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SOCIALISATION, EDUCATION AND WOMEN

PERSPECTIVES IN INDIAN DEVELOPMENT

SOCIALISATION EDUCATION AND WOMEN

Explorations In Gender Identity

Edited by
KARUNA CHANANA

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Preface

It gives me great pleasure to say a few words about this work, entitled *Socialisation, Education and Women*, which is being published under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The publication of this work owes a lot to the scholarly initiative of Dr. Karuna Chanana, who was with us as a Fellow for a couple of years. Arising out of her interest in women's studies and in the sociology of education, Dr. Chanana organised, in April 1985, a symposium in which a large number of scholars participated. The proceedings of this symposium, which generated very substantial interest in the scholarly community, are now being brought out in the form of a book. I am thankful to Dr. Karuna Channa for the trouble she took in organising the symposium as well as in editing its proceedings.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, Dr. Hari Dev Sharma, Dr. N. Balakrishnan, Kumari Deepa Bhatnagar, Smt. Aruna Tandan and Kumari Amrit Varsha Gandhi, for the help they have given towards the publication of this book.

Ravinder Kumar

Acknowledgments

The papers in this volume are selected from those presented at a symposium organised by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in April 1985. They appear here in a revised and updated form, drawing on the rich debate and discussion sparked off at the symposium where they were originally presented. I am indebted to all those who contributed to this book.

I am grateful to Professor Ravindra Kumar for inviting me to organise the symposium. But for his sustained interest, the symposium may never have been organised. Moreover, grateful thanks are due to him and to Professors Leela Dube and Veena Das for comments on an earlier draft of the Introduction. I am also grateful to Dr. H.D. Sharma for giving his time ungrudgingly during the publication of the volume and for answering all my queries with patience. Various members of the staff of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library were involved in the organisation of the symposium and then in the publication of this book. To all of them I express my appreciation and gratitude.

My sons Arush and Dweep showed a rare understanding despite their young age. They were a source of moral support by encouraging me to work on this book, and by cooperating throughout by allowing me the time and space to do so. I want to express my warmest thanks to them. This volume has been for all of us a part of the learning experience and the process of socialisation.

Editor

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Introduction

KARUNA CHANANA

I

Education has been seen as the magic wand for curing the ills of society. The developing countries placed great emphasis on it and hoped that expansion of education would also bring about greater equality in their societies. Thus, emphasis was placed on the growth of education among all sections of society regardless of caste, creed or sex. As a result, enrolment in educational institutions expanded phenomenally after the achievement of independence in our country. All sectors of population shared in this expansion. The disadvantaged sections as well as women made their entry into education (Ahmad, 1979).

Concern for providing equality to women in education was an integral part of the nationwide social reform movement in pre-independence India. This concern became enshrined in the Constitution and has been reaffirmed in various official documents in the post-independence period (Ahmad, 1985). As a result, women's education gained momentum after independence. For instance, the female literacy rate has been increasing steadily. It increased from 7.93 per cent in 1951 to 24.88 per cent in 1981. The enrolment of girls and women at the different levels of education as well as the institutions meant for them showed a steep incline. As against 33 girls for every 100 boys at all levels in 1950-51, their number increased to 55 in 1980-81. The enrolment of girls in all institutions and at all levels of education has gone up from 64 lakhs in 1950-51 to 398.64 lakhs in 1980-81 (Bhandari, 1982 : 33). Table 1 gives the break-up of enrolment of girls by level and year. We notice that their enrolment has been increasing throughout the period from 1950-51 to 1980-81.

So far as higher education is concerned whether we look at the age-specific enrolment of girls at various levels in the schools or we look at their enrolment in various faculties, they have registered an increase in numbers. The number of women in all faculties per 100

Table 1
Enrolment of girls per 100 boys

Year	Primary	Middle	Secondary	College and university (general education)*
1950-51	39	22	16	16
1960-61	48	35	25	27
1970-71	60	43	37	38
1980-81	65	52	43	45

Source: Bhandari, 1982: 31.

* The figures would be much lower if professional and technical education were included.

men has increased from 16 in 1950-51 to 45 in 1980-81. Therefore, while the gap between the enrolment of women and men is narrowing, it has not disappeared. Enrolment of men continues to be twice as high as that of women. Again, there is variation in enrolment by faculty. For example, the proportion of women students has increased in some faculties and decreased in others.¹ The decrease in enrolment of women in the arts and the science faculties is common to men as well. The exception is the decline in the enrolment of girls in medicine (Ahmad, 1970 : 37, 45).

However, what is significant is that the proportion of women to men continues to be lower in all faculties (see Table 2 in the Appendix). If we look at their enrolment in higher education and divide by level we find that the proportion of girls to total enrolment increased at all levels (India, 1975; Bhandari, 1982). The proportion of women in higher education increased consistently and at a rapid rate till the mid-seventies. Since then, the increase has been so gradual that it has become almost stagnant. We had anticipated this stagnation a few years earlier (Ahmad, 1979) and had suggested special support to women's education.

Some of the declining trends or the gains in numbers across faculties may also be treated as indicators in the direction of moving away from the stereotypes, such as higher enrolment in law and

commerce and decline in arts. Some of the trends are positive and significant in so far as they reflect major gains for women in education. However, these statistics also indicate certain negative trends. For instance, the percentage of females to total illiterates has increased from 33.6 per cent in 1950-51 to 56.4 in 1980-81.

The number of illiterate women per thousand illiterate men has increased from 1055 in 1911 to 1322 in 1981. This gap is higher in states with a higher literacy rate, as for example, there are 1428 illiterate women per 1000 illiterate men in Kerala, 1482 in Maharashtra and 1521 in Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, educationally backward states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Nagaland have a lower illiteracy sex ratio, (Mazumdar, 1985 : 3-4). The literacy rate of women in the rural areas is nearly 18 per cent while it is almost 48 per cent in the urban areas. In other words, nearly 82 per cent of rural women and 52 per cent of women in the urban areas are illiterate. The corresponding figures for men are 49 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. Again, 93 per cent of Scheduled Caste women and 91 per cent of Scheduled Tribe women in the rural areas are illiterate. In the urban areas, the corresponding figures are 73 and 76 per cent respectively (Dighe, 1985).

According to the 1981 census 8 per cent of girls in the 6-14 age group are out of school (Mazumdar, 1985 : 13). At present, girls comprise eighty per cent of the children who are non-enrolled in the 6-14 age group. The age-wise break up of boys and girls who are out of school is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Non-enrolment of children

	Boys	Girls	(Figures in per centages)
6-11	20	45	
12-14	57	75	
15-17	71	85	

Source: 1981 Census

Thus, the problems of dropout and non-enrolment have to be taken on an emergency basis. It should be seen in the context of our

emphasis on the need to define 'access' to education of girls. Moreover, regional disparities are glaring. For instance, female literacy varies from 65.73 per cent in Kerala to 11.42 per cent in Rajasthan. Girls' school attendance rates are also not comparable to those of boys and the gap between the enrolment of boys and girls remains at all levels. Again, more boys than girls proceed from school to college.

Moreover, the gap increases as we move from the lower to the higher level of education. Women also seem to be concentrated in a few faculties like education and arts (see Table 1 in Appendix). The likelihood of getting professional education such as engineering and technology courses continues to be very remote for girls. Thus, boys are very likely to enrol in physics, chemistry, engineering and agriculture while girls study arts, domestic science, or take nursery and teacher's training courses. Disparity between male-female participation in education has not disappeared even after the rapid expansion of the educational system (Table 2 in Appendix). In fact, it is replicated in various Third World countries (Megarry, 1984 : 15). Usha Nayar sums up the situation in the following words: 'Education of women in India in the last four decades has had an undirected growth, is largely status quoist and marked by a slowing rate of progress. There are quantitative shortfalls and a qualitative lag in the education of women' (Nayar, 1986 : 1).

How do women fare as teachers in the educational system? We have tried to compare their faculty-wise enrolment as students with their proportional representation as teachers in the same faculties. We observe that the proportion of women teachers has appreciably increased in the faculties of arts, science, commerce and medicine over a period of 30 years (see Table 3 in Appendix). But what is interesting is that their proportion as teachers is lower than as students in every faculty. Also, in the faculty of education, where their proportion as students has increased from 24.3 to 47.3 per cent, the proportion of women teachers has declined from 24.3 in 1951 to 22.9 per cent in 1981. Again, the proportion of women students in science was 28.7 per cent in 1981 while as teachers it was 17.1 per cent. This is consistently true of all faculties in spite of the fact that the proportion of women teachers has increased from 8.5 to 18.1 per cent. The implications are that the increase in the proportion of women students is not matched by the increase in the proportion of women teachers. It also indicates that the chances of a woman

enroling in various faculties are higher than her chances of becoming a teacher. If we break up the data institution-wise and also between colleges and universities, the representation of women teachers decreases at the higher level and in the prestigious institutions.

What are the suggested reasons and factors which create this disparity in the enrolment of men and women? Some of the important factors that are mentioned are the 'level of a nation's economic development, cultural and religious milieu, and the role of social background factors, viz., parents' education and income. The other factors may be the content of schooling, household responsibilities, role expectations of a girl as a housewife, the problem of reconciling society's notion of an ideal woman with the pursuit of formal education and a career. More recently, researchers have emphasised the availability and accessibility of education to girls, because, as far as schooling is concerned, the availability of places is not enough. School has to be made 'accessible' in terms of social values attached to the expected role of a girl. For example, if a school is set up in a neighbourhood which is not considered proper or safe by the parents, the girls will not be sent to it. Again, although the government has set up the limit of a distance of one kilometre between the school and the village,² this distance may not be considered safe by the parents. Therefore, in so far as girls and women are concerned, 'access' is culturally defined and the 'relevance' of formal education is determined by the societal expectations of what is feminine.

Relevant questions in this context are:

1. Which factors affect enrolment or access and dropout of girls at the school stage, especially at the primary stage?
2. Which factors determine their chances of continuing in school and later on with higher education?
3. Which factors affect their choice of subjects?
4. How does gender interact with class or other factors so as to bring about differential distribution of girls by level, institution and courses?
5. Is there any impact of pupil-teacher interaction on the choice of subjects?
6. What is the role of the teachers and others in the educational system and their choice of gender-typed subjects?
7. Does schooling reinforce the social division of labour based on gender?

Until recently, sociology of education paid little attention to these and similar questions. The question of social class or caste background and its role in education have been the concerns of sociologists in India. In fact, caste and tribe have been the most important variables and have received attention from the sociologists. This has largely been due to the concern with the policy of positive discrimination through which seats are reserved in the educational institutions for the disadvantaged groups of Indian society. Sociologists have been concerned mainly with the question of who is taking advantage of these reservations (Desai, 1974, 1978; Chitnis, 1972, 1978, 1981; Ambasht, 1970; Ambarao, 1976).³

Earlier studies on women and education in India have so far presented either a descriptive analysis of discernible trends (Mazumdar, 1975; Nayar, 1978; Ahmad, 1979). Most of these are based on macrodata while a few studies are based on microdata. Education in this context has been seen only as formal education. Moreover, most of these studies do not use or apply any of the available theoretical frameworks within the discipline of sociology. This lacuna in the studies on women's education is due in part to the fact that this area has not so far attracted the attention of sociologists in India. Those writing on women's education have a varied background. Moreover, socialisation itself has not received the attention it deserves by sociologists and anthropologists in India. This may be due partly to the weakening of the social anthropological tradition in our country. The linkages of socialisation with education have also not been established except for some attempts at a general theoretical level using the Parsonian framework of functionalism (Singh, 1975). While the socialisation of girls and its impact on formal education has been referred to in policy documents, reports of various committees and commissions, and in studies by researchers, no systematic analyses have been undertaken so far. This volume will hopefully help to fill this gap. We have tried to take a very broad definition of education which includes socialisation and which also looks at the interaction between these two processes. We have also explored the linkages of education and socialisation with gender.

II

Before we examine the relationship between gender and education, we must look at what the girls have learned before coming to school

and how the informal processes in the school operate to reinforce gender differences. Our basic premises are

1. Education must be defined broadly and not in a narrow fashion whereby only formal education is indicated.
2. The impact of formal education is neutralised by the values imbibed by children through the process of socialisation which is basically the process of construction of a woman's reality in the home. This process of value internalisation begins at birth and moulds their self-perceptions and attitudes to education and work.
3. This process of the construction of a woman's reality or socialisation also determines the perceptions of 'significant others' about boys and girls and their social roles, namely, the dichotomous masculine and feminine roles.
4. These values are a continuous and consistent influence in so far as they delimit girls' choices with reference to education and work.⁴
5. Women's self-perceptions are influenced by the others' perceptions about women (Nash, 1980 : 2).

In other words, whether they receive education, for how long and what kind, whether they work or not and the kind of work they take up—all these are determined to a great extent by the perceptions of family members and by their self-perceptions and expectations of a woman and what a woman should be.

Basically, the following broad questions were in our minds when we conceived the outline of this symposium.

1. What is education expected to do *to* women and *for* women, subjectively, in terms of their self-perceptions, identity and role, and objectively, in terms of others' expectations from educated women and the perceptions about their identity and role?
2. What does education actually do for women and why? What does it not do and why?
3. How does socialisation react to and interact with the process of education and how does it affect women?
4. What are the interlinkages of formal education with employment opportunities for women?

Durkheim defines education as 'the methodical socialisation of the

young generation (1956 : 71). Later sociologists included the influence of social class background, family relationships (Craft, 1972), peer group influences, classroom interaction and the effect of social class on the construction of ability (Simpson & Rosenholtz, 1986; Rosenbaum, 1986) as the prime areas of importance in the sociology of education. The theoretical models used by them were structural-functionalism and the interactionist approach (Shipman, 1976 : 61). The focus on the former was on the smooth running of the school and the functions of education for the society while the latter was concerned mainly with the problems relating to ability and performance in the classroom and the school.

The radical or the new sociology of education which dominated British sociology of education in the seventies raises questions relating to the organisation of knowledge (Young, 1971), the construction of the curriculum and the role of language in delimiting the ability of the children from the working class to respond to classroom teaching (Bernstein, 1971). While these sociologists were influenced by Marxism, they differed in their concerns and emphases from those who raised the question of ideology and the role of the state using a specific Marxist framework and applied it to education (Freire, 1972; Althusser, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

The distinction between the radicals and Marxists is very fine and largely heuristic (Demaine, 1981) because they share common concerns. But problems such as the role of the dominant ideology in the curriculum (Apple, 1979), and in the reproduction of class relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), the role of the state in promoting the dominant ideology, the perpetuation of the status quo in society through education, the uses of education as a tool in the hands of the ruling elite and the hidden curriculum become the concerns of the sociologists. The feminists extended these arguments further, which will be discussed later. However, we may mention that 'when educational inequalities were first examined, the effects of being a male or a female pupil were not considered relevant to educational performance. ...' (Chapman, 1986 : 61). More recently, researchers committed to the principle of equal opportunities have focussed on the effects of early socialisation and the education system. They have succeeded in pointing out the existing inequalities but also underscore the processes which differentiate between students on the basis of gender in the schools.

Socialisation in the context of women seems to be heavily weighted

in favour of tradition, and the social institutions of family, kinship and marriage. It is closely intertwined with the process of role socialisation of boys and girls which eventually leads to the dichotomising of masculine and feminine roles or to gender asymmetry.⁵ Social and cultural differences are seen to be based on biological differences and therefore viewed as natural. In this way the difference between the biological, the natural and the social is obliterated through the process of value internationalisation within the sacred confines of the family and kinship group. These are further reinforced through religious ideology, myth, and ritual (see Leela Dube's paper in this volume).

Educational institutions reflect and reinforce these differences between men and women in various ways. This is seen first in the organisation of separate schools and classes for boys and girls. Secondly, through the content of their syllabi in which the dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles is projected. Thirdly, through the organisation of subjects and extracurricular activities in a manner so that girls are taught different subjects from boys. For example, girls are not encouraged to study science; they are not allowed to play football even in coeducational schools. The informal views and comments of the teachers (i.e. by their socialisation) as to what boys and girls ought to do, are another influence.

In this formal setting, the teachers, the organisers of the educational institutions, the writers of textbooks and all those involved with the running of the educational institutions constitute components of a complex whole. The socialisation of the girls and women within the formal institutions is a variable by itself. Together, these give rise to perceptions, views and images of women that are presumably not and perhaps cannot be taken into account within the formal structure of the organisation of schools, their curriculae and their various activities.

However, schools operate to maintain and perpetuate gender relations in subtle ways thereby reinforcing the socialising values and norms.⁶ For instance, the organisation of the schools assumes that boys and girls have different needs and interests based on sex. These are referred to as 'gender codes' (Macdonald, 1980). As such, from the time of registration itself boys and girls are treated differently. Registration, seating arrangements in the classroom, organisation of games (boys play football and girls swing) choosing of subjects (domestic science and needlework for girls, crafts for boys)—all take

the sex of the student into consideration. Teachers refer to students as 'boys' or 'girls' rather than as children, and they are encouraged not to compete. Moreover, students see men in authority positions and leadership roles in most schools. Even in coeducational schools they find women teachers in the junior section and men in the senior section. All these gender-typed arrangements reinforce social stereotypes and their expectations from education.

The list of gender-typing does not end here. Schooling perpetuates sexual division of labour in other more subtle ways too. For example, the organisation of working hours in most jobs is not compatible with the domestic role of women. Therefore, teaching remains most compatible with feminine roles and therefore girls take to teacher's training. This, in turn, perpetuates the sexual division of labour by delimiting labour force participation of women to certain jobs and by excluding them from certain others. On the basis of a study of 11 societies, Bourguignon concludes that even salaried jobs for educated women and 'such work opportunities in the public sector for women who previously did not have them does not necessarily give them greater freedom or increase their power, authority, or status' (1980 : 39).

This assumes special significance for girls since in their case the social and the educational functions are seen as one, whereas in the case of boys these functions are separated. Education is expected to perform a function for boys which is quite apart from their social role while it is expected to reinforce the social role of girl which is seen as that of a housewife and a mother (Ahmad, 1985). Did or could education ever be an equaliser in a situation where the socialisation process intervenes in such a manner? This is a very wide question and it needs to be answered on the basis of research linking gender with education.

III

As a result of the women's movement in the west, the interlinkages between gender and education have been studied systematically. While feminist scholars in general have tried to distinguish between sex and gender, the sociologists among them have established linkages between gender and education. They have looked at the various sociological theories and explored their implications for gender and education. The main problem that they address themselves to is—the structural subordination of women in almost

all societies (Acker, 1984 : 66). Further, they ask—what is the function of education in the subordination of women? While some have tried to seek explanations of these in the differences between men and women others have highlighted the processes through which individuals in any culture internalise and perpetuate these differences.⁷ However, most social scientists emphasise the differences in the role expectations for feminine and masculine behaviour and personality. For example, according to the functionalists education is expected to inculcate the values which will reinforce role socialisation and establish a continuity between the family and the school. This view is in keeping with the major concerns of the functionalists which are continuity and social solidarity. Feminists criticise this framework because of its implicit assumption that the familial role will govern women's choices within the educational system.

Recently, feminists have used the Marxist framework in varying degrees to explain the universal subordination of women⁸. These include a number of perspectives ranging from Marxist-feminist, radical feminist to socialist feminist⁹. All these theoretical viewpoints are derived broadly from Marxism and its interpretations. Some feminists draw upon the work of Engels wherein he explains the origin of female subordination to private property. Others have linked women's subordination to capitalism and to patriarchy. Some have combined different theoretical perspectives in order to explain women's subordination. However, as mentioned earlier, Marxist frameworks have been used to focus on the role of education, especially the role of the curriculum, in class reproduction (Apple, 1982; Bourdieu, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Feminist theorists interested in the role and function of education extend these approaches to highlight the role of school in the reproduction of gender relations (Macdonald, 1981; Barratt, 1980; Arnot, 1981; Wolpe, 1978; Kelly & Nihlen, 1982). They have also highlighted the contribution of the hidden curriculum in reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. The other question that is of interest to us and to which neo-Marxists have paid attention is : does education, through its formal curriculum, perpetuate the existing sexual division of labour in society by pushing women to poorly paid and lower category jobs? There seems to be a correspondence between unequal enrolment and differential experiences and the sexual division in the family and in the labour market. There is a

correspondence between the amount and the type of education received by women, on the one hand, and the expectations of masculine and feminine roles, on the other. For instance, boys are more likely than girls to go in for higher education and to study science and technology. This segregation extends into the vocational courses with girls tending to take up domestic science.

While Marxist-feminists emphasise class divisions among women, radical feminists stress what is common to all women, i.e., oppression regardless of their class background. Firstly, women's lowered self-esteem and their acceptance of inferiority to men is considered as 'given'. This arises out of women's experiences in school. Radical feminists also point to men's control over knowledge through the designing of official curriculae. Studies have been undertaken in Britain which indicate that boys get a greater share than girls of teacher attention in mixed classrooms (Clarricoates, 1978; Spender, 1982; Evans, 1979). Again, classroom projects are designed keeping the interests of boys in view and leadership roles are assigned to them (Clarricoates, 1978). Moreover, teachers habitually refer to what boys and girls should be like. However, researchers are not yet clear as to how girls internalise these messages about their inferiority and their difference from boys (Acker, 1984: 71). They have also not been able to establish whether educational experiences create them or reinforce them or whether education can be used to reverse them. While studies of this kind have not so far been undertaken in India, Vibha Parthasarathi's paper in this volume tries to provide answers to some of these questions.

The second issue that is raised by the radical feminists is the creation and transmission of knowledge in the educational institutions through the curriculum and other educational materials. Radical feminists have applied this approach to the study of gender typing and gender differentiation in the curriculum. It has helped them uncover explicit and implicit gender bias in the curriculum (Spender, 1981; Bowles and Duelli Klein, 1983). This has brought the attention of women's studies experts to the issue of the curriculum. Scholars have been concerned with this issue in India too and efforts are being made to re-examine the curriculum to make it sex-neutral (Barnabas, 1977; Mazumdar, 1978; Kalra 1979; NCERT, 1982, 1984).¹⁰ The underlying assumption that most disciplines have a gender bias has been exposed systematically in the analyses of textbooks. This is one of the important factors leading to

the growth in women's studies programmes and courses. Debates are underway as to whether these may be offered as separate courses, or as integral to the existing courses, or as alternative pedagogy.

There are others who, while linking schooling with class, also analyse the relationship between schooling and the structure of patriarchy. According to these social scientists, gender categories or the concepts of masculinity and femininity derive from the social and cultural transformation of biological differences. They argue further that education produces not only 'classed subjects' but also gender-typed subjects. The class identity as well as the gender identity is socially and culturally transmitted within the patriarchal system which assigns a position of inferiority to women. Men and women are hierarchical categories as much as classes are. This is a departure from earlier theories of class-reproduction under capitalism which ignore gender and patriarchy.

While some feminists have been concerned with offering an explanation for women's subordination, others have been concerned with ways and means of alleviating it through increasing opportunities and fighting discrimination. These social scientists have undertaken studies on sex-role socialisation (Delamont, 1983) and its interlinkages to traits such as submission, nurturance, and dependency. These, they contend, result in restricted vocational choices and prevent career success in adulthood. They argue further that lack of independence training and autonomy among girls becomes a permanent handicap at the higher stage of education and in the choice of a career. They seem to be in agreement with other feminists who argue that schools reinforce tradition by shaping the self-concepts of girls and future roles which are sex-differentiated (Lee, 1973). These reform-oriented feminists are optimists in so far as they believe that girls can be socialised differently by consciously changing the method of teaching. Most of the studies in India would fall under this category where reforms and modifications in the existing system of education are suggested without reference to changes in the wider social context. This optimism appears to derive from the functionalist model adopted since independence by our planners and policy makers to bring about social change in the Indian society through planned development. This model continues to enjoy support in spite of its known and by now proven drawbacks and limitations.

IV

The papers in this volume focus on the theme of socialisation, education and women with considerable flexibility and imagination. Some of the social settings and contexts on which the papers focus are the family, educational institutions like the school or the college; the media (television); the performing and the literary arts; and the world of work and professions dominated by men. They raise—and try to answer—several questions. How do the two processes interact and react to each other within a school or in the world of entrepreneurs? What are the role stereotypes and the images of educated women depicted in or portrayed in the media, the performing and literary arts? Do socialisation and education create conflict in the lives of women or project conflicting images of women? Are they complementary or contradictory processes, and in which specific social contexts are they found to be so? What are the perceptions regarding the function of education in the context of masculine and feminine stereotypes and the pre-eminence of the family?

The papers are multifaceted the multidisciplinary; in a way they reflect the character of women's studies. The questions posed are suggestive and not exhaustive. Since there can be no single approach to this problem, the contributions reflect varied perspectives and methodologies based on micro- as well as macrodata. The papers therefore approach the twin processes of socialisation and education in their many contexts and situations. The sources of data vary from studies based on empirical data to literary sources to those which use historical and life-history data. Thus, the variation is from primary to secondary sources, from micro- to macrodata and from literary to sociological sources. Similarly, there is variation in the methods of data collection. The range of papers is very wide, varying from a theoretical discussion of the interlinkages of women's education to development to empirical studies of women in theatre, television and literature, and others delineating the historical factors leading to the introduction of women's education in India.

According to P.N. Mukherjee freedom and equality have to be seen in relation to the culture and structure of specific societies, and differences in male and female roles do not ipso facto result in inequality between the sexes. He proposes three counter concepts to understand equality. These are discrimination, exploitation and

oppression (DEO). He contends that a progressive reduction in DEO would indicate an increase in equality. He points out the two basic contradictions, namely, between the sexes, on the one hand, and between family solidarity and individual and spatial mobility on the other. The three counter concepts refer to a set of asymmetrical relationships between groups in the social, economic and political fields. He draws a model of the interlinkages of the three and argues that its application to the study of the relationship between the sexes, between sex and society will lead to a better understanding of inequalities between the sexes.

The papers by Karlekar, Basu, and Chanana deal with the beginnings of women's education in British India. Karlekar highlights the growth of women's education in Bengal, Basu takes up the same question in the Bombay Presidency, while Chanana focusses on the interlinkages of sociocultural factors to women's education at the all-India level and also on the continuity of this interlinkage from the colonial to the post-independence period. The motivations and urges of those who wanted to introduce education for women as well as the agents themselves are identified. What is highlighted is that while certain factors of social change helped women, there was the overriding consideration that masculine and feminine roles should not be blurred through the education of women. In other words, the socialisation process at home was not to be counter-balanced by the processes going on in the school. In fact, the latter was to reinforce the former. However, another point that emerges is that, in spite of over-concern with reinforcing the stereotypes, some changes creep in and affect women in ways that push them towards modernisation and social change, and help them step out of the boundaries of their homes.

Aparna Basu's paper focusses on women's education in western India from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first two decades of the twentieth century. It draws upon the life histories, biographies and autobiographies of seven women who were among the first few to receive education. All of them were brahmin by caste and belonged to 'respectable' middle class families. One gets an idea of the orthodox reaction to 'the new woman' who was seen as a threat to the family. The fear was that exposure to English education would result in disrespect for the traditional norms and values. Basu's paper outlines some of the debates that took place as to whether women should be given higher education and if so, should this be the same

as that given to men. A further question implicit in these debates is why women should be educated. These questions are raised in the context of a separate social space for women. Thus, the regional variation in the social context is brought out here as well as in Chanana's paper.

Chanana's paper argues that the growth and expansion of women's education in colonial India has to be seen and understood within the social context which determines its goals and functions. She argues further that the social conception of feminine and masculine roles should be fully underscored in order to grasp the issues and problems pertaining to women's education. She looks at the growth of women's education from 1921 to 1947, a period of intense political awakening and social reform in India. She demonstrates the linkages between the debates on curriculum changes for girls, and enrolment of girls in coeducational schools to the notion of the role of a girl as a daughter, housewife and a mother. No direct linkage between the social role of a boy and his formal education is visible. Again, the differential response to education by different religious groups and from different regions is viewed in relation to socio-cultural practices such as *parda* and the segregation of sexes in certain areas and by some groups.

Karlekar's main argument is that the participation of women in education and employment in non-traditional areas has not brought about a substantial change in the notions of femininity. She traces the genesis of women's education in nineteenth century Bengal and links it to the differential perceptions of its functions for a boy and a girl. According to her, this system catered to the needs of the emergent Bengali middle class. For example, the belief that over-exposure to formal education would destroy what was special about a woman's nature limited her access to education. Therefore, formal education was to be imparted only to enhance this 'special nature'. Thereby, choices were limited in formal education of girls and this put constraints on its emancipatory role. She looks at existing reality to see the continuity of traditional role models, and observes that asymmetrical relations between the sexes have influenced and shaped the system of education during the colonial period and after.

Leela Dube's main concern is—how are women produced as gendered subjects in the patrilineal, patrilocal Hindu society? In order to do this, she analyses this problem in the context of the family structure as well as the wider context of kinship and contrasts

it with the situation pertaining in matrilineal societies. She argues that the construction of femininity is a continuous process and starts early. A girl's training for future roles and management of her sexuality are reflected through the use of space, time, speech and deportment. The role of ritual in reinforcing femininity is underscored. She has looked at the relationship between formal education and socialisation. She observes that the home and the school are constantly reinforcing each other in perpetuating gender differences and gender asymmetry.

The papers by Dube and Das bring us to the problem of subordination of women through control over their sexuality—an aspect that has attracted the attention of several feminist scholars in recent years. For instance, Heidi Hartmann (1981 : 15) mentions two sources of men's power over women, namely, men's control over economic resources and women's sexuality. According to Lynn Bennett, 'One of the most powerful and pervasive symbolic structures concerning women is the set of meanings attached to the female body' (Bennett, 1986 : 214).

Veena Das explores the double perspective on the body—'the body as an object and the body as a subject' and argues that the sense of being a woman can be analysed through this double perspective. The feminine body is both perceived and experienced differently from the masculine body. 'A girl grows up to perceive herself and relates to her role in society through her body. For example, the belief that a woman becomes impure or polluted at certain times of life or through sexual relations makes women see themselves as the persons who absorb not only pollution but also sin and danger.'¹¹ This results in their internalising the belief that they are responsible for problems experienced by, or even created by their men. Das refers to the socialisation process which reflects the way society views the bodies of men and women and the different values assigned to the masculine and feminine body. This is then linked to the formal socialisation of the female which establishes gender identities resulting in a double perspective relating to the male and the female. The body becomes the most important medium to reflect these differences.

Zarina Bhatti's paper on the socialisation of Muslim girls could well be about any Indian girl within a similar social context. The assumption that women are physically, mentally and spiritually inferior to men and that they are responsible for the continuity of

tradition and culture are common to all Indians. The double standards of morality for men and women as well as the association of *izzat* or honour with the behaviour of women may not, however, be as explicit among other communities as among the Muslims.¹²

Vibha Parthasarathi tells us very effectively the role a school or formal educational institution can play in neutralising the role of traditional stereotypes, as well as in helping boys and girls overcome the societal expectations of predetermined masculine and feminine roles. The main issue is the status of girls among students and women among the staff. The emphasis is placed on individuality and essential personhood of girls in the process of socialisation. Boys and girls are offered alternate role models. In this process the masculine and feminine roles are blurred, if not interchanged. Boys are socialised into accepting a new status for girls in a climate of respect and equality. This experiment has an all-round focus within and without the classroom and also sensitises the teachers as well as students. Prejudices are also fought on pedagogical grounds. Teachers are seen as an essential tool for bringing about change in the values of the students.

Mrinal Pande looks at the portrayal of women characters in Indian theatre, starting from Bharat Muni to contemporary theatre. She raises several issues notable among them being the stereotyped depiction of women characters. She contends that the classical theatre, especially the Sanskrit theatre, reflected the ideals of a patriarchal feudal system and, therefore, adhered to its code of discrimination between men and women. Contemporary theatre, she argues, is closer in its *samskaras* to the theatre of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries i.e., a curious mixture of the Hindu, the Muslim and the Western (British) influences. The beautiful courtesan is the central figure and typifies the ambivalence towards women. There is the contrast between the talented, artistic and intellectual courtesan, and the wife, the *sati sadhvi*, who sits at home and takes care of the children and household. The husband spends nearly all his time with the former. Thus, the social role is extended into the theatre where the rules are set and the parts are known.

While comparing male and female playwrights, she contends that female playwrights are motivated by two forces to write plays. First, it is their commitment as a means of communication and second, they would like rethinking on the whole question of woman's status in society. Thus, while their plays remain weak as literary works,

protest and indignation are important elements. Pande also explores the pattern of female employment in the theatre. Women actresses have still to bear the ignominy of being compared to the oldest profession and earning the disrespect of their audiences.

Meenakshi Mukherjee uses five autobiographical texts to examine the perspective of self in relating to society and how far these perspectives are shaped by the education of the writers. All the writers were born in nineteenth century Bengal, their years of birth ranging from 1819 to 1879. Mukherjee is trying to recreate a world of values as reflected in their texts. The important point to note is that all these accounts referred to the education of the narrator directly or indirectly, although only one narrator had formal schooling. These texts reflected a beginning in the direction of defining their self images in terms of individual identity.

While the texts are important for what they tell us, their significance also lies in the omissions. For instance, all the texts avoid reference to the biological aspects. Clearly, the narrators are governed by a social code in what they are writing and what they are omitting. This paper underscores the fact that education for women was not expected to help them bring about any change in the traditional notion of femininity and the concept of a feminine role, a point emphasised by Basu, Chanana, Karlekar, Lakshmi, and Krishnan as well.

C.S. Lakshmi's paper delineates the images of educated women as reflected in modern Tamil literature. These portrayals are very much in keeping with the traditional images of women. The educated woman was anathema in this atmosphere. A new factor to deal with, she created a variety of reactions from the writers. While some saw in her the ultimate ruin of the culture, others looked to her for the revival of tradition and expected her to use education to buttress traditional notions of femininity and womanhood. Fears about the disintegration of the family structure and the breakdown of social norms were expressed. Her physical appearance, and dress were criticised, and certain qualities, namely, arrogance, defiance, sociability and boyishness were automatically ascribed to her. It was considered that the educated woman did not know how to adjust to the married state; she therefore had to hide her education in order to get married. If she worked, this was only to support her family. Not to deviate but to conform seems to be the message given to the educated woman.

Prabha Krishnan takes up science fiction serials to substantiate the point that science fiction fails to offer alternate role models and social structures. She takes, as an example, a popular American serial, *Star Trek*, which was shown on the Indian television network and became a hit. While it is expected that the view of life in the future as depicted in science fiction or in fantasy will provide alternate roles for men and women, serials like *Star Trek* fail on that count. This is mainly because science fiction is a predominantly male activity. As a result it remains embedded in the matrices of patriarchy in capitalist, socialist or fascist systems. Since the present systems provide a nurturing environment for man, science fiction as a genre predicts advances on the technical front only. Therefore, this exercise into predictive history does not envisage anything different for women of the future. In fact, what it does is to celebrate male dominance and perpetuate the ethos of violence.

Pushpa Sundar writes about the education and socialisation of women entrepreneurs. The significance of this phenomenon is that women are entering new and exclusively male preserves. Traditional socialisation emerges as one of the important factors that keeps women out and continues to create problems for those who have managed to make an entry into these areas. The fact of being a woman is important because women are still seen as supplementary earners. This attitude is reflected in the programme for help offered to women because the planners and policy makers also believe in them. Thus the stereotyped attitude to women results in the belief that women cannot set up every type of industry. Further, families are also reluctant to finance an enterprise run by women; consequently women do not often receive familial encouragement and/or support. Government agencies are also reluctant to finance women unless they can bring men as guarantors. Sundar concludes by referring to the need for change in attitudes, the reorientation of the curriculum and more effective designing of training and support programmes for women entrepreneurs.

V

The main point that emerges from this volume is the overarching importance and impact of socialisation on the lives of girls and women. This process is, moreover, so intertwined in women's lives that it determines motivations, expectations, perceptions and attitudes to formal education of girls and women as students and as

teachers. At the formal level, it affects the growth, expansion and goals of women's education. Again, the socialisation of others, whether they are parents, policy makers or educators, influences the curriculum, the organisation of school hours and classes, the availability of subjects and disciplines within the school and the role models that girls will find around them.

Therefore, it seems relevant to stress that formal education cannot be effective unless we understand its strong interlinkage with the socialisation process in so far as socialisation involves internalisation of values and identity formation. Socialisation emerges as the stronger of the two processes. It is also intangible and operates not only within the family but within the school as well. Vibha Parthasarathi's experiment very clearly points out that a formal educational institution can play an interventionist role in the socialisation of boys and girls. But the need to underscore the role of leadership is crucial. By interviewing parents, students and teachers, an effort is made to see if a gap existed between the self-images and expectations of girls. Boys and girls are offered alternate role models within the school and also helped to accept them.

We find that the process of socialisation begins at home, enters the school and spreads to the world of work. Thus, the construction of femininity is continuous and girls and women are moulded in subtle and not so subtle ways so that their educational and employment choices are limited and their movement is directed. Formal education is unable to change either this direction or to provide more options to them. In fact, formal education not only fails to neutralise the values acquired earlier, it, in fact, reinforces these values. Formal education or schooling achieves this gender typing explicitly as well as implicitly.

Gender differentiation in schooling and the use of schooling in perpetuating gender typing has its genesis in the past. We have not succeeded in breaking the linkage between the stereotyping of subjects on the basis of gender and socialisation. This continuity and link is evident. Whether we look at the curriculum or the educational policy with specific reference to the schooling of girls, what is brought home forcefully is the fact that the social role of girls defines their educational needs and goals. Thus, the instrumental value of education continues to be different for boys and girls.

In addition to the schools and the educational policy, the modern mass media, the theatre and literature give a similar message,

namely, that gender is paramount in determining the role and function of education. Apart from the stereotype of a traditional Indian woman, we also receive the image of the modern educated Indian woman, the antithesis of the former. Although the educated woman has come to stay, there is reluctance to accept her as an individual and as a person. She is seen as a threat to the traditional social structure represented by the family and the kin group. The dilemma of the educated working woman, her perceptions, and her problems are also reflected in the paper by Sundar. An educated working woman is comparable to Trishanku, a character in Hindu mythology, who had to hang between heaven and earth since he dared to enter heaven with his body (Ahmad, 1986 : 55).¹³ According to Hindu belief, only gods could enter heaven with their bodies whereas only the souls of mortals could do so. Thus Trishanku paid the price of breaking an age-old and accepted norm. The working woman who steps out of the traditional confines of the home into the world of work,¹⁴ faces a similar problem for she can never be fully accepted in the world of work nor can she come back to the world she has stepped out of and left behind. Educated women, especially those who are working, are constantly given the message that they cannot and should not be different: therefore, the threats, veiled or otherwise, that come through in the media, literary sources etc. Education in the service of the family and for socialising girls into their feminine roles is accepted. But education leading to employment seems to be seen as dangerous and ominous, a highly undesirable situation with adverse effects on traditional institutions. This is so even when domestic responsibilities have a negative impact on women's professional careers. The message is clear : even if you have ventured out into nontraditional spheres and spaces, do not step out of bounds.

What are the consequences of stepping out of the boundaries and limits set for these women? Will Indian women remain confined within the *Lakshmana-rekha*¹⁵ for fear of being abducted by Ravana? Lakshmi observes that the educated woman is delineated as a wayward character and the threat of punishment for nonconformism is ever-present. One is forced to conclude that education and work are in fact not expected to bring about a change in the social role of a woman. The *Lakshmana-rekha* is as real for the traditional Indian woman as it is for the modern Indian woman. If she stays within the boundary she is seen to be powerful. Her power can even burn and

destroy the evil and the corrupt. On the other hand, she is powerless outside this boundary which has been set by her male guardians. If she steps out, it is a reflection of her waywardness and irresponsibility.

The function of socialisation in instilling this fear or in creating inhibitions, and of formal education in perpetuating them, is undeniable. However, apart from the family and the school, myths and rituals also play a significant role in communicating this message. Besides, the female body, language and deportment also become important media of the message of gender differentiation in social roles. One finds that the socialisation process in this context cuts across religion. 'The effects of the teaching of various religions on male and female roles have often been to limit the access of women to education : thus the influence of religion on educational opportunity continues to merit attention' (Sutherland, 1984 : 11).

The papers by Dube and Bhatti highlight these similarities among the Hindus and Muslims. However, while the Muslim women are noticeable by the practice of *parda*, the notion of sex-segregation is dominant even in the South where *parda* is not practised. Whether Islam and other religions adversely affect women's access to education is not clear because several other factors are involved (Kelly, 1984 : 85). Similarly, the unilateral right of a Muslim male to divorce his wife could be equally matched with the discarding of a wife by a Hindu husband who lives with a mistress. Both the situations stress the instrumental value of the woman whether she be the first wife, the second wife or the mistress. All are equally, though differently, victims of exploitation. Ironically, women fail to perceive their use as instruments by men for exploiting other women. This leads, in turn, to several questions that women in the movement must address—What is the quality of liberation women want? In liberating ourselves are we going to be as exploitative as men are and have been? Should we not ask ourselves in what way are we going to be different from men: in what ways we see the social environment as being different? Will education help us overcome our orientation of perceiving ourselves as instruments alone? Can it help us overcome the limitations and constraints imposed by socialisation? How far can we use education to break this vicious circle imposed by our orientations and reimposed by our perceptions? Can efforts to reorganise the curriculum, to rewrite books, to make science and mathematics compulsory for girls and boys, introduction of women's

studies in the universities, etc. help us move in the direction of equality for women? This volume will hopefully address itself to some of these questions.

VI

'Education for all'—can we ever achieve that goal if one half of our population is excluded from the purview of education—whether, nonformal, formal or incidental?

Our contention is that unless goals of education for girls and women are clearly identified a large majority of girls and women will continue to be denied the benefits of education. Secondly, it is time that these goals are disentangled from the web of attitudes relating to role-expectations. Thirdly, the goals and objectives of education of women should not be viewed only in the context of feminine roles.

The point we wish to make is that so long as we continue to expect formal education to be an extension of the socialisation process within the family and the home it cannot overcome the drawbacks of the latter. The need to distinguish between the 'public' and 'private' roles of women and the association of time, space and behaviour patterns has to be obliterated. For instance, there need not be a contradiction in the private and public roles of women. Why should one anticipate a conflict or contradiction between the values imbibed at home and those taught in the school only in the case of girls? And if necessary, why should we not be willing to allow some conflict to meet the challenge posed by a new emerging society? Why should there be a contradiction between personhood and womanhood? Is conformity to traditional roles in a changing society just or fair? Why should the personal (or the social) role of men alone be separated from the economic role? Women's roles—social, personal, economic—all seem to overlap and keep her at the lowest end of the hierarchy of roles. The status summation model seems to operate in this context (Bhatt, 1975 : 1-7).¹⁶

We also contend that all schemes for girls such as free education, uniforms and books, midday meals, scholarships and stipends, hostels etc. are part of a piecemeal approach to the larger problem of girls' education. These must be viewed, conceived and implemented within a larger framework of goals of education in general and of girls' education in particular. There is need to understand the interconnection between women's status and the dynamics of the contemporary process of social change.

It is time we asked ourselves—what do we want education to do for women? The answer to this question should be linked to our expectations from education for men. We shall be able to do it if we look at men and women as individuals in apposition and not in opposition to the community (Naik, 1982 : 153).

The barriers to women's education are structural as well as cultural. Both are closely intermeshed and are present in the school and the family or the home. For example, while the family structure prevents women from stepping out, the cultural constraints also limit their access to education. Though it was expected that education would neutralise the impact of tradition, it has failed to do so. In fact, some traditional customs have received a boost from education. Dowry is an excellent example of this. Dowry is an indication of gender asymmetry and it has spread to those regions, castes and communities where this custom was non-existent. Also, the demand for dowry has increased along with the increase in education. Educational qualifications of the groom, especially in the middle strata, have become crucial in determining his 'economic' value in the marriage market. For the girls, education has only 'status' value.

Let us assume that the marital value of a boy and a girl is zero without education. The boy's social value (status) as well as economic value (price) go up with the input of education. His parents can demand a higher dowry due to the son's higher social and economic value and can expect that the girl's parents will offset the cost of his education. Thus, the boy's education has a positive value. What happens to a girl who receives education? Do her parents give less dowry? Do they expect that the cost of her education will be offset by the boy's parents? As the girl's qualifications increase, only her social value (status) goes up; her economic value¹⁷ remains at 'zero'. Dowry goes up according to the 'status'. Thus, the higher educational qualifications of a girl, in a sense, have negative value for the parents; they have to pay a higher dowry for a highly qualified groom for their highly qualified daughter.¹⁸ It would be an interesting exercise to work out a formula to show the difference in the impact of education on the lives of women and men.

Finally, we raise the question of social change in the context of structural and cultural barriers to the education of women. While some papers highlight the role of culture and tradition in maintaining the status quo, others refer to change that has taken place in the lives

of Indian women. Thus some papers give descriptive analyses of women's lives, while others have a dynamic perspective. Yet none among the latter are radical enough to demonstrate far-reaching changes in the lives of women. Therefore there is need to underscore the importance of presenting alternative viewpoints, theories and paradigms emanating from the experience and world view of women:

Recently, some women scholars have begun to argue that unless there is a change in the perceptions of roles of men and women no significant changes can be brought in the lives of women through education. The crucial question here is: Is education for women expected to generate its own dynamics? (Ahmad, 1985 : 26).

The answer is an emphatic 'no'

Other scholars have argued that women's studies is necessarily a study of social change. In fact, Dube states rather emphatically:

It would not be wrong to say then that the new studies on women in anthropology are, by and large, informed by a positive perspective on change in terms of a radical transformation of gender relationships and fundamental structural changes in society (Dube, 1986 : xix).

In other words, these feminist scholars assert that women's studies ought to have a vision of the kind of social change they envisage in their societies. The papers in this volume give us an idea of the changes that have or have not taken place in the lives of Indian women. Feminists have to be actively involved in drawing up paradigms of social change and new ways of living (Rosaldo, 1980). But we need to go further and relate the basic issues in women's studies to development. These issues

relate to culture and ideology, social structural and institutional arrangements and relations of production which define the access of women and men to resources for living, a woman's place in the household, and her rights over her children. We confront conceptions regarding the nature of female and male sexuality, cultural perceptions of women's roles and the reasons behind them, planners' perceptions of women's participation in and contribution to production, and the primacy of the domestic sphere generally explained in relation to women's roles in biological reproduction and childbearing. In other words, we

confront what is basic to gender relations and women's redicament. Therefore, if we agree that gender inequality is connected to and sustained by other kinds of inequality then nothing short of structural transformation can do away with the problems that come up in the context of development. Alternative visions of development need to think of such transformation as a precondition (Dube, 1986 : xxxv).

APPENDIX

Table 1
*Percentage distribution of men and women
in university education (faculty-wise).*

Faculty	Year							
	1951		1961		1971		1981	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Arts	43.2	67.9	41.7	70.2	38.7	64.3	34.6	56.1
Science	33.4	21.0	30.8	18.6	33.2	25.7	19.0	20.6
Commerce	9.6	0.4	10.2	0.5	14.1	0.4	23.2	11.8
Education	0.8	3.1	1.5	3.7	1.5	3.2	1.8	4.5
Engineering/ Technology	3.4	0.04	5.1	0.2	3.8	0.1	6.2	0.7
Medicine	3.6	5.8	3.1	4.5	3.2	3.4	4.1	3.6
Law	3.8	0.7	3.0	0.5	2.9	0.4	8.1	1.6
Agriculture/ Veterinary Science and others	2.2	1.1	4.6	1.8	2.5	2.5	2.8	9.5

Sources: 1. Ahmad, 1979 (for figures on 1951, 1961, 1971)
2. U.G.C. Annual Report, 1982-83.

Table 2
Proportion of women students to total students in all faculties

Faculty	Year			
	1951	1961	1971	1981
Arts	16.1	24.6	31.7	37.7
Science	7.1	10.5	17.8	28.7
Commerce	0.6	0.9	3.7	15.9
Education	32.4	32.8	36.5	47.3
Engineering/Technology	0.2	0.9	1.0	3.8
Medicine	16.3	21.9	22.8	24.4
Law	2.1	3.0	3.7	6.9
Agriculture/Veterinary	5.8	7.0	9.5*	9.5
Science and others				

* A large majority of the students are enrolled in faculties entitled 'others'. The number of women in agriculture was 1,000 out of 39,000 total enrolment in 1980-81. It was much less in Veterinary Science. This is in spite of an increase in women's enrolment in these faculties during the last three decades.

Source: Bhandari, 1982: 37

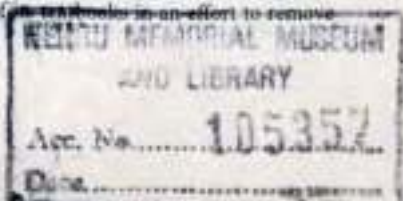
Table 3
*Proportion of women students and teachers
 in higher education (faculty-wise)*

Faculty	Year			
	1951		1981	
	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers
Arts	16.1	11.4	37.7	24.2
Science	7.1	6.3	28.7	17.1
Commerce	0.6	0.4	15.9	6.3
Education	32.4	24.3	47.3	22.9
Engineering/Technology	0.2	nil	3.8	2.0
Medicine	16.3	9.8	24.4	20.9
Law	2.1	nil	6.9	4.5
Agriculture/Veterinary	5.8	0.2	9.5*	1.7
Science and others				

* To understand this high percentage see Note in Table 2.

Footnotes

1. The figures are as follows : in 1950-51, 0.6; 32.4, 2.1 per cent of all students in higher education were women who had enrolled in the faculties of commerce, education and law respectively. Their proportion in 1981 increased to 15.9, 47.3 and 6.9 per cent respectively. For comparative figures on men, see Table 1 in the Appendix.
2. The Indian Government is committed to the setting up of at least one primary school within one kilometre of every village as a starting point for providing education in the rural areas.
3. These are only some of the references. Many others are available. For details, see S. Chitnis, 1985. We may also mention that the Indian Council of Social Science Research commissioned two surveys on the problems of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in different states of India. (The state reports were published and are available in the library of the ICSSR.) For all-India reports see Chitnis, 1974, 1981.
4. Shirley Ardener puts it aptly '...perceptions of the *nature* of women affect the shape of the *categories* assigned to them, which in turn reflect back upon and reinforce or remould perceptions of the *nature* of women, in a continuing process' (1978 : 9).
5. This aspect has been highlighted in Shirley Ardener (ed.) 1978. While referring to a paper in her book she writes that 'the biological properties of women may be used as 'markers' of social categories in a way that does not so often happen in the case of men' (p. 13).
6. In other words, through the formal educational institutions the underlife and overlife structures, which shape women's lives and behaviours, tend to merge. According to Boulding, 'The underlife concept implies an overlife as well, which consists of overtly articulated role structures—the visible terrain of society. Women's sex-designated position, resistant to social changes that alter other parts of the social structure, tends to keep her in the underlife sector, (Boulding, 1976 : 17). The underlife structures reinforce the socialization process while the formal educational system or schooling does that too for the girls.
7. Sandra Acker distinguishes between fundamental and implementary approaches to the study of gender. Fundamental theories, according to her, seek basic and universal explanations to gender differentiation. They seek these explanations in human nature or in social organisation. Functional and all variations of Marxist approaches would fall under this category. Implementary approaches, on the other hand, do not seek explanations of subordination. They try to explain how gender differentiation is perpetuated and what should be done to change the situation, without altering the social structure (1984 : 66).
8. However, there is lack of complete agreement among feminists on this point. See, for example, Leacock, 1986.
9. These are heuristic distinctions because it is very difficult to draw a distinction between different categories of Marxist-feminists.
10. The National Council For Educational Research & Training (NCERT) is in charge of commissioning of and publication of textbooks for schools in India. It has undertaken a serious analysis of some of the textbooks in an effort to remove

T55:(Y) 2, N85
M5; M8

gender bias. There are many other publications besides the references given above.

11. 'Among all the different mechanisms which "keep women in their place" perhaps the most effective is the notion that the place is designed for their own good and that of their families. Thus infringement of a boundary may be thought to expose their own "vulnerability" to danger. ... they may even come to regard themselves as a threat to themselves and their families.' (Ardener, 1978 : 29).
12. Oakley's analysis of the behaviour of English school girls is equally true for the Muslim girls' behaviour described by Bhatt. According to Oakley, all the actions of these girls are mapped out in advance and the degrees of freedom allowed are few. Ardener goes so far as to say that 'the old adage that little girls should be seen and not heard might well be extended to read "females should be neither seen nor heard" — except in certain carefully defined spaces.' (Ardener 1978 : 14).
13. The story of Trishanku is part of the *Ramayana*. Trishanku was a king of the Sun dynasty. He wanted to ascend to heaven with his body but was forbidden to do so by the gods although Vishwamitra found him fit to do so on the basis of his piety. Therefore when he ascended towards heaven through the special powers of the sage, he was stopped outside it by Indra, the king of gods. Trishanku could not return to earth because that would have been a vindication of the powers of the sage. Hence a new heaven called Trishanku Swarga was created by the sage Vishwamitra. It was thus agreed that he should hang with his head downwards and become a star, thus paying the price for aspiring for a world to which he did not belong and leaving the world (the earth) where he did belong (Dowson, 1973 : 288, 321).
14. 'Work' denotes paid work or employment outside the home.
15. *Lakshmana-rekha* was the boundary line that Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama, drew outside the hut in which he left Sita, (Rama's wife) when he went in search of the golden deer, Maricha. He instructed Sita not to step out of it, anyone, on the other hand, who dared to step inside would burn instantaneously. In the guise of a holy man, Ravana, the demon king, implored her to come out to give alms to him. Sita stepped out of this boundary and that spelled ruination for her. She suffered because of her weakness and her mistake. Her husband Rama had to wage a war against Ravana in order to redeem his honour. Thus, he too suffered for the weakness and fault of his wife. (For details on *Lakshmana-rekha* see Chakravarti, 1983 : 73.)
16. Here we are drawing a parallel with the model of social stratification in traditional India, namely, the caste system which has been described as a system of 'institutionalised inequalities'. This was so mainly because an individual who was lower in the ritual hierarchy tended to be lower also in the political, economic and social hierarchies. In other words, if one were to look at the several dimensions of the caste system, all these overlapped. Thus, an individual was likely to enjoy a higher or lower status in all the dimensions and there was no status incongruence among these dimensions. Thus, the degree of status summation was high in the caste system. This may be extended to women in India. (For details, see Bhatt, 1975 : 1-7).
17. This is so even if she is working, which is quite often the case in metropolitan cities.
18. The implications of this for the expansion of girls' education are serious as was

pointed out by a district education officer from Madhya Pradesh. He stated that the demand for girls' education had decreased because parents were reluctant to educate their daughters since highly educated daughters needed highly educated husbands who, in turn, demanded large dowries.

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Sex and Social Structure

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The woman question is at once complex and complicating. It has generally exposed the inadequacies of established paradigms in the social sciences in providing satisfactory explanations of the structure and persistence of the pervasive male-dominant social organisation of gender relations. The structure of relationships between the sexes admit of variation in societies, in time, space and across cultures. There have been (or are) societies in which relationships between the sexes have been (or are) based on reciprocity and symmetry of rights and obligations; there exist (or existed) societies with asymmetrical relations of power and position with male (or female) as ascendant, and, there is now an ever-growing consciousness and realisation of the need to order societies on sex-egalitarian principles.

This raises very complicated ideological and theoretical questions. First, what is a sex-egalitarian social structure? Is there any consensual ideal-typical model of such a society? Second, is there any relationship between a sex-egalitarian social structure and 'hierarchical versus egalitarian productive structures'? (ILO, 1981 : 43). Is equality among sexes 'fully' realisable in hierarchical societies? If so, what will be the nature of such equality? Third, it follows that in so far as the concept of equality is problematic, the concept of sex equality too will remain correspondingly problematic.

In this paper, before discussing the theoretical aspects of the problem I shall briefly discuss the evolution of the position of women in Hindu society; anthropological evidence of societies in which the position of women is claimed to be equal to, if not higher than men; the changing position of women in the capitalist bulwark (USA); and socialist experiments which are consciously seeking to equalise the status of women with men, particularly with reference to China and Vietnam.

I

The relationship between the sexes during the earliest period of our history—the Vedic age (before 1000 B.C.)—was characterised by a

reciprocity in which the rights and obligations of each were nearly equivalenced. Thus both boys and girls underwent religious initiation (*upanayana*) which entitled them to the study of Vedic texts. Hymns composed by some of the outstanding women scholars during this period later on became a part of the sacred canon. They excelled in music, dance and fine arts and engaged in productive labour such as manufacturing (of bows, arrows, baskets, cloth) and agriculture. Sex norms were liberal and marriage though valued was not obligatory. There were instances of women living in their father's house until death. Both premarital and extramarital love were in evidence and tolerated, for, 'even wives suspected of having paramours were not denied social and religious rites, far less driven away from the family' (Mazumdar, 1953 : 10). Elopements, though infrequent, were not negatively sanctioned.

Marriage and family bestowed considerable status on woman. Neither the *Rig Veda* nor the *Grihya Sutra*s enjoined any kind of binding obedience of the wife to her husband. She was free to participate in all religious practices and sacrifices and was 'entitled to all the *samshkaras* or religious sacraments like men, and not only were religious prayers and sacrifices jointly offered by the husband and the wife, but the wife alone could offer them in the absence of her husband' (pp. 4, 5). Married women being gainfully employed retained the right over their wealth or property such as utensils, ornaments, apparel and so on, but this did not include immovable property as this was still jointly owned by the patrilineal family. Unmarried women got a share of the patrimony with the sons. Levirate (the custom by which a dead man's brother or next of kin married the widow) was sanctioned and extensively practised; widow marriages were allowed. It was even expected by some that 'the bride would in course of time be able to command the audience at a public meeting' (Altekar, 1953 : 27).

