims unmonolithically, but gender is not a directly addressed issue. It appears that even gender in

governance, regarding panchayat raj and the women's reservation bill is not consistently woven into its discourse. Thus it does not get a mention in its recent flier for a maha-rally in March 2004 which is addressed to both *bhaiyon* and *behnnon*. This forthcoming centenary celebration for Abdul Qaiyum Ansari is given out as mainly being ranged against communalism and globalization.<sup>115</sup> Tellingly, the gender question is also not discussed in some papers recently published on the theme of Muslim OBCs confronting inequalities.<sup>116</sup> Though the TN appears to be unanimated as of now, AIPWA to which it is affiliated, has been expanding its base and has the support of progressive diasporics in its agrarian struggles and electoral politics.<sup>117</sup> Seen together, both the TN and PMM have interrogated the hold of the AIMPLB, though differently: for its patriarchal and *ashraf* ideologies and practices respectively. This dimension and their wider and forthcoming politics will add to the critique of competing contemporary patriarchies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Disparate Women: Transitory Contexts, Persistent Structures", in Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti, (eds.), *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender*, Manohar & ILAS, Delhi/Shimla, 1999, pp. xi-xii, xv and xxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997 reprint [1989], p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Violent Routes: The Traffic Between Patriarchies and Communalism", in K.N. Panikkar and Sukumar Muralidharan (eds.), *Communalism, Civil Society and the State: Reflections on a Decade of Turbulence*, Sahmat, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 100-1.

<sup>4</sup> Hasan, Zoya, "Introduction: Contextualising Gender and Identity in Contemporary India" in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1994, p.xv; Vina Mazumdar and Indu Agnihotri, "The Women's Movement in India: Emergence of A New Perspective" in Bharati Ray and Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence Towards Freedom*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.229; Samita Sen, "Towards A Feminist Politics? The Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective" and Urvashi Butalia, "Confrontation and Negotiation: The Women's Movement's Responses

to Violence against Women" in Karin Kapadia (ed.), *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Basu, Amrita, "Appropriating Gender" in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (eds.), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 3; also see Tanika Sarkar, "The Gender Predicament of the Hindu Right" in K.N.Panikkar, (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide To Communalism*, Viking, New Delhi, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Butalia, Urvashi, *op. cit.*, pp. 219, 222.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey, Patricia, "Agency, Activism, and Agendas" in *Appropriating Gender*, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> Sangari, Kumkum, "Gender Lines: Personal Laws, Uniform Laws, Conversion", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 27, Nos. 5-6, May-June 1999, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Hasan, Zoya, "Gender Politics, Legal Reform, and the Muslim Community in India", in *Appropriating Gender*, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Butalia, Urvashi, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> See my forthcoming "Partition and the South Asian Diaspora" for an overview.

<sup>12</sup> As summed up by Javeed Alam, "Communist Politics in Search of Hegemony", in Partha Chatterjee, (ed.), *Wages Of Freedom: Fifty Years Of the Indian Nation*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> "A Minority Moves Into Another Millennium" in Romila Thapar, (ed.), *India: Another Millennium*, Viking, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 137-51. Also see Papiya Ghosh, "Enumerating For Social Justice", in Ajit Bhattacharjee, (ed.), *Social Justice and the Constitution*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1997, pp.136-151; "Partition's Biharis" in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998, in particular, pp. 241-64; and "Backward and Dalit Muslims in Bihar, 1930s-1990s", unpublished [1998].

<sup>14</sup> For this description see Zoya Hasan, "Introduction: Contextualising Gender and Identity in Contemporary India", p. xxi.

<sup>15</sup> Tanika Sarkar, "Woman, Community and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics", in *Appropriating Gender*, pp. 88-104.

<sup>16</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Hasan, Zoya, pp. xii-xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Hasan, Zoya, "Minority Identity, State Policy and the Political Process" in *Forging Identities*, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Radha Kumar, *The History Of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Kali For Women, New Delhi, fifth impression 2000 [1993], pp. 160-71.

<sup>20</sup> Amrita Chhachhi, Farida Khan, Gautam Navlakha, Kumkum Sangari, Neeraj Malik, Nivedita Menon, Ritu Menon, Tanika Sarkar, Uma Chakravarti, Urvashi Butalia and Zoya Hasan, "Reversing the Option: Civil Codes and Personal Laws", note prepared by the Working Group of Women's Rights, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxi, no. 20, 1 May 1996, pp. 1180-3.

<sup>21</sup> Kirti Singh, "Combatting Communalism", *Seminar*, no. 441, May 1996, pp. 55-6.

<sup>22</sup> Rajni Palriwala and Indu Agnihotri, "Tradition, the Family and the State: Politics of the Contemporary Women's Movement" in T. V. Satyamurthy, (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp. 511-9.

<sup>23</sup> Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxx, no. 29, 22 July 1995, p. 1873.

<sup>24</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "The Personal and the Political: an interview-discussion with Shehnaaz Sheikh, in Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon and Nighat Said Khan, (eds.), *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996 (second impression).

<sup>25</sup> *The Republic of Bihar*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 106-20.

<sup>26</sup> Adhi Zameen [hereafter AZ], October-December 1996, p. 21, "ML Partiyon Aur Groupon Ke Antarashtriya Mahila Samellan Mein Prastut Parcha: Kathmandu, Nepal, 1-5 November 1996"; Arindam Sen, "Mahilaon Ke Beech Party Nirman Ke Kaam Ko Agay Badhao!" AZ, January-June 1995, pp. 34-5.

<sup>27</sup> A point made by Bela Bhatia in, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar: A Note", presented at the International Conference on 'Bihar In The World and The World in Bihar', workshop organized by the Asian Development Research Institute, Patna and European Science Foundation, Patna, December 16-19, 1997.



<sup>28</sup> Prakash Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, Wordsmiths, Delhi, 2002, p.271. Also see Aparna Mahanta, "The Indian State and Patriarchy" in T.V.Satyamurthy, (ed.), *State and Nation in the Context of Social Change*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Vol. I, pp. 109-15.

<sup>29</sup> See "Bihar: Caste Equations", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxx, no. 4, January 28, 1995, p.189; *The Pioneer*, October 27, 1997 and *The Hindustan Times*, December 3, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> *Dharmnirpeksh Bharat Ke Liye Laro, Laro Ek Behtar Zindagi Ke Liye*, leaflet: December 11, 1992.

<sup>31</sup> *Indian People's Front, Tiritiya Rajya Sammellan, January 29-30, 1992, Ranchi*, pp. 14-15 and 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> *Baithani Tola Jansanhar: Zameeni Sach Aur Sarkari Jhoot* and other related pamphlets of August 1996 for which [and others mentioned in this paper] I would like to thank Shahida Hasan.

<sup>33</sup> Vinod Mishra, general secretary, CPI ML, "*Nari Mukti Ka Sawal Marxvaad Ke Paripaksh Mein*", presented at the Bihar State Women's education camp, AZ, April-June 1993.

<sup>34</sup> "Summary of the PB Deliberations, June 5-7, 1995".

<sup>35</sup> [www.cpiml.org](http://www.cpiml.org), "ML Update", Vol. 6, no. 31, 30 July-5 August 2003, "Uniform Civil Code To What End?". The editorial notes that the apex court never seems as invested in tracking the directive principles on education and wages.

<sup>36</sup> Brochure for the National Convention for Women's Liberation and paper presented on behalf of the organizing committee by Meena, AZ, October-December 1992, pp. 12-14.

<sup>37</sup> *All India Women's Conference '94, Delhi, February 11-12, 1994*.

<sup>38</sup> *All India Progressive Women's Association: Preamble, Objective, Programme and Constitution, Adopted in the Founding Conference, February 11-12, 1994, Delhi*.

<sup>39</sup> See AIPWA circular no. 2/96 of June 22, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> *AIPWA Souvenir, Second National Conference and Rally, 1997* (5-6 April, Lucknow), pp. 19-20. But not much was done in this direction.

<sup>41</sup> [www.cpiml.org](http://www.cpiml.org), "Women's Front"; [www.greenleft.org.au/back/2001](http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2001), Margaret Gleeson, "India: Women unite to fight globalization", mentions that the conference was preceded by a public meeting of more than 1000 participants who were addressed among others by Shahida Hasan of TN.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times of India* (Patna), July 25, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> *Indian People's Front, Tiritiya Rajya Sammellan*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Shahida Hasan, "The Inquilabi Muslim Conference", *Inquilab: South Asia Solidarity Group*, Vol. 3, no. 2, Autumn/Winter 1994 (London), pp. 10-11.

The IMC aimed for the "protection and modernization" of Muslim identity and the "complete" separation of religion from politics. It opposed the Hindu Rashtra project, and supported the formation of a Indo-Pak-Bangladesh confederation. It also demanded the punishment of the killers of a thousand Muslims during the 1989 Bhagalpur riot when 15-20 mosques were demolished.

<sup>45</sup> *All India Muslim Convention, Patna, November 7, 1993: Whither Indian Muslims?* "Many people are under the illusion that communal forces had been held in check by Mr. Laloo Yadav alone. Though partially true, it was mainly due to conscious people integrated in the ongoing democratic movement".

<sup>46</sup> *IMC: Chand Gaur Tulab Baatein*, (n.d.)

<sup>47</sup> *IMC: Maujooda Siyasi Soorate Haal Aur Musalman*, (n.d.) [end 1994].

<sup>48</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), July 4, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> What follows is based on an interview with Shahida Hasan, 20 October 1997. Patna; *Tehreek e Niswan*, affiliated to AIPWA: *Aims and Objectives and Programme*, Patna, 1994; Shahida Hasan, "Dohri Bhumika", *AZ*, January-June 1995, pp. 20-1; "Tehreek e Niswan Ki Sargarmian", *AZ*, July-September 1994; Shahida Hasan, "Muslim Khawateen Ke Badhtay Kadam", *AZ*, January-June 1995 and "Musulman Auraton Ki Bahadurana Pehal", *AZ*, October-December 1997. See Prakash Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 178, for a passing reference to the *Tehreek e Niswan* and the detail that Shahida Hasan came third in the 1995 Assembly election, polling 15,449 votes.

<sup>50</sup> See Shahida Hasan, "Talaq", *AZ*, July-September 1994 and "Muslim Khawateen Ne Muslim Personal Law Mein Tabdeeli Ki Maang Ki", *AZ*, December 1995.

<sup>51</sup> What follows is based on Shahida Hasan, "Muslim Personal Law — possibilities of reform", *AIPWA Souvenir, Second National Conference and Rally*, 1997, pp. 27-9.

<sup>52</sup> The bill proposed the setting up of a Muslim Family Council in each State with a chairman who will be a retired Muslim judge of the High

Court and will function as the appellate authority. At the district level a naib will register all Muslim marriages.

<sup>53</sup> This has however, not happened: conversation with Shahida Hasan, July 24, 2003, Patna.

<sup>54</sup> Contrast this with an opinion survey among 200 respondents from the Muslim localities in and around Jamia Milia Islamia in Delhi: fourteen per cent of the respondents felt that Muslim personal law should be replaced with a gender just uniform civil code and thirty eight per cent felt that it discriminates against women. See Sabecha Bano, "Muslim Women's Voices: Expanding Gender Justice Under Muslim Law", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 25, 1995, pp. 2981-2.

<sup>55</sup> Telephone conversation with Rozina Khanam, 24 July 2003. Khanam runs the NGO which is active among the Muslim middle class in Samanpura and domestic servants in Tripolia and focuses on self employment, education and legal aid. She got to know of the TN at an AIPWA seminar in 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Shahida Hasan, July 24, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> "An Appeal to the Muslim Personal Law Board of India", (n.d.)

<sup>58</sup> Shabnam Minwalla, "Muslim academics look inward for answers to burning questions", *The Times of India*, March 31, 2002.

<sup>59</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), July 8, 2001.

<sup>60</sup> *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, pp. 352 and 494.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 363, 367, 383-4 and 386.

<sup>62</sup> It may be mentioned that Sanjay Kumar, "New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar, 1990-2000", in Ghanshyam Shah, (ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002, p. 346, too, leaves it at, "even among the Muslims there are upper and lower castes". Table 13.14 on p. 347, differentiates between the voting pattern of "upper" and "lower" Muslims with these details. Whereas in 1991, 39 per cent of "lower" Muslims voted for the Congress, in 2000 only 3.8 per cent did so, as against 68.6 per cent for the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

<sup>63</sup> "Subaltern Resurgence", *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), July 8, 2001.

<sup>64</sup> "Backward and Dalit Muslims in Bihar, 1930s-1990s" (unpublished).

<sup>65</sup> See p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

<sup>67</sup> *Masawat Ki Jung — Pasemanjar: Bihar Ke Pasmanda Musalman*, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2001, p. 184 and 194.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times of India* (Patna), August 19, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, July 2, 2000. He also assured the organizers of the Mulki Jagao Diwas that pasmanda Muslims would be included in the 20-point Implementation Committee.

<sup>71</sup> *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), July 22, 2000. See July 8, 2001 for the BMM claim that this was in response to its demonstration in front of the assembly on July 20, 2000. The Dalit Muslims include Dhobis, Pamarias, Halalkhors, Dom-Dafalis, Gadheras, Pasis, Bakhos and Lalbegis.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, December 7, 2000.

<sup>73</sup> *The Hitavada* (Nagpur), June 30, 2003. The lecture was organised by the Dharamnirpeksh Nagrik Manch.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, February 27, 2003, Patna.

<sup>75</sup> *Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, Bihar: Ghoshana Patra*, December 13, 1998, point 20.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, point 15.

<sup>77</sup> Interviews with Ali Anwar, February 18, 1999 and February 27, 2003, Patna and with Safia Akhtar Ansari, convenor Pasmanda Muslim Mahila Mahaz, July 27, 2003, Patna.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, July 24, 2003, Patna.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Safia Akhtar Ansari, July 27, 2003, Patna; *Hindustan* (Kaimur), February 26, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, *Dainik Jagaran*, November 4, 2002, speech at Bhabua.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Afshan Jabin, February 14, 2003, Patna.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, and interview with Safia Ansari, July 27, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> See for example his presentation [no title] at a conference on 'Hindutva and Minorities', organized by the Equal Opportunity Trust, IIC, New Delhi, March 14-15, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, July 24, 2003.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Times of India* (Patna), July 28, 2003.

<sup>86</sup> *People's Democracy*, Vol. xxvi, no. 11, March 16, 2003 mentions the participation of AJDWA, AIPWA and the Muslim Women's Forum..

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, July 24, 2003. See *Tribune* (Chandigarh), September 16, 2000 for a report on the launch of the MWF to demand abolition of triple *taluk* and early codification of personal laws.

<sup>88</sup> *Masawat Ki Jung*, p. 131.

<sup>89</sup> Abdul Mujeeb Ansari, spokesman, AAA, letter to the editor, *The Times of India* (Patna), February 13, 1998.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, 24 July 2003. Also see *Prabhat Khabbar*, March 3, 2003 (for the burial case) and *Hindustan*, March 4, 2003 (for the tailor story).

<sup>91</sup> "Violent Routes", pp. 91-3.

<sup>92</sup> *Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, Bihar Ghoshana Patra*, December 13, 1998, point 19.

<sup>93</sup> See pp. 159-66.

<sup>94</sup> See *Dainik Jagaran*, November 3, 2002 for a mention of a Halalkhor panchayat meeting in Sasaram under the PMM banner.

<sup>95</sup> For a report on the survey see Amulya Gopalakrishnan, "Gender Issues: Dispelling Myths" in *Frontline*, January 18-31, 2003. [Since I did not have access to the survey I have based myself on reports of the findings].

<sup>96</sup> Excerpts in *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), December 19 and 21, 2002.

<sup>97</sup> See Zoya Hasan, "The 'Politics of Presence' and Legislative Reservations for Women" in Zoya Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan, (eds.), *India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2000, pp. 405-27.

<sup>98</sup> Excerpt in *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), December 20, 2002.

<sup>99</sup> Amulya Gopalkrishnan, *op.cit.*

<sup>100</sup> See Damayanti Sinha, "Panchayat Pratinidhiyon Ko Sarkar Dalal Banana Chahti Hai", *AZ*, October-December 2001, pp. 34-5; for the PMM see *The Times of India* (Patna), June 25, 2001.

<sup>101</sup> Pamela Philipose, "Change in the air", *The Indian Express*, April 19, 2000.

<sup>102</sup> See *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), September 2, 2000; *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), September 3, 2000; Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, "Now We Shall Speak — Muslim Women Must Be In Control", *The Times of India*, June 21, 2001.

<sup>103</sup> See Sakina Yusuf Khan, "Divorced From Reality: Amending the Triple Talaq Law", *The Times of India* (Patna), October 5, 2000.

<sup>104</sup> *General Secretary's Report, presented by Moulana Syed Minnatullah Rahmani*, AIMPLB, third session, Ranchi, October 15-16, 1977.

<sup>105</sup> *Legacy of A Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp. 309, 320-6.

<sup>106</sup> See Zoya Hasan, "The 'Politics of Presence'", p. 417. She argues that the belief that OBC women are at a particular disadvantage appears to be, "a trifle misplaced", with the Bihar detail that there are only ten women MLAs, but of them, "five belong to OBCs, two each to the Scheduled Tribes and Castes".

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Ejaz Ali, August 31, 1997, Patna.

<sup>108</sup> Ejaz. Ali, "Aurat Ka Arakshan Aur Islam", *Aaj*, June 13, 1997 and "Arab Origin Ashrafs Misleading Indian Muslims", *Dalit Voice*, June 16-30, 1997, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> *Jansatta*, 5 July 1994, the allegation was made by the chairman of the Bihar Minorities' Commission, Jabir Hussain; see *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), February 21, 1995, for the Keoti report.

<sup>110</sup> *Quaiadat Aur Kalank*, published by Syed Javd Hussain, Patna, (n.d.), pp. 9-11; but Ejaz Ali denied having made the remark: interview, August 31, 1997.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ali Anwar, February 18, 1999, Patna.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Noor Hasan Azad, February 18, 1999, Patna.

<sup>113</sup> Discussion with Nasima Bharati, Bibi Marjani Ansari, Baby Naaz Ansari, Reshma Khatoon, Sabiha Rayeen, Salma Khatoon, February 18, 1999, Mainpura, Patna.

<sup>114</sup> See her "Introduction", in *Forging Identities*, pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>115</sup> "Pasmenda Jagao, Mulk Bachao Maharally", slated for March 21, 2004.

<sup>116</sup> See Anwar Alam, "Democratisation of Indian Muslims: Some Reflections" and Irfan Ahmad, "A Different Jihad: Dalit Muslims' Challenge to Ashraf Hegemony", both of which discuss Ali Anwar and his book, *Masawat Ki Jung*, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxviii, no. 46, November 15-21, 2003.

<sup>117</sup> See *The Times of India* (Patna) November 27, 2003, for a report of UK and US scholars and the South Asia Solidarity Group urging Rabri Devi to probe the links of the Ranvir Sena with political parties in the aftermath of the killing of its leader Manju Devi in Arwal district on November 10, 2003.

## References

Agnihotri, Indu and Vina Mazumdar, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxx, no. 29, July 22, 1995.

Ahmad, Irfan, "A Different Jihad: Dalit Muslims' Challenge to Ashraf Hegemony", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 15-21, 2003.

Alam, Anwar, "Democratisation of Indian Muslims: Some Reflections", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 15-21, 2003.

Alam, Javeed, "A Minority Moves Into Another Millennium", in Romila Thapar, (ed.), *India: Another Millennium?*, Viking, New Delhi, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Communist Politics in Search of Hegemony", in Partha Chatterjee, (ed.), *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the India Nation*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998.

Ali, Ejaz, "Arab Origin Ashrafs Misleading Indian Muslims", *Dalit Voice*, June 16-30, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Aurat Ka Arakshan Aur Islam", *Aaj*, June 13, 1997.

Anwar, Ali, *Masawat Ki Jung — Pasemanjar: Bihar Ke Pasmanda Musalman*, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2001.

Bano, Sabeeha, "Muslim Women's Voices: Expanding Gender Justice Under Muslim Law", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 25, 1995.

Basu, Amrita, "Appropriating Gender", in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu (eds.), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

Bhatia, Bela, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar: A Note", presented at the conference on 'Bihar In the World and The World in Bihar', workshop organized by ADRI and European Science Foundation, Patna, December 16-19, 1997.

Butalia, Urvashi, "Confrontation and Negotiation: The Women's Movement's Responses to Violence Against Women", in Karin Kapadia, (ed.), *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

Chhachi, Amrita, Farida Khan, Gautam Navlakha, Kunkum Sangari, Neeraj Malik, Nivedita Menon, Ritu Menon, Tanika Sarkar, Uma Chakravarti, Urvashi Butalia and Zoya Hasan, "Reversing the Option: Civil Codes on Personal Laws", note prepared by the Working Group of Women's Rights, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxi, no. 20, May 1, 1996.

Das, Arvind N., *The Republic of Bihar*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1992.

Ghosh, Papiya, f.c. "Partition and the South Asian Diaspora".

\_\_\_\_\_. "Partition's Biharis", in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Backward and Dalit Muslims in Bihar, 1930s-1990s", 1998 [unpublished].

\_\_\_\_\_. "Enumerating For Social Justice", in Ajit Bhattacharjee, (ed.), *Social Justice and the Constitution*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1997.

Gopalkrishnan, Amulya, "Gender Issues: Dispelling Myths", *Frontline*, January 18-31, 2003.

Gupta, Shaibal, "Subaltern Resurgence", *The Hindustan Times* (Patna), July 8, 2001.

Hameed, Syeda Saiyidain, "Now We Shall Speak — Muslim Women Must Be in Control", *The Times of India*, June 21, 2001.

Hasan, Mushirul, *Legacy Of A Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997.

Hasan, Shahida, "Muslim Personal Law — Possibilities of Reform", *AIPWA Souvenir, Second National Conference and Rally 1997*, 1997.

Hasan, Shahida, "Musalman Auraton Ki Bahadurana Pehal", *Adhi Zameen*, October-December, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Muslim Khawateen Ke Badhtay Kadam", *Adhi Zameen*, January-June, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Muslim Khawateen Ne Muslim Personal Law Mein Tabdeeli Ki Mang Ki", *Adhi Zameen*, December, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Talaq", *Adhi Zameen*, July-September, 1994.

Hasan, Zoya, "The 'Politics of Presence' and Legislative Reservations for Women", in Zoya Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan, (eds.), *India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Gender Politics, Legal Reform and the Muslim Community in India" in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu, (eds.), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Introduction: Contextualizing Gender and Identity and Contemporary India" and "Minority Identity, State Policy and the Political



Process" in Zoya Hasan, (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1994.

Jaffrelot, Christophe, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003.

Jeffrey, Patricia, "Agency, Activism and Agendas" in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu (eds.), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

Khan, Sakina Yusuf, "Divorced From Reality: Amending the Triple Talaq Law", *The Times of India*, October 5, 2000.

Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2000 [fifth impression].

Kumar, Sanjay, "New Phase in Backward Caste Politics In Bihar, 1990-2000" in Ghanshyam Shah, (ed.), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002.

Louis, Prakash, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, Wordsmiths, Delhi, 2002.

Mahanta, Aparna, "The Indian State and Patriarchy", in T. V. Sathiyamurthy, (ed.), *State and Nation in the Context of Social Change*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Vol. I, 1994.

Mazumdar, Vina and Indu Agnihotri, "The Women's Movement in India: Emergence of a New Perspective" in Bharati Ray and Aparna Basu (eds.), *From Independence Towards Freedom*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

Menon, Ritu and Kamla Bhasin, "The Personal and the Political: an interview-discussion with Shehnaz Sheikh", in Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon and Nighat Said Khan, (eds.), *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from Indian and Pakistan*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996 [second impression].

Minwalla, Shabnam, "Muslim Academics Look Inward for Answers to Burning Questions", *The Times of India*, March 3, 2002.

Mishra, Vinod, "Nari Mukti Ka Sawal Marxvaad Ke Paripeksh Mein", *Adhi Zameen*, April-June, 1993.

Palriwala, Rajni and Indu Agnihotri, "Tradition, the Family and the State: Politics of the Contemporary Women's Movement" in T.V. Sathiyamurthy, (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996.

Philipose, Pamela, "Change in the Air", *The Indian Express*, April 19, 2000.

Sangari, Kumkum, "Violent Routes: The Traffic Between Patriarchies and Communalism" in K. N. Panikkar and Sukumar Murlidharan, (eds.), *Communalism, Civil Society and the State: Reflections on a Decade of Turbulence*, Sahmat, New Delhi, 2002.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Gender Lines: Personal Laws, Uniform Laws, Conversion", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 27, Nos. 5-6, May-June, 1999.

Sangari, Kumkum and Uma Chakravarti, "Disparate Women: Transitory Contexts, Persistent Structures" in Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti, (eds.), *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender*, Manohar and Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Delhi/Shimla, 1999.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An Introduction" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997 reprint.

Sarkar, Tanika, "Woman, Community, and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics" in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu, (eds.), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Gender Predicament of the Hindu Right" in K. N. Panikkar, (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, Viking, New Delhi, 1999.

Sen, Samita, "Towards A Feminist Politics? The Indian Women's Movement in Historical Perspective" in Karin Kapadia, (ed.), *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.

Singh, Kirti, "Combating Communalism", *Seminar*, no. 441, May, 1996.

Sinha, Damayanti, "Panchayat Pratinidhiyon Ko Sarkar Dalal Banana Chahti Hai", *Adhi Zameen*, October-December, 2001.

# **'Living' with Dowry: Contemporary Oral Testimonies from Orissa**

**Biswamoy Pati**

## **The Problem**

**V**ery few people realise how violent contemporary Oriya society is vis-à-vis women who face the brunt of patriarchy in diverse ways. This is a point that can perhaps be proved statistically with the state leading the list in the reported dowry-related deaths, which increased from two in 1987 to 63 in 1991. Similarly, reported rape cases have increased from 184 to 285 over this period. These co-exist with a decline in the female population over the 1981-91 decade. Thus the male:female ratio, which was 1,000:981 in 1981 has gone down to 1000:971 in 1991. This paper focuses on Orissa in the context of increasing violence both in and outside the household. In the 1980s the 'kerosene stove' accidents where women 'died' — along with terror inflicted on them to extract dowry from their parents after their marriage — became a virtual part of urban/semi-urban Oriya society.<sup>1</sup> This piece focuses mostly on those who have survived — given a discourse that allows the 'golden egg laying hen' to live. What is presented are five oral testimonies brought before the Utkala Mahila Samiti and a report on bride burning from a local newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

## **The method**

Quite a few studies have tried to study the problem of dowry in India. At the same time some of the methodological problems need to be articulated at the outset. Although the problem of gender devaluation has pre-colonial roots, it is yet to receive any scholarly

attention as far as Orissa is concerned.<sup>3</sup> It needs to be mentioned that although certain features demonstrate the specificities related to colonial Orissa, it would not be possible to say anything substantial about the phenomenon for similar reasons. Nevertheless, here one can refer to the existence of certain cultural practices that demonstrate the devaluation of women in colonial Orissa. These include female infanticide among sections of the adivasis (i.e. indigenous communities) in western Orissa;<sup>4</sup> the practice of sati in some of the zamindaris and princely states;<sup>5</sup> the targeting women for witchcraft in some of the princely states like Kalahandi;<sup>6</sup> and, the dowry demands made by some chiefs, while getting their sons married.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it would not be correct to locate it as a fall-out of colonialism, although increased monetisation polarised the phenomenon—a point that can be even more relevant when it comes to post-colonial India.<sup>8</sup>

There are some other complications posed by scholars who have studied this problem. Thus, it would be difficult to generalise that this phenomenon presupposes an increased agricultural productivity, a general prosperity and access to the organised sector, if one is talking about Orissa.<sup>9</sup> In fact, we have to keep in mind the problems related to under-development and scarcity while discussing dowry in Orissa. However, while economic explanations can explain some aspects of the problem, they can be hopelessly inadequate in explaining the problem of dowry. It is perhaps here that it should be emphasised that dowry needs to be located as a part of an over all process associated with the devaluation of women.

Although sensitivity to gender has to be a major factor when it comes to researching problems like dowry, one cannot perhaps over emphasise this point to mean that only women social scientists should study it.<sup>10</sup>

### Real life stories

*Farida Khan (daughter of Mohammad Ayub, Kendrapada, Cuttack district, Wife of Abdul Jani, Keonjhar district)*

Farida was married to Abdul Jani in 1986. Her father had given a dowry of Rs. 10,000 in cash and five *tolas* of gold as dowry. Subsequently, she mothered three children. At first she was tortured

for not bringing furniture. Soon after, her father sent a furniture set. Farida was next tortured for a motorcycle. Her father had agreed to this as well. However, unable to bear this any longer, Farida decided to leave for her parent's place on 8 November 1992.

As she waited at the Keonjhar bus terminus her brother-in-law landed up and whisked away her children. This forced Farida to return home in order to get them back. When she reached there her husband and her brother-in-law doused her with kerosene and set her on fire. She was then taken to the local hospital where her husband declared that she had got burnt when their kerosene stove had accidentally exploded.

Her father and her uncle shifted Farida to the Cuttack hospital very soon after this. In a dying statement she accused her husband and her brother-in-law of setting her on fire. Farida's father did meet the then chief minister and the director general of police with a request to punish the guilty.<sup>11</sup>

*Namita Swain (daughter of Padmacharan Swain, wife of Narendranath Swain, Cuttack district)*

Namita was married off on 30 June 1988. Her father, a 'petty worker' in the Cuttack Medical College, raised a huge amount of money, which was given as dowry. This included Rs. 15,000 in cash, five *tolas* of gold and Rs.50,000 in the form of gifts.

Soon after marriage, Namita's husband discovered that she was 'dark' and 'ugly'. She was told that he had married the dowry — not her. Namita was asked to get another Rs.50,000 and tortured for some time. After this her father-in-law took her to Cuttack (16 July 1988) and left her there, asking her to return with Rs.50,000. It was impossible for Namita's father to raise the money. At this juncture her husband wrote a letter to her father in which he threatened to burn her.

After a year a few relatives of her husband came to Cuttack. They asked Namita to go back immediately to her husband since he was very ill. On reaching her husband's place she realised that this was a lie. She was asked if she had got the money. She told

them that her father's position was very critical and he had not been able to raise the money. She was tortured for her failure and after this her father-in-law repeated the earlier ritual of taking her and leaving her at Cuttack and asking her to return, if at all, with the money. On 7 September 1991 Namita heard that her husband had remarried. After this she had to go to court in order to fight a battle for a maintenance allowance.

*Anima Das (daughter of Panchkadi Pati, Bhubaneswar, wife of Ashok Das, Cuttack)*

Anima was married to Ashok Das on 26 January 1989. Before her marriage Ashok's parents had 'demanded' a scooter, a T.V. set and a refrigerator as dowry. Anima's uncle had flatly refused this since her father (a retired government servant), was not in position to meet this demand. In fact, they were even told to forget the marriage proposal in case they were serious about dowry. Anima's in-laws seemed to have changed their position and the marriage was solemnised at Bhubaneswar.

After the marriage Anima went off to Rourkela where her in-laws lived. Her mother-in-law began comparing the dowry brought by Ashok's brother's wife. She was abused and ill-treated by her husband and her in-laws. Ashok went back to Cuttack where he taught at a school and Anima stayed on, being reduced to a 'maid' of the household. One day she was beaten very severely and had a swollen hand. She went over to her uncle, a doctor, for help. When her uncle and aunt went to drop her back in the evening, her in-laws were not prepared to take her back. After a lot of persuasion they were made to change their minds.

In the meantime, Anima's parents were traumatised by the treatment meted out to her, the news of which reached them at Bhubaneswar. They wanted Anima to get back to them. Before she left for Bhubaneswar Anima's in-laws took away all her ornaments and saris. At Bhubaneswar, Anima recounted her harrowing experiences, which included an attempt to persuade her to sit with her father-in-law in a locked room, to shake off the evil influences of spirits. After this her parents decided to send her to

stay with her husband at Cuttack. He did not approve of this idea. Subsequently accompanied by her sisters and a cousin, all of them went over to Ashok's place. The underlying belief was that perhaps without the presence of her in-laws the marriage would work. In fact, both her sisters camped with Anima for some days. In course of this Ashok abused everyone. Anima's in-laws came over and she was beaten, abused and kept in semi-starved state. Realising that the attempt was futile, Anima rejoined her parents.

*Sabita Samal (daughter of Narayan Lenka, wife of Rabindra Samal; Patkura, Cuttack district)*

The Independence Day celebrations on 15 August 1992 converged with what was perhaps the most traumatic day in Sabita's life. Her father had married her off in July 1991 paying a dowry of Rs.28,000 in cash. Along with this, gold and silver ornaments worth Rs. 40,000 were also given. A fire constable, Lenka had to sell off his land for Sabita's marriage. Rabindra Samal, her husband, worked at the Bhubaneshwar Development Authority (BDA) on a temporary job. In fact, Prafulla Nayak, (Rabindra's brother-in-law), an overseer in the BDA, had helped him secure the job. The young bride was caught in a vicious network of dowry and bribery. Her husband began to beat and abuse her quite regularly. He took away all her ornaments — after all, Prafulla Nayak had to be 'paid' back for securing him a job and also make it permanent. Her parents-in-law never intervened to help Sabita and she had to go through various ordeals, including a session with a witch-doctor.

After a point Sabita could not take it any more and decided to escape to freedom. Since her father was posted at Kendrapada, she had to live alone in their village. Taking advantage of this her husband, a cousin of his and Prafulla Nayak visited her and ransacked the house. They forced Sabita to accompany them and took away Rs.12,000 that they found in the house. Although this happened in front of the villagers nobody came to Sabita's rescue.

Sabita was taken to Prafulla Nayak's house on 15 August 1992 and then began her trauma. She was gagged and Nayak and two of his college-going sons began torturing her. Nayak's sixteen year-

old daughter also joined in to give Sabita electric shocks. She was forced to sign a blank piece paper. Finally, a rod was put on the lower part of her body and the young men stood on it. Sabita bled profusely and lost consciousness. The 'carnival' was at last over. Thinking she was dead, they dumped her in a deserted place about a kilometre away. It rained late that night and Sabita regained her senses. As she was found to be alive and shivering by an 'inspection team' of the Nayak household, she was taken to the Bhubaneswar hospital. Here the doctors were told that she had fallen from the roof. Her broken hand was plastered and she was discharged from the hospital.

Sabita's father reached Bhubaneswar when he heard about these events, expecting to have a last glimpse of her. In fact, most people in her village were certain that she was dead. At this stage Nayak spread the story that Sabita had stolen eight *bharis* of gold from their house and had fallen from the house while trying to escape — through which the serious injuries received by her was explained — that she was mad, etc.

Sabita and her father reached the Shahid Nagar police station (Bhubaneswar) and lodged a compliant on 18 August 1992. The inspector, Bijayalaxmi Acharjya, accused her and her father of conspiring and suppressing facts — viz. that they had 'misreported' an accident. Ms. Acharjya in fact stripped her father of some money he had with him. Subsequently she demanded Rs.500 in order to go to Sabita's and her in-law's village in order to make enquiries. No police action seems to have been taken till October 12, 1992.

*Priyambada Mishra (daughter of Gyaneshwar Rath, wife of Shibashankar Mishra, puri district)*

Priyambada was married on 24 September 1992. Her husband was posted at Bangalore. Her husband's family was a small one and consisted of her mother-in-law and her two sons. Since her late father-in-law was a government employee, her mother-in-law got a pension. These features seemed to be 'attractive' to Priyambada's parents. The dowry demand included Rs. 40,000, a scooter, a T.V. set and 5 *bharis* of gold. Besides, 4 *bharis* of gold,



10 *bharis* of silver, Rs.13,000 in cash and certain other things were also given.

After her marriage these things were forcibly taken away from Priyambada. When she reached Bangalore she discovered that her husband was a driver of a transport vehicle, not a supervisor in a bank, as had been claimed before their marriage. Her neighbours in Bangalore were very kind to her and it was from them that she learnt that her husband planned to murder her. In fact, they advised her to go back to her parents.

Priyambada returned home with her father and her brother who had gone to visit her. Sometime after this she delivered a baby. When her brother informed her mother-in-law about this she was very abusive and packed him off saying that this was not possible as her son had not been married in the first place. Soon after she rented out their house and went away. In the meanwhile Priyambada's husband was transferred to Hyderabad.

When Priyambada reached Nayagarh with her parents and her brother and found tenants at her in-laws' place, they decided to stay on. While staying there the local council chairman's wife paid them a visit. She tried to poison her child and left after abusing and threatening her. She returned the following day with *gaondas* and Priyambada's brother-in-law. They broke into the house and manhandled both Priyambada and her father. Priyambada and her father filed a report (F.I.R.) at the Nayagarh police station. They had also met the then chief minister of Orissa, with a request for his intervention.

*Chapala Nayak (daughter of Kantha Nayak, Patkura, wife of Akshaya Behera, Barchana, Cuttack district)*

Chapala Nayak was married off for dowry, which included Rs.5,000 in cash and Rs. 20,000 in the form of gold ornaments. Akshaya Behera, her husband, had a rice business and was subsequently employed as a driver. In fact, the dowry was handed over during the marriage itself. Soon after this her in-laws wanted a *bhara*—a customary gift for *Sabitri Amabashya*—a coastal Orissa

parallel of the *Karwa Chauth*. Since she had been beaten up for this the *bhara* had to be sent by her parents.

When Chapala was pregnant her father took her back home. However, her husband persuaded her to return. They spent some time together and were blessed with a son. After about two months her husband expected a T.V. set from her father. Since Chapala refused to comply in asking for this she was stripped of all her belongings, which were sold in order to buy a T.V. set.

After this Akshaya developed an attraction for another woman and his behaviour vis-à-vis Chapala worsened. Her husband and her in-laws beat her regularly. They even tried to give opium to her child and kill him. Once when her husband was away her in-laws beat her mercilessly. Fortunately, the villagers intervened and restrained them.

Chapala's father came over to see her. He was persuaded to take her along with him for a month to let things cool. Her husband went over to meet him thrice after which she was conveniently forgotten for a year. Her father had to go over to her in-laws and work out a 'compromise' to send her back. This followed a decision of the village panchayat. What is striking is that the village folk extracted a feast from Chapala's father, in line with the position of the panchayat, for helping them. However, when Chapala returned she was kept segregated by her husband and his family and was exposed to systematic terror. With the help of some villagers Chapala collected a medical certificate to prove that she had been severely beaten. Then she filed a First Information Report at the Barchana police station. Attempts by the police to talk to her husband and her father-in-law proved to be counter-productive. She was tortured even more. Consequently, she was forced to return to her parents. Even after a year she was living with her parents and was too scared of even thinking about going back to the hell she had escaped from and hoped that some day she would perhaps get a maintenance allowance for herself and her child.<sup>12</sup>

### **An overview**

Certain features emerge from what we have discussed so far. Before anything one needs to perhaps reiterate the point that a

simple economic explanation cannot explain dowry since complex ideological components together with certain social and cultural practices serve to perpetuate it. Although the connection between dowry and patriarchy is rather obvious, its association with caste is more complex. Thus, although by the 1990s it had become a multi-caste phenomenon—viz. *khandayat*, *karan* and Brahmin women are affected by it, one needs to keep in mind that a lot of research needs to be done in order to determine the magnitude of this problem among the adivasis and the dalits. Moreover, although two of the victims belong to Nayagarh (an ex-princely state) in the present-day Puri district and the Keonjhar district (an ex-princely state), one needs to look at the western tract where problems of poverty and hunger are very dominant themes and the pressures of patriarchy are very severe. At the same time, the fact that dowry and dowry-related violence transcend barriers of caste and class hardly needs any reiteration.

Dowry and dowry harassment are directly associated with power within the household. At the same time, the idea of reaching an agreement over 'dowry' involves legitimisation outside the legal framework. It is perhaps this aspect that makes the exercise of power possible after marriage in order to make new 'demands'. It needs to be mentioned that the violence associated with dowry is quite often used as a weapon to extract it. On many occasions this yields the desired results. It is highly possible that the idea of dumping one of the women (Sabita) on the road after badly injuring her was perhaps aimed to demonstrate what could happen to her, in case her father did not accept the demands that were being made. At the same time, this violence also poses an immediate threat to the lives of many innocent women caught in the web of dowry. The way patriarchy draws legitimacy for such action and trivialises violence seems to be particularly striking. In fact, that the present 'Domestic Violence Bill' accepts the use of violence against a woman — in case her husband sees any threat to his property — demonstrates the patriarchal consensus that domestic violence enjoys, which indicates the possibilities of directing it to make dowry demands.

What we have seen shatters patriarchal myths that seek to perpetuate dowry as a share of parental property, or as a daughter's 'life insurance policy', secured by her parents at the time of her marriage.<sup>13</sup> Besides, the agencies of the state perhaps legitimise and strengthen a practice that spells disaster to the affected women. One notes the conditioning of some of the women and their parents at the hands of patriarchy, which makes both dowry and perhaps even violence perfectly acceptable. At the same time, dowry produces 'multiplier effects' in terms of corruption and the circulation of money. Parents who give dowry (for their daughter/s) hope to get it back while marrying off their son/s. Taken together, these features undermine the very existence of civil society.

As seen, the problem of dowry transcends the rural/urban dichotomy. Although the women affected by the problem are mostly from the lower middle class, one should not locate it as a phenomenon of this class alone. It is very possible that some women from the middle class or from the poorer sections do not report such cases — fearing social stigma or because of the lack of knowledge about the legal process — unless the level of violence and associated terror pose a threat to the lives of the women affected by it, or in the event of their death. Similarly, ideas of marrying a daughter into a small, urban family, with relatively low economic pressures, does not necessarily prevent dowry demands and violence associated with it.

What is also witnessed is the multi-religious character of this problem. In fact, this paper refers to the dowry demands faced by a Muslim woman (Farida).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the ease with which a Hindu husband can re-marry after harassing his first wife for dowry and without any formal divorce is clearly demonstrated in one case (Namita). This aptly illustrates how patriarchy and the problems that it poses for women transcend religious boundaries.

What is evident is that most of the women had been 'married off' in line with patriarchal notions associated with the 'responsibilities' of their parents. This follows a discriminatory logic that operates within a framework that prevents the women from

being educated or being able to stand on their feet. These features, coupled with the general neglect of a girl's education and career, mould women into a stereotyped role associated with reproduction and 'wifely' responsibilities for the 'home'. These create a structure of absolute dependence on the husband. Perhaps they explain the eagerness of some parents to get their daughter married and to ensure that the marriage works. It also makes them see to it that their daughter (and they) make all the compromises in what is essentially an unequal relationship. This makes the husband and his family exercise power over his wife without any problem. Consequently, this poses serious dangers for women who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (by male members in the family of their in-laws), terror and murder. These perceptions also veil a major structure of exploitation of the women who work as unpaid labourers within the household/domestic sphere.<sup>15</sup>

One also sees in all this an attempt to draw in 'traditions' like the *Sabitri Amabashiya* in order to legitimise predatory demands. Similarly the established norm that a married daughter delivers her babies in her parent's place ensures a structure of legitimacy and acceptance for the underlying logic — which transfers the expenditure involved with this process to her parents. These co-exist with a lumpenised perception that commodifies a so-called 'sacred act' like marriage into a materialist exchange. The inherent logic of competitiveness and its association with consumerism is obvious. This has shifted from scooters and colour TVs to cars, or 'disguised forms' based on cash flows between the 1990s and today.

The attempt to raise money for dowry has serious implications. In some cases the resources raised for dowry are disproportionate to the income of the parents. This leads many of them to sell off their land or property in order to meet the dowry demand. There is also the possibility of this pressure pushing them towards corruption. Consequently, the nexus between dowry harassment, bribery and unemployment needs to be highlighted.