Altekar describes the overall situation during this period. The Aryans were busy in the task of political expansion, times were unsettled, and the women contributed to the war efforts by productive labour in manufacturing and agriculture. They had access to knowledge and economic resources and were accorded high status as active participants in major spheres of societal activities (p. 29). We also note during this period the incipient tendencies which marked the forebodings for the future. Society was already patriarchal and the birth of a son was definitely more valued than

that of a daughter.

The period between 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. was characterised by Aryan political consolidation in north India. A part of the conquered population was reduced to slavery and their cheap manual labour replaced the active role of women in manufacturing and in agriculture. However, we are told, in home industries such as spinning and weaving their productivity did not wane. 'On the whole, women became less productive members of the society, and that indirectly lowered their status' (p. 30).

Although the status of women during this period did not undergo any drastic decline, the basis for its erosion was already taking place. Vedic studies got professionalised. The father as the teacher was replaced by the *acharya*. This was accompanied by a shift from Vedas hitherto considered as devotional songs composed by saint-poets, to their being regarded as 'revealed', representing the very word of god, and hence, to be preserved in their pristine form. 'This canonisation of the Vedic literature necessitated its prolonged study with meticulous care for about twelve years at least' (p. 31). Thus the knowledge of the Vedas remained incomplete by the time women got married around the age of seventeen or eighteen. Thus unequal access to knowledge for men and women was the first overt manifestation of their inequality. It is not surprising that thereafter there were persistent demands for reducing their age at marriage so that they would be precluded from any access to knowledge and reduced to a status totally dependent on men. By 500 B.C. legal treatises recommended that girls be married at or close to puberty.

Between c. 500 B.C. and c. 600 B.C. Vedic knowledge had acquired great complexity and required more time to master, at the same time, age at marriage for women had been considerably reduced. Only a select number of brahmins could now acquire scholarship by devoting upto sixteen years or more of arduous studies. Vedic sacrifices also became more elaborate and complex. Thus initiation (*upanayana*) which was a passport to Vedic knowledge became a mere formality with women, performed without chanting of Vedic mantras (c. 500 B.C.), and finally dispensed with (c. 500 A.D.) (p. 35). Once women became ineligible for Vedic studies by being denied initiation rights, they were clubbed with the shudras who too were denied the same rights. Women gradually lost their rights. Marriage became obligatory for a woman. She was denied divorce and the right to remarry on the death of her husband.

She was withdrawn from her earlier economic activities and thus became an inevitable, unavoidable appendage to a man, who was now considered her lord and master, and in whose veneration lay her final emancipation. In course of time, so complete was her subservience and surrender to man that she had to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband to demonstrate that she was a paragon of virtue!¹ A quote from Mazumdar will serve to illustrate in what disesteem, Manu the lawgiver held women:

Verses 14 and 15 of Chapter IX in *Manusmriti* depict the licentious and grossly sensuous character of women in general in such terms as cannot be reproduced without violating decency and modesty. The creator 'implanted in them carnal passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct' (9.17). 'Women who are destitute of strength and knowledge of Vedic texts and for whom no sacramental rite is performed with sacred texts, are as impure as falsehood itself' (9.19). 'In view of their inherent wicked character they must be carefully guarded, specially by their husbands, to whom they are naturally loyal' (9.15-16). (Mazumdar, 1953 : 29).

However, as if to compensate somewhat for the utterly dependent and low status to which woman was relegated, she was given certain rights in property. Thus the daughter's right to father's property in the absence of a son, and the mother's and grandmother's right to inherit property of an issueless son or grandson was generally recognised. 'The main progress recorded in this age', to be sure, 'was in recognition of the widow's right to inherit the property of her husband, if he had separated from the joint family prior to his death' (Altekar, 1953:38). It was Yajñavalkya who championed the cause of the widow's rights to the share of her late husband's property, and the British based their inheritance laws for women in India deriving authority from him.

Two variables emerge as crucial from an analysis of the broad pattern of changes in the position of women over two millennia: participation in productive labour and access to knowledge. From the time they were withdrawn from productive labour a steady erosion in their freedom and consequently of their status took place. So long as the Aryans were busy with wars and political consolidation, society was relatively egalitarian, caste hierarchisation had not ossified society, and women enjoyed considerable freedom and high

status. With the establishment of Aryan domination over other communities and principalities and the use of slave labour to produce surplus, the relationship of subordination and superordination between master and slave was presumably turned inwards. From an egalitarian social order the shift had taken place to a hierarchised structure and woman was subordinated to man. This was naturally paralleled by greater elaboration of Vedic knowledge and rituals and rationalisations and interpretations of the emerging norms and values.²

The contradictions introduced into Hinduism gave rise to disenchantments and periodic protests and revolts. Thus Buddhism, Jainism, the Bhakti movement, Islam, Veerashaivism, Sikhism, Christianity—all testify to the need felt by large sections of the Indian society for more satisfactory alternatives to the existing socio-religious orders of the day. In each of these religions, except perhaps Islam, the position of women marginally improved (ICSSR Report, 1975 : 45-50). But it was not until the impact of Western liberalism had made itself felt through English education that reform movements really launched their crusades. The Brahmo Samaj in the east and the Prarthana Samaj in the west crusaded against child marriage, seclusion of women, limited inheritance rights and polygamy. Education to women was considered the best instrument to combat these social evils. Intercaste marriages were encouraged and widow marriages were sought to be given wider social sanction (pp. 51-2). The Arya Samaj regarded the Vedic age as its model and sought to introduce reforms in the caste system and in the position of women. Its influence spread mostly in the north. However, it has been argued that such attempts at reforms 'aimed to change the position of woman within the family and the domestic framework and did not foresee any radical change in the social structure ... None of these movements aimed to make the woman an equal partner of man in the societal roles outside the family' (p. 53).

The status of women today reflects the 'national neglect' of the woman in India and is discernible in the alarming trends that have come to sight. These are, the persistent decline in the sex ratio; increasing gap between men and women in literacy, education and training for employment; accelerated decline in women's employment since 1951; glaring disparity between men and women (among the poorer sections of the population) in access to health care and medical services (ICSSR, 1977 : 1-2).

It must be clearly understood that the entire discussion on the position of women in India follows a very broad pattern as revealed through classical religious and legal scripts and statistical trends. It can presumably be upheld that to the extent that the larger society was relatively undifferentiated, that property in land had not crystallised, that wide divergences in the distribution of power did not exist, that caste hierarchisation had not become rigidly institutionalised, to that extent the characterisation of the position of Hindu women in ancient India may have had a fairly uniform and therefore a wide coverage of the universe. Thereafter, the discussion becomes less certain about the universal applicability of the generalisations. For instance, it is not clear whether self-immolation of the widow (sati) on her husband's funeral pyre was not a practice largely confined to the wealthier and elitist sections of our society to avoid possible complications that could arise out of a demand for share in the property of the deceased. We also know that restrictions based on purity and impurity in the ritual sphere applied differentially to caste in the social hierarchy. Finally, who, after all, withdrew the women from manufacturing and agriculture but those who commanded the slaves.

In conclusion, broadly three processes can be identified with respect to the evolution of the position of women in India in the past. In the sphere of structural elaboration, sex differentiation gradually but inevitably evolved in a manner such that societal roles which were linked with production, governance and ecclesiastics became more or less the exclusive domains of the male sex. Concurrently, the biological capacity of the female to reproduce the human species and ensure its survival, led to her being assigned roles which progressively tied her down to the home and withdrew her from the wider economic, political and religious arenas of social participation. Paralleling these two processes there took place the progressive elaboration of an ideology which rationalised this shift from differentiation to discrimination and institutionalised it by means of customs, rituals and religious or social prescriptions. The present predicament of women in India, therefore arises from the major contradiction between structural inequalities between men and women and cultural rationalisations of them.

II

It will be useful at this stage, to draw on cross-cultural studies which

have a direct relevance on the position of women in society. We are told that a wealth of anthropological data 'give testimony to the fact that women have held important ritual and political offices; that in many societies they lead relatively autonomous lives; that they have organisations to defend their own interests; and that in some societies they have had a direct as well as indirect effect on societal decision-making processes'. It has been further observed, and very perceptively that, 'though the changing position of women in relation to changes in the structure of society was not often a focus of analytic concern, most anthropologists acknowledged that women usually had a higher relative status in economically egalitarian societies as against stratified and industrial societies, and in societies organised along matrilineal rather than those organised along patrilineal lines of descent' (Sutton, 1976 : 188-89).

It is only proper to begin with Engels' oft-quoted classic description of the Iroquois society:

Division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature; it existed only between the two sexes. The men went to war, hunted, fished, provided the raw material for food and all the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the house, prepared food and clothing; they cooked, weaved and sewed. Each was master in his or her own field of activity; the men in the forest, the women in the house. Each owned the tools he or she made and used: the men, the weapons and the hunting and fishing tackle, the women, the household goods and utensils. The household was communistic, comprising several and often many, families. Whatever was produced and used in common was common property, the house, the garden, the long boat (1955 : 307).

It is clear that Engels' illustrates a model of sex-equal society. Male and female domains of work activity and responsibility were well defined. Whilst the ownership of the instruments of production specific to each sphere of activity was private, production in each sphere was meant for collective consumption of both. Thus the relationship between the two sexes was reciprocal, interdependent and non-exploitative within the family and the wider society. Such an arrangement has been interpreted as society's first important cultural adaptation 'assigning to the woman tasks compatible with child bearing and child rearing, and to the man (for the most part) all others, encouraging a higher development of both kinds of tasks,

What was produced had to be used in common if anyone was to survive' (Guettel, 1974 : 11).

Esconced in the Himalayan foothills in the northern region of West Bengal (India), the Meches and Dhimals were, around the mid-nineteenth century, 'nomadic cultivators' practising shifting cultivation by clearing forests. The only instruments of production were 'an axe to fell the forest, a strong billhook to clear the underwood and to dig the soil, a spade for rare and more effectual digging, and lastly, a dibble for sowing the seed'. In their relatively undifferentiated social system there was 'no separate calling of herdsmen or shepherd, or tradesman or shopkeeper, or manufacturer, or handicraftsman'. They had no buffaloes, few cows, no sheep, a good many goats, abundance of swine and poultry, and some pigeons and ducks—each family tended 'its own stock of animals which [was] entirely consumed by that family, and no part thereof sold'. Their sex roles were clearly differentiated in terms of their contribution to the family—the man made 'basketry for himself and family', while the women spun, wove and dyed the clothes of the family. They hardly had any concept of property on soil (Hunter, 1876 : 68-9). In short, Engels' observations would apply equally to the Meches and the Dhimals.

In contrast to the preceding examples, the Tlingits studied by Laura Klein in faraway Alaska do not distinguish between male and female domains nor is 'the division between domestic and public domains . . . pronounced'. They are an example of a matrilineal clan which has got sufficiently differentiated under the impact of the larger American society, but which has adjusted with it without destroying its sexual egalitarianism. Men and women are active participants 'in the economic activities outside the household and the traditional sexual division of labour still operates in the commercial realm of fishing and processing. In the new occupations of the modern economy, women have a higher rate of year-round employment than men'. In politics, both men and women 'achieve political influence and power on the basis of their own personal connections, some of which are derived from matrilineal kinship ties'. Although in the household sphere 'domestic work and child care are primarily the responsibility of women, men also engage in those activities'. The Tlingits are aware of the discrimination between the sexes in the wider society and are therefore all the more conscious about upholding their sex egalitarianism. In their culture,

therefore, 'knowledge and power are associated with rank, not sex, and rank is shared by women and men alike' (Klein, 1975 : 588-91).

Here we find a society sufficiently differentiated in terms of wealth and rank, but sex-stereotyping of role-domains does not exist, and both men and women have equal access to higher ranks in society. The structure of equality of the sexes is maintained by free access to education by both. The persistence of matrilineal clan organisation is certainly one of the crucial variables which explain this unique adjustment with the wider environment.

The fourth societal situation is described by Constance Sutton in which the subordinate Barbadians show remarkable equality between the sexes. She distinguishes between the dominant public domain and the domain of family and community life of the black folk culture. The former was monopolised by the politics of plantation economy which had flourished by exploitation of slave labour. The slaves both men and women 'subjected to a system which gave them little control over their own lives . . . generated a folk culture that was invisible to the dominant group.' Although the Afro-Caribbean women display matrifocality with special importance given to mother-child relationship, 'the mother role does not necessarily entail greater dependence on man—nor do child care domestic responsibilities confine and isolate woman in the home. Because these tasks are shared among female relatives, with additional help from the men and adolescents in the household, women with children frequently continue to participate actively in the public domain'. Though there is some sex-stereotyping of roles, 'there is also considerable overlap'. At any rate prestige of an occupation does not derive from its association with one or the other sex but 'from the skills required and remuneration received'. Like Tlingit society, although the black Barbadian folk society is fairly differentiated, 'the concept of dominance in social relations is not identified with either sex, but with those who hold positions of power and authority outside the village' (1975 : 592-3).

These illustrative cases drawn largely from anthropological sources, suggest that equality between sexes can be interpreted in two ways: first, as a relationship within the larger framework of a society which is egalitarian (Iroquis, Meches and Dhimals). Second, equality lies in members of each sex having the cultural freedom to be structurally mobile in stratified systems (Tlingis and Barbadians). These two interpretations of equality between the sexes, as we shall

see, roughly correspond with the logic of socialist and feminist theory and ideology on the women's question.

A wealth of anthropological and related data testify to the existence of female and male farming systems. Much of Africa (Congo, large parts of South East and East Africa, and parts of West Africa), predominantly tribal regions of India and South East Asia, have engaged in extensive female farming (Boserup, 1970 : 17, 24). Such farming has been found to be generally associated with shifting cultivation for subsistence with control of land vesting in the lineage. In contrast, plough cultivation areas are usually male predominant with private ownership in land and characterised by 'a comparatively numerous class of landless families in the rural population' (p. 26).

The introduction of modern commercial agriculture in Africa by European settlers, colonial administrators and technical advisors for the overseas market promoted selectively the productivity of male labour. The colonials did not believe, ethnocentrically, in female dominance in agriculture (p. 54). Land reforms introduced by the Europeans transferred land rights to men even though women were doing the cultivation (pp. 60-61). Men were initiated into new technology and cash crops, whilst the women were left to pursue subsistence farming and socialisation of children. Left with little or no surplus, female cultivators were not in a position to save money incomes, whereas their male counterparts could accumulate cash earnings through cash crop cultivation or wages. With this shift in the productive base, the high status which the women enjoyed has been undergoing steady erosion. Occasionally, this has given rise to women's resistance in parts of Nigeria, Uganda and other places (pp. 63-64). In these regions, it would appear that it was not so much the change in the productive forces that brought about a change in the sex relations, as it was the 'culture of masculinity' of the colonials that set about discriminating against female cultivators.

III

Since feminist theory and ideology and the feminist movement have emerged out of the concrete conditions of Western capitalist societies, it will be instructive to make a brief survey of the socio-economic-historical roots in which these are embedded. I shall confine myself to the United States of America. The evolution of the position of women can be roughly periodised in the following way: the preindustrial phase; the period of rapid industrialisation (1830-

1942); World War II and after; the Civil Rights phase (upto 1964); and the feminist phase which is continuing.

America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resembled preindustrial Europe. 'The household served as the centre of production and the labour of each of its members was indispensable to survival. No one was without a task, and woman's contribution was essential to economic self-sufficiency' (Chafe, 1977: 18). Women's participation in public economic life was significant; they ran large farms, merchant business or shops, ran taverns, groceries, practised medicine, served as midwives, teachers, nurses and printers. Although there was a cultural notion of woman's 'place' and her appropriate qualities of passivity and genteelness, her actual behaviour patterns were often at variance with these notions, and yet were accepted within the range of permissiveness. The impact of rapid industrialisation polarised the male and female spheres of work activity, by transferring the former to the factories. The initial sweep of industrialisation drew women into the labour force, but selectively. It was the black and immigrant women who were drawn into the heavier and less pleasant jobs, the white middle class women were excluded. The earlier cultural notion of the woman's 'place' which admitted of a wide range of permissive deviation, now acquired greater specificity in elaborations of the qualities of 'masculinity' and 'feminity'. This period witnessed the release of two parallel antithetical processes. First the expansion of female education was meant to formally socialise them into efficient motherhood, so that they, in turn, could socialise their children to enter society's specified social roles. Second, the process which had sharpened the contradiction between the sexes in structural terms, gave rise to protests against sexual discrimination. In 1848, nearly three hundred men and women gathered together to issue a Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, New York, appealing for an end to discrimination against women 'in every sphere of existence' (p. 25). Although the Declaration was much ahead of its time consequently not attracting large numbers, yet 'feminists boldly carried their campaign to state legislatures, Congress, and public assemblies, challenging through their speeches and literature virtually the entire framework of traditional ideas about woman's 'place' (p. 25-6). Women's demand for suffrage emerged out of this structural situation and can be viewed as in continuity with the spirit of the Declaration, which also had demanded equal voting rights for men

and women. However, the suffragists also drew their continuity with the educational ideology of the state emphasising the need to extend the superior feminine qualities of motherhood to the 'market place and government' (Guettel, 1974 : 16). Women were granted suffrage in 1920, but their 'place' in the social structure remained unaltered. In fact, women graduates complied with the socialising role of education and preferred to marry than enter into the newly emerging job market (only 12.2 per cent of all professional women were married). Even the job market provided a 'place' for the women, and they found themselves, in 'sex-segregated' occupations such as typing, stenography and clerical work. Middle class married women found themselves outside the work force (pp. 30, 31).

World War II brought in its wake a large number of war jobs for blacks and women. This provided a structural opportunity in which women could demonstrate their efficiency in the expanding job market outside 'home'. The rate of increase of women's labour force became four times that of men in 1950, and by 1960, 40 per cent of all women over sixteen were in the labour force compared to 25 per cent in 1940. And yet, forties and the fifties remained a period of quiescence for feminists. It was subsequent to the passing of the Civil Rights Act, in 1964 that the feminist mobilisation around sex was conceived analogous to the mobilisation around race and colour.

Thus it would seem that the feminist movement acquired momentum not so much at the time when the contradiction between the sexes was most clearly defined, but rather at a time when the economic structure had already started providing work for the woman outside her 'place'. Feminism is poised for 'radical' changes *within* the capitalist system of production relations and only *between* the sexes. For the radical feminist, sex and not class is the crucial egalitarian principle.

IV

Like racism, is sexism an ideology specific to capitalism? It is one thing that there are concrete and perceived structures of inequality, it is another, that this is supported by a dominant ideology. Inequality is generally structured. But one could ask how has this structure come into being, what conditions make for its persistence, and what processes, if any, are at work for its 'unbecoming' or changing? We shall have this perspective in mind while describing the socialist experiments in China and Vietnam.

The position of women in traditional Chinese society during the Ch'ing dynasty bears striking resemblance to their Indian counterparts of the time. Woman was made totally dependent and utterly delicate and too weak to transgress the boundaries of expected behaviour set by the cultural norms. Footbinding was popular. Chastity, as in India, was given such importance that social pressures to remain chaste or to commit suicide out of loyalty to their deceased husbands were particularly intense and applied even to young girls whose betrothed had died before their marriage could be consummated. At the same time, concubinage and prostitution flourished (Ropp, 1976 : 5, 7). So strong were the social pressures upholding the customs and practices regulating women's status, that even the attempt at reform by three of the early Ch'ing emperors did not bear much fruit. Thus the ban on footbinding imposed in 1662 by the Kiang-hsi emperor did not last more than six years, and the objections to widow suicides later in the century by Kiang-hsi and Yung-Cheng emperors did not last long either. On the contrary, later, 'the Ch'ing court system of rewards for widow chastity and suicide was in fact continually expanded and refined' (p. 9).

The otherwise patriarchal Confucian doctrine, which emphasised education as a civilising force, opened the gates of literacy and knowledge to women. Many took up the crusade against oppression of women, lauded the virtues of the female sex and condemned the rigidities of the prevailing doctrines. Women began writing poetry to entertain and it became a popular pastime with them during the Ch'ing period (p. 11). The emergent culture was represented by the trends of urbanisation and commercialisation with the expansion in the production of cash crops and the growth of handicrafts and interregional trade. Intellectually it manifested itself 'in the rapidly expanding genre of fiction and drama which provided entertainment to the urban areas' (p. 20). This emergent culture which portrayed a less puritanical and more egalitarian world 'than Confucianism could accommodate' persisted through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was only towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that they started replacing the dominant culture of the Ch'ing period, and in it lay 'the seeds of change which, once sprouted, would grow to revolutionary proportions' (p. 25).

What is however most significant about the evolution of the feminist struggle is that it acquired the character of a struggle 'of all humankind struggling to escape from oppression'. Feuerwerker's

observation that 'by the 1940's in China, the "woman question" had become a part of the total revolutionary struggle', has great relevance for the understanding of the massive mobilisation that shaped the revolutionary transformation of China into a socialist state and the subsequent task of socialist reconstruction (Diamond, 1976 : 220).

The role of women in the socialist reconstruction of China is one of most outstanding political and economic experiments of our times aimed at a search for a cultural definition of equality between the sexes consistent with the evolution of an egalitarian structure. Phyllis Andors' article in this respect is quite illuminating. Between 1953 and 1966, four phases of Chinese development have been identified. The first Five Year Plan (1953-57) adopted a strategy of economic development in which the large masses of Chinese women were precluded from entering into the production process. During this period the mother-housewife roles were dominant. The period of the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) saw a new context in which mass participatory experiments were attempted with great gusto and new institutions like communes, street industry, industrial management, local economic planning, etc. came about. In such a context the active participation of large numbers of women was both necessary and accepted. In the urban areas the development of street industries with 'minimal or no help from the state other than encouragement and praise in the newspapers' brought the urban women out into the mainstream of productive labour. In rural areas too women entered into hitherto male-dominated role-areas. In spite of the fact that the Great Leap Forward was severely disrupted by recession, 'for women . . . the kinds of work and political participation in which they engaged—created the possibility that women would be socially productive workers'. (Andors, 1976 : 92). The recession (1960-62) saw a relapse in which 'attention was focussed on the role of the family in production, reflecting the traditional image of this institution as basic to societal existence' (p. 94). This relapse was interpreted as a 'resurgence of feudal practices in which women became a commodity to be sold in order to arrange secure family relationships and to "marry well"' (p. 94). It was argued that feudal resurgence was inimical to socialist reconstruction and hence needed to be curbed. In the fourth phase (1962-66) the Socialist Reconstruction Campaign, taking its cue from Mao's speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (1962) emphasised class struggle in the transition to socialism. The relationship between a

change in the family and success of socialist revolution was accepted. The debate that ensued can be reduced to two perspectives. The revolutionary perspective emphasised that female emancipation would gradually take place with technological development. The other perspective 'viewed the resolution to the oppressed status of women as possible only through the development of class struggle' (p. 98). It was argued that the 'two-line struggle' manifested in the 'contradiction regarding women's role in society between proletarian socialist ideology and the combination of bourgeois capitalist ideology and the remnants of feudalism' would work itself out.

What is very significant in the entire range of experiments in socialist China is that nowhere is the basic unit of the family allowed to be threatened. The structural change that is envisaged relates to the role content of the women's role, in or out of the family. Thus marriage is a positive value, to beget children is recommended as a necessary experience as is motherhood, but limiting family size through birth control, and opportunity of access to a variety of politically and economically productive roles outside home, sum up the directionality of change in the position of women in Chinese society. The aim was 'the successful integration of modern, revolutionary family roles and productive roles' (p. 115). Sheridan's five case studies of outstanding women leaders of China suggest that 'they have family roles, which are ascribed with strong social values of emotional fulfillment and personal privacy'. The goal of China today is, she observes 'to reduce role conflict by opening more opportunities to women in such a way that family, work and political activities become complementary rather than exclusive' (1976 : 60).

Notwithstanding these progressive trends, Chinese society is continuously contending against persisting patriarchal values. The Women's Movement as a separate social movement with exclusive female membership was re-established in the late sixties with the realisation that 'the establishment of socialism does not automatically wipe out centuries of feudal male chauvinism all at once' (Croll, 1978 : 330); the consciousness of women has to be raised both as members of a class and as women; and, that 'real equality between men and women does not come of itself, and it cannot be given to anybody', it can only be won, 'if the women themselves fight for it with a constantly heightened socialist consciousness' (p. 333).

The revised Marriage Law adopted by the Fifth National Peoples' Congress held in September 1980 lays down that 'the marriage

system based on free choice of partners, on monogamy and, on equal rights for the sexes is put into effect'.³ The marriage laws provide for freedom of nomenclature identity through father or mother; assures equal rights for engaging in any productive work; guarantees equality in inheritance and right to property; and stipulates rational divorce laws. In spite of these legal provisions the government acknowledges that a lot needs to be done through national propaganda and education to thwart feudal and bourgeois influences (Supplementary Report to Women of China, 1984 : 6-7).

Vietnamese society prior to the revolution was characterised by arranged marriage, bride price and patriarchal authority. Child marriage was common, widow remarriage was frowned upon, divorce was rare and then usually at the initiative of the husband. Succession and inheritance followed patrilineality; polygyny and concubinage were common. The 1920s witnessed a middle class feminist movement focusing on education, political rights, arranged marriage, female chastity and occupational restrictions. During the 1930s women scholars and progressive women from middle class and land owning families joined the Communist Women's Union.

Ho Chi Minh and his early associates realised that working women and peasant women suffered the double exploitation of feudalism and colonialism. Besides, all women of every class suffered male domination. The strategy for liberation of women was found in their struggle against landlordism and colonialism.

According to Kathleen Gough, Vietnamese women communists 'completely oppose those feminists (whom they regard as bourgeois) who claim that men in general are the main exploiters and oppressors of women. They point out that oppression of women is not class oppression, but cuts across the oppression of class and nation while being reinforced by them' (1978 : 75-6). On the concept of equality between sexes the Vietnamese believe that 'women can become equal to men without playing identical roles with them in all spheres of activity . . . without weakening of the family as the main residential unit and focus for love, sexual relations and daily cooperation' (p. 84). They acknowledge that 'women's reproductive capacity, the average differences in physiques between men and women, and the differences in their history, make it more appropriate for *some* activities to be done by men, while at the same time the *majority* of the roles and occupations are fully open to all sexes' (p. 84) [emphases text].

In summary, the evolution of the position of women in Hindu society, anthropological evidences and experiences from the capitalist and socialist worlds point to the following :

1. The withdrawal of women from productive work and education has led to the progressive deterioration in their status.
2. Societies which accord high status to their women provide them access to knowledge and productive skills.
3. Sex-stereotyping of occupational roles need not lead to status discrimination so long as prestige associated with an occupation does not derive from its association with one or the other sex.
4. Where men and women have the cultural freedom to be structurally mobile, there is no discrimination between sexes.
5. There are two senses in which equality between sexes can be understood: (a) as the absence of discrimination between male and female sex in a structurally egalitarian society in which there is freedom to be equally 'unequal', and (b) as the absence of discrimination in a society or system in which men and women are operating within some egalitarian frame work.
6. Women do not have to vie for identity with men in all spheres of activity to qualify for equality with them.

V

The theoretical terrain in the social sciences poses problems of parallel and competing paradigms. The same phenomenon (for instance, sex inequality) lends itself to a variety of interpretations (Marxist, feminist, functional) which at many points become irreconcilable.

Feminist theory asserts that woman finds herself in a male-constructed world in which man is the subject and woman, his constructed sex-object. Sexuality, 'the social process which creates, organises, expresses and directs desires', which includes more than 'genital arousal', is the organising principle of structured sexual inequality (MacKinnon 1982 : 515-16; 1984 : 185). It is male sexuality which determines the mode of such organisation; female sexuality is lost in the bargain, and with it the identity of the woman. Her freedom of sex is lost because it is male determined. Woman becomes an object cast in the mould of the female person that man would like to see. Her total existence from birth to death is circumscribed by and is subservient to man, while man himself is

privileged not to be similarly, reciprocally bound. The family with its male-dominated authority structure is defined as the proper place for woman; marriage is the institution that legitimises it. The reproductive capacity of women has been exploited to tie her down to sexual, childbearing and socialising roles within the confines of the home. This is the notion of patriarchy whose bastion is the cellular home and whose extension is the society. Just as a society dominated by racist ideology consigns the black population to an inferior race and makes it believe in this ideology, a society based on sexist ideology condemns the woman to an inferior sex, and makes her believe in it. It is this male-constructed patriarchal system—in which men and women are socialised, which men and women have deeply internalised, which fashions the institutions from which each is 'included' or 'excluded' which oppresses women—that needs to be overcome, destroyed, transcended. The feminist response therefore is to organise women as members of the female sex against the oppression of the male sex. Logically, the patriarchal-sustaining institutions such as marriage, family, reproduction, childbearing, childrearing, have to be redefined, now from the 'women's point of view'. The manner and methodology is that of 'consciousness raising', which is inductive and experiential, by which women collectively share the nature, consequences and causes of male oppression, such as wife-beating, and all other kinds of exploitation. It seeks the commonality between members of the female sex transcending stratifications of class, race, caste, community and so on. Like the slogan 'workers of the world unite' it beckons women of the world to unite. The primary inequality (contradiction), is sex inequality. Class, race, nationality etc. are only secondary contradictions. That is why even in the socialist transformations, sex inequality persists and is accorded a lower priority than other inequalities. Feminist theorists have their agreements or disagreements within the framework of this broad paradigm.

The feminist paradigm is not coextensive with feminism, which admits of a much broader range of concerns involving women and society without necessarily subscribing to some of the premises of the feminist paradigm.⁴ The central orientation of feminism, however, overtly or implicitly, is anchored in the general proposition, that in an institutionalised system of unequal patriarchal gender relationships, the woman is disadvantaged with respect to man. This system is so pervasive that from marriage and family to work and

politics, the subordinate and subservient nature of the woman's position is indelibly imprinted. This in spite of the fact—and this assumption tends to remain implicit—that gender differences, *ipso facto* did not make for unequal capacities or capabilities in the performance of societal roles.

While there may be 'aberrant' cases or structures which do not fit into this ideal-typical frame, like some marriages not involving dowry, or some preliterate systems still paying brideprice, or the comforting thought of having in a woman, the most powerful political person in the country, the fact still remained that overwhelmingly dowry and bridegroomprice were the prevailing norms, and that political representation of women in structures of power and authority were disproportionately lower than their number of political participation demanded.

The conscious (and to be sure, often unconscious) reactions of those conscientised against such institutionalised structural anomalies, are far from uniform. While it is indeed difficult to identify the variation in the range of such responses, it is possible and necessary to classify and differentiate the dominant orientating thrusts which characterise them, if only to bring about some analytical clarity in the thinking of researchers and activists.

We can consider the first approach as the one which is explicit about the retention and reinforcement of the identity of the woman. It does not consider man-woman relationships to be inimical to each other, but rather as complementary and cooperative. It strives to bring the woman in a respectable partnership with man in all areas and spheres of activities where gender does not make any difference. And where gender does make a difference (procreation), or is seen to make a difference (socialisation of the child), woman is regarded as a proud and noble symbol of creation and regeneration. It is this spirit that informs their struggle for the emancipation of women from economic, social and political structures of inequality. Sarojini Naidu would presumably be the archetype symbol of this approach.

The second approach, very explicitly, is concerned with the system which generates inequalities. The problem of women's emancipation cannot be isolated from the overall structure and culture of society. Hence it is necessary to view the woman's predicament along with those of other classes and categories. Women cannot be generalised as an omnibus class in opposition to men, for, women too, among themselves are distinguished by class, caste,

religion, tribal ethnicity and so on, and therefore can be identified among both, the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited. Therefore, women's problems cannot be attended to in isolation from the inequities that flow out of an inequitable system.

The third approach of the radical feminist, has already been stated in the feminist paradigm. For each of the approaches there are attendant implications. The Naidu model does not necessarily have to seriously question the system, although it can. It can contend that the system is sufficiently elaborate and flexible to admit the rectification of the various structural anomalies without impairing (but rather improving) the system, whose articulation is imperfect. The radical feminist model by its aggressive posture towards male dominance, attempts to create a societal abstraction based predominantly on gender stratification. It is this abstraction that is sought to be demolished. In attempting to do so it either neglects or is unconcerned with the overall stratification system, and may consequently reinforce it. The systems model, by linking the women's question, to other problems of inequality, sees in the emancipation of women, the emancipation of the other classes and categories as well, and vice versa. Each of these models, while analytically discrete, is not, substantively, mutually exclusive. Elements of one may be found in the other, and some elements may even be common to all three. However, in terms of their ideological thrusts they can and should be distinguished.

This typification of the three approaches is neither exhaustive, nor should it lead to reification. But it could well be further elaborated with the research process studying women's movements, to serve as a useful heuristic device, to indicate the character of a women's movement and the implications it may have for the system. At this stage, it is necessary to ask, how does gender via movement affect the system? Does a women's movement restrict itself as a bargaining structure for a greater share of the available resources, or does it seek to create or eliminate institutional structures that facilitate or impede women's participation in opportunity structures? Or, does it seek to change the very system of distribution to enable a more equitable share of the system's resources to its various components? Tactics and strategies, for one, should not be confused with the basic nature and character of the movement.

These three approaches *per se*, since they are analytical categories, are neither bad nor good, neither relevant nor irrelevant in

themselves. They acquire relevance or irrelevance depending on the nature of the concrete conditions on which they are operationalised. Thus, assuming a system which is by and large egalitarian with respect to its major institutional structures but discriminatory in terms of gender relations, the radical feminist approach could be considered as quite relevant. If on the contrary, the system on which it operated was basically inegalitarian, the same approach could be considered as reactionary and could even prove counterproductive.

VI

In any methodological discussion of sex inequalities the logical starting point is to identify the basic, irreducible differences between the two. There are two such basic differences, one, physiological, and the other physical. Physiologically, it is only the women who can procreate and suckle the child, whilst man can only 'sow the seed'. Physically, man is stronger though only in the 'brute' sense of the term.

The physiological and physical differences do not mean that the two are 'unequal'.⁵ These differences, however, provide the basis for social organisation of the reproduction of the species, not of production. What makes these differences 'equal' or 'unequal' or something else, is the cultural 'meaning' attached to these differences by the members of the society and the 'use' to which members of both the sexes are put. The many and varied empirical manifestations of primitive and contemporary societies bear testimony to the above proposition. In fact, it is this natural difference of the sexes that is the basis of social differentiation in Iroquois society about whose egalitarianism Engels waxes eloquent. A clear conceptual distinction between simple differentiation and social stratification is, therefore, a *sine qua non* for any theoretical understanding of the concepts of equality and inequality.

If a 'difference' does not necessarily imply 'inequality' then equality too need not necessarily refer to 'identity' or 'sameness'. If equality was possible only on the basis of identity then we cannot think of achieving equality between the sexes without transforming everyone into bisexuals, and perhaps, additionally, without reproducing our population in test-tubes and incubators! (Radical feminists like Shulamith Firestone, however, finds women's emancipation in precisely such a technological breakthrough.) Granting for a moment that such a physiological difference is eliminated with

the magic wand of science, or that babies are born in test-tubes, this ipso facto need not lead to nor signify equality in the non-physiological domains of social interaction. Concepts such as equality or freedom, by themselves, mean very little. They may be shared values at a very abstract level, with strong agreements and disagreements on their varied interpretations. Therefore, it is more relevant to ask: equality with respect to what (height, muscular strength, income, opportunity)? Freedom to do what (oppress, enlighten, produce)?

Comparative data from primitive and contemporary societies have demonstrated that sex-differences cannot be interpreted as sex-inequality, and further, such differences are not the cause of sex inequality. Therefore, sex-inequalities, where they exist, are an outcome of historical evolution. It is very unlikely indeed that such inequalities will have so evolved during the period of their unfolding that sex differences would correlate uniformly with certain disabilities in an all-pervasive manner in a society. Thus the contention that 'in respect of some institutionalised disabilities, women as a whole can be compared with men as a whole, for differences between the status of women and men are important in the cognitive map as well as in ordering interpersonal relations' (ICSSR Report, 1975 : 7) can be methodologically problematic. It has been further observed in the same Report that 'Traditional India had seen a woman only as a member of the family or a group—as daughters, wives and mothers—and not as an individual with an identity or right of her own' (p. 7). This seems to argue in favour of individuality as against a collective identity. Harevan observes:

In traditional society marriage is an economic partnership, in addition to representing the legitimisation of cohabitation, sex, procreation and childrearing. Success in marriage, therefore, is found not on the survival of romantic love but rather in the effective division of tasks in collaboration for the management of the family's economic resources. Family members are valued for their labours within the family and for their respective economic contributions (1976, 202).

This would broadly seem to hold true equally for the landed classes in feudal India.

It will be clear by now that male and female specific roles ipso facto do not make male and female statuses unequal. These roles may

be culturally differentiated and yet rewarded and prestige accorded to them may be equally valenced on purely universalistic criteria of performance, skill, output and so on. The black Barbadian folk culture is a demonstration of this and so is the Iroquis culture. Again, it is possible that male dominated roles are open to females but there is discrimination in the dispensation of rewards. Thus sex discrimination in wage labour in India, and in higher education in the United States, are cases in point (Weal Fund, 1977 : 8-9). Put differently, to argue that a society will manifest complete sex-equality only if it is structured entirely on sex-neutral roles, would be generalising the particular. Assuming further, that such a society can come about, it does not follow that it would be an egalitarian society.

It follows that equality and freedom have to be understood and interpreted in terms of the culture and the structure of societies and the relationship between them. Further, since there is no perfectly satisfactory model of 'equality', it can be better understood by analysing its 'counter-concepts'. It is suggested that these counter-concepts are discrimination, exploitation and oppression (DEO). Thus a progressive reduction in DEO would indicate a commensurate increase in equality. Each of these counter-concepts refer to sets of asymmetrical relationships between groups such that one group (or a set of groups) exercises dominance over the other group (or set of groups). These relationships cannot be studied in isolation from the system, in fact, they may constitute the system itself.

Discrimination essentially conveys the content of a social relationship which is asymmetrical and normatively legitimated by societal norms. This is a product of accretions arising out of certain historical conditions. Thus discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, sex, race can be concretely analysed in terms of the more abstract yardstick of equality of freedom. Exploitation is best applied to the content of economic exchanges emanating from within a normatively defined system of exchange and market. Freedom in such a context would refer to the degree of access to the available economic opportunities and also to the capacity to withstand unequal exchange. Equality naturally will concern itself with distributive aspects of goods produced and the management of surpluses. Oppression is clearly a political concept which defines the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. It is a means by which the dominant group (or individual) is able to impose its conditions on those who are weak and unwilling or are deviants,

More simply, oppression is an overt behavioural manifestation of power, which is conceptualised as force. It also implies deliberate impediments and barriers created to obstruct access to power.

In any meaningful understanding of equality and freedom, the interrelationship between these three analytically distinct phenomena is essential. Thus it is not surprising to find discrimination on the basis of caste or sex having a close correspondence with exploitation. The untouchable castes in India, the Blacks in the world's most 'modern' society, and women in both the countries are products of discrimination and exploitation not through any historical coincidence. Again, an exploitative system may be so well institutionalised that the need or occasion for oppression does not arise—a member of the feudal nobility or a zamindar may, in fact, command respect for being 'enlightened' and liberal, whereas, elsewhere, the use or threat of oppression by the dominant group enables the exploitative system to have its run. By punishing the 'deviants' and the 'inefficient role performers', the system is maintained. It is also possible that a relatively less exploitative system employs a greater degree of oppression than a more exploitative system. Thus the exploitation of tribals in certain parts of India may have been much greater but the need to oppress them did not arise. The burden of the whole argument is that DEO do not necessarily stand in a one-to-one relationship with each other, and the study of their variations in empirical reality is essential for a more efficient understanding of the inequalities and their consequences in any society. It can be profitably argued that the movement of a society away from a discriminatory-exploitative-oppressive one to its opposite, constitutes social development.

Having explicated the DEO model, I would suggest that its application to the study of the relationship between sexes, and between sex and society, can be more profitably pursued, to enable a somewhat clearer understanding of the concrete conditions of social reality upon which sex inequalities rest. The relationship between the sexes could be studied at three levels: (a) stratification (class), (b) hierarchy (caste and ranked groups), and (c) family. With sex as the key dependent variable in each of these levels one will need to find out the status of the sex incumbents in relation to DEO. Thus the questions that could be formulated are:

1. With variation in class position is there any change in the

degree or direction of discrimination as between the sexes? Thus as between different classes are the women more or less or not discriminated against, at home or outside, with respect to ritual status, access to education, food and nutrition, entertainment and leisure, medical attention, access to gainful employment, and so on? (Class discrimination.)

2. Similarly, as between different castes are the women more or less or not discriminated against at home or outside? (Caste discrimination.)
3. As between different classes are the women more or less or not exploited at home or outside, with respect to work or employment? (Class exploitation.)
4. As between different castes are the women more or less or not exploited, at home or outside? (Caste exploitation.)
5. As between different classes are the women more or less or not oppressed at home or outside? (Class oppression.)
6. As between different castes are the women more or less or not oppressed at home or outside? (Caste oppression.)

An empirical mapping of sex, stratification, hierarchy and their relationship with DEO behaviour can reveal to what extent the attribute of sex emerges as a powerful and efficient explanatory variable (Mukherji, 1984 : 124-5).

VII

Before concluding this paper it is important to point out the two basic contradictions in our understanding of sex, family and society. Firstly, there is the contradiction between the sexes. This contradiction can remain non-antagonistic or turn antagonistic. Thus if sexual division of labour becomes complementary or if the division of labour in society is sex-neutral, the relationship between the sexes would remain non-antagonistic. So much for sex and the wider society.

The second major contradiction is between family solidarity, and individual and spatial mobility. So long as status is rated by pecuniary rewards in an open market, and freedom of access to education and skills, and occupational choice becomes a value with men and women alike, the contradiction between family and mobility is likely to sharpen and the contradiction between the sexes become antagonistic. The increasing number of divorces in the West

may in part be interpreted as one such fallout of the contradiction.

A society will have to decide for itself what it intends to do with the family. If family is valued as a social institution, if it is not to be replaced by some other societal arrangement, then there has to be an allocation of rewards in conformity with the logical existence of the family as a stable social institution. Changes in sex roles may have to come within the family structure to conform to the changes in the wider environment, but whether family itself should stay or go, is something which merits the most careful study and analysis. The primary solidarity of the clan was replaced by the joint/extended, and later, nuclear family. What will be the consequences of a society which does not retain the most primary of primary groups or does not replace it by a functionally relevant primary unit of society?

This change in the wider society, towards an egalitarian system without discrimination on the basis of sex, caste, religion, race will be facilitated if every adult member of the society is allowed and encouraged to become a productive member of the society and has free access to knowledge and skills. This possibility exists in an environment in which narrow economism is disvalued and the system can accommodate the total adult population as its work force. In underdeveloped, inequalitarian societies such a possibility can be realised only in the context of a change which is essentially socialist in content, where labour and not capital is valued more, and where labour becomes the main capital.

Women's movements will have to be clear about the implications of their actions. If the object of women's movements is merely to pressurise and bargain for an equal share of the economic opportunities with men when there is deprivation even amongst men, then this amounts to finding their proper place in the existing system. As a matter of fact such a movement will be a part of the system's functioning in as much as it will be pressing for opportunities for which the society has already given them the freedom to acquire the necessary skills, and hence already stands committed to an extent. This is not to detract women from their legitimate demands but to conscientise them about the more important proposition that equality of women as a whole can only materialise in an egalitarian system.

It is in this context that any women's movement, more appropriately, any movement for women, has to be understood in terms of the ideological position taken by such a movement. Devising,

discussing a women's movement without making explicit the ideological underpinnings or commitments of activists, to my mind constitutes the greatest invisible danger posed in the name of a women's movement. Ideology provides, however simply, an idea of the directionality of change a movement intends to bring about in the system of which it is a product. A society in ferment is likely to generate a plurality of social movements, reinforcing each other in the overall process of social change for a transformation to a 'better' system. There is simultaneously, a plurality of counter-movements which begin to take shape to thwart the tendencies of the social movements. It is all the more imperative that the woman's question be not examined in isolation but within the ambit of the larger processes both historically and contemporaneously, in order to give it the needed thrust in the direction of emancipation from discrimination, exploitation and oppression. For the same reasons, the woman's question is part of the rational canvas of every society and needs to be worked out by their citizens and not by societies other than their own. In any scheme of man-woman relationships in any society the concept of equality between them has to be worked out not by making man and woman identical, not by a process of 'dewomanising', but by accepting the fact of their differences, giving proper value to their differences and giving them equality without discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

It is fitting to conclude with the observation made by the Committee on the Status of Women in its Report:

We believe that disabilities and inequalities imposed on woman have to be seen in the total context of a society, where large sections of the population—male and female, adults and children—suffer under the oppression of an exploitative system. It is not possible to remove these inequalities for women only. Any policy or movement for the emancipation and development of women has to form a part of a total movement for removal of inequalities and oppressive social institutions, if the benefits and privileges won by such action are to be shared by the entire women population and not be monopolised by a small minority (ICSSR Report, 1975 : 8).

Footnotes

1. 'Attention has been drawn to a number of "Indologically-oriented" sociologists like

Ghurye, Karandikar, Karve and Kapadia, who have provided enough evidence to support the view that kinship usages and institution of family among the Vedic people have not remained static but have undergone significant changes in the course of centuries. . . . If we agree with the view that kinship terminology of the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* shows an evolution from a system which did not distinguish between different generations to a system which differentiated between different generations, the conclusion is inescapable that the earlier system reflects communal functioning, whereas in the latter one may see the emergence of the joint family in which three or four generations related to the male ego stayed together, an institution which became the norm in later times' (Jaiswal, 1977 : 55).

2. Referring to the process of crystallisation of the caste hierarchy, Jaiswal observes, 'In our opinion, the continuance of endogamy is not so much due to the strength of certain religious values in our society as to the stranglehold of some material factors such as the socioeconomic subordination of women resulting in their segregation and a system of arranged marriages, which naturally takes place along traditional channels. The social context of caste is provided not only by the exploitation of the lower castes by the dominant ones but also by the subordination of female sex who is to be "gifted away" in a manner which would enforce caste relationships' (Jaiswal, 1977 : 3).
3. Excerpts from China's Report on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
 - i. After a marriage has been registered, the woman may become a member of the man's family, or the man may become a member of the woman's family, according to the agreed wishes of the two parties.
 - ii. Husband and wife enjoy equal status in the home. Husband and wife each has the right to use his or her family name.
 - iii. Both husband and wife have the freedom to engage in production, to work, to study and to participate in social activities and are duty-bound to practise family planning.
 - iv. Children may adopt either their father's or their mother's family name.
 - v. The property acquired during the period in which husband and wife are under contract of marriage is in the joint possession of the two parties unless they have agreed otherwise. Husband and wife enjoy equal rights in the management of the property in their joint possession.
 - vi. Husband and wife have the duty to support and assist each other and they have the right to inherit each other's property.
 - vii. Parents have the right and duty to subject their children who are minor to discipline and to protect them.
 - viii. The husband is not allowed to apply for a divorce when his wife is pregnant or within one year after the birth of a child. This restriction does not apply in the case of the wife applying for divorce or when the people's court deems it absolutely necessary to agree to deal with a divorce application by the husband.
 - ix. In the case of divorce, the disposal of the property in the joint possession of husband and wife is subject to agreement between the two parties. In cases where agreement cannot be reached the peoples' court should make a judgement after taking into consideration the actual state of the family

property and the rights and interests of the wife and the child or children (1984 : 6-7).

4. For an understanding of the feminist paradigm please see Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein (eds.) *Theories of Women's Studies*, London, 1983 and Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, Princeton, 1979.
5. When I say man is more powerful 'physically' than woman it is said purely in the sense of the application of brute strength. One objective indicator that comes readily to my mind is from the field of athletics. All the world records for men and women display an incontrovertible superiority of men over women. But this inequality in strength does not mean that they are unequal as human beings! The conceptual clarification can be further sharpened by an example which will show the absurdity of those not in agreement with the above statement. Gama Pahalwan the one-time champion wrestler of the world, was infinitely more strong than M.K. Gandhi, his contemporary, but this inequality did not make the wrestler superior to the Father of the Indian Nation!

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A Century's Journey Women's Education in Western India: 1820-1920

APARNA BASU

The position of women in India in the early nineteenth century has been described as that of caged birds.¹ How women came out of this cage, what role education played in this, and to what extent it changed their lives is the theme of this paper. The focus is on western India, i.e. Maharashtra and Gujarat, between 1820 and 1920. We begin with the 1820s because that is when Raja Rammohan Roy first began to speak and write about the suppressed condition of Indian women. It is also the time when the earliest schools for girls along modern lines were started in Bombay. The year 1920 is a good cut-off point since with the Noncooperation Movement and women's participation in it, a new phase begins in women's education.

The paper draws upon the life histories of six women who were among the first to break the chains which had long tied Indian women down and among other things, denied them education. They have been chosen because apart from the pioneering role they played, all of them have left behind some record of their life in the form of autobiographies or memoirs. All of them were high caste Hindus, (Brahmins in fact), and belonged to what may be called the respectable middle class. The women who figure here are Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Anandibai Karve, Parvatibai Athavale, Ramabai Ranade, Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharda Mehta.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section gives a brief history of the early beginnings and growth of women's education in the nineteenth century in the Bombay Presidency. Section II takes up the life histories of each of the women separately, the emphasis being on how they obtained education, the opposition they had to face in doing so, the kind of education they obtained, what they did in turn for women's education and how education affected their role within the family and outside.

I

In the early nineteenth century in India, women were almost totally excluded from the formal system of education. There were strong and deeply rooted prejudices against women's education. It was believed that female education would not only produce widows, but also facilitate romantic intrigue (Adam, 1836). It was said that no man would marry an educated girl (Adam, 1835). Objections to female education seem to have been based on a fear of the unknown powers education could give a woman. When Sir Erskine Perry, Chief Justice of Bombay, suggested in 1852 the appointment of a women's committee consisting of European ladies to superintend girl's schools, it aroused strong opposition. The *Chabuk* saw in it a danger of western educated girls making slaves of their husbands. 'If they cannot succeed in this,' the paper prophesied, 'they will drag them into courts of justice to make a display of their talents, their culture, and the power they have acquired by their knowledge.' The facetious editor portrayed a vision of judgement: Sir Erskine on the Bench expecting, with ill-concealed malignity, the arrival of a luckless husband with his wife, the latter shouting 'Knowledge is power' (Masani, 1939 : 46-7).

It was maintained that education would undermine the feminine qualities in women and bring disgrace to their families. Education officers in the districts reported how it was difficult in the mofussil to get parents to educate their girls. They were all too useful in the house, and parents felt that they despised ordinary household duties if they learnt how to read and write. Girls who were educated were also said to become *duchta*, less amenable to discipline, and less likely to submit to their parents' choice of husbands.

The women's role was to look after the house and by offering equal educational opportunity to boys and girls 'society would merely suffer' (Bapat, 1928 : 81). Bal Gangadhar Tilak argued that in this world the spheres of duty of women are different from men, and, therefore, the education of the one must differ from that of the other. In addition to this, there was the very practical orthodox apprehension that once girls started attending school they would become discontented with their traditional lot in life, perhaps even with the husbands their parents had chosen for them. 'Start with founding a high school for girls,' said Tilak, 'and it would soon lead to women running away from home.'²

It was not only men who opposed women's education. In those years women in general, were also very hostile. They looked upon educated women with fear, regarded them as witches and protected their children from them.

The wide prevalence of child marriage among all castes also prevented girls' access to education. Once married, a girl was wholly cut off from reading and writing, because it was considered a shame for a young woman or girl to hold a paper or book in her hand, or to read in the presence of others in her husband's house. It was rare to find a girl above the age of 10 or 11 unmarried. In the Census of 1901, 70 per cent of girls under the age of 15 were married. While *parda* was not as strictly observed in western India as it was in the northern and eastern parts of the country, seclusion of women was practised among some castes including the Chitpavan Brahmins.

Whereas education of males was directly related to employment, female education had no economic function. The domestic role of women fostered a belief that education for girls was wasted because it could not be put to any financial use. The cost of education, in terms of fees, materials and so on, as well as the temporary loss of a helper in the household, and the lack of visible monetary return, were strong economic deterrents reinforcing the existing taboos.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when the Bombay Government undertook an enquiry into the state of indigenous education in the 1820s, in the reports received from the collectors, judges and commissioners, there was no mention of a single female scholar attending any of the common schools of the province (Parulekar, 1951 : XI/VI-XI/VII).

The earliest efforts to educate girls along modern lines were made by Christian missionaries. The first girls' school was started by the American missionaries in Bombay city in 1824 and by 1829 they had 9 schools with 400 pupils. The same mission started 2 girls' schools in Ahmednagar in 1831. The Church Missionary Society's first school was started in 1826 and in the course of the next ten years it opened elementary schools for girls at Thane, Bassien and Nasik (Richey, 1922 : 50). The London Missionary Society and the Irish Presbyterian Mission started girls' schools in Gujarat and Saurashtra. In 1829, Margaret Wilson, wife of Rev. John Wilson of the Scottish Missionary Society opened a girls' school in Bombay city which is known today as St. Columbia High School. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson started several more girls' schools in Bombay city as well as in the

districts and the number of pupils in them soon rose to 200 (*idem*).

The number of mission schools or their enrolment does not really reflect the attitude of Indians towards women's education at that time. The girls who went to these schools were usually Christians, orphans or from low castes and poor families. The upper castes kept away for fear of proselytisation. Many of the mission schools offered presents in cash and kind to attract pupils. In Gujarat, girls were given Rs. 45 worth of presents as dowry when they got married after leaving school. In addition they also got the Bible and two other Prayer Books³ (Chandler, n.d : 58).

The missionaries were followed by social reformers whose pioneering work helped to lessen to some extent the prejudice against women's education. They laid great stress on women's education and argued that it was the master key for betterment of society and were convinced that it would exert a humanising influence on society and help in the removal of social ills. Madhav Govind Ranade, Maharashi Karve, R.G. Bhandarkar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Jotiba Phule and others in Maharashtra, the poets Dalpat and Narmad, Bholanath Sarabhai, Mahipatram Nilkanth, Karsandas Mulji and a number of others in Gujarat, championed the cause of women's education; the poet Dalpatram wrote that the way to improve society was by giving education to women. According to him there were many advantages in educating one's daughters, and he even mentioned such things as the prevention of petty quarrels and obstinacies among women. It was hoped that female education would help preserve harmony in the joint family. Many writers stated that uneducated women were the main cause of dissensions in the family. Dalpatram added that if a father gave dowry to his daughter, the husband would usurp it, but if education were given to her, no power on earth could deprive her of her wealth (Desai, 1978 : 337). The poet Narmad also wrote extensively on women's education urging girls 'to study, study and study'. He argued that women should be educated as they were in no way inferior to men, nor were they men's slaves. Reformers cited historical and scriptural examples of educated women in ancient India to show that female education was not prohibited by religion. Had not Gargi defeated in debate the most learned *rishis* in the court of king Janaka, asked Narmad.

First educate women and then find out if they can acquire as much fame as men By educating a woman, the man will benefit. An educated wife will help her husband, he will be able to talk to her

and share his joys and sorrows ... An educated man cannot share his life with an illiterate wife ... Education will make a woman a better wife, a better daughter-in-law and a better mother. She will, by her learning and wisdom, contribute to family peace and happiness. (1874, pp. 200-29).

It was held that educated mothers, sisters and wives were essential to the training of a race of intelligent sons, brothers and husbands. 'Women's education should aim at making a woman an ideal housewife, ideal wife, an ideal mother and an ideal citizen'.³ But an implicit presumption in these and in many other similar statements was made clear. Women were to be educated primarily for grooming men. The reformers put their views into effect both at the personal and at the organisational level.

It would not have been possible for women in the nineteenth century to obtain education without the support of the men in their family. The first to educate their girls in Western India were the Parsis. From the 1840s, Parsi girls had been educated at home, often secretly.⁴ Framji Cowasji Banaji educated his daughter and his example was followed by Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and Maneckjee Cursetjee. Maharashtrian and Gujarati Hindu social reformers like Ranade, Ramanbhai, Nilkanth, Karve, Gopal Hari Deshmukh and others followed suit. They took considerable pains in educating their wives at home. They also started school for girls.

The students of Elphinstone Institution in Bombay city established in 1847-48 a Students' Literary and Scientific Society mainly as a result of the efforts of Prof. Paton. With Paton were associated Dadabhai Naoroji, Bhau Daji, Rao Saheb Mandlik and others. In 1849 the student members of this society started experimental schools and within a few months they were running seven schools, three for Hindu and four for Parsi girls. Lord Falkland's government regarded the spontaneous organisation of these schools as an epoch in the history of education of Bombay presidency. (Masani, 1939 : 44-6). By 1859 the Society was running 9 schools in Bombay city.

From Bombay the movement spread to Surat, Ahmedabad and Pune. In the former city, Durgaram Mehta, a social reformer established a school for girls in 1851. In Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vernacular Society started a school for girls in 1849 and the next year, Harkunvarbai, the widow of Sheth Harishang Keshar Singh, a leading Jain businessman of the city opened a school for girls (Trivedi, 1934 : 172). In the same year another girls' school was

started with a donation of Rs. 20,000 from Sheth Maganbhai Karamchand.