The structure of acceptance enjoyed by dowry is significant. Thus, English words like 'demand' (sic) — for dowry — are a part

of urban/semi-urban Oriya vocabulary since the 1970s, which is discussed very openly. This perhaps explains why co-villagers did not help some of the harassed women. In the case of one woman (Chapala), 'help' was extended and a feast extracted from her father by the village panchayat. This has very serious and dangerous implications if seen in a context where the village community, very much in line with the demand for dowry itself, siphoned resources out from the girl's father. Besides, help and sympathy for the women tormented by the menace blurs gender-based distinctions. The behaviour of the women in the family (viz. mothers-in-law and female relatives), in the locality and at the police station (viz. the woman police inspector) reveals this most unambiguously. Moreover, going by the track record of the police and the time taken by the judiciary, one can definitely argue that both need a thorough restructuring.

Things are perhaps made more difficult owing to the absence of women's groups or a powerful women's movement in Orissa. The lack of any serious coordination among the few groups that exist also adds to the problem. At the same time it needs to be articulated that dowry harassment seems to have been disguised over the last decade — this deserves to be taken very seriously, since the lack of reporting need not be taken as an indicator suggesting a decline of this curse.

One may mention here the way the 'demands' have shifted. Thus according to a survey conducted very recently, this phenomenon seems to have started among the adivasis — where there has been an inversion of the logic of bride-price — and the dalits. The post-cyclone situations, coupled with the problems posed by the taking over of lands for mining coal in areas like Talcher have created new complications. Thus, in some parts of coastal Orissa the problem of raising money for dowry has seen an increase in the trafficking of girls. In Talcher, the Mahanadi Coal Field had provided some monetary compensation and had promised some jobs to five families whose lands had been taken over. Five unemployed young men had married girls in these families without dowry with the understanding that the jobs would be transferred in

their names. The marriages had been registered in the local court in 1992. Later on the Mahanadi Coal Field went back on its promise and the five husbands refused to accept their wives who are now living with their parents. Of courses, the 21st century version of dowry has assumed a devastating form, with the registration as a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) in the name of the bridegroom being accepted as dowry.<sup>16</sup> Besides making one ponder about the role of many of these NGOs, it demonstrates the many faces of patriarchy and the way dowry can be reinvented.

Nevertheless, the fact that some of the women affected by dowry harassment and their relatives do report cases to the police and women's groups, and some others are accepted back in their natal homes, offers possibilities associated with resistance. These cannot be ignored by anyone who wishes to combat this menace.

## Notes

Acknowledgement: This paper would not have been possible without my late mother's help. I would like to acknowledge the help of the Utkala Mahila Samiti, Cuttack, for allowing me access to the interviews and the written statements made by the women, who had been exposed to dowry harassment. I am thankful to Prem Chowdhry for sharing her on-going research on similar issues related to contemporary, post-colonial Haryana with me, and, Shashank Sinha for his comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>1</sup> The kerosene stove 'accidents' had parallels with similar happenings in other parts of the country; Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, for example, refers to such occurrences in Delhi in the same period; vii. In fact, a document *Expanding Dimension of Dowry*, All India Democratic Women's Association, Delhi, 2003, also identifies the late 1970s and the 1980s as the phase when dowry-related violence assumed alarming proportions in India.

<sup>2</sup> Utkala Mahila Samiti is one of the oldest women's groups in Orissa; established on November 7, 1970, it has been associated with women's struggles in Orissa. The newspaper report I have used is from the *Sun Times*, November 28, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Tyagi, Jaya Sinha, 'Gender and the early household: Brahmanical rituals in the early *Grhyasutras*, c 800-500 BC', Ph.D. thesis, Department of

History, Delhi University, 2000, which is being re-worked for her forthcoming book would in fact tell us many interesting features which have some continuities right upto contemporary times.

<sup>4</sup> *History of the Rise and Progress of the Operations for the Suppression of Human Sacrifices and Female Infanticide Correspondence, 1836-1854.*

<sup>5</sup> Patnaik, Nihar Ranjan, *Social History of 19th Century Orissa*, Vohra and Distributors, Allahabad, 1989, Appendix A and B.

<sup>6</sup> 'Confidential History of Gangpur State (upto 1927)', R/2 – 306/121, Crown Representative papers, India Office Library, London, hereafter IOL.

<sup>7</sup> The first evidence we have for this is a reference to the chief of Talcher demanding an amount of two lakhs of dowry for his son's marriage, which was the 'first instance of an Orissa Chief having demanded it'; R/2 – 306/134 IOL.

<sup>8</sup> This is a position articulated by M.N.Srinivas, *Some Reflections on Dowry*, 10-13, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Srinivas, *Some Reflections*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Srinivas, *Some Reflections*, pp. 7-8, seems to argue in this way.

<sup>11</sup> *Sun Times*, November 28, 1992. Thus, the position of Muslim women and dowry as articulated in *Expanding Dimensions*, that the problem is not acute, though the practice is growing needs to be kept in mind; 85.

<sup>12</sup> The exact date of Chapala's marriage is not mentioned, though her formal complaint was received by the Utkala Mahila Samiti in 1992.

<sup>13</sup> This position—justifying dowry—is echoed in a series of articles by Madhu Kiswar; a classic example is 'Dowry - To insure her happiness or disinherit her?' *Manushi*, no. 34, 1986, 2-13. Veena Talwar Oldenburg in an interview, 'A cultural whodunit', *Times of India*, August 8, 1992 had echoed an identical position, which I had questioned in a short communication, 'Re-thinking dowry', *Saturday Times, Times of India*, September 12, 1992. What is very significant is that Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder...*, based as it is on rigorous research, correctly grasps the inherent flaws in the arguments that project dowry as an 'insurance policy', based on the daughter's share of her parental property.

<sup>14</sup> Thus, as *Expanding Dimensions*, points out, although the problem is not acute, though the practice is growing among the Muslims in Orissa; 85.

<sup>15</sup> I tend to agree with arguments related to a woman's work inside the family yielding surplus value, something that is applicable to these women as well.



<sup>16</sup> *Expanding Dimensions*, 'Orissa: No Jobs, No Marriage', 83-88. In a short note 'Globalisation and its imprints', *National Federation of Indian Women Bulletin*, October-December, 2002, 9, I have raised some of these problems.

## References

All India Democratic Women's Association. *Expanding Dimension of Dowry*, Delhi, 2003.

Crown Representative papers, India Office Library, London, R/2 – 306/121 and R/2 – 306/134.

*History of the Rise and Progress of the Operations for the Suppression of Human Sacrifices and Female Infanticide Correspondence, 1836-1854.*

Kiswar, M., 'Dowry - To insure her happiness or disinherit her?' *Manushi*, no. 34, 1986, pp. 2-13.

Pati, B., 'Re-thinking dowry', Saturday Times, *Times of India*, September 12, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_, 'Globalisation and its imprints', *National Federation of Indian Women Bulletin*, October-December, 2002, p. 9.

Patnaik, N.R., *Social History of 19th Century Orissa*, Vohra and Distributors, Allahabad, 1989, Appendix A and B.

Srinivas, M.N., *Some Reflections on Dowry*, 10-13, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984.

*Sun Times* (English Daily from Bhubaneshwar), November 28, 1992.

Talwar, Veena Oldenburg, 'A cultural whodunit', *Times of India*, August 8, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002.

Tyagi, Jaya Sinha, 'Gender and the early household: Brahmanical rituals in the early *Grhyasutras*, c 800-500 BC', Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Delhi University, 2000.

Utkala Mahila Samiti: Oral evidence from the audio tapes of women who have been exposed to dowry-related violence (1992).



## More Marginal than the Marginalised? Tribal Women as Breadwinners in Central India

Archana Prasad

**A**nthropological literature in the contemporary context is ridden with images of the freedom and egalitarian position enjoyed by the women of tribal societies throughout the country. It has generally been assumed that women in tribal societies were freer than their counterparts in the mainstream caste Hindu society. These images have often led to the characterisation of the tribal society as a free society: or as a society where women and men enjoy equal rights, access to material resources and social and cultural freedom. These images also fit in well with the concept of an egalitarian society and the romantic image of a society where people lived in harmony with nature. Such an imagination of the pre-colonial tribal society has coexisted with conceptions of eco-feminism and the view that the subjugation of the tribal society was a direct result of the penetration of capitalism during the colonial rule. By this logic the subjugation of tribal women also began with the advent of capitalism that imposed a patriarchal ethic on the tribal society and economy. Such an eco-feminist analysis, though outdated for Himalayan and peasant economies, is very much alive in the historiography of tribal societies. But such conceptions have also been subject to scathing critiques by prominent scholars who have tried to analyse the relationship between women and environment in the context of larger political and economic changes that are taking place within the tribal economy.

The changing nature of sexual division of labour and its impact on women's position in the household and the society form an

important part of contemporary feminist analysis. While it has been common to argue that economic independence of the woman has a positive impact on her social and cultural status, analysis of the postle economic reforms economy and society show that there is a feminisation of poverty taking place within the political economy. This means that even while the women started working outside the house and earning money, their working conditions and the norms of the society they lived in ensured that they remained disempowered breadwinners. Perhaps there is no better example of this than the one that has been cited by Radha Kumar for colonial Bombay, and later successively by different women's movements for the late post-colonial period, especially after the late 1980s.

In the context of such writings this paper traces the emergence of the tribal woman as the main breadwinner of her family and a mainstay of household survival strategies in marginal areas. It uses the case of the Baigas of Mandla and Dindori districts of Madhya Pradesh to examine whether broad ranging changes in natural resource management have come to place an extra burden on tribal women. I also examine the relative changes in status of men and women and use the experience of the Baiga tribe to demonstrate the extent to which women are more marginalised than men in a socio-economic situation that is rapidly becoming peripheral to the rest of the Indian society. In the process I attempt to evaluate, both the eco-feminist and breadwinner, thesis in the tribal context.

### **Tribal Women in Baiga Community: Free and Equal?**

In his seminal work *The Baiga* the eminent anthropologist Verrier Elwin argued forcefully that the Baiga society, and indeed all tribal societies, were morally and socially superior to modern ones because of the freedom it provides its women. As he wrote:

In Baiga society the women enjoyed an excellent position. Theoretically, in so patriarchal and priestly a tribe man should be in the ascendant: actually women have great freedom and no little authority. She may go about on her own; she generally chooses her own husband, and changes him at will, she may dance in public; they she may take her wares to a bazaar and

open her own shop there, she may own property and she may drink and smoke in her husband's presence.<sup>1</sup>

Elwin's evaluation of the status of the Baiga woman is done in relation to the social and cultural freedom that she enjoys. But it is worth placing this so-called freedom in the context of her access to and control over natural resources. In fact Verrier Elwin's own evidence belies this claim.

The Baiga of the Central Provinces were a patriarchal society that depended primarily on a combination of swidden cultivation (or *bewar*) and the seasonal gathering of forest produce for their survival. Within this system access to land primarily belonged to the male members of the family. This also depended on the way in which the Baiga defined their family. The settlement of Baiga villages was usually near their fields and lived in a cluster of houses. Within the cluster, houses generally belonged to the same family related to each other by marriage or by birth.<sup>2</sup> The granary however could be shared by more than one family and served not only as a storehouse for grains but also as a shed for hen, goat or cattle. The phenomenon of sharing granaries was especially true for the Maria villages in Abhujmarh.<sup>3</sup>

The family consisted of the father and his sons sharing the same cluster compound. The patriarch was the head of the family and generally an elderly and much respected man in the village, also known as a *siyan* in Baigani language. All family disputes were resolved and marriages fixed under his supervision. Relations between joint families were conducted through him. Once the father died the eldest son attained this position. The identity of the patriarch got articulated only in times of ritual performance and in the case of disputes with other families. In routine life the family identity was constituted through the formation of work groups. The patriarch of the family led his sons to clear the fields. The sons, who lived and dined with their father, did not have separate fields. According to community norms, when the son got married he continued to work in the same field as his father and partake of the produce from the family land. As long as the son lived in the same compound he

belonged to the family work group. Before marriage even his axe belonged to his father whereas after marriage he was gifted an axe by his father. However, in his personal life, he enjoyed the privilege of having a hut different from his father. If the son separated from the family there was no community sanction for the allotment of a separate field. At best he could hope for the partition of his father's field.<sup>4</sup> This was quite unlike the Khond system where sons are entitled to separate fields once they got married.<sup>5</sup> In their dealing with the outside world, the married son formed a part of the joint family headed by a Khond patriarch. But in routine life the term 'family' implied a 'nuclear' family.

Though the family was the organising principle of work groups, the definition of these groups depended upon the time and the nature of the agricultural activity involved. The family worked as a group and its tasks were differentiated on a gender basis. Two kinds of work groups existed in Baiga society. The first class of work group consisted of male members and was formed in periods of clearing and guarding of fields, and threshing crops. In May-June or the Indian month of *jeth*, the Baiga men went to prepare the fields for cultivation while women picked leaves. This task entailed the clearing of trees and undergrowth. The second group consisted of the whole family that worked in the fields during periods of sowing, fencing, harvesting and threshing. In periods where only the male members work in the fields, women stayed at home, brewed *pej* (rice beer), gathered fruits and leaves, or dug roots.

The labour of women and *lamsenas* created a special problem in the determination of these work groups. Both these cases were characterised by the movement of people from one family to another. Once a woman was married, her labour and property belonged to her father-in-law. Her own family thus lost her labour but gained a bride price or *sukh* of about Rs. 18 or Rs. 25. They did the same for a son whose wife's labour belonged to her father-in-law who in turn paid *sukh* (bride price).<sup>6</sup> The same was the case with *lamsena* labour. The *lamsena* was a youth who served for a wife in her home before marriage. It was like a period of probation where a girl's family could test the abilities of the boy she sought to marry.

During this period, (lasting 2 to 5 years), he received food and clothing from the family. In return his labour and earnings belonged to his father-in-law. He returned to his home after the marriage was fixed.<sup>7</sup> The composition of the work group in the field was thus affected by the movement of people to fulfil the social norms and beliefs of the community. The economic position of the household and family was closely linked to the way in which social relations between families were planned through marriages.

Patriarchal authority formed the basis of the formation of the work groups. The oldest male member of the family decided when and how the girl would get married; what would be her bride price and how long the *lamsena* would stay in his house. The same authority also decided the distribution of work within the household, the location of the fields, and the separation of the son's household from the father's. Male headship of the community and household was in turn legitimised by the Baiga oral traditions. The male head of the household was responsible for the dissemination of these traditions that ordered the behavioural patterns of the Baigas towards their own environment. The elders within the community or the *siyans* also had an important role in the transmission of the Baiga myth to Baiga women and younger members of the community. The primary way in which the Baiga elders socialised young children into behaving like 'good Baiga' men and women was by telling them stories of Nanga Baiga. While hunting techniques were taught to young boys, domestic chores were taught to girls through games. Some of these games were recorded by Verrier Elwin as late as 1930.

My explanations about the details of community life are important because this determined the way in which the women dealt with the outside world, and whether they dealt with it at all. At another level the communitarian codes also reflect the lack of access of women to ownership of property and technology. For example, the wife or the daughter was not entitled to any land, and if they touched the axe (i.e. the primary technology of cultivation) the axe was considered impure or unholy. This meant that women only had an opportunity to increase their economic power through collection

of forest produce and labour. But here too, the situation was not too encouraging. Both women and men undertook gathering activities. Women gathered roots, fruit, leaves, and mahua and sal seeds. Root and fruit gathering were important sources of food in periods when *bewar* crop was ripening. Men also gathered roots in times of drought and famine. According to Russell and Hiralal, a Baiga could collect a full basket of roots in a single day.<sup>8</sup> Mahua and sal seeds were collected by women and used as food or for brewing *tadi* (country liquor). Apart from this, the collection of leaves was useful for household purposes and bamboo was collected to make baskets and mats that were sold in the markets. This brought them in contact with people who did not live in the forests but depended in one way or another on them. The nature of the contact was, however, quite gendered in at least some respects. Men sold more lucrative produce like honey, lac sticks, silk cocoons, and tans to the craftsmen. In contrast the women sold flowers, leaves and seeds of trees like the sal as well as fuel wood to peasants. These were presumably less lucrative than the produce sold by men.

The Baiga patriarch reinforced his position vis-à-vis the women in their relationship with the peasants. Even as the Baigas considered cultivation by the plough a sin, and most peasant castes as socially inferior, the structure of the regional political economy ensured that peasants were wealthier and had more social influence than the Baigas. Apart from excluding the women from the decision making process, the self-image of Baiga men as protectors of mother earth had little effect on their social and economic position within the wider economy. They continued to eke out their existence from the precarious combination of swiddening and gathering. But by refusing to work as wage labourers, the men forced the women to do the bulk of the work and perform the tasks of transplantation and harvesting, especially during times of scarcity when *bewar* crops had failed. Men only hired their labour out for one specific task: the uprooting of rice seedlings before transplantation.<sup>9</sup> This meant that women were forced to go outside the house and labour in the houses and fields of uppercaste and non-tribal people where they were often abused sexually and otherwise. It is well known that Baiga



men loathed this work and thus put their own women in a most vulnerable position in times of crisis. Thus the position of Baiga women was far from comfortable in the pre-colonial or early colonial period, both economically and socially. But it is also necessary to note that both men and women played an important role in meeting their daily family needs. Swiddening or other forms of agriculture formed an integral part of their survival strategies. In this sense, both, men and women, could be described as breadwinners within the Baiga family, with women's decision-making power being defined and limited by patriarchal authority.

### **Patriarchy and Capitalism in Baiga Society**

Eco-feminists have often argued that the marginalisation of women began with the beginning of capitalist penetration, which was signified by the advent of colonialism in India. In the context of the Baiga society, this proposition needs to be qualified in that we have already seen that the position of Baiga women was far from satisfactory by the advent of colonialism. The question that we need to ask therefore is what type of qualitative change was brought about in the life of Baiga women by the advent of colonialism in the Baiga area.

Colonialism in the Baiga area was characterised by two significant trends. The first was the state take-over of all forests and the banning of *bewar* in forested areas. The second was the formation of the Baiga Chak, a designated area for swidden cultivation in order to ensure that the Baiga could work as cheap labour for the forest department. But apart from this there were a few general trends that affected the survival strategies of all tribal people. The rise in the world demand for minor forest produce led to the influx of European capital into forested areas and changed the very nature of production relations. The case studies of lac and tan show that the supply of raw materials to the artisans got curtailed because tribals started selling forest produce to the foreign firms. At another level the land alienation of tribal land holdings increased thus prompting the government to enact the Central Provinces Tenancy Act. But though the security of tenures was assured to

tribal people, most of them were pushed into low productive and marginal lands. Reports of the British officials in that period showed that those having land holdings were mostly Gond tribals and not Baigas as the latter never had any recorded rights over land. Even the lucrative business of extracting lac was monopolised by better-off tribals. In this situation the Baiga were reduced to working as labourers in the forest department.

By the late 1930s and early 1940s the main source of Baiga subsistence was forest labour. The Chak experiment had also failed and most Baigas shifted to forest villages. In 1940 Governor Wylie wrote of the forest labour in Mandla and Balaghat:

In both tahsils (Dindori and Baihar) the principal activity of the Forest Department is the extraction of sal timber in the shape of sleepers for railways...There is a complaint that the present daily wage of 3a for forest labour is too low. Let this not be dismissed as a whine. We are dealing with people whom their admirers describe as the ancient lords of the jungle but whom I personally prefer to consider as forest labourers isolated from the normal working of the law of demand and supply and as such at the mercy of the Forest Department who are the sole purveyors of the labour from which, if the inhabitants of the forest villages are to stay there at all, they have got to make a livelihood.<sup>10</sup>

Wylie showed that cash payments were not enough to meet their requirements and he called upon the forest department to have a more humane approach towards the problems of forest labour. He questioned the scale of wages paid to labour for felling and carting and demanded an early report on the subject. He also spoke of the problem of piece work when he said that the Baigas were made to labour on roads till they were physically in a most "unsatisfactory shape". Thus he concluded that the conditions under which these Baigas worked affected their health. Lastly, the Baigas were exploited by the forest department, as there was a departmental extraction of 'illegal and forced labour' during harvest and sowing time. The forest department made the labourers work more than 8 hours a day without paying them extra money. According to Wylie

this was equivalent to the practice of *begar* or forced labour. The department forcefully extracted supplies for visiting forest officials in the 'reserve'. Wylie demanded careful consideration of all these points if the forest department wanted the active cooperation of the forest dwellers.<sup>11</sup>

In this context it is worth asking what effect these developments and the complete marginalisation of the Baiga production system had on Baiga women. The decrease in cultivation by the Baigas also led to their dependence on gathering and labour for their survival. This in turn gave the Baiga women a greater role in the fulfilment of Baiga needs. At the same time Baiga men no longer held the weapon that they used to marginalise the women: their monopoly over the control of the means of production. The latent conflict over power and control between two segments of the community were witnessed in the articulation of an aggressive Baiga identity vis-à-vis other communities. Increased the power of the Baiga patriarchs, the cornerstone of this articulation was still *bewar* cultivation and the social and cultural power of the Baigas over other people. The cutting of each *bewar* is an event in the exercise of power against hostile forces. Oral traditions of the time also show that the attitude of the Baiga towards their women did not seem to be altogether a favourable one. This was seen in the personal life of many Baigas that were recorded by people like Elwin, who played an important part fixing this image of the Baiga in the minds of his contemporaries. For example, in a description of his own life Mhatu, Elwin's informant, said:

I was born in Dutirawar in Kawardha State. When I was five took my sickle and axe and went with my father to his *bewar*. At that time we also went to Ajnu and cut *bewar* there also. We lived seven years there and then came to Kapripani where we cut *bewar* at two rupees an axe. In those days there was a Raja at Ramgarh. Then came the English when I was twelve year old and robbed us and beat us. So we went to Damin Tola and lived there for 3 years. In Damin Tola lived a witch Maniaro. She and my father were friends. But when she tried to marry my father he sent her away. So she was

angry and made a snake and sent it to bite my father. The snake came in the bewar and bit him and after two and a half days he died.

After my father's death we lived six years in Damin Tola, then we shifted to Karadih. My mother took a new husband. In Karadih I cut bewar for 7 years. Then came Utrana Sahib with his wife and children. He called all Baiga to him. I went with the others. We met in bewar where trees had just been felled. There were trees everywhere and some were so big that the Sahib's wife couldn't climb over them. When she saw them lying there she wept and embraced them calling them her children. Then she said to us 'from today your bewar is stopped; you are never to do bewar again'. The Sahib tried very hard to let us continue bewar but his wife prevented him.

So then I went to Chauradadar and lived there five years. When bewar was first stopped we had a very hard time. In Karadih in the bewar days twenty five drums used to come out for the karma dance.

Afterwards there would be only two or three and there would be no joy. We were all broken up, some ran to one place and some to another place. We had little food for we didn't know how to plough and we believed it to be a sin. So what do we do? We go to the Gonds and they hold our hands and teach us how to plough. But they rob us in every way ...<sup>12</sup>

Mhatu's life story is very long and there are several other stories like his where the *bewar* formed the central reference point for personal histories. In many of these personal histories women are seen as creating trouble for particular Baiga families through their actions. For example, the witch in Mhatu's father's life is identified as one who destroyed the breadwinner. Similarly, it is not the Englishman, but his wife at whose insistence the British ban *bewar*, the source of male power in the Baiga society. The events of Baiga history, as Mhatu's life shows, could be divided into two periods: the time of 'joy', i.e. the period of unrestricted *bewar* and the period of 'no joy' when the restriction on *bewar* cutting started.

The first period packed with accounts of the great deeds of the Baigas who were meant to be experts at hunting tigers and as medicine men and in the evil deeds of witches. In describing these deeds and attributing the problems of survival to either his mother or the sahibs' wife, Mhatu also reproduced the patriarchal authority that characterised the Baiga society. Thus we find that the advent of colonialism not only put the burden of meeting all the livelihood needs of the family squarely on the women's shoulder but attributed the ills of Baiga marginalisation to the role of the women in family life. In one sense their ritual and ideological condemnation for all the ills that were befalling the Baiga reflected the emergence of the Baiga woman as a breadwinner in her family. Thus colonial control over land and forests resulted in higher contribution of women in meeting the daily needs of the family even as men lost most of their control over productive and natural resources. But their increasing economic role did not necessarily provide them a better social and cultural status as the men folk began to manipulate oral traditions to define the limits of their patriarchal authority.

### **Baiga Women in a Welfare State**

We thus see that the state became an active player in altering the relationship between men and women in the Baiga household. This role did not decrease after Independence, rather it increased considerably through the expansion of the Baiga Chak and the formation of the Baiga Development Agency. Though there is little evidence about the status of Baiga women in this period, we can use the nature of interventions to gauge the impact that they may have had on the status of women.

In keeping with the doctrine of the welfare state, the mechanisms for the development of the Baiga area concentrated on expanding plough cultivation in the Baiga area since the 1950s. The area under the Chak was expanded and the government attempted to use its agricultural extension service to get the Baigas to turn the plough. Dr. D.S. Nag's field visits to the Baiga Chak in the 1950s and 1960s revealed that the condition of the Chak in the early years of Independent India was very bad as the per capita annual income of Rs. 37-13-0 was the lowest amongst all zones of Baiga land. In

addition out of 91 families surveyed, 61 families had an income below average.<sup>13</sup> This reflected the inability of the Baigas to fulfil their own needs and the rising population of the tribe. An average Baiga family of the Chak consisted of 7.2 persons per family and the size of its holdings was not sufficient to meet their basic dietary needs. This was partly because the Baigas had started practising plough cultivation on tracts with laterite soils. The declining productivity of the land was a result of lack of irrigation, shorter fallows and lack of land improvements. These factors were further accentuated by the lack of ownership of land. A survey in 1976 identified this as one of the major causes of deprivation in Baiga society.<sup>14</sup>

Looking at it from the point of view of the status of women, early developmental plans and strategies hardly showed any sensitivity towards their position. This was evident from the fact that the main strategy for development was the spread of plough cultivation, which would have naturally enhanced the control of men over access to land resources and the technology required to produce the food grains. But the impact of this strategy showed, that this was far from true. Of the Baigas' income, 76% went into purchasing food and the high percentage of expenditure on food grains especially cereals was evident with the progress of plough cultivation. Out of this expenditure the Baigas of the Chak only bought food-grains and salt. Their consumption of oil, vegetables and spices was almost negligible.<sup>15</sup> This made their diet almost dependent on cereals: a fact that brought about dietary changes within the Baigas after the formation of the Chak.

However, changes in Baiga food habits were not only a result of the changing cultivation, but of the accentuating tensions that emanated from the disruption of linkages between *bewar* and other activities in the 1970s with the expansion of the Baiga Chak. The Chak was now spread over several districts of Shahdol, Balaghat, Mandla, Bilaspur, Pandaria, and Rajanandgaon. It consisted of 312 villages and 1,219 families. In 1978 these families were put under the administration of the Baiga Development Agency whose main objectives were to create income-generating opportunities for the

tribals and identify the problems of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes of the Chak area. The agency was put under the operation of the District Collector. It was to encourage tribal handicrafts, understand the craftsman's problems as well as provide infrastructural facilities such as public health, roads and education. The main strategy concentrated on the progress of plough cultivation and education amongst the Baigas. However, by the late 1980s this strategy had received little success. The Baigas were forced to depend much more on wage labour and minimal self-employment like rope and basket making that was not sufficient to raise their standard of living.<sup>16</sup> The plan also identified that the Baiga were depending more and more on wage labour and attempted to create opportunities where tribals would be able to get better wages for their labour whose main beneficiary was the forest department.

The main labour used in forest operations was in silvicultural, clearing and felling operations. These were all male jobs, whereas planting operations also involved women but did not last more than a few months a year. Apart from this, the family, especially women and children also collected *tendu patta* in the season for some income. They were paid Rs. 35.57 to Rs. 43.71 per day for picking and pruning *tendu* leaves in 1992.<sup>17</sup> If the duration of the *tendu* season were considered to be 30–40 days a year, then the average income of an individual would be Rs. 1500–2000 per season. However, a visit to Baiga country in 1993 revealed that these rates were not paid in Mandla and the average monthly income of a Baiga family was about Rs. 900. In addition to this, no employment was available for the rest of the year and men were forced to walk to Bastar and work as daily-wage labourers for contractors in the construction or mining industry. It is significant to mention here, that unlike in the Santhal area, women did not migrate from the Baiga area but were left with the entire responsibility of looking after the needs of the family including carrying fuelwood, water and digging roots for their meals. Even when the men were at home it was the women's job to dig roots. The women went into the forest to dig roots once in two days, and it took them the whole day to dig out one basket of roots. Then they boiled and dried them

before they were ready for eating. In a field trip to the uplands of Kanha Wildlife sanctuary, the Baiga men of the displaced villages admitted that digging roots was a tough and strenuous job but also added that "it was not their job". After all they were contributing to the family income by working outside for four months of the year!

Perhaps what is most striking about the exposition I have just made is that the period from the late 1950s to the early 1990s supported the proposition that women were primarily dependent on forest and land resources to eke out a livelihood for their families. For at least four months of the year women headed the household. They not only collected produce for meeting their household needs, but sold produce or fuelwood to make a minimum income. In addition they continued to sow and harvest for their Gond neighbours, who did not treat them much better than the high caste Hindu peasant landholders. In contrast, men depended on departmental labour and other forms of labour for their income. This division of labour supported the argument that women perhaps depended more on natural resources to fulfil the daily needs of their household during this period. But it is also true that despite state efforts to establish men in permanent cultivation and private property, these efforts failed miserably and led to the stagnation of the Baiga economy. In this situation the women were landed with the sole responsibilities of looking after all the needs of their family for at least four months of the year and collecting firewood and food for the rest of the year. There is no doubt that the menfolk also contributed to the family needs through their labour, but the increasing dependence on forests for year-round needs often meant that the women ended up doing a lot more unpaid work than men. This division of labour and the tribal economy till the mid-1980s typically signified an enclave of underdevelopment within the process of the development of a modern capitalist economy.

### **Women and Struggles for Land and Forest Rights Today**

We have seen that till the 1990s there was not much interest shown by the State in enhancing the economic capacity or power of Baiga women. Even though land continued to be one of the main



sources of the origin of male authority in the Baiga society, its influence was limited by extremely low productivity and inability to meet the needs of the household in a substantial way. Instead, the migration of Baiga men for four months of the year became one of the major sources of cash income for the household. This income was important because it was used to purchase items of daily needs including rice, salt, oil and clothes. The state intervention in tribal areas and efforts to strengthen male propriety rights in land and creating opportunities for labour for them. In the post 1990s period we find that this is not really true as the state has already begun to withdraw from the social sector and opportunities for seasonal and migrant labour are becoming less and less. This changed the livelihood and work situation of men and women considerably.

The conclusions of this section show that this scenario had changed considerably having an impact on the nature of male and forest dependence on natural resources by the late 1990s. A survey of 200 Baiga households done with the help of the Madhya Pradesh Gyan Vigyan Samiti shows a remarkable change in the occupational structure of the Baiga people.

**Table 1**  
**Occupational Structure by Percentage of Population**

Occupation	Male		Female	
	Main	Supplementary	Main	Supplementary
No Response	22.6	45.2	29.8	45.2
Agriculture	10.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fuelwood Collection	33.7	1.9	14.9	2.9
Agricultural labour	20.7	33.7	24.5	30.3
Migration	1.9	2.4	0.5	1.0
Other labour	6.3	7.7	28.1	3.9
NTFP Collection	1.0	6.7	0.5	14.7
Others	1.9	0.5	0.0	0.5

Source: Survey by Madhya Pradesh Gyan Vigyan Samiti, 2003.

The first characteristic of these households is that at least a third of them do not see themselves doing any work at all. This is significant in the wake of the fact that out of 200 households, 65% have no land at all and another 14% have land that is less than one acre. Another 15% have unirrigated land that is between one and five acres and not able to produce sufficient foodgrains to meet the needs of the entire family.

The other significant point is that none of the women see themselves as "agriculturists" or farmers and primarily report themselves as agricultural labour. This substantiates the argument that land rights are one of the most important factors in determining the woman's economic independence and status within the household. It should also be noted that women's movements and ideologues have been demanding land rights for women and carrying out land struggles for women's rights on lands since a long time. In the main we notice two types of struggle. The first type is that symbolised by C.K. Janu in the Matunga forests of Kerala. Here the struggle is primarily between the 'community' and the state in the sanctuaries and forest reserves of the Wynad. It also encompasses an element of romanticism in which Janu argues that if tribal people are given land rights in forests then they will automatically save the forests. The second type of land struggle is the one carried out by tribal women under the banner of the All India Democratic Workers Union and All India Democratic Women's Association by women of Bairat near Banaras. The women have occupied the surplus land of the Raja of Benaras and Chandauli and forced the public recognition of their rights on the zamindar's land. Here the women's right to land is seen not only as a part of the improvement of her status, but also as a part of a larger class struggle that pits the interests of the landless against that of the zamindars. These struggles are part of a larger land reform process that demands that women who till and work on land should be the title owners of that land. These struggles also differ from C.K. Janu's movement in another way — the they do not ask for the withdrawal of the state from the management of land and forest

resources, rather they demand that the state should play a creative and just role in the redistribution and development of these resources.

But the argument for a just and creative role requires that the livelihood of women be seen in totality, with non-farm options and labour playing a major role. If we get back to the survey of our Baiga households we find two remarkable and startling facts in the Baiga area. The first is that a greater number of men than women report themselves to be fuelwood collectors. The main occupation of a third of the men report their main occupation to be head loading whereas the same number of women consider it their supplementary occupation. Most of the women consider themselves as agricultural labourers who work either on the field of their own households or others. The other factor that emerges is that more women consider themselves dependent on sale of non-timber forest produce, but the sale of such produce is mostly a supplementary occupation and no family fully depends on it. Both these facts clearly highlight the worsening situation for the family and the reported per month income has decreased to about Rs. 500 to 800 at an average. In terms of our discussion of the division of labour this means that the men are now forced to depend on the forest for their livelihood. What is significant about this is the nature of dependence where the men seemed to have got off labour and become dependent on headloading. This trend in Baiga society goes against the work of some scholars who have been contending that men were more concerned with timber and women with firewood in the forests. In fact the sale of firewood seems to have become a major source of household income with the males appropriating it as their main occupation. I will come to the possible explanations for this a little later, and for now I will concentrate on discussing what the implication of this is for the status of female resource use and control.

The importance of land in determining the relationship between men and women can be seen in the context of the relationship between household land holdings and women's work as evident in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Relationship of Land Holding Patterns with Female Occupations (Main)**

Count

Land (acres)	Occupation						Total
	No response	Fuelwood Coll	Agricultural Labour	Migration	Other Labour	NTFP Coll	
.00	36	26	16		50	1	129
0 - 1	5	3	19	1	3	31	
1 - 3	14	2	9		4		29
3 - 5	3		2			5	
5 - 6	2		2			4	
6 - 8	2		2			4	
Above 8			1			1	
Total	62	31	51	1	57	1	203

**Table 3**  
**Relationship of Female Occupations (Supplementary) with Land Ownership**

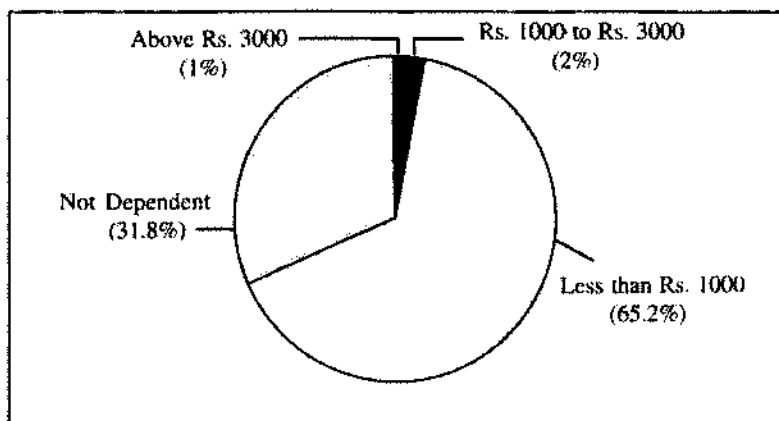
Land (acres)	Occupation							Total
	No response	Fuelwood Coll	Agricultural Labour	Migration	Other Labour	NTFP Coll		
.00	57	3	49	1	6	13	1	130
0 - 1	11	2	6	1	1	10		31
1 - 3	15	1	7			6		29
3 - 5	4		1					5
5 - 6	2				1	1		4
6 - 8	4							4
Above 8	1							1
Total	94	6	63	2	8	30	1	204

On examining Table 2 and 3, the class dimension even within women's work becomes clear. Out of 204 respondents, the valid responses show that women do the most labour in landless households and households with marginal landholdings. Here again the patterns and wages of work show that women take on most of the burden of household livelihood. The status of women within this resource-use pattern can be judged in terms of the duration of work and wages and its relationship. The male-female comparison of months of work and wages is given below:

**Table 4**  
**Months of Work and Daily Wages By Percentage**

Months of Work			Daily Wages		
Months	Male	Female	Rs.	Male	Female
No Response	55.8	66.3	No Response	62.0	60.1
2	0.0	13.5	15.00	0.5	0.5
3	0.5	0	20.00	2.9	4.3
4	2.4	5.8	25.00	3.4	6.3
5	1.4	2.9	30.00	24.5	6.7
6	3.8	3.8	35.00	0.5	0.5
7	1.0	1.4	40.00	0.5	0.5
8	25.5	2.9	50.00	2.4	2.9
9	2.9	0.5	60.00	1.4	15.9
10	4.8	1.0	65.00	0.9	0.5

Table 4 show an interesting picture. For one, two-third of all male and female respondents have chosen not to reply to these questions and also find it difficult to recount the months in which they do what they define as "work". This is particularly the case women according to whom "work" is mostly going out and earning either grain or wages. A majority of the women get under six months of work that would cover 2-3 months of agricultural labour, at best 30 days of *tendu patta* collection and some days of other labour

**NTFP Income of Women by Percentage**

like forest or road works as and when it arises. What this does not seem to include is the collection of firewood. Most of the houses that report a collection of fuelwood also show that half of that fuelwood is utilised in the household. It is perhaps this half that the women do not count in their income and the other half of which is sold, gets reflected in the figures for male income. What is clear from this is the fact that women do not consider the collection of firewood as their legitimate and paid "work" even though they go with men and help them build up their head-loads. In comparison, the women who go out for paid labour, either agricultural or other, get up to Rs. 50 or 60 a day after 8 to 12 hours of work. In this way we see that in the post-reforms period, Baiga women have started depending more on labour and less on sale of firewood whereas the men have started depending increasingly on the sale of firewood for their income. There is one other issue that remains unresolved in the relationship of women with land and forest resources and that is one of the collection of non-timber forest produce. The Baiga case shows that women and children are the main collectors of non-timber forest produce. In the Baiga area the main collection is that of *tendu patta* and *mahua*. People complain that other produce like *harra*, *behera* and *amla* are scarce now and do not get them,

much income. It is evident from Table 4 that a majority of the people in the area had an income of less than Rs. 1,000 from this work and a third of the women did not even report a dependence on it for their survival. But there are other trends also where people are living in forests that yield other forest produce like *amla*, *chironji* etc. and it is worth looking at them with particular reference to Bastar.

**Table 5**

**Prices and Income from Non-Timber Forest Produce in Bastar Haats, 2001-2002 Season**

Name of Produce	Prices per Kg. (Rs.)	Approx. Seasonal Quantity Collected by a Family	Appx. per Capita Seasonal Income (Rs.)
Tamarind with Seed	2.00	3-4 Quintal per tree, One family collects an average of this much.	800.00
Tamarind without Seed	4.00	Tribals report that if they decorticate the tamarind they loose about 5% in the process. So we can assume about 3.8 quintals	1600.00
Amla Dry	7.00	4 kg	28.00
Amla Green	3.50	6 kg (= 4 kg Dry Amla)	21.00
Mhowa	3.00	6 quintals	1800.00
Chironji with Seed	20.00	5 kg in 15 days season	100.00
Chironji without seed	150.00	4 kg (= 5 kg with seed)	600.00
Safed Musli			100.00
Harra	3.00		Not available



The villagers report that Behara, one of the valuable non-timber forest produce, is not available in their forests any more. They also report that the season for *amla* has been particularly bad this year and that they are getting minimum amounts as reflected in Table 5. Further there has been illegal felling of the *amla* tree at a large scale and this has led to the virtual extinction of *amla* in the area.<sup>18</sup> Given this state of affairs the average seasonal income of a family may be around Rs. 4128.00 if tribals decorticate the *imli* and *chironji* seed and dry their *amla*. If they do not do this it would be even lower. Most of the collection is done by women and children and they work for about 5 hours a day from 6-7 am when they go to the jungle, to about noon when they come back. This means that they get about 130-150 person days of work. The labour cost of this would be about Rs. 30-50 per day that seems to be the average wage of this area.<sup>19</sup> The total cost of labour collection works out to about Rs. 4500-5000 if we take it on the lower side of the estimate. The above estimates do not take the processing cost into account because it is assumed that the tribals do not process any produce. However, on closer inspection we find that some preliminary processing of the produce takes place at the local level. Drying of *amla* and decortication of *imli* and *chironji* seeds is common and given a higher price than green produce. But this price rarely covers the cost of collection, let alone the processing costs.

Given the state of the non-timber forest produce economy, it is perhaps possible to say that the policy of donor agencies in promoting the development of non-timber forest produce as a way of empowering women. While joint forest management groups are meant to have a women's representation in their committees, the latter themselves have been shown by many scholars not to function properly. At the same time the formation of non-timber forest produce societies, which should have benefited women, the primary collectors, is again ineffective and dominated by traders. This is seen in the Baiga and the Bastar case. It is for this reason that activists are demanding a greater control of communities and gender sensitisation of the forest department in the control of forest resources. But whether the balancing of forces within the

committees and the adjustment of control between the state and the so-called egalitarian "community" can improve the status of women within the political economy is a question that still remains to be answered. The only thing that is clear is the fact that the status of women in the household and the larger political economy is influenced by the structural relationship between land, water and forest and use patterns in natural resources. Today these relationships favour the non-local international economy and till the balance is tilted in favour of the local society with a specific focus on the enhancing women's skills and access to productive resources this will not be possible.

Thus rather than withdrawal the demand should be for the restructuring of the states' role in providing the basic necessities for the enhancement of the tribal local economy. Steps should be designed in a manner that ensures that any expansion of the local economy has so that her status and decision making power will increase within the family and the political economy as a whole. For the present it is safe to say that this has not taken place in Madhya Pradesh. Even while the economic role of women has apparently increased, social indicators in the state and amongst tribes in particular suggest a worsening status of tribal women in the society. For example, if we look at the true picture about women's status becomes clearer.