Joriba Phule realised the importance of educating women and 'shudras' and despite stiff opposition from orthodox quarters started a school for girls in Pune in 1851. Savitribai, his wife, whom he had educated, was the headmistress of this school. Such was the prejudice against women's education that Savitribai was constantly under threat of physical persecution and a peon was employed to take her to and from the school (Richey, 1922 : 57). Despite these threats, Phule opened 2 more schools for girls in Pune.

Ranade founded a primary school for girls in 1881 in Pune which at first only the wives and daughters of social reformers attended. In 1884, he, together with other social reformers, founded the Huzurpaga High School for girls. It was immediately attacked by the orthodox party in Pune, who saw in it a further threat to traditional Hindu values (Tucker, 1972 : 172).

Maharshi Karve believed that education provided the most effective path to social reform and he was prepared to put his views into effect at both the organisational and personal levels. He became an indefatigable organiser of reform associations for widow remarriage and educational institutions for women. His original determination to bring about change in the social status of widows broadened to become a lifelong concern with women's education. To educate widows he established the Hindu Widows' Home in Pune in 1896.

While missionaries and social reformers had been active, the East India Company had refused to take any steps for the education of girls since it was unwilling to enter into any socially controversial issue. In 1815, Mountstuart Elphinstone organised the Bombay Native School Book Society, but only for boys. In his long minute on education written in 1823, there is not a single reference to the education of girls.⁵ In none of the despatches relating to education submitted to or received from the Court of Directors during the first half of the nineteenth century is there any reference to girls' education. The Company's position was aptly summed up by J.H. Littler who argued against the Government taking over Bethune's School in Calcutta on the ground that female education was unpopular and looked upon by the Indian masses with fear and dread. 'Will it not involve', he asked, 'a dereliction of the principle of neutrality to which Government is pledged? Government should not

interfere in such cases (Richey, 1922 : 57). In 1853, William Jacob in his evidence before the Select Committee of Parliament said: 'I do not think a single female has come under the government system of education in Western India yet' (p. 34).

The credit for changing this official attitude of indifference goes to John Drinkwater Bethune, the Law Member in The Governor-General's Council and to Lord Dalhousie. The Governor-General was most impressed by Bethune's efforts to promote a great revolution in Indian habits. Wood's Despatch of 1854 agreed with Dalhousie that 'the importance of female education in India cannot be over-rated'. It wanted girls' schools to receive grant-in-aid and expressed its 'cordial sympathy' with efforts being made in this direction (pp. 57, 62, 388). Government thus accepted some responsibility for women's education, forty years after it had done so for men. But in Bombay city, the Government had not opened a single girls' school till 1873. In the nineteenth century the initiative for women's education was taken mainly by missionaries, Indian social reformers and some British non-officials and officials in their individual capacity.

In 1881-82, there were in all 16,766 girls under instruction in the Bombay Presidency, only 1 girl in 431 was under instruction and 1 in 244 could read and write. By 1921-22 the number of girls under instruction rose to 187,265.⁶ The last two decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the entry of women into colleges and higher education of women came to be accepted in principle. In 1888, Cornelia Sorabji became the first woman graduate of Bombay University. In 1921-22, 258 girls were in colleges, of these 179 were in arts and 79 in professional colleges. In that year one woman obtained a M.A., eight obtained B.A. Honours degrees and seven B.A. pass degrees. While very few women still went to college, by the 1920s there were some signs that the old prejudices against women's education were lessening and social barriers such as early marriage were being relaxed to enable middle class girls in college to receive at least primary and secondary education.

II

Pandita Ramabai

While male social reformers had been working for women's education, women had been initially too suppressed to be even aware

of their subordinate status. The first Indian woman to publicly undertake propagating women's education was Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922). Ramabai was a truly remarkable woman who had an unusual childhood. Her father, Anant Shastri Dongre, a Chitpavan brahmin of great learning asserted his right to teach his wife to read and write Sanskrit. For this heretical act he was forced to leave his ancestral village of Malherambi in Mangalore and move into the Gangalval forest in the Western Ghats where Ramabai was born. In her evidence before the Indian Education Commission, Ramabai said: 'I am the child of a man who had to suffer a great deal on account of advocating female education and who was compelled to carry out his views amidst great opposition.'⁷

Ramabai was taught at home by her mother from the time she was 8 years old till she was 15. 'During these years she [Ramabai's mother] succeeded in training my mind so that I might be able to carry on my own education with very little aid from others. I did not know of any schools for girls and women existing there, where higher education was to be obtained' (Ramabai, 1917 : 3). Among Ramabai's earliest recollections were those of being awakened in the early morning by her mother to hear and repeat lessons, of being 'lifted from the bed of earth and awakened with many endearments and sweet mother-words; and then, while the birds about them in the forest chirped their morning songs, the lessons were repeated, no other book than the mother's lips being used' (Ramabai, 1930 : 5). Lakshmi Bai knew thousands of Sanskrit *shlokas* by heart and taught them to her daughter who by the age of twelve could recite from memory eighteen thousand verses from the *Bhagavat Purana* alone.

Ramabai's early education was at home, given by her parents and in Sanskrit. She however had not so far dared to break the rules of orthodox Hinduism to study the Vedas. It was the great Brahmo reformer, Keshub Chandra Sen who gave her, when she was in Calcutta, a copy of the Vedas and advised her to study it and the Upanishads. Ramabai had inherited a questioning mind and moral courage from her father. 'Soon I persuaded myself with the belief that it was not wrong for a woman to read the Vedas' (Ramabai, 1917 : 10-11).

In Calcutta, Ramabai was asked to give a series of lectures on the emancipation of women. She pleaded with her sisters to give up child marriage, educate themselves and to do away with the wrongs meted out to women. But during these early years she based her plea

on the ancient scriptures and the epics. 'Draupadi used to sit with her father in full court; she urged Yudhishtira not to play dice; Shri Krishna sat in public assembly with his mother. All this showed that women were not secluded in ancient times'.⁸ Ramabai felt at this time that she could move forward only by referring to the past. This appeal to tradition to justify rational, humane conduct had been resorted to by Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other reformers. Women attended her meetings in large numbers, though of course few could have understood her as she spoke in Sanskrit. Ramabai defied orthodox Hindu society not only by studying the Shastras and Vedas but even more so by marrying a man of her own choice and that too someone who was neither a Maharashtrian nor a brahmin. She married a friend of her brother, one Bipin Behari, a Bengali Kayastha who was the headmaster of the Gauhati Normal School. Ramabai's marriage was as unconventional as her childhood and education. The marriage took place according to the Civil Marriage Act, as a result of which Bipin Behari was excommunicated from his caste.

Unfortunately, within two years of their marriage, Bipin Behari died and Ramabai was left a widow with a baby daughter. Outwardly she followed the habits of a Brahmin widow—had her hair shorn, though not shaved, wore a white sari and no ornaments and her personal habits were rigidly orthodox. But at heart she was a rebel and refused to submit to the servile fate to which widows were consigned by Hindu custom and law.

In April 1882 Ramabai arrived in Pune the stronghold of the Chitpavan brahmins. There were two men who dominated the social and political scene of Pune at this time—Tilak, who allied political nationalism and Hindu orthodoxy, and Ranade, a cautious, able, farsighted leader of social and religious reform. Ramabai was warmly welcomed by the reformers but aroused strong opposition from the orthodox section. To reformers like Ranade, it seemed that the cause of women's education had gained in her a supreme treasure. It is not surprising, on the other hand, that by those who held orthodox opinion, she was viewed as one who was drawing destruction upon society.

Ramabai rented one room and lived with her daughter, Manorama. She gave shelter to a child widow of twelve, Thakubai, who later became one of the most ardent workers in Mukti Sadan, Ramabai's home for widows. Ramabai, only twenty-four, a widow with a baby

daughter, was determined to fight for women's freedom and for raising the social status of women. The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj—Ranade, Bhandarkar, Telang, Chandavarkar, Modak—all initially welcomed her and befriended her. They organised meetings where she gave discourses on the Puranas. Among one of her earliest friends and helpers was Ramabai Ranade.

Ramabai felt that her education was incomplete as she knew almost no English and very little of anything else except Sanskrit. In 1883 she sailed for England with her little daughter Manorama and stayed at the Home of the Sisters of St. Mary at Wantage. She went to the Ladies College at Cheltenham where she taught Sanskrit and at the same time studied English, Mathematics, Greek and Natural Science.

From England, Ramabai went to the United States to be present on the occasion of her cousin Anandibai Joshi,⁹ receiving the degree in medicine at Philadelphia. While in America, Ramabai became interested in Froebel and the Kindergarten system.

Unlike most men and women of her time, Ramabai did not believe that women's education was only for making them better wives and mothers. She wanted education to 'dispel the illusion of many superstitious beliefs, the wrong ideas that now keep women in subjection' (Chapman, 1891 : 40). Education, according to her, was crucial for women's emancipation.

She also wanted women to be self-supporting and economically independent. In *Strive Dharma Niti* she said that women should be given knowledge and should be helped to develop themselves—'Self help is the best help, and women must not depend on others'. Ramabai reiterates again and again that the salvation of women lies in their own hands, they must not depend on men. She was a great believer in women's independence and felt that the chief means for improving women's position was education which should make a woman self-reliant. In the *High Caste Hindu Woman* she cites the example of Chandramukhi Basu,¹⁰ principal of Bethune College, Calcutta and Kadambini Ganguly,¹¹ B.A., M.B., as well as of Anandibai Joshi. She welcomed Mary Carpenter's proposal of establishing Normal Schools for training female teachers.¹² The careers she could think of for women, particularly widows, were medicine, teaching and nursing. In her evidence before the Indian Education Commission she urged that special training should be given to women teachers who should receive higher salaries than

men. Women should be appointed as Inspectresses of schools, and there should be greater facilities for training women doctors.

After returning from England and the United States in 1889, Ramabai started her first home for widows in Bombay, Sharda Sadan, with a view to educating young widows and making them self-reliant.

By the end of the first three months, the number of pupils in Sharda Sadan increased to 22, and for many of them a new life started with their admission to the institution.

In November 1890, Ramabai shifted the Sharda Sadan from Bombay to Pune. Orthodox Hindu opinion in Pune was being mobilised against her. Many thought it a sin to support and educate widows. Others like Lokmanya Tilak suspected her of using Sharda Sadan to spread Christianity. Tilak's paper *Kesari* carried bitter attacks against Ramabai. After some girls from Sharda Sadan embraced Christianity, other social reformers including Ranade, Bhandarkar and others resigned from the Advisory Board. But Ramabai was undeterred and continued her work. She shifted her centre of activity to Kedgaon where she established Mukti Sadan whose aim was to make the girls who were its inmates economically independent. She was made convener of a women's convention held in Bombay in February 1891, where Cornelia Sorabji¹³ was the Chairman. The subject was the enactment of a Bill sponsored by Malabari to raise the age of consent of marriage to 14.¹⁴ Kashibai Kanetkar spoke in favour of the Bill but she was opposed by a woman who asked: 'How would you like your son-in-law to be sued in court for infringing the conditions laid down in the Bill?' Kashibai was taken aback and could not answer; but Ramabai was quick to reply, 'Never mind the son-in-law; his life is not worth more than that of her daughter.' Ramabai was bitterly criticised for her view on the Age of Consent Bill but she ignored this and continued her work. Often, even if the audience booed her and abused her, she continued to speak in public. Most men could not bear to listen to a woman talking about the power of women and tried to drown her voice by shouting (Sengupta, 1968 : 256).

Pandita Ramabai was also the first woman to start a women's association in western India. With the foundation of the Arya Mahila Samaj in Pune on 1 May 1882 and in Bombay on 30 November of the same year, women's organisations were inaugurated in different parts of the province. The aims of the Samaj were: '(1) to work for

the deliverance of women from the evil practices (e.g. child marriage, the bondage of ignorance, etc.) which by tradition and custom have come down to India from the past; and (2) to work for the removal of the present deplorable condition of women in respect of religion, morality, etc. and of their uplift.' The Samaj was meant to be 'the centre from which might issue a powerful agitation for the emancipation of the enslaved women of the land'. To begin with, women were unfamiliar with even the concept of such an organisation. The Samaj sponsored lectures to encourage women to come together and undertake social work, hold discussions, kirtans, arrange trips, etc. Ramabai went from city to city establishing branches of the Samaj. She wanted the Samaj to be the nucleus of an agitation for the emancipation of women.

Pandita Ramabai was an exception in that she questioned the subordinate role of the woman. Consider her statements on this issue. 'Men look upon us women as chattels. We make every effort to deliver ourselves from this situation. But some will say this is a rebellion against men and to do this is a sin. To leave men's evil acts unchecked and remain unmoved before them is a greater sin. . . .'¹⁵ Why should women obey men, be treated like slaves and not be cared for at all? 'They toil without end and all twenty four hours. They have to put out the water for bath when the men return home, prepare their food and serve it. They have to massage the husband's feet even if they are tired, and still be prepared to receive kicks and blows at the slightest pretext.' It is clear that she wanted to free women from the tyranny of men and this was considered extremely dangerous by orthodox men and women (Deshpande, 1963 : 83).¹⁶ Her views were disapproved of because they threatened male domination in the family. Ramabai Ranade who befriended the Pandita in Pune and who admired her, was told by women in her family not to bring her into the house: 'Outcaste woman that she is, she must not come into our house and defile it. You, if you like, can hug her to your bosom, but such pollution is intolerable to us. The horrid creature when her father had duly and properly married her to Shri Krishna at Dwarka, must needs commit sacrilege and marry a Bengali Babu. And does she then keep at home? Not she, she brings ruin there also; and now she comes here, intent on spreading her unholy influence over the whole world' (idem).

Pandita Ramabai did not agree with the Shastras that women were inferior to men, could not get *moksha* and that their only hope for

liberation was the worship of their husbands. This doctrine had troubled her since she was 13 or 14 years old and had heard at Dwarka the story of Meerabai. She looked upon Meerabai as a leader in the rebellion against the tyranny of the husband. Hindu women of the time were asked to look upon their husbands as god: 'This god may be the worst sinner and a great criminal. Still he is her god and she must worship him.' But even this would not bring *moksha* to a woman. Women had no right to study the Vedas and Vedanta and without a knowledge of these, no one could know Brahma, and without knowledge of Brahma, *moksha* could not be attained. A woman's best hope was to be reborn as a high caste man. Ramabai revolted against this attitude towards women, against the injustice and cruelty of a system that denied a woman her rights as a free individual. It was this which led her to accept Christianity.

Pandita Ramabai's views were unusually progressive and radical, indeed subversive for her times. She displayed remarkable courage in disregarding caste taboos, braving hostile public opinion, and going to England and America. Max Muller regarded Ramabai's bold decision to go abroad as requiring more moral courage than Napoleon's march to Russia (1899:127-8).

Anandibai Karve

Anandibai Karve (whose original name was Godubai) and Parvatibai were sisters. Like Ramabai Saraswati they were Chitpavan brahmins. Their father Balkrishna Keshav Joshi owned a few acres of land and also engaged in petty trading in the village of Devrukh in Ratnagiri district. He was a man distinguished for his piety and liberality. He was known in the village for giving water to the untouchables and Muslims. Their mother was extremely hardworking, industrious and efficient, qualities which the daughters inherited. Godubai was born in 1865. She was married when she was eight years old to a man seventeen years older than herself. Within three months he died leaving poor Godubai a child widow. She had received no education in her childhood—'The thought that I should go to school or even learn something at home never occurred to anybody. Once when I brought back a little book on elementary arithmetic, my mother-in-law angrily took it away from me. It was universally considered improper for a woman to learn to read and write or calculate' (Karve, 1963:65). When she was twenty-one she was forced to shave her head and wear ochre coloured saris: the dress

of a widow. This was a traumatic experience for her — 'I had heard of widows who had refused to have their hair cut being subjected to physical violence, bound by ropes, starved or shut up behind closed doors, and I feared that if I did not consent, I would also have to suffer such treatment ... It was when I lost my hair and had to wear a red sari¹⁷ that I realised for the first time what it was to be a widow. I spent days and days with tears constantly filling my eyes, but there was no way out. And that was not all. The ordeal had to be repeated every month, and even now I feel for the unfortunate young woman that was' (p. 66).

Godubai's brother Narharpant was at this time studying in Bombay and was keen on educating her but their mother refused. Godubai was useful in the house sewing clothes and looking after the younger brothers and sisters. But when his wife died, Narhar needed somebody to cook for him in Bombay and look after his infant son. So Godubai was allowed to go. Narhar and Karve were living in a communal household of thirteen or fourteen young men for whom Karve's first wife and Godubai had to cook.

In Bombay, Godubai learnt the Marathi alphabet and the multiplication table up to ten. Then the announcement of the opening of Pandita Ramabai's Sharda Sadan appeared in the papers. Her brother was keen that she should join this school. But the announcement gave 20 as the maximum age, and she was 24. Narharpant went and saw Ramabai and fortunately she agreed to take Godubai into the school.

'At first I was a day student. As my brother's son was too young to be left at home, I put him in a perambulator and walked to the school. A servant from the school used to come daily to fetch me and help push the perambulator. I began to wear a pair of *jodas* and to carry an umbrella as protection against the sun. Widows, particularly those with shaven heads, were not supposed to have footwear and people often peeped out of windows and from balconies at my untraditional behaviour' (p. 70).

While Narharpant was keen on educating his sister, he had a violent temper and beat her on a couple of occasions. Godubai wrote to her father that she wanted to shift to Sharda Sadan as a boarder. The effect of this however was that her parents came to Bombay to take her back to Devrukh. Godubai appealed to Pandita Ramabai who rose to the occasion; she offered fifty rupees a year to Godubai's father so that he could engage a servant to help in the work at home

on condition that his daughter was allowed to stay in the school and carry on her studies. And so Godubai became a resident student of Sharda Sadan.

There were very few girls in Sharda Sadan in those early years but they were all much younger than Godubai and had gone to regular schools. She had never had any schooling and since she was the eldest many duties were assigned to her—'Thus I had to milk the cow, look after the guests, and cook for Brahman visitors because they would not eat food cooked by other castes. My study therefore was not very satisfactory and I was weak in most subjects. Still I managed to complete six Marathi standards and learnt English of the first three standards' (p. 70). But Sharda Sadan, she said, taught her a number of things, particularly compassion towards widows, orphans and other helpless humans. She also learnt to work hard and never waste time in useless things. Ramabai also told her pupils that woman is the worst enemy of woman and women themselves must come forward to uplift womanhood.

Karve's first wife died and he decided to remarry a 'virgin widow'. Godubai's father proposed that he should marry her and Karve agreed. Widow remarriage among the high castes was still a rarity and only one or two such marriages had taken place. Thus it required considerable courage on the part of Godubai's father to take the initiative for the remarriage of his widowed daughter. In retrospect Anandibai was also surprised at her father's progressive suggestion. In 1893, Godubai who was 28, was married to Karve who was 35 and then a Professor at Fergusson College, Poona. Pandita Ramabai organised a big reception in Sharda Sadan and as was customary among Maharashtrians, Godubai's name was changed—to Anandibai.

After returning to Pune, Anandibai began attending school again as she wanted to finish high school, if possible. She had, of course, also to cook and look after her husband and his relatives, about seven of whom were staying with them. People in Pune thought it funny for a grown, married woman to be going to school and made rude remarks about her within her hearing, but she ignored these.

Anandibai's married life was no bed of roses. She not only brought up her own children but gave shelter to and raised countless orphans and widows. And this on a very limited budget—Karve gave her Rs. 45 out of his salary of Rs. 100 a month and she was supposed to manage everything on that. 'The amount I got to run the household

was very meagre. I used to supplement it by working as a midwife in my spare time' (p. 77). Karve used to be away very often on account of his work and Anandibai had to see to all the usual affairs of the family—the children's food, illnesses, studies, the family budget and so on. 'Sometimes in fun I tell him that although people call him Maharshi, some of the credit is due to me. For if I had not managed the family affairs and set him free to carry out his public activities, he could not have achieved so much' (p. 77). Without consulting anybody, he assigned his life insurance policy for Rs. 5,000 to the Widow's Home. Anandibai cried, quarrelled with him, abused him; as she was worried about her future and that of their children in case she was widowed a second time. But he would not budge.

Thus, though Karve was the champion of Hindu widows and a pioneer of women's education in western India, his personal life was in many ways marked by the kind of domination by the husband characteristic of the traditional Hindu family. As his daughter-in-law Iravati Karve, the distinguished anthropologist, remarked, 'How fortunate I am that I am the daughter-in-law of such a man (who has done so much for Hindu women) and how still more fortunate that I was not his wife' (Karve, 1963:104).

Parvatibai Athavale

Anandibai's sister Parvatibai was born in 1870, one of eleven brothers and sisters. When she was not married till she was eleven, neighbours would whisper to one another, 'What a big girl she is and not yet a bride!' And so her mother quickly arranged her marriage to a lame man whose pay was Rs. 15 a month. At the age of twenty, she became a widow. She had had no education as there was no school for girls in her village. Her education started when she was 26 and that was entirely due to the efforts of her brother-in-law, Prof. Karve.

Parvatibai started going to what she calls a 'home class' which was presumably not a proper school but a kind of adult education class. It was attended by the wives of a number of wealthy citizens of Pune. She was a shaven widow and the teacher did not pay as much attention to her as she did to the rich ladies.

Parvatibai thus preferred to stay at home and occupy herself with household work and cooking. But her sister refused to let her do any household work—'You must either sit in the house and do nothing or go to school and learn ... If you want to become a teacher, instead

of sitting idly near the fireplace, you must spend your time in the school'. (Athavale, n.d.)

Professor Agarkar's widow had a teacher from the Home Class come to her home to teach her. Mrs. Agarkar and Parvatibai were equally ignorant, so they both began to study together. There, Parvatibai learnt the Marathi alphabet, read the first book, learned the multiplication table up to ten times fourteen, and to count up to hundred. Then she began to feel that if she had to study, she might as well do so in a manner to make it worthwhile. After much thought she decided to enrol herself in the school in Huzurpaga which had a boarding school attached to it. At that time widows with shaven heads were not accustomed to go to school and so naturally Parvatibai was very nervous and anxious. 'All I knew was the multiplication table up to fourteen, counting up to one hundred, and how to read such simple words as 'do', 'house' and 'cart' I was now twenty-six years of age, and my son seven. How was I to get an education at my age! When indeed would I become qualified to become a teacher! How was I to become able to meet the expenses of my son's education! Such were the anxieties that, never thought of before, now stood before my sight' (pp. 24-6).

Her sister, Anandibai gave her courage and took her to the school founded by Ranade in Huzurpaga. Parvatibai felt most awkward as girls began to look at her 'with curious glances'. 'Girls who are now in school can have no idea', wrote Parvatibai later, 'of how I felt in that uncomfortable position.' The teacher was not very willing to accept her as a pupil but Anandibai argued with him and finally persuaded him to do so.

The first year was very difficult. In her class there were a number of unmarried girls of 8 or 10 years of age. Altogether there were 60 girls in the class. Parvati was the only widow, with her shaven head, widow's sari and no ornaments. She had to work extremely hard, take help from girls who were her son's age, but she managed to pass the examination. From then on she had an easier time with her studies and passed every examination. She received a scholarship to the Teacher's Training class and in the third year she obtained a Teacher's Certificate of the highest grade.

Parvatibai overcame her initial reluctance and almost forced herself to study partly because she did not want to be a burden on anyone and partly to please her sister and brother-in-law. 'The pleasure that my success gave Prof. Karve, and the satisfaction felt

by Baya, are beyond my powers to describe' (p. 25).

After finishing her education, she started teaching at Prof. Karve's Widow Home at Hingane near Pune. 'I think that the credit for my decision to give my life to the Home belongs to ... my honoured Guru, Professor Karve' (p. 26).

The Widow's Home in 1902 was merely a hut. Water had to be brought from a canal. When Parvatibai joined it there were 18 young widows. She did all the work from that of a cook and maid servant to that of a Lady Superintendent. Soon her task became that of collecting funds. This she undertook to relieve Prof. Karve of the hardships of travelling to raise money for the institution. *

Parvatibai had an amazing capacity to bear hardships and suffering. She travelled on her first fund raising trip to Khandva on a servant's pass. One of the girls was going to Khandva and had obtained a railway pass which allowed her to take a servant. Parvatibai accompanied this girl on a free servant's pass as she did not want the widow's home to bear the expense of her journey. Her task was not easy. No one paid attention to her, some scoffed at her—who, after all, was willing to listen to a lecture by a widow? But by her sincerity and perseverance at each place she found someone to listen to her and help her. Having started from Pune on a servant's ticket, and then having travelled all alone to distant places, she returned having collected Rs. 500. From 1904 onwards she travelled far and wide across India collecting funds. Every year she collected three to four thousand rupees. While doing this she had to face many difficulties because of the prejudice against a widow and also an educated woman.

Parvatibai had a great desire to learn English and hence bought an English primer and began to study. At the suggestion of a friend she joined the Bandra Convent School in Bombay to learn English. She was then forty three years old! It was a Christian school where she was unhappy and so she shifted to the Scottish Mission School. Here she had to sit with little girls but despite this embarrassment and loneliness she continued for three years in this school.

Prof. Karve had the idea that if Parvatibai went to the United States of America and stayed with American families she would learn English much more quickly and also get an opportunity to see women's institutions there. And so at the age of forty eight, a strict vegetarian, unable to speak English, with no money, she set sail for America, utterly ignorant of the American way of life. The voyage

was full of hardships and she barely survived on bread and milk and fruit, falling grievously ill as soon as she landed in San Francisco.

Parvatibai earned her living in the States by learning to be a house-maid, cleaning, sweeping, dish-washing—sometimes four hundred dishes a day! As a dishwasher in a hospital she fainted and fell seriously ill. But nothing could deter her, neither illness, nor poverty, nor lack of food. She was a woman of indomitable courage, determined to accomplish the purpose for which she had come. Overcoming numerous difficulties and frustrations, she ended her American journey triumphantly by addressing a gathering of women in the Hotel Waldorf Astoria in New York and other distinguished women's clubs where she eloquently pleaded the cause of Indian women.

Parvatibai was a great advocate of women's education but she wanted women to be given an education suited to their special domestic life. 'Such an education should include the first principles in medical care, care of children, cooking, care of garden, how to keep a house clean, the purchase and care of food, singing, religious and moral instruction and such like important subjects' (Athavale, 1986 : p. 134).¹⁸

'At present educated girls are receiving the same education as boys. The education is of no use whatever in their domestic life. I do not see that the domestic life of our educated women is any better than the domestic life of our uneducated women. But the tendency still exists of giving our girls the same education as is given to boys. This tendency should be checked at once' (p. 134-5). She wanted women to be educated in a way that would teach them to manage their homes better, make their homes beautiful and healthy so that their husbands are attracted to the home and do not stay out.

Parvatibai held that for the majority of women marriage was the goal. She was against child marriage and thought that girls should get married between the ages of sixteen and twenty; no life is complete without marriage. She did not, however, advocate girls and boys choosing their own partners and argued in favour of arranged marriages and got her own son married when he was 27 to a girl of 21 who had received some education and whom Parvatibai had known and chosen to be her daughter-in-law.

Parvatibai was against women seeking education for employment. 'For women there is greater servitude in outside employment than that in the married life If by freedom from servitude is meant

freedom from men and a life of independence from them, then that freedom is unnatural, impossible, disastrous and opposed to the laws of right living. In order to escape servitude to their husbands, they must not accept servitude to outside employment (pp. 146, 148). She held that in Europe there was a strife between men and women and the latter had entered into all men's occupations which had 'at times made them strangers to the homes, the sacred place of their duties. We do not want such conditions in India. If no difference is made in the education of girls and boys, founded on the differences of duties and place, evil will result like Europe.' In India, she wanted every woman to place before her mind the ideal of being the best sister, the best mother and the best wife 'and female education should be in accordance with this ideal' (p. 147). Prof. Karve, she asserted, had founded the Indian Women's University in order that Indian women may become good mothers and home-makers (p. 148).

Parvatibai wanted to create a national movement for female education but education which would make women better wives and mothers and home-makers.

Yet education did change some of her views. She came to believe that widows should not be forced to shave their heads. After 1912, she allowed her own hair to grow and she also gave up the widow's garb. Discarding these signs of widowhood was a bold step for she was severely criticised by the orthodox Hindus of Pune.

Both the sisters displayed remarkable determination and strength in educating themselves at an advanced age against all possible odds. After finishing their education, Anandibai looked after the house and children thereby enabling Karve to dedicate his public life to the Widow's Home. No work was too low or demeaning for them and at the same time they had a desire to educate themselves and work for the cause of widows and women's education.

Ramabai Ranade

Ramabai Ranade was born in 1862. She was also a Chitpavan brahmin. Her family were respectable gentry having ties with the Patwardhan family who were jagirdars of Sangli since the Maratha days. Describing her childhood she writes: 'The women dared not enter the front apartment and come into the presence of the father—not even a daughter who had come home for short while from her husband's home; nor girls above eight years. Singing and

playing about was unthinkable. So was reading and writing' (Deshpande, 1963 : 37).

Ramabai's father had an elder sister, who was married into a family in Brahmavrata. She was the only woman in her family who could read and write some *stotras*, including the *Vyankatesh stotra*. Unfortunately, she lost her husband. When she became a widow, Ramabai's elder uncle decided that teaching girls to read and write brought ill luck. 'When the women came to hear of this, they came to fear even the thought of reading and writing. So it was inevitable that all our girls should be completely illiterate' (p. 38).

At the age of 11, Ramabai was married to the great social reformer and nationalist Mahadev Govind Ranade. He was a widower and this was his second marriage. He married under protest because of pressure from his father and wanted to make his second marriage as useful to the cause of reform as possible. He, therefore, began his young wife's education on the evening of their marriage, requiring her to pronounce his name in violation of the traditional Hindu custom whereby a wife never addresses her husband by his name (p. 37).

There was considerable opposition within the Ranade family to Ramabai being educated. She had to put up with a lot of harassment, direct and indirect from women in her family. The women in her husband's house, eight or ten of them, tried to tease her and mock her and put her to shame because she was taught to read and write and recite every evening. Some of the younger women would say to her: 'You draw upon yourself such displeasure from the elderly women just for the sake of reading and writing. We are really very sorry for you. But what can be done? You see even if the menfolk like it, you should read just once in a while. Isn't this reading disrespectful towards the elders in the house?' (p. 47).

A few months passed in this manner. Ramabai persisted with her studies and completed her Marathi lessons. Her husband then began to teach her English. This required more time and it was not enough for her to do her lessons only at night or early in the morning. She had to sit an hour or more to learn the words by heart. There was no place to do so downstairs and she had to go upstairs to their room. That made the women all the more furious and they said to her, 'You may do what you like in your room. But we cannot tolerate this disrespectful behaviour' (p. 48).

Ramabai received all her education at home and her only teacher

was her husband. Ranade was a great advocate of women's education. Ramabai recalls how when they were posted in Nasik her husband, Gopal Hari Deshmukh who was the Joint Judge there, Ketkar, Wad and others established a branch of the Prarthana Samaj. Ranade and Deshmukh encouraged their wives to get the women of the place together at least for '*haldi-kumkum*' ceremonies and read out to them the lives of Sita or Savitri and by such efforts persuade them to educate themselves. They also exhorted them to visit the local Girls' Schools and encourage the pupils by giving prizes and such other means (p. 63). Ramabai had been associated with the first women's association in western India the Arya Mahila Samaj, and was its President from 1889 to 1901. She started in 1902, after Ranade's death, the more broad-based Hindu Ladies' Social and Literary Club which included women from different communities. Among its members were Lakshmibai Chandavarkar, a Saraswat Brahmin, Manekbai Kothari, a Pathare Prabhu, Lady Cowasji Jehangir, a Parsi, Mrs. Badruddin Tyabji, a Muslim and at a later date, Jambabai Sakai and Mrs. Bhavanidas Motiwala, both Gujaratis. The object of the Society was promotion of women's education and service to other women.

Ranade faced criticism whenever he broke new ground and this was also true when he established western-oriented primary and secondary schools for girls. In 1881, Ramabai and he founded a primary school for girls which at first only the wives and daughters of social reformers attended. Its regular teachers were women but the leading social reformers also sometimes gave talks to encourage the pupils to emerge from the seclusion of their homes. In 1884, Ranade and a number of reformers founded a girls' high school—the Huzurpaga school—which Parvanibai Athavle joined. It was immediately attacked by the orthodox party in Pune, who saw in it a further threat to traditional Hindu values. A few months later Ranade and his friends founded the Poona Female Teachers Training College (Tucker, 1972 : 172). Ramabai helped her husband in all these activities.

After Ranade's death in 1901, Ramabai stepped out into public life on her own. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati's Sharda Sadan inspired her to start the Seva Sadan in Bombay in 1908, with the cooperation of Behramji Malabari and Dayaram Gidumal who were Ranade's colleagues in the movement for women's uplift. Within a year a branch was opened in Pune with a class for girls above 14 who were

taught reading, writing and arithmetic. It began with only six pupils. The idea was to provide primary education and also give an opportunity to unmarried girls, widows and deserted wives to become self-reliant. She was assisted in this work by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, G.K. Devdhar, Annapurnabai Apte, D.N. Patwardhan, Sitabai Dukale and Sitabai Bhandarkar. Branches of the Seva Sadan were soon opened in Satara, Sholapur, Ahmednagar and different parts of Bombay Presidency and even in Nagpur and Gwalior. The Seva Sadans did pioneering work in training primary school teachers and nurses. The first Indian woman nurse in western India was the product of the Seva Sadan. Ramabai devoted herself completely to the Seva Sadan from its foundation till her death. When Ramabai died, a thousand girls were being educated in Seva Sadan training college, practising school, music school and other departments.

In December 1904, the first all India Women's Convention was held in Bombay under the auspices of the Bombay Social Reform Association and the Hindu Ladies' Social and Literary Club under the Presidentship of Ramabai. Among those who spoke at the conference were Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Tyabji, Mrs. Fazzal, Kashibai Kavitkar, Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharda Mehta. The main demand of the conference was for greater educational facilities for women. The kind of education these conferences and associations wanted was different from that given to boys. It was to make women into good wives and better mothers.

Ramabai Ranade firmly believed that her primary duty was to please her husband. When her in-laws tried to persuade her to give up studying, ridiculed her as a kind of semi-outcaste or untouchable, she put up with all this in silence because her husband had enjoined her not to make any rejoinders to the ladies of the household, however great the provocation. She faithfully followed his command. During Ranade's lifetime, she did not prominently attract public attention and had completely merged her personality into his. Even after his death, she called herself his mere shadow. To be of as much service to her husband and to minister as much as possible to his comforts was regarded by her as her primary duty and such public appearance as she made in meetings and gatherings were at his instance. It was he who wanted her to take an interest in movements for the welfare of women but she herself gradually came to love her work. Her devotion to her husband continued till her death. When she moved to her new Seva Sadan building she kept a sofa in the hall

in which an impressive portrait of Ranade was kept. Every morning and evening she bowed before the portrait, said her prayers and so began and ended her day (Pavte, 1963 : 301-8).

Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharda Mehta

Vidyagauri Nilkanth (1876-1958) and Sharda Mehta (1882-1970) were both Gujarati Nagar Brahmans, a caste among whom education was fairly advanced and which produced a large number of social and religious reformers of Gujarat in the nineteenth century. Nagar women were always regarded as intelligent and capable and their status within the family was quite high. Vidyagauri and Sharda were the granddaughters of Bholanath Sarabhai Divetia, one of the founders of the Prarthana Samaj in Gujarat, and a champion of social and religious reform. Bholanath's daughter Balabhen was their mother. As their father, Gopilal Dhruv who was a petty Government officer, was often posted outside Ahmedabad, they spent a considerable part of their early childhood in their maternal grandfather's house.

Unlike the women we have considered so far, both these sisters had an opportunity of being in formal schools. They had their primary education at one of the oldest girls' schools in Ahmedabad, Maganbhai Kanyashala. Parents in those days were unwilling to send their girls to study under men teachers, and Vidyagauri recalled how the latter brought their wives to school with them who, poor things, sat in the classes with their heads covered. Vidyagauri studied in this school till Gujarati Class VII and joined the Anglo-Vernacular classes of the Mahalakshmi Female Training College in 1887. Sharda followed her sister there. There was no proper high school in Ahmedabad which admitted girls and at the Mahalakshmi Training College they proceeded from reading one set of English books to the next under the guidance of Mrs. Macaphee, the Lady Superintendent who wanted to convert these informal classes into a proper school. She herself took enormous pains over her pupils during school hours and outside as she was determined to send this first batch of girls for the matriculation examination.

In 1889, while she was in the English Standard V, Vidyagauri was married at the age of 13 to Ramanbhai who was 21. He was the son of Mahipatram Nilkanth, one of the leading social reformers of his time, educationist and Principal of the Teachers' Training College. Mahipatram was the first Gujarati Nagar to go to England and was

thrown out of his caste for doing so. Vidyagauri was no doubt very keen to study and was an unusually intelligent girl, but she could not have continued her studies without the support of her husband and father-in-law, Ramanbhai who was himself an ardent reformer, helped and encouraged not only his wife but also his sister-in-law, Shardabhen to study by teaching them at home. Vidyagauri passed the Matriculation examination in 1891 standing first in Gujarati in the entire Bombay University. Her examiner was the distinguished Gujarati novelist Govardhanram Tripathi, author of *Saraswatichandra*. She could not immediately join college because of repeated deliveries. In 1894 she enrolled herself in Gujarat College, the first Gujarati Hindu girl to do so. In the Inter Arts examination of Bombay University she stood first in Logic and opted to do her B.A. with Philosophy Honours. Because of frequent pregnancies and deliveries, she had to withdraw from college every alternate year and so it took her eight years to complete a course which should normally have taken only four. She was advised by many of her relatives to give up studies: after all, as the argument went, what was the point of a woman passing her B.A. But Vidyagauri was impervious to all this and was determined to continue. She received all cooperation and support from her husband as well as her mother who volunteered to look after her children. She and her sister both graduated in 1901, the first two Gujarati women to do so.

Shardabhen was married when she was 14 to Sumant Mehta who was four years older than her and then a student at medical college. His father, Dr. Batukram had been to England and hence their family was considered to be progressive. Shardabhen recalls the pressure that was exercised on her family when she was 12, to get her married to the first person available, as an unmarried girl as 'old' as she was would bring bad name to the family. However, her parents were determined to wait and get her married only when a suitable boy was found. Immediately after marriage, Sumant Mehta left for England to study, and Shardabhen continued her education in Ahmedabad.

College life was not easy for them. The men resented their presence and would overturn their desks and chairs, spread irritating substances on their benches which caused itching and burning, write anonymous letters using foul language and compose verses making fun of them. They found in college all kinds of abusive remarks about them written on desks, walls and blackboards.

Such was the prejudice against women appearing in public that once when in a college drama Vidyagauri was given the role of Sita and her cousin, that of Rama, there was stormy opposition to her coming on the stage and the idea had to be dropped. Vidyagauri, however, loved the stage and organised shows for raising funds for the victims of the famine of 1900 and for the First World War. She was interested in music and could sing beautifully and also play the Sarangi. It was considered improper for women to sing or play musical instruments in those days but both Ramanbhai and Vidyabhen wanted to fight against these prejudices (Nilkanth, 1976 : 13).

Vidyabhen helped Ramanbhai in his literary work. They together edited a journal *Jyamnudha* and also wrote a book *Hasyamandir*. Vidyagauri and Shardabhen together translated Ramesh Chandra Dutt's *The Lake of Palms* into Gujarati. Collections of Vidyagauri's essays and speeches have also been published. Ramanbhai's literary standards were, however, very high and he was a severe critic and perhaps that is why Vidyabhen did not write much on her own.

Just as she helped him in his literary pursuits, so also she was associated with him in all his public activities—Mahapatram Rupram Anath Ashram, Victoria Jubilee Hospital, Diwalibai Kanyashala, Ranchodlal Chotalal Girl's School, Maganbhai Karamchand Girls School, Social Reform Association, Gujarat Vernacular Society, Gujarat Sahitya Sabha, Sahitya Parishad and of course the Prarthana Samaj. After Ramanbhai's death, she became the principal office-bearer and organiser in many of these associations.

Vidyagauri and Shardabhen were actively involved in women's education. Vanita Vishram was a type of educational centre started by women for providing education to girls above the age of 14. The first such institution, Vanita Vishram, was started in Ahmedabad in 1907.¹⁹ A Mahila Vidyalaya was begun here at the initiative of Shardabhen. The school offered a year's course teaching girls English, Gujarati, History, Geography, Sanskrit, Hindi, Music, Sewing and Drawing. Debates and 'ras' and 'garba' folk dances were also arranged. It was meant to provide an opportunity for married girls and young widows to continue with their education.

A similar Vanita Vishram was established in Surat which did excellent work among widows and married women whose household duties did not permit their joining a full-time school. Sharda Mehta was behind this institution also. The success of the Surat institution

prompted a group of women to start work along the same lines in Bombay.

Lalshankar Umiashankar an eminent social reformer established in Ahmedabad the Bholanath Sarabhai Literary Institute which housed a library and reading room for women and also provided recreational facilities for them. The activities here began when Vidyabhen started a Ladies' Club in 1887. It provided a place where middle class women of different communities could meet, in days when their lives were confined within the four walls of the house. A Mahila Mandal was also started by her.

Shardabhen together with Indulal Yagnik and others started a women's college in Ahmedabad which was affiliated to the Karve Women's University. Vidyabhen helped collect funds for the college and also taught English and logic in it for many years.

Thus the two sisters were not only the first two graduates of Gujarat but also opened the doors of higher education to hundreds of women in Gujarat.

III

The attitude of these educated women towards their husbands and their own role in the family, however did not alter perceptibly. The ideal of the '*pativrata stree*', the Sita-Savitri syndrome had been so deeply internalised by high caste Hindu women that it could not change overnight. Besides, education also socialised them in this direction. It was being continually dinned into their ears by men as well as women that the main goal of women's education was to make them better wives and mothers. Anandibai Karve was an exceptionally tough and courageous woman but suffered and accepted her husband's domineering attitude. Ramabai Ranade, as we have seen, worshipped her husband. She had completely merged her personality in his and even after his death she called herself his mere shadow. Vidyagauri Nilkanth called her husband her '*jivanvidhata*' and Shardabhen referred to Dr. Sumant Mehta as her '*margdarshak*' (Mehta, 1983 : 3).

It must be remembered, of course, that the movement for women's education and emancipation was initiated by men. And all these women realised that they owed their education and other advantages to the supportive roles of their husbands, brothers or fathers and were deeply grateful for this. While they accepted their husbands' political and social views and regarded them as their

superiors, they did not consider their own roles as those of being merely wives and mothers. They had a role outside the home also.

It would not, therefore, be correct to say that education made no difference to women's attitude or family life. The Ranades' was an exceptionally happy marriage and an example to many. Women like Ramabai Ranade, Vidyagauri Nilkanth, or Sharda Mehta became companions and co-workers of their husbands in a way traditional Indian women never before had. Husbands in such families treated their wives with greater regard and there was more companionship between husbands and wives. While the relationship between the husband and wife was not one of equality, these were 'companionate' marriages. These marriage relationships were different from the traditional Hindu ones. Wives shared their husbands' intellectual, political, social and other public interests. In these reformed families, men and women ate together and went out together and there was little discrimination in the bringing up of boys and girls. There was no segregation and girls were provided equal educational opportunities. Education provided women with an opportunity to form friendships with other women outside their own castes and communities. Girls in these families were married late and given higher education. While Vidyagauri and Sharda Mehta married when they were 13, none of their daughters married till they were 21. All their daughters were graduates.

The women whose life histories we have considered played an active role in public life. In fact all of them had a deep sense of social commitment. Pandita Ramabai founded the Sharda Sadan. Ramabai Ranade became one of the leading women of her times, established and ran the Seva Sadans. Education changed Parvatibai Athavale's thinking. She began to think about widows and how their condition could be improved. She worked tirelessly for Karve's Widows' Home, going from town to town raising funds. She said she felt that she must serve her motherland and decided that she could do this best by serving widows. 'I determined to work for the betterment of my motherland by my efforts for her widows' (Athavale n.d. : 29). Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Sharda Mehta were associated with the Vanita Vishrams, Ladies' Club, Prarthana Samaj, widow remarriage associations and various women's associations and educational institutions.

In the nineteenth century, women occupied a very low position in Hindu society. Education, despite its limitations, was one important

way of bringing about some change in their condition. Parvatibai writes 'While I was in my Konkan home at Devrukh, I had no conception of what education meant. How far from my thoughts was that of service for my country. Like many other widows I would have blamed fate for my condition and continued to live the rest of my life in my Devrukh home. But it was Baya's remarriage that gave me an opportunity to come to Poona and to live there and gain an education. It was the education I received that made questions revolve in my mind, as to the real meaning of 'the country of India, her national life and what is needed to be done for national uplift' (p. 27). To Anandibai Karve or Parvatibai Athavle, education thus presented a possibility of escaping the drudgery of poverty and domestic routine to which they would otherwise, as child widows have been condemned. Pandita Ramabai was able to stand on her feet and defy orthodox society because of the education she had received.

In the early years of the nineteenth century there were only a handful of literate women, but a hundred years later, by 1920, going to school had become almost an accepted part of an urban middle class girl's life. The growth of women's education was a change which had in the long run far-reaching implications for women's role although the actual extent of disruption, immediately, was much less than that feared by the orthodox critics—male and female. For women themselves, education widened their horizons. To quote Parvatibai again 'My education gave me, as it were, a new birth, and a wider field of knowledge. Indeed, this new birth gave me so wide a field of knowledge that my opinions changed very rapidly' (p. 28). 'Education awakened my mind. I was determined on carrying out my ideals. And for this purpose I decided to give my whole life to the service of the Widows' Home' (p. 80). Educated women were ready to entertain new ideas, to form associations and express their opinions in public meetings and through journals. Their social relations underwent some change, they participated in social, political and economic activities. They were thus exposed to the process of modernisation which affected certain aspects of family life, altered their view of the world and changed their self perception to some extent.

Footnotes

1. Nagendrabala Mustafi, in *Abarodhe hinabostha*. Quoted in Ghulam Murshid, 1983 : 63.

2. In *Kesari*, 28 September 1887 and 25 October 1887.
3. First Gujarati Education Conference, October 1916. Speech of Hiralal Tribhuvandas. Second Gujarati Education Conference, 1917. Speech of Hargovind Dwarkadas Kantawala.
4. See E. Kulke, *The Parsis in India: A Minority as an Agent of Social Change*, Bombay, p. 104.
5. See *A Source book of the History of Education in Bombay Province: Part I*, Bombay, pp. 35-44.
6. Report of the Indian Education Commission, 1982, p. 524. Quinquennial Report on Progress of Education in Bombay, 1917-1922. p. 96.
7. See *Subodh Patrika*, 7 May 1922.
8. Quoted in N. Macnicol, *Pandita Ramabai*, 1926 : 45.
9. Anandibai Joshi was born in 1865. Her father Ganpatrao Amruteshwar Joshi was a small landowner. Married at the age of 9 to Gopal Vinayak Joshi, a clerk in the Postal Department, she pursued her education at home. She was very keen on becoming a medical doctor and after considerable effort went to America. She studied at the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia and qualified as a doctor in 1886. Unfortunately she contracted tuberculosis and died within a year at the age of 22.
10. Chandramukhi Basu, one of the first female graduates of Calcutta University in 1883, passed her M.A. in 1884 and became Lady Superintendent of Bethune College in 1886. She married a Kashmiri and later went to live in Dehra Dun.
11. Kadambari Ganguly (born 1861), was the first woman to pass, in 1878, the Entrance Examination to the M.B. (medical) Course. She graduated in 1883, and became, in 1886, the first woman doctor in Bengal.
12. Mary Carpenter (1807-77) visited India three times between 1866 and 1870. She stressed the need for female teachers and hence for teacher's training colleges.
13. Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman graduate of Bombay University. She was admitted at Somerville College, Oxford, became Bar-at-Law, Lincoln's Inn, and also practised as a lawyer.
14. The Age of Consent of Marriage Bill aroused a great deal of controversy in the 1880s. The initiator of the Bill was Behramji Merwanji Malabari. It proposed to raise the age of consent for marriage for girls. Despite considerable opposition from orthodox Hindus, the Bill was finally enacted in 1891.
15. See *Subodh Patrika*, 4 June 1882.
16. Ramabai Ranade's reminiscences, *Amchya Ayushatil Kali Athavai*, are translated into English: See K. Deshpande, 1963, *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences*, Bombay, 1963.
17. Widows in Maharashtra wore red-ochre sarees.
18. Parvatibai Athavale. *My Story: the Autobiography of a Hindu Widow* (Tr. Rev. T.E. Abbot), New Delhi, 1986 edn.
19. Vaniia Vishram, *Golden Jubilee: 1915-65*, Bombay, 1965.

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Social Change or Social Reform The Education of Women in Pre-Independence India

KARUNA CHANANA

The central theme of this paper¹ is that any attempt to deal with the issues relating to women's education is likely to be unrewarding unless these are viewed within their social context. In other words, neither the goals of women's education nor the issues relating to it can be properly understood except within the societal context. Our contention is that most of the key issues and problems articulated during the period reflect on women's role in society and actually derive from it. For example, emphasis on a relevant curriculum which characterises the writings on women's education during the pre-independence period is directly linked to the conception of women's domestic role as housewives and mothers. Again, wastage in girls' education often discussed in extant literature similarly derives from this same conception. Education was intended to train boy students for jobs. Since girls were not expected to work outside the home any education that did not train them for the roles of housewife and mother was viewed as wastage. Education for girls was thus sought to be moulded along the requirements of their traditional role expectations so as to reduce wastage. Therefore, the problems and issues relating to women's education will be discussed here within the societal context and the position accorded to women² within the society.

We have identified some of these issues through a survey of a large body of literature and official documents relating to the education and the status of women since the turn of the century.³ While the issues and problems relating to women's education are many, we shall be dealing with four of them, namely, curricular change, regional variation, differential response by religious community and co-education. Although some of these are common to boys as well—for example, differential spread by region and religion—their manifestation is more imbalanced among girls and has a special

bearing on women's education. Our choice is governed by the fact that we are not interested in statistical growth and expansion *per se* but in providing a sociological explanation to the introduction, growth (or lack of it) and expansion of women's education and the framework governing it. For instance, why did girls' education make more progress in Madras and Bombay? Is it because of the early start (which was true of Bengal Presidency as well) or because of social factors like the absence of *parda* and prejudice against educating women? How far was early marriage responsible for slow expansion of girls' education?

The study is confined to the period before independence to what was British India. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, the official policy of the British Government applied to the whole of British India whereas the princely states were affected by the policies of individual rulers. Second, social legislation as a response to revivalist and reformist movements was, by and large, confined to British India (notable exceptions among the Indian princely states being Baroda, Mysore and Travancore).

Debate over women's education

Even though the social position and education of women had attracted the attention of social reformers⁴ earlier, the debate over the question acquired a particular intensity around the end of the nineteenth century. The spate of books and tracts reflecting on the status of Indian women and the need for educating them towards the end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century offer conclusive evidence of this.⁵ Education of women had definitely come to be a public issue by the early 1920s, opposition to it notwithstanding. The slogan of Indian leaders and social reformers by this time had come to be: educating a girl means educating a family (Rajagopal, 1936 : 199).

This had become possible because the 1920s were a period of immense social and political awakening in India followed by intense reformist efforts made by social reformers with or without organised support. Thus, the issue of women's status, which had long become the focus of social reform, was also reflected in a series of legal enactments relating to or affecting women. To mention only a few, the Sati Abolition Act was passed in 1829 while the Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1854. The Special Marriage Act followed in 1872 (it was later amended in 1923). By 1929, Indian

women had been granted the right to vote. The Sarda Act which set the minimum age of marriage for girls at 14 was enacted in 1929.

Education had become a transferred subject under the Montagu-Chelmsford Constitution in 1919. Thereafter dyarchy was introduced in 1921 and education came under dual charge. This permitted greater Indian initiative in education policy and facilitated its implementation. Acts were passed authorising the introduction of compulsory education by local option. The British Government had also gradually changed its position vis-a-vis women's education and was willing by that time to lend support.⁶

Emergence of a class of women by this time and the awareness on their part that organised action was necessary to ameliorate the lot of women were additional factors in helping to focus on the current position of women and the need for educating them (Forbes, 1979 : 162). Lone pioneers like Pandita Ramabai had become rare indeed by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Again, as more and more women received formal education they became conscious of their problems and social status and sought amelioration of their situation. However, so far as their social background is concerned, there was not much difference.

Women leaders in early twentieth century were, by and large, educated and belonged to families closely involved either in social reform or in the independence movement and in the activities of the Congress or in both. Thus, the leaders of the women's movement in the early stage represented the elite. There were women leaders like Sarojini Naidu who were simultaneously involved in reform and in politics. Then there were women like Cornelia Sorabji whose roles were largely non-political and who were working mainly in the field of women's education or other social services (like Ramabai Ranade). Again, Kasturba Gandhi and Kamla Nehru were closely identified with their husbands' work. Nonetheless, they were all working to help women.

What one witnesses is that until the 1930s women's organisations, by and large, concentrated on welfare activities, social reforms and social service and on education and tried to keep out of political activity (Minault, 1981 : 83-84). The AIWC articulated its misgivings about intermeshing of politics and women's activities by including a clause in its constitution that it would refrain from political activity. However, as the social reform movement and the movement for independence began to intersect, it became difficult to keep the two

apart and women leaders and their organisations began to shed their apprehensions (Forbes, 1981 : 49-50). Historians like Basu take the position that this intermeshing was beneficial to women and accelerated the pace of change in their position (1976 : 38-9). Their first public political work was to register as voters in 1922 and to vote in 1923. Women's Indian Association and its branches helped women to register and also encouraged them to vote. By 1940 there were eighty women legislators in the various provinces and states and India stood third in the world in respect of the political influence and position secured by its women (Cousins, 1941 : 55).

Moreover, during this period Gandhi and Besant too supported women's cause by opposing *parda* and by supporting widow re-marriage and a ban on prostitution etc. Besant gave a call in 1914 to Indians to unite and to free their girls from illiteracy and early marriage. Most of those writers, who have written on Gandhi and his contribution to the cause of women have been laudatory. (McDougall, 1943 : 157; Basu, 1976 : 37; John, 1975 : XV; Menon, 1975 : 23). Gandhi is credited with two things, namely, breaking the age-old barriers to bring women out of their homes and into the streets. In other words, he made women visible in the literal sense. Secondly, he tried to channel their traditional qualities of forbearance and self-sacrifice through the non-violence movement (Ahmad, 1984). However, lately, a more critical view of Gandhi's role has also emerged (Omvedt, 1975; Mies, 1975; Mazumdar, 1976; 66). The Indian National Congress also played a progressive role by taking consistent interest in women's cause. One such example is the organisation of the All-India Ladies Conference at its annual meeting in 1921-22 held at Ahmedabad. It was presided over by Bi Amma, the mother of the Ali Brothers (Mitra, 1922 : 7-8). Gandhi also stressed the need for educating women. His call to women to join the political movement brought women out of their homes in large numbers from all parts of India and from varied backgrounds and had a catalytic effect. The impression that had gained currency all over India was that Gandhi was not only a social reformer but a reformer who had a special message for women. Srinivas contends that Gandhi's success in attracting the women to the political struggle was partly due to the confidence and respect he enjoyed among men (1978 : 26-27). Clearly, thus, women's education and amelioration had received a great deal of impetus by the third decade of the twentieth century.

Agents of women's education

The four main agents of women's, as of men's education, in British India were the missionaries, the Indian social reformers, who worked either through associations or independently, the philanthropic foreigners interested in the cause of women, and the British government. Women's education was promoted in the initial stages, by the missionaries (Murdoch 1888 : 19-54). They made their contribution by opening day schools and *zenana* schools as early as the nineteenth century. Later on, some Britishers and other foreigners and Indian social reformers also joined and made significant contributions. The Indians worked either through voluntary organisations or independently but most of their work was organised through voluntary organisations. Therefore, the role of voluntary associations was very crucial in spreading the education of girls in the pre-independence period.

What motivated the missionaries, Indian social reformers and the government to press for the education of women? What advantages did they perceive in educating women and what objectives prompted them to undertake it? A perusal of the literature suggests that the objectives or goals of women's education were formulated at that early stage within the context of their social role.

If we were to look upon women's education from the societal viewpoint and relate it to the motivation of those who introduced it, we find that the demand for women's education arose as a concomitant of the social reform movement. As has already been noted the social reformers reasoned that reform in the social position of women would reform society. They viewed women as being an integral part of family and society. They argued that since the family was and is the basic unit of social organisation in India, the contribution of women to the stability of family, and through it to society, was crucial (Mazumdar, 1976 : 66; Forbes, 1979 : 162-63). Moreover, women were seen to have considerable influence on the socialisation of children, and were considered central to childrearing and housekeeping. Apart from their own sphere of activity women impinged on the sphere of male activity, mainly through ideas and values, which pertained to cultural transmission and provided support to the male. It was for this reason that, while they propagated the cause of women's education, they also promoted the idea of traditional role reinforcement through school curriculae.

Another objective of the social reformers and thinkers in the pre-independence period was to meet the challenge posed by Christian missionaries who were proselytising while imparting education. Although the Christian missionaries were concerned about the moral and intellectual uplift of Indians, their main aim in educating girls, as of all Indians, was to proselytise. Therefore, the response of Indians to these schools, although enthusiastic in the initial stages, became lukewarm. With the passing of time, Indians became suspicious of their aims, and were afraid that their daughters may be so influenced as to want to convert to Christianity.⁷

Minault outlines the response of Muslim leaders to women's education as compared to the Hindu leaders and the Christian missionaries. She contends that one of the motivations of Muslim social reformers and leaders in setting up schools for girls was to counteract the influence of Christian missionaries and their proselytising zeal. They were particularly suspicious of the *zenana* schools which had been set up in Amritsar, Lucknow, Lahore and Calcutta. In addition, they were also equally concerned about the impact of the *shuddhi* movement started by the Arya Samaj in Punjab and UP. Yet another motivating factor was the provision of an education within the Islamic framework. For example, Muslim leaders like Hali, Shaikh Abdullah in Aligarh, Shah Din and Mian Mohammad Shafi in Lahore supported and worked for the education of women within the Islamic framework. A number of leagues were established to counteract the impact of *zenana* schools and to uphold Islamic ideals e.g., Anjuman-o-Himayat-e-Islam which was founded in Lahore in 1884 is a good example. Apart from setting up schools for girls, some of them advocated classes for girls in their homes after the primary stage (Minault, 1982 : 85-88). Thus, even the proponents of reform among Muslims could not transcend the limits of traditional social structure (Bhatty, 1976 : 108).

Again, the fact that educated men came to prefer educated girls as brides further reinforced this concept of education and motivated their parents to send their daughters to schools. However, whatever the motivation, most parents were keen to have an education for the girls which would embellish their feminine qualities. Social reformers, Hindu as well as Muslim, propagated this view. Therefore, girls' schools run by Hindu voluntary organisations like the Seva Sadan at Pune imparted music lessons, home science, first-aid, nursing, midwifery, etc. apart from the teaching of languages for

girls. Those run by Muslims had the teaching of the Quran as an essential component of the curriculum. However, the main idea in promoting women's education was that since a girl had to be a wife and a mother, school education should train her to perform that role more effectively. To quote Srinivas, 'the pressure to get women educated is part of the process of securing good husbands for them'. He extends this point further to link it to jati or the rules of endogamy. Thus, a girl had to receive 'sufficient' education in terms of the educational levels of the males of her endogamous group (1978 : 24). Mazumdar states that the gap between an educated husband and an uneducated wife had to be bridged. But there was another significant reason: these urban-based educated men had come to prefer the company of courtesans. Also high-caste Hindu widows had to be educated so that they would not become courtesans (1976 : 49).

As indicated above, the argument for promoting education among Muslim girls was similar to that used for providing education to Hindu girls, namely, that they should be prepared for their future roles and also that educated men wanted educated wives (Wazir Hasan, 1938 : 23-24). But this had to be done within the Islamic context. The interest of the English educated young Muslim men in the education of women is evident from the setting up of a female education section by the Mohammadan Educational Conference. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah became its secretary in 1902 and set up a school for Muslim girls at Aligarh in 1906. In the early twentieth century the major centres of educational activity among Muslims in the North were Aligarh and Lahore.

Growth and expansion of women's education

Education was generally in a most unsatisfactory state in the early nineteenth century. This backwardness characterised all education, but the state of girls' education was much worse. Some idea of this is provided by the Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the official surveys of indigenous education carried out in different parts of the country. This backwardness was somewhat made up by the interest taken in the expansion of education by missionary societies, Indian leaders and social reformers, but any real expansion of education, including women's education had to wait until education passed on into the charge of Indian ministers.

Several trends are discernible from the statistics relating to

women's education during the period under discussion. First, there was an increase in the number of institutions from 1921-22 until 1936-37 but this number declined thereafter, as is evident from the figures of 1946-47. This should not be taken to mean that there was an actual sliding down of women's education. The explanation for this decline probably lies in the fact that during this period many inefficient institutions (mostly primary schools) were closed down while many more girls were studying in coeducational institutions than had been the case earlier.

Table 1
Number of institutions for girls

(All types)

1921-22	23,517
1926-27	27,756
1931-32	33,969
1936-37	33,989
1939-40	34,564
1946-47	28,196

Sources: The Quinquennial Reports on *The Progress of Education in India* (referred to as PEI). 1917-22, 1922-27, 1927-32, 1932-37, 1937-47 are the sources of statistics for all the tables in this paper.

Notes: (a) The lowest number of institutions (26,142) reaches in 1944-45.

(b) Figures for 1941-42 are not given in PEI, 1937-47.

The number of girls enrolled in various institutions increased steadily (Table 2). For example, while there were 14,24,422 girls in 1922, their number increased to 42,97,785 in 1947 (in all institutions). This increase occurred despite a decline in the number of institutions for girls

Table 2
Number of pupils by sex in all institutions

Year	Boys	Girls
1922	69,62,928	14,24,422
1927	93,15,144	18,42,352
1932	1,02,73,888	24,92,649
1937	1,10,07,683	31,38,357
1942	1,22,66,311	37,86,876
1947	1,39,48,979	42,97,785

This is confirmed by figures on enrolment in coeducational institutions. The enrolment of girls in coeducational institutions rose steadily, rising from 35 per cent in 1921-22 to 54.6 per cent in 1946-47.⁸ Proportionately more girls were studying in coeducational colleges than at secondary school level, presumably because the number of girls' colleges was not particularly large. For instance, in 1946-47 while 9,042 girls were enrolled in girls' colleges of Art, 11,262 were enrolled in boys' colleges. While, out of a total 2,80,772 girls enrolled in high schools, 2,22,574 were studying in girls' schools.⁹ At primary level the number of girls enrolled in coeducational schools was higher (19,80,393) than those studying in girls' schools (14,94,772). On the other hand their enrolment in special, technical and vocational schools was higher in separate schools (41,638) than in coeducational institutions (17,355).¹⁰

Nearly 50 per cent of the schools for girls were private institutions, aided or unaided. For example, in 1946-47, there were 24,852 recognised institutions. Of these 13,635 were private institutions (Table 3).

Table 3
Institutions of girls by management

Year	Govt.	Dist. Board	Muni- cipal Board	Private Aided	Un- aided	Total recogni- sed ins- titutions	Unrec- ognised instit- utions
1937-38	754	6,878	2,065	19,458	3,720	32,875	3,999
1946-47	908	7,856	2,453	11,863	1,772	24,852	3,344

Certain broad conclusions emerge from these trends about women's education. For one thing, it is clear that women's education became an important issue during this period. Starting from nothing women came to receive education in large numbers and there are indications that they were taking to careers in many cases. This development was confined to urban areas because women's education was very considerably in private hands and the activities of private organisations were restricted to urban areas. Lack of resources inhibited the government from taking it to the rural areas. It was only after Gandhi's call for universal primary education that social activity

spread to rural areas. Second, while women's education registered a definite expansion, this still left them way behind boys. For every 100 boys in 1946-47 there were only 30 girls in all institutions. Whereas in the colleges of professional education there were 7 girls per 100 boys and 12 in the colleges of general education and in the universities; 36 in the primary schools and 14 in the high schools (India, 1959 : 28). Finally, private education contributed greatly to the expansion of women's education until independence. Major initiatives in women's education came from Indians, though their efforts too were often hampered by the shortcomings of the grant-in-aid system, the mainstay of private initiative in education.

However, education in general and girls' education in particular continued to suffer from limited financial resources during this period since the British government allocated very small funds to education. Girls' education involved higher investment since not only were separate schools to be set up; sometimes hostels had to be provided where the distance between home and school was not commutable, or escorts had to be provided to see them home in areas where they were traditionally not allowed to go outdoors; women teachers had to be trained; parents were reluctant to let their daughters come in contact with male teachers; and lastly, freeships had to be provided as incentives to parents so that they would agree to forego the earnings and labour of their daughters (in the agricultural families) or overcome their traditional prejudices against educating daughters.¹¹ Most parents were unwilling to invest in education which was going to be 'wasted' since the girls were unlikely to take up jobs. These problems were specific to women's education while others were experienced by men as well; differential spread by region is one such example. Nevertheless, women's education reflected these imbalances more acutely than did men's education and we shall take them up for detailed discussion.

Regional variation

The regional variation in the growth and expansion of women's education in the initial stages may have been due to the fact that English education was introduced first in the three Presidencies and only later in the other provinces. However, this factor offers only part of the explanation and that too for the initial stage. The differential spread of women's education, particularly in the early twentieth century and in the period under discussion, has to be

explained in terms of socio-cultural factors. Our contention is further reinforced by the intraregional variation in educational expansion. We argue in this section that interregional variations are embedded in the socio-cultural context as are the intraregional variations discussed in the next section.

The regional variation in the growth and expansion of women's education and even in the response to women's education began to be reflected in the statistics by the end of the nineteenth century. These were also taken note of by those who were writing on women. By the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, however, there are several references to it. Choksi (1929 : 64) mentions that as early as 1883 eight girls had matriculated from Bombay University. In 1886, a Parsi gentleman admitted his daughters to Wilson College. Madras Medical College admitted the first girl in 1878. By 1927, there were 550 girls in arts and 140 in medical courses in Madras while in Bombay there were 450 students in different colleges affiliated to Bombay University.

We shall now focus on those provinces which were fairly advanced in women's education. Among the British provinces Madras and then Bombay stand out (Sen, 1938 : 103-4; Mayhew, 1926 : 98; Sorabji, 1938 : 19) in terms of enrolment of girls in all institutions, expenditure by the Government on girls' education, the proportion of trained to untrained teachers, the highest enrolment in co-educational institutions and in the number of government run institutions.¹² The Report on the Progress of Education in India, 1927-32 mentions that Madras had long been a pioneer in girls' education. We shall now present statistics to substantiate the claim of Madras as being foremost in girls' education, particularly in so far as the contribution of the government is concerned. Bombay is a close second and sometimes even stands first. We shall also refer to some of the backward provinces like Punjab, UP, Bihar and NWFP. The purpose is to show that some parts of India did better than certain others. We will also try to infer and explain, wherever possible, the reasons for advance and progress in one region than in the other.

Table 4 gives the number of institutions for girls in 1946-47. There were 256 institutions for girls run by the government, district and municipal boards and 7,010 private institutions in Bengal. On the other hand, Madras had 2,758 public institutions run by the government, district and municipal boards¹³ and 1,789 private institutions. Thus, Madras had the highest number of public

institutions and second highest number of private institutions for girls. Bengal, on the other hand, had the largest number of institutions in the public and private sector. In Bombay Presidency there were 1,580 public institutions and 2,394 private ones. The United Provinces had 1,597 and 1,357 girls' institutions in the corresponding categories.

Table 4
Recognised institutions for girls by management

Province	Public Institutions*	Private Institutions**	Total
Bengal	256	6,754	7,010
Bihar	440	1,670	2,110
Bombay	1,580	814	2,394
Madras	2,758	1,789	4,547
NWFP	143	76	219
Punjab	2,304	589	2,893
United Provinces	1,597	760	2,357

* Includes those managed by government, district and municipal boards.

** Includes aided and unaided institutions.

Looking at the enrolment figures in Table 5, we find that Madras has the highest enrolment and also continued to retain its lead. For example, the enrolment of girls in all institutions in the Madras Presidency increases from 539,351 in 1926-27 to 1,435,617 in 1946-47. The enrolment of girls in Bombay Presidency goes up from 223,317 in 1927 to 581,333 in 1946-47, less than half of the enrolment in Madras. Yet it is second in terms of enrolment of girls. In the United Province the corresponding figures are 124,236 and 310,784 in 1927 and 1947 respectively.

Table 5
Enrolment of girls in all institutions

Province	1927	1937	1947
Madras	539,351	921,536	1,435,617
Bombay	223,317	326,571	581,333
Bengal	425,152	733,389	890,944
Bihar	119,030	119,236	164,432
Punjab	128,880	246,059	369,768
NWFP	7,905	16,956	32,171
United Provinces	124,236	224,688	310,784

There is variation in terms of percentage of increase in enrolment during 1927-47. For instance, it varies from 38.1 per cent in Bihar to 307.0 per cent in NWFP. Looking at the number of girls enrolled in NWFP, we find that there were only 7,905 students in 1927 and this number increased to 32,171 in 1947, an increase of nearly 300 per cent. Yet in terms of numbers the enrolment of girls continues to be very low in this province. Punjab records an increase of 187.0 per cent and Madras 166.2 per cent.

In spite of highest enrolment, the rate of retention at the primary level was very low in Madras in the beginning as is evident from Table 6. For instance, of every 100 girls who joined Class I in 1922-23, only 16 reached Class IV (1926-27) in Madras while 31 did so in Bombay and 8 in UP. However, the situation changes and Madras gains a lead by 1946-47, (For details see Ahmad, 1983a : 58). Bengal continues to maintain a very low retention rate.

Table 6
Retention rate among girl pupils in Class IV

Province	1926-27	1936-37	1946-47
Madras	16	18	36
Bombay	31	29.5	34
Bengal	2	4	13
United Provinces	8	12	20
Punjab	16	19	31
Bihar & Orissa	3	21	31
NWFP	Not given	16	19

Note : Figures for 1926-27 refer to girls studying in girls' institutions whereas figures for other years include those girl students studying in boys' institutions as well.

What is reflected through the statistics presented above? Can we explain them in terms of socio-cultural factors? Some of the factors responsible for high wastage mentioned by the various quinquennial reports are : a large number of primary or incomplete primary schools with 3 classes which break-up before Class IV. Therefore, students who enrol in them drop out, poor attendance in Classes I to III and the inefficient primary schools where only one teacher is in charge of Classes I to V; and lastly uninteresting methods of teaching

are the other reasons for low retention rate at the primary level. So far as the lower retention rate in Madras during 1927-32 is concerned, it may be because parents were willing to send young girls to coeducational institutions but withdrew them as they grew up. It may also be that parents admitted them to mixed schools initially but withdrew them soon after. The presence of men teachers in the girls' schools may also have been a contributory factor.

According to Cousins (1941 : 45) *parda* in the North and child marriage in the South were hindrances to the promotion of women's education. Whether *parda* and rigid sex segregation acted as a positive or a negative factor is somewhat difficult to say. For instance, Anderson mentions that Punjab had made rapid progress during 1927-32 as compared to the preceding quinquennium. The reasons, he opines are the insistence of parents on separate schools for girls with women teachers. Initially, parents would not send their daughters to coeducational institutions and also if men were employed as teachers. Therefore, the government had to set up schools for girls, employing only women teachers. Therefore, even though Punjab started late in women's education, it could consolidate its position by the 1930's. Here, one should also mention the role of the Arya Samaj and its counterpart Sanatana Dharma in setting up schools for girls. This will be discussed in the next section.

Other reasons for inter-regional variation in the rate of dropout among girls have also been identified. Notable among these are : early marriage and betrothal, parental apathy, and prejudices. This eventually affected the development of women's education and also slowed down the process of narrowing the gap between the education of boys and girls.

Therefore, what we are arguing for is that it is almost impossible to discuss regional variations in educational expansion without referring to social practices of various communities and their impact on the education of their girls. We find that there is an overlap between region and community or religion. We have come across references to the fact that within a region different religious communities responded differently and according to their socio-cultural traditions. For example, Cousins refers to the variation in the response of Hindus, Muslims and other communities to women's education within the *parda*-dominated North (1941 : 45). We do not imply that religion is the most important factor accounting for cultural variation. We are referring to it because data on religion-wise

variation is available and religion is an important factor of cultural response.

Religion-wise variation

Thus far we have argued that the differential regional spread derived partly from cultural differences. As for instance, it is generally assumed that the practices of *parda* and the custom of early marriage hampered the progress of women's education in Bengal, Punjab, Bihar and NWFP while their absence contributed to educational expansion in Madras and Bombay.

Mayhew refers to the overlap between religious and regional variation thus, 'The figures would be far more distressing if communities such as the Parsee, Anglo-Indian and Indian Christian were removed. . . And progressive provinces such as Bombay and Madras veil the appalling backwardness of other provinces' (1926 : 98).

In this section, we shall demonstrate that at another level these cultural differences derived from religion and therefore, the response of various religious communities varied within a region. For instance, *parda* was a Muslim practice but it had been adopted by Hindus in these areas where Muslim influence was dominant either because of numerical or socio-economic dominance as for example in Punjab and Bengal. Therefore, these provinces lagged behind Madras and Bombay where communities like that of Parsis etc. led the movement for female education (Mayhew, 1926 : 267). However, within Punjab and Bengal, Hindus did better than Muslims because in comparison to Muslims of the same province they were not as rigid in their social customs. While, on the other hand, compared to Hindus of the other provinces (e.g. in Madras and Bombay), they were socio-culturally backward. 'Within Madras and Bombay Muslims continued to provide normal education to girls in schools run for Muslims alone . . . enthusiasm spread from Indian Christian and Parsees to the most advanced sections of other communities. It is essentially the work of Christian missions that is bearing fruit. . .' (1926 : 267). On the other hand, McDougall in her study of girls in a college in Madras refers to the Muslim community having been slower than others to recognise the need and value of higher education for women (1943 : 137). Yet, what emerges is that after an initial slow start Muslim girls seem to have recovered in most states. For instance, during 1920-30, the enrolment of Muslim girls in UP increased by 53 per cent, of Hindu girls by 28 per cent, of

Depressed Classes by 379 per cent and of Indian Christians by 9 per cent (Hauswirth, 1932 : 161).

The enrolment figures for girls from different religious communities are available upto 1937. Table 7 gives the number of female students in general education by their religion. The enrolment of Anglo-Indian and European girl students was the highest in 1937 (23.15 per cent of total female population) and remains steady during the period 1922-37. Parsis with 19.60 per cent female students in relation to total population were second and Indian Christians third in the year 1937. Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs and Buddhists had comparable enrolment in relation to their total female population. The Indian Christians had made the maximum gains because their enrolments went up from 5.18 in 1926-27 to 11.08 in 1932-37.

Table 7
Race or creed of female scholars in general education
(All institutions)

Race or creed	1921-22	1926-27	1936-37
Anglo-Indian & European	21,651	23,190 (24.11)	24,361 (23.15)
Indian Christians	101,538	71,177 (5.18)	197,544 (11.08)
Hindus	751,021	644,451 (0.80)	1,815,560 (2.11)
Mohammedans	349,228	356,809 (1.26)	798,815 (2.51)
Buddhists	103,806	44,256 (0.76)	193,281 (3.00)
Parsis	6,558	7,350 (17.10)	9,085 (19.60)
Sikhs	Not given	15,404 (1.51)	41,191 (2.90)
Others	16,244	5,247 (0.16)	34,102 (0.85)
Total	1,418,422	1,167,884	3,113,943

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages of female scholars to total population.

Again, of a total of 2,966 women attending college in 1932 only 105 were Muslims while their number goes up to 1,008 in 1946-47 (see Table 8). In the United Provinces, there were 50 Indian Christian girl students, 48 Hindus and 10 Muslims in four colleges at Allahabad, Kanpur, Lucknow and Banaras in 1932.

Table 8
Girls attending colleges

	1932	1946-47
Hindus	1,595	5,741
Indian Christians	726	4,829
Parsees	197	38
Mohammedans	105	1,008
Sikhs	—	178

Apart from these figures which are available for different religious communities, statistics are available in somewhat greater detail about Muslim girl students in different provinces of British India upto 1937. Table 9 presents statistics relating to the percentage of Muslim girl students to Muslim female population in selected provinces of British India. The maximum gains seemed to have been made in Bihar where their percentage to total Muslim female population goes up from 0.9 per cent in 1921-22 to 12.2 per cent in 1936-37. The other two notable provinces are Madras and Bombay (6.3 and 6.9 per cent respectively in 1936-37) although an increase is registered in all the provinces. During 1932-37 the number of Muslim girl pupils in public institutions increased by 26 per cent while that of Muslim boys increased by 9 per cent (PEI, 1932-37 : 246).

Table 9
Percentage of Muslim girl students to Muslim female population in recognised institutions

Province	1921-22	1926-27	1931-32	1936-37
Madras	2.3	3.8	4.8	6.3
Bombay	2.0	2.3	2.7	6.9
Bengal	1.4	1.8	2.3	3.0
United Provinces	0.4	0.5	0.7	1.0
Punjab	0.3	0.5	0.7	1.7
Bihar & Orissa	0.9	1.2	1.1	12.2
British India	1.1	1.4	1.8	2.5

What emerges is that while Muslims have been generally backward in the education of their women, there were provinces where they were doing well. For instance, Anderson mentions that 'in the Punjab . . . progress has been very rapid, the enrolment of Muslims having advanced from 278,340 in 1922 to 590,834 in 1927 and to 675,061 in 1932'. He goes on to say that in Bihar, 'in all stages of instruction taken together Muslims remain ahead of the general level of the province; it is remarkable that during the five years the number of Muslim pupils should have risen while that of others has fallen . . .' (PEI, 1927-32 : 243). 'Lahore was considerably more advanced in girls' education than was Aligarh. In fact, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan opposed pushing women's education in the 1880s, for he felt it might detract from the work in boys' education of Aligarh College. . . ' (Minault, 1982 : 80).

Various other reasons have been suggested for the progress or backwardness of Muslims in certain provinces and these may be applicable to other communities as well. The occupations pursued by certain communities determined their response to education. Wherever Muslims were agriculturists and lived in rural areas, as in the Punjab and Bengal, they made a slow beginning in education. The Punjab Census Commissioner explained this indifference in terms of their need to use child-labour and lack of apparent utility for literacy and education. This affects their women as well as men. The Bengal report also refers to the poverty of Muslims in Bengal and this has a bearing on what we said earlier about the socio-economic status of Muslims and its impact on education.

Another reason that is mentioned is their loyalty to traditional learning and religion. Therefore, in Bengal, UP and Bihar large number of students attended *maktabs*, *madrassas* and *mulla* schools. A factor that emerges from the perusal of the literature is that wherever facilities in vernacular were provided and the indigenous system of education survived (and expanded), as for example in Bihar, girls in general but Muslim girls in particular seem to have done well (PEI, 1927-32 : 243; Hauswirth, 1932 : 161). Although this led to wastage among boys because the schools were inefficient and also because their education did not lead to jobs, it was good for girls since they could receive some education. Minault mentions the reverse process too. According to her, discontinuance of such schools in the North affected the girls' education, particularly among Muslims, adversely. She states that:

With newer private investment in education going into English-medium institutions like the Aligarh and Islamic Colleges, the quality of vernacular education declined. This fact particularly affected the lives of those families who had traditionally educated their girls and women in the vernacular. Now private tutors, whether grey-bearded males or female *ustanis*, were increasingly hard to find. For women in *parda*, the result often was that they got no education at all (1982 : 77-78).

The presence of indigenous schools in the initial stages was, therefore, crucial to girls' education. The Bengal report, on the other hand, mentions that lack of *maktabs*, *madrassas* and Muslim managed schools, and their location away from the Muslim populated areas led to the backwardness of Muslims in education. These factors, so far as we are concerned, would have affected the girls. On the other hand, 'if *parda* acted as a drag . . . it also provided opportunities—and the justification—for women's service to other women' (Minault, 1982 : 93).

Thus, the relationship between social practice and women's education is not a simple one. There are examples of Muslim women who participated in the political movement and propagated the cause of women's education while continuing to be in *parda* even while making public appearances (Jacobson, 1982; Minault, 1982). It seems likely that women's education may not have advanced in India, particularly in the North, if it had not received the support of leading social and political leaders and if they had begun to question or attack social practices. To take only one example, it is difficult to decide whether the leaders, Hindu as well as Muslim, men as well as women, tried to reinforce *parda* by setting up *zenana* schools for reasons of strategy or whether they were convinced that these traditional social practices should continue (Minault, 1981 : 92-93). Social opposition to women's education was so strong that it is likely that they played it safe by not hurting the prevailing public opinion and adopted a neutral or *pro-parda* stance for purposes of strategy alone (Ahmad, 1983b : 11-13). In fact, they had to assure the parents of prospective students that established social practices and behavioural patterns would be followed in the new institutions.

Coeducation

Separate schools for girls were found in the initial stages in Bengal and other states where missionary activity was strong. In the other

provinces the girls either attended boys' schools, as in Madras and Bombay, or did not go to school until much later as in Punjab, Bihar and NWFP. In fact, in the early twentieth century, more girls were studying in boys' institutions than in the 1930's. For instance, in 1902 as many as 44.7 per cent of the girls under instruction were reading in boys' institutions, but this percentage dropped to 38.5 per cent in 1927 although their overall enrolment had gone up (PEI, 1927-32 : 171). The main reason was the setting up of separate schools in the interim period by the social reformers.

Here, too, one comes across regional variation. For instance, during 1927-32 Madras had the highest percentage of girls under instruction as well as a much higher percentage of girls reading in boys' schools than in the other provinces. The low percentage of girls in coeducational schools in Bengal could be attributed to a large number of girls' schools. In 1932 more than half the girls' primary schools in British India were in Bengal. This may be due to early start of educational activity in this province. The missionaries and philanthropists like Bethune and reformers like Ram Mohun Roy and Vidyasagar provided a boost to the movement for girls' education. One also comes across references to Bengal being the foremost in the number of single teacher schools. There were 13,663 such schools in 1937, the highest in British India.

Table 10
Percentage of girl students enrolled in boys' schools

Province	1922	1927	1932	1937
Madras	52.1	55.5	51.1	59.8
Bombay	36.4	33.9	36.2	39.7
Bengal	16.5	14.4	17.5	24.7
Uttar Pradesh	36.0	33.3	35.8	38.7
Punjab	5.4	8.1	11.2	10.7
Bihar & Orissa	42.6	39.6	42.7	42.7
NWFP	6.0	8.6	5.9	9.4
British India	37.7	38.5	38.4	43.4

Note: PEI 1937-47 does not give the percentages for 1946-47.

Looking at the enrolment figures of girls enrolled in boys' and

girls' institutions, we find that Madras has the highest percentage (Table 10) while NWFP and Punjab have a very low percentage of girls enrolled in boys' institutions.

Various facets of this issue have come to the fore during the course of preceding discussion. The first was whether or not to open separate schools for girls and at what level. The response varies by province or region as has already been pointed out. For instance, Bengal had the largest number of primary schools for girls whereas coeducation was not under debate in Bombay and Madras. As to the level of education, the main question was at what level should coeducation be introduced? By 1930, almost all provinces seemed to be in favour of introducing coeducation at primary level, separate schools at the secondary stage and reintroducing coeducation in the universities linked to this issue was that of women teachers. In the *parda* dominated areas, the presence of men teachers in girls' schools was not socially desirable. That is why Bihar and Punjab started late and made a slow beginning. Therefore, missionaries and social reformers concentrated their efforts in setting up separate schools for girls as well as training schools in contrast to those set up by the government which was governed more by financial considerations.

We have mentioned earlier that financial constraints were an important factor in tilting opinion in favour of coeducation. A cutback of 24 lakhs in educational expenditure during 1927-32 further helped the cause of coeducation. By the 1930s backward states like Bihar had come to accept that coeducation had come to stay. Another effect of the shortage of funds was that when separate schools were set up for girls they had to manage with a minimum of facilities, e.g. only one teacher in a primary school. Therefore, the choice was between inefficient girls' schools or better run co-educational schools. The government chose the latter alternative. In fact, the government was unwilling to grant aid to inefficient schools. Again, sometimes the number of girl students was not sufficient to warrant the setting up of separate schools for girls. Therefore, pragmatic considerations seemed to outweigh the socio-cultural factors in determining the response to coeducation.

Curricular change

Curriculum content has been a salient issue in women's education and continues to be so even now, although in a modified form. Since English education was introduced initially for boys while girls

education merely followed suit, girls began to study the same curriculum as the boys. In fact, education for boys and girls was structurally and content-wise similar. But very soon opinions began to be expressed that curriculum should be designed to meet the special needs of girls. It was argued or assumed that while boys were receiving education or degrees to be able to get jobs, this was not the reason why girls were studying. Therefore, a plea was made to introduce different curriculae for boys and girls. By 1882, there was considerable public opinion in favour of a differentiated curriculum. The Education Commission, 1882, supported this view while advising a cautious approach.

What comes out from reading the relevant literature is that it was easier for private schools to teach special subjects even within the constraints of the grant-in-aid policy which required conformity to curriculum set up by the government. Private schools whether they were run by the missionaries or reformers, had to teach additional subjects if they wanted to include subjects suited for girls. Therefore, the whole debate seems to have been necessitated because of the rules of grant-in-aid. This policy did not allow innovation in subjects. Therefore, the government officials had to be convinced that a curriculum suited for girls' social role was more desirable. In this process, certain subjects emerged as 'feminine' subjects e.g. hygiene, domestic science, needlework, music, home science etc. while physics, chemistry and mathematics became 'masculine' subjects.

Another point that emerges is that discussion on curricular change was linked to the level of education—primary, secondary and higher. There seemed to be a general agreement that there was no need for differentiation in curriculae at the primary level. The need was seen to be greatest at the secondary level. At the college stage, the curriculum should be differentiated yet the girls should be allowed to take 'masculine' subjects if they so desired. Therefore, so far as higher education was concerned, while there continued to be stress on role socialisation as the primary function of education, there were some who looked upon higher education as training for jobs or even for inculcating critical thinking.

The majority view was that there should be different curriculum for boys and girls (Mayhew, 1926 : 271-274; Siquira, 1939 : 129; Chiplunkar, 1930 : 232; Hauswirth, 1932 : 157; Doren, 1936: vi-vii). It was argued that girls were not going to take up jobs after completion of their education; they were instead going to be married.

School education should equip them to become better wives and mothers. Therefore, the curriculum should be made relevant by teaching subjects suited to perform that role more efficiently. Siquira and Chiplunkar argued that although the moral, emotional and intellectual make up of women and men was common, psychologically and physically, they were different. Therefore, there was a need for a separate curriculum to enhance these differences. Siquira argued that a common syllabus upto primary level is desirable except perhaps girls should be trained in sewing, skipping and weaving instead of games, carpentry and gardening. Mayhew mentioned that such a change may not be easily implemented so long as the present degree remained linked to jobs. He opined that parents would not like to give up forever the possibility of a university career for their daughters since change in curriculum would mean that those who went in for purely home science and allied subjects would be denied the opportunity of going in for a university degree and eventually a career.

Later, the All-India Women's Conference propagated the view that education for home-making was crucial and this led to the founding of Lady Irwin College in November 1932. The basic idea was to utilise science for effective running of the home. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the issue of curriculum change became closely interlinked with the issue of Indianisation of education. The uncritical imitation of what was taught in the west was deplored. It was argued that a curriculum which was not relevant to Indian boys would be more so to the girls. Therefore, it should be so designed that the girls will not only be trained to become efficient housewives but also become acquainted with their culture. This was the argument put forward by Indian social reformers and political leaders. Western social reformers and Liberals, too, shared these views.

Whether one argues for change in curriculum with or without reference to Indianisation of education, both views put main emphasis on the function of education as role socialisation. Therefore, these two may be grouped together as those representing the traditional view. This is the majority view. There are some exceptions, of course. For example, Choksi (1929 : 68, 72) and Menon (1944 : 17) argued that the primary function of education should be to inculcate critical thinking, particularly at the university stage. Choksi argued that :

... an alteration on a much broader basis in the high schools is desirable ... to suit the varied needs of a large number. But it is doubtful whether a university can so circumscribe cultural aims as to propose and equip women as housekeepers, wives or even mothers. Its great aim should finally be to produce accurate, far reaching and critical thought (65).

Menon, far more radical than Choksi mentioned that the clamour for a change in curriculum came mainly from men. She also emphasised the need for intellectual training and suggests that mathematics, physics and social sciences should not be excluded from the curriculum meant for girls even though certain subjects meant for them may be included.

Hannah Sen and Hansa Mehta took a middle position between the traditionalists, on the one hand, and Choksi and Menon, on the other. While emphasising the need for relating the curriculum to the life and home and for inclusion of domestic science in all curricula for girls, Sen held :

It seems paradoxical that, while the progress of higher education has reduced the inevitability of marriage as the only career for women, greater stress is being laid on the study of domestic subjects. The present attitude is but a reaffirmation of the age-old principle that, whether women marry or follow other pursuits, on them will devolve the main task of managing the home, at least for decades to come Indeed . . . education, based on the threefold principle of health, beauty and economy, must be available to all women and may be to all men; for men share with women the responsibility of producing healthy children, or providing them with the right atmosphere and of guiding them into a life of self-controlled freedom (1938 : 100-101).

Hannah Sen mentions that domestic science in a narrow sense, may be taught at school as well. But at the college stage its potential as a vocational and professional course should not be undermined. 'Though training in domestic science may form an essential part of the large majority of girls, it would be well to remember that a woman's usefulness is not circumscribed by the limited demands of her husband and children' (1938 : 103).

Here, we may refer to Hansa Mehta's views since she refers to the necessity of choice. While she supported an identical core curriculum for boys and girls, she favoured the addition of subjects useful

for girls at high school stage. But at the same time she underscored the need to leave the choice to the girls and was opposed to the Sargent Committee Report which recommended domestic science as a compulsory subject at high school. While she considered it desirable that girls should know domestic science, it should not be forced on those who wanted to go in for university education and a career (1938 : 21).

Conclusions

Various proponents of women's education can be identified and although their specific motivations seemed to vary, they all seemed to believe in the idea of enlightened motherhood and were governed, by and large, by the narrow perspective of the social roles of women. For instance, while the Christian missionaries were motivated to introduce education with the ultimate aim of proselytisation, the Hindu leaders, on the other hand, hoped to reform society by ameliorating the position of women (the idea of enlightened motherhood seemed critical here). They also wanted to protect their women from the proselytising influence of the Christians. Muslim leaders had the ideal of an education within the Islamic framework in mind in addition to protecting their women from the proselytising zeal of the Christians as well as the Hindus (particularly the Arya Samaj in the north). Yet, in spite of these differences, their views seemed to converge on the specific objectives of the education for women.

We have come across variation in the growth and expansion of women's education by region and religion. Some macro data relating to religious communities is available for the pre-independence period and it is an interesting and worthwhile area for research and deserves to be studied in depth. Perhaps, a number of studies will have to be conducted for purposes of comparison.

We have attributed the regional and religion-wise variations to socio-cultural factors like the practice of *parda*, sex segregation and early marriage among certain communities and in certain parts of India. For example, we came across references to Maratha women who were not subjected to *parda* and to Muslims being backward in the education of their women. The implication of *parda* was that strict sex segregation was enforced and this resulted in the reluctance of parents to send their daughters to school in the initial period. Schooling meant sending the daughters outdoors, something which

girls and women were not expected to do except on social occasions. Again, if the schools were mixed or there were male teachers, parents were unwilling to expose their daughters to their company and influence. Therefore, separate schools for girls with women teachers had to be opened in those provinces where this custom was practiced. This involved overall higher cost and coupled with the initial reluctance of parents fewer girls could avail of educational facilities. However, the impact of socio-cultural practices was not always regressive. The prevailing socio-cultural values and practices gave a fillip to private activity in schooling and provided the necessary impetus to women's education. In Punjab, for example, the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma played a major role in setting up schools, colleges and training schools for girls. As a result, there was an increase in the enrolment of girls and by the 1930s Punjab seemed to have made up for a late start.

The practice of *parda* varied among Muslims and Hindus but also by class since it was mainly an upper and middle class custom and was mainly confined to urban areas. However, we do not come across specific studies which link *parda* to women's education or study the impact of the former on the latter. All that we have are generalisations about *parda* being inhibitive for women in general or for their education in particular. The conclusions are only inferential. There is need to undertake studies to demonstrate the impact of *parda* on women's education.

Another implication of *parda* is that the indigeneous system of education continued to flourish in those provinces where it was practised. One found *pathshalas*, *madrassas* and *makhtabs* in Bengal, Bihar and UP. On the other hand, wherever these schools were wound up either because funds were diverted to new schools or because they were replaced by new schools, girls did not receive any education. This affected the Muslim girls more than those from other communities. These aspects need to be explored.

The response to coeducation is closely interlinked to these socio-cultural factors and therefore, varies by region. In Bombay and Madras presidencies the issue of coeducation is not widely discussed and girls are sent to coeducational institutions sooner than they are in the Punjab, UP and Bengal. The demand for women's education due to various reasons mentioned earlier and the financial constraints in setting up separate educational institutions for girls changed the response to coeducation by the 1930s. Thereafter, the government

was encouraged to set up coeducational institutions. However, the private institutions wherever possible, were still set up either for girls or boys since they were more susceptible to public sentiment. Therefore, if data were available, one is likely to come across a higher number of separate institutions for girls in the private sector than in the public sector.

The contribution of the private sector in the pre-independence period is very crucial and it seems that girls' education may not have expanded the way it did had it not been for the impetus it received from social reformers and missionaries. There is need to collect detailed data on this aspect so that one could measure the actual contribution made by the private sector at different levels of education and in different regions of India in the pre-independence period. The comparison of the contributions made by different agents of English education could be highlighted. The distribution of educational management could offer interesting insights. In other words, what was the distribution of schools by management. Information on the curriculum in private and public schools and also in private schools of different denominations is another aspect that deserves attention. The enrolment of students by religion in different schools would also be fruitful. This would tell us what was being taught and who were being taught at denominational schools. We may also mention here that debates on whether coeducational schools should be set up or not are found mainly in the official documents since these centred on or related to official policy. As mentioned above, the private management seemed to set up separate schools wherever public opinion favoured them without debating the issue at length.

The debate on curricular change is very extensive. We could sum up the debate on this issue in the following terms. The relevance of curriculum and the function of women's education, even by the enlightened leaders was viewed within the framework of role socialisation. What is surprising is that hardly anyone mentions that the primary aim of education for boys is also reinforcing their social role. No one mentions that boys have to be husbands and fathers and that education should equip them to be better fathers etc. If education for women is to be used for their social role then why not the same be true of men as well? It indicates the differential importance attached to the social roles of men and women. While the social role of women as housewives and mothers is primary, that of

men as husbands and fathers is secondary or marginal in their lives. For men, their role as earner is considered of primary importance. Otherwise, why should committee after committee and social reformer after social reformer harp on the same idea that domestic science, health education etc., should be imparted to girls?

Some questions that arise are as follows. Had a survey ever been undertaken to find out whether this purpose could be achieved through schools etc? Were women not efficient housewives and mothers before schools came into existence? Did anyone try to compare educated wives with uneducated ones? Again, perusing the literature one finds that diversification of courses in terms of choices—for girls as well as boys has not been mentioned. The assumption is that choice is not necessary. Moreover, except for some, others do not anticipate of change in the role of men even in future India. The thought of far-reaching reorganisation in the division of labour between the sexes is far from the minds of most. So education had to be used for reinforcing the status quo. Therefore, from women's roles and women's tasks, we proceed to women's courses.

The developmental perspective on this issue suggests that earlier, the view was that the curriculum for girls should be specially designed to suit their needs. Later, need for change in curriculum for boys and girls was questioned in view of its remoteness from Indian culture and reality. Within that perspective, it was argued, that the curriculum for girls should be so designed as to make it suited not only to Indian reality but also to their role as wives and mothers. But there is a common point between the two views. The common point is that both views express the need to link school education to the traditional role of girls as wives and mothers. The idea was mainly to reform society, and not to change it. Home science training would reinforce the existing male-female dichotomy of roles.

Social change envisages structural and fundamental changes whereas reform can be achieved without effecting or basically altering the system. Therefore, even those who argue that women should be educated and trained for jobs do not want them to do so at the cost of their traditional social role. Surely the woman's place is in the home. But one might ask, why should school and home be viewed as incompatible? 'Besides, the woman's place is not only in the home, she has a right to be in other places as well, and without any harm to the home, in field, in factory, in hospital and school, in

craft and trade and profession, in the highest strata of state, even upon the throne' (Nag, n.d : 187).

The basic premise of the earlier social reformers and others involved in women's education was that reform in the position of women was only a part of the package of desirable measures to improve society. Therefore, men and women worked together to improve the position of women. Gandhi's call to women further brought their cause nearer to the societal goal of reform and independence. Since wider issues were involved the battle of the sexes, did not take place. Men and women were united on the issue of social reform, women's education and advancement and for independence.

However, another view that began to emerge in the 1940s and which was later incorporated in our Constitution, was based on the premise that men and women are equal and therefore equality and social justice are to be provided to the hitherto underprivileged sections of society. Discrimination on the basis of race, caste or sex was to be eliminated. In other words, education of women was no longer seen exclusively as an instrument for inculcating values appropriate to women's role in society as had indeed been the case earlier. It was seen as an instrument providing equality of opportunity to women. However, even this conception of the role of women's education failed to question the existing structure of social relations and the social roles of men and women mainly because of the over-arching influence of the political movement for independence on social movements in general or on those of women in particular.

The intermeshing of the movement for social reform in the earlier phase (later on with the political movement as well) and women's education had several implications. The first one was that women were to be given a particular type of education and that too for a limited purpose. Women were not to question their position in society. But education is likely to and is also expected to increase awareness of one's position in society. However, the process started by the education of women was not expected to generate its own dynamics. It was expected that at best it will train them as housewives and mothers and will provide wider intellectual horizons or improve employment prospects only in exceptional cases. The last two objectives were not to come into conflict with the first one, which was the most crucial. But in some cases, especially in the urban

areas, intellectual awakening and economic independence of women may have created conflict with the prevailing social norms and values. Some women, and even men, may have questioned the rigid male-dominated structure. If so, could they be dismissed as mere aberrations or were they the logical outcome of the process of educating an individual? Whatever the explanation, we should look for these exceptions.

The introduction and promotion of women's education within the specific sociocultural context in historical perspective as well as in the contemporary period is a fruitful area of enquiry. Again, the constraints it placed on the proponents of women's education before independence and the separation of the issue of women's education from social reform movements etc. (since these seemed to have culminated in the achievement of independence) in the post-independence period are worthwhile areas of research.

Footnotes

1. Prepared in November 1983 for publication in A.M. Shah, B.S. Baviskar and E.A. Ramaswamy, (eds.), *Srinivas Festschrift*. The author is grateful to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library for awarding her a fellowship to work on this theme.
2. We are aware of the diversity that characterises Indian women and that generalisations about them may seem like oversimplification of facts. Yet it is possible to refer to an all-India pattern in the value-orientations relating to women and to draw a general picture (Ahmad, 1983a).
3. Wherever possible we have given statistical data for the period 1921-1947 unless, of course, it was not available.
4. This refers to progressives as well as revivalists. We have not made that distinction here, although it is relevant.
5. Some of those are: Murdoch (1888), Chapman (1811), Billington (1895), Ramabai (1901), Maharani of Baroda (1911), Nehru (1938), Yaseen (1917), Bhagwan Das (1929), Ghosh (1928), Hauswirth (1932), Dasgupta (1938), Cousins (1941), McDougall (1943). These books are in English. We have not explored the regional literature but we assume that literary works relating to women would also have come out in regional languages.
6. The Education Commission 1882 seemed to make an important contribution towards clarifying the official position. Its Report discusses almost all aspects of women's education and emphasizes the role of the government. Therefore a number of documents were prepared which surveyed the situation and set guidelines. Some of these are: *Schemes for the Advancement of Female Education in India since 1902*; *Papers Relating to Female Education, 1907*.
7. As an example, one may mention the case of the American Mission Girls' School at Ahmedabad. This school had 20 Hindu girls on its rolls in 1839. Their number

went on increasing till 1842 when several girls expressed a desire to be baptised. When three of them were baptised, their relatives and parents tried to take them away by force. When the parents appealed to a magistrate, he declared that girls of 13 and above could take such decisions for themselves. As a result many girls were withdrawn from schools run by the Christian missionaries. A similar reaction set in in other parts of British India.

8. PEI, 1937-47, V. 2, p. 361.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
11. The belief was widespread that education brought bad luck, as for example, a woman receiving education would become a widow. There were others reasons too. The likelihood of educated girls becoming less adjustable and even defiant added to the reluctance of parents to send their daughters to school. (For details see Ahmad, 1983b : 9-10).
12. If we were to include the private institutions, then Bengal would have the highest number of institutions for girls. However, this advantage is not reflected in the enrolment of girls. In that respect, Madras and Bombay were far ahead.
13. These institutions will be referred to as public institutions (because they were run by public money) throughout this paper.

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Woman's Nature and the Access to Education

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Over the past century, expansion of women's education in India has been a much debated issue among social reformers, politicians and policy formulators. The main argument of this paper is that views on what constitute femininity have not changed much despite the rapid participation of women in education at various levels and employment in non-traditional areas. Consequently, the likely influence of the formal educational system in bringing about change in the thought processes, aspiration levels and status of women was, and continues to be, severely constrained by prevailing notions on how a girl should be socialised. Education was permitted to enter into the lives of nineteenth century women only when its subject matter and method of teaching was not regarded as threatening to the existing power relations within the family. In fact, quite often, basic literacy skills and other accoutrements were seen as essential for the daughters and wives of the recipients of western education.¹ Today, what girls should be taught and the levels to which they can be educated remain a matter of concern among policy makers as well as middle class families.

While education in general is a topic of considerable discussion in many homes, there is, by and large, a difference in perceptions of what it should mean for a boy and for a girl. Educational statistics tell us that each year there are more girls in school as well as in various institutions of higher learning; yet, a societal ideology based on male superiority in decision-making and control affects the self-perceptions of women as well as conditions familial views on the feminine role. This necessarily limits the nature and extent of change possible through education. Nor have policy makers been free from these biases: a careful reading of the texts of various government reports on education in the post-Independence period shows that there is a commonality of views among those committed to education

for a modern India, and the early reformers. Above all, this is reflected in an assumption, either covert or expressed, that there could be a conflict between the demands for education of a certain kind and the 'essential nature' of woman. The now century-long debate on whether girls should have access to the same school curriculum, or, at a more fundamental level, looking for answers to the question, what are girls being educated for, finds its roots in such a view.

In this paper, some post-Independence policy statements on women's education will be looked at against the historical backdrop of Bengal between 1870 and 1920. This fifty years is of crucial importance in the history of Indian women's emancipation; it was during this time that women's education expanded substantially and their literary talent found expression in autobiographies, novels and article in journals, often edited and founded by them. It was also a period when families fought oppression and prejudice to enable their girls to become teachers, doctors and political activists. Bengal was not only a pioneer in women's education but also in alternatives on how best to educate girls according to the needs of society. The issue involved radicals, as well as the conservative protagonists of the status quo. Not surprisingly, underlying much of the discussion was a difference of opinion on what constitutes femininity and female roles. Much of the contemporary debates on women's status is also basically concerned with just these matters.

In India, irrespective of sex, an individual has to be viewed in the wider context of family and kinship networks. Among other things, this means taking cognisance of the views of others as well as being responsible to them. As we shall see, the expectations and consequent tensions generated by such relationships affect women more than they do men. The Hindu way of life draws heavily on a rich mythological tradition: gods and goddesses—not always frightening, remote immortals—symbolise certain values to be emulated. Numerous deities in various acts of valour, cowardice, pique and humour provide role models for even the maverick personality (Dimmit and Van Buitenen, 1983). Creativity is not essentially a characteristic of female goddesses nor dominance and power that of male gods. The female godhead is both nurturant and submissive as well as destructive and fearsome. She is Sati as well as Kali. Custom and tradition have focussed on those models which are supportive of the social order, and underplayed the emulative potential of others.

Women are to be like Savitri or Sita whose lives epitomised chastity, purity and dedication. Sita, Rama's wife paid dearly for her one unfeminine act of disobedience when she crossed the *Lakshmana rekha*. The popular cinema and fiction are replete with themes where those who conform are rewarded while those who question suffer many indignities.²

Interestingly, Kali is worshipped by men of the warrior Rajput and Gurkha castes, well known for their valour in battle. In Bengal, however, apart from Krishna, no male god occupies the same position as do Durga and Kali and their many local manifestations such as Sitala and Manasa.³ The malevolent Kali, Sitala and Manasa need to be propitiated so as to limit their powers of destruction while Durga is worshipped as the benevolent mother goddess who can destroy in order to protect. These two facets of the female principle, Sati and Shakti, and the need to blend the two are best described in the story of Durga as it is told today. Created to conquer evil by all the important gods of the Hindu pantheon, Chandika as she is called in the *Markandeya Purana*, slew Mahisasura, the buffalo demon, armed with special powers of the deities who had failed. The *Purana* goes on to say that 'the divine goddess, although eternal, takes birth again and again to protect creation'. The goddess destroys so as to protect: violence, whose aim is the restoration of peace, is not an end in itself (Bhattacharya, 1977).

At the annual Durga *puja* festival in which women from all social groups in West Bengal are active participants, the image of the goddess slaying the demon is flanked by her four children. She is on her annual visit to her parents' home. The immersion marks the beginning of the journey back to her husband. The image of the woman astride a lion with a spear drawn represents female destructiveness; yet, the presence of her children sanctifies this *shakti* and vindicates its use for future generations. In the original puranic myth, there is no mention of Chandika being a wife of Shiva. It is possible that as Durga *puja* became increasingly popular in the zamindari homes of Bengal of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the goddess was 'domesticated'. She symbolised the supreme mother who would destroy so as to protect her children and the children of forthcoming generations.

This interpretation was essential for the perpetuation and strengthening of the notion that women's actions must be oriented to the needs of the family collectivity. Independent displays of *shakti* such

as the slaying of the demon, acquire meaning only in the context of the need to conquer evil by a superior moral force, in this case that of the protective—yet powerful—mother. A woman's innate power lies in her ability to enrich the kin group; thus she is the protective mother figure, the submissive and fertile wife and the obedient daughter.⁴ Nonetheless, most of the goddess myths deal in some detail with the notion of female sexuality and sexual prowess. Female *shakti* is closely related to sexuality, and while controlled power is beneficial, uncontrolled sexuality is greatly feared.

This fear of female sexuality is shared by many cultures: in the Christian vision, women are the Virgin Mary, the archetypal nurturant and pure mother, as well as Mary Magdalene, the temptress. An insightful study based on contemporary literary texts, paintings and graphics establishes that in medieval Europe, nature was viewed as feminine; yet the obverse of pastoral calm and bounty was the wild fury of stormy nights, i.e., the horror of untrammelled female sexuality. Control of this sexuality found expression in the oppressive witch hunts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when hundreds of women are estimated to have been killed; a common allegation against them was that of cohabiting with the devil.⁵ One of the main functions of *parda* or the seclusion of women, characteristic of Muslim societies, is to provide shelter, symbolic as well as real, from a world of impulse and desire (Nawal el Saadawi, 1982; Papanek and Minault, 1982).

In the caste-based Hindu system where endogamy and exogamy determine marriage and commensal relations, the entire kin group has a stake in feminine chastity. The woman is the *kshetra* or field in which the male *beej* or seed is to be sown; the wife is the vehicle through which a man establishes his *bangsa* or ego-based group.⁶ In traditional marriage negotiations the purity of the potential bride or bridegroom's lineage as well as the status of the *gotra* is important in determining eligibility. Where women are vital not only for the perpetuation of the lineage but also responsible in large measure for its purity there is reason enough to constrain their activities. An errant daughter-in-law would not only taint the family's reputation but also threaten the purity of the lineage. Apart from such extreme cases, women of the household are primarily responsible for the maintenance and execution of caste and family norms on commensality and social intercourse. Through the correct performance of rituals, establishment of networks within the extended family as well

as with women from other socially desirable families, socialising children according to expected norms (today this would also mean taking an active part in school-oriented work), women maintain, as well as sometimes help, in improving the status positions of their families. Essential for family-maintaining roles is stress on the Sati-Savitri model; anything that detracts from a woman's primary role is to be discouraged. I shall argue in this paper that early responses to women's education were in no small measure influenced by an apprehension of what schooling might bring. In the last decades of the present century such apprehensions have been subsumed in debates on the nature of women's dual roles and the belief that competent women must in fact be able to combine domesticity with a career.

The notion that a woman's primary role is to bear and rear children, and cook, clean and scrub at home, is not peculiar to any one culture.⁷ Of relevance here are the cultural and ideological variations which legitimise some kinds of individual behaviour and societal interaction, and not others. Notwithstanding regional differences however, it is generally believed that a woman's role in reproduction assigns to her a near-monopoly of instinctive qualities associated with mothering, nurturance and home management. However, emphasising the strength of the umbilical cord can hardly be logically extended to denying the existence of other, nonbiologically conditioned qualities, nor the sharing of 'feminine' instincts by men.⁸ Clearly, there are certain advantages to be had in stressing conventional role stereotypes; they not only facilitate male dominance in the field of public power, authority and decision-making but also ensure that women are safely at home, taking care of the future generations of mothers and leaders. Even if women do work outside the home, the pervasive influence of an ideology which stresses the glorification of motherhood, successfully limits involvement with a non-home-oriented life.

It is precisely over an interpretation of roles then that a conflict arises between the ideals of womanhood and the ideals of education. The purported aims of education which are the creation among all of a certain measure of independence of thought, a spirit of enquiry, and of objectivity, could well threaten the carefully maintained differences between boys and girls. A workable via media between the two sets of ideals was established when education was introduced in British India with the notion of separate syllabi and subjects for

boys and for girls. These were often faithful reflections of views prevailing in Britain, where, by the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was growing discussion on the right kind of education for girls. The influence of the physical sciences, and in particular that of Charles Darwin, led to debates on differences in capabilities between the two sexes. Articles were written on the size of men's and women's crania, the size of the brain and so on; the aim of such research it would appear was to indicate that women were in fact inferior intellectually to men. A second line of thought was concerned with the ability of women to perform successfully their primary responsibility, namely that of bearing and rearing children. If too much study could result in the using up of much-needed energy, it was clearly to be avoided. As we shall see, educated westernised Indians at the beginning of this century were greatly concerned with the impact of examinations on women. Thirdly, and this is the line of argument which has influenced twentieth century investigations as well, there was a conviction that there was a variability in characteristics between men and women. It was assumed that as men's characteristics were more variable than those of women, they had a wider range of aptitudes (Griffiths and Saraga, 1979).

In the Bengal of the closing years of the nineteenth century, the access of girls to education became an area for considerable debate among a wide cross-section of people, ranging from dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, housewives, members of the Brahmo Samaj as well as the women who were being educated. As more and more young Indians moved into educational institutions, an influential body of opinion cautioned against the granting of equal education to boys and to girls. In any case women's educational institutions and the spread of *zenana* education in Bengal were started with the specific and limited goal of making them intelligent companions for the emergent *bhadralok* and better mothers for the next generation. Education had the dual aim of reinforcing the conventional home-oriented stereotype of girls as well as of training them to keep up with the changing needs of the times. In fact, the *bhadramahila* was, in most senses, modelled on the Victorian prototype of the genteel middle class woman.⁹

Thus, the historical roots of prejudice against the expansion of women's education in certain areas lay in a basic conviction that there was something special about a woman's nature, which would

be destroyed by excessive exposure to education. The rudiments of reading, writing and a little arithmetic, hygiene, needlework, embroidery and, in Bengal, the vernacular as well as English, were regarded as being more than adequate for them. While concern about the differentness of women resulted in much public debate on syllabi, textbooks and where girls should be educated (Murshid, 1983; Borthwick, 1984), it also successfully concealed the fact that there was considerable ambivalence with respect to the entire issue; the education of one's own womenfolk involved a very different set of values from the rationale, for instance, behind agitating for home rule and later, legislative representation. There was no guarantee that if excessively liberated, women would accept either the moral straitjacket imposed on them or the sexual double standards of men. When such subconscious insecurities surfaced, they took a hysterical and almost vituperative form as was witnessed in the response to the marriage and lives of social reformer Dwarakanath Ganguly and his remarkable wife, Kadambini.

Born into a high status Kulin Brahmin family of Behrampur of what was then East Bengal, Dwarakanath reacted early to polygamy within his kinship group. When, in 1869, he moved to Calcutta, and started the journal *Abalabandhab*,¹⁰ opposition to kulinism had become a strong public conviction with him. His journal which was dedicated to the right of women to live as human beings recorded in detail the agonies of those subjected to indignities of various kinds. Though he was attracted to the Brahmo Samaj of Keshub Chandra Sen, it was not long before Dwarakanath and some of his associates such as Durga Mohan Das, Sibnath Sastri and Monomohan Ghosh joined issue with him over the question of why women could not sit with men during the Brahmo service. Sen's expressed disapproval of women sitting outside the *parda* area in male company was part of a wider ideological framework: he believed that the ideas of Ganguly and his friends on women's education would 'unsex' women, and on the whole, their views on female emancipation were potentially 'fraught with grave danger'. Nonetheless, Sen was keenly interested in a certain kind of women's education where he strongly advocated separate syllabi. Girls were not to be exposed to science or to mathematics (Sastri, 1911 : 237-8).

Despite criticisms of the radical exponents of women's emancipation, Keshub Sen's views were more representative of the thinking of his times; in fact, the Hindu fundamentalists would balk at granting

even a modicum of what he had in mind for Brahmo women. Only a few decades earlier, the prevalent view that widowhood would result if women were educated was rebutted by Gourmohan Vidyalkar in his *Strisikshavidyayak*.¹¹ Women's education continued to be viewed with hostility, particularly at the institutional level. While by the 1840s, the need for the expansion of zenana education was being written about and discussed, girls' schools, which were considerably dominated by missionary influence, were not as yet popular. It was only after the establishment of the Bethune School in 1849 that *bhadralok* Bengalis started thinking in terms of more educational institutions for girls (Bagal, 1956; Murshid, 1983; Borthwick, 1984).