The most interesting aspect of this table is that a majority of the women in the state do not have much power in decision making as far as their health or mobility is concerned. Access to money especially in Scheduled Caste and tribal households is also minimal compared to the status of women as breadwinners. The only area where women seem to the dominant power to make a decision seems to be in the area of what to cook for their families. Clearly this reflects that the division of labour and power equations within the household have hardly changed. In fact if we look at the mortality rates and the sex ratio amongst the tribal people it becomes clear that the position of females children is worsening in the post-reform era. The 10th Five Year Plan holds that the sex ratio amongst tribal people was better than the rest in the 1980s but has been rapid

Table 6

Back-ground Characteristic	Percentage involved in decision making on					Percentage not needing permission to		Percentage with access to money
	None	What to cook	Own health care	Purchase	Stay-ing with parents	Go to mar-ket	Visit friends relatives	
<b>Residence</b>								
Urban	13.6	77.8	43.5	50.8	44.2	35.2	32.3	68.0
Rural	12.1	83.1	34.2	42.1	36.0	16.1	15.1	42.9
<b>Region</b>								
Chhattisgarh	7.9	84.3	49.2	54.2	53.1	27.1	26.8	53.7
Vindhya	8.5	89.1	22.4	37/2	37/4	10/4	8/5	40/7
Central	14.9	76.3	39.5	47.7	40.6	24.5	22.5	57.4
Malwa	16.1	78.0	31.7	38.6	30.9	21.4	17.6	43.9
South Central	10.7	83.2	36.2	47.4	40.4	24.1	21.7	53.7
South Western	18.7	75.1	39.0	41.5	31.5	24.7	22.9	52.7
Northern	17.1	80.2	30.1	36.3	24.8	11.5	12.9	44.5
<b>Caste/Tribe</b>								
<b>Scheduled</b>								
Caste	9.7	85.5	34.4	43.2	36.5	20.9	17.4	42.7
<b>Scheduled</b>								
Tribe	10.3	84.6	38.2	46.1	40.1	19.1	17.7	42.5
OBC	14.5	80.0	33.9	42.6	36.9	19.2	18.5	49.8
Others	12.9	79.4	41.6	46.7	39.2	26.5	24.9	60.3

Source: National Family and Health Survey 2, Madhya Pradesh, Bombay, 2001. (hereafter NFHS 2).

declining since then because of the high mortality amongst mothers and females.<sup>20</sup> Similarly the infant mortality rates, a good indication of women's status, are also one of the highest in the tribal areas of the state. What is significant is that infant mortality has in fact increased in the state from 130 to 138 between 1991 and 1999, that is between the two family health surveys. The mortality rate in tribal areas is even worse at 179 per 1,000.<sup>21</sup> This clearly shows that state programmes and a greater economic role for women has not improved the status of women in the tribal society. If anything the emergence of the tribal woman as a breadwinner in the post-reforms era has also led to her worsening social situation - a factor that is characteristic of the feminisation of poverty in this era. Clearly the tribal women are more marginal than the marginalised in a society that is becoming exceedingly endangered.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elwin, Verrier *The Baiga*, Frank Allen and Unwin, London, 1939, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>3</sup> Grigson, W.V., *Maria Gonds of Bastar*, Oxford University Press, London, 1927, p.117.

<sup>4</sup> Elwin, Verrier, pp.78-79, 273.

<sup>5</sup> Notes on the Khonds, Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi (hereafter Khond Notes), No. 165, 1935.

<sup>6</sup> Elwin, Verrier, pp.78, 273.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.288.

<sup>8</sup> Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, Government Press, Nagpur, 1910, Vol. 2, p.91.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91. Also see settlement reports of various districts for evidence of the employment of lower class Gond and Baiga labour by richer peasants of the same or other upper caste communities.

<sup>10</sup> Forest Department, Eastern Circle Conservators Office, Jabalpur, (hereafter FDECCO), Case File No: XVI-M of 1940/121, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1-4. Wylie quoted Symington to emphasise this perspective: "The State has a clear right to extract from all its forests all the

profits that can *justly* be derived from them but justice demands that forest labourers should be treated somewhat better than slaves....". (p.2)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

<sup>13</sup> Nag, D.S., *Tribal Economy —A study of the Baiga*, Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, Delhi, 1958, p.83.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Tribal Development, *Sixth Tribal Sub-Plan for Primitive Tribes, The Baigas*, Bhopal, 1980-85.

<sup>15</sup> Nag D.S. 'Socio-economic Appraisal of the Baiga Diet' *Conference on Tribal Welfare, Jagdalpur, 1955*, pp. 255-56.

<sup>16</sup> *Sixth Tribal Sub-Plan for Primitive Tribes, The Baigas*, pp. 44–45, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Pethya, B.P., *Collection and Marketing of Tendu Leaves in Sehore Division*, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, 1993, pp. 63–64.

<sup>18</sup> Interview Members of Self Help Groups, Bunagaon, Kondagaon District, Chhattisgarh, 27.01.2002.

<sup>19</sup> The average wage for a woman worker is Rs. 35 per day and for a male worker Rs. 50 per day when they harvest for others.

<sup>20</sup> Planning Commission, *Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-2007*. New Delhi 2002, Vol. II, p.452.

<sup>21</sup> *National Family and Health Survey - 2*, Institute of Population Studies, Bombay, 2001, pp. 130–132.

## References

Elwin, Verrier, *The Baiga*, Frank Allen and Unwin, London, 1939.

Elwin, Verrier, Notes on the Khonds, Verrier Elwin Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, 1935.

Government of Madhya Pradesh, Department of Tribal Development, *Sixth Tribal Sub-Plan for Primitive Tribes, The Baigas*, 1980-85, Bhopal.

Grigson, W.V., *Maria Gonds of Bastar*, Oxford University Press, London, 1927.

Nag, D.S., 'Socio-economic Appraisal of the Baiga Diet' *Conference on Tribal Welfare, Jagdalpur, 1955*.

Nag, D.S. *Tribal Economy – A study of the Baiga*, Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, Delhi, 1958.

National Family and Health Survey - 2, Institute of Population Studies, Bombay, 2001.

Pethya, B.P., *Collection and Marketing of Tendu Leaves in Sehore Division*, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, 1993.

Planning Commission, *Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-2007*, New Delhi 2002, Vol. II.

Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces*, Government Press, Nagpur, 1910.

# Women, Development and Local Governance in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh: Emerging Linkages

Amit Prakash

Development has been the *leitmotif* of much of the public discourse over the past half-century. Any discussion about society and/or polity is hardly complete without invoking development as either the root cause of the maladies under discussion or as panacea to all ills. In this context, the contemporary discussions on development have stressed the desirability of the creation of structures of local governance. While the democratic argument for the desirability of local governance structures as units of self-government is not new, the recent literature on local governance puts forth a functional dimension of improved delivery of development services as well. The earlier discussion on decentralisation, implying de-concentration of decision-making to local levels of government bureaucracy, has been replaced by local governance, implying not only local decision-making but also stressing the democratic aspects of the processes of decision-making with its corollaries of transparency and accountability. In the gamut of issues thrown up by this discussion of development and local governance, women form some of the key links, both as agents as well as beneficiaries of the development process.

This paper seeks to address the relationship between development, local governance and women with the help of some statistical patterns emerging from Uttar Pradesh. The paper is divided into three parts: *Part I* briefly discusses the conceptual meaning of the term local governance and the place of women in the paradigm of governance and development; *Part II* discusses

the central features of the local governance structures in India and then analyses the relationship between local governance and women's participation with the help of some available data for women at the local level; *Part III* utilises some of the Census data for the periods 1981–91 and 1991–2001 to map out a pattern between the operation of local governance institutions over the past decade and any shifts that may be noticed in development outcomes for the State of Uttar Pradesh, particularly for women.

## I

The development paradigm has undergone a number of changes since its emergence in the 1950s, even though many commentators use the term in a self-evident fashion. Along with the relative importance of market, state and its functionaries as the allocation mechanism for 'development', what has also changed is the role seen to be available to the various social groups and the centrality of women therein. Along with this, the development paradigm has also stressed various agencies/ levels as central in the promotion of 'development'. While at one point of time, the capacities of a central state were extolled, the contemporary literature on development stresses the importance of decentralisation and local governance. Besides, the central role arrogated to agencies of the state earlier has also undergone a fundamental change and the importance of civil society and community organisations is underlined. Therefore, it is salient to focus some attention on the trajectory of development discourse by which the term 'governance' has come to acquire currency in the contemporary literature.<sup>1</sup>

### **Development and the Concept of Governance**

The term governance was first used in development literature (in a sense different from its dictionary meaning) by a World Bank document<sup>2</sup> which suggested that the Bank's programmes of structural adjustment and investment in sub-Saharan Africa were ineffective due to a 'crisis of governance'. Good governance was equated with 'sound development management', defined as 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development'.<sup>3</sup> Its



four key dimensions were public sector management, accountability, the legal framework for development, and information and transparency.<sup>4</sup> The managerial and apolitical content of development in such a formulation of governance was closely related to the neo-liberal economic policies of the Bretton Woods institutions and both "made a case for democratic capitalist societies, governed by a minimal state".<sup>5</sup>

However, via the route of contestation by academic writings as well as popular protests of the notion of economic growth<sup>6</sup> as development, the meaning and concept of governance has undergone a considerable metamorphosis over the past decade. These newer definitions of governance talk of "de-centring and the pluralisation of the state into a number of levels that stretch horizontally from civil society and market organisations on the one hand, and vertically from the transnational to local self government institutions on the other, is considered to be a welcome step for several reasons"<sup>7</sup>. Thus, notions of "participation, accountability, governmental responsiveness and even broader concerns such as those of social equality and justice"<sup>8</sup> have become an integral part of the content of the concept of governance.

### **Women, Development and Governance**

Issues about women's equal participation in the political systems have been debated for a long time although focused attention on the central importance of locating women in development programmes is of relatively recent origin. "The idea of integrating Third World women into aid practice first emerged in the USA in the early 1970s when development practitioners and researchers began pushing for greater representation of women in aid agencies".<sup>9</sup> The argument put forth was that the major development programmes of aid agencies as well as international organisations were skewed in the favour of men and adequate attention and resources were not devoted to ensuring that women were equal beneficiaries of the programmes. This led to a US-led effort by aid agencies to 'integrate' women into their "existing developmental practices under orthodox notions of development".<sup>10</sup> Despite the

significant role of the United Nations (UN), along with many of its agencies such as the UNDP, ILO, FAO, UNIFEM, etc. in development discourse and practice, the UN declaration that announced the First Development Decade (1961–71) had no specific mention of women. The declaration for the Second Development Decade had a brief reference concerning the centrality of ensuring “full integration of women in the total development effort”.<sup>11</sup> ‘Integration’ thus became a catch-cry of aid agencies in the 1970s and early 1980s, fuelled, to some extent, by the axiomatic assumption that women’s lives would improve once they had been integrated into the development process.

While approaches such as ‘gender and development’ (GAD) and ‘women and the environment’ have crept into the discourse “... and despite the fact that the concept of integration is now being challenged, integration still futures strongly in the rhetoric of most aid agencies”<sup>12</sup>. Firmly located in the modernisation paradigm, this approach hardly addressed the question of development in relation to women. The few scholars who did separately talk of women theorised that “modernisation and development would lead to a replacement of the traditional extended family, the site of virtually all social activities, by modern nuclear family, separated from the public sphere of production. Within the family there would be an increasing division of labour, with women and men specialising in different spheres of household activities”.<sup>13</sup> This approach thus hardly dealt with the question of women and development as there was inherent faith in the neutrality and equitability of rationalist economic growth.

This was also the precise question over which intellectual departure from the modernisation approach emerged. Developments experience from many parts of the world showed that the development process of the modernisation kind was not gender-neutral and economic growth often either left women out completely or worsened their situation. New formulations were put forth to address these issues which while continuing the belief in the modernisation logic, questioned the ability of the same to benefit women.

The intellectual momentum sparked off from this contestation underscored the importance of focusing on women in development programmes and has thrown up a number of approaches which have considerably enriched the analysis of gender relations in the society, including questions related to development.<sup>14</sup> A full analysis of all these paradigms is beyond the scope of this paper. It may suffice to note that the contemporary development discourse and its treatment of women and development issues speak of an engendered governance paradigm.

The contemporary gender and governance paradigm throws up issues related to participation, empowerment, and development. Furthermore, stress is laid on an institutions defined as both "consensual arrangements, conventions, and codes of conduct that govern the patterns of individual and collective behaviour . . . that are enforced through social practise or custom" as well organisational arrangements.<sup>15</sup>

The rest of the paper will focus on two of these issues: participation, which is a central concern in local governance; and the patterns in development outcomes, particularly for women, during the time institutions of local governance have been put in place and have been functioning in the context of some empirical material from UP.

## II

In light of the discussion in Section I, local governance may be defined as local institutional structures created for the ensuring participation of the local population in governing local affairs in a transparent and accountable manner. Further, in view of the stress of the conceptual framework of governance on social equity and justice, such institutional structures must be so structured as to ensure that women and weaker sections have full structural opportunity to play an equal role in all the affairs of the local community.

Keeping these definitional goals in mind, a brief overview of the structural arrangements for local governance in India is important. The Constitution of India, in the Directive Principles of State Policy, provides that "The State shall take necessary steps to

organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government".<sup>16</sup> However, in view of the fact that these provisions were enumerated in Part IV, the Directive Principles of State Policy and not Parts V or VI of the Constitution (dealing with the institutions of Union and State governments), the panchayats remained a pious hope until the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

The 1990s' initiative was rooted in a series of earlier attempts. The first major initiative towards establishment of institutions of local governance in India was the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, which had conceived of Panchayats as a body representing the interests of the village community but also taking up development programmes at the village level. The "gram panchayat ... was therefore perceived as an implementing agency of government in a specific, namely, developmental sphere. In 1977, the Ashok Mehta Committee recommended a fundamental change to this concept of panchayati raj. It asked for transformation of panchayats from an implementing agency to a political institution".<sup>18</sup> The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was the culmination of a series of efforts in this direction, whose main features are:

1. Panchayats will be considered as decentralised political institutions.
2. The Gram Sabha, constituted by voters of the village, would be the main deliberative body, to which the panchayat would be accountable.
3. All there tiers, gram panchayat, *taluka*/block panchayat and zilla parishad would be elected through direct adult franchise and have a life of five years, unless dissolved sooner. In case of dissolution, re-election is to be held within six months.
4. A separate State election commission would oversee elections to panchayats in each State while State finance commissions would recommend the devolution of resources to the panchayats.

5. Besides the obligation on the part of the Union and States government to provide adequate functioning to the panchayats, they have powers to raise their own resources.

6. Some States, mainly Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have provisions for *nyaya* panchayat for resolution of disputes.

7. One-third of the seats at all the three levels are reserved for women, of whom one-third would be from the SC/ST community.<sup>19</sup>

While the 73rd Amendment lays down the minimal framework, States are free to delve further towards greater powers and authority being devolved to the PRIs. Hence, a variety of additional provisions have been added in the confirmatory legislations of the many States, which go beyond the framework laid down by the Constitutional amendment, while other States have taken a rather minimalist view of the matter. Further, the 73rd Amendment itself is not without problems.<sup>20</sup> While the "objective of the act is to build the panchayat as an effective decentralised political institution at the grass roots level, the division of functions in its 11th schedule makes it in reality, essentially an implementation agency for developmental activities ... [Further,] the resource raising capacity of the panchayats are limited".<sup>21</sup>

As regards the question of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, "the founding fathers of our Constitution did a magnificent job in ensuring gender justice in the supreme law of the country, the Constitution. The Preamble to the Constitution, *inter alia*, assures justice, social, economic and political, equality of status and opportunity and dignity of the individual. The Fundamental Rights guarantee women's equality under law. Articles 14 and 15 pronounce the right of men and women to equality before law and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex by the state. Article 15 forbids the state to subject any citizen to any disability, liability or restriction on the basis of sex in access to, or use of, any public place or service. Article 16 provides to both men and women equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment under the state.

Taken collectively, these provisions spell out the basic right to equality of women in India as individuals. The Directive Principles of State Policy provide for affirmative action for securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women, equal pay for equal work, protection of health and strength of workers — men, women and children — from abuse, just and humane conditions of work, raising the level of nutrition, maternity relief and conditions of work ensuring decent standards of life and full enjoyment of leisure. Many of these provisions were incorporated in the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>22</sup>

### **Uttar Pradesh**

The geographical area today known as Uttar Pradesh (UP) had undergone many political realignments over the centuries under various dynasties and rulers. It acquired its present shape as a result of a number of reorganisation under the British Rule during the 19th Century. It was reorganised and named the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1901.<sup>23</sup> The name was shortened to the United Provinces in 1935. In January 1950, the United Provinces was renamed Uttar Pradesh.<sup>24</sup> which continued without any major modifications until the creation of the state of Uttaranchal from the UP hill region of Uttar Pradesh on 9 November 2000.

The State of Uttar Pradesh has been marked by regional imbalances in social and economic development. "In terms of economic indicators like agricultural productivity, infrastructural facilities, industrial growth, the Uttar Pradesh's economy can be categorised into four regions; Western, Eastern, Central, and Bundelkhand. The Western Uttar Pradesh is agriculturally prosperous. It is relatively more industrialised and has seen greater degree of urbanisation. At the other end is Bundelkhand with low agricultural growth, less number of industrial units, lesser gross value of industrial products making this region as the least developed in the state".<sup>25</sup>

As far as the demographic profile of UP in the 2001 Census<sup>26</sup> is concerned, the population of the state is 166,052,859 — 16.16% of the national population, with a decadal growth rate of 25.8%.

The male and female decadal growth rates of population in UP during 1991–2001 were 24.31% and 27.5%, respectively. The population density of UP in 2001 was 689 persons per square kilometre. The sex ratio in 2001 was 898. The literacy rate according to the 2001 Census was 57.36% while the female literacy rate was 42.98 %. As far as the health indicators in the state were concerned, infant mortality rate in 1991–92 was 98 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy at birth in 1991–92 was 57.14 years for males and 52.84 for females.<sup>27</sup>

In the macro economic indicators of UP, its per capita income of the state in 1994–95 stood at Rs. 5,331 (India: Rs. 8,339). Net State Domestic Product for the same year was Rs. 79,024 crore. The structure of state income shows that the contribution of agriculture was 43 % though the sector still sustains 78 % of the total working force (1991). This shows the continued pressure of working population in the primary sector. The share of industry in State income was 20 % while the Services sector contributed 37 % of the State income.<sup>28</sup> “At the time of Independence only a few states were ahead of Uttar Pradesh in development ... [today] the state is was behind...” in almost all the development indicators. The State “has made inadequate efforts to raise resources for development and/or has not deployed them in a productive manner”.<sup>29</sup>

Politically, UP has been one of the most important states of the Indian Union. It sends 80 representatives to the Lok Sabha, making it central in the scheme of the Union government as well. The State has been an arena of intense contestation of the political area by hitherto disadvantaged castes/social groups leading to massive churning, often assisted by the statutory requirements of the new PRIs.

### **Women and Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

As has been noted earlier, participation is an important component of local governance and two elections to the three tiers of the PRIs in UP conducted in 1995 and 2000 would be the one of

the indicators for evaluating the level of participation of women in these institutions.

The data about women participation in terms of membership of the various levels of PRIs in some select States has been tabulated in Table 1. Clearly, UP does not demonstrate a good record in terms of proportion of women amongst members of PRIs at various levels. It has not only failed to fulfil the Constitutional requirement that one-third of the membership of PRIs at all levels should be women but the overall level of representation of women in PRIs is a meagre 16%. This is despite the fact that studies have reported that "women's entry and 'winning edge' over male contestants has been proven beyond reservations. It reflects their capacity and potential to actively participate in matters of concern for local people".<sup>30</sup> Clearly, party political considerations of winning as many seats as possible is not the main factor behind such poor representation of women (as may have been expected in the highly contested political space of UP).

The poor levels of representation of women acquire greater seriousness in view of the fact that even the low levels of representation do not appear to reflect some degree of political empowerment for women. Mere membership of a PRI is not sufficient guarantee for substantive participation of women in these bodies. There is sufficient literature documenting the problems that women have faced in discharging their duties as members of these bodies. Further, the patriarchal bias in society has not been particularly conducive for women's active participation in PRIs. Even worse, scholars have documented the fact that women are proxy members while the real functions are discharged by their male relatives. 'Panch-Pati' and 'Sarpanch-pati' have emerged as significant political actors on the UP PRI scene.<sup>31</sup> In view of these factors, it is important to review some data about the actual survey of women and their participation in PRIs.

Amongst the few surveys of this kind that have been conducted in UP, the one conducted by Ekatra — an NGO — in the year 2000 in four states of north India at the International Centre for Ethnic



**Table 1**  
**Women Representation in PRIs in Select States**

	Gram Panchayats		Panchayat Samiti		Zilla Parishad		All Three Tiers	
	Women	Percent	Women	Percent	Women	Percent	Women	Percent
AP	78,000	34	5,420	37	363	33	83,783	34
Bihar	9,020	45	850	40	81	40	9,951	44
Kerala	3,883	38	563	36	104	35	4,550	38
Maharashtra	1,01,182	33	1,174	33	587	33	1,02,943	33
MP	15,6181	33	3,169	35	338	33	1,59,688	33
Rajasthan	33,566	30	1,740	32	331	32	35,637	30
UP	1,20,591	15	13,865	23	634	24	1,35,090	16
All India	6,94,161	27	38,597	30	4,046	30	7,36,804	27

Source: Rustogi, Preet, *Gender Bias and Discrimination Against Women: What do Different Indicators Say?*, New Delhi: UNIFEM, 2003, p. 66.

Studies, Colombo stands out for its relevance to the discussion at hand.<sup>32</sup>

As far as provision of reservation of seats in the various tiers of PRIs to encourage women's participation are concerned, respondents from UP demonstrated the poorest knowledge of such provisions. Only 42 % of the respondents were aware of reservation for women in the PRIs while 44 % were not aware of any such provisions. When contrasted with the figures for the other three north Indian States surveyed (Table 2), the situation in UP was poor.

**Table 2**  
**Responses to Some Select Questions concerning**  
**participation in PRIs in the north Indian States (in %)**

	UP		Delhi		HP		Punjab	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Knowledge about reservation for women in PRIs	42.2	44.0	77.0	22.0	59.0	28.0	70.3	14.7
Elected Members who have attended Panchayat meetings	93.0	7.0	100.0	0.0	95.8	4.2	90.1	9.9
Self-motivation as a factor in contesting Panchayat seat	76		30		38.4		38.9	
Voting in the past	91.3	8.8	91.0	9.0	96.7	3.3	85.0	15.0
Does the state represent you	75.4	10.0	51.0	38.0	67.2	27.7	71.0	26.6

Source: Tambiah, Yasmin, ed., *Women and Governance in South Asia: Re-imagining the State*, Colombo, ICES, 2002, pp. 335-43.

However, in response to other questions concerning participation of women in PRIs, the respondents from UP reported a brighter picture. Amongst the respondents surveyed, 93% had attended meetings of the Panchayats, which did not compare too badly with the other three states surveyed (Table 2). Whether such attendances at meetings amount to women's empowerment is an open question, particularly in view of the intensity of political competition in UP and the societal context wherein duties and responsibilities of the elected women PRI members have been reported to be discharged by their male relatives.