After his return from England in 1870, Keshub Sen started the Indian Reform Association with an attached ladies' school. However, his views on women's education did not satisfy the radicals within the Brahmo Samaj: Sibnath Sastri, a member of the breakaway group commented that not only was Sen against higher education for women, but also 'objected to teaching them for instance, such subjects as mathematics, philosophy and sciences' (Sastri, 1911 : 239). In 1874, Dwarkanath Ganguly together with Sastri, Durga Mohan Das, Annada Charan Khastgir and others established a faction entitled the Samadarshi Dal; in the same year, with the visiting Unitarian, Annette Akroyd, this group set up the Hindu Mohila Vidyalaya. The school, which started originally with five students, attempted certain experiments in girls' education, some of which were successful. This institution as well as its successor, the Bangiya Mohila Vidyalaya, which was established two years later, were vital in Ganguly's crusade for women's emancipation. With single-minded devotion he took on the entire organisation of the schools even to the extent of sweeping up after a day's work (Kopf, 1979 : 123-8). However, what was less of a success was the attempt at cooperation between a British feminist and the Bengali reformers. Miss Akroyd had clearly got less than she had expected out of her attempts at penetrating the Bengali psyche; she felt that her participation in initiating a new kind of education for Bengali girls had been more or less fruitless. While distance in time and historical age makes it difficult to analyse the reasons for this disillusionment, it is nonetheless clear that a part of it must have been caused by the deep cultural divide which separates not only men and women, but also a woman of the empire from colonised men.¹²

However, even after Miss Akroyd's departure, reformist initiatives

in girls' education continued. Dissatisfied with the existing Bengali textbooks for mathematics, geography and health science, Ganguly wrote alternative tracts for his students who among others included the daughters of many eminent Brahmos of the newly-formed Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (Bandhopadhyay, 1952). Sarala, Durga Mohan Das' daughter, Monomohan Ghosh's sister, Binodmoni, Acharya Jagdish Bose's sister, Swarnaprabha as well as Kadambini, (a cousin of Monomohan Ghosh and later Dwarakanath's wife) were recipients of an educational system based on the belief that women had every right to the same knowledge as men. However, Dwarakanath was well aware of the fact that his students could be accused of being anti-national as they and their families had rejected many traditional values; in anticipation of any such situation, Ganguly composed a book of patriotic songs—the first of its kind—to be used in his school (Gangopadhyay, 1945 : 65-6).

Due to Ganguly's efforts, Sarala Das and Kadambini Basu were deemed fit to sit for the entrance examination for Calcutta University at a time when no leading British University had opened its doors to women: he was particularly fortunate in having to deal with Sir Arthur Hobhouse, a Vice-Chancellor who was sympathetic to women's education, and accordingly, in 1877, both girls were given permission to sit for the entrance examination after having passed a preliminary examination. While it was decided that there was to be no difference in either the examination syllabus or in the books to be studied, a separate examination centre was to be set up. Kadambini passed the entrance examination in the second division, though Sarala's marriage took her out of the stream of formal education even before she could sit for the test. In 1879, the Vice-Chancellor at a meeting of the Senate of the University of Calcutta commented on 'the young lady' (Kadambini) who had passed 'the entrance examination with great credit'; she had not only obtained 'very high marks in Bengali, tolerable marks in history and even in exact science—a subject which is not usually considered to be congenial to the female intellect'—but missed her first division by only one mark (Gangopadhyay, 1945 : 73).

In 1882, Kadambini, and Chandramukhi Basu, a Bengali Christian from the United Provinces became the first women graduates of Calcutta University when they graduated with B.A. degrees from Bethune College. Kadambini now decided to study medicine at the University, where only a simple B.A. degree was adequate for

admission to the course. Somewhat reluctantly, the University authorities gave admission to Kadambini who surely had the support of the ever-zealous Dwarakanath. Shortly after entering medical college, Kadambini married Ganguly, by now a thirty-nine-year-old widower. Dwarakanath had been her teacher, and clearly the two had become very close during Kadambini's later school years; though we do not have much information on reactions to their marriage, Ghulam Murshid who has done considerable work on this period reported that 'Dwarakanath's friends such as Sibnath Sastri, Umesh Chandra Datta and Ananda Mohan Bose strongly disapproved of this marriage and refused to attend the wedding ceremony (Murshid, 1983 : 106). Further, it was interesting that the *Bamabodhini Patrika* which usually carried news on Brahmo marriages, made no mention of this interesting match. At the time of their marriage, Kadambini was only 21 years old, and Dwarakanath's daughter by his first marriage was a few years younger than her. While the age difference may have been one reason for disapproval, it is also possible that Ganguly's co-workers felt that Kadambini was too much under the influence of her mentor to be able to be objective about him. Nonetheless, the marriage was apparently an extremely successful one.¹³

Though Kadambini passed in all the written papers for the final medical examination, she failed in one essential component of the practicals. In lieu of the M.B. degree, she was awarded a G.B.M.C. (Graduate of Bengal Medical College) which gave her the right to practice.¹⁴ This was in 1886. Earlier, in 1884, the Government had announced a scholarship programme of Rs. 20 a month for women medical students of which Kadambini became a recipient. This entitled her to the stipend from the time she had taken up her medical education in 1883. In 1888, Kadambini was appointed a doctor at the Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital on a monthly salary of Rs. 300. She had also established a lucrative private practice and her patients included women of the Nepali royal family. The Queen Mother of Nepal loaded her with gifts including a small hill pony. This pony provided hours of amusement for her children and step-grandchildren, to whom she was at times a remote and busy figure: in an essentially conservative, *parda* society, where nonetheless there was a growing awareness of rendering professional help to pregnant women before and during childbirth, a competent woman doctor was much in demand. Kadambini had a separate clinic-cum-

study in the house, equipped with, among other things, a human skeleton (Chakravarty, 1956 : 3-7). Despite her professional commitments, Kadambini took time off to run the house and supervise the cooking of meals which included a special menu for her husband's older sister who had remained a Hindu. She clearly did not believe in wasting time and when going from one patient to another in her horse-drawn carriage, she occupied herself by making yards of fine lace. Soon after the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, Dwarakanath started agitating for women's representation at the annual sessions. As a consequence, the 1889 session included six women, of whom one was Kadambini: she moved a vote of thanks in English and was hailed by Annie Besant as being 'a symbol that India's freedom would uplift India's womanhood' (quoted in Borthwick, 1984 : 342). Kadambini Ganguly was soon perceived as a threat to women from respectable homes. Claiming no concessions for her sex, she was successful in a number of examinations where she competed equally with men. She thus questioned the prevalent belief that women should not be exposed to the rigours of science and mathematics. Further, her participation in incipient nationalist politics, the preserve of both Hindu and Brahmo men, was a source of further concern. Fearing that, among other things, women from their homes may seek to emulate her, a section of conservative Hindu opinion launched a slander campaign against Kadambini. In 1891, *Bangabasi*, a journal of the Hindu orthodoxy, accused Kadambini of being a 'fitting example of a modern Brahmo woman'. Though by then Kadambini was a mother of five, and a responsible housewife, the author of the article accused her of being a whore (Kopf, 1979 : 125-6; Borthwick, 1984 : 324-5).

Not unexpectedly, Ganguly together with Sastri and Nilratan Sircar, a well known Brahmo doctor, started legal action against the journal and its editor. Shortly afterwards, the *India Messenger* put forth the views of the persecuted Brahmos, and, among other things made the important point that for the critics, 'maintenance of female virtues is incompatible with their social liberty': when women were granted opportunities due to them, it was assumed that 'a vast majority of them [were] unchaste' (Kopf, 1979 : 126). Ganguly felt it necessary not only to defend his wife, but also the point of view that women needed to be liberated from superstition and taboos. He was successful, and the editor of the journal, Mohesh Chandra Pal was found guilty. He was fined one hundred rupees and was also

sentenced to six months imprisonment. In 1893, an undaunted Dwarakanath sent Kadambini, by then a mother of five, to Edinburgh for higher studies in medicine.

In calling Kadambini a whore, *Bangabasi* was externalising the male fear of a competitive and competent woman. Her status as a wife and mother was no defence against a hostile public opinion which felt that a career and life outside the home threatened traditional notions of chastity and femininity. Further, physical mobility could logically imply weakened control over a woman's behaviour, sexual and otherwise. In order to be socially acceptable, women could not question either established stereotypes, nor participate in an educational system which helped in the emergence of alternative role models. By all accounts, Kadambini was sensitive to her peculiar situation and took special care to spend time on her role as homemaker. Yet, her determination, independence and courage in the public sphere violated conventional notions of how a respectably married woman should behave. Kadambini's stay in England, her foreign patients as well as her later participation in social work and politics, detracted from the image of a devoted householder. Her ability to combine a duality of roles was viewed as inconsequential; what was relevant was that she had chosen to enter into a situation where there could be a conflict of interests. It was precisely the idea of conflict which the main body of educated Bengali opinion wished to avoid.

By limiting educational options to those subjects which stressed the creative and nurturant aspects of their nature, girls were to be prepared for future roles. That there were clear advantages in keeping the emotional and educational development of women under strict familial control will be evident soon. Dwarakanath Ganguly's wife and a handful of pioneering women were clearly exceptions who were not acceptable not only to Hindus but also to the large bulk of Brahmos.¹⁵ By the third decade of the nineteenth century, women's emancipation, of which education was a vital element, had become an issue for debate among the *bhadralok*. Between the years 1863 and 1890, the number of girls' schools had gone up from 95 to 2,238 and the number of school-going girls from 2,486 to 78,865 (Murshid, 1983 : 43). The majority were primary school students. Clearly, a certain amount of deliberation in many homes lay behind this expansion. By and large, opinion on the education of girls was divided along the following lines: while Dwarakanath Ganguly,

Sibnath Sastri and other radicals felt that as both men and women should have equal chances in life, there was no justification for the study of separate subjects or limits to the level to which girls should be educated, mainstream Brahmos led by Keshub Chandra Sen and Umesh Chandra Datta, editor of the influential *Bamabodhini Patrika*, as well as a section of more enlightened Hindus were advocates of limited education for girls, with a separate curriculum. On the other hand, conservative Hindus, most of whom were not prepared to go beyond a modicum of zenana education, were greatly concerned with the harmful effects of education, which they felt would make women negligent of their families and lax in housekeeping (Murshid, 1983 : Chapter I; Borthwick, 1982 : Chapter I).

In the early 1860s, the *Bamabodhini Patrika* had started a scheme of education for girls and women through correspondence, known as *antahpur shiksha*. As a feasible alternative to a few years of schooling in a formal institution, this course provided the opportunity for girls to continue with learning even after they were married (Murshid, 1983: Appendix II), *zenana* education through the columns of the *Bamabodhini Patrika* as well as from home tutors continued to be a popular method of education for girls for several years. Apart from actively supporting *zenana* education, Sen and others were involved in the development of an appropriate formal scheme of education for girls. That women themselves were becoming aware of the issues involved is clear from a reading of women's journals of the times.¹⁶ Jnanadanandini, the wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service, was instrumental in devising a less cumbersome way of draping the sari as well as for popularising the sari blouse. The *brahmika* sari as it was called was an extremely useful innovation for the generation of women who were now coming out of *parda*.

On a number of occasions, Jnanadanandini entertained her husband's British colleagues to dinner 'with perfect propriety'.¹⁷ Through the *zenana* system, Satyendranath's wife had acquired sufficient dexterity to conduct herself in mixed company as well as to write cogently on issues relating to women. While she was clearly concerned with the position of Bengali women in a changing environment, her articles reflected the prevalent view that feminine success lay in the ability to be a competent wife and mother (Murshid, 1983 : 59-60). A few years later, Priyambada Bagchi, who had graduated from the University of Calcutta in 1892, wrote in

Antahpur, a journal for women, on the need for women's education to be more feminine in orientation. Radharani Lahiri, who had been associated with the progressive Brahmo attempts of introducing enlightened education for girls, felt nonetheless that despite all that women learned, 'housework is the most important'. Further, a woman must 'also learn childcare, because nothing is more important to her than this' (Murshid, 1983 : 60). Thus, when Keshub Chandra Sen's long-standing disagreement with certain trends in women's education culminated in his establishing the Victoria College for girls, he received considerable support from women as well as his male co-workers. In 1882, writing in the prospectus of the new institution, Sen stressed that he had been inspired to go in for the venture because he felt that there was a need to train girls for their 'special duties' in life. He further pointed out that to give women 'the same education and make them solicitous to earn fame and titles are both wrong and resulting in evil'. Such an education would not only 'distort their natures' but also make them interested in 'the outward veneer of civilisation'. In addition to the usual arts subjects, (there was a mention of elementary science, but not of mathematics) hygiene and domestic science, as well as painting and needlework 'the ideals of Indian womanhood will be taught' (Bethune College Centenary Volume, 1849-1949 : 144).

The Mahakali Pathsala, established in 1893, was the Hindu response to what was viewed as excessive westernisation in girls' education. Its founders who were against the system of similar education for boys and for girls wanted 'to educate girls on strictly national lines in the hope that they may regenerate Hindu society'. It published its own textbooks which included a catechism for the training of girls in keeping with Hindu precepts as well as books in moral science. The school soon gained enormously in popularity and within twenty years, its student body was over 450, which exceeded that of any other school for girls, including the well-established Bethune School (Bethune College Centenary Volume : 145). During this period, there was considerable governmental support for a separate curriculum for girls as well as for viewing their education in a different perspective from that of boys: the Education Commission of 1882 felt that 'it ought not to be taken for granted that instruction which is suitable for a boy must necessarily be good for an Indian girl'. While in literary subjects, girls could be taught upto an elementary level, 'there are subjects of a practical kind to which girls

might at least be introduced during their school course' (Report of the Progress of Education in India, 1897-1902, vol. II : 305). Accordingly, though there were no differences in the textbooks used for boys and for girls in the government and government-aided schools, girls were encouraged to take up needlework instead of 'Euclid, mensuration and science', and in lieu of 'native accounts' they could read 'a little poetry' (p.306).

That an increasing number of families were prepared to send their daughters to school upto the primary level is reflected in educational statistics: however, there is a huge drop in numbers of those going on to middle and secondary school. For instance, in the late 1890s while 61,380 girls were studying in primary schools at the stage of 'reading printed books', the number dropped to 2,080 at the upper primary level, while only 230 went on to high school (p.110). A large percentage of girls at the primary level were enrolled in boy's schools. It is also interesting to note that differences were reinforced from the day children entered school: while both boys and girls learned the three Rs, played games and heard stories to enliven the day, 'the drill of the boys differs from the physical exercises of the girls as do the games played by them'. Further, when girls studied in only girls' schools, the contents of the stories were also different. In 1907, a revised syllabus for the infant and lower classes for girls added needlework and domestic science and omitted drill (Report of the Progress of Education in India, 1907-12, vol. I: 219).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, while an increasing number of girls continued to go to primary school, their participation at the higher level was limited; at the same time, *zenana* education gained in popularity. There were a number of reasons for this uneven growth in girls' education. To start with early marriage meant that girls left school before the age of ten years. Inadequate girls' schools as well as an insufficient number of women teachers meant that in a society where women's seclusion was not uncommon, families were under considerable social pressure to take their prepubertal girls out of coeducational institutions. Further, a general dissatisfaction with the content of teaching in schools continued, and what is significant is that the demand for differentiation of curricula related not merely to the higher levels but to primary school as well. What underlay parental concern with the learning content of their five and seven year old girls? Why was there so much hostility to a similar curriculum for boys and for girls? As we have seen, from the 1880s

onwards, there were acrimonious debates in public and through newspapers and journals on the right kind of education for girls, culminating often in the establishment of alternative institutions.

Though men as yet did not envisage competition in employment nor mothers and future mothers-in-law harbour visions of rebellious girls in the home, families were clearly apprehensive of what the ideology of equal education could mean. The Review of Education for 1886 noted that 'while the lessons of emancipation are being learnt, and stability has not yet been reached ... the period of transition will be marked by the loosening of social ties, the upheaval of customary ways, and by prolonged and severe domestic embarrassment.' This is precisely what was happening in Bengal, and 'native gentleman, advanced and enlightened enough in ordinary matters' dreaded the 'harrassing times' when 'the women of the country begin to be educated and learnt independence' (Review of Education in India, 1886 : 278). At the same time, the need for educated daughters could not be ignored: western education had created a new breed of young men who expected something more from their prospective brides. An article entitled 'Strishiksha' in *Jnanankur*, a journal of the 1870s, pointed out that 'soon it will be difficult to get bridegrooms for girls of upper and middle class Hindu families unless these girls are given some education.' Not only were the relatives of college-going boys looking for brides who were more than literate, but also, 'a marriage between an educated man and an illiterate girl cannot be a happy one; discord and disagreement will naturally be the result of such a marriage' (quoted in Murshid, 1983 : 41).

In other words, there were benefits to be had from giving girls a specific kind of education. This would be based on a curriculum, which perhaps through fables, stories or even moral education, would teach the virtues to be cultivated by girls such as obedience, patience, chastity together with some basic learning; the joys of motherhood and the merits of the educated wife and companion were instilled into the minds of girls from an early age. In several ways, *zenana* education was ideally suited for the creation of the total feminine personality. By 1907, the number of girls officially recorded as receiving learning through this system had gone up to 1,431 as against 1,200 at the end of the earlier quinquennium. The actual numbers may have been higher. In keeping with the Education Commission's recognition of the need to strengthen

zenana education as a feasible alternative to formal schools, grants were provided to Indian committees running such centres as well as to a number of peripatetic governesses as the home tutors were called (Report of the Progress of Education in India, 1907-1912, vol. I : 213).

Thus whether through the many government-supported primary schools, those run by private organisations or the *zenana* system, the goals of girl's education were the careful training of well-tutored young women who would have a positive role to play in the fast-changing society of Bengal. While Western education was opening up new horizons for Bengali men, it was also bringing new values and styles of life. Women were now seen as important agents of stability and continuance, and as bulwarks of the proverbial hearth and home. At the same time, a girl steeped in too much traditionalism would hardly satisfy the needs of a modernised husband nor understand the changes underway. A certain degree of training for the new life was increasingly becoming a prerequisite for a girl's eligibility as a bride. Interestingly enough, the *Bambodhini Patrika* published a number of articles entitled *Strisangini* (wife companion) which were basically vignettes from the lives of women who had helped their husbands' careers by providing them with a caring and understanding home ambience (Borthwick, 1982 : 114). From the third quarter of the nineteenth century onwards education became an important status symbol necessary for familial mobility: as we have seen, controlled learning for girls had an increasingly significant role to play in the evolution of modern Bengali society. At the same time, by creating the stereotype of the well-educated yet unquestioning and docile girl, the purportedly liberating potential of education was minimised. Rather than foster equality, the educational system brought about a new difference between boys and girls, namely, the difference in access to the kinds and levels of knowledge.

Even as the Bengali intelligentsia argued ad nauseum on the role of education for woman, an increasing number were going in for higher education. For instance, in 1902 of the 177 female college students in India, 55 were from Bengal. During the quinquennium, 1897-1902, thirty-seven women students (all of whom were from Bethune College) graduated from Calcutta University as against seven students from the Madras Presidency and one each from the United Provinces and Bombay (Progress of Education in India, 1917-22, vol. I: 229). The successors of Kadambini, Chandramukhi

Kumudini Khastigir, Sarala Ghoshal, Indira Tagore and so on became teachers, doctors and social workers. Increasingly, women faced the dilemma of choosing between a career and respectable matrimony or of trying to combine the two roles. However, it was not as though the protagonists of women's higher education unreservedly accepted a system of equal advantage for boys and for girls. At a different level, the debate on the areas in which girls should specialise continued. This is clear if one looks at the evidence given to the Calcutta University Commission of 1917. Under the chairmanship of Dr. Michael Sadler, the Commission was to look into the functioning of Calcutta University as well as comment on the general state of higher education in the province. A detailed questionnaire, which included a question on women's higher education, was circulated to eminent public personalities, lawyers, doctors and social workers. Apart from eliciting responses on the 'peculiar difficulties and needs' of women's higher education, question 23 asked the respondents to specify whether their responses to the 'needs of men and of women' in education were going to differ; further, it asked, to what extent and in which areas were 'additional and special facilities' required for girls (Sadler Commission Report, 1919-20, vol. 13). One hundred and twenty-nine answers to this question were recorded of which seven were institutional responses, ten were those of women and seven of non-Indian men. In this paper, the one hundred and five responses of the Indian men as well as those of the four Indian women have been analysed in some detail. These will give some idea of the prevailing attitudes towards women as reflected in the views of influential individuals.

While only two men said that they were positively against higher education for women, twenty-three persons including three out of the four women felt that there should be equality in education; in fact wherever possible, some additional courses should be introduced particularly in teaching and medicine. That these courses were increasingly popular is clear from the classification of the five-yearly reports on education which had only three columns for girls' higher education, namely medicine, teaching and commerce. While in the 1917-22 period, no Bengali girl offered commerce, 11 were studying medicine and 13 were training to be teachers (Report of the Progress of Education in India, 1917-22, vol. II : 162). The answers of four respondents to the questionnaire were inadequate for the present analysis, and of the rest, over 80 per cent felt that women should not

have equal access to all courses in higher education. In particular there was a strong objection to women going in for science and technology of any kind, which was deemed totally unsuitable for them.

Irrespective of whether they unqualifiedly supported women's higher education or expressed certain reservations, most responses convey the impression that the Bengali *bhadralok* in the early part of this century was more than aware of the need to state its position in this increasingly important area of discussion. From the answers, some of which did not extend beyond a couple of sentences to those which covered almost two pages, certain views appeared to occur with a degree of regularity. While the argument that girls needed to be educated so as to make them better wives and mothers persisted, there was a growing realisation that in addition, a certain formal level of education was now necessary; as a respondent put it candidly, guardians knew that if they wanted well-educated bridegrooms, they would have to give their girls 'higher education at least up to the matriculation stage'.¹⁸ Nonetheless, there continued to be a difference of opinion on the right kind of education: were girls to have access to the same subjects, study in schools or even college or should they only be confined to *zenana* education? Beneath arguments for a separate education for girls lay the conviction that there were basic differences between boys and girls which education should in no way disturb.

This conviction gathered strength as the more westernised among the *bhadralok* who had access to new trends in theories of human behaviour adapted these to their own needs: apart from Charles Darwin, who among other things believed that 'man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has more inventive genius' (quoted in Warren, 1980 : 104). Havelock Ellis' (1859-1939) views were much in vogue. His notion that women conserved energy while men were more catabolic or energy-consuming became widely known. He further observed that women were also more responsive to psychic stimuli, as well as susceptible to neurosis. (see Warren 1980 : 132-4). While Ellis argued for equal rights for the sexes, he also felt that biological differences did lead to substantial variations in behaviour and responses to situations. Quoting Ellis, P.C. Mahalanobis who was to bring modern statistics to independent India, felt that 'the existing system is pressing too heavily on our women students' (Sadler Commission Report,

1920 : 436). Apart from certain essential modifications in the institutions where girls studied, it was necessary that special provision should be made for 'their study of the higher branches of household science as well as domestic science'. Another eminent Brahmo, Dr. B.C. Roy, post-Independence West Bengal's Chief Minister from 1948 to 1962, was critical about the examination system in general; further, a girl 'with her finer susceptibilities and more delicate constitution' was more adversely affected and 'comes out very badly indeed'. Roy, a medical doctor of some repute, was against examinations for girls and felt that they should remain at home unless they could be accommodated in an university 'of their own'. Further, they were to be encouraged 'to undertake practical lessons in nursing, housekeeping etc'. (p.444).

A well-known Bengali journalist, Ramananda Chatterji who edited the *Modern Review* expressed concern over the custom of women's seclusion which was observed by Muslims as well as 'Hindu women of the *bhadralok* class'. Deprived of adequate sunshine and air, 'too much brain work' without 'corresponding physical activity' could therefore be injurious to them. Schools should accordingly make the 'best possible arrangements for play and recreation as well as for well-ventilated classrooms (p.416). Nonetheless, 'for physiological reasons' girls should attend fewer lectures than boys. Former Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, Sir Gooroo Dass Banerjee who had been active in nationalistic politics felt that while a woman's 'mental constitution' gave her an advantage over men, higher learning was to be concerned only with those subjects which impart 'knowledge or skill which will be useful to females in playing the part assigned to them by nature in their domestic and social spheres' (p.403).

Among those who were for equal opportunities for women, a number felt that there was no need for special facilities; in fact, there was a genuine requirement for expansion only in certain areas. Writing at some length, Bimal Chandra Ghosh made the point that apart from being trained as teachers, girls needed scientific and medical education. 'For first hand opinion' on other issues such as those relating to conveyance to and from college, the controversy over the strain of examinations and so on, 'women graduates should be represented on the Senate and the Board of Studies and one at least should sit on the Syndicate'. Ghosh's views however received little support among the bulk of Bengali men who were hostile to

examinations for girls and felt that in any case, equal access to education would only be going against the grain of sexual differences (p. 424).

By the end of the first decade of the present century it was clear that the official education authorities had taken note of this general hesitance of sending girls up for examinations. The Director of Public Instruction for Bengal, Mr. Hornell commented that it was 'a monstrous anomaly' to make girls, who had no interest in further education 'devote the whole of their energies to preparing for an examination which ignores all their peculiar needs'.

Accordingly, alternate schemes were thought out; but it is interesting that these too met with limited success. For instance for the quinquennium 1912-17, there were approximately 2,700 girls studying in a system geared to examinations; however, in 1916, only 65 girls passed the matriculation and of these not more than half went on for higher studies. In order to rectify this situation, it was decided to have only a couple of schools which would concentrate on examinations, while organising the others to give 'a more fitting education' in which the emphasis would not be on final results but on learning needlework, cooking, nursing and so on. The missionary schools too responded favourably to the new curriculum; however, the experiment was a failure and the educational authorities ruefully concluded that 'the people of Bengal seem to appreciate the matriculation certificate more than any useful practical course of studies' (Report of the Progress of Education in India, 1912-17, vol. I: 177-9).

Clearly, the present-day obsession with degrees and diplomas had early roots. That families were increasingly prepared to allow their daughters to sit for examinations was a response to a changing world; it was not necessarily an expression of a basic shift in notions on women's roles. In the following years, M.K. Gandhi's much-published call for women's participation in the national movement spread throughout the country and attracted those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. His message stressed the self-sacrificing and nonviolent nature of women which he felt made them suitable proponents of the philosophy of satyagraha. The success of his appeal lay in the fact that he was reaffirming and not contradicting existing sexual stereotypes. In a fast-changing environment charged with the heady appeal of self-rule, families supported the participation of their womenfolk in nonviolent protest; they

boycotted foreign goods and sold their jewellery for the Motherland. Sacrifice at home was matched by sacrifice in the wider political arena.¹⁹

Superficial improvements in woman's social and political position brought new dilemmas: she became Charulata of Rabindranath's long short story *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest) and Bimala of *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World) (Tagore: 1962). Charulata's and Bimala's husbands, both western-educated liberals with nationalistic commitments brought their wives out of the repressive *andar mahal* of Bengali society; they were committed to *zenana* education and dispalved touching (if not naive) faith in their wives' ability to use learning to improve home life, and relations with their husbands. Charulata fell in love with her liberator-tutor, the young and attractive Amal, her brother-in-law, and soon surpassed him in literary creativity. Soon, Amal left to study abroad; in any case, he did not seem aware of the havoc he had created in the mind of his sister-in-law. An agonised Bhupati decided to leave Charulata and make a life for himself in Madras; while he initially ignored Charu's plaintive requests to take her with him, he ultimately relented. But by then, Charulata had steeled herself and refused to go. Bimala's love for Sandip, a friend of sorts of her husband, Nikhilesh, led to the destruction of the family unit. In both stories, women's emancipation resulted in 'broken nests'.

Was Tagore then against women's education and liberation? Clearly not, as is evident from a reading of *Gora*, *Shesher Kabita*, *Char Adhyay* and his many poems on women. However, what his writings did express was a general concern with the psyche of the Bengali women in an uncertain world; clearly, she was no longer to be confined to the recesses of the *andar mahal*. But then, what was her role to be? And was it not true that she 'as much as a man' possessed the capacity for deep love, physical desire and devotion? When education and learning opened up the cloistered mind and encouraged the process of questioning, family unity based on sexual double standards and the quiescent woman was often in jeopardy. Tagore does not blame the woman who is groping for an identity for the breakdown of family norms; he sees it as inevitable. In fact, his writings were the honest and overt expressions of a prevailing viewpoint, which when put forth by others was clothed in hypocrisy and pleas of concern over women's delicate constitution and so on. It may of course be argued, with a certain degree of justification, that a

literary personality has far greater license in saying what he or she really wants to say. Even if this point is conceded it does not detract from the basic position that the Bengali *bhadralok* soon started viewing women's education as a veritable Pandora's box. In order to be able to cope with what was to emerge, it was felt prudent to publicise arguments on the basic differences between the sexes, women's essential needs and so on. Though each year, more girls were in school or participating in *zenana* education, and later, going to college, their education was, as we have seen, a part of definite familial strategy. While with general social change, expectations were modified somewhat, basic convictions remained unchanged. The rancour that was directed against Kadambini Ganguly was now camouflaged in more sophisticated and convincing arguments. What is of interest here is that in present-day India, views on women and their relationship to education have not changed much from those who initiated the early debates.

As the dust settled after the frenetic years of civil disobedience in which women participated actively, the horror of Partition and finally, Independence, women's education became an important issue once again. The University Education Commission of 1948-9 which was headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan devoted an entire chapter to women's education. The attitudes of the all-male membership however, appeared to have advanced little over the views expressed by enlightened Bengali men of thirty years ago: members firmly believed that 'a well-ordered home helps to make well-ordered men'. The mother 'who is enquiring and alert' and familiar with subjects such as history and literature will be 'the best teacher in the world of both character and intelligence'. At the same time, it was clearly prudent to argue that as women have 'demonstrated their ability to think and work alongside of men', much education could be in common.

Nonetheless, due cognisance had to be taken of the basic differences in the nature of men and women, and the 'greatest profession of women is and probably will continue to be that of the homemaker (Report of the University Education Commission, 1948-9, vol. I, 1950: 395). However, children grow up, and husbands need intelligent companions, and while women could profitably be trained to make 'the home a work of art', they could also specialise in certain other areas such as home economics, teaching, nursing and the fine arts (Ibid: 393). The Commission

was clearly committed to the view that a woman's nature was essentially different from a man's and her primary role had to be home-oriented; however, in an expanding world, this function needed a certain degree of finesse and specialisation which could be provided through the right type of educational courses.

Between 1950-51 and 1960-61, to every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, the number of girls rose only from 39 to 44; for general education at the college and university levels, figures rose from a mere 16 to 27 (Report of the Education Commission 1964-66, 1966). Clearly, the policy towards women's education had to be looked at from various points of view. Accordingly, the National Committee on Women's Education which was appointed in 1958 under the chairmanship of Mrs. Durgabai Deshmukh was to enquire into low enrolment, reasons for wastage as well as the scope for vocationalisation (Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, 1958). The Committee prefaced its analysis and recommendations with the two existing views on women: the dominant opinion that women did not have much of a role to play outside the home, and even if they did, this was 'definitely secondary and subject to the demands and exigencies of her role within the home'. The other view of course was that a woman should 'have open to her all avenues to life which are open to men'. Nonetheless, the Committee hastened to add that education was in no way to prove a threat to family life; equally, if women were to perform a multiplicity of roles, it was essential that 'our men should also come forward to join the women in work within the home' (pp.7-9).

Girls were to receive equal educational opportunities and this related to vocational and professional education as well; but any education would have to equip them 'for their duties both in the home as well as outside'. Further, differences in the nature of duties and responsibilities meant that from the middle stage onwards, there was to be differentiation of curricula. This did not in any way mean a lowering of standards, but a shift in focus. Quoting various agencies concerned with the implementing of education, the Committee reported that there was a feeling to 'a greater or lesser degree that some of the subjects taught to boys are not related to the aptitudes, interests and needs of girls' (p. 86). There was a need therefore, for the introduction of more courses in the fine arts, nursing, home science, dietetics and so on. Clearly, the debate on women's essential nature was now replaced by talk of aptitudes; however, terminologic-

al changes cannot change an existential reality where aptitudes are carefully nurtured to suit a specific purpose.

That observations on differentiation of curricula were reflected in the streaming of girls into certain courses is clear from a look at a few selected figures, at both the school and college levels. In 1955-56, the number of girls enrolled to hundred boys in vocational courses in schools was 31, while at the collegiate level, only 7 girls to the same number of boys were studying in professional courses (Ibid : 240). We shall soon see that the picture changed little over the next thirty years. Nonetheless, in an attempt to investigate the basis for streaming a Committee was appointed by the National Council for Women's Education on the Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls headed by Mrs. Hansa Mehta in 1962 (Aggrawal, 1984: 395). The Committee stated quite unequivocally that while girls did have certain home-oriented duties to fulfill, these could not be made the basis for dividing subjects on the basis 'of sex and to regard some of them as "masculine" and others as "feminine".'

Further, by forcefully pointing out that 'the so-called psychological differences between the two sexes arise not out of sex but out of social conditions' the Committee was categorically placing the responsibility for differentiation whether in curricula or in other areas of life in the home as well as wider society. It also added that there was an urgent need to publicise 'that stereotypes "masculine and feminine" personalities do more harm than good'. Nonetheless, recognising that social transformation could not be achieved overnight, the Committee agreed that for the time being certain psychological differences as well as those in roles and responsibilities would 'have to be accepted as matters of fact'. Within this framework, the aim was to work towards equal access to all subjects as well as organise a campaign against social attitudes, while providing some special courses for girls (Aggrawal, 1984 : 396).

Two years later, the Kothari Commission spoke of the need for equalisation of educational opportunities; yet there clearly was a certain ambivalence towards girls and their education. For instance, at the beginning of the section of girls' education, it stated that 'their education was of greater importance than that of men' because they were responsible for 'full development of our human resources, the improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy'. At the same time, women had every right to a career and a life outside the home, and

there was no case for different curricula. In other words, the modern Indian women had to be equipped to carry the dual burden of rearing the right type of citizens as well as for bringing home a pay packet. Education had no role in disturbing the sexual division of labour within the home based on the convenient argument that women were better at certain things than were men (Report of the Education Commission : 238).

Reacting sharply to continued ambivalence towards women's education, the all-women Committee on the Status of Women in India which submitted its report in 1974 felt that it was high time that a realistic evaluation of attitudes towards women and their education was made : reiterating the Hansa Mehta Committee's position, the CSWI felt that 'inequality of the sexes is built in the minds of men and women through a socialisation process which continues to be extremely powerful (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1975 : 281). Far from promoting equality, the educational system with its schools which 'reflect and strengthen the traditional prejudices' through curricular differentiation, 'the classification of subjects on the basis of sex and the unwritten code of conduct enforced on their pupils has indeed become subservient to the prevailing social system (p.282). Not only did the Committee suggest a similarity of courses upto class X, but at the classes XI and XII stages, girls should have full opportunity to choose vocational and professional courses in keeping with local needs. University education needed to be made more relevant for all, and at the primary school level, both boys as well as girls should be taught music, simple craft and needlework (p.276). It is interesting that the 1975 NCERT document on *The Curriculum for the Ten-Year School* drafted by an impressive forty-member committee of distinguished men and women made no mention of differentiation of curricula; but the student was consistently referred to by the male pronoun 'he' (NCERT : 1975).

In 1984, the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal set up by the CPI (M) government submitted its voluminous report without so much as bothering to give a sex-wise breakdown of those in various educational courses. Further, a sub-section of the chapter on 'Courses of Study' which dealt with 'Home Science Education for Girls' lamented the fact that there are only two home science colleges which necessarily limited admission to an elite. There was an urgent need to expand home science

education as it was a course which educated girls 'to rebuild homes consistently with the demands of modern life, [teach] to create an atmosphere of peace, happiness and moral and spiritual well being in the family'. Further—and it is not clear how this goal fitted with 'the earlier home-oriented ideal woman that home science was to create—it would make girls 'economically independent and capable citizens of the community (Report of the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal, 1984 : 144). Out of its 228 recommendations, there were only two which related to women, namely a plea for the expansion of home science and polytechnic education. Clearly, the hand-picked educationists from a Marxist-dominated state who talked easily of class exploitation did not see that their arguments could be extended to women's oppression as well. In fact, their position on women's education could, without much difficulty, be mistaken for that taken by those advocating education for women in the Bengal of the late nineteenth century !

Stereotypes about abilities are consistently reproduced in most policy statements despite the avowed commitment to the adage that all are to benefit equally from the educational system. What are the bases for these views? Are they only biases kept alive by those who have a stake in the sexual division of labour or do they indeed have some objective legitimacy? Are girls in fact not capable of becoming neurosurgeons, engineers, nuclear scientists, and so on? Looking at recent statistics, we come to some interesting conclusions. For instance, in the Delhi Senior School (class XII) results for 1985, girls secured a higher pass percentage than boys in all the four groups namely science, humanities, commerce and vocational studies. Of the 6,644 students who offered science, 4,852 or 73 per cent were boys while of the 26,716 appearing in the humanities group, 59 per cent were girls. The commerce group was evenly divided between boys and girls. Interestingly, though a fewer number of girls were in science group, their pass percentage was as high as 83.8 per cent as against 70.7 per cent for the boys.³⁰ The all-India figures of enrolment in higher education in 1980-81 show that while girls accounted for over 60 per cent of the enrolment in the arts stream, the figure for participation in science was 40 per cent while only 4 per cent were studying engineering or technology. Medicine which gained early respectability as a profession suitable for women accounted for a ratio of one girl to every three boy students (Bhandari, 1982 : 37).

There are certain tentative conclusions to be drawn on the basis of the empirical data given above; on the whole, arts subjects are more attractive to students irrespective of sex, more boys than girls study science and engineering and girls are clustered in lower status courses and institutions. However, most importantly, these figures are not a true reflection of actual ability. The fact that science, technology and engineering education is unequally distributed among the sexes does not necessarily represent differences in aptitudes; the streaming which takes place at the relatively early age of 16 years is not based only on academic factors: Conversations with principals and teachers of leading schools in Delhi indicate that often bright girls opt out of the science stream for reasons which have no connection with their academic performance. Classroom behaviour may also hold out some clues on what factors influence the choices and attitudes of girls: while doing practice teaching in some of the capital's important schools, student-teachers not only found a sharp drop in the numbers of girls studying science at the Plus-Two level, but also that their class participation was substantially different from that of boys: those who taught classes VI and VII found that girls were as assertive and definite in their points of view as their male peers. At the higher levels, they became quiet and reserved nonparticipants, though they were diligent with their homework and performed well in unit tests. Outside class too, older girls tended to wander around in groups by themselves while boys could be heard shouting lustily on the playing fields.²¹

A principal commented that most of the girls who took up science hoped to enter medical college. Of those who were not successful, the majority went into home science, science, biochemistry or switched to arts subjects. Very few aspired to be engineers, research scientists or geophysicists.²² Studies of girls who do become scientists and professionals in competitive areas indicate a low degree of job involvement and concentration in the lower echelons of service. One reason for this of course is that women do not remain long enough in a profession or job to be eligible for promotions. Often, familial reasons such as marriage, limited physical mobility due to the nature of husband's employment, reluctance to spend more time at work as it would mean compromising with responsibilities at home and so on are responsible for well-demarcated hours of work and degrees of participation.²³ Role conflict is minimised by a socialisation process which stresses the primacy of home-oriented

duties. Girls are trained to be good housewives early as participation in culinary and other activities is actively encouraged and applauded by family members.

Thus not only does a pervasive ideology determine a girl's academic choices but also influences her behaviour soon after she attains puberty. Femininity means non-assertiveness, compliance, obedience, and in education, choosing options that will not conflict with these basic orientations. Socialisation at home is amply reinforced by school textbooks which depict the brave, outgoing boy, and the weak, dependent girl, the man as worker and the woman as mother (Nischol, 1976, 1978): a perfect fit therefore must exist between the needs of society and the role of education in providing these. Clearly then, education has to be manipulated to provide goals and training for girls which are to be substantially different from those for boys. It is imperative therefore to curtail the influence of education which in its ideal state, aims at the liberation of the mind irrespective of sex. In keeping with social needs, education 'socialises for conformity as much as it provides ideas for independence and freedom' (Shukla, n.d. : 8).

Socialisation not only accounts for the behaviour of girls at home and at school but also for the manner in which academic interests are manipulated. For instance, recent psychological studies in the West have established that while boys are better at computations and in spatiotemporal activities, girls excel in verbal skills. While these findings have subsequently been challenged by other feminist psychologists, they nonetheless indicate that girls are indeed responsive to stimuli of one kind and not to others: they appear to like languages and literature but not mathematics. At a recent workshop on the attitude of English girls to mathematics it was found that girls felt that they would run into difficulties with figures while they stated that this was rarely likely to be a problem with boys.²⁴ However, such self-perceptions are not always in keeping with actual ability: a British investigator in the mid-seventies worked out that if entry to engineering courses depended on spatial ability alone, then the ratio of women to men would have been 2 : 3. In actual fact it was more like 1 : 100 (Griffith and Saraga, 1979). As we have seen in India too, only a small fraction of girls take up science, mathematics and engineering at a higher education level; school results indicate however that a much larger percentage have the ability to do so.

Thus with regard to educational options for girls, there is often a

clear contradiction between initial ability and subsequent choices: while statistics belie the carefully nurtured belief that a girl's basic nature equips her to deal with certain kinds of knowledge and not with others, a powerful socialisation process amply aided by official statements as well as the school ambience leads to a streaming which is not always a true reflection of aptitude. It can be argued that if girls themselves are content to think of their futures as proficient housewives and mothers, or at best school teachers, librarians and perhaps nurses and doctors, why is it relevant for others to talk of frustrated ambition or lost human resources? The counter-argument to this clearly is that (a) most girls are not free to make choices in keeping with their abilities in an environment which celebrates certain qualities and denigrates others, and (b) in a hierarchical, status-oriented system, the male-dominated spheres of learning and employment are precisely those which carry high prestige and monetary benefit. In other words, by stressing that girls are fit for certain courses and not for others is not only to argue against natural justice but also to deny women access to positions of power and dominance.

By limiting choices, the emancipatory role of education in the lives of women is kept under strict control. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explain not only the historical genesis of an educational system which catered to the specific needs of the emergent Bengali middle class, but also to look at the existing reality where it continues to perpetuate traditional role models; essential for such stereotypes is inequality in access to knowledge and the technological era. There are important linkages between informal socialisation, the formal system of education and future roles. As we have seen Kadambini Ganguly's education and career were held responsible for the development of independent action in a woman who should have been tending dutifully to her hearth and home. She was thus perceived as being a destructive woman by a section of society. Today, there are many Kadambinis in India as well as other women who have achieved much more. Yet, except for a handful from the so-called westernised elite who supposedly believe in equality of the sexes, most have to take cognisance of a strict moral code. An independence of beliefs and freedom of movement as well as long hours in the laboratory or hospital which is necessitated by higher education of a certain kind causes insecurity in the minds of middle class families accustomed to the rigid observance of certain family norms. Further,

if girls who wish to train to be engineers, architects, research scientists and so on, want to take up jobs in their areas of specialisation, there are additional problems such as physical safety, working in close proximity with male colleagues as well as being excessively involved with their work. Such developments not only result in fears of daughters becoming emotionally involved with the 'wrong' kind of young man, and of the resultant social ostracism, but also an apprehension of reduced control over the younger generation. This would result in the weakening of bonds required for keeping family unity and prestige intact. An educational—and later, work-ethos—which may well come into conflict with the demands of the family is viewed as potentially destructive.

In order to avoid the growth of this independence, it is in the interests of the family collectivity to actively discourage any interest in science, technology and other allied subjects from an early age; instead, girls are taught how they are best fitted to be teachers, doctors, clerks and typists. Not only would such occupations be acceptable by potential conjugal families but it would also be possible to combine domestic responsibilities with a job of this kind. It is stressed that girls have aptitudes in certain areas and not in others, and the educational system must work for the development of these and not create conflict in the minds of young women over their true role in life. For boys the need is to avail of all that educational opportunities have to offer; they are the legitimate bread-earners who have to compete in an increasingly difficult world. Even if a woman brings back a salary comparable to her husband's, she is neither regarded as the head of the family nor is she granted the concessions due to such a person. She is supposed to combine a multiplicity of roles with ease. Thus, any thought of educational strategies has first to take stock of whom the benefits are meant for: in a society based on a sexual division of labour within the family which is carried over to the educational and occupational realms, there can be no one educational strategy for boys and for girls.

As we have seen, the development of the contemporary educational system in India with its carefully built-in imbalances is the result of colonial rule. In many cases, ideas prevalent in the empire were adapted and introduced in the colony. What would the educational scene have been like without British influence? What was the middle class urban Indian woman like before she was exposed to foreign influences? Clearly, answers to these questions would require a study

of a different and more far-reaching type. Nonetheless, on the basis of the work done so far it is clear that education was not to be permitted to undermine the notion of the all-preserving, virtuous and obedient woman. The Shakti model clearly was to be underplayed except in so far as its benevolent manifestations were of benefit to the kin group. An exogenous factor such as education has been and continues to be viewed with suspicion because of its potential for creating a spirit of enquiry and independence. At the same time there is today a growing awareness of the need to educate girls for a variety of reasons. Access to formal education is no longer the preserve of a few families. The dilemma caused by exposure to the external world coupled with the need to keep intact the notion of female subordination is resolved by stressing the suitability of certain courses and the avoidance of others. That the making of such choices may in fact result in the suppression of genuine interest and talent in other areas is not regarded as being of much consequence. Of far greater importance is the need to preserve the unity and prestige of the family.

The Indian notion of femininity arises out of a rich and varied mythico-religious tradition; in some respects there is a coincidence of views between the dominant Hindu ideology and that of Christianity and Islam. Thus traditionally, women's oppression has carried the weight of religious sanction. The western system of education which indeed succeeded in creating a new kind of Indian woman did not however affect fundamental views on womanliness. At the level of social intercourse, the Bengali *bhadramahila* would perhaps have had more in common with her contemporary from England than with her kin in the natal village; yet the Victorian morality which came with the ruling class only reaffirmed the existing commitment to keep women within the emotional, psychological and in cases, physical boundaries of the home (Borthwick, 1984: Chapter 9).

That the system of education both during the colonial period as well as after has been deeply influenced by asymmetrical relations between the sexes is clear from the brief review of policy statements. At a time when the educated world was excited by new discoveries and theories, concern with differences between men and women was part of the process of scientific enquiry. What is far less acceptable however is the obstinate adherence to such views—many of which have been disproved—in the late twentieth century. When discriminatory attitudes lead to the stress on education of one kind and set

limits to girls' participation in competitive courses associated with status, power and dominance, it is clearly necessary to look for factors outside the formal processes of education for the perpetuation of biases.

Footnotes

1. See for instance Cornelia Dimmit and J.A.B. Van Buitenen's (ed. and tr.) *Classical Hindu Mythology*, 1983 for readings from the Sanskrit Puranas which deal with gods and goddesses in various roles.
2. In 'The mythological film and its framework of meaning: Analysis of Jai Santoshi Ma', Veena Das (1980) discusses the runaway hit film and reasons for its popularity: she also discusses the Shakti and Sati role models and approbation for the obedient and chaste women.
3. In his 'The goddess Sitala and epidemic smallpox in Bengal' Ralph Nicholas (1981) discusses the reasons for the continued observance of Sitala *pooja*, though smallpox has been eradicated. He concludes that this is one occasion on which 'Bengalis have subordinated biology to sociology and transformed calamity to community' (p. 40). In a different genre of writing, namely the retelling of folk tales for a younger audience, Shanta Rameshwar Rao (1979) in her *The Legend of Manasa and Other Stories*, describes in graphic detail the malevolent powers of the snake goddess and reasons for her continued worship.
4. Michael Allen (1982) discusses some of these prevailing notions about Indian femininity in his 'The Hindu view of women'. See also Margaret Cormack (1961) and Sudhir Kakar, (1981) for descriptions of the socialisation patterns of Indian girls.
5. Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (1980) discusses in detail the Christian response to women who were different.
6. In their 'Bad blood in Bengal: Category and affect in the study of kinship, caste and marriage' Fruzzetti and Ostor (1983) discuss the Bengali Hindu theories of lineage purity. At a more general level, Nur Yalman's 'On the purity of women in the castes of Ceylon and Malabar', (1963), and Leela Dube's 'The seed and the field: Symbolism of human reproduction in India', (1978) deal with the role of the women in reproduction as well as the maintenance of the 'good name' of the family.
7. British sociologist Ann Oakley's studies of housework as an occupation have focussed on the division of labour within the household as a major cause of inequality between the sexes. See for instance her *Housewife* (1974) and *The Sociology of Housework* (1974). Clarice Stacy Stoll's *Female and Male: Socialisation, Social Roles and Social Structure* provides a good introduction to the supposed biological and psychological differences between men and women and what it has meant for society.
8. Ashis Nandy's insightful 'Woman versus womanliness in India: An essay in cultural and political psychology' (1980) describes male attitudes towards women, and the advantages in pressing for superiority in a culture which does not inherently assign certain qualities as either male or female.

9. In his influential *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, (1968: 13 and passim) J.H. Broomfield has dealt with the term *bhadralok* at some length. To him, they were the gentle folk, a distinct status group of the landed, professionals and government servants. Contemporary Indian historian Rajat Kanta Ray feels (1984: 30) that 'it is better to look on the *bhadralok* as constituting a respectable society rather than a single status group, which implies a misleading homogeneity. Ray's definition perhaps gives a more realistic view of the situation where the *bhadralok* way of life with its stress on education and correct forms of behaviour tried, among other things to be distinctive from that of the *chorolok*, the small people or manual workers, petty traders, shopkeepers and so on. Though this term supposedly encompassed both men and women from certain backgrounds, recently Borthwick (1984) has identified the *bhadramahilās* as the mothers, wives, daughters of this growing category. In keeping with recent feminist enquiry into the undiscovered lives of women, she succeeds extremely well in portraying the existence of the women of the *bhadralok*.

- From the middle of the nineteenth century, sections of the *bhadralok* became actively involved in the teaching of their womenfolk; soon, group teaching within a suitable home was recognised as a feasible alternative to formal school, and the Government of India started funding home tutors by the end of the century. Known as *atma* education, this form of learning soon gained popularity.
10. Literally translated it means 'friend of the weak': women were commonly regarded as physically and emotionally defenceless, and hence weak.
11. Translated to mean 'Arguments in favour of female education', this was the first in a series of booklets and tracts on women's education. It borrowed heavily from the work of Ram Mohan Roy (Murshid: 1983: 24).
12. Borthwick (1984) discusses Miss Akroyd's disenchantment on the basis of the Akroyd-Beveridge papers as well as some issues of the *Banabodhini Patrika*.
13. This is described by Kadambini's stepgranddaughter, Panyalata Chakravarty in her memories *Cheley Baylar Din Gali* (Childhood Days) (1956).
14. Some held that it was prejudice against women which led the conservative examiner to fail Kadambini. See Gangopadhyay, 1945: 88.
15. This was evident from Keshub Chandra Sen's general stand on women as well as expressed firmly in his views on education for women. See *Bothune College Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, p. 144.
16. Apart from the more radical *Abulabadhak*, *Banabodhini Patrika* and *Tattvobodhini Patrika* were the most important journals for women at that time.
17. Meredith Borthwick (1982) describes the lives of the women of the Tagore family in some detail. This is how Mary Carpenter described Jnanadanandini (see Borthwick 1982: 114). Surendranath and his wife's activities are also described in Chitra Deb's *Thakurbarir Andar Mahal* (1982) translated as *Within the Andar Mahal of the Tagores*.
18. View of Umes Chandra Haldar; see Sadler Commission Report, 1917-19, vol 13, 1920: 427.
19. Gandhi's view on women have been put forth in his *To The Women*, as well as in various articles in *Young India*.
20. Analysis based on a report in the *Patriot*, New Delhi, May 25, 1985.
21. Observations of some B.Ed. students of Jamia Millia Islamia, 1984-85.
22. See for instance Rajni Kumar's 'Secondary education for girls: The what and the

- how' (1982). Kumar is Principal of the leading Springdales School, Delhi.
23. Maithreya Krishna Raj has dealt with the status and commitment of women in science in some detail. See her 'Employment participation of university education of women in India and its implications', (1977), and again 'The status of women in science in India' (1988). Karuna Ahmad's 'Equity and women's higher education' (1979) deals with the problems encountered by middle class women. In his 'perspectives on women's education' (mimeo) Suresh Chandra Shukla discusses the carry-over of superior-subordinate relations at home to the place of work resulting in the crowding of women in low status occupations.
 24. Reported in the *Times Educational Supplement*, London June 3, 1983.

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On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India

LEELA DUBE

I

The process of socialisation of girls in the patrilineal, patrilocal milieu of Indian society has received inadequate attention from social scientists. The many subtleties and complexities of the process have been missed out. What does it mean to be a girl? At what age does a girl become conscious of the constraints under which she will have to live, of the differential value accorded to male and female children, and of the justifications behind it? When and how does she learn the content of roles appropriate to her? What are the mechanisms through which women acquire the cultural ideas and values that shape their images of themselves, and inform the visions they have of the future? How do they acquire sensitivity towards the contradictions in values and norms presented to them and towards the limits within which they have to function necessitating the adoption of particular strategies? In other words, how are women produced as gendered subjects?

This paper¹ goes a part of the way in answering some of these questions. I do this by focussing on aspects of the process of socialisation of Hindu girls through rituals and ceremonies, the use of language, and practices within and in relation to the family.² It should be kept in mind that gender differences that are culturally produced are, almost invariably, interpreted as being rooted in biology, as part of 'the natural order of things'.³

Gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships. To understand this process it is necessary to keep in mind the implications of the family structure and the wider context of kinship in which it is embedded. There are two major aspects of the implications of family structure. A family structure, at a given point of time, is not just a function of demography, it also reflects the rules of recruitment and marital residence and the normative and actual patterns of rearrangement of the family in the process of the

replacement of the old generation by the new. Second, there is something beyond the actual composition of a family unit—its 'configuration of role relationships' and 'specific' and 'objective' contribution of members to the business of living—that goes into the apportionment of family resources, gender-based and age-based division of work, and the conceptions of, and training for, future roles of male and female children.

Kinship is not merely a moral code but provides the organising principles which govern the recruitment to and placement of individuals in social groups, formation of the family and household, residence at marriage, resource distribution including inheritance, and obligations and responsibilities in the business of living of individual members of the group. The notion of entitlement—to membership in a family, to food and nutrition, to health care, to education, to authority and decision-making—cannot be understood and a proper analysis of family ideology is impossible unless we take note of these aspects. Many of them may not be clearly spelt out; it is necessary, therefore, to examine the assumptions underlying the ideas and behaviour of the people. Their close relationship with religion as it is lived and practised by the people does not need emphasis. The specificity to a kinship system is crucial for understanding the process of socialisation.⁴

Finally, family structure and patterns of kinship are tied to the institution of caste. In the caste system the fact that membership of discrete and distinct groups is defined by birth entails a concern with boundary maintenance through regulation of marriage and sexual relations. Although group placement in most of Hindu India is governed by the principle of patrilineal descent, in the attribution of caste status to the child the caste of the mother is not irrelevant. The onus of boundary maintenance falls on women because of their role in biological reproduction. Caste, then, imparts a special character to the process of growing up female in Indian society.

II

The recognition of the special value accorded to male children comes early. While surrounded by affectionate and appreciative parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, a little girl of three or four may hear a maid-servant exclaim: 'Oh what a sweet child! How wonderful it would have been if this was a boy!'⁵ The happiness expressed all around at the birth of a son and the way the parents and the close

relatives of the new born are congratulated can hardly escape the attention of little girls. The desirability of having sons and undesirability of having more daughters is made explicit, often by outsiders: 'Four daughters? Each one will take ten thousand rupees and walk out of the house. Bringing up a daughter is like pouring water in sand.' Parents who have only daughters are pitied. Their future is bleak for they will have no support or succour in old age. A Telugu expression conveys this effectively: 'Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard.'⁶

Elders bless young girls and women by wishing that they have a large number of sons (and just one daughter). The notion of the greater value of sons is further strengthened by the existence, with regional variations, of special worships and *vratas* (fasts and observances) that are performed by women to have sons and to ensure a long life for sons already born. A son born after a daughter is often described as the fruit of penance and vows undertaken by the mother. A male child is so valuable that the sister after whom it is born comes in for special praise as auspicious and auguring good fortune. She is honoured in various ways. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, a lump of jaggery is broken on her back. She has the distinction of bringing in good luck in the form of a brother, a son to continue the family line.

Girls grow up with a notion of their temporary membership within the natal home. Rituals provide one of the important means through which girls come to realise the inevitability of their transfer from the natal home to that of the husband. Sucheta Mazumdar, talking about the socialisation of Hindu middle-class Bengali women, says:

... Durga *pūja* does carry one important message for young girls. This *pūja* is supposedly in celebration of the goddess's return to her natal home. The fact that it lasts for five days in the whole year forcefully suggests to the girl that, once married, she too cannot expect to visit her family very often (Mazumdar, 1981 : 34).

Durga *pūja* has a parallel in Karnataka, Gauri *pūja*. Gauri *pūja* is celebrated about a month before the Durga *pūja*, commemorates Gauri's visit to her natal home. The songs sung by women describe how Gauri entreats Shiva to send her home and Shiva comes out with a series of arguments which spell out the duties of an ideal housewife and mother. An interesting argument that Shiva puts forward is that Ganesha is young, he is used to comforts and luxuries in their house,

Gauri's parents are poor; if Ganesha makes demands which her parents cannot fulfil the child will be miserable. It would also be an embarrassment for her parents. Gauri persists in her request entreating that she may be allowed to go at least for three days which Shiva finally permits. Just as Durga comes with her four children, Gauri is followed by Ganesha, her younger son. The visit lasts for three to five days and is celebrated with great fanfare.

Then comes the hour of farewell. The atmosphere is heavy. Young girls are often moved to tears just as they are at the weddings of their female relatives and friends when the transfer of the bride from the natal family to the husband and his family is dramatised through rituals and ceremonies. The Gauri *pūja* conveys to young girls the truth that they too will have to leave the mother's home. It also underscores a woman's lack of autonomy with respect to her visits to the natal home. In fact, in the process of socialisation of girls there is considerable emphasis on the possible need to bow before the wishes of the husband and his family, and, in general, on submissiveness and obedience, as feminine ideals.⁸

The change in the daughter's relationship with her natal home after marriage forms the content of many other rituals. In Bengali weddings, before leaving her natal home with the bridegroom, the bride stands with her back towards the house and throws a handful of rice over her shoulder. This signifies that she has returned the rice that she consumed so far and has absolved herself of the debt to the natal family.⁹ In an Oriya wedding, the bride pours rice into the *pallu* (end of the sari) of her mother. This gives rise to sighs, mutterings, wailing and weeping all around that now that she has returned the rice she had consumed, the daughter's relationship with her natal home is broken for ever.¹⁰

The songs sung in the Hindi belt at the time of sending off the bride express feelings of sorrow and resentment of the bride:

O father you brought my brother up to be happy,
You brought me up for shedding tears,
O father, you have brought your son up to give him your house,
And you have left a cage for me.¹¹

The entire complex of wedding rituals which dramatise the transfer of the bride from one family to another is, in fact, a poignant experience and a revelation to girls in their childhood. Many girls vividly remember the first experience of the wedding of a girl in the

family/kin group. This is not surprising since the message of the inescapability of marriage and of separation from the parents as a necessary consequence of marriage is first put across through lullabies and nursery rhymes:

Rock-a-bye baby, combs in your pretty hair,
The bridegroom will come soon and take you away
The drums beat loudly
The shehnai is playing softly
A stranger's son has come to fetch me
Come my playmates, come with our toys
Let us play, for I shall never play again
When I go off to the stranger's house.¹²

A necessary corollary of the sense of inescapability of marriage is the feeling of uncertainty about moving to a harsh environment. This is expressed in terms of a contrast between the natal home and the mother-in-law's house:

I went inside the house and the maid-servant
scolded me
Fearing the maid-servant, I went to my room
And my sister-in-law abused me
Fearing my sister-in-law, I went to the
kitchen to cook
And my mother-in-law threatened me;
Please do not be angry, mother-in-law, I am
like a daughter to you
If you drive me out, wherever shall I go?

Similarly, songs of Bhulabai, a special collective worship of the Mother Goddess observed for a determinate number of days by little girls in Maharashtra and the songs of Gangaur in Gujarat and Rajasthan invariably speak of the contrast between the husband's home and the natal home. An oft-repeated stanza in the songs of Bhulabai goes as follows:

The natal home is beautiful; There we can play
to our heart's content
The in-law's place is cruel
It stifles and kills.¹³

The construction of femininity is a continuous, complex, and

occasionally contradictory process. The differential value of sons and daughters and the unshakable association between marriage and departure from the natal home is complemented by the notion of the intrinsic purity of pre-pubertal girls. This quality of purity is given special recognition in several rituals. In the marriage ceremony of certain brahmin groups and a few other communities in Karnataka a little girl carries an auspicious pot of water decorated with betel or mango leaves on her head and walks in front of the bride. She is believed to ward off evil. In fact, a little girl carrying a pot of water decorated with leaves and often covered with a coconut is a necessary feature of marriage ceremonies and other rituals among many caste groups in South India and Maharashtra. Among the brahmins of Andhra Pradesh such a girl has to accompany the bridegroom. In Maharashtra, when a Maratha bridegroom is going in a procession to the wedding pandal, a little girl sits behind him on horseback and carries a small pot of water on her head. A pre-pubertal girl is looked upon as a manifestation of Devi or the Mother Goddess and is believed to be an antidote to evil spirits and the evil eye.

In parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, at the name-giving ceremony of an infant, a little girl is chosen to act as the mother of an infant which is represented by a stone, usually an elliptical grinding stone. She sits near the mother of the new-born on a decorated seat. The stone representing an infant is wrapped in a new cloth, just as the human baby is in new clothes, and it may also be adorned with an ornament. The little girl and the stone infant go through the various rituals before the mother and the new-born do so; this is to ward off evil. In some communities a little girl also plays the role of a companion to a pubertal girl during the period of seclusion on her first menstruation.

The custom of worshipping and feeding virgin girls (*kanya*) on special occasions is widespread in India. The eighth day of the festival of nine nights (*nava ratri*) is one such special occasion. On this occasion in Bengal, one girl is chosen as representing the Mother Goddess. She is decorated in finery and is worshipped. The offerings made to her are consumed by others as *prasad*. Two points emerge: First, in the instances given above the roles or forms assigned to little girls are essentially feminine ones¹⁴ and help in developing their consciousness of femininity. Second, the purity and the consequent privileged status of a girl in the pre-pubertal phase contrasts sharply with puberty and post-pubertal status and thus define the later phase

with tremendous clarity.

III

The onset of puberty introduces dramatic changes in the life of a girl. In many Indian languages menstruation is likened to the process of flowering or blossoming—the necessary stage before fruit can appear—and expressions such as 'her body is full', 'it is ripe', and 'it is ready' are common. References to 'full-grown body', becoming a 'woman', becoming 'big', becoming 'mature' and 'knowledgeable' all express the fact of a girl's changed status.

In South India this change in status is expressed through rituals and ceremonies.¹⁵ Some castes in Maharashtra and Orissa also share the essential features of puberty rituals although they often conduct them on a fairly modest scale. The common features of the celebration of the onset of puberty are: confinement or seclusion of the girl for a certain number of days,¹⁶ *arti* (waving of lighted lamps) to signify the auspiciousness of the occasion and to ward off evil to which a menstruating girl is believed to be especially vulnerable, serving her special food, informing the relatives and friends, giving the girl a ritual bath, presenting her with new clothes and accessories of beautification such as flowers, jewellery and bangles, and a feast which also serves the purpose of announcement of the event.

In Karnataka, at her first menstruation a girl is fed with dry coconut, milk, ghee, certain fruits, a mixture of jaggery and sesame seeds, and meat and chicken soups among meat-eating groups. It is customary for the relatives, particularly the affinal relatives, to bring gifts. In Andhra Pradesh jaggery and sesame seeds are ceremonially pounded by women, often to the accompaniment of songs; small balls made out of this mixture are given to the menstruating girl and are distributed among women and girls. There is also an exchange of turmeric powder and *kumkum* among married women which is common feature of most auspicious occasions. Among the Vokkaligas of Mysore the period of confinement lasts for sixteen days at the end of which there is a celebration. The girl has to be kept from attending school or going out.

The fact of a girl's maturity and her full grown body is communicated symbolically through certain gifts. In Andhra Pradesh pre-pubertal girls customarily wear a long skirt and a blouse. An important component of the puberty ceremony is the

ritual of wearing a half-sari gifted by the maternal uncle. A half-sari is much shorter than a full-length sari and hence more easily managed by a young girl. However, it serves the main function of a sari: to provide an outer cover for the upper portion of her body. The ritual of wearing a half-sari, therefore, symbolises the changed status of the pubertal girl.¹⁷ In Marathi, attaining maturity is euphemistically expressed as 'she has now acquired a "*padar*"': *padar* is the upper end of the sari which is used to cover the chest and is taken over the shoulder and allowed to hang on the other side. Among the Nattari Nadar, as reported by Pauline Kolenda, a maternal uncle brings a sari for the niece when she reaches puberty. The implications of a full grown body will be discussed a little later.

It is in the light of her emergent sexuality and prospective motherhood that the special diet for the pubertal girl needs to be understood. Apart from eating nourishing food, the girl has to avoid 'cold' foods and particularly 'hot' foods. The regulations may continue from a few days to a few months to one or two years after the first menstruation. Indigenous understanding of the qualities of different kinds of food is at the back of these restrictions and recommendations. They are meant to make up for the loss of blood, regularise the menstrual cycle and flow, strengthen the reproductive organs, and in general, to contribute towards future fertility, to make the process of child-bearing smooth, and to restrain the girl's sexuality. Puberty celebrations and the special diet regulations seem to express the value of restrained and controlled sexuality and of motherhood.¹⁸

Although the celebration and the ingredients of the special diet may vary across regions and caste groups, the message is clear: the girl is now equipped to become a mother and this is a matter of rejoicing, for the main purpose of the female body is to reproduce. The ceremonial wearing of green bangles by pubertal girls among the Marathas in Maharashtra makes this clear since green is the colour of fertility and signifies auspiciousness. The girl has, moreover, reached marriageable age and those people (particularly affines) who are likely to be interested in a marital alliance should know about this fact.

Does this emphasis on fertility and marriage and special attention which a girl receives when she reaches puberty increase her sense of self-worth? Or does it give her a feeling of being trapped and having lost her freedom? We cannot be certain. What is clear, however, is

that the special value accorded to fertility and marriage also has its other side, the apprehension of barrenness and of the failure to get married.¹⁹

In most of North India the first menstruation is not marked by any rituals.²⁰ The event is taken care of by the mother and the female relatives unobtrusively and within the home. The observances relating to menstrual pollution are introduced quietly, often with an attempt that children and males in the family and outsiders should not notice them. A menstruating girl is asked not to eat spicy food, pickles and curds, and in general to avoid what are considered very 'cold' or very 'hot' foods. She is advised not to stand in cold water for too long or to walk around with wet feet. Jumping, playing rough games and riding a bicycle are considered harmful during menstruation. All these are related to the care which needs to be taken of the girl's reproductive organs and of the regularity of the menstrual period and flow.

But in both North and South India the onset of puberty is a definite point of departure in the life of a girl. She has now crossed the threshold of childhood and entered the most critical stage of life when her body has acquired a capacity to reproduce but she has no authority to do so. During the period between puberty and marriage a woman's vulnerability is at its peak. The post-pubertal phase then is characterised by restrictions on movements and on interaction with males and by the imposition of special safeguards. I shall look into these later. My point here is that the management of a girl's sexuality is tied to her future as a wife and mother. Motherhood is the highest achievement in a woman's life. Marriage is the gateway to motherhood. Everything else is secondary to these two goals.²¹

IV

Preoccupation with the desirability of marriage is expressed through a number of practices. Blessings and *trata*s for getting a husband like Shiva or Vishnu convey the message forcefully. The purpose of the two popular festivals, specially meant for little girls, Bhulabai in parts of Maharashtra and Gangaaur in parts of Gujarat, which are characterised by collective worship, singing and playing, is to obtain a good husband. There are parallels in collective and individual worships and fasts in other regions (for Bengal see Mazumdar, 1981); the commemoration of the penance performed by Parvati for

obtaining Shiva as a husband through a fast and *pūja* is very widespread. In Karnataka when the bride worships Gauri and distributes *prasād*, young unmarried girls are advised to come forward and get a share so that they too become fortunate like the bride and soon get married. In Andhra Pradesh, it is believed that whoever acts as the bride's companion during the wedding ceremony while she is going through the rituals will soon get married. The same idea informs the practice of sharing the bride's plate and absorbing some of her good luck.

It is impossible for young girls to escape the value of the married state. Marriage signifies good fortune and a state of bliss. The terms for a married woman whose husband is alive are *saubhagya* or *suhagan* which means the fortunate one, and *sumangali* which means the auspicious one.²² On all kinds of ceremonial occasions and rituals participation of these 'fortunate' and 'auspicious' women is essential. Thus it is only a married woman with a living husband who can participate in digging the earth and carrying it to the marriage pandal, spreading oil and turmeric paste on the body of the bride or the bridegroom, and performing an *arti* on these auspicious occasions. The instances are innumerable.²³

This *saubhagya*—good fortune—or auspiciousness has to be carefully nurtured. There are a series of *vrātas* to be observed by married women for the long life and prosperity of the husband and the accompanying narratives have clear messages. Feeding a 'fortunate' married woman on special occasions increases one's good fortune; so does the distribution and exchange of various accessories symbolising the good fortune of the married state such as turmeric powder and *kumkum*, glass bangles, fruits, flowers, comb, and mirror. Although there are considerable regional variations the core appears to be the same.

The message of the value of the married state is also transmitted in negative terms. If a married woman is auspicious, a widow is inauspicious and the significata of widowhood have to be avoided. If bangles break it is not said that they have broken, but that 'they have increased' or 'they have become many'. So also with the *mangalsutra*, a necklace of black beads, or *tali*, a special gold chain, which are the symbols of married state, and which are removed at widowhood. Similarly, in language, *kumkum* does not get rubbed off a married woman's forehead; it 'increases in size'. The same care in language is taken in regard to the vermilion in the parting of the hair—a mark

which signifies the married state of a woman. These expressions are a part of various Indian languages.²⁴

All over India, depending on the kind of attire that is accepted for widows, there are rules regarding what a married woman should not wear. In parts of South India there are rules which say that a married woman should not sleep at night on an empty stomach, without eating at least a little bit of rice, particularly on certain auspicious days, for such practices are associated with widowhood. And even though the practice of shaving off the hair of widows has almost died, there is still an association of scissors and razors with widowhood. In many houses girls are discouraged from letting scissors, blades or any sharp instrument touch their hair. There still exist considerable reservations about girls trimming their hair in order to make the ends even. Many women in South India are very particular about wearing flowers in their hair: flowers signify an auspicious state and a right to beauty which a widow is denied.²⁵ The other opposition which serves to define the value of the married state, particularly for unmarried post-pubertal girls, is the image of the prostitute. The ways of the fallen, wanton, provocative, immoral woman must be avoided. This takes us into the question of the management of a girl's sexuality.

V

A girl is, we have seen, at her most vulnerable between the onset of puberty and marriage. Marriage has to be carefully controlled in a caste society concerned with the maintenance of boundaries.²⁶ The phenomenon of boundary maintenance is a crucial element in the definition of the cultural apprehension of the vulnerability of young girls and the emphasis on their purity and restraint in behaviour. This is expressed in the construction of 'legitimate' and 'proper' modes of speech, demeanour and behaviour for young girls and in the organisation of their space and time.²⁷

Considerable importance is attached to the way a girl carries herself, the way she sits, stands and talks, and interacts with others. A girl should walk with soft steps; so soft that they are barely audible to others. Taking long strides denotes masculinity. Girls are often rebuked for jumping, running, rushing to a place and hopping. These movements are considered a part of masculine behaviour, unbecoming to a female; however, the logic of the management of a

girl's sexuality also defines them as unfeminine; they can bring the contours of the body into greater prominence and attract people's attention. A girl has to be careful about her posture. She should not sit cross-legged or with her legs wide apart. Keeping one's knees close together while sitting, standing, or sleeping is 'decent'; and indicates a sense of shame and modesty. 'Don't stand like a man' is a common rebuke to make a girl aware of the demands of femininity.

Girls are encouraged to speak softly, and to avoid abrasive—'male'—language. Boys, of course, learn all kinds of abuses; however, even the milder abuses used by women, are frowned upon if used by young girls. A girl must demonstrate her capacity for self-restraint: talking and laughing loudly is disapproved of; a girl should not be argumentative. In Andhra Pradesh, a loud-mouthed girl may receive the epithet of 'Mari' which refers to the malevolent goddess who brings pests and destruction. Sucheta Mazumdar's statement that being soft-spoken and demure qualifies a Bengali girl for a description of her being like Lakshmi while a loud and noisy girl is rebuked as Alokhi (the opposite of Lakshmi) seems to capture a common experience for girls. The actual epithets, however, vary.

To establish her feminine identity, a young girl should avoid masculine demeanour and behaviour. This identity, however, demands that she should be circumspect with men. A girl who has come of age has to be protected not only from men but also from herself.²⁸ She has to be carefully guarded against even a remote resemblance to a woman of loose character, a woman of the street, a prostitute, someone who uses her charms to attract men. For a post-pubertal girl whistling is not merely being tomboyish; it signifies amorous inclination. This is also true of the jingling of bangles. Smiling without purpose, and glancing 'furtively', looking through the corners of one's eyes do not become a 'well-bred' girl. Shyness and modesty are approved of and considered as 'natural' feminine qualities.²⁹ In North India the association of a curved posture with a dancing girl is so strong that even an unconscious act on the part of a girl of leaning against a wall or a pillar brings forth rebuke from elders. Chewing betels makes the lips red, loose unplaited hair speak of abandon; these are sources of attraction. In many parts of India girls were traditionally forbidden to look into a mirror or to comb their hair after sunset since these acts were associated with a prostitute getting ready for her customers. These practices still continue in many families.³⁰ Restrictions on the

wearing of bright and gaudy clothes by unmarried girls are also rooted in similar associations. A girl standing in the doorway of the house, particularly at dusk, may be rebuked even by brothers with a mention of the prostitute.³¹

Prescriptions regarding the ways in which a girl should act and behave that we have discussed are, it should be clear, set out in the context of specific notions of space and time. The injunctions about physical segregation and control of contact with males make certain demands on a girl outside her home: with downcast eyes, silent and unobtrusive movements, and her body almost shrinking, a girl is expected to create a separate space for herself in places full of strangers. More often, however, a girl prefers to move with other girls in a group:

... we boys used the street for so many different things—as a place to stand around watching, to run around and play, try out the manoeuvrability of our bikes. Not so for girls. As we noticed all the time, for girls the street was simply a means to get straight home from school. And even for this limited use of the street they always went in clusters, perhaps because behind their purposeful demeanour they carried the worst fears of being assaulted³² (Krishna Kumar, 1986 : 22).

It is not only molestation but also the fear of being maligned as a girl of bad character which a girl tries to avoid in following a strategy that Johanna Lessinger (1985), describing the activities of women petty traders in Madras, has called public chaperoning.

If the space outside the house has to be negotiated in determinate ways by girls, this is also true of spatial divisions within the house. Pre-pubertal girls can generally play with both boys and other girls on streets and in parks, courtyards and other open spaces. With the onset of puberty the compulsions of safeguard on female modesty push her into the interior of the house which is the secluded 'private' domain of the family. There are similar restrictions that are defined by the dimension of time. There is a certain familiarity which girls have with 'Return before it gets dark' and 'Who is going with you?' These constraints of space and time create problems for middle class girls in terms of choice of schools/colleges and courses—coeducation and staying out till late which certain courses demand are frowned upon—and consequently, in their choice of careers.³³

I have touched upon only a few issues in the way the organisation of

space and time for a girl, which reinforce each other, are implicated in the management of her sexuality. It would be interesting to explore these questions further keeping in mind the variations across caste, class and social groups.

VI

I turn now to another aspect of the process of socialisation: training for feminine tasks.³⁴ It is, of course, difficult to speak of a single pattern of gender-based division of work since it is characterised by considerable diversity across regions and social groups. At the same time, work around the kitchen, menial and dirty household work and childcare generally fall in the feminine sphere. The notions of appropriateness or inappropriateness of particular kinds of work for adult females and males get reflected, if not replicated, in the work assigned to girls and boys. The distinction between feminine work and masculine work comes early in childhood and becomes sharper as the child grows up.³⁵

The naturalness of the work supposed to be appropriate for girls is conveyed effectively, but without generating a feeling of discrimination to little girls by encouraging them in various games which involve 'dolls', 'household', 'kitchen-work', 'marriage', 'baby', and 'visiting neighbours'. Beginning with assistance in cooking and other kitchen-work, serving of food, caring for younger siblings, preparing for the worship of family deities, and looking after the aged, girls learn to take over some of the responsibilities themselves. Washing clothes is a feminine task to be shared by the girls; where men wash their own clothes, children's clothes are still left to women and girls. Sweeping and mopping the floor is women's work. According to my informants in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh it is, in fact, considered the height of impropriety if the broom touches any male of the family.³⁶

The point which needs emphasis, then, is the naturalness which imbues the gender-based division of work. This is expressed in many ways. A girl who does not like 'feminine' tasks is reminded that if she thinks that she can become a male, she is mistaken. She is told that she may as well learn to do the work assigned to her, for, having been born a female, how can she escape it? A boy who likes to work in and around the kitchen and is interested in doing what are considered as feminine tasks—for instance, embroidery or drawing designs on the floor—becomes the target for derision and teasing. The most

common terms used for such a boy describe him as a womanish male, one who is neither male nor female, effeminate, unmanly, and even impotent.

An important component of this natural division of work is the notion of a sense of service (*sewa*) as the necessary quality for girls. I shall examine this notion as part of the training of girls through the ideas, values, and practices associated with food.

A necessary feature of the organisation of the serving and distribution of food within the household is that the left-overs should be eaten by female and not by male members of the family. Little girls have to learn this: an expression of resentment on their part may bring in concessions but often with a remark that a capacity to adjust is of prime importance for girls. If a girl continues to cry and shout for food because she is hungry she is considered fussy and is teased about her lack of self-restraint. In many middle class houses girls are instructed to take care that the rice at the bottom of the pan is not served to a male member of the family.⁵⁷

Girls should learn to bear pain and deprivation, to eat anything that is given to them and to acquire the quality of self-denial. This is a part of the training for reality that they are likely to confront in the house of the mother-in-law.

The notions of tolerance and self-restraint are also rooted in a consciously cultivated feminine role which is embedded in and legitimised by cultural ideology. The cooking, serving and distribution of food are important constituents of a prestigious and valued role for Hindu women. This role contributes to women's self-esteem, offers them a genuine sense of fulfilment, and is central to the definition of many feminine kinship roles. The ideal of Annapurna, the unfailing supplier of food, is accepted across different regions of India. This ideal which has an aesthetic appeal and which sets out privation and sacrifice as defining characteristics of feminine moral character generates a set of dispositions where a woman has to think of others before herself and ought not to care about what is being left for herself. Finally, practices relating to food are associated with notions of the male and female body. Tall and hefty boys are a matter of pride for the family; special care is taken to give boys such food as would make them strong. On the contrary it is said that a girl grows like a refuse heap. It is best, therefore, if her intake of food is controlled, particularly just before and after the onset of puberty. Girls should look younger than their age: a girl with a developed

body raises questions about containment of her sexuality and reminds people that marriage is imminent for her. It is believed that she is also more likely to become a victim of sexual aggression. Women's concern that girls should internalise proper attitudes and modes of behaviour as a part of their training to become women and the different notions regarding requirements of male and female bodies often combine to make a significant difference in nutrition for males and females.³⁸

The structuring of women as gendered subjects through Hindu rituals and practices is fundamentally implicated in the constitution and reproduction of a social system characterised by the subordination of women. To state this, however, is not to argue that women are passive, unquestioning victims of these practices and the representation of these practices. It is to suggest that Hindu rituals and practices set certain limits in terms of the dispositions they inculcate among women and the different kinship roles with varying status which they assign to them within the family. The rituals and practices and the social system are, moreover, imbued with a certain givenness and appear as a part of the natural order of things. It is within these limits that women question their subordination, express resentment, use manipulative strategies, often against other women in the family, carve out a living space and collude in their own oppression.³⁹ All this is informed by, what we can call after Gramsci, a contradictory consciousness.⁴⁰

Footnotes

1. Material for this paper has come from a variety of sources. I have drawn upon the personal experiences of a number of people from various regions of the country—their observations, accounts of rituals and festivals, and counter-questions have helped me shape this paper. Very often these people also acted as mediators and interpreters between other informants and me. I shall acknowledge here, among many others, Ahalya, Annapurna, M.K. Chander, Suzanne Daniel, Suresh Patil, Rati Rao, D. Vijaya, and Robert Zaedenbos from Mysore; Abhilasha Tiwari and Pramila Kumar from Bhopal; Pratima Sant from Nagpur; Bhoies and Ramanamma from Pune; V. Mohan Kumar from Trivandrum; and Indrani Chatterjee, Sujata Patel, Tanika Sarkar, and Sanjay Sharma from Delhi. Yashodhara Misra, a sensitive story writer in Orissa, generously allowed me to borrow some proverbs and sayings used by her in her stories and in a paper

presented at the Asian Regional Conference on Women and the Household held at New Delhi in January 1985.

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2. I have restricted my paper to focus on the socialisation of Hindu girls for two reasons: the first-hand material on rituals and linguistic expressions, customs and practices which I could gather for the paper came mostly from Hindu informants or about Hindu girls; and my own upbringing in a Hindu family formed a solid base for collecting information and for understanding and interpreting it.

The material used in this paper comes from various regions of India. While producing instances, I have, in the anthropological tradition, specified the region to which, and often the group to whom the ritual/customs/practice relates. However, the spread of these rituals, customs, and practices is wider in terms of geographical and social space; the generalisations and inferences regarding basic motivations and perceptions drawn from them have much wider applicability.

3. To give one relevant example, in patrilineal India the commonly-held idea regarding the roles of father and mother in procreation is that man provides the seed—the essence—while the woman provides the field which receives the seed and nourishes it. A child shares the father's blood. Thus, while the natal group emphasises woman's transferability or her nonfunctional nature from the point of view of perpetuation of the group and continuity of the family, the husband's group emphasises her instrumentality, her place as a receptacle, a vehicle for the perpetuation of the group. This social arrangement in which men and women have unequal rights, positions, and roles, both as brother and sister and as husband and wife, is perceived as corresponding to the arrangement of nature which assigns unequal roles to the two sexes in procreation. For an elaboration of the implications of this symbolism of biological reproduction for gender relations within the family and household, see Leela Dube, 1986.
4. This is, of course, not to deny the need to examine the various interlinkages between the individual household and the wider structures and processes of society; the recognition of the importance of the specificity of kinship is crucial for such examination.
5. This is an incident narrated to me by M.K. Chander of the Department of English at the University of Mysore. The little girl in question was the second daughter of parents who were hoping for a son.
6. I am not arguing that a girl is given a feeling of being unwanted all the time. In many regions there are some special days on which daughters of the family are honoured. There is considerable interest in a daughter's clothes, ornaments, and accomplishments. A saying in Marathi that 'the father of a girl will never remain hungry' expresses a general feeling of usefulness of a daughter for housework. Many parents are proud of their daughters' achievements at schools and colleges. The message that gets communicated is, however, invariably that of the immutability of the social system and that a daughter's stay in her parental home

is short-lived. Moreover, not only is there something unnatural about a delay in or absence of marriage, but such a situation is seen to be full of danger and risk to the reputation of the family. An Oriya proverb equates a daughter with *ghiv*; both are valuable but both begin to stink if not disposed of in time. As informed by Ramamurthy of the Department of English at the University of Mysore, an expression in Telugu, very often repeated by women in the context of the worry about marrying a girl at the appropriate time, describes a post-pubertal daughter as a boil on the chest. At the premature death of her husband a woman is consoled that very soon her sons will grow up and look after her. One never hears this being said about daughters. On the contrary they are looked upon as a liability and the mother is consoled that god is great and these girls too would be married off well.

Related to this contrast between the expectations from sons and daughters is the commonly observed fact that in middle class families with meagre resources daughters are sent to relatively inexpensive regional language schools whereas boys are educated in more expensive English medium schools. In people's perception, education of a daughter is essentially for her own benefit; it is not an investment so far as the natal family is concerned.

7. I owe the description of Gauri *pūja* to discussions with D. Vijaya, a feminist scholar and a writer in Kannada, who teaches at the Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore.
8. Gauri *pūja* is celebrated also in parts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Some other festivals in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra also contain the idea of the coming home of a goddess or goddesses; around the same time as Gauri *pūja* many families celebrate the coming home of two Devis, known as elder and younger Mahalakshmis (who are believed to be sisters) along with their children. The festival lasts for three days: the first day is for *sthāpana* or installation of the goddess, the second day for the *pūja* and the feast, and the third day for a send-off. It is customary to invite married daughters of the family, real and classificatory, to the feast in honour of the Mahalakshmis. A popular festival of married women in Maharashtra in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) celebrates the coming home of Gauri: women invite each other to view the well-decorated idol which is surrounded by different kinds of offerings. The women also exchange or distribute *sashlagachinka* or symbols of the married state which indicate good fortune and auspiciousness. In all these festivals the coming of daughters to the natal home is a happy event but always of brief duration.
9. Another custom, also from Bengal, which is a variation of the 'returning of the rice' theme seems to express a feeling of helplessness and worthlessness on the part of a daughter. The morning after the wedding when the bride is preparing to leave the house she comes to her father with a handful of dust and says three times 'I have taken from you in handfuls of gold. I am giving back in handfuls of dust.' A sense of rupture with the natal home is also conveyed through a custom among the Punjabis reported by Karuna Chanana. While the act is almost the same as that of throwing of grains of rice in Bengal, the meaning is different: it expresses the wish of the daughter before she leaves for her husband's house that her natal home should prosper.
10. The idea of the accident of birth and the contrasting fortunes of daughter and son is a common theme in wailings at the 'send-off' of a bride from her natal home and also in subsequent visits and departures of a married daughter. In parts of Central

India, on the eve of the ceremonial departure of a daughter after the wedding, a mother wails: 'My child, had you been a son you would have lived with us and ploughed the field and looked after us. I would have served you hot rice. But now you are being sent out of the house like a corpse.'

11. Looking upon the daughter as a temporary member of the family and the son as a permanent member has its consequences: often girls themselves are keen to collect their own dowry without much consideration for the plight of the parents and the future of younger siblings. If they have no right of membership in the natal family, they also have no obligation to contribute towards its maintenance. Their main concern is to establish themselves in the new family and acquire a status there. They look upon dowry as a necessary contribution towards this process. An Oriya proverb brings out the lack of convergence between the interests of the daughter and the mother: 'Mother and daughter go into the temple, each to pray for her own happiness': just as a daughter's well-being is not essential for her mother's happiness, the daughter too need not pray for her mother, for her own happiness is not dependent on her natal family's well-being. On the other hand, since childhood a boy is depicted as the future provider, the light of the lineage, the one who would alter the family's fortunes. He is induced to do well in life for his own sake as well as for the sake of the family. This contributes to feelings of tension and insecurity and is one of the reasons why young men find it difficult to take a stand against dowry which is the easiest way to improve one's life style overnight.
12. This and the following song are both from Bengal. Meenakshi Mukherjee suggested that a look at lullabies and nursery rhymes would be useful for understanding what goes into the socialisation of girls. These two songs were given to me by Meenakshi Mukherjee and Tanika Sarkar. I thank them.
13. In regions like Maharashtra where the bridegroom's female kin also accompany the *buraat*, there are special ceremonies in which the bride is handed over to the bridegroom's mother who is entreated through songs to treat the bride like her own daughter. The rituals and ceremonies held at the bridegroom's place signify the process of incorporation of the bride into the bridegroom's family. These ceremonies and rituals do not, however, remove feelings of uncertainty and insecurity about the future.

It would be interesting to look further at the lullabies and nursery rhymes. In Bengal, as in many other parts of India, such lullabies and nursery rhymes are very common and cut across the rural-urban divide and, often, across class and social group. Each song has many renderings in different dialects. There are songs meant for girls alone—for instance, the one quoted in the text, songs for both boys and girls, and songs that are meant for boys alone:

Do not cry my beautiful baby
 I shall bring a wife for you
 Her skin will be like gold
 Her lips will be nipples of red
 I shall fill huge drums with ghee
 I shall cook very fine rice
 My son will eat his fill
 His wife will lick his empty plate.

It is obvious that these songs convey the same message to the girls who hear them:

that of their transferability and the possibility of an unfriendly environment which they will have to face in future.

A very effective source of conveying these ideas is everyday language. Take, for instance, the following questions which form part of the conversation among elders: 'In which family have you given your daughter?' or, as in Oriya, 'Where have you sent your daughter to toil' or 'Into which family have you married your daughter?' These expressions imply a lack of autonomy and transferability or transference of a female child as 'givens' of the social reality.

14. The rituals show that a pre-pubertal girl is never visualised as someone who can engage in the pursuit of knowledge or in the learning of a professional craft. This contrasts with the situation regarding boys. Among many brahmin groups all over India and among some upper castes, the beginning of the process of learning is ritualised for a male child. It is known variously as *aksharabhyasa*, *vidyabhyasa*, and *vidyarambha*. Generally the father or guru makes the little boy write the first alphabet with his index finger on specially spread out rice grains or earth, or on a special slate with a bamboo pen. The first word to be written is generally 'Om' (believed to be the first sound uttered at the beginning of creation) or an ode to Sri Ganesha, the god who removes obstacles. Among occupational groups a little boy may be ceremoniously initiated into the craft of the family and the community.
15. My account of puberty rituals and special dietary prescriptions and restrictions for pubertal girls is based on observation and informal interviewing. I have benefitted greatly from recent articles on puberty rituals by Pauline Kolenda (1984), Deborah Winslow (1980) and Denis McGilvray (1982). It was a conscious decision on my part to avoid going back to earlier accounts of puberty rituals prepared by anthropologists and administrators and published in volumes on tribes and castes and in monographs and journals. I was keen to know the situation which exists now. Information was collected for different groups of Brahmins, Vokkaligas, Naiks and Scheduled Castes from Karnataka, Nayers from South Kerala, various Hindu groups in Madurai district, Brahmins and other groups from Andhra Pradesh, and also for the Marathas and Kunbis from Maharashtra. Interestingly, elaborate puberty rituals and dietary prescriptions and proscriptions are practised among non-brahmin domestic workers from Tamil Nadu who have migrated to Delhi. Though on a restricted scale, they are also practised among many Iyengar Brahmin families and Saraswat Brahmin families in the city of Bombay.
16. Confinement or seclusion can take various forms. The menstruating girl may be confined to a corner at the back of the house; she may be confined to a dark room; to a hut made with bamboo and different kind of leaves; to a shelter some distance away from the house made with nine kinds of leaves, or there may be just a symbol of such a shelter for which nine kinds of leaves are woven together and kept near the girl as among the Holeys in Mysore; she may be made to sit on a mat of palmyra leaves, with a few grains of rice spread underneath the seat, as among the Andhra Brahmins. The important aspects of confinement of a menstruating girl are to avoid causing pollution to others, to be protected from the possible effect of evil eye, and to be out of sight of men, away from their gaze.
17. School-going girls often feel embarrassed when they are confined at home for a determinate number of days, depending upon the custom of the particular caste and an application for sick leave is sent to school. Certain customs such as wearing a half-sari make the change in status obvious, and in coeducational institutions

when they return to school, these girls may have to face some teasing from the boys. It is however not easy for parents to discontinue the practice for they may be criticised for being stingy in avoiding the celebration of a girl's coming of age.

18. As a part of the changing scene among educated people in towns and especially in cities, the event of first menstruation is being turned into a family affair without any ostentatious celebration, though the basic rituals may be retained. What McGilvray (1982 : 34) says about the Moors in Sri Lanka seems to be the reaction of at least some people in Karnataka: 'The Moors, on the other hand, seem nowadays to be more concerned with the liabilities and proprieties of having a nubile unmarried daughter in the household and so they avoid any public ritual which might draw attention to her changed status.' It is seen that if an elder sister is still unmarried there is a tendency to hush up the onset of puberty for the younger sister. As a matter of adherence to tradition some families perform puberty rituals only for the first daughter, with celebration and invitations, and take the coming of age of subsequent daughters more or less as a routine event.

A special diet is, however, given to a pubertal girl, and in upper castes observances of purity and pollution relating to menstruation are practised to a certain extent. Although school-going girls from educated families are able to have their way and may even be helped by the father in avoiding celebration of the event, they cannot avoid sharing a part of a common core of ideas and beliefs.

19. This stands in sharp contrast with the picture under matrilineal systems. The Nayers, for instance, had elaborate puberty rituals, but a woman's status did not depend upon her proven fertility. Nor was a childless woman considered inauspicious. She may be viewed as unfortunate but not inauspicious. Widows too were not considered inauspicious. And an unmarried woman did not have to be scrupulously excluded or ignored as she is when 'auspicious gifts' are to be given to the 'fortunate ones' (married women) and auspicious roles are to be performed by them under patriliney.
20. It is interesting to note that in Nepal, the onset of puberty is marked by confinement and special rituals. As described by Lynn Bennett (1984: 238-240) among the upper caste Pabaiyas, it is marked by immediate removal of the girl from her natal home and seclusion in a dark windowless room known as the *gupha* or cave. She may not see or be seen by Surya, the sun god or her male natal kin during the period of her seclusion. At the end of her seclusion she must take a purificatory bath and receive from her father and brothers gifts consisting of a red sari and a blouse and accessories of a married woman signifying 'a complete transference of the daughter's nascent sexuality away from her natal group and to another patriline' (p. 240). A related significant point made by Bennett is about the cultural assertion of a girl's sexuality in relation to her natal male kin as symbolised by the severe avoidance of these kin by her during the period of seclusion.
21. My emphasis on the inescapability of marriage for girls should not be understood as freedom from compulsion for young men to get married. They too are under pressure for marrying within the acceptable boundaries and, more importantly, to bring dowry to contribute towards the expenses incurred on their own education or in the marriage of daughter(s). Marriage of a son is necessary to continue the family line. In the case of girls, however, their placement in a group depends on marriage and an unmarried status runs the risk of tarnishing the reputation of the

- family. The proportion of unmarried, married and widowed males and females in the population is indicative of different norms for girls and boys.
22. In wedding invitations, the prefixes to the names of the bridegroom and the bride differ: for the bridegroom it is *Ayushman* or *Chiranjeev* meaning 'one with long life'; a feminine form of such a prefix may or may not be used for the bride, but what is invariably used is *Saubhagachandhini* 'one who aspires for a blissful married state'.
 23. During the last few decades the age of marriage for girls has gone up among the middle and upper middle classes, and the number of unmarried young women in white collar occupations has increased. At the same time, the cultural import of marriage has changed very little. Unmarried young women are excluded from the 'auspicious' activities of the 'fortunate' women and are made to feel that there is something wrong with them. Those who remain unmarried, by choice or through the compulsion of circumstances, often prefer to live in large cities where it is possible for them to exist in relative anonymity, and where the norms are less stringent. While in some cases it may be true that parents themselves are indifferent to, or even against, their daughter's marriage due to their dependence on her earnings, in many cases motives are imputed to the parents and brothers that the young woman has had to remain unmarried due to a calculated indifference on their part generated by the interest in her earnings. The underlying, strongly entrenched notion is that a woman's earnings belong to her husband's family and it is a sacrilege if they go to her parents or siblings. There are, moreover, certain notions of an appropriate match which girls tend to imbibe during their formative period. Middle class girls, for instance, while in schools and colleges often resent being confined in space and constrained by time and the gender-based division of work which clearly separates the roles of men and women. It does seem, however, that most of them have already imbibed, often unconsciously, the idea of natural inequality between the sexes and 'complementary but unequal' relationship between husband and wife. This is indicated by the fact that these girls think that there is something odd if the wife is taller than the husband, or if the two are equal in age or the wife is older. And, very few of them would willingly accept a less qualified man as husband, perhaps, for two reasons: apprehension of social disapproval and the impracticability of negating the derived status of wife and the difficulty of adjusting with the husband in a social system which is premised upon the natural inequality between men and women.
 24. These euphemisms are a part of several Indian languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Bengali, Hindi, and Oriya. The underlying idea is the same: everything happens as though spoken words have a capacity to act or to come true and hence their utterance must be avoided. At the husband's death, a woman's bangles are ceremonially broken, her vermilion mark/*kumkum* is rubbed off and her *mangalsutra/tali* and toe rings are removed. Even among those communities which traditionally allow remarriage of widows these practices are followed: at the second marriage the insignia are restored.
 25. Among the Iyer Brahmins of Tamil Nadu when the husband dies the wife continues to wear the insignia of the married state for ten days. At midnight of the tenth day all these are removed. This job has to be done by women who have already become widows. *Samangal* women have to scrupulously avoid being anywhere near the unfortunate and inauspicious woman on this occasion. The

atmosphere is considered charged with misfortune and in order to protect herself from inauspiciousness, a *manangali* woman must clench a piece of turmeric in her fist. I owe this information to Kamala Ganesh.

26. I hope this emphasis on significance of caste in the concern for management of sexuality of young unmarried girls does not give an impression of a changeless Hindu society nor of impenetrable boundaries of castes. The phenomenon of caste is too complex, and subsumes too baffling a variety of patterns to yield to simple explanations. It may be mentioned, however, that due to a variety of factors contributing towards social change the boundaries of endogamy are widening: distinctions between 'sub-castes' are not considered relevant by many. There is also greater tolerance of inter-caste marriages, provided the ritual distance between concerned caste groups is not too wide, and there are no problems of disparity in economic and social status. But these changes are limited in scope and extent and have not radically affected people's ideas.
27. *Mulagi Jhuli Ho* (A Girl is Born), a street play in Marathi by a group of feminists which has attained considerable popularity sums up the do's and don'ts administered to a post-pubertal girl:

Do not abandon the vow of womanhood taken by you.
 You have to follow your mother, grandmother,
 and greatgrandmother
 You have to mind the hearth and children.
 Do not ask odd questions.
 Do not exceed the boundaries.
 Do not get out of control.
 Do not abandon the vow of womanhood.
 Do not speak with your face up
 Be inside the house.
 Wash clothes, clean the utensils.
 Cook and serve food.
 Clear the leavings and remove the soiled plates.
 Sew and embroider.
 Sweep and draw designs on the floor.
 Water the Tulsi plant.
 Circumambulate the sacred tree.
 Observe fasts and perform *cratus*.
 Bend your neck downwards.
 Look downwards.
 Walk without looking up.
 Do not let your eyes wander.
 Do not abandon the vow of womanhood.

(The translation is mine.)

28. The need to control female sexuality is often expressed through metaphors. Emphasising the necessity of not allowing young women and men to come close, it is said that unless a physical distance is maintained between hay and fire, it is impossible to protect the hay from catching fire. Another saying prevalent among the matrilineal but caste-bound Nayers powerfully conveys the fact of vulnerability of young girls: 'Whether the thorn falls on the petal or the petal falls on the thorn, it is always the petal which runs the risk of getting hurt and disfigured.'

The same idea is expressed in Central India: 'Whatever can happen to buttermilk? It is the milk which gets bad,' and, 'It is the earthen pot which gets polluted and defiled easily and permanently; a metal one can be rubbed, washed off and cleaned to purity; nothing happens to it. Likening woman to an earthen vessel and man to a vessel made of brass is widespread in India and is even used in the deliberations of Panchayats.

29. While on the theme of development of femininity, it is necessary to make one point: the importance given to the physical appearance of a girl. Even in regions where fair complexion is uncommon, the value accorded to it is conveyed not only through lullabies, songs, and sayings but also through open praise or criticism of individual girls within their hearing. So also with other components of physical appearance. A girl's fortune (marriage being its most salient component) is tied up with her appearance; good looks are considered an important 'qualification' of a female. No wonder that many girls tend to develop an excessive interest in their appearance—often at the cost of other qualifications—and in clothes, jewellery, and cosmetics. Such an interest is interpreted as an expression of femininity and thus 'natural'.
30. I was told in Mysore that in some houses there is a practice of keeping the mirror of the dressing table covered with a cloth; this way the problem of inadvertently looking into the mirror at night can be avoided.
31. I owe this information about brothers rebuking sisters for standing in the doorway to Dr. Ramanamma from Andhra Pradesh who teaches at the Department of Sociology, University of Pune.

In the process of training for proper behaviour certain assumptions and indications can seriously offend the sensibilities of growing girls. For instance, there is a commonly held notion that the demeanour of a girl is itself responsible for eve-teasing. The presence of this notion can be sensed, if not clearly expressed, in the manner in which particular instances of eve-teasing are analysed.

32. Krishna Kumar goes on: 'Watching these silent clusters for years eroded my basic sense of endowing individuality to every human being. I got used to believing that girls are not individuals.' Krishna Kumar is describing what he calls 'a tragic pattern of socialisation'—his experiences of boyhood in a small town in Madhya Pradesh. His article is a reminder that to understand the socialisation of girls it is imperative to look into the socialisation of male children.
33. At any rate, it appears that home and school reinforce each other in the process of socialisation. My experience at a school in one of the villages in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra brings this out clearly. During my visit to the school along with a group of post-graduate students, we were taken to various classrooms and, as is the practice in such schools, students sang songs. In the juniormost class boys and girls sat together; the song in which both joined was about *Chandamama* (the moon addressed as maternal uncle), a popular theme for nursery rhymes and songs for children of this age. In a somewhat senior class, however, certain shifts had occurred: girls sat in one half portion of the room and boys in the other half. They sang two separate songs. The song which the girls sang was accompanied by a dance and was about the flowers in the rainy season. Both the boys and the girls were reasonably confident.

In the classroom of the 7th Standard, the girls who were all sari-clad, not only

sat in a portion of the room separated from the boys, but they sat on the floor by the side of the planks. The boys were cocky: they stood up on the wooden planks and in full-throated voices sang confidently—a song describing the valour of Shivaji. We tried very hard to persuade the girls to sing but they sat coyly and did not open their mouths. The teacher who was a male did ask the girls to sing but seemed to appreciate and understand their reticence and shyness. When we questioned the girls as to why they did not sit on the planks it was the boys who answered: 'They themselves choose to sit on the floor. What can others do?'

It is important that the most prominent caste group in Kolhapur district is that of the Marathas who emphasise their martial past, follow a pattern of hypergamous marriages, observe a kind of seclusion of women and talk of sexual asymmetry as a part of the natural order of things. A question emerges: Can we really think of reforming the educational system or of a reformed system of formal education to bring about a more 'enlightened' relationship between the sexes as long as the larger structures which provide the context for this educational system continue to reproduce gender-based relationships of domination and subordination?

34. There is, of course, a certain ambiguity that characterises the training of girls. While they are being trained for present and future roles, the fact that they will eventually be going into another family is never forgotten. Families differ. That a girl will leave her parental home eventually is certain: to what kind of home she will go is not. And it will take years for her to acquire any power of decision-making or any autonomy in that new home. There are also many 'ifs' in the process. Socialisation for an unfamiliar setting and an uncertain future imparts a degree of tentativeness and provisionality to the process. This, I feel, affects the development of self-confidence and initiative in girls.

Ambiguity also characterises the presence of contradictory values and expectations which essentially reflect the contradictions inherent in the patrilineal, patrilocal kinship system. To give one example, the tie between a brother and a sister is supposed to be life-long; throughout their life sisters are expected to observe special days for the well-being, long life and happiness of brothers. At the same time, they also hear that a woman should be like water which does not have any shape of its own and so can take the shape of the vessel in which it is poured; nor does it retain any mark on it. Or, that a woman should be like pliable mud—to be cast into a shape of his choice by the potter. A woman should thus be able to discard all the earlier loyalties and habits and get absorbed in the husband's family.

35. The responses of 100 randomly selected parents of students admitted to Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, a leading school in New Delhi, to the question whether they would have girls or boys to do certain chores are revealing. Twenty-five per cent parents did not distinguish between their sons and daughters for any of the ten chores mentioned in the list but among the rest, there was a clear bias towards asking the girls to work in the kitchen, sweep the floor, wash tea cups, put washed clothes on the line, and dust the furniture, and asking boys to fetch eggs and bread from the market, help change the tyre of the scooter or car and so on. These responses reported by Vibha Parthasarathi in this volume show deeprooted ideas regarding the gender-based division of work in our society.
36. Needless to say, this description of division of work, based on conceptions of

masculine and feminine tasks, has specific reference to the domestic scene: it does not apply to paid work outside one's own home. For example, a man employed as a domestic servant would sweep the floor and clean utensils in the house where he is employed; but in his own home this work is expected to be done by his wife and other female members of the household. So also with cooking, and, as a profession tailoring is commonly carried on by men.

37. Rice at the bottom of the pan is closest to the fire and runs the risk of getting burnt or scorched; there is also a possibility of its containing some tiny pebbles. One wonders if this rule is not there as a safeguard against men getting to know about the carelessness of women in cleaning and cooking the rice. One of the important tests of an efficient housewife is the ability to process and clean the cooking material properly. In Karnataka I was told that this is also because if there is a stone in the rice and a male happens to swallow it, the structure of the male body is such that the stone might harm it. Similarly, males including boys, are not served the first *dosa*—a pancake made of soaked and ground rice and *and dal*—for it is always an experimental piece in terms of adequate heat, fat, and consistency of the batter. There is of course no harm if a girl eats the first *dosa*. Interestingly, Alice Joseph of Higher Education Grants Commission in Madhya Pradesh, who belongs to South Kerala, informs me that similar instructions regarding the serving of rice and *dosa* are received by girls in Christian homes also.
38. The explanation commonly given for discrimination in nutrition is the differential value accorded to male and female children in Indian society. Although not stated clearly, its presence can be felt in my discussion of food in relation to the training of young girls.
39. The argument of this paragraph was developed in discussion with Saurabh Dube and was set out in a paper we did together on 'Women in India: Hinduism, and the category of politics' (Dube and Dube, 1986).
40. The concept of contradictory consciousness is that of Gramsci. It opens the possibility of reconciling the apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant groups and the cultural autonomy of subordinate groups. A contradictory consciousness which combines a range of attitudes—approbation and apathy, resentment, resignation and rebellion—is, we feel, a useful concept with which to approach the responses of women of different social groups and the process of their (women's) implication in their own subordination. (See Hoare and Smith (eds.), 1971 and Jackson Lears, 1985.)

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Femininity and the Orientation to the Body

VEENA DAS

The centrality of the body as a metaphor for society has been repeatedly asserted in sociological and psychological literature. The body occupies an essentially ambivalent position in social discourse, for it is the only object which can be subjectively experienced and conversely, the only subject that has an existence in the world of objects. Hence, while the body may be seen as a metaphor for society, the meaning inscribed in the use of the body is also internalised as subjective experience. In this paper, I would like to explore this double perspective on the body—the body as object and the body as subject; the third person perspective and the first person perspective as they pertain to the feminine body and I shall argue that the sense of being a woman is internalised through this double perspective.

The anthropological interest in the human body goes back to Marcel Mauss, and has re-entered the popular consciousness of the anthropologists through the revival of interest in symbolic anthropology. In the Indian context, Mary Douglas argued that the concern with controlling the peripheries of the body in Hindu rituals reflects the concern with controlling the boundaries of social groups. In contrast, Tambiah, Marriott and Inden have emphasised the importance of the Hindu perspective according to which the person is being constantly transformed through various transactions of food, women, and services. It seems to me that the concern with boundaries on the one hand, and with flux and transformation on the other, is to be seen as two poles of the same process, each implying the other, rather than being considered as exclusive preoccupations. The ethnography pertaining to the Caribbean and Malayo-Polynesian social formations that has been collected in recent years shows that persons are not defined in any culture as *either closed or open* but rather that there is a dialectical relation between open and

closed states of the person over the life-cycle of the individual.

In this paper, let me introduce a second polarity, that of the male and female body and see how it interacts conceptually with the polarity of the open and closed person. For this purpose, I have drawn examples from many sources—manuals of behaviour, anthropological monographs, folklore, and my own experience with urban Punjabi families among whom I conducted fieldwork. The purpose is not to attempt a complete description but a possible way to constitute the problem. It is the argument of this paper that the female body may be best described in terms of the following life-stages of a woman:

1. The body of the child, which is seen as bearing the marks of a future gender identity which has not yet crystallised.
2. The body at the onset of menstruation when it is defined as the body-in-nature.
3. The body in sexuality when the body of the other is discovered.
4. The maternal body when the inner alien space is converted into a communicative space.
5. The body at death when it finally achieves the status of the body-made-whole which is simultaneously the body without organs.

The body of the child

In early childhood, the body is seen as bearing the marks of a future gender identity but the male and female identities are not crystallised. The sexual organs are, for instance, considered to be merely a *nishani* or a mark. Since they do not embody any sexual functions there is no shame associated with them, no attempt to hide them and in some languages such as Punjabi, the linguistic term for the penis of a child is different from the term for the penis of an adult. Punjabi women may carelessly fondle or kiss the penis of a small boy and remark that it was not the sexual organ but the mark that was being fondled.

In childhood, the ritual occasion when the identity of the girl appears in a most marked fashion in its femininity is the occasion of *kanyak* or *kanya puja*, when the girls are worshipped as the embodiments of the goddess. Decked in their finery, they stand in a row in each house while the father or the brother washes their feet

and finally they are offered food and money so that the goddess may be placated for the whole year. Now, although the ritual is especially for girls, one often finds little boys included in it, for the differentiation between boys and girls is not supposed to be sharp in childhood. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that boys participate in this ritual by virtue of being like girls, and hence it is the feminine virginal body which is the abode of the goddess. This connection established between the feminine and the cosmic, as we shall see later, often subverts the order of law and language which is masculinity's most privileged domain. I cannot resist giving an example of that here.

A death had occurred in one of the families in the kin-group among whom I did fieldwork. I was, therefore, surprised to discover from one of the children that *kanyak* had been celebrated in a very small scale in the dead man's uterine cousin's house. When I casually discussed this, the mother of the girl whose *pūja* had been held, told me the following story. On the day of *ashtami* —when the neighbourhood was celebrating *kanyak*, her five-year-old daughter asked her mother why there was no celebration in their house. The mother replied that no celebrations of any kind could be held for a year since a death had occurred in the kin group. At this, the girl sorrowfully said, 'Oh, so you will worship the mother when she comes to me.' Since 'visit by the mother' (*mata ayi hai*) is an expression to indicate the onset of a disease such as small-pox, chicken-pox or measles said to be caused by the wrath of the mother goddess, the girl's mother heard the voice of the mother goddess in the statement of the girl. So she inferred that if the goddess was not worshipped now at the appropriate time, then she would be forced to offer her worship due to the onset of disease. The girl learnt in this manner that her speech could be inferred as the voice of the goddess and the formal order of the rule could thus be subverted.

In the ritual of *kanyak*, the little boy finds a place by virtue of being assimilated to the female sex. In language, it is the girl who imitates the boy, often taking on the gender markings of the male. There is an indulgent attitude to this kind of linguistic behaviour and it is seen as part of 'baby-speech'. As girls grow older they are encouraged to use the female gender markings in a systematic manner.

It seems then, that female and male identities may not be sharply distinguished in early childhood. Yet, while this statement may be true in the sense of the being of childhood, it is not true for its

becoming. For, while an indulgent attitude is taken towards the mixing of male and female identities in ritual and language during early childhood, the parents are already looking towards a near future when the gender identities will have to be sharply segregated and towards which formal socialisation would soon turn its attention.

The body in nature

Significantly, it is not the body of the child which is defined as the body-in-nature, *par excellence*, but the body of the adult in two contrasting perspectives. Punjabis conceptualise the submission of man to the order of nature by reference to his being hungered. '*Is papi peta ke liye kya kya nahin karna padta*'—what is it that one does not have to do for this sinful stomach? The Hindu universe does not conceptualise the fall of man as an event in history as the Christian universe does. Thus, the condition of being hungered and sexed is not the result of a fall from Eden, but a necessary component of being human. Of these two terms, it is hunger which is symptomatic of the condition of man, and hence the stomach that is selected as the most condensed symbol of man's constant attempt to defeat the biological needs of the organism in order to follow the path of *dharma*. Food becomes difficult to obtain due to the vagaries of nature and the uncertainties of man's existence. Thus, the hungered condition of man signals the placement of the body in the order of nature, but also the uncertainties and vagaries of nature itself. The body constituted in this manner is the male body, which stands for the unmarked condition of being human. Men try to rise above this by somehow maintaining the rule of *dharma* in pursuing *artha*, while women try to rise above this by consciously cultivating the ascetic practices of abstaining from food during various fasts.

In contrast to the unmarked human body, the female body makes the notion of regularity of nature available to mankind. For the Hindus, it is the regular periodicity of menstruation that is the guarantee of the regularity of nature. Thus, the word *ritu* stands for both seasons and the menstrual cycle. Similarly the word for the woman's menstrual cycle and the moon's cycle is the same, showing that the rhythms of the body and the rhythms of the cosmos are in harmony.

At the level of the person, the onset of menstruation marks a radical change in the orientation to the body. In many parts of India,

the first onset of menstruation is ritually announced. The female initiation rituals performed at this stage, define the female body as crystallised and sexually mature. It is important to note that male initiation rituals, such as the *yajñopavita samskara*, give the male an external and ever widening universe. The male initiate is ritually taken outside the house often to the edge of the city near the river; he is introduced to the preceptor thus taking him outside the domain of the family, and most importantly he is introduced to the order of Logos. The whispering of the Gayatri Mantra in his ear gives him privileged access to the domain of the Word. Although the themes of exteriority, both social and spatial, and access to the Word appear in a very elaborate fashion in brahmanical rituals, I believe, that variations of these themes may be found in the rituals of other castes in which the neophyte is introduced to a wider spatial and social world.

The female initiation rituals, in contrast, emphasise the interiority of feminine domains. For the period of her menstruation, the girl is confined to a room where, as the Newars say, even the sun does not have any access. Her movement is completely curtailed and for the duration of her period she may not bathe, change her clothes, comb her hair or wear any ornaments. On her return to purity which is publicly celebrated among many social groups such as the Coorgs, the Nayars, the Newars and the Brahmins of Tamil Nadu, the themes of covering and binding the body become predominant. A woman is now acknowledged as a concrete sexual being and for the rest of her sexual and productive life, she must oscillate between the periods when her body must be hidden, separated spatially and made bereft of all cultural symbols, and the periods of her purity when the body may be available for the gaze of a well-defined kinship group but must appear as hidden and bound by clothes, and with the organs marked by the use of ornaments.

It is interesting to see that among some social groups such as the urban Punjabis, there is no formal ritual to mark the onset of menstruation. The taboos on the woman are silently observed and communicated and have also been considerably abbreviated. For example, the only part of the house which a woman will not enter during her periods is the kitchen and the only food item which she may not touch is pickled food which is said to spoil by her touch. However, precisely because there is no acknowledgement of the woman's condition at the level of the collective group, the

responsibility of observing these taboos falls entirely upon the individual woman. Thus the laws regarding pollution and purity are observed but must be communicated without the use of speech.