The survey also tried to probe into the contention that most women members of the PRIs were elected at the behest of the male members of their respective families (often due to the fact that the male members could not contest due to reservation of seats) and were thus proxy members only. On this count, the survey revealed quite a different picture as 76 % of the respondents from UP chose self-motivation as the primary reason for their contesting for the seat (the other choices were reserved seat, people's support, family support and party support). Further, compared with the other three north Indian States, this figure is much higher, raising suspicions about its veracity.

Apart from participation in the PRIs as members, the survey also tried to gauge the involvement of women in the political process by asking if they had voted in the past. Once again a higher proportion of respondents from UP responded in the affirmative. Ninety-one per cent of the respondents indicated that they had voted in the past, a figure surpassed only by the respondents from Himachal Pradesh.

Further, the sense of involvement in PRIs and other structures of governance was also the highest in UP with 75.4 % of the women recording that the state does represent them. Once again, none of the three other States found women PRIs members relating to the state in such a large proportion (Table 2). This figure is once again in consonance with the overall trend but the validity of responses to such obtuse questions remains open to debate.

In view of the overall discussion in this part, it may be surmised that as far as participation in PRIs is concerned, UP has not fared poorly. Questions about the quality of such participation will remain but there is inherent merit in participation in the political process itself if assertion of equal rights by women is the goal. One has to only recall the parliamentary and assembly elections in UP during the 1990s and the social churning that it has thrown up to buttress the point.

### III

#### **Development and Local Governance<sup>33</sup>**

Governance, local governance in particular, is often seen as a tool for generation of a variety of benefits for the general population, including the weaker and marginalised sections and women. Policies encouraging the creation and operation of structures of local governance are often used to generate goods such as transparency, accountability and empowerment, many of which are linked to development outcomes. While robust conceptual linkages have been offered by both, independent scholars as well as international organisations such as the UNDP, it remains difficult to establish such linkages on the ground with the help of concrete data.

However, some micro-level studies (mostly of a few villages or development blocks) have indeed developed and demonstrated such linkages leading to the necessity of examining and analysing the possibility of such linkage at a more macro level. This is what this section of the paper hopes to do with the help of some data recently released from Census 2001. Here, it must be pointed out that an analysis of any unit of India smaller than a state is a difficult task because very little data is available at sub-state and district level. Hence, detailed correlation between development outcomes and local governance is not a plausible task.

This section seeks to analyse if a pattern exists between the functioning of local governance structures and development outcomes. For this purpose, outcomes of three central indicators,<sup>34</sup> namely, sex-ratio, literacy and employment profile in UP between

1981–91 (when local governance structures, i.e., Panchayati Raj institutions did not exist in the present form) and 1991–2001 (during which local governance structures were put in place and in fact, two elections to the PRIs have since been held in UP). The data examined below delineates a pattern of positive development outcomes on these three heads during the time PRIs have been in existence and operation.

### **Sex-Ratio**

While sex-ratio in itself only indicates the ratio between male and female population in a certain geographical area, it is a useful indicator to proxy for a vast number of socio-economic processes. Many studies have documented the impact of a variety of factors — from economic status of the target family to availability of medical facilities — on the changes in sex ratio. Besides, it can also be argued that an improvement in sex-ratio is not only an outcome of a better effectiveness of development policies but also reflects rising empowerment levels and would contribute to encouraging the equality of women. Therefore, sex-ratio has been used as a proxy for the overall outcome of the development policies and the influences that may have emerged therein due the existence and operation of local governance structures.

As far as the overall averages of UP are concerned, during the period when statutory PRIs did not exist (1981–91), the sex ratio declined from 886 women per 1,000 men to 879 women per 1,000 men. However, once the statutory PRIs were created and were operationalised (1991–2001), there was a significant improvement in the sex ratio from 879 in 1991 to 898 women per 1,000 men in 2001.

In view of the fact that UP is a large state in terms of both population as well as area, many of the average figures hide significant disparities. This issue becomes particularly relevant when one is analysing the developmental outcomes at the local level. However, in view of the fact that UP comprises 70 districts, each divided into several blocks, a full analysis of development outcomes at the sub-district level (for that matter the district level) will require

much more time and space than that is allowed by this paper. However, inclusion of some texture of the regional disparities is central to the task presently being undertaken. In order to reconcile the two divergent concerns enumerated here, the districts of UP have been divided into four 'developmental regions': eastern UP, western UP, central UP, and Bundelkhand.<sup>35</sup>

There are significant differences in the sex ratio of the four 'developmental regions' of UP (Figure 1). Three 'developmental regions' — Central UP, Eastern UP and Bundelkhand — closely followed the trends of the state averages. All three showed a decline in sex ratios over the period 1981–91 when the PRIs did not exist and showed substantial improvements during 1991–2001, the period during which PRIs were created and operationalised. The developmental region of western UP showed a positive trend during both periods with one significant difference. While the sex ratio in western UP during the period when PRIs did not exist (1981–91) had shown a modest improvement, during the latter period when the PRIs have started functioning, the improvements are substantially larger, as depicted in Figure 1.

In view of the pattern seen above, there appears to be a positive correlation between the establishment of PRIs and improvement of sex ratios in UP.

## **Literacy**

The importance of literacy in the overall developmental scenario of any state or region can hardly be overstated. It is a central link not only in sustainable progress of economic development policies but also in the generation and maintenance of social sector development. Further, it is now conventional wisdom that female literacy has a salient and irreplaceable role to play in social sector development and the empowerment of women. "... in the context of female education in India, researchers in recent years have developed a large body of empirical evidence demonstrating how education can promote greater capabilities, such as the freedom to participate in political and economic processes; use new technologies; protect oneself against exploitation (legal, economic,

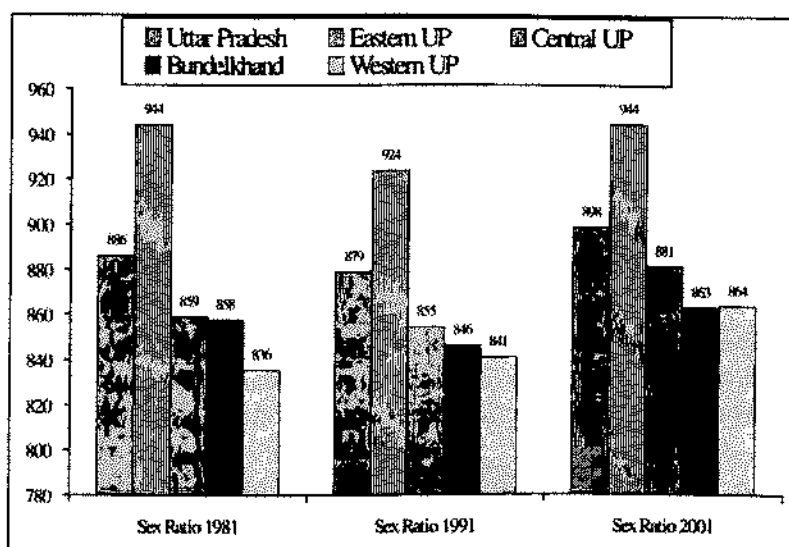


Figure 1 : Change in Sex Ratio in UP 1981 - 2001

sexual); exercise personal mobility; attain higher social status; and increase child and maternal well-being".<sup>36</sup>

The patterns of correlation for the literacy figures for UP and its region are the same as those for sex ratio. During the period 1981–91 (when statutory PRIs had not yet been established) the total literacy figures for UP show an increase of about six percentage points – from 27.4 % in 1981 to 33.1 % in 1991. However, during the period 1991–2001, i.e., the period during which the statutory PRIs had started functioning, the same improvement is of 13 percentage points; to 46.83 % in 2001.<sup>37</sup> This significant rise in the performance of the literacy policy in UP can, at least partially, be attributed to the establishment and functioning of the statutory PRIs in UP over 1991–2001 (Figure 2).

All the 'developmental regions' of UP demonstrate a similar pattern as far as the growth in total literacy rates are concerned. During the period 1981–91, the best performance in literacy in UP was noticed in Central UP where the literacy rates rose by more than 7 percentage points – from 27.08 % in 1981 to 34.7% in 1991. During the period 1991–2001, this developmental region almost

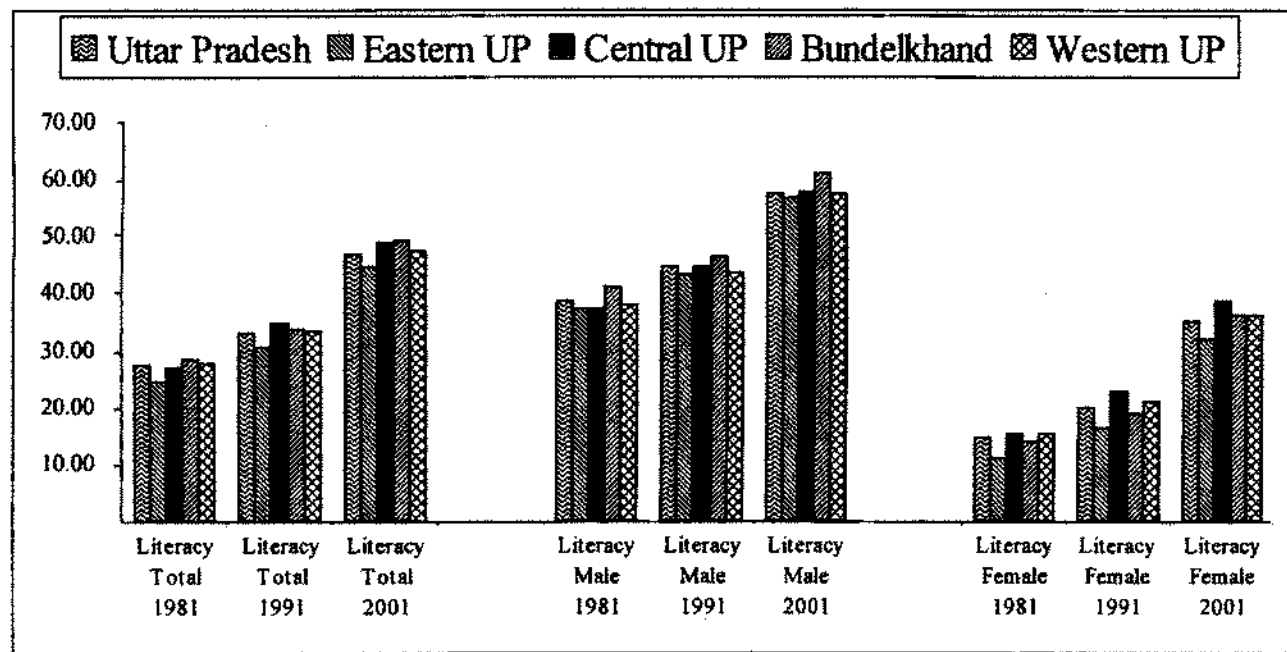


Figure 2 : Growth of Literacy in UP 1981 - 2001



doubled its decadal achievements by clocking up a growth of more than 14 percentage points to 48.94%. Similarly, all other 'developmental regions' had demonstrated a decadal growth of 5-6 % between 1981 and 1991. However, between 1991 and 2001, all the 'developmental regions' of UP showed a decadal growth in literacy between 14 and 15 %. Bundelkhand, which was the lowest performer between 1981 and 1991, surpassed all the other 'developmental regions' with a decadal growth of over 15 % as far as literacy was concerned.

Thus total literacy rates, which are undoubtedly salient in determining the future developmental scenario of UP and its 'developmental regions', appear to demonstrate a positive correlation with the creation of PRI structures.

Historical trends in India in general and UP in particular have shown that the average figures of the total population often hide a significant degree of gender disparity. However, a perusal of Figure 2 shows that this is not the case for the literacy figures, particularly during the decade 1991-2001, the time during which the PRI structures had started functioning. Although the overall female literacy figures are still substantially lower than the male literacy figures, the growth in female literacy has been higher than the male literacy figures.

During the decade 1981-91, the female literacy figures for UP had increased by only 5.6 % — from 14.42 % in 1981 to 20.03 % in 1991. However, during the decade of PRIs' functioning, 1991-2001, the decadal growth in female literacy was of almost 15%, to 35.01% in 2001. Further, the significant gap in literacy outcomes between total literacy and female literacy which can be noticed from the data for 1981 and 1991 was practically erased in 2001. The rate of improvement in literacy of the female population of UP between 1991 and 2001 was practically the same as that total population. In fact, the decadal improvement in the literacy of male population during 1991-2001 was lower than that of female population at 12.7 per cent. This significant turn-around and achievement on the front of female literacy definitely points to a correlation with the structures

of local governance. By now many studies<sup>38</sup> have documented that the most important re-orientation in developmental priorities at the level of PRIs due to the presence of women as members and/or *sarpanchs* has been that social developmental areas such as literacy, primary health and education have found greater emphasis.

"The women leaders have been playing a key role in the linkages between the state and the people. Most of the general developmental works like water supply, schools, roads, and electricity arrangements, and also higher-level official works have been completed under the influence of the women legislators. Almost all women legislators have been able to provide such general facilities for society as a whole in their areas during their term. A few women legislators could also get the developmental work done on a large scale due to their position as ministers, though there have been only one or two such women legislators at a time. Their role, however, appears to be similar to the role of their male counterparts"<sup>39</sup>

In view of this, it is perhaps not an over-interpretation to contend that the substantial improvement in the literacy profile of women in UP during the period 1991–2001 was at least in part, due to the functioning of PRIs.

Turning to the 'developmental regions' of UP, the impetus of growth in female literacy during the decade 1991–2001 was equally balanced in all the 'developmental regions' of UP — something which cannot be noticed during 1981–91. Bundelkhand led the 'developmental regions' with a 17 % decadal growth in female literacy. In fact, the highest improvement in total literacy in Bundelkhand, as noted earlier, was led by the high achievements in the female literacy figures. This is something which has always been a rarity in the developmental scenario of India.

In all the other 'developmental regions' of UP, the decadal improvement rate for female literacy stayed between 15 and 16 % as opposed to 12 to 14 % decadal improvement in male literacy figures. Once again, it was the good performance in female literacy figures in all the 'developmental regions' of UP which contributed to the achievements in total literacy figures.

## Employment

One of the central links in the overall developmental outcomes is the availability of gainful employment. While improvements in social development figures like literacy and health are central in the possibility of generating employment, long-term achievements in the social development profile of any State or region cannot be sustained unless economic development is ensured leading to employment and income. Further, economic empowerment is a crucial link in female empowerment which remains an important component of most development policies. Hence, the third indicator chosen for this analysis is that of employment, particularly that of female employment.

The employment rate of UP had shown a negative turn over the decade 1981–91 from 31.8 % in 1981 to 29.73 % in 1991. However, over the decade during which PRIs were created and started functioning, the employment rate for UP has risen to 32.6% — higher than the 1981 levels. Amongst the development regions of UP, like the other indicators, Bundelkhand showed the greatest improvement in employment rate. During the pre-PRIs decade of 1981–91, Bundelkhand had recorded a small decline in employment rate from 34.4% in 1981 to 32.64% in 1991. However, during the decade 1991–2001, there was a substantial increase in employment rate from 32.6% in 1981 to 39.4% in 2001. Eastern UP and Western UP recorded a similar pattern, though the improvement in employment rate in these two ‘developmental regions’ was more modest. While Eastern UP had recorded a small (2.6%) decline in employment rate during the pre-PRI phase from 32.1% in 1981 to 29.5% in 1991, during the decade 1991–2001, a substantial (5.5%) improvement was recorded (35% in 2001). Western UP similarly had shown a small decline (0.55%) in the pre-PRIs phase of 1981–91 but a reasonable increase (2.2%) in employment rate during the PRI-phase (Figure 3). Interestingly, amongst all the indicators examined in this paper, the only category which recorded a decline during the PRIs phase was that of employment rate in Central UP. Employment rate in Central UP had declined from 33.2% in 1981 to 30.6% in 1991 (pre-PRI phase) while during 1991–2001, the decline was by 0.96% – to 29.6% in 2001.

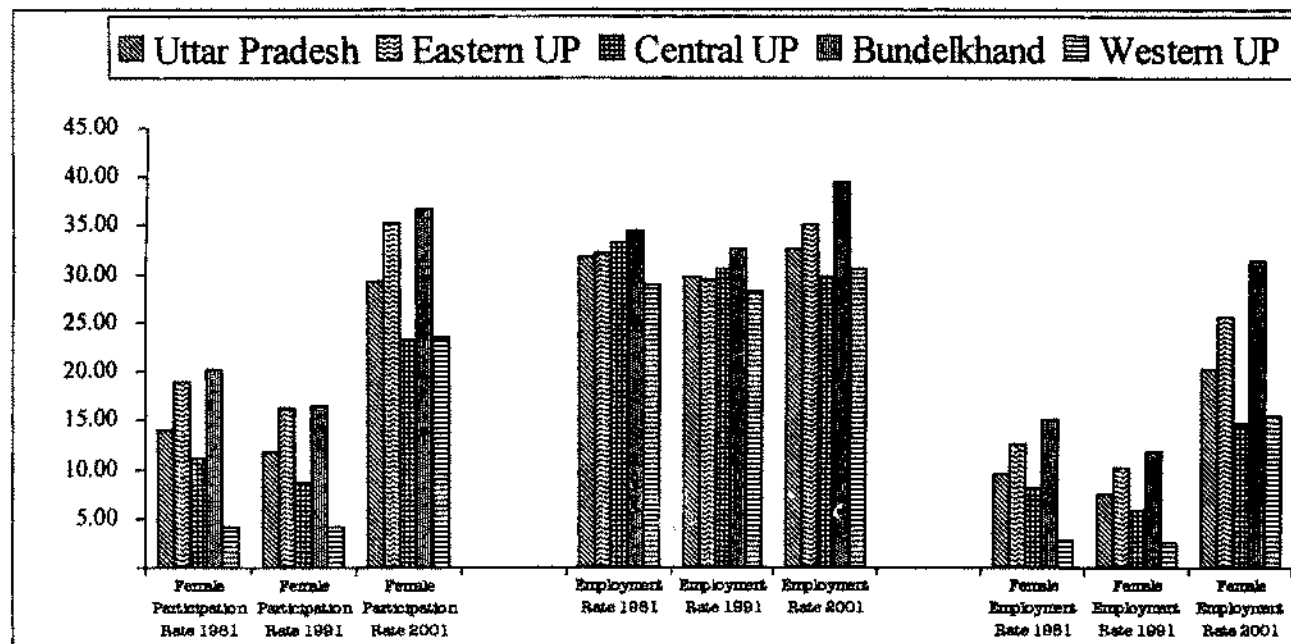


Figure 3 : Employment and Female Employment in UP 1981 - 2001

Turning to female employment rate, Figure 3 shows that there was a significant improvement recorded during the PRIs-phase. While the pre-PRIs phase of 1981-91 had recorded a decline (by 2.1%) in female employment rate from 9.57% in 1981 to 7.45% in 1991, during the PRIs-phase, there was substantial improvement (12.8%) in the female employment rate to 20.27%. Similar pattern was repeated for all the 'developmental regions' of the State. Once again, Bundelkhand led the 'developmental regions' in the gains on the front of female employment levels. While female employment rate had recorded a decline of 3.37% in Bundelkhand during the pre-PRIs phase, during the PRIs-phase (Figure 3), this 'developmental region' of UP recorded an improvement of almost 20 per cent as far as female employment rate was concerned. The relevant figures for female employment rate in Bundelkhand in 1981, 1991 and 2001 were 15.09%, 11.72% and 31.29%, respectively. Similar, the three other 'developmental regions' had recorded a decline ranging from half per cent to 3.3 per cent during the pre-PRIs phase of 1981-91 while during the PRIs-phase of 1991-2001, there were significant improvements in female employment rate in Western UP, Eastern UP and Central UP ranging between 9 per cent and 15.4 per cent. The significant gains recorded in the category of female employment rate in UP and its 'developmental regions' seem to be leading the averages for the relevant region, as was noticed in the other indicators.

Another significant indicator of the level of female employment in any given region or State is that of female participation in the workforce, i.e., the proportion of women in the workforce. On this indicator also, the pre-PRIs phase has recorded moderate decline while during the PRIs-phase substantial improvements were noticed. In 1981, female participation rate in the workforce was 14.1 per cent, which declined to 11.73 per cent in 1991. However, during the PRIs-phase, the same figures had increased to 29.4 per cent in 2001 – an increase of 17.6 per cent during 1991-2001 over the pre-PRIs decade of 1981-91.

Similar patterns were repeated for all the 'developmental regions' of UP. Once again, Bundelkhand led all other 'developmental

regions' in the improvements in the rate of female participation in the workforce during the decade 1991–2001. While a decline of 3.7% was recorded in the pre-PRIs phase of 1981–91, the PRIs-phase recorded an improvement of more than 20% (Figure 3). Similarly, the other three 'developmental regions' of UP, Eastern UP, Western UP and Central UP recorded an improvement of 19%, 19.5% and 14.6%, respectively.

Thus overall, there were positive gains in all the three areas which have been discussed above during the decade of 1991–2001. While it is acknowledged that it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between the establishment and functioning of PRIs and the gains recorded in the development outcomes, the improvements in the three areas discussed above far surpass any gains made in the decades prior to the establishment of PRIs. Further, these positive outcomes cannot be easily attributed to a general upturn in the economy and policy process on account of the fact that the neo-liberal policies being pursued over the past couple of decades detract from state expenditure on social sector rather than encourage such an effort.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While there have been significant debates on the relationship between processes of development and the social group which might be its targeted beneficiaries over the past decades, the broad direction of the debates has been towards greater participation, democratisation and inclusiveness. The contemporary paradigm of local governance certainly underlines these factors in the development process. Consequently, many marginalised social groups, women in particular, have been able to assert their due place and play a more meaningful role in the development process.