The onset of menstruation is experienced by girls as a terrible curse, as if an alien being had come and taken possession of their bodies. Youth for a woman is an enemy (*bauri*) say many women, for it robs them of the freedom of childhood and the spontaneity which they could experience in their father's household. Sooner or later, they must move into the family of the husband where they would have to strain themselves to the maximum in order to preserve the honour of their father's house.

When a girl begins to menstruate, she learns that one of the most important ways in which women must learn to communicate is by non-verbal gestures, intonation of speech, and reading meta-messages in ordinary languages. 'What kind of a daughter are you, if you cannot read the way the eye of the mother points?'—this is the way mothers admonish their daughters.

I may give an example of that here. A man was visiting his brother's house and he expressed the wish to take his brother's daughter out for the day. In Punjabi ethos, parents may never make their authority over their children explicit if it contradicts the kinship ethos according to which the children belong to the entire kin group. So the mother could not have refused permission. Her explicit verbal behaviour, therefore, emphasised that the father's brother had complete authority over the girl and he could do what he wished. Her nonverbal behaviour, on the other hand, signalled to the girl that her going out would not be approved of. As it happened, the father's brother did not take the girl out because she insisted that she was not feeling very well.

One of the lessons of adulthood for women is that their use of language must be different from that of men, for women must never use words which make emotions explicit, reveal the tensions of a situation or subvert the authority of the ordering principles of language and law, especially in domains that include relations between men and women. These rules may all be broken in communication between women as we shall see later. At the moment, the point is that menstruation is the first event that reveals this side of social life to the girl and thus commences a new set of relations in which women learn to place themselves outside of the formal domain of communication through official languages.

The body in sexuality

Engaging in sexual relations is the means by which one discovers the body of the other. We may even say that the knowledge that a body possessed by one person may have its ego in another, emerges only through engagement with sexuality. Thus sexual relations may be seen as not only satisfying desire but also as leading to carnal knowledge, which, after all, is a form of knowing of the other. From the objective point of view a man and a woman may be seen as reciprocally possessing each other's bodies. The cultural discourse, however, defines this possession asymmetrically. We shall try to show that the entry into a sexually active life is also constitutive of the perception of women that their bodies are destined to be submitted and used and are a source of continuous pollution to them.

The Hindu law books show a great interest in the sexuality of women. We may discern two major concerns in these rules, both of which are expressed through the metaphor of impurity. The first set of rules relates to the periods of purity and impurity which regulate sexual access to the woman. For example, a woman is sexually inaccessible even to her husband during her menstrual periods. Sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is said to be dangerous for the man and harmful for any progeny thus conceived. A woman becomes purified only on the fourth day of her menstrual period when her sexual desires are said to be at a peak and a man is advised to approach his wife after she has had her bath. This is the period which is considered propitious for procreation also.

A woman who has engaged in adulterous sexual relationships with a man of a higher caste remains sexually inaccessible for her husband till she has had a menstrual period. Rituals of purification and expiation vary according to the caste status of her adulterous lover. But the point is that the texts emphasise a woman's return to purity, her sexual accessibility and the responsibility that a householder has towards his ancestors to procreate and increase his line. In Punjabi social life, a new bride is blessed thus: 'Bathe in milk, and grow with sons.' A new Dewan bride wishing to take part in household chores may be told: 'Sit on a high bed and increase the creeper of the Dewans. Aren't there enough servants to do all these chores?'

The point I wish to make is that the law texts, which present the place of women in a patriarchal universe, emphasise the woman's accessibility to the male, her return to purity, and her obligation to

increase the lineage. The blessings showered by old women on brides are blessings showered by 'female patriarchs' for old women may often speak on behalf of men. In fact, if women did not internalise the voices of men and speak like patriarchs themselves, the social order could not be maintained. Coercion and force can never ensure the authority of the rule as can an internal voice. Hence we should be sensitive to the manner in which women define their sexuality in accordance with the dominant paradigms of their societies.

Having pointed to the internalisation of the obligation to be sexually active and to procreate, I must also point out that this constitutes a third-person perspective on the body in sexuality. Underlying this discourse, there is a second discourse which I think constitutes the first-person discourse and is articulated among women. According to this perspective, the impurity that a woman incurs during sexual intercourse is the impurity of a thing partially consumed. A woman's body, they say, is made *jhuti*, every day. The words *asauca* and *sutaka* used in the *Dharma Shastras* define pollution capable of being terminated by passage of time. But that which has been made *jhuta* by partial use can never attain purity again. Hence the women's discourse emphasises the irreversibility of a pollution that a woman is obliged to incur through the process of sexual relations. 'There is nothing to be proud of in a woman's body'—so girls are admonished if they are seen to be dressing in an ostentatious manner, or if a woman becomes too proud of her beauty.

One of the consequences that follows from this view of the female body in sexuality, is that women see themselves as the persons who absorb not only pollution but also sin and danger. Just as a woman absorbs in herself, the pollution of sexual intercourse, so that the life-process in the deepest sense of the word, may continue—so does a good wife absorb in herself the dangers to her husband. Women blame themselves excessively if a misfortune befalls the husband and may also be blamed by others. The whole notion of sati implies an ascetic life by the wife through which the *dosha* (faults)—a generic term implying faults, pollution, sin, and danger—may be internalised by the wife.

We can now see how polyvalent is the symbol of pollution. On the one hand, the engagement with sex leads to the perspective on the female body as being constantly transformed by use, as being progressively polluted. On the other hand, it is the very capacity of the woman to absorb the negative forces of the cosmic and social

world, that allows men to be regenerated. An example of this may be found in the following episode.

A girl I knew had come away to her mother's house because she said she could not bear the drunkenness and the abusive behaviour of her husband. One of the old women who had assembled there, appealed to me: 'You are a married woman yourself. Tell me, would one find a man who had no fault? The *jat* (genre) of men is like that. But, surely, it is the *dharma* of a woman to hide the faults of her husband, deep inside the pit of her stomach.' Thus, the open state of a woman's body makes it polluted, but it is this very capacity to absorb pollution and danger that allows the life-process to continue.

The body in sexuality, that I have described, is in the domain of married love in which the woman is the man's field, his garden in which his sex bears fruit. She is the object of his sexual desire but also the subject who voluntarily embraces all his faults. In the entirety of this encounter, the female and the male retain their separate identities. Through the process of sexual engagement, every part of the body is differentiated and activated. Thus bridal jewellery, names and separates each part of the woman's body and we may say that the body achieves its most differentiated status in the sexual encounter between men and women.

The duality of the third-person perspective and the first-person perspective on the female body, helps us to identify the two discourses on the body in sexuality. Unfortunately, I do not have enough material on the body in erotic discourse. It is well known that the erotic discourse in poetry emphasises the transgressions of female and male identities and the rejuvenation of that secret spring of life that keeps the world of poetry and Eros alive as against the demands of law and Logos. This much, however, may be stated. Women seem to live their lives on the double register of law and language which emphasises their roles as wives, and poetry and meta-language which emphasises their roles as standing outside of language and law. Hence, much of the communication between women on matters sexual, is not accessible to men. As the lawful wives of men, women pay allegiance to the entire male discourse on female sexuality. However, burdened with the task of maintaining the orderly world of patriarchy represented by law, they are not always averse to maintaining appearances at the cost of individual transgressions. For example, a woman who was not able to conceive, was advised by her sister-in-law to exchange her quilt—a verbal pun by which she was

being advised to become pregnant by another man, thus confirming that maintaining order sometimes involves individual transgression.

I cannot conclude this section without remarking that a woman's sexuality binds her to the cosmic world in a relation that is very different from that of a male. A woman is said to be married to three gods, before she can be given to a human husband. As many of the *vrata kathas* emphasise, a woman's sexuality may sometimes be claimed by her divine husband, and she may bear him a child. In the rituals of some groups such as the Newars, a woman is first ritually married to Suvarnakumara and Vishnu and secondarily married to a human. In some of the *vrata kathas* a woman may have a snake for a brother who may, in turn, be mistaken for a lover. Thus, the collective consciousness acknowledges through these *kathas*, certain preoccupations of women that emphasise the inadequacy of the official kinship norms to give an exhaustive and definitive understanding of the sexuality of women. The discussion of sexuality leads us to the maternal body which is the concern of the next section.

The maternal body

A specific function of the female body that is treated as an object of thought is the maternal function. The maternal body has been characterised by Julia Kristeva in the following words:

Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. 'It happens, but I am not there.' 'I cannot realise it, but it goes on.' Motherhood's impossible syllogism (Kristeva, 1980 : 237).

Kristeva, then goes on to suggest that this becoming a mother can possibly be accounted for by only two discourses—that of science which neutralises the subject or by Christian theology in which maternity is only a vessel for divinity and is constituted in its virginity or dormancy. In fact, the notion of the child as the alien who comes to inhabit the body has such a 'taken for granted' quality in western thought that it seeps into modern philosophical discourse. For instance, in the debate on abortion, the body is often characterised as the 'house' of a woman in which the foetus has intruded and can stay on only with the permission of the mother.

In contrast to this perspective, the Hindu cultural milieu thinks of

the changes occurring in the mother's body as closely related to her volition. Although the sanskritic texts, representing the patriarchal view of the body of the mother, describe the womb as *ksombhinarka*, a particular kind of hell in which the foetus finds himself enclosed and struggles to escape, the discourse of the women alters this alien, struggling being into a welcome and cherished guest in the body of the mother.

The Punjabis believe that the mother and child are in direct communication with each other and the body of the mother is the medium through which this communication takes place. The food cravings of a mother are indulged in because these are said to emanate from the foetus. A craving for sweet foods indicates that the foetus is male, whereas a female foetus is attracted towards sour foods. Sometimes, a pregnant woman may dream of strange lands, people and events. These dreams are said to be the memories of the previous birth of the foetus. Everything that the mother does during her pregnancy—the food she eats, the people she visits, the thoughts she has, the stories she listens to—all affect the character of the child. This discourse is supported by the medical texts of *Ayurveda* and reinforces the position that the maternal space is not alien, but is deeply intimate. Mothers think of pregnancy in terms of the voluntary suffering that they underwent in order to give birth. 'I kept you inside me for nine whole months—and is this how you are going to treat me?' This is the question women often put to their grown-up sons if they feel that the maternal wishes are not being respected. One should emphasise that the mother does not use her relation to the child to secure his allegiance to the domain of patriarchal rules, but rather to those of her wishes that individualise the relations with her son. The individual allegiance that a child owes his mother is seldom used to subvert the authority of the patriarchal rules.

A brief illustration of this point may help. The classical example at the level of myth, that shows this relation is the myth of Parsurama, the famed sage who had to decapitate his mother in obedience to the father. In everyday discourses, I found that the formal position reiterates the rights of the father over the child. But there is a subtle way in which this chain of command and obedience may be subverted. A mother may be so grieved by the punishment given to a child or a course of action proposed, that she may become depressed, refuse to eat her food or fall ill. In deference to her wishes, the father may alter his command. One of the manners in which one

encounters this frequently is the father's threat that the son is being indulged by the mother and he would send him away to a hostel for study. The mother is so grieved by the prospect that the father is unable to implement his plan. I have encountered several cases where men have been compelled to pursue certain careers in deference to the wishes of the mother. One man, now in his fifties, lost his mother at the age of thirteen. It seems that the woman had made her husband promise that the son would become a doctor, so although he intensely disliked the subjects taught in a medical college, he was compelled to pursue a medical career. Another man, an Air-Force Officer, could not forge ahead because his mother was terrified of flying and would only give permission to him to be part of the ground crew. Thus the mother may be formally compelled to hand over the child to the patriarchal domain but her continuing hold over the child finds expression in her individual wishes and the legitimacy of these wishes in the special position of the maternal body.

Although the mother-son relation may be seen as a dyad, the third term (the father) is not absent from consciousness. Punjabis often state that if a woman really loves her husband, she will bear him a son who is a complete imitation of the father, in looks, character, and habits. The resemblance posited here, is not attributed to genetic factors alone, but to the thoughts of the pregnant woman. In all cultures, resemblance and non-resemblance are means of positing connectedness, continuation, and contiguity. Among the Trobriands, for example, it is believed that a child should resemble his father, but siblings should not resemble each other. The Punjabi statements about resemblance are complex. A child may take after the paternal or the maternal kinsmen and in general it is thought that sons should resemble their mother while it is auspicious for daughters to resemble their father. Within this over-all complex of beliefs, for a woman to produce a son who resembles the father in every way is that great gift that she may give to her husband's lineage. Old women often jokingly tease their daughters-in-law: 'I want my little son back from you and in exchange you can have my grown-up son.' This emphasis on resemblance as an index of love also shows that the patriarchal social formation cannot be reproduced but for the loving cooperation of women.

At the level of cultural semantics, a pregnant woman is represented by a full pot. It may be the earthen pot, full of mud, in which

grains are made to sprout or a full vessel of water. In both cases, it is fullness, rejuvenation, and plenty that are symbolised through the maternal body which becomes symbolic of the regeneration of the material and social universe. When Aristotle remarked that he was unsure whether the earth learnt to become pregnant from women or women learnt this art from the earth, he was pointing to a deep connection felt in many cultures between the regeneration of the material and social life through the agency (not instrumentality) of women.

The dependence of the patriarchal order on the cooperation of women is, naturally, viewed with some ambivalence in the masculine discourse of society. Hence, the purest creation, that of the ascetic, is a creation by the word alone. If we are correct in assuming that the word constitutes the domain of the masculine, patriarchal order, then these stories are symbolic of a world from which women have been expelled and their functions abrogated by men.

The body at death

We have seen that the life-cycle of the woman provides the continuing rhythms through which the orientation to the female body comes to be defined. As the virginal body, it houses the goddess and is a source of prosperity and well-being to the father's house. The onset of menstruation locates the female body firmly in nature, and the rhythms of the body and the rhythms of the cosmos are seen in harmony. The woman, even as she becomes a source of pollution, is the guarantee of the regularity of nature's rhythms. As a woman enters the domains of sexuality and procreation, she is seen as one who is capable of absorbing the *doshas* of her husband and of the masculine world. It is at this stage of her life, that the woman stands completely differentiated from the man and at the same time her body comes to be articulated as a body with organs that are differentiated from each other. She is 'open' to pollution, danger, and sin and this open quality of her body allows the world to be purified. We can see these themes in the mythic register, in the story of Sita whose ascetic existence allows the line of Raghu to be continued and Kali who must absorb the demon Raktabija in herself, so that the world may be rid of demonic forces. As the possessor of the maternal body, the woman establishes a symbiosis with the earth, both of whom rejuvenate the world by processes that are mysterious-

ly hidden and deeply interior. The life-process is seen as a process of transformation, flux and change. It is the open body, the divinely mutilated body, that is capable of engaging in the life-process.

At death, the search for purity and the engagement with pollution—necessitated by life—comes to an end. The preparation for cremation involves the process of cleaning the body and making it closed and whole. The body peripheries are closed by stuffing them with sandal-paste. It would be extremely dangerous for the social order if some wandering *bhuta* or *preta* were to gain an entry into the dead body and make it its own. The dead person may be given an insignia, that indexes the kind of life he or she lived and the colour of a woman's shroud is a marker of her matrimonial state. Married women go on this final journey bearing the signs of their married state, whereas widows are cremated in white. When the corpse is ready to be cremated, relatives often gather round it and praise its beauty and tranquillity. However, there is a tragic ring to these discussions for the body-made-whole is, by definition, a body-without-organs. The tragedy of a beautiful corpse is precisely that its beauty cannot be soiled. The dead person may go on to take new bodies as one takes new clothes, but the affair with this particular body is over. Whereas, the Christian and Muslim universes emphasise the importance of the body as the means by which the person may be resurrected again, for the Hindu, the body made beautiful by closure signals a terminal event rather than a transitional one.

Concluding remarks

I have refrained from discussing the distinction between masculine and feminine worlds through use of master oppositions such as those of culture and nature; exteriority and interiority; writing and weaving. All these oppositions are present but rather than succumb to the masculine preoccupation of reducing them to a master order, I have tried to weave them in a feminine discourse of creating patterns and dissolving them. One of the favourite preoccupations of Punjabi women is to weave a *phulkari* in which all the symbols of their culture are brought into existence; the parrot which represents the parole of society, the garden that represents the rhythms of society, the *bulbul* which is the eternally betrayed lover. The men's activities are better seen in terms of the scripts, which have to be learnt and transmitted,

as rules. The male eye stylises continuity in linear terms and would like to fix the transformations through the agency of rules. Women, on the other hand, standing outside of this order of language and law are always being assimilated into the cosmic world and can call upon the cosmic beings to draw attention to levels other than that of the formal script. Phuldevi of the *vrat kathas* would call upon her snake-brother whenever she was lonely in the husband's house; Sita could call upon her mother earth to take her back into her comforting womb once she had completed the cumbersome requirements of the patriarchal order of the king Rama. Through this double perspective of male and female, the societal symbols attain a polyvalence and the body is the most important medium for recording this very polyvalence of symbols.

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Socialisation, Women and Education: An Experiment

VIBHA PARTHASARATHI

This paper presents a picture of the efforts of a composite school¹ (14 years of classes, pre-school to 'Plus Two') to sensitise its members to the status of girls in our society, with a view to improving attitudes through a conscious policy and a set of programmes. The school is a private urban one, catering to broadly middle class children. It is coeducational, with a strength of 1,426 of which 878 (61.5 per cent) are boys and 548 (38.5 per cent) are girls. The school thus presents an 'ultra-micro' scenario of our endeavours to influence the socialisation of boys and girls through planned programmes. It should be clarified at the outset, that such socialisation is but a part of the process of shaping attitudes desirable in the citizens of tomorrow. Second, since what is being done at the school was not attempted originally as a *research* project, statistics or other data are presented only when they happen to be available.

It is well recognised by now that the family is the first and major source of attitudes among children. Parents, as exemplary models, transmit values. Children, who identify with them, imbibe these values imperceptibly, very early in life. Attitudes are felt and caught, they are not taught didactically. Research undertaken in traditional as well as younger countries has shown that the basic attitudes of children are established before they begin formal schooling. Consequently it was essential to acquire some idea of the attitude of parents, specifically their views on role expectation and the consequent upbringing of their sons and daughters.

A questionnaire presented to parents aspiring to get their children admitted to our Vidyalaya contained, among other indicators, a set of situations that would enable the school to collect information on the views of parents on the role expectation and the consequent upbringing of their sons and daughters.

The responses of 100 randomly selected parents of children

admitted to the Vidyalaya reveal an interesting mixture of prejudices that currently characterise our society. The following table gives the distribution of responses to the question whether they would have girls or boys or both (irrespective of sex) do certain chores:

Table I

If you have a daughter and a son, both about the same age and equally competent, who would you ask to do the following chores? Indicate by putting G for work for a girl and B for a boy:

Situation	Boys	Girls	Both
1. Fetch eggs and bread from the market	67	2	$6 + 25^* = 31$
2. Sweep the floor	6	48	$21 + 25 = 46$
3. Help in the kitchen	1	58	$16 + 25 = 41$
4. Help change the tyre of your scooter/car	67	1	$7 + 25 = 32$
5. Run an errand at the neighbour's	46	6	$23 + 25 = 48$
6. Wash up two tea-cups.	11	30	$34 + 25 = 79$
7. Dust the sitting room furniture	10	33	$32 + 25 = 57$
8. Lay the table	22	19	$24 + 25 = 49$
9. Put washed clothes on the line	7	42	$26 + 25 = 51$
10. Walk the dog	49	7	$19 + 25 = 44$

* Twenty-five parents did not distinguish between their daughter and son at all. The answer for each situation was both.

Over the years teachers have found that children, especially those in the junior classes, echo their parents' views and imitate their behaviour. Anthropologists and sociologists have provided evidence of the correlation of views between parents and children and ascribed it to the fact that parents expose children to a particular set of values. In the majority of homes in the above sample, role-expectations for boys and girls are clearly different. Work (however trivial or enjoyable or necessary) *outside* the home, such as going to the market (67 per cent), or to neighbour (46 per cent), or walking the dog (49 per cent), is assigned to boys. In contrast, sweeping the floor

(48 per cent), helping in the kitchen (58 per cent) and putting the clothes on the line (42 per cent) is reserved for girls. A heartening feature, however, is the fact that fully 25 per cent of the respondents stated that there was no discrimination between their sons and daughters. Moreover, even this overall picture has certainly changed for the better over the last decade. Is this the result of greater awareness of parents? Or are they getting to know the 'ideal' answers for the Vidyalaya? I am inclined to believe that there is an element of both aspects in the answers given.

Obviously parents seeking admission of their children to a school known for its progressive philosophy and practice, would hardly be 'acceptable' if they did not expect their son, of 'the same age and equally competent', as their daughter, to wash up two tea-cups. Children enter school already showing awareness of their role-expectations, flowing from the norms wittingly or otherwise fostered in their homes since their infancy.

Experience, exigency and rationality are known to bring changes in the attitudes of children as they grow. The home, their peers, the mass media and school, represent four major clusters affecting the formation and change of attitudes of children. As might be expected, each cluster is connected with the other and each plays a more dominant role at different stages of the child's growth. Researchers have not proved conclusively the primary importance of one cluster over the other.

The school is a social system to which children belong for fourteen years—the most formative years of their lives. The values imbibed during this period have a major impact on the kinds of citizens our children become. Therefore the school carries a great responsibility in the process of modernisation of our society. In the USSR as well as in the West, schools are known to have profoundly influenced socialisation. In both cases the totality of the school community has been known to be more important as an agent of inculcation of values than the process of formal learning. Thus, wide-ranging and all-encompassing programmes have to create the ethos for such socialisation.

The Vidyalaya is thus perceived by us as a social system responsible for the socialisation of girls and boys. Single classrooms or other units where children assemble and interact with each other, as well as with the teacher, are also considered to be social systems. Members of the faculty (and this must include the teaching,

administrative and auxillary staff) are thus all involved and responsible for the socialisation that takes place. This applies specifically to the issue I am considering in this paper—the status of girls among students; and women among the staff.

The views of school-leaders (i.e. teachers) on the role-behaviour of girls, and their motivation for improving the situation are by no means homogenous. A questionnaire conducted in the Vidyalaya, among the faculty of 66 (44 women and 22 men) shows a wide range of expectations. Whereas over half of the men expect girls to be bright at studies, well-behaved, modest and obedient, they feel that society expects them to be docile, submissive and concerned about the family. The women teachers provide an interesting contrast: about the same proportion of them (thus greater actual numbers) expect girls to be organised, hard-working, independent and confident, despite their recognition that society expects them to be docile, obedient and submissive.

Conflict arises on two counts. Male teachers display a traditional expectation of role-behaviour from girls, whereas the women teachers believe in a definite personhood being given to girls and ascribe roles to girls that are incongruent with our society's expectations. The same questionnaire administered among 100 students of Class IX (age 14+) and 100 of Class XI (age 16+) brought out a similar sharp contrast between the role-aspiration of girls and role-expectation of boys about girls. The overwhelming majority of parents, and thus society, expects girls to be good housewives; other roles/traits expected are a fraction of this overwhelming response. Boys, on the other hand, are expected by our society to be good at studies, to be good citizens, to be brave and do well in life. The girls themselves aspire to independence and a career, the boys to a career, success and wealth.

The gap between the traditional social expectations of girls and their own aspirations is very wide. Is this gap a *product* of the way the Vidyalaya influences and shapes the role perceptions of children of both sexes?

Another interesting finding is that 95 per cent of those who joined the school only in July 1984 (6 months earlier) showed no conflict between the social expectations and their own aspirations. However, 40 per cent of those who had been with us for two years or more had a self-image that conflicted with traditional expectations.

Since trying to bring about a humanitarian outlook is an important

goal of education, programmes which focus on the individuality of girls and their essential personhood, find an important place in our planning and functioning. This extends to 'engineering' the acceptance by boys of a new status for girls in a climate of respect and equality.

Our attempts at bringing about such changes in the Vidyalaya can be roughly grouped in the following categories:

1. sensitising teachers
2. utilising the classroom
3. utilising the co-curricular sphere
4. strategies at the administrative level

Sensitising the teaching faculty

Nothing can be achieved unless the entire staff-team is consciously aware that the Vidyalaya places great value on the personhood of girls, their status and dignity and that, therefore, an irrational premium placed on boys or their ascribed superiority, is to be consciously countered. Consequently, children are to be evaluated for all purposes, primarily on the basis of their competence. Prejudices in favour of or against any person, based on sex, have to be fought on pedagogical grounds. Pedagogical dictates require the staff to be professionals first, and thus not to discriminate against girls *per se* nor to contribute towards the existing acceptance of the superiority of boys. This policy is not made into an issue or pushed aggressively. At the same time I am constantly alert and press the point whenever an opportunity arises. Despite the difficulty of quoting as examples something that is done *all the time*, I shall attempt to furnish a few instances.

Indicative of the democratic way of our functioning is the weekly faculty meeting, held for two hours after school on Fridays. The frequency of such assemblies enables us all to talk a great deal, discussing happenings of the week, airing views, sharing plans—generally acting and reacting. Over the years, the tendency of male teachers to dominate discussions (despite being fewer in number) has been curbed, not by discouraging them but by encouraging women teachers who I know have a substantial contribution to make when I can perceive from their faces that they want to say something but are too shy to do so. When such a woman is coaxed into participating, not only do I emphasise the relevance and importance of her

contribution publicly at the meeting, but, on occasions, pat her on the back privately later, specifying something positive in the content or expression of her contribution. By the end of the year, the participation of such a staff-member becomes a natural phenomenon. The latent competence in a woman-teacher is brought to the surface, confidence instilled, and dignity enhanced.

At such meetings I like staff members to volunteer to be leaders for projects and activities being planned. The dominance of male members in organisational work was the rule because, generally, only men used to volunteer for such work. Initiative cannot be an attribute in women where society has consistently deprived them of such an opportunity. The result is reinforcing the belief that leadership roles are meant only for men. Competent women should give of their best in a team (like they do in a family unit) but the kudos for leadership are reserved for the male patriarch! Getting women to volunteer to be convenors of organisational sub-committees is not easy, even today. So, despite our generally democratic style in the school, I do resort to nominating women for such tasks. The assignment completed competently, public acknowledgement is made at the staff meeting. An important point is that only the staff knows that the leader was nominated; the pupils never find out. They see her in her operational role and accept her as such. It is our hope that as a result, when our boys grow up, they will not find it difficult to accept a woman as their boss, or in leadership roles in their places of work. Seeds of respect for competence, irrespective of sex, are thus sown early in life. Our belief has been substantiated by research in the West, which has found that boys from coeducational schools do not have problems with their superiors if they happen to be women, whereas, boys from unisex residential schools are found to have problems adjusting and are often unsuccessful.

A third change is that, ten years ago, it was customary at faculty meetings, for men to occupy all the front seats. Even if there were vacant seats in front, the women would walk to the rear rows, leaving the front row reserved (as their birthright!) for men. Even worse, was the incredulous look on the male latecomer's face, when he discovered a few years later, 'his' seat being audaciously occupied by a woman, this confidence arising from a generally improving climate in the school regarding equality between the sexes. Currently, approximately half the front seats are occupied by women depending

on their time of arrival at the staff meeting.

A related issue is that a decade ago, at such staff meetings when we broke for tea, the first cup would be handed over to me (acquired status by virtue of hierarchy), the next lot being directed towards the men (ascribed status). How could a woman drink her tea before the men? Finally, the women helped themselves. Today, to see everyone get their cups in turn, depending on their proximity to the tea-can is a matter of great satisfaction; and to go myself without tea, without this being noticed because I was too busy in conversation to drift towards the can, is a matter of pride. This is an achievement, a success I would not have dreamt of in the 1970s. Clearly feudal attitudes can be changed, and fairly quickly.

Finally, I had felt that in addition to the traditional ascribed shyness of women, some were indeed inhibited because I used to require them to come up to the front in order to speak. Sarees and shawls are not as conducive as trousers to springing up to make a point. We now have a system where every teacher can reach out to a network of microphone leads, and speak up. Not having to come up to the front, not being watched and yet being fully audible has resulted in an astounding number of women-teachers participating in our discussions. The monotony and monotones of yesteryear have given way to such lively, enthusiastic, almost aggressive debates as a matter of routine that I find I cover less in terms of agenda than I used to in a given two-hour meeting! The slow accumulation of confidence, sense of security, the rising demand for being heard are delightful to experience. The 'noise' in the staff meeting, and the way 'matters don't move fast' are commented upon by teachers, now retired, when they attend an occasional meeting.

What matters are not moving? As an administrator, I feel that mention of change makes male members unhappy; they grudge the lead given to, and the direction taken by, a vast band of women. I see no need to rub these points in. It is sufficient that at least some of them have moved out of a particular passivity in a positive direction, for, they change the climate of the school community and the children, our target benefits. Our primary interest is in socialising the student population; teachers are not the target, rather an essential tool... perhaps the most important tool.

I can multiply such examples, these few have been chosen to give an idea of the type of problem that exists today, and the strategies evolved to counter them, an indication of a change in trend observed.

Inside the classroom

The little society within the classroom exerts a very powerful socialising influence. Its structure as well as happenings need to be watched and channelised by the teachers.

Formally, our classes do not have 'girls' rows' and 'boys' rows'. In the junior school, complaints from a boy that 'I don't want to sit next to a girl' are taken to signal serious attention and subtle handling, for the boy shows a deeply ingrained attitude that needs to be combatted over time. Never do we have teams of girls versus boys, say, for a spelling quiz. Even when children choose their own team-members, the purpose of the team is emphasised. The child-leader is continuously reminded that competence relevant to the fulfilment of an objective and the completion of a task should guide the choice of team-mates, *not* consideration of sex, of friends or foes. And yet as they grow up, go for camps and tours, girls and boys are given different dormitories to change and sleep in. Over time, they must realise that it is not superiority/inferiority that distinguishes a boy from a girl or vice versa, but a biological difference which is to be respected under certain circumstances.

Responsibility within a class-group is distributed among six leaders elected by a secret ballot. Campaigns fought on the issue of girls voting for girls or the other way round are always discouraged. The suitability of a person to the job of being class-leader has to be evaluated and votes cast. The results of such elections in the Vidyalaya are most heartening. Young democrats are learning to choose a person for a job. It is qualities which are assessed and weighed, and a leader chosen for the task, not a girl, not a boy, nor a friend.

Teachers new to the Vidyalaya have often expressed surprise at the phenomenon of the rivalry between girls and boys being swept under the carpet—in a most matter-of-fact way—when the purpose of election or any other task is discussed.

Colleagues report that when picnics are being proposed the preference for spots is discussed on a rational basis rather than girls uniting to press for one location and boys opposing it as one man. During such interaction which is always chaired by a teacher, the stress is on drawing out the individuality of each person rather than allowing groupism; one or two leaders emerge, others mostly drift but groupism on the basis of sex is discouraged.

Evidence of such a search for competence and skill is seen year after year when each class is required to send a team for an inter-class competition, even for *rangoli* (traditionally a woman's art) at Diwali time. Each class is allowed to send not more than two teams of four members each and we find again that members of the team are chosen irrespective of sex. The following table covering the last five years offers an interesting illustration of this point.

Table 2

Participants in rangoli competition (held annually to celebrate Diwali)

Year	Number of participants	Breakup	
		Girls	Boys
1979	100	39	61
1981	115	50	65
1982	162	89	73
1983	164	88	76
1984	198	119	79

The rangoli competition was started in 1979. Were there such few girl participants because initially girls were shy and unsure of themselves? Over the years their number has swollen 300 per cent—as they gained in self-confidence.

Equally, how does one explain the preponderance of boys competing in this competition, when this traditional skill is neither common to Delhi nor normally the prerogative of men? In fact it is the reverse. The answer perhaps lies in the strategy adopted by the Vidyalaya. When the competition was being planned, it was decided to have a live demonstration of floor decorations—*rangoli*, *alpna*, *kolam*, *poo-kolam*, etc. from as many parts of the country as possible, for, this highly creative and ancient art-form is not common to Delhi. Parents form a major resource for us; with their help within a week we were able to assemble fourteen skilled artists who demonstrated the styles prevalent in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Bastar, Madhuban, Bengal, the U.P. hills and U.P. plains. By a wonderful coincidence, of these fourteen, five were men and nine were women.

Whereas only girls had crowded around the artist demonstrating at the beginning of the day, as time passed, more and more boys arrived, initially merely out of curiosity but admiring and ardent learners by the end of the day. Their motivation was fired and we were as surprised as delighted when sixty-one boys came forward to try their skill at *rangoli* painting the following day. A new chapter thus started at the Vidyalaya, a new way was discovered to break the barriers imposed by generations of subtle socialisation; one more wall of irrational segregation crumbled.

Social norms set by patriarchal members, acceding women and the media are so deeply absorbed by children that they accept them wholly. Children are therefore encouraged not to accept any dictum—'Girls are poor in maths', 'Boys take to science effortlessly', 'Girls are good at languages', etc.—without testing it.

Choice of subjects to be taken even when there is an alternative available, often remains a theoretical option for a child in our parent-dominated society. Decision-making is not taught; children are instead brought up to accept decisions about themselves made by elders; because (only) they know! In this sense personhood is denied equally to boys and girls in our society. There is as much furore over a boy wanting to take up Home Science as when a girl thinks of sitting for the Indian Forestry Service Examinations. In the Vidyalaya such cases are not only encouraged but also supported, to the point of spending hours winning the parents over to accepting it by persuading them, provided that we are sure that the candidate has the aptitude for it. Once again, emphasis is on potential competency and personhood, rather than vogue.

The seeds of such awareness are sown gradually. Decision-making is encouraged, the reasons for arriving at a decision are regarded as more important than final decision itself. It is thus for instance that the children choose what club they wish to enrol in in the new academic year.

Strictly within the parameters of the course-content, teachers of languages and of social studies in particular (sensitised at staff meetings to this issue) seize every opportunity that arises to reorientate the outlook equally of boys and girls. A few examples may be cited:

At an early age, in Class I and in pre-school, when children play games based on action verbs, girls and boys may be asked to act out the following verbs:

boy—sweep the room
girl—post a letter
boy—comb sibling's hair
girl—answer the door
boy—answer the telephone
girl—dust the scooter
boy—serve a cold drink to a guest, etc.

There are boys who are most reluctant to even act out such verbs initially; among others such games rouse uncomfortable laughter, but over time they accept that it is a game and play it increasingly without inhibition. A beginning is made.

Stories to narrate and plays to dramatise are chosen most carefully. No girl is to be labelled 'dumb' or unintelligent. Resourcefulness is not to be the monopoly of boys alone. Just as jokes on 'sardarjis', 'marvaris' and such ugly traditional stereotypes are strictly taboo in the school, so are those on a foolish or flippant girl.

In Social Studies, for example, when the Rajputs and the system of *jauhar* is discussed, the latter are not eulogised for their sacrifice. Nor are they stated to be choosing a soft option. Instead a whole period may be utilised for an open-ended discussion on this unique phenomenon. What would they have been thinking of as they jumped into the fire? How would they have liked to have been without their men (hundreds and thousands of men)? Would a women's world be organised and managed by themselves? Can they see a parallel with the USSR after World War II when the USSR lost 20 million men? Would it have been braver to take up arms and die fighting if they had to die anyway? If there had been electronic warfare as we have today, would women have considered fighting: would the girls of today? Do they know that girls are not recruited in the NDA even today? The discussion can be endless, and the major objective is for children to think, discuss the role of women then and now. . . .

The co-curricular sphere

To find a number of boys in clubs such as Ikebana, Cookery, Food-preservation and Nursing, traditionally regarded as feminine strongholds is a common sight. They enjoy batik and jute-craft as much as any other activity. On festive or special occasions when the entire school is bedecked and decorated it is not uncommon to see

groups of boys and girls stringing flowers together to make garlands, arranging flowers in vases, polishing brass or waxing wood—the articles shining as much as their eyes. The joy comes from doing, and no-one is conscious of doing a boy's job or girl's job.

The most spectacular breakthrough is perhaps that we have had boys opting for the bakery class. Baking and the resulting feasting has become so popular that for two years the bakery club became the exclusive domain of boys. The skill learnt is utilised in the spirit of social service during Sports Week, on Parents' Days, at cultural events, etc., when the cakes and confectionery baked by them are sold to visitors, with pride and pleasure. Mothers have written to us about their sons baking a cake for the younger sister's birthday, the delight and pride they felt and the furore it caused among certain guests.

It was their involvement in these bakery classes that eventually led to the boys opting for Home Science as a subject at the Plus Two stage. Bitten by the bakery bug, a few boys went on to learn how to cook and about the preservation of food in the form of jams, jellies and squashes. There was thus interaction with the Home Science teacher, and they started then frequenting her lab. Three of these boys actually chose Home Science as a subject at the Plus Two level in 1980 and made history at least in the Delhi schools by doing so. Outsiders were curious, even incredulous at this, but their fellow pupils took it quite matter-of-factly. The female members of the staff were pleased; a few of the males disapproved. I made it a point to congratulate the boys, treated them as heroes for treading on non-traditional ground. Since then, year after year, we have had boys opting for this subject.

Acceptance of, and respect for roles chosen by individuals, even if they are non-traditional, is an aspect of socialisation which profits girls more than boys; for as their roles change, so will their self image. Such a change cannot be made by one side alone. For society to maintain its equilibrium, not only should the new role of girls be acceptable to boys, but where needed, adjustment on their part would call for change of roles. Both girls and boys have to be socialised for this; otherwise the girls will push and demand aggressively, the boys will resist with all their strength and strategy. Where does such a situation get us? In order to give the essential personhood to girls, the boys too have to be prepared both to accept and respect it. This can only come about, imperceptibly and over

time, by engineering a healthy interaction between the two sexes; by promoting a deep understanding not only of each other but also of that aspect of our deeply ingrained heritage which thus far we have accepted without scrutiny, without questioning, and without discrimination.

Cultural programmes are an important part of every school's activities. Whether they are informal and at the class level or for a formal occasion, 'girls' items' and 'boys' items' are strongly taboo. The senior choir, which the boys enrich with their deep bass expresses all the beauty and exuberance of choral singing and harmonisation. The choir itself feels, and makes the audience feel, the bliss of boys and girls singing together. Occasionally, by purposely keeping either the boys or the girls out of a school's favourite song, pupils are made to realise how incomplete it sounds. Having felt that, they then enjoy the wholesome totality, the essential togetherness and reciprocity much more.

From Class VIII onwards, the changes associated with adolescence tend to make children group together as boys or girls much more. This feeling is respected but teachers are alert that they should not form isolated groups, should not stop interacting. The plays they participate in are chosen with greater care; but participate they must.

The not uncommon custom in school plays/dances of having girls dressed as boys as for example, Krishna or *guala* in folk dances, is another strict taboo. If children are learning the fisherfolk's festive dance, or the tribal dance of Bastar or Dang, they are reminded that among those people everyone shares in the gaiety and everyone rejoices together. So do our children (sometimes to the consternation of new teachers and students).

However, one swallow does not make a summer. An odd tribal dance or a *raas* once in five years is not sufficient to re-shape attitudes. Such a strategy has to be sustained and woven into the very fabric of the institutional structure.

Boys can be 'allowed' to enter the cultural arena but will the girls be allowed entry into the male territory of debates, elocution competitions, panel discussions and most of all student government, so far the boys' preserve? Can girls win a place there?

The post of the General Secretary of the Student's Executive of the Vidyalaya is a prestigious and coveted one. The General Secretary is not nominated by the Principal or a panel of teachers. She or he is elected by a secret ballot by the elected class-leaders of the school

after being given a gruelling interview, presenting a manifesto to the entire assembly of pupils, intense campaigning for three days and so on. Girls do not present themselves for this highest of student posts as often as we would like them to and expect them to, given the climate created over the years. The three girls who have held such a position so far have far overshadowed many of the boys who were their predecessors. It seems that as in society at large, so in the school a girl has to be obviously infinitely superior, way above the competing boys, to hold a position which both aspire to.

Once elected, the General Secretary chooses his/her Cabinet. It is interesting that year after year the number of girls in the Cabinet happens to be more or less representative of their strength in the Vidyalaya. Girls are good administrators, they enjoy authority, they execute well but not yet from the very top.

One area where we see immense opportunities for making a dent in our students' way of thinking is the Leadership Training Camps (LTC). The elected leaders of classes III to XII participate in these weekend camps, in age-homogenous groups. The emphasis is naturally on programmes that make them understand themselves better, especially the strengths that they can harness as leaders, the weaknesses which they should try to overcome, or at least prevent from causing harm to themselves and their fellow students. The study of group dynamics, group psychology and group behaviour plays an important part in such camps. When children are involved in discussions, role playing, games and simulation exercises, traditionally ascribed roles are purposely reversed. Boys, for instance, join in sweeping the floor, help cook the food with the canteen staff, serve at meal times. Girls are made to chair panel discussions, compere and conduct the camp-fire programmes and present reports to the assembly of campers at the valedictory function.

These camps provide a convenient forum for discussion of role stereotypes; for example where the same traits in a male and female leaders are interpreted differently.

The table below illustrates this:

Table 3

Quality	Interpretation for a man	Interpretation for a woman
Unflinching	Strong-willed/ determined	Stubborn/obstinate
Open	Flexible	Fickle
Forthright	Frank	Rude, does not know how to say things properly
Resolute	Firm	Rigid
'Pucca'	Attends to details	Vain, fussy
Assured	Confident	Arrogant

Children tend to see the point easily. Discussions follow, and hopefully some are convinced about the injustice of such interpretations. The others at least become aware of it, hopefully awareness leading to different attitudes in the future.

Administrative support

No programme can function successfully without full administrative support, structural and strategic, overt when necessary, diplomatic when required. This issue is a particularly sensitive one. Our traditional society is most complex. It would be foolish to underestimate the forces resisting change despite their proclamations to the contrary. Change has to be ushered in carefully: the aim is to strengthen the girls, to sensitise the boys without making them insecure, to cash in on the resilience of adolescence, the need to explore and venture into challenging territories.

Organisation determines the ethos that is created in the Vidyalaya, who interacts with whom—horizontally within a classroom and vertically across age-groups. But haphazard contact alone is not enough. It has to be engineered. Its success depends upon the structure of the situation, the opportunity it creates for learning and transmitting the message.

Organisation is always for a purpose. Purpose however is to be viewed as having two strata. The upper one stands for the primary, immediate objective, e.g. the formal teaching of a unit in a class, or

preparing children for an elocution competition, or organising a picnic, or a long-distance tour. The lower stratum consists of the bedrock of our omnipresent tenets, one of them being regard for the essential personhood of girls, by drawing them out, giving them confidence, giving them a taste of dignity and honour, and getting the boys to accept all this on the grounds of reciprocity and rationality. It was customary in the Vidyalaya ten years earlier to draw up a list of pairs of teachers—one man and one woman—to accompany class picnics, on the grounds that the presence of a man was essential for any venture outside the school; for what would the 'poor' woman teacher do in an emergency?

This came to my notice when a picnic was in the process of being altered because what had been decided democratically, by an overwhelming majority did not suit the male teacher, indispensable thanks alone to his sex. No other male teacher was willing to spend a holiday with school children. One incident revolutionised this system. At the last minute the male escort found it difficult to go. A woman substitute was found with my explicit confidence in the ability of the new unisex pair to handle any unforeseen problem. Fortunately there *were* problems, with hooligans which the driver of our hired bus watched with interest and a touch of comedy till the tact, firmness and resourcefulness shown by the (female) teachers and their team of children changed the promise of fun for the lumpen lot into the reality of their disappearance. When this news filtered down to the colleagues, a mixture of glee, horror and triumph prevailed. Parents poured in to advise me not to send any group for picnics without it having at least one man. The matter was discussed at length at the staff meeting the following week, without arriving at a conclusion regarding the wisdom or otherwise of my experiment.

About the same time, I came across a teacher who was organising a fifteen-day tour across three states and 2,000 km., trimming the excursion at the behest of the male escort. Under a combination of pressure and cajoling from me she stuck to her original plan which was pedagogically by far the sounder of the two. The escort declined cooperation. In a dangerously drastic move, he was dropped and two women teachers replaced him.

For six years now the lists of male-female pairs have disappeared. Teachers who have joined us since this change would not even know it had existed once upon a time. Tours have gone up to Kanyakumari, Gulmarg and Aizwal, they have missed trains, they have

fought for space on the deck of the Goa-Bombay ship, matadors have overturned at night in forests in Mysore, engines have developed trouble in game sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, the schoolbus has rammed into a bullock on a foggy winter evening, drunkards have stopped the bus on the highway, etc.—and we have survived, even triumphed! Today teachers in charge of a picnic or planning a tour choose their colleagues to accompany them, irrespective of their sex. Parents have accepted it, children do not know that it used to be different, teachers are not paired off by nomination. The entire experience is fully democratic in the broadest and deepest sense of the term.

Such an attitude stands in stark contrast with that of some others. At an interview recently at a senior secondary school in New Delhi I came across a teacher of geography who, when discussing some of her field-trips, virtuously observed that she does not take the girl students out for survey work in rural or slum areas. I asked for the reason, to be told that 'since our girls come from good families, we have to protect them.' Her patriarchal principal nodded in proud approval.

We at Sardar Patel Vidyalaya do not advocate preferential discrimination for girls. They are neither SC (Special Cases!) nor require ST (Special Treatment). Make them feel equal not special; let them awake and be.

This is not to deny covert preferential discrimination extended judiciously, though sparingly, very sparingly, when necessary. For instance a class of early adolescents does at times elect a totally male leadership group; or (even more rarely) a few negative male chauvinists may influence a class to vote so as to keep girls out. Such a case is invariably discussed among colleagues, or brought up to me; a strategy for the inclusion of one or two girls is worked out—all without an inkling of our game to the concerned class. Patient and clever handling is called for. Within the next few days, as opportunities arise, discussions are geared subtly to the desired end—till the necessary infiltration into the bastion takes place!

Administrative ruthlessness had to be reverted to, initially in order to jolt some of the women into believing and accepting the tenet of equality of sexes. The worst case that I remember was when, one day, exactly a decade ago, seven out of less than the forty teachers were absent, without any prior information. I discovered that it was 'Karva Chauth' and that the seven married teachers were fasting for

the welfare of their husbands at the cost of the well-being of the institution. They were informed that I did not approve of their leave.

The matter was discussed at the staff meeting, but like most such issues—very sensitive in our ancient, deeply traditional and superstitious society—in my initial years of tenure, they were only discussed, open-ended airing of opinions and reasons without reaching any conclusion. For one, I was not sure of my own strength. For another I am not an impatient revolutionary. Revolutions cause revolts which divide a group into friends and foes. It was slow conversion that I was attempting—at times imperceptible, at times not so. The design was to alternate uneasy storms and rapprochement.

Quite unexpectedly, this treading on private lives occasioned facing an irate mother-in-law once, and anxious husbands more than once. Interestingly most women teachers were sitting in the fence. On the one hand they were unable to answer my question as to what fast their husbands kept for their welfare, or explain the need for such a fast on rational grounds. On the other, they were too frightened and too superstitious to do something about it. I confess, I did not touch those who were married into the most uncompromisingly conservative families. Extremes, I decided were to be left untouched to begin with. I should win over those who could be converted more easily. Let numbers grow, they exert their own influence and automatically help the situation. To begin with, with such women, I insisted on their presence in school but saw to it that they did not have to physically exert themselves too much when they had kept a fast. Today no one even applies for a casual leave for this or other such fasts, no preferential discrimination is extended. I may not even know that the festival has come and gone.

Socialisation in this sense is like conversion from one set of beliefs to another, related or otherwise, for one sees the need for it. The need may be practical exigencies or a felt desire on rational-cum-emotional grounds. In an institution where independent thinking, equality, dignity, confidence and resourcefulness earn approval, children and teachers alike are motivated to show these qualities in their behaviour. I in turn endeavour not to miss an opportunity of appreciating the attempts made by everyone in this direction most often verbally, at times in writing. Shaping of behaviour through reinforcing desired responses is a recognised psychological technique for socialisation and conditioning. I have personally experienced that

there is not a strategy more powerful than positive reinforcement when either girls are trying to change and assert their individuality or when boys rise in reciprocation.

Building a desired self-image is yet another tool I bring to the fore as often as possible. Girls have been brought up to believe in their inferiority, helplessness, dependence etc. They fear having to make a decision, to assert and insist. They are brought up to be beautiful brides, competent housewives, submissive wives and doting (to their sons only) mothers. Can't they be geared into dreaming different dreams? They don't have to be mothers and wives only. Can't they be made to see themselves as someone else too? Can't we teach girls to dream differently? Let us see how I work towards this goal.

There is no use pretending that one can induce homogeneity in dreams. In the past, society conditioned all girls to dream the same dream: beautiful bride, handsome husband, lovely children and a cosy home. Variations were almost non-existent. But if we are to spark off the ambition of girls at school, help them see themselves as someone specific in the future rather than as non-persons, who must bask only in reflected glory, the suggestive remarks, the seeds sown have to match some known and definite aspect of their personality at school.

A game I like to play is to spot girls who are developing a stoop—not a very uncommon phenomenon among fast-growing lanky girls who may be facing in their homes a barrage of remarks such as 'Look child, don't grow very tall; it will be difficult to find a husband for you.' Instead of repeating unwanted didactic remarks such as 'Don't stoop', 'That stoop of yours is bad for your posture' etc. I vary my remarks depending on a *particular quality* that I may know of in the girl; e.g:

To the brilliant girl, in the medical stream of Plus Two I would say: 'Can you imagine how that stoop will spoil your presence when you move about a large hospital as an important doctor ten years from today?'

To a somewhat glamorous girl: 'You'll not be selected as an air-hostess or a model with that stoop—why don't you do something about it?'

To a serious-minded all-rounder, popular girl: 'Hey, think of yourself behind a large teakwood desk, on a leather upholstered

chair, as an important executive in the year 2000—how would you look in that stoop?’

To a good sports girl (or a fine painter or a promising actress): ‘You are so good at sports but imagine yourself walking across a dias to go and receive your Arjuna award (or prize from Lalit Kala Academy) with that stoop.’

To a girl good at languages, interested in international affairs and national issues: ‘You looked like an efficient investigative journalist when you came to interview me for the school magazine. You would look a “pucca” professional if you got rid of that stoop. It was not there last year. How did you acquire it this year?’

Changes do come over these girls. I don't forget my targets after the remark. When I see them straightening up as they approach me, they are rewarded verbally or with a smile or with a nod of the head communicating: ‘Yes, that's a good try, keep it up.’ Their friends would have heard the remark; they would remind her: what is more important; the girl and the friends begin to dream of the future with a career. They must have a very positive self-image; not just take up a job when they grow up; find their identity, think of the future with a career seriously. For a career and an identity, personality matters. A stoop is just one thing that is used to make them aware of the fact, and enable them to see over the man-made walls that got built, solidly and imperceptibly over generations of upbringing.

Careers are important. In a school where 100 per cent go on to institutions of higher learning and professional colleges, it is important that the students are guided in terms of their aptitude, job-opportunities, etc. At the Career Conference (held for 3 days every year) a very definite effort is made to present speakers of both the sexes, and if possible get at least one woman from male-dominated professions to come and speak on her experiences. This is essential as much for girls as for boys. Fewer women are in professions and still fewer ready to come to speak. Thus the effort becomes most time-consuming. And yet year after year 25 per cent to 35 per cent of our speakers at Career Conferences are women and they represent journalism, the police service, IAS, IFS, advertising, newscasting, banking, tourism etc. In a similar strain, men are invited to speak on hoteliering, para-medical sciences, interior decoration, textile designing, etc. Neither the staff and certainly not

the children have had an inkling as to how this is worked out. But if unwanted walls have to be destroyed, it will have to be done most systematically, subtly, and persistently. Thinking and time would be the most essential inputs on the part of administrators.

While one introduces a lot of desirable strategies, such as those outlined above, certain pernicious customs that ruin the possibility of a woman's personhood have to be countered. One such example is that of getting a chief guest (who is entitled to be a chief guest other than a man?) to grace an occasion and his wife to give away the prizes. The decorative piece called a wife is an essential ornament on the dias. Since she is there 'it would be so nice to get her do something', think the generous-hearted patriarchs. However what can a mere wife do? Give an address? Definitely no! She can gracefully accept a bouquet at the beginning and smile for the photographer. She can also give away the prizes which an efficient teacher passes on to her, as children file past, and smile at them, again for the photographer. Her task, her honourable task, is a child's job. She would not have been selected for that job had she not been the wife of an important person. A mere appendage?

Chief guests at the Vidyalaya come because of *their standing*, unaccompanied by their spouses. If Dr. Raja Ramana comes *he* gives away the prizes; children know him, and his work, not his wife. In the same way, if Ms. Kiran Bedi comes, *she* gives away the prizes, not her husband!

Implicit in the example above is the fact that, we think hard, look around closely and search exhaustively in order to locate chief guests, which must include women, appropriate for the occasion—academic, cultural and sports—that we celebrate. Admittedly, far fewer women enter areas of importance, even fewer are given places at the top. Recognising even these few at the top and honouring them as chief guests is education enough for students. Otherwise our society expects, implicitly, that the place at the top must belong to a man.

Indicative of this is the way in which year after year I receive letters from parents of students studying in the school which begin with 'Dear Sir'. Incredible though it may sound, the father who writes such a letter is upset when the letter is taken back to him by the child as 'it was not addressed to our Princip'. The father is angry that I react as strongly to such a 'triviality'. I am sure a letter to him, by a subordinate of his in the office which begins with 'Dear

Madam' would be a scandal to be punished most immediately! Letters from publishers, manufacturers of laboratory instruments, the Directorate of Education and even fellow principals addressing a general circular meant for all heads of schools follow more often than not the same form of address . . . 'Dear Sir'.

To summarise, our programmes for the reorientation of expectation of behaviour-roles of girls and boys are rooted in the assumption that education is not neutral; it either maintains status quo or causes it to change . . . either on a rebound or because it is so geared. As teachers, we are concerned with the process of modernisation and democratisation of our society. To that purpose the school climate is created, an ethos established.

Methods used are commonly accepted psychological ones, known to influence the process of attitude formation: identification, normative and cumulative learning, cognitive development and reinforcement of positive responses with a system of reward. None of these can be isolated easily, for together they are woven to create the appropriate climate. For instance the normative attitude would be defined by the Vidyalaya; its appropriateness communicated through situations—incidental as well as contrived—as they arise or are created out of necessity. Cumulative learning through poetry, stories, passages for summarisation, titles for composition, panel discussions, assembly talks, competitions in elocution and declamation, plays shown at school, bulletin boards, poster competitions, etc. would reinforce our definition of normative behaviour, as also help cognitive development.

Democracy as a way of life—the equal status of boys and girls constituting only a part of it—has to be practised by the faculty, it has to be promoted by programmes as much as examples. Children observe most minutely and if they identify with the proper models, their views and values begin to change even if they are in conflict with those held by the family. Children have to be continuously bombarded with signals of expected appropriate behaviour, if the sanctity of outdated pernicious values is to be eroded.

This can never be a one-person crusade. Involvement of teachers—and as far as possible winning over of at least a section of parents—is crucial.

On the practical side, all our programmes of such socialisation have grown out of the body of the Vidyalaya. They are not alien patches on the structure or practices prevailing in the school. What

existed was modified to begin with, not uprooted and weeded out to be violently destroyed. Abruptness only rouses fear and suspicion, insecurity, and therefore non-cooperation. We felt it was wiser to make haste slowly. Successes gave us confidence and signalled that things were working out; they were not opportunities for loud jubilation which would have invariably put more backs up than was the case.

What has been achieved is a small beginning. We are not very sure if ten years from today these attitudes would continue to prevail, or if the forces of conservatism and the poisonous perniciousness of media would cause any reversal.

Even now, the picture at school is a very mixed one. While we feel deeply satisfied at boys baking and girls galvanising, it is still rare for a girl to join woodcraft or to learn the repair and maintenance of electrical gadgets. The very rarity of it, creates news. Nor has any boy till date joined the sewing and tailoring group. Successes as we have witnessed must multiply till they become routine, till they stop being material to be presented at such a seminar.

The process has begun; it must be accelerated judiciously. It has given us confidence that programmes can work and deliver what we want them to. As for the future, we at Sardar Patel Vidyalaya do believe that 'We shall overcome . . . one day'—and the day will be before 2000 A.D.

Footnotes

1. Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, New Delhi.

Socialising of the Female Muslim Child in Uttar Pradesh

ZARINA BHATTY

'I wish I could say the same for my daughters,' my mother lamented, in answer to her friend, Mrs Akbar's boastful declaration, about her daughter Fatima who had just turned 14.

Fatima is the model of an Indian Muslim girl. 'No man,' boasts Mrs Akbar, 'has even heard her voice outside the house, nor has anyone seen her head uncovered, since the age of eight when her father decided that she should observe *parda*.' Soft-spoken Fatima never wasted her time playing games or running around outside the house. She learnt instead, the household chores, and grew up into such an obedient daughter accepting everything without ever questioning, and never a murmur of discontent: 'Oh, what a sacrificing, self-effacing, obedient young woman she is now, looking after the comforts of her father and brothers. Never does she eat before they have eaten, no matter how late they come home.' 'Men are men after all,' continues Mrs Akbar. 'They belong to the outside world and women in our respected families only go out twice in their lifetime—once they go out in the palanquin (*dola*) at the time of their marriage and then once when their funeral goes out. 'In matters of religion Fatima is very particular too. She never misses her *namaz* and fasts for all thirty days,' Mrs Akbar comes closer to whisper to my mother, 'even on "those days" lest someone may guess.' (Women are considered impure while they are menstruating and thus cannot fast or pray during that time). 'It is a woman's curse and she should suffer it secretly. The brothers are forever teasing her—those monkeys (says Mrs Akbar most indulgently) never even completing their Quran, not to speak of *namaz* or fasting. But then boys are boys and girls are girls We can't allow our daughters to be irresponsible, it is the woman who carries on the tradition. We

women can't afford to fool around with our likes and dislikes. We have to teach our daughters the day they open their eyes, what are their duties and obligations. After all they are 'someone else's' property (*paraya dhan*). We are only custodians until the right "owner" comes and takes them away.' Mrs Akbar ended with a sigh: 'My only wish now is that Fatima should go as a bride where she belongs, and serve her husband and in-laws,' leaving my mother confused between her newly-acquired modernity and the seemingly blissful traditionalism of Mrs Akbar.

This is a conversation which could have taken place in any Muslim home in UP. Little girls are fed on the model of 'tongueless', desireless, submissive, passive, obedient, sacrificing, serving, pious women, non-persons who are to live and die as daughters, wives and mothers, who should never even aspire to have an identity of their own.

Every human society develops its own role models. Conformity to those models is an important mechanism for sustaining social structures. Sociologists have argued that all societies evolve systems of obligations and avoidances to regulate social behaviour, a necessity to sustain social structures, and to ensure stability. Traditional societies in particular have been found more concerned with stability and therefore, conformity to social norms, condemning deviance and treating catalysts more harshly.

The well-known French sociologist Emile Durkheim, characterised traditional societies as having mechanical solidarity whereby conformity to existing social norms was deemed most essential and deviance most harshly punished. Any deviant individual behaviour was considered as an offence against the society and therefore severely punished. Society and not the individual was supreme, therefore conformity to social norms was considered laudable human behaviour. This social objective of sustaining the existing social structure by demanding and ensuring conformity to social norms was achieved by rigidly allocating roles to individuals on the basis of gender. Male and female roles were distinctly and elaborately defined in traditional societies.

Role behaviour is learnt through socialisation. It is a process by which individuals, particularly the young, imbibe the social norms of their society. The socialisation of the young takes place at different levels: main socialising agents are the family, the school and the mass media. Socialising begins in the family, and personalities are

formed in the socialising process through the child's interaction with the parents, the teachers and exposure to mass media, like radio, T.V., films and the written word.

The social structure of Muslims in India is in many respects a mixture of Islamic and Hindu social systems. The early Muslim conquerors realised that in order to attract converts, Islam had to be fitted into the Indian society. The Islamic social structure with strong bias towards patriliney found a favourable setting in northern India where the Hindu social structure itself was strongly patrilineal and patrilocal and inequitous in essence. Given the inequalities based on the Hindu caste system coupled with the inequalities between the sexes, which Hindus and Muslims shared, Muslims evolved a rigid hierarchical system where various social inequalities were heightened to the extent of modifying purely Islamic injunctions. Among some Muslim communities, the Indian judicial system sanctioned the prevalence of the customary law over the Islamic personal law e.g. in Islamic law a woman is entitled to half of her parents' property. This right was denied to Muslim women in accordance with the customary law which did not allow any share of property to a woman.

Although different interpretations of the Quranic injunctions exist, those commonly held in India and on which the Muslim legal system has been based, refer to male superiority over females in every respect. The legal inequalities include both personal and property rights. A woman is regarded as half a person: for example she inherits from her parents only half of what her brothers are entitled to. For the purpose of providing witness to any contract two men or one man and two women are required, only women can never be witness to any legal contract, a provision which Zia-ul-Haq's government has currently been trying to implement in Pakistan. Even the compensation that has to be paid to her family on murdering a woman is stipulated to be half of that to be paid on the murder of a man. In matters of personal and family life a man has the absolute unilateral right to divorce without providing compensation to the divorced wife and he has the right to marry four wives. Women have no such reciprocal rights. These legal and social inequalities and insecurities of Muslim women reflect in the socialisation of Muslim female children in India.

The male-female bias among Muslims starts from the time of conception. The phrase used to describe a pregnant woman is that

'she is going to have a son', the greeting that a married woman receives from the elders is usually 'Live long and produce sons'. There are many superstitions relating to the possibility of conceiving a son, for example it is believed by some that boys are conceived on moonlit nights while girls are conceived on dark nights. Again, sleeping on the right side during pregnancy produces sons, while sleeping on the left side produces daughters (the right hand is needless to say regarded as the 'better' hand.) Pregnant women go to religious shrines to pray for sons. As a consequence of the desire (bordering on obsession) for sons, the birth of a daughter brings gloom while the birth of a son calls for rejoicing. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, an English woman who married an Indian Muslim and lived in Lucknow (UP) during the years 1816 to 1828, writes:

It is generally to be observed in a Mussalman family even at this day that the birth of a girl produces a temporary gloom whilst the birth of a boy gives rise to a festival in the *zenanah*. Some are wicked enough to say that it is more honourable to have a son (Ali, 1917 : 86).

Socialisation of Muslim girls in UP is based on three basic concepts. First, women are inferior to men in every sphere of life. They are weak physically (less muscle power), mentally (less wisdom), and spiritually (they talk ill of others thus women can never enter heaven). Second, women are responsible for ensuring the continuity of cultural norms by conforming to the traditional culture and by socialising the young accordingly. Third, women must safeguard the *izzat* of the family. The second and the third concepts are interconnected since non-conformity threatens *izzat*. Indian Muslim society, like many other traditional societies, uses double standards of morality for judging men and women and demands from women complete adherence to these double standards. Any deviance from the codes of morality prescribed for women threatens the *izzat* of her kin group.

The concept of *izzat* plays an important role in socialising girls. A family's *izzat* depends on the 'honourable' behaviour of its women, while men are expected to be wayward and pleasure-seeking. There is always a conscious feeling in Muslim homes that men are more important, their lives are more precious, they are the chosen ones. Women are to play a subordinate, at best a supportive role. Along with this, the ingrained sense of insecurity born of the possibility of

being divorced by verbal declaration without even a witness and the fear that the husband may bring another wife, is another underlying principle of socialising Muslim girls. This is reflected in everyday customs—for instance a girl is never allowed to eat any fruit or vegetable which has a twin growth lest her husband should bring another wife. In the same fashion the inequality of the sexes is also elaborately ritualised. At the *aqiqah* or christening ceremony when the baby's hair is shaved, two goats are sacrificed for the baby boy but only one goat is sacrificed for a baby girl. Similarly on the sixth day of the baby's birth the mother and the child are given a purifying bath; the occasion is celebrated with much more pomp if it is a baby boy than if it is a baby girl. On that occasion the father's sisters bring gifts for the baby for which they are compensated with cash or jewellery by the father, depending on the economic status of the family. Here again the compensation is much more if it is a boy than if it is a girl.

It is a social irony that women themselves are given the task of socialising the girls. Once girls are about eight years old fathers do not communicate with them much. The father normally communicates with daughters through the mother or the grandmother. Thus these two figures, the mother and the grandmother, play the most important role in socialising Muslim female children.

The basic lesson taught to girls is that they should learn to be subservient to their husbands because marriage is the ultimate goal for a female child. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali writes:

'I may add here to the praise of a good wife among these people, that she never utters a reproach nor gives evidence, by words or manner, in her husband's presence, that she has any cause for regret. She receives him with undisguised pleasure . . . this was the lesson taught them by mothers and this is the example they would set for the imitation of their daughters' (1917 : 183).

She further adds:

'All who have any regard for the character or the honour of their house, seclude themselves from the eye of the strangers, carefully instructing their young daughters to a rigid observance of their own prudent examples. Little girls when four years old are kept Strictly behind the *parda* (p.172).

Parda was one of the important mechanisms to be used to maintain

the segregation of the sexes. The demands of *parda* created the *zenana*, inside of the house where the girls grew up, lived and died. Their entire life was spent inside the walls of the *zenana* while the men enjoyed the life outside. Men came inside the *zenana* at night to be with their wives for sexual gratification whenever they felt like it. Of course, it was not essential for them to have sex only with their wives. Visits to prostitutes were socially accepted and girls were trained not to object to their husbands having sexual relations with other women as it was accepted that men could not be satisfied with one woman only.

During early childhood itself Muslim girls were carefully nurtured into the discipline that they would have to observe in their adult life. Hence the need for conditioning from the early age to the established social norms and patterns.

Shahida, a Muslim woman from a middle class home in Lucknow, reminisces how the entire emphasis in her socialisation was on 'curbing' and 'stifling' all that she was as an intelligent curious child. Every movement of hers was watched closely and corrected. 'Don't walk like the boys,' 'Don't raise your voice, girls don't talk loudly,' 'Don't eat so much, girls should have small appetites.' How Shahida had to curb her appetite because it was regarded to be unbecoming for women to eat more than two chappatis while boys and men were expected to have at least four to six! She was instructed from childhood to learn to cook, sew and embroider. She remembers having been given not only female but male dolls and every now and then she was encouraged and assisted by the older women of the household to celebrate dolls' weddings and other life cycle ceremonies with elaborate rituals. This was regarded as a good practical training for the little girls. It helped them to learn to play their roles as adults. Shahida remembers how at the age of six she was severely scolded for listening and reacting to a conversation regarding her marriage. She was told to always 'put her head down in shame' whenever her marriage was discussed. The girls were taught to remove themselves from the company where their marriage was being discussed. Discussing marriage was the most favourite topic of conversation among adult women and arranging marriages the most popular pastime. Marriage for a girl was like being thrown into a dark well because she was not even allowed to hear about the future husband and his family. Knowing them prior to marriage was unimaginable. When marriages took place between cousins, the girl

had the advantage of knowing her in-laws but not her husband since *parda* was observed between male and female first cousins also, a male first cousin being a potential husband.

In such circumstances the family was almost the only agent of socialisation. However this situation has been changing and the school and the mass media have entered the scene as socialising agents during this century. For Muslim girls schooling came much later than for Christians and Hindus in this country.

With the spread of western education Muslim society also gave birth to a few enlightened men like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Maulana Hali the poet, and a few others who advocated education for women but within the confines of *parda*. The message for women in the early part of this century was not to educate women to change their role in society but to train them through education so as to play their traditional role better. There was also public recognition of this role. For example, the poet Hali who, judged from the standards of his time, was an enlightened Muslim, wrote a book called 'Mussaddas' where he lauded women's role as mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan the well-known educationist started a school for girls in Aligarh which later became a college. But strict *parda* was observed in the college and the emphasis was on socially and politically conscious mothers, daughters and wives. This is not to deny that there have been exceptional Muslim women in India who broke these barriers and even participated in the Independence movement while keeping themselves within the confines of the traditional society. But the number of such women was much too small to present any effective role models.

The partition of the country in 1947 brought about substantial change in Muslim society. For one thing the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1947 created a fear that Muslim women in *burqa* would be immediately recognised. This led many families to do away with *burqa*. Partition also created a sense of economic insecurity among Indian Muslims and many families sent their sons to Pakistan while they remained in India with their unmarried daughters. Often these daughters had to seek employment out of economic necessity. These factors led to some favourable change in Muslim attitudes towards women's education and seclusion became less rigid. Now more and more Muslim girls are going to schools and colleges. The incidence of *parda* is also on the decrease particularly in the urban areas.

However, it must be noted that the model for Muslim women as

submissive, passive and housebound has still not changed substantially. Muslim women, like other Indian women are acquiring a new role, that of bread earners, without shedding the traditional role and virtues which were associated with that role.

Educational institutions being the other agents of socialisation, have also been breeding conformity rather than change. A study of textbooks, was undertaken by Kamlesh Nischol in 1975 to determine the role of textbooks in changing images of women. Stories and pictures in the NCERT English and Hindi textbooks, which were analysed, portrayed women as passive, submissive, gentle, non-doers and non-achievers. It was found that most stories did not mention women at all, e.g., in the English Readers out of ten lessons nine mentioned only men and one mentioned women; when women were mentioned they were not mentioned by their names but as mothers, wives and daughters.

Women also did not make any praiseworthy achievements; when they did, it was by virtue of their beauty or charm and very rarely on account of their intellectual and personal attributes. Women were rewarded for their achievements by marriage to a prince. Men on the other hand, did courageous things, were explorers, inventors, fought wars, and engaged in sports.

The pictures also showed men more prominently doing things, while females were illustrated as only watching, e.g., in science laboratories boys were shown to be performing experiments while girls were shown to be watching or helping the boys.

The textbook study was followed up by observation of classroom teaching and other activities in a coeducational primary school. Similar conclusions emerged from that study also. It was found that boys were asked to do things like moving chairs, putting up bulletin boards etc. while girls were taught to prepare food and serve the boys. Boys were encouraged to be aggressive and competitive, play games like football and hockey while girls usually skipped or ran around.

In dramatics too girls were given roles of fairies or mothers while boys played the roles of kings or warriors. The girls were repeatedly told to help their mothers at home in cutting vegetables and making tea for the father when he returned from work. Girls were also scolded more harshly for showing the slightest aggression in classroom behaviour. They were taught to be gentle and submissive.

Mass media being yet another important vehicle of socialisation is

no less conformist than the home and the school. Hindi films are well known for portraying women either as sex symbols or as sacrificing, self-effacing, suffering, faceless and defenceless women. Added to these media are the commercial hoardings advertising various products. T.V. sets are advertised with the bride suggesting one more item for dowry. Despite the Government's anti-dowry stand even the State Bank of India displays a poster in its offices advising parents to save for their daughter's marriage. All varieties of detergents show only women washing clothes despite the fact that in India it was always a washerman who washed clothes, women going jubilant over a new model of sewing machine, although even traditionally it was men who tailored clothes. In Indian villages there used to be a specific caste of tailors. In the cities also most tailors are men. Yet advertising repeatedly attributes tailoring to women.

One can enumerate any number of examples whereby modern mass media not only propagate traditional roles for women but even suggest new ways of pushing them into the mother/daughter/housewife syndrome. This makes one wonder whether the *parda*-bound Muslim girls were advantaged or disadvantaged by not being exposed to these modern means of socialisation.

However, a note of optimism must be struck. There is some evidence of change in Indian Muslim attitudes towards their women. Although this should not lead to complacency, a concerted effort towards pushing modern ideas of equality and social justice for both sexes is required. An initiative taken by the enlightened section of Muslim population both men and women, supported by all enlightened Indians will go a long way in changing the socialising patterns and thus the status of Indian Muslim women.

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Women in Indian Theatre: From Bharata Muni and Bharati Vritti to Bharata that is India Today

MRINAL PANDE

Bharata Muni, the venerable saint-author of *Natyashastra*, the classical theatrewallah's bible, declares that the treatise uses a unique style, the 'Bharati vritti', perpetrated by him, from the use of which women are barred altogether:

*Ya vakpradhana purushprayojya stree varjita Sanskrit vakayayukta
Swanam dheyaibharatah prayuka sa Bharati nam bhavet tu vrittih.*

The attitude reflected in these pithy lines, sums up the attitude of the entire classical theatre towards women in general, and female characters in plays in particular. The plays were basically of men, for men and by men. Women were there only as pretty diversions, whom the Dhir Lalit, Dhirodatta, Dhir Prashant and Dhirodhatta Nayakas (heroes) hunted alternatively with *mrigas* (animals) and married and abandoned with great regularity.

In the stylised and ritual-oriented world of the Sanskrit theatre, the self of both the male and female characters, was largely a social creation, and not an individual one. However, in as much as the classical theatre was an expression of the ideals of a patriarchal feudal system, it was particularly subject to its discriminating code. The female protagonist, the Nayika was conceived thereby, as an object, a passive character, whose existence as wife or beloved was a relative one. Bharata Muni delineates 4 types of Nayikas—Divya, Nripatini, Kulastri and Ganika (*Roop Rahasya*). Sharada Tanaya in *Abhinav Natyashastra*, gives seven types: Mahishi (the proud one, the king's favourite), Mahadevi (the dignified one among the queens, loyal to the king and peace-loving), Devi (the queen without samskaras, jealous, proud and young), Bhogini (a sexual mate, fond of dressing, good natured, envied by other queens), Ashrita (the

passive one who arranges the king's pleasures), Natkiya (the one who whips up the king's passions by song and dance) and Kamuka (a queen who does as her lord commands). Dhananjaya in *Dasharoopaka* describes three types of females: Swakiya (one's own), Parakiya (another's wife) and Ganika, or prostitute. He also describes women in various minor roles of Sakhi (the friends), Dooti (the messenger) Dasi (the maid), Prativeshika (neighbour) and Lingini (a yogini). The language all these women spoke on stage (barring the Mahadevi, the Sanyasini, the Swamini, the daughter of the prime minister and occasionally the learned prostitute), was not the language of gods, Sanskrit, but Shauraseni Prakrit, or Prakrit, the language of the lower castes and servants.

In contrast to the Nayika, all the various roles of the Nayakas or the hero, are basically active ones, and are firmly rooted in his status in society, both as a member of a particular caste, as also the inheritor and perpetrator of a (royal or brahmanical) patriarchal legacy. He is expected to be polygamous by nature, and also expected to be 'understood' by the wife at any time at his return. Problem figures like the widow or the deflowered virgin are missing in these plays. Interestingly, these Nayaks are all excellent lovers. The true face of patriarchy is much softened here by the concept of a gentle and generous courtly lover. So much so, that often in moments of dalliance, the all-powerful male even chooses to play the servant to his beloved, asking her to place her lotus feet upon his head: '*Dehi padapallavam udaram*' (*Gita Govindam*). But upon close analysis, one may find, that this chivalrous stance of the Nayaka, is actually that of a master, playfully raising his subject onto a pedestal and in the process attributing impossible virtues to her. The Nayika in all these plays is thus, a creation of the male fantasy, dressed and undressed according to the whims of the male, bearing his sons and being good and naughty to him by turns.

Social role-playing of this sort in theatre is like playing a complex game of chess. The framework of the game is given, and both sides are in agreement about the basic rules, the moves are set and carefully orchestrated, and the end of the conflict is also the end of the game. Since the conflict is very different from the conflict in a Greek tragedy, a resolution of the sort as found in the latter is also not possible. So the gods or the rishis step in when the situation calls out for a solution, and divine intercession ends, rather than resolves the conflict.

Our theatre today, is closer in its *samskaras* to the theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was a curious hybrid of the Hindu, the Muslim and the Western (read British) influences, all combined and fitted into a musical mould, where fantasy and music smoothed all the seemingly irreconcilable contours. The morality preached by these plays is a curious monism of virtues, very different from the plurality that prevailed in the classical ages, where love-making and thieving were all part of the 64 types of practised art forms.

Amanat's *Inderabha*, a musical written towards the middle of the nineteenth century, is a good example of the theatre of the period. Women in this musical fantasy are all fairies, dressed in red, green, yellow and blue, who come to the stage attired as courtesans, and sing a medley of semi-classical songs to please their lord and master 'Inder', much as the courtesans did in *darbars*. Inder declares that he is the king of the *quam* and his only job is to live well and entertain and be entertained. The fairies are richly rewarded by him, but when one of them, the green one or Sabzpari, falls in the love with Gulfam, a *pardeshi* (foreigner) prince, she is punished severely. Eventually she wins her true love back, by dressing up as a *jogini*, a female ascetic, and singing beautiful tearjerkers, and the play ends with the entire *darbar* standing and singing *mubarihi* (congratulations).

Nothing typifies the ambivalence of this age towards women, as does the figure of the fairy-courtesan. Of all the women in society at this age, it was only the harlot who could come out in the world of power and artistic excellence, and could use men as instruments in her desire for both. This strange emancipation, and her subtly threatening quality of mind made her a very attractive character for playwrights of the commercial Parsi theatre (like Pandit Narayan Prasad Betab and Agha Hashra Kashmiri) as also the more sophisticated poet-playwrights like Jayashankar 'Prasad' and 'Bhar-tendu' Harishchandra. But the pressures of their own *samskaras* (to bring the shameless woman low and laud the legally wedded wife at the end of the play) being immense, most of their plays end with the errant husband venting his turpitude upon the harlot, and eulogising the Sati Sadhvi, who sat at home and took care of things while the husband whiled away the nights with the other woman.

Lively antagonism between the whore and the matron is one of the chief dramatic devices, whereby the nineteenth century playwright

created intrigue, comedy and dramatic tension within his plays. In only two playwrights from this period, Jayashankar 'Prasad' and Agha Hashra, does one spot a definite struggle to give the harlot, or the wronged queen, a chance to vent her justified anger at the shoddy deal she has had. Both *Dhree Swamini* by 'Prasad', and Agha Hashra's *Ankh Ka Nasha* have scenes where the slighted woman gives as good as she gets.

However, in the ultimate analysis, the value of these plays lies not in providing us a way out of the Indian neurosis vis-a-vis women, but in having the honesty to express and dramatise them. There is a kind of cultural catharsis in these plays, a result of the fact, that they first uttered the unutterable, the disgust, the decay, the contempt, the hostility and the violence with which our culture surrounds female sexuality. Since it is women, upon whom the onerous burden of sexuality falls, theatrically the most interesting characters in these plays are naturally females.

Closer to us in time are Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar, two playwrights, who began writing not too long after the women's question had presented itself on a national level for the first time. They typify the general attitude of most playwrights of the post-50s towards the women.

Mohan Rakesh's women are largely expressions of his own sexual neurosis, as any reader of his novels and short stories will testify. His Lawrentian fascination for, and revolt from, the mother-figure, his men writhing in the vice-like grip of their bitch-goddess women, and their intense fear of an ultimate emasculation at their hands, are reflected in a novel like *Andhere Band Kamare*, short stories like *Ardra* and plays like *Adhe Adhure*. His Mallika in *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, is the stock woman-betrayed. But interestingly, the basic problem the play revolves around, is not that of her betrayal, but the tragedy of the romantic poet-laureate, who must break away from his woman and her ensnaring love if he is to fulfil himself as a creative artist. The woman's question in Rakesh's play, is actually, thus, a man's question. Again and again, his intense, brooding males draw blood from the rebellious flanks of their women, enslaving them, and in the process demeaning themselves, but for this eventual debasement of man, Rakesh squarely blames the woman. Here he is no different from the classical playwrights or medieval saint poets like Tulsidas or Kabir.

A middle class working woman like Savitri, (in *Adhe-Adhure*) driven by her frustrated ambitions, almost forces her husband into being a sado-masochist, but according to Rakesh while her anger is understandable, her reaction is far in excess of what she makes the poor man undergo. Lucky the man, who can resist women, his men seem to say.

Tendulkar realises (in plays like *Kamala* and *Kanyadan*) more shrewdly, the daily debasement of the Indian woman, (matron and whore alike) within the family, which springs from a certain Indian brand of male sado-masochism towards women, and a deep-seated hatred towards a permanent alliance of any sort with a woman who is Maya—immanence, misleading the male again and again. While his observations are shrewd, Tendulkar sees his female protagonists' agonised outbursts, less as evidence of a justified dissatisfaction with the limitations of a man-made situation, but more as being symptomatic of a universal tendency. In plays like *Sakharam Binder*, or *Kamala* or *Kanyadan*, we find that each tortured and exploited woman is juxtaposed against an equally tortured and exploited male. The conclusion, therefore, seems, that exploitation is a universal phenomenon and big fish shall eat all small fish eventually. This rather simplistic explanation, and a sort of a cultural sanction for the violence against women latent in Indian society, seems to spring from the male writer's desire to play a kind of Pygmalion in reverse, whereby disciplined and emotionally inhibited middle class female characters end up discarding all their genteel trappings and turn into foul mouthed whores, who give their exploiters as good as they get. Eventually leaving the bloodied dregs of the males behind them, these harridans saunter out into the big, bad world beyond, all by themselves. Certainly a bleak scenario this, but Tendulkar feels, this is what anyone who tastes the forbidden fruit called liberty must face. One feels that beneath his modern clothing, he too is as conservative and rigid in his unforgiving attitude, as the Sanskrit playwrights.

A similar resolution (?) is held out by Bhisham Sahni's new play *Madhavi*. The heroine of the play, Madhavi is sold again and again by her husband, in concubinage, to various kings, to produce male heirs for them, in return for certain holy cows. Eventually having collected the requisite number of cows for his guru (*gurudakshina*) the husband seeks to set her free (?) so that she may be his devoted wife. At this point, Madhavi herself offers to walk away and set him

free of the obligation of accepting a much-used and aged woman for his wife. This she calls fulfilling her duty, and so saying walks away into the wide world beyond.

In contrast to the somewhat liturgical pomp with which Sahni surrounds sexuality, the determined profanity of Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*, *Giddh*, *Ghashiram*, *Panchhi Aise Aate Hain*, and even *Kanyadan*, stands out, and poses certain interesting questions. It is not by chance that his heroes like Sakharam or Ghashiram are often common criminals or conmen, or hucksters, with no priestly or intellectual role to uphold. Their cold-blooded love-making and sexual assaults on women, are intended as a sacrilege to the tenderness of the middle class phenomena of romantic love. Here Tendulkar is far from having escaped his puritanical Indian middle class origins: it shows clearly in the spirit of the plays (*Sakharam Binder*) in the frenzy of the women (*Giddh*) and in the violence and contempt of the love-making. We are never allowed to forget that this is forbidden, and the sweeter for being so, that lust has greater excitement than love, and that women degrade themselves by participation in sexuality. The brutality with which he handles the language of sex, soiled by centuries of prurience and shame, is an indication of his certainty of how really filthy all this is. In a play like *Kanyadan*, Tendulkar is careful to preserve an obstinate separation between, sex and the 'higher life' of poetry and ideas, which can only be experienced in itself or in masculine company. He has little or no interest in parenthood, and his compliments to maternity are few and devoid of feeling.

One may add here, that while the release of such inhibited emotions of the middle class Indian mind, is certainly advantageous, the expression of such lavish contempt and disgust, can come to be an end in itself, eventually harmful, even malignant. To provide unlimited outlets for masculine aggression, does little besides airing a situation out in the open. It can never solve the basic dilemma of the sexual politics of Indian society. To confuse such neurotic hostility and frank abuse, with 'boldness' and 'sanity' and 'freedom,' is frankly rather vicious, were it not so very sad.

Interestingly, while the male playwrights have mostly dealt with the woman's question against the background of the bygone feudal ages, it has been women playwrights like Tripurari Sharma, Irpinder Puri and Jyoti Mhapsekar, who have faced it frankly and squarely in their own time. One may find their work comparatively weak as

plays, but the forces shaping these plays are different, and so perhaps they cannot be explained within the limited meaning of the word 'play' as we know it. Mhapsekar's well-known *Mulgi Zali Ho*, (Oh! a daughter is born) Tripurari's *Bahu*, (The daughter-in-law) and Irpinder's *Balanji Tum Aage Mein Pichhe* (Husband dear, you walk ahead) have arisen not merely out of a deep commitment to theatre, but also an equally deep-seated desire to provoke the collective psyche of the viewers, into rethinking the whole question of a woman's status in society.

As a genre, feminist plays are closer in shape and spirit to the little impromptu musical skits women have been enacting traditionally in the women's quarters, during *ratjagas* (the night-long festivities preceding a son's wedding) where men and their social mores are present only as caricatures presented by women. It is no coincidence, therefore, that plays like *Mulgi Zali Ho*, make ample use of traditional songs, lyrics and laments sung by women which not unlike the 'blues' sung by the Blacks, reflect the agony of their suppressed souls. Plays like these challenge the relaxed, casual quality of our play-watching as suddenly the familiar joyousness of old songs begin to reveal old, unhappy, far-off things all of us have known but have chosen to ignore. Protest naturally becomes a distinctive moral feature of such plays, and indignation the predominant emotion. Here one may recall that the original meaning of the word 'protest' was, to bear witness, and only as a consequence of that allegiance, to bear witness *against* something else. These women are protesting, because they have been both witness and participant in the whole social drama, and their protest thus has a distinct rationale of its own, readily grasped by even the least initiated among their audiences. Flawed as they may be, these plays nevertheless foreshadow an important new direction.

The pitfall that women playwrights have now to watch out for, is that of assuming an overly aggressive posture towards male dominance, and thereby creating within their play, a social abstraction based predominantly on gender stratification. In attempting to do this, feminist playwrights often neglect the overall stratification of the Indian social system.

It is important to remember, that the woman playwright's social situation often inclines her to seek in her plays, an emotional outlet for all the pain and the humiliations that she and her kind have suffered at the hands of society as women, and the very circumst-

ances that turn her to creative writing, also become obstructions she is often incapable of surmounting. We do not often find in our women playwrights, the irony and the easy elan of a master, which lifts a play from an autobiographical piece, into the category of high art. The traditional Indian woman is still a very confused and inhibited human being, and her interaction with a confused and multicultural society is bound to be ambiguous in nature. In treating these areas in broad sweeping strokes of black and white and depicting the female protagonist more or less as a mere symbol of exploitation, these women seem too concerned with serving a cause and fail to assume the objective attitude towards the world, that really unlocks the doors of true creativity. The negative audacity of these plays still leaves us vaguely dissatisfied, and faced with an enigma. Truth has to be essentially ambiguous, and somewhat mysterious in good theatre, as in life. This we do not find in these plays yet.

It should be said here, that the majority of male playwrights have similar limitations, but it is when we compare our noteworthy women playwrights with truly great playwrights, that they seem mediocre. Certain misogynists would assert here, that women being neurotic cannot create anything worthwhile. Yet, these are often the same people who pronounce genius akin to madness. In order to explain their limitations it is the Indian women playwrights' situation, that must be analysed, and not some mysterious essence. Their future remains largely open.

The pattern of female employment within theatre follows the course of the role women play outside. The Puranas frown upon the tribe of actors, calling them *Jayajanya*—those who live by their wives' earnings. *Ratnavali Natika* and *Janaki Parinay*, two plays have the Natis expressing their worries about their marriageable daughters and the corrupt world of actors they are forced to live in. *Mahabhashya* condemns Natis declaring pompously, that the tribe lacks '*satitva*'.

By and large, women as theatre hands have almost always been ancillary handmaidens in the more important work of men. One of the oldest living members of a commercial theatre company, Kamala Bai Gokhale, said in an interview:

No one urged a girl to take up acting as a career. Look at Shanta Apte and Hansa Wadkar and their experiences—we faced severe

opposition particularly from actors who were playing female roles on stage. We were their first natural enemies. They hated us. Bal Gandharva [a well known singing star] wanted my husband to join his company for major roles opposite his female roles, and when my husband accepted only on the condition that myself and my mother should also be taken in the company, Bal Gandharva refused. ... There were many subtle and also crude ways by which they made our life miserable. It is the simplest thing for a man to crowd you in a doorway or in the wings of a stage.

Public reaction to 'professional' women acting in religious plays is reflected clearly in the episode involving the celebrated Gauhar Jan. Gauhar was playing the roles of Sita and Draupadi in two religious plays (by the celebrated playwright Pandit Narayan Prasad 'Betab') being staged by the travelling troupe of Parsi Alfred Co. of one Mr. Jahangir Ji Khatau. The company, unfortunately, when performing in the city of Lahore, picked up a fight with one Mr. Lal Chand 'Falak', the editor of a local daily. It is said that the quarrel concerned the issuing of free passes for the friends and family of the journalist, which the mercurial Mr. Khatau was fiercely opposed to. Mr. Falak then wrote an inflammatory editorial, alleging that the company was deliberately defiling the Hindu scriptures, by getting a 'professional' woman, a tawaif, to play the roles of venerable Sita and Draupadi. This led to fierce communal clashes in the city, as a result of which the company suffered grievous losses and had to close down for good.

One wonders how women in the audience reacted to these hapless women. Kamala Bai again on this:

They maintained a stiff distance. I was not considered respectable company.

Recently while talking to a young stage actress, I asked her, what irked her the most while performing in small towns? She answered frankly:

The local attitudes, that still link the actress with the oldest profession in the world.

This is an area where I am afraid we have not come a long way at all.

The Unperceived Self: A Study of Five Nineteenth Century Autobiographies

MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE

I

In India, throughout the nineteenth century, education continued to be a matter of debate and public concern. After the battle between the Orientalists and Anglicists was settled in 1835, the question of education for women grew into a controversial issue in the second half of the century, at least in the metropolitan areas. In Calcutta, although the beginning of formal education for women can be traced back to 1850 when the first girls' school was established through the joint efforts of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Drinkwater Bethune, going to school remained a relatively rare experience for the majority of girls until well into the twentieth century. Whatever education women received was imparted at home informally, and there is very little systematic record of this process. Women of enlightened families were educated at home. A good number of them must have thought about themselves and their lives and the process of social change that was so evident in the Bengal of the late nineteenth century. The novels of the time, which often act as subtle reflectors of social and individual perceptions do not help us to understand the woman's point of view because these were mostly written by men. Whatever women wrote, if they did write at all, was not for publication, and often did not have 'literary' value. But some of the Bengali writings of the time which are now being unearthed from family-papers through the efforts of a few enthusiastic persons mostly connected with the Bengali journal *Ekshan*, reveal to us an alternative perspective in understanding the question of education and women in nineteenth century Bengal.

Five such autobiographical texts have been used as primary material in this paper (see Table I). All these accounts are in the first person, either written as memoirs or diaries (B, C, D, E), or orally

transmitted to a scribe (A). The writers were all born in nineteenth century Bengal (years of birth ranging from 1819 to 1878) and the language of these texts is Bengali. There the similarities end. These women belonged to varied levels of society, ranging from landowning families in rural Bengal (C, E) or families of government servants (B) to an urban slum (D) which produced the most outstanding stage actress of nineteenth century Calcutta. Their accounts are dominated by different kinds of concerns and preoccupations. While introspection on religious and spiritual matters characterise text A, text B is a joyous account of a young bride glowing in the security of her educated and powerful husband's love. Text C dwells at length on the various stages of the protagonist's education, and how at some point, in spite of being equally bright, her brothers went ahead to go to schools and colleges while she had to be satisfied with domestic training. Text D being the autobiography of an actress is the most unusual of all—where the usual frame of the extended family and the background events of marriages and rituals are entirely absent. Binodini Dasi sees her life mainly in terms of the roles she played and what she learnt from them. Text E is merely the account of a childhood, recollected by the narrator at the age of 75 and ends as the negotiation for her marriage begins when she is ten. Only two of these texts were written as conscious literary composition (C, D). The others were unmediated records of personal and family life without any thought of publication, and often without any conscious structure or plan. Chronology is meant to be linear, but it is not uncommon to find the narrator going back and forth as she remembers more events. Time and again the narrator's own story gets lost in the detailed description of a marriage or a festival or is interrupted by general reflections on life.

But even the most unselfconscious of reminiscences can reveal certain assumptions and cultural codes.

All knowing and telling are subject to the conventions of art. Because we apprehend reality through culturally determined types, we can report the most particular event only in the form of representational fiction (Scholes and Kellogg, 1977 : 151).

Thus in the act of remembering most of these writers create a world of values. In attempting to decode these, one discovers that autobiographical writing is one of the most sensitive registers of the

idea of human existence and the pattern of individual life in a given society.

Almost all these autobiographical accounts refer to the education of the first person narrator directly or indirectly, although only in one of the five cases (E) this education consists of formal schooling. But whether written in a distinctly literary style (as in B and D) or with a general carelessness about spelling (B) or disregard for organisation of material (A and E), all these narrators show a demonstrably heightened awareness of their own situation and a sensitive response to life, partly due to education, partly due to their indirect participation in an ethos where the life of the mind mattered. The very fact that these writers attempted to capture their past through the verbal medium, testifies to the presence of some literary culture in their environment or the existence of certain literary models in the background. An attempt will be made in this paper to examine the perceptions of self in relation to society that emerge from these texts, and how far are these perceptions shaped or sharpened by the education of the protagonists.

II

Now, as everyone knows, it has only been in the last two centuries that the majority of people in civilised countries have claimed the privilege of being individuals. Formerly they were slave, peasant, labourer, even artisan, but not person (Saul Bellow, *Mr Sammler's Planet*).

Writing this in twentieth century America, Saul Bellow probably intends to emphasise the economic determination of the concept of individualism. In the past, the poor could not afford the luxury of being persons. But other than the economic, there is a philosophical dimension to this question as well. Even in prosperous and enlightened households in nineteenth century Bengal, where the men, through their contact with the West via the English language were beginning to define their self-images in terms of individual identity, the women were still seen only in terms of their familial roles. They were not persons; they were wives or widows, mothers or daughters. Describing the aspiration and expectation of a woman in another cultural context, V.S. Naipaul, with his characteristic precision describes the women's situation in a traditional society thus:

... to be taken through every stage, to fulfil every function, to have her share of the established emotions; joy at a birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at a death. Life to be full had to be this established pattern of sensations ... [for these women] ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow (*A House for Mr Binas*, p. 160).

Even when we read the autobiographical account of an unusual woman like Saradasundari Debi (text A) who as the mother of Keshub Chandra Sen was right in the fray of the Brahmo-Hindu conflict of mid-nineteenth century Bengal, surrounded by people who made history, we find that she too invariably sees herself as a daughter, a bride, wife and eventually as mother. From what is revealed in her incidental reflections on religion and faith, she emerges as an extraordinary woman whose metaphysical bent of mind was tempered with tolerance and rationality. But in her account there is no sense of her own worth. The earliest recollections in this narrative are of the terrors of the child bride. At the age of ten

When I first came to my father-in-law's house, every time I'd look somebody in the eye, one *pao* of my blood would dry up ... I did not lose this fear even after I was the mother of three children.

Her mother-in-law had apparently taken a dislike to her, although the writer bends over backwards not to blame her for anything. She insists that she herself was at fault because she often played around with the other girl-brides in the joint family, neglecting the strenuous household chores. Even though there were many servants, the mother-in-law insisted that these girls mop the floors of large rooms and do other heavy tasks of the house. Saradasundari Debi does not dwell too much on the subject of her husband, perhaps out of modesty or a sense of propriety, but the fact that she had very high regard for him is clear from her occasional references to him:

My husband had advanced views on women's education. He really wanted me to be educated. Since there was no other way, he used to teach me at night. His handwriting was very neat. He would write and ask me to copy his words. I used to try.

At the age of seventy when she recalled all this orally she also added

'Now I cannot write because I have not done so for years, but I can still read.'

After her husband's death she lost all interest in material things of life at a very young age and against everybody's wishes went on a pilgrimage even though her children were very small and her presence was necessary when the ancestral property was being divided. There is some ambivalence in her disregard for the not-inconsiderable property of her father-in-law (seventeen houses in Calcutta, eighty thousand rupees cash for each of the sons, quantities of gold, pearl, precious stones, and silver utensils), and her subsequent lament that because she was a widow, her husband's brothers cheated her out of her rightful share. But on the whole, religion remained the predominant concern of her life. This concern is of particular interest to us, because unable to remain in the groove of Hindu orthodoxy which the Brahmo Samaj had attacked (her own son was a leader of the Brahmo Samaj) and yet unable to give up Hinduism altogether, she was forced to think on the question of religion, and had to fashion her own individual faith.

She was born in an orthodox Hindu family (Vaishnav from her mother's side and a worshipper of Shakti from the father's side), visited distant places of pilgrimage undertaking hazardous journeys (Hardwar, Mathura, Brindavan, Kurukshetra, Puri), and yet went to Keshub's prayer meetings as well, and herself initiated her youngest daughter-in-law into the Brahmo faith. She records her thoughts on this contradiction of her behaviour in great detail. Twice she tells us how people were baffled by her behaviour. During her pilgrimage to Kurukshetra, a place sacred to Hindus, someone asked: 'You are the mother of Keshub Chandra Sen, why have you come here?' She replied: 'These places are ancient in origin—they are God's realm, what is the harm in my seeing them?' Elsewhere she says in a hesitant manner:

I am not sure that our salvation cannot be achieved through image worship. I know that salvation is possible through the worship of the abstract godhead, and my own salvation depends on that. But I do not expect to be saved. I just want to be at His lotus feet.

She explains her insatiable desire to visit places of pilgrimage not in terms of her desire for spiritual salvation, but as an activity she loved and enjoyed.

Pilgrimage in those days was the only pretext of travel for

women—the only means of coming out of the enclosed world of a claustrophobic joint family to breathe freely and be exposed to the variegated outside world, its mountains, rivers and oceans. Her repeated pilgrimages might have also been her unconscious bid towards selfhood because within the confines of the household almost every wish of hers was stifled by the autocratic elders.

What were these wishes? Most of these concentrated around the choice of partners for her children. Her first son's marriage was decided against her wishes by her mother-in-law when Saradasundari Debi was still dazed at the loss of her husband and daughter. After her first daughter's death her third daughter was married to the widower son-in-law: 'This marriage took place against my wishes.' Later when she had set her heart on a particularly pretty girl for Keshub, the family disapproved of her choice and got him married to a bride so small, thin and insignificant that

had my Keshub been of a different nature, he would certainly have gone astray. But Keshub had a streak of asceticism from childhood. Thus, instead of being harmful, this marriage turned out to be good.

Saradasundari's only attempts at asserting herself were generally thwarted. In their large joint family, marriages of cousins were performed in groups of two or three. Individuals did not matter. Thus Saradasundari's insistence that the celebrations for Keshub's wedding would not be shared was overruled by the head of the family (her husband's elder brother) and he arranged his own son's marriage at the same time.

Predictably, Keshub's conversion to the Brahmo faith also caused Saradasundari Debi considerable agony within herself and persecution from outside:

My husband's elder brother abused and scolded me daily. There was not a single day when I did not cry. Because I did not say anything to Keshub about his religious belief I became the target of hostility and criticism. Once in a while I felt Keshub might be wrong, but now I don't think so at all.

She shows her true liberation in refusing to interfere. She mentions very casually in passing an incident in her son's life which is almost of historical importance. She says: 'When my husband's elder brother stopped Keshub's allowance because he took his wife to

Debendranath Tagore.... Keshub wanted to file a suit.'

What had actually happened has been described in vivid detail by Benoy Ghosh

The day was 13th April, 1862—a red letter day in Bengal's history of women's emancipation.

Keshub Chandra Sen decided to take his wife to the house of Debendranath Tagore. His intention had become known ahead of time and angry relatives along with hired goondas crowded near the main gate to prevent his going out. When Keshub ordered them to open the lock, no one had the courage to disobey:

Keshub followed by his timid youthful wife (who could not be more than fifteen at the time) her sari hanging in a long veil before her bashful face, came out of his room, and with suppressed excitement walked past the marshalled groups of angry relatives¹ (Ghosh, n.d: 227).

Benoy Ghosh calls this not only a dramatic and historic event, but perhaps also a symbolic one.

The turbaned men with sticks symbolise the old illogical and orthodox tyranny. The locked gate is the barrier between the old and the new. Keshub and his wife—the young man and woman of the time—come out in the open thoroughfare under the clear sky to fight their battles publicly (p. 227).

Keshub's mother does not dwell upon this drama, perhaps because the incident was far too well known at the time, also perhaps her own attitude would be ambivalent towards Keshub's act. However, by and large her account reveals the true humanism of her attitudes, although she never glosses over her inner conflict. For example, when her grandsons married outside their caste, she felt a great pain:

But after the weddings were over and the brides came to live with us I was charmed by their beauty and personal qualities. Mohini and Sarayu never spoke ill of anyone. I loved them as much as I did the other girls.

In this account of a long life (she was over seventy when she was recounting her story) time is usually measured in terms of marriages, birth and deaths ('... when my second daughter Chuni was nine

months old, my father-in-law died'; or '... one year after my Phuleshwari's marriage my mother-in-law died'). It is entirely an other-oriented life, seen in terms of her relationship with others, yet there is a core of philosophical introspection that gives a deeper dimension to the reminiscences. These two strands are fused in the concluding paragraph of her autobiography:

You want to know how I am now. In the family of my father-in-law Dewan Ram Kamal Sen, there are over two hundred persons. My own family numbers nearly a hundred. In this extended family, every day there are some events of joy, some of sorrow. At regular intervals I receive news of happiness and grief. My God does not let me dwell in total bliss or complete misery. He is testing me through this crucible to prepare me for a world beyond joy or sorrow. One part of me is the inheritor of regal splendour—and another part is a penniless street beggar. Therefore the tidings of joy do not agitate me nor do the news of sorrow upset me. I look at it all as divine play and sitting in the midst of this large populous family I shed tears with one of my eyes and laugh with another.

III

The second text under consideration (B) was written by Kailasbasini Debi whose husband Kishorichand Mitra was a well-known social reformer of mid-nineteenth century Bengal and the brother of Pyarichand Mitra who wrote what is considered to be the first novel in Bengali. Kishorichand Mitra sent an appeal to the Government of India in 1855 to enact legislation to prohibit polygamy. This was the beginning of a movement that attempted to change decadent social customs through legal enactments. The movement really began in 1854, when in Kishorichand's house in Kashipur a group was founded (Samajonnati Vidhayini Suhrid Samiti) with Debendranath Tagore as President and Akshay Coomar Dutt and Kishorichand Mitra as Secretaries, to fight social evils.

It is necessary to say all this about Kailasbasini's husband before attempting to analyse her autobiographical text because she admits to having been moulded by her husband. She repeatedly asserts, that a woman's destiny is determined by the accidental factor of her husband's personality. During her pilgrimage to Kashi, the only journey in her life that she undertook without her husband, she met a

woman called Lakshmimoni who impressed her by her natural intelligence and self-acquired knowledge:

If she had been married to a modern young man she would have been a remarkable person—but unfortunately she was married to an orthodox man . . . She is like a seed that just fell on the ground accidentally—then grew into a tree and bore many fruits. Whatever I am today is due to the fact that the ground has been cultivated and watered very carefully. There is nothing surprising about this. My mind might have been fertile, but even the most ignorant person would have become enlightened if so much care was taken.

Of the five autobiographies studied here, this is the only one to dwell upon the husband-wife relationship in some depth. Kailasbasini admires her husband deeply, but unlike the expected behaviour pattern of her time where the husband was to be worshiped, her admiration is combined with playfulness, raillery and an easy companionship.

One of the first things one notices about this is its totally erratic spelling. Not a single sentence is free of spelling mistakes. Yet in terms of thoughts and ideas this is the most educated and well-informed among these narratives. It is difficult to reconcile this naivete of language with the sophistication of content. Most of the other narratives by women concentrate on personal and domestic issues. We have seen how Saradasundari Debi, in spite of her exposure to so much of the outside world, sees her happiness and grief only in terms of her extended family. Kailasbasini Debi punctuates her private reminiscences with the important public events of her time and seeks to forge a link between the two. Describing a particular house in Rampur where she and her husband stayed for some time, she says: 'Nothing worth mentioning happened while we were there, except that Dwarakanath Tagore died in England that year.' She refers to the 1857 uprising not just incidentally, but gives her version of its causes and repercussions. To her the year 1858 is important for many reasons:

My husband lost his job . . . and his Raibahadur title. There was a comet in the sky and an earthquake. The East India Company lost its lease. India became part of the Empire after exactly 101 years and 4 months of Company Rule.

When her husband lost his prestigious government job (she does not mention the circumstances why this happened, and I have not been able to find this out from any other source) she consoled him by drawing a parallel from the public realm:

Nothing in the world is permanent. Look at what has happened to the Emperor of Delhi. He was sent to England in an iron cage. Think of what he was. You at least have a home, and enough to eat. You don't have too many children. You have a daughter—and she is now married.

Later she refers to the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh. So much awareness of the outside world is remarkable in a woman who had no formal education, and whose own writing does not testify to a high degree of literacy. Even though her writing was poor, perhaps her reading was quite extensive because now and then she makes unexpected literary references:

In Jahanabad . . . when he went out on tour I lived like Robinson Crusoe—I would eat, sleep, read and do needlework. I would teach my daughter and write in this diary. And count the days for his return.

Her husband was in the Civil Service, and he was posted to various district towns. A good part of the narrative is an account of the travels on river boats where she always went with her husband, and her story virtually glows with the joy of being loved by a very worthy husband and also loving him in return. In some of these towns they made friends, but even where there were no families to socialise with—they were quite happy to be engrossed in each other. 'He taught me English. We also played cards on bets.' She writes, as if learning English was another kind of game.

She analyses her euphoria at this stage of her life:

I was happy in Natore . . . My husband is cheerful by nature; he never feels depressed. In addition there was the heady joy of being rich and powerful . . . He had many more friends than I had, but nevertheless we were happy. That is because we are women, our hearts are small, and we are satisfied with very little.

Altogether this is a very happy book. Kailasbasini must also have been a cheerful person by nature, because although the narrative begins at a bleak period of her life when she lost her first son at the

age of one, and she thought she would never be happy again—she soon bounced back when a daughter was born. Her mother-in-law was disappointed. 'We lost a piece of gold and got a piece of glass instead'—but her husband was overjoyed. Quite a few pages are devoted to their combined love for this child whom they believed to be growing up into an unusually intelligent and beautiful girl. She reports how her husband used to go around Hindu College, Hooghly College and Krishnanagar College in search of a suitably bright bridegroom for her, and when she got married (perhaps in 1856) the British and the Bengali guests were given a dinner together. 'No one raised any objection. I have always said the Bengalis cannot do anything to people who are in high position.'

Pride in her husband's high position and joy in his love are frequent motifs in her diary. He was the first Indian Magistrate of Calcutta, drawing a salary of Rs. 800 in the 1850s, and until they bought a garden-house in Kashipur in Calcutta they paid a house rent of Rs. 90 per month.

Talking about her friendship with the wife of another Magistrate, she writes:

We were very happy . . . Not only were we young and our husbands held high positions, but they also loved us deeply. The world looked up to them in honour but our husbands would live or die at our command. What can ail a woman who has such a husband at her feet? We lived in an aura of perpetual happiness.

Not that there was no disagreement between them, but she records even their quarrels with tenderness and affection. One source of conflict was his drinking. Kishorichand belonged to the generation known as Young Bengal, who defied orthodoxy by eating beef and drinking alcohol. She blames his friends:

I won't name them—these uncivilised 'gentlemen'—members of the British Indian Society who instigate him to drink.

Their altercations on this subject are never very serious because in the dialogues reported by her, Kishorichand always seems to win the battle by making her laugh. On the subject of observing orthodox rituals also they have a disagreement. He is an iconoclast as far as rituals are concerned—she follows the conventional forms as a matter of strategy:

I do not believe in the rituals of orthodox Hinduism but I observe

them, the reason being that if I appear to be lax, my husband will violate further limits. All our close relatives are orthodox Hindus. We cannot give them up My husband can do what he likes. Nobody would mind that as long as my conduct is pure I do not really believe in these rituals, but I don't tell him. If I told him I know he would be very happy.

To me this seems to be an important statement concerning the relationship between education and socialisation. Kailasbasini's husband educated her—therefore she imbibed his rational ideas and was convinced of the ills of superstition and empty rituals. But in the context of daily life she instinctively knew that women were expected to uphold tradition, and unorthodox behaviour on her part would not be easily forgiven. She dreads excommunication:

I shudder to think what will happen if people do not eat the food I have touched. There can be no worse humiliation. Death is better than that.

In a society where a woman is brought up to believe in her identity in terms of her relationship with her family, clan, caste and community, losing contact with these supporting structures would undermine her very existence. Kailasbasini instinctively preserves her selfhood by balancing the two parts of her being—one imbibed through education and the other instinctively acquired.

The logic of the narrative almost makes it inevitable that the diary will not continue beyond her husband's death. The journal comes to an abrupt end with a paragraph beginning:

Dear readers, my book ends here. My life ended today. Twenty fourth of Shravan, the thirteenth day of the moon, Wednesday, at 11 p.m. I threw all my material happiness in water. While being alive, I died The word 'widow' is like a thunderbolt to my ears. Oh Father of this world, why do you give me this name? How long shall I bear this! What a terrible word . . . I tremble when I hear its sound.

.The Diary ends.

IV

The third text (C), *Poorva Katha*, is by a writer who published nine books in her life. There is considerable artistry of language and

design in the narrative. It is possible to read it as an account of Prasannamayee Debi's education, and the process through which she became a writer although there are many digressions about social customs of the time and nostalgic recollections of her childhood village. She was born in a landowning family in East Bengal, and her liberal father gave her an unusual education.

The editorial notes tell us that after two years of marriage, her husband became insane. There is hardly any reference in the narrative to this important fact of her life except a brief mention of a trip to a village where a famous doctor treated insanity. The journey was a failure. Elsewhere, describing her own birth she very cryptically says that 'The astrologer's prediction that I should bring good luck never came true in my own life.' Other than that no direct mention is made of her husband, either out of an embarrassed consideration for the reader's sensibility or a desire to forget an experience that must have been traumatic.

Notwithstanding this submerged memory, the morale of the narrator is fairly high. Remembering her childhood dominated by the impressive sisters of her father, she says:

In our Barendra Brahmin community the women were generally beautiful, intelligent and spirited . . . Due to the custom of Kulin marriage they never had to leave their rich father's houses. Since they had never lived in their father-in-law's families, they did not know what fear or submission meant. My father's sisters were specially famous for their extraordinary beauty. There are stories about how the village idol-makers used them as models while making images of the goddess.

She herself emerges as no less spirited and unusual a character. When she first went to her father-in-law's house, she became an object of curiosity because of her stitched blouses and ability to read and write. She not only displayed her literacy unashamedly but also played on her concertina to entertain the visitors, scandalising her in-laws. She drew a lot of hostile criticism and her parents were blamed for giving her a totally depraved upbringing.

A great deal of space is devoted to education generally, and her own education in particular. The boys in the village learnt Persian, Sanskrit and Bengali in the village school. The girls were not supposed to go there, but before her marriage, she sometimes went there dressed as a boy. At a very early age, her real education was through listening to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, being

recited by her aunts, and learning stories about Data Karna and other puranic characters:

Then we were given lessons in housework. First we were taught how to make the Shivalinga and how to worship. Gradually, cooking, serving and fine art were also introduced. Making moulds for *sandesh*, weaving pot holders, stitching *kantha* (quilts), drawing different alpana designs, making carpets of five colours—these skills were taught by the older women of the house.

This was only the early stage in the village joint family. When her father took his nuclear family to Banagram, his work place, he took the education of the children firmly in hand:

In the morning he taught us and in the evening he would test how much we learnt . . . This evening session often clashed with the time by mother dressed my hair into braids. Braiding hair was a complicated art and took a long while. Because I often got delayed it was arranged that my younger brother Ashu would test my learning. I did not want my younger brother bossing over me . . . but dared not disobey my father. In prose, poetry, geography, history and grammar my knowledge matched his—only in maths I lagged behind . . . I did not study any English at that time. Afterwards Ashu went on to a regular school; I stayed behind at home.

Later a series of English missionary ladies were employed (including the one called Bob's Mother whose attempt to take the girls to the church became an explosive issue) to teach her English and how to play the piano. It is possible that her liberal father, disappointed in his daughter's marriage, and guilty about yielding to social pressure in getting her a Kulin husband, decided to spare no pains for the education of Prasannamayee. The education she received was certainly very unusual for the time.

An elderly relative, seeing her interest in studies took her education in hand—hoping to make her appear for the Matric. But instead she began to write poetry and her father published her first attempts in a volume. This was the beginning of a long literary career.

This autobiography has really two phases—although the point where one moves into another is not sharply demarcated. The early part is more like a social history where the narrator-protagonist is

almost invisible. She is merely the 'large lucid reflector' through whose consciousness the ethos of her childhood is conveyed to us. In the second part she becomes a distinctive individual, reading *Bangadarshan*, writing poems, being acknowledged by men as great as Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. In the first phase she recollects events and anecdotes from her village including the story of a doctor who had a missionary zeal about spreading women's education:

He used to think of new ways of spreading education among women, and when he visited families in the course of his professional duties he would talk about his ideas. Some listened out of respect, others dismissed his words as the rantings of a mad man.

When this doctor's wife died he broke down completely. His uncle admonished him by saying 'Jadav, what kind of behaviour is this? A wife is no better than a pair of slippers. If you have lost a pair, we'll get you a better one.' But the doctor never replaced his slippers.

Such anecdotes become fewer as Prasannamayee moves away from the rural background to which she had unquestioningly belonged, to achieve a new literary distinction, and enter a new social ethos. Her brother Ashu went to England to become a barrister and the entire family was excommunicated as a result. Prasannamayee's childless aunts who had hoped that their last rites would be performed by Ashu were so disappointed that they decided to perform their own cremation rites while they were alive. Later when Ashu and her other brother Pramatha (Pramatha Chaudhury, a well-known Bengali writer) married into the Tagore family, and the younger sisters got married outside the Barendra Brahmin community, the links with the village home were completely severed.

Poorva Katha is thus an account of transition from an unselfconscious traditional way of life to a consciously chosen path of dissent, individualism and assertion of the self. It is possible (although it is never stated) that Prasannamayee's disastrous marriage was the turning-point, causing self-reproach and soul-searching to her father, who had so far avoided non-conformity. Her father emerges as the true hero of the book, which begins with his birth and comes to an end with his death. Prasannamayee's life and literary pursuits are shaped and encouraged by her father. Even though they consciously move away from the organic integrated rural life and are ostracised in the process, there is no bitterness or regret in the tone of

the narrative. On the other hand, her evocation of her past and the village of Haripur are replete with nostalgia and tenderness. The tension between an attachment to the old ways of life and an acceptance of a new world outside superstition and orthodoxy is something that holds the text together.

V

The narratives discussed so far are all about women in the context of their families, primarily acting out their roles as mother (A), wife (B) or daughter (C). In Binodini Dasi's *Amar Katha* (D) we see for the first time a woman alone, grappling with the problem of defining her own identity unsupported by ties of kinship. As the reigning queen of the Bengali stage for over a decade, whose performance moved men as diverse as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Edwin Arnold and Bankimchandra, Binodini had many reasons to have a more sharpened sense of self than the writer of the other texts who spent their lives at home—away from public gaze.

Binodini was born in 1863, and her stage career lasted for twelve years (1874-86). *Amar Katha* is an account of those twelve heady years, ending in 1886 when at the age of twenty-three she retired from the theatre for reasons not given in the book. She lived