As far as UP is concerned, there have been significant gains during the period of operation of the newly created structures of local governance in the State. The performance of UP on the indicators of development have not only been positive for all the development regions during 1991–2001, the rate of growth has been far higher than the period 1981–91. While it is difficult to establish

a direct causal relationship between this pattern of positive growth in development indicators and the operation of local governance structures in the form of PRIs, the high growth levels during the operation of PRIs points to a positive correlative pattern. Further, if this pattern is read with the evidence from other micro-level studies (discussed earlier) about the change in orientation of PRIs under women leadership towards a greater development function, the link appears to be stronger. However, a more detailed micro-level study across the State is required for such linkages to be delineated.

While the functional and democratic aspects of PRIs in encouraging women's empowerment appear to be a rosy story all along, it must also be stressed in the same breath that PRIs are also not a panacea for all ills. It has been pointed out earlier that merely being elected to PRIs has not meant that women have broken away from the shackles of patriarchy. In many cases, the male relatives continue to exercise power and discharge responsibilities of the elected women PRIs members. Further, it must also be stressed that the bold and far reaching experiment of statutory PRIs may be a rather progressive step but it has to operate in a societal milieu of intense caste-politics contestation of UP. Such a situation may not be most conducive to engendering the public life at the grassroots in UP. However, in view of the rather limited successes of other models till date, perhaps, given sufficient time and resources, PRIs will be the single most important tool for both, women empowerment and development at the local levels.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the changes in the trajectory of development discourse and the relative emphases on the state, market and civil society, see Amit Prakash, *Good Governance and Development Policies: A Comparative Study of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh*, forthcoming under the auspices of Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long Term Perspective Study*, World Bank, Washington DC, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, *Governance and Development*, World Bank, Washington DC, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Jayal, Niraja Gopal, 'Locating Gender in the Governance Discourse' in Martha Nussbaum, Amrita Basu, Yasmin Tambiah and Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Essays in Gender and Governance*, UNDP, New Delhi, 2003, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Along with its low focus on the resultant the social inequity and unsustainable growth.

<sup>7</sup> Chandhoke, Neera, 'Governance and the Pluralisation of the State: Implications for Democratic Citizenship' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxiii, no. 28, July 12-18, 2003, p. 2957.

<sup>8</sup> Jayal, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Koczberski, Gina, 'Women in Development: A Critical Analysis' in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 19, no. 3, 1998, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Kabeer, Naila, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Koczberski, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Kabeer, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the approaches are WID WAD, GID GAD, etc. However, space constraints and focus of the paper preclude a detailed recap of these approaches.

<sup>15</sup> Mathur, Kuldeep, 'Neo-liberal Agenda and Study of Institutions' in *Development and Change*, Vol. 1 no. 2, July-December 1996, p.171.

<sup>16</sup> Constitution of India, Article 40.

<sup>17</sup> It may be noted that earlier attempts between 1950 and 1992 by most States to create Panchayats were a creation of the respective State governments and hence, open to a wide variety of manipulations by the State governments. Also, they had a very wide variety of structures (from 2 to 4 tiers) and uneven distribution of powers with respect to the State government concerned. Further, there have also been cases wherein the State governments (though the State legislatures) have created a reasonably empowered panchayat structure but subsequent governments have found them inconvenient and therefore, had amended the relevant provisions of the State law to make the panchayats more pliable. Therefore, the pre-1990s phase of the panchayats cannot be seen to be fulfilling the constitutional requirement of being units of self-government.

<sup>18</sup> Mohanty, Bidyut, 'Panchayati Raj, 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and Women' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxx, no. 52, December 30, 1995, pp.3346.



<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Some of the major problems have been ably pointed out and discussed in Poornima Vyasulu & Vinod Vyasulu, 'Women in Panchayati Raj: Grass Roots Democracy in Malgudi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 25, 1999. While the case study context is different, many of the issues discussed are the same as in UP.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Bandyopadhyay, D., 'Gender and Governance in India' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxv, no. 31, July 29-August 4, 2000, pp. 2698.

<sup>23</sup> *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (Chairman: S Fazl Ali), Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1955, para 19.

<sup>24</sup> *India 2001: A Reference Manual*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2001, p. 756.

<sup>25</sup> Information given by the UP government at its website <http://www.infoindia.org/>.

<sup>26</sup> All figures about the Census 2001 have been taken from *Census of India: Provisional Population Totals: India – Paper I of 2001*, Census Commissioner of India, New Delhi, 2001. The data for Census 2001 is also available at the website of Census Commissioner of India at <http://www.censusindia.net/>.

<sup>27</sup> For a full analysis of the developmental imbalances in UP, please see Amit Prakash, *Good Governance and Development Policy: A Comparative Study of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra*, forthcoming.

<sup>28</sup> CMIE, *Profiles of States*, CMIE, Mumbai, 1997, p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> Shankar, Kripa, 'Development of UP: tasks for the New Government' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxvii, no. 22, June 1-7, 2002, p. 2122.

<sup>30</sup> Rustogi, Preet, *Gender Bias and Discrimination Against Women: What do Different Indicators Say?*, UNIFEM, New Delhi, 2003, p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> See Leiten, G.K., and Ravi Srivastava, *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh*, Sage, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 196-201, 250-55.

<sup>32</sup> The report of the survey has been published as Tambiah, Yasmin, (ed.), *Women and Governance in South Asia: Re-imagining the State*, Colombo: ICES, 2002. Owing to the relative paucity of surveys which have relevance for this discussion, this section has depended heavily for its data set on the results of this survey and its published report.

<sup>33</sup> The State of Uttar Pradesh in this paper refers to the present-day State of Uttar Pradesh, i.e., the residuary State after the creation of UP Hills as a separate State of Uttaranchal.

<sup>34</sup> The possibility of detailed analysis of more indicators is limited by the fact that detailed socio-economic tables for Census 2001 are yet to be published. Further, updated developmental data on issues such as health, education, etc. are not yet available beyond mid-1990s.

<sup>35</sup> The classification of the districts into 'developmental regions' has been derived from many sources, particularly, the studies undertaken by CMIE and UP government. The districts according to the classification used in this paper are as follows:

Western UP: Agra, Aligarh, Auraiya, Baghpat, Bareilly, Bijnor, Budaun, Bulandshahr, Etah, Etawah, Farukhabad, Firozabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad, Hathras, Jyotiba Phule Nagar, Kannauj, Mainpuri, Mathura, Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Pilibhit, Rampur, Saharanpur, Shahjahanpur.

Central UP: Barabanki, Fatehpur, Hardoi, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur Nagar, Kheri, Lucknow, Raebareli, Sitapur, Unnao.

Eastern UP: Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Azamgarh, Bahraich, Ballia, Balrampur, Basti, Chandauli, Deoria, Faizabad, Ghazipur, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur, Kaushambi, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Mau, Mirzapur, Pratapgarh, Sant Kabir Nagar, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Shravasti, Siddharthnagar, Sonbhadra, Sultanpur, Varanasi.

Bundelkhand: Banda, Chitrakoot, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Mahoba.

<sup>36</sup> McDougall, Lori, 'Gender Gap in Literacy in Uttar Pradesh Questions for Decentralised Educational Planning' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 6, 2000, p. 1649

<sup>37</sup> There is a significant discrepancy in the literacy data for UP for 2001. While the calculations (using population and literacy totals from Census 2001) yield figures used in Figure 2 and the paper, the Census data for literacy in UP in 2001 is significantly higher at 57.36, 70.23 and 42.98 per cent, respectively.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Ishrat Shamim and Ranjana Kumari, *Gender and Local Governance: A New Discourse in Development*, New Delhi: Mimeo, 2002; *Women in Decision Making at Grassroots*, Centre for Social Research, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Singh, Pitam and J.K. Pundir, *Women Legislators in UP: Background, Emergence and Role: Background, Emergence and Role in Economic and Political Weekly*, March 9, 2002.

## References

- Bandyopadhyay, D., 'Gender and Governance in India' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxv, no. 31, July 29-August 4, 2000, pp. 2696-99.
- Bandyopadhyay, D., Saila K. Ghosh and Buddhadeb Ghosh, 'Dependency versus Autonomy: Identity Crisis of India's Panchayats' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxviii, no. 38, September 20-26, 2003, pp. 3984-91.
- Bannerji, Himani, 'Projects of Hegemony: Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' "Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxv, no. 11, March 11-17, 2000, pp. 902-20.
- Census of India: Provisional Population Totals: India – Paper I of 2001*, New Delhi: Census Commissioner of India, 2001. The data for Census 2001 is also available at the website of Census Commissioner of India at <http://www.censusindia.net/>.
- Chandhoke, Neera, 'Governance and the Pluralisation of the State: Implications for Democratic Citizenship' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxiii, no. 28, July 12-18, 2003.
- CMIE, *Profiles of States*, CMIE, Mumbai, 1997.
- India 2001: A Reference Manual*, Publications Division, New Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2001.
- Jayal, Niraja Gopal, 'Locating Gender in the Governance Discourse' in Martha Nussbaum, Amrita Basu, Yasmin Tambiah and Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Essays in Gender and Governance*, UNDP, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 96-134.
- Johnson, Craig, 'Local Democracy, Democratic Decentralisation and Rural Development: Theories, Challenges and Options for Policy' in *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 19, no. 4, 2001, pp. 521-32.
- Kabeer, Naila, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1994.
- Kapadia, Karin, *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2002.
- Koczberski, Gina, 'Women in Development: A Critical Analysis' in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 19, no. 3, 1998.
- Krishnaraj, Maithreyi, Ratna M Sudarshan and Abusaleh Shariff, 'Introduction' in Krishnaraj, Maithreyi, Ratna M Sudarshan and Abusaleh Shariff, (eds.), *Gender, Population and Development*, Delhi, 1988.

Leiten, G.K., and Ravi Srivastava, *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh*, : Sage, New Delhi, 1999.

Manor, James, *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralisation*, The World Bank, Washington, 1999.

Mathew, George, *Status of Panchayati Raj in India*, Concept, New Delhi, 1995.

Mathur, Kuldeep, 'Neo-liberal Agenda and Study of Institutions' in *Development and Change*, Vol. 1 no. 2, July–December 1996.

McDougall, Lori, 'Gender Gap in Literacy in Uttar Pradesh Questions for Decentralised Educational Planning' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 6, 2000, pp. 1649-58.

Mohanty, Bidyut, 'Panchayati Raj, 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and Women' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxx, no. 52, December 30, 1995.

*Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (Chairman: S Fazl Ali), Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1955.

Rustogi, Preet, *Gender Bias and Discrimination Against Women: What do Different Indicators Say?*, UNIFEM, New Delhi, 2003.

Shamim, Ishrat and Ranjana Kumari, *Gender and Local Governance: A New Discourse in Development*, Mimeo, New Delhi, 2002.

Shankar, Kripa, 'Development of UP: tasks for the New Government' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxvii, no. 22, June 1-7, 2002.

Singh, Pitam and J.K. Pundir, 'Women Legislators in UP: Background, Emergence and Role: Background, Emergence and Role' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxvii, March 9, 2002.

Upadhyay, Videh, 'Panchayats and Paper Laws: Simmering Discontent on 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xxxvii, no. 29, July 20-26, 2002, pp. 2988-99.

Vyasulu, Poomima & Vinod Vyasulu, Women in Panchayati Raj: Grass Roots Democracy in Malgudi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 25, 1999.

*Women in Decision Making at Grassroots*, Centre for Social Research, New Delhi, 2001.

World Bank, *Governance and Development*, World Bank, Washington DC, 1992.

World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long Term Perspective Study*, World Bank, Washington DC, 1989.

Yasmin, Tambiah, (ed.), *Women and Governance in South Asia: Re-imagining the State*, ICES, Colombo, 2002.

# Globalisation with a Female Face: Issues from South Asia

Miriam Sharma

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

**T**he transformative events that have occurred throughout Indian society and the broader South Asia region between 1860 and 2000 have been of tectonic magnitude. Not the least of these has been the experiences of colonial oppression and its accompanying massive social dislocations. The imposition of capitalist relations of production has produced great changes in the political economy, while the Independence struggles and creation of new states in South Asia evoked further transformations. But none, perhaps, is seen as being more critical today than the impacts of globalisation that appear to penetrate all sectors of the body politic, bringing joy, happiness, and affluence to some and more misery and impoverishment to others. The current manifestations of many social conflicts — often expressed in ethnic, religious, and caste terms, among others — are clearly interwoven with this phenomenon called “globalisation”. At the same time, all indicators point to the fact that academic studies of gender — and especially of women — have an important role to play as a critical voice analysing what happens under the forces of globalisation.<sup>2</sup>

Ideas about the globalisation project as it has specifically affected and impacted women in South Asia are raised and explored here. The argument has usually been framed in terms of whether women are benefiting from the process or are rather to be seen as victims — especially as victimised workers. While there is a large literature on these two views, this chapter considers the position of

women in manufacturing and multinational employment, particularly in India and Bangladesh. I hope to convey a sense of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the matter of women and globalization that have emerged from a number of recent studies and to argue convincingly for the need to have a greater understanding of the multiple impacts this has on society at large. While most people tend to focus specifically on its economic aspects, arguably perhaps the most critical, there are other ramifications of the globalising project that have impacted women's lives. Sonpar and Kapur (2001), for example, assert that research on the gender differentiating impacts of structural adjustment must also take account of men and masculine identities. While women are working longer hours in an effort to reduce the effects of rising costs of living and social services cutbacks, this may affect the role of men as key providers within the family. Thus, socio-economic changes may disrupt notions of gender and "could be threatening, demoralising and oppressive for men and women in some contexts and empowering in others" (Sonpar and Kapur, 2000). Masculinities in question or perceived jeopardy may lead to mental distress, abuse, and violence.<sup>3</sup>

After an initial discussion of what we may understand by "globalisation", I turn attention to what gender has to do with it. Sections that take up the issue of women's work in various parts of the manufacturing sectors, especially the garment industries, electronics, and others, in India and Bangladesh follow this. The last section looks at what we may conclude about women in the globalization process and raises some questions for further consideration.

### **What is Globalisation?**

Trying to define globalisation is truly opening a "can of worms"; so many thoughts and competing ideas squiggle about. We may see two broad perspectives, however. One, a view closely associated with the historical sociology World-Systems School and Immanuel Wallerstein in particular, sees globalisation as a "misleading concept since what is described as globalisation has been happening for 500 years" (Wallerstein 2000: 251, see also Palat 1998).<sup>4</sup>

Globalisation, in this view, starts with the search for riches and knowledge that led to explorations, "discoveries," and territorial acquisitions as colonies by the West of the "Rest".<sup>5</sup> Wallerstein looks at history in the "*longue duree*" and concludes that the current processes are not only old, but the current historical crisis actually represents an "age of transition" ... "in which the entire capitalist world system will be transformed into something else (Wallerstein:252)".

A second main view, utilised in this paper, understands globalization as marking fundamental changes in capitalist production as well as exacerbating other aspects of it. For sociologist Philip McMichael, it marks a "major transition in the political regulation of *economic* activity: from a primarily national to a primarily global form of regulation" (McMichael 1995:37; my italics) and a recolonisation of nation-states by capital—all under the banner of liberalisation. McMichael further argues that the development project that had been a postwar *universal* blueprint for national economic development has been replaced by the globalisation project. What we have now is basically a group of "new rulers of the world" (Pilger 2001, 2002) who represent global managers of a global economy. They include the transnational corporate and political elites as well as the multilateral institutions that all share an interest in an expanding global economy (McMichael 1996: chap. 5).

Without belaboring the point, I indicate some of the main parameters of this meaning of globalisation. It is rooted in the tremendous impact and range of new technologies—*especially in the information sciences during the last two decades* — which may, indeed, constitute a "third revolution" in human society, after the agricultural and industrial ones. While increasing attention is being paid to the cultural aspects of globalisation<sup>6</sup> and the social impacts of labour migration, for the most part the process is still understood in its economic incarnation. It refers to:

- \* increased flows of capital, people, commodities, ideas, and cultures (especially through the media) across national boundaries

- increased decentralisation and fragmentation of production processes
- establishment of global institutions to regulate and control trade and markets.<sup>7</sup>

Hensman marks some further useful distinctions between globalised capitalism and imperialism which notes the former's distinctiveness: the participants (nation-states) are politically autonomous; rules and regulations are set by multinational bodies; and information moves freely and rapidly by means of information technology (2004).

### **Liberalisation in South Asia: A focus on India**

While the exact dates of entry into this transformed global economy for the different states of South Asia are difficult to determine (see Round and Whalley 2002), 1991 stands out clearly as one key point of departure for India. A fiscal crisis was triggered in the country by the end of remittances from migrant workers in the Middle East who were forced to return home due to the First Gulf War. This led to a 20% devaluation of the rupee and acceptance of structural adjustment policies that went along with a bail-out loan from the World Bank. The series of reforms, now known as "liberalisation,"<sup>8</sup> brought about a New Economic Policy (NEP) that was all set to rock and roll "with the middle class as its engine" (Varma 1998:171; also chap. 5 and the wonderful collection of essays in Indian Association for Women's Studies 1993). The end of the "license raj" marked the end of high tariffs and quotas on foreign trade, the above-mentioned devaluation shock, and the opening of the country to foreign investments and ownership, foreign companies, and — of course — increased foreign commodities.

The NEP incorporated further strictures of the World Bank's lending policy terms known as "structural adjustment". India's large public sector, the *bete noir* of the Bank, was to be sold off and privatised. The economy would move full steam ahead to focus on production for the world market and, in order to attract foreign capital through the country's comparative advantage of cheap labour,



wages would be controlled and cut when necessary. Global competitiveness has served to alter the role of the state *vis-a-vis* its citizens and reduced its economic and political role as "protector" of citizens' welfare. At the same time, the state may react to this threat of global competition by trying to strengthen its own position in society. Both of these moves may be discerned in India. It is paradoxical that, on the one hand, the state has become the principal author to remove itself from directing the economy and institute neo-liberalism while, on the other hand, the increase of social inequities following upon the state's withdrawal has led to its greater role as a coercive force (Pasha 1998). As the state leaves the economic sphere it must then take up the role of policeman. What becomes clear is that globalisation does not erase the state but operates critically through it. However, to enforce compliance under times of increasing crisis, the state becomes more and more coercive.<sup>9</sup> It may seek to play the ethnic, nationalist, or religious card in the hope of recuperating lost ground.

Public costs are also to be controlled and cut; this falls with a heavy hand on social expenditures on health, education, and welfare (Krishnaraj 1993). As has been the case elsewhere, the impacts of these policies are greatest on the most vulnerable — women, children, and the poor. At the same time, both the cost of imported necessities and the price earned on local items produced for export are held hostage to the fluctuations of the world market. While there is considerable debate about whether or not poverty is alleviated by globalization,<sup>10</sup> one can easily see how the poor are adversely affected and imagine how the burden to provide for basic family subsistence needs (especially food) will fall increasingly on poor women.

### **What's Gender Got to Do with It?**

Globalisation and restructured economies have often meant massive unemployment in the formal sector, with an associated expansion of the informal economy (Frontline 2000) and promotion of flexibility in the labor market that draws more women into employment (Dev 2000:137). Both are areas beyond the reach of

institutional control, where protective laws are not available. Even a more sanguine study of the outcome of economic liberalisation on employment in South Asia admits the increased work participation of women has been in "low-skill jobs, usually non-unionised, and [they] experience adverse working conditions like low wages and long working hours" (Dev 2000). All of this has prompted increased attention to women in the globalised economy and a discourse about engendering the globalisation process that has its genealogy in conversations about "women and development".

A recent study, "Global Trade Expansion and Liberalisation: gender issues and impacts", affirms that gender is a key determinant of vulnerability to poverty. "Whilst the processes which bring about poverty among men and women are similar, there are impacts which are gender specific. Women are more vulnerable to fall into, and to remain trapped within poverty, than men" (Fontana, et al 1998:12). Women's vulnerability is linked to their pattern of employment and to their disadvantaged position in the labor market. They are concentrated in low-paid, irregular and insecure jobs, often placing them beyond the effective reach of labor and social protection laws.<sup>11</sup> The International Labour Organisation details three main factors for women's placement into low wage, low productivity, and usually casual employment:

- Women's reproductive and domestic responsibilities are generally perceived to be primary. This reinforces structural barriers to their access to education, training, land, and productive assets. It also restricts women's time and mobility for productive work and limits their choice of income-earning activities.
- Women are perceived as secondary earners; often men have priority over women in the allocation of opportunities for remunerated employment.
- Women face unequal access to productive resources and services although they are largely dependent on self-employment for which land, capital, technology, and labour are critical (from the ILO 1995:10; quoted in Fontana et al *loc.cit.*)

One of the main impacts of the economic reforms in India — and even more so in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — has been to draw upon and use women as a ready source of cheaper labour. When social security systems weaken and men lose their jobs, then women are more and more enmeshed in a labour market that is informal and needs a flexible workforce. Anuradha Chenoy (n.d.), argues — as have others — that, “globalisation has shown up as grounded in a gender ideology that is basically exploitative of women’s time, work and sexuality”. While “sections of the elite have integrated themselves into the new transnational classes, which controls and benefits [sic] from these new policies,” that has increased exploitation and inequality (see also, *EPW* 2002; Rajamoorthy n.d.).

Clearly, then, gender is at the very heart, not only of globalisation, but also — as Chhachhi and Pittin discuss so lucidly — of theorising labor and its strategic development as well. They demonstrate how distinctions in the working lives of women and men have major consequences for labor strategy, and especially for organising. Their analysis of female factory workers in India and Nigeria, respectively, explores the development of women workers’ *consciousness* and how this impacts strategies for labor organisation. Just as there are diverse reasons for women’s decisions to enter the workforce, so there are pluralistic expressions of feminism and consciousness that are based on a multiplicity of identities — not only those of class or gender (1999).

I turn attention now to a consideration of how women have been “integrated” into the globalised economy and consider the example of female labor in the manufacturing and multi-national employment sector in some detail.

### **Women’s Work in Manufacturing and the Multi-National Employment Sector: the Garment Industry**

As a general observation, it is well documented that the increased turn to production for the global market has resulted in a feminization of the industrial labour force. There is a strong correlation between increased exports and increased female employment in manufacturing. Studies of Export Processing Zones

(EPZs) and export-oriented manufacturing firms show a high level of female participation especially for Sri Lanka,<sup>12</sup> Bangladesh, and, increasingly so, for India. Many have lauded the creation of such employment opportunities for women; more "benefits" are likely to occur from the employment-creation dimension of trade expansion, largely limited, however, to the industrial sector (Fontana et al 1998: 14; also Dev 2000). What is not fully explored is the connection between expanding opportunities for women and the shrinking of those for men who lose jobs in India's restructured industries, and how this impacts overall employment opportunities. Others suggest that there may be more threats than opportunities for women in the current liberalisation process.

### **Garment Industry in India**

India has emerged as one of the major garment producing and exporting areas of the world, with c.50,000 units. It is a labour-intensive industry. Most of the employment falls to women and 85% of the units are in the unorganised sector (Varghese 1999:43; cp. Singh 1991, for an earlier study). Development of the readymade sector is fairly recent, as is its dominance among India's exports. With c.15% of total exports (1995–1996) it formed the largest employer in the private sector (Varghese n.d.) and of the nearly 15 million people engaged,<sup>13</sup> almost 90% are female. The trend towards contracting and subcontracting of work and use of irregular and flexible labour is common in export industries and in the EPZs, where the main item produced are garments. These workers do not come under the organised or unionized sectors (Varghese: 10). In her study of the garment industry in the Cochin Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) of Kerala, Varghese found that women outnumber men in all of the garment-producing units; there are also units with no male workers at all. It represents an overwhelmingly female intensive industry where — again — nearly 90% are women, echoing the nation-wide statistic.

Young women are the preferred workers, seen as more flexible, able to work longer for lower wages; less involved in union activities or strikes. There is a high turnover as most are retrenched on getting

married (Varghese: 25). Workers are recruited mostly from the rural areas (often kin networking to bring in new job seekers) and assigned to "line" work where the production process is divided up into simplified and specific, repetitive tasks. Only 30% of men and some 12% of women were employed on a permanent basis; the rest have no job security. Job segregation and differential wages were, not surprisingly, also according to gender (see Varghese 1999:31ff for details).

While new employment opportunities may draw in rural workers, industrial closures have made life for impoverished residents of urban slums particularly difficult, and opportunities seem to be shrinking. Economic liberalisation does not appear to have been a panacea. Earlier, some of Mumbai's textile mills closed down in the wake of the textile workers strike of 1982; others have been affected by the government sell-off of "sick" industries. New businesses set up during the first flush of liberalization to stitch shirts for garment export houses have not always fared well and benefited workers as businesses linked to global trade (and even others) are pushed to the wall. Cost cutting comes at labour's cost.

Parveen Swami, writing in *Frontline* (2000), documents how individual workers in the city of Bollywood dreams are negatively impacted by the decline in the organized sector. Women are forced to leave the home to supplement family earnings through their wages as domestic employees. Priyanka Kakodkar writes a similar human-interest story (1999) about the increase of job opportunities for women in Mumbai, but where the majority — both male and female — are employed in the rapidly swelling unorganised sector. This was calculated as c. 85% a decade ago for women, and subsequent structural adjustment program inaugurated by the New Economic Policy has had the similar effect of cutting regular employees in favor of contract and casual workers. In this urban setting, with rapidly increasing prices, growing retrenchment, and shrinking household incomes, more and more women and men enter the labor market with poor bargaining positions.

Further south, in Bangalore, the garment industry is also the largest employer of women in the state. There are an estimated

788 units in Karnataka, of which 729 are in the city. The total number of garment workers in Bangalore is 146, 835 — of which 103,039 are women recruited from the rural areas.<sup>14</sup> Production quotas require the women to stitch 120 shirts or jeans per hour, with any small error inviting abuse and a salary cut. The pay is Rs 8 per hour,<sup>15</sup> although lower wages are not unknown. One worker stated:

"If we are late by two minutes, the factory gates are slammed on us and we are asked to come the next day. Our wages for that day are cut. If a worker takes leave due to an emergency, she is told to report back after a week, so that she is not paid wages. To harass the worker, she is often given work which she is not used to" (*loc. cit.*).

While most work in factory settings, the lack of trade unions leaves it an unorganized sector, at the mercy of "unfair labour practices and abusive behaviour by superiors" (Charan 2003). A combination of the threat of dismissal and the use of local "muscle men" keep workers in control. However, a Garment Workers' Union was formed in Bangalore in 1996. Of its 25,000 members, 91% are women!

A study by Jayati Lal also focuses on the role of the state and impact of liberalisation policies on workers' rights and labor practices in the Indian garment industry (1998). She argues that global processes of production challenge ideas about the unilinear trajectory of globalisation. The importance of domestic state initiatives and the agency of labour as major forces changing the face of globalisation are foregrounded. The success of the garment industry lies, on the one hand, in the "flexible, fragmented, dispersed, and contract labour" of women, men, and children and, on the other hand, in the labour of "highly regulated, feminised, assembly-line factory workers." Lal's observations of production on the shop floor and her interviews with workers, managers, union organisers, and industry representatives chart the implications of the global economy for Indian garment workers. This has become a "global sweatshop" as "an outcome of globalised conditions" (*loc. cit.*).

### **Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh**

Much of what is described about conditions in the Indian garment industry will certainly be found similar to what has occurred in Bangladesh. However, this is a country where women's position has been dramatically altered by economic changes with often-contradictory consequences. I had the opportunity to visit there for three weeks last December with my husband.<sup>16</sup> We were fortunate to be able to visit the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Chittagong and two of the garment factories there, courtesy of a former student from the University of Hawaii who is now an extremely important customs official.<sup>17</sup> After a tour of the Chittagong harbour ships and containers we visited two garment factories in the EPZ, on two successive days. The EPZ contains over 100 factories. Approximately 70 are foreign-owned, 26 local, and 18 joint ventures.

The first unit we visited was a high-end, Korean-owned garment (winter outer wear) and shoe manufacturing plant. Youngone (or "Young One") Company,<sup>18</sup> established in 1974, is the largest export manufacturer of sportswear in the world., with the export market divided equally between the United States and Europe. In the US, their biggest buyer is Nike.<sup>19</sup> They were the first foreign investor — and remain the largest — in Chittagong in 1982 and Youngone owns a number of factories there, as well as in the Dhaka EPZ (where they were also the first and largest). There are altogether ten plus factories in the country employing approximately 28,000 people, 72% of whom are women. Youngone's record on labour rights is less than exemplary. In 1997, nine workers from their Dhaka factory were in jail, 300 injured (50 seriously), 97 fired, and 800 charged with criminal offences after they tried to present a statement to their employer, a Nike contractor. Before workers had a chance to make their statement, also demanding that two of their colleagues who had been arrested earlier in the week be released, police attacked them. Youngone, along with other leading investors in the EPZs, as well as Bangladesh's own entrepreneurs, is fighting to retain the current policy to ban unionism there despite the fact that there is no provision in the EPZ charter that prohibits trade unions.

The government of Bangladesh is also waffling on the issue even though it had given a prior assurance that full trade unionism would be permitted there by January 1, 2004. As far back as 1999, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions condemned their own government for its complicity in urging Bangladesh to keep unions out of the EPZs as such activities "will have negative impact on investment and thus will not help in employment."

Youngone is not only the largest foreign employer in Bangladesh, but a sister concern, Korean EPZ Corporation, formally received land from the Bangladesh government in 1999 to set up the first private sector EPZ in Chittagong in the Bandar-Anwara-Potia area. It was allotted more than 2,400 acres of land, larger than the current Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs (355 and 453+ acres, respectively). KEPZ applied for a license the following year; however, until the present there has been no significant progress in obtaining a green light to begin construction. The Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh has expressed concern over the delay after some basic infrastructure development work; further advance has halted amidst uncertainty and facing "conditions after conditions to get the license".

The American manager, from Portland, Oregon,<sup>20</sup> served us tea and biscuits and had his next in-charge (a long-time Bangladeshi worker) give us a factory tour. I was not permitted to videotape or photograph. Women workers (and some) men on the factory floor that produced expensive running shoes stood at their fast-moving stations all day long. Those who worked with heavy glue that emitted strong fumes had latex gloves and no masks. Nearly a thousand garment workers were on another floor, sitting at sewing machines in lines and rows. While we were there in winter, there was no air conditioning and during summer months the heat must be intolerable. Work was six days a week for ten hours a day, and the wage was 1,800 *taka* per month.<sup>21</sup>

An Indian family from Thailand owned the second factory we visited. It was started in 1983 and said to be the first foreign investment in Bangladesh. This textile factory produced lower-end men's and women's pants and shorts for stores like Walmart in the



US. The manager<sup>22</sup> originally from Jullundur, treated us to tea and sweets and then invited us for lunch in their "Investor's Club" dining room. They also had attached accommodations for foreign buyers. He gave us a personal tour of the entire factory, with a view of the production process from start to finish. The working conditions and wages were similar to the first factory. Here, one main room consisted of nearly 1000 line workers — 80 to 90% female. They sat at sewing machines in lines of about two dozen workers, each line producing a pair of shorts or pants from start to finish. Each worker also performed the same piecemeal sewing throughout his or her workday. The factory produced some 7000-8000 pieces daily.

What I saw and learned about the conditions in the factory corroborated much of the rich literature on women workers in Bangladesh (e.g., Kabeer, Feldman). This research puts my own brief visit and observations within a broader and more meaningful context. Feldman shows how women's interests and struggles are closely tied to the intersections of changes in the political economy and those of key cultural transformations and concerns. Religious resurgence is part of a broader crisis created by the contradictions of these altered economic and social relations and the changing expectations regarding women's behavior. Women are now recast as subjects who *threaten* extant social practices rather than as objects or victims of new economic and social opportunities. In this view, female wagedworkers are not envisioned as victims of the modernisation project but as invokers of change who challenge particular urban and rural petty bourgeois interests (Feldman 1998:35).

Bangladesh's response to market forces in the late 1970s was to develop an export-oriented garment industry. Local entrepreneurs, however, did not take notice until the New Industrial Policy (of 1982) provided incentives. Producers were permitted to import fabrics duty-free, provided they were made into export goods, and credit was extended to purchase foreign material. The industry grew exponentially — from 8 units in 1977 to c. 700 in 1985. Today it boasts more than 1,500 garment factories<sup>23</sup> employing over 1.2

million people, 90% of which are women. A major IMF-assisted structural adjustment program began in the mid-1980s. However, it is from 1990 onwards that the state embarked on much more liberalising policies and reforms involving trade and financial liberalisation as well as privatisation.

Garment exports now exceed jute as the primary source of foreign exchange in the country (Kabeer 2000:69). The several thousands of women who were drawn into jobs<sup>24</sup> were largely first-generation workers,<sup>25</sup> while the number of women who remain working in agriculture has dropped dramatically. This urban manufacturing sector has become a major force in the changing pattern of female labour participation (Round and Whalley 2002:8). While in 1993, approximately 70% of women were engaged in the agricultural sector; today it is less than 50%.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Bangladesh is touted as "a case of female-led industrialisation, *par excellence*" (Fontana et al. 1998:26) and the degree of female participation in manufacturing is regarded as "far above the norm for other developing countries" (*loc. cit.*). This is despite the fact that the illiteracy rate for women is 72%.<sup>27</sup> Kabeer points out, however, that in a country where tailoring is traditionally a male occupation, where women are confined to the domestic domain by norms of seclusion, where men have been defined as primary breadwinners, and where there is a large pool of male unemployment, the speed with which women responded to the new opportunities offered by the export-oriented garment industry which emerged in the early 1980s requires *an explanation* (2000:81, my italics).

Of course, one explanation is provided by the well-known response that employers are drawn to female labour because it is cheaper, more docile, and is endowed with the proverbial "nimble fingers". However, factory owners' preferences are only part of the story. What is it, then, that draws women to radically depart from long-established norms of female seclusion and respond to these opportunities?

Here is a similarity with the case of India — women work *not only* because they may be the preferred (i.e., cheaper, more docile) workers of employers, but often because of their own preferences.

This reflected different levels of agency, mediated by individual histories and experiences. Women also had different understandings and situations regarding interpretations of and restrictions due to *purdah* and how factory work meshed with these views. One response is to "domesticate" the factory space that helps to create an alternative and more positive discourse about such work than that promoted by the media and religious community. Ironically, it was the very feminisation of this employment space that made it less attractive to men (Kabeer 2000)!

An analysis, such as Kabeer's, firmly underscores the systematic gender dimension to conflicts surrounding women's decisions to take up factory work. Their desire for employment clearly touched on a "nerve" point in gender relations within the family, revealing, yet again, the crucial relationship between gender, power, and conflict. The multiple reasons for men's resistance to women's paid employment (ranging from interfering with child-husband care and household chores to issues of family honor) also reveal a fundamental conflict about the sorts of changes that both men and women were prepared to tolerate to the culturally-sanctioned division of roles and responsibilities both within and outside the family. Ideas about the appropriate use of women's labour are close to the very core of individual gender identity and hence most resistant to negotiation. Even still, there was surprising diversity in the levels of tolerance to changes in "core beliefs and practices" as well as to what constituted these. Kabeer concludes that the genesis of women's entry into factory employment must be understood within this "perceived erosion of the patriarchal contract, and the increasing inability of men to sustain the model [myth?] of the male breadwinner (2000:140).

While there is an active preference for the cheaper, seemingly more docile, female worker in Bangladesh, it appears there is a more positive attitude toward wage employment in industry than is the case in India (Sen n.d.:17). Why this more positive attitude exists in one country, where interpretations of religious injunctions would confine women to the home, and not the other is unclear. Also unclear is why there exists such a disparity between the

apparent benefits of women's work in the two countries. In Bangladesh, "despite lack of security, considerable gender discrimination in wages, long hours and deplorable work conditions, women have a positive attitude to wage employment in the industry. They have benefited, not only in intangibles like autonomy, self-confidence, improved conjugal lives, matrimonial relationship but also in decreased fertility, increased age of marriage and reduction in dowry demands" (conclusions of other studies, cited in Sen n.d.).<sup>28</sup> Familial dependency would seem to mediate equally the lives of *both* women, in terms of access to and experience of wage work (c.p. Sen n.d.:17). Why, then, this would lead to women's withdrawal into domestic roles as men's working conditions improved in India, but not in Bangladesh requires further study.

### **Other Manufacturing Sectors in India**

Some of the same observations may be found in studies that have explored other manufacturing sectors in India. One such is a three-year study (1993 to 1996) by Sujata Gothoskar, Amrita Chhachhi, Nandita Gandhi, and Nandita Shah covering 610 women workers in the electronics industry of Delhi and the pharmaceuticals, plastics, soaps and detergents, and gems and jewellery industries in Mumbai. It looked at the effects of industrial restructuring on women workers, both at the workplace and in the home, interviewing male workers, managers, and trade unionists as well.<sup>29</sup>

The report examines the impacts of an increasingly "flexible" market that demands a more flexible workforce. When this is combined with the preexisting easy availability of labour and laxity in implementing labor regulations, the result is a large increase in subcontracting. The impetus for this is the much lower labour costs combined with the attempts to avoid a unionized workforce and its demands. Delhi's electronic industry, studied by Chhachhi, employs 45,000 workers (the numbers must have greatly increased in the past five years), of whom 40% are women. This industry has responded to global competition following the 1991 economic reforms and met the challenge of the MNCs by introducing more "flexibility" in its organisational structure as well as in the production

of items. Sixty-three per cent of workers in all five industries were regarded as temporary and not covered by union regulations. A ban on recruitment of new permanent workers in Mumbai's pharmaceuticals, soaps and cosmetic industries means that "what were earlier stable, well-paying jobs, are now being converted into sweat-shops jobs", writes Gothoskar (cited in Joshi 1998). The women joining this new flexible workforce are those mostly in their twenties. Some industries are giving more work for employees to take home, such as in the assembly of toys, switches, toothbrushes, and scooter parts. There has also been an accompanying job loss — resulting in a loss of income and family financial security, as well as loss of identity and dignity.

Nandita Shah and Nandita Gandhi, reporting in another paper on women workers in plastics processing and diamond polishing and jewellery manufacturing in Mumbai (2001) look at household-level responses of women who experienced changes in their work lives<sup>30</sup> and the flexible strategies that worked within that unit. These were: income-increasing strategies to deploy household members in the labour market that often broke gender barriers (e.g., young women seeking employment); expenditure-reduction strategies (e.g., cutting food and other household expenses; withdrawing children from school); and employing strategies that developed and utilised social networks and mutual support systems (from Saptari 2003).

The consumer electronics industry in Delhi is the subject of an in-depth study by Amrita Chhachhi (1999). She explores how women workers are faring in the industry restructuring since the economic liberalisation and globalisation of the 1990s. Primarily geared to the domestic market, but increasingly with a push to export, some fully-export units have been established in the past decade. As Chhachhi notes, "India's experiment with liberalisation began with the electronics sector" (1999:2). From its inception, the industry has employed women in significant numbers (as, for example, throughout Southeast Asia) and this is likely to increase. "Women have formed around 30–40 per cent of additional manufacturing employment ... so far" (*loc. cit.*)

The study covers 24 companies in Delhi's industrial estates; the city ranks fourth as a site for the electronics industry and has a large concentration of small-scale electronic manufacturing units. While there have been significant changes in the electronics industry, labour market flexibility is not something that has been just introduced with the onset of globalisation. Restructuring of the industry, rather, has intensified a pre-existing pattern of flexibility as it pertains to women workers. Chhachhi notes, "the Indian labour market has always been flexible in the sense that labour market regulations/protective legislation has rarely been extended or implemented for the vast majority of workers" (1999:4-5). However, what is new about the term "flexibility" bandied about by capital and the state — as well as by the World Bank — is that it has come to refer exclusively to labour market flexibility. This is viewed as a panacea to what is perceived as the main impediment to industrial employment growth, i.e., the protection of existing jobs. "Rigidities" in the labour market are to be overcome by introducing labor market flexibility. Regardless of the type or size of the manufacturing unit, the overall strategy remains reduction of labour cost, which translates as financial flexibility.

One of the interesting conclusions that arise from Chhachhi's study [with regard to how far women constitute a flexible labour force] is that employer preferences are not the only consideration; individual and household reproduction strategies are important in determining women's employment patterns (as Kabeer well-documented in the case of Bangladeshi garment workers). She found that women in the 1980s who began as working daughters are still working. There has been an important change in the perception of employment as "time pass" to the need to continue working in order for families to make ends meet. As she states, "the idea of a 'natural turnover' " no longer holds true. Further, there seems little difference between married and unmarried women in their availability for overtime or night work and employers in the industry pushed for lifting legal restrictions on the hours of work.

The picture of the female workforce is dynamic — both married and unmarried women of different generations participate.

However, it appears that women in their late 30s who have worked for many years are losing jobs due to their involvement in unions and their more politicised, "strongly developed worker identity" (Chhachhi 1999: 25). In more than half of the units surveyed, the workforce has been reduced through a variety of labour saving methods. Thus, industrial restructuring is responsible for "extending the conditions of casualisation and insecurity through the dismantling of the organised sector to categories of workers [i.e., those 30 and above], who through years of struggle and organisation have become 'inflexible' " (*Ibid*:26).

Much depends upon international competition as it impacts future possibilities for women, and for men. The push to provide a haven for cheap labour is built into the structures of globalisation. At the same time, as Chhachhi observes, unionisation is spreading in the industry and often the initiators are women. Those who produce televisions, consume both the product and its images and the study closes (as does that of Chhachhi & Prittin 1999) with a more hopeful vision of women's participation and intervention.

### **Women as Victims or Victors in Globalisation?**

Globalisation increases a nation's vulnerability to volatile conditions in both financial markets (witness the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997, from which India — and China — were fairly well insulated) as well as in economic activity. That globalisation has increased inequalities both between and within countries has been acknowledged even by its proponents. This should come as no surprise as global capitalism only speeds up and exacerbates the intrinsic structural unevenness of the system. Of course, for true believers the argument is that this is a temporary phenomenon and eventually we may look forward to the (generally now discarded) "trickle down" effect (see also, Bhagwati 2001). I very much appreciate how even a liberal thinker like Pavan K. Varma critiques trickle down: in a "country where as many as forty per cent of their [the middle classes'] people live in the most abject poverty and half the population cannot read or write...how many decades of this trickle-down process would lead to a transformation in the lives of the bulk of Indians" (1988:186).

In light of the above discussion — what conclusions, if any, may we come to? It may be, in fact, that it's all “globaloney” of a different sort. A recent survey, conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project on “Views of a Changing World” examined the “global public’s” thinking about globalisation during the past five years (2003). This survey of 38,000 people in 44 nations (including many among the “developing” world) found that the poor like globalisation!<sup>31</sup> While they acknowledged problems and anxieties in their own lives — lack of good paying jobs, deteriorating working conditions, growing gap between rich and poor, and loss of traditional way of life — they were “not inclined to blame such troubles on growing inter-connectedness”, but rather on poor governance in their own countries (see also Dollar 1993). While certainly a large onus of the problems people face are to be placed squarely on misgovernment, it is again ironic that it is the very forces of globalisation that have weakened the ability of governments to provide adequately for the security of their citizens.

There is no doubt that the working and wage conditions for female labour in South Asia, and particularly as seen through the cases of India and Bangladesh, leave much to be desired. It would be good if all employers had to face a week working on the line and live within the salary provided so that they may begin to understand what goes into the making of their profits and the “growth rates” of a nation. The most pernicious and fallacious argument of all, for the perpetuation of these conditions, is that *the women themselves are happy to take the employment and if they did not have this, they would have nothing at all* (or, possibly, something much worse). There is no doubt either, that people are “happy” for the employment and the wages that enable them to survive (see further the cogent argument in Hensman 2004). What is less arguable, however, is that those in dire straits with no or few alternatives deserve to be taken advantage of at the lowest common denominator. It is here that capitalist globalisation, with its never-ending competitive search for markets and cheap labor to make even cheaper goods, can only result in a “race to the bottom”. And the first to reach there are the poor women of and from the south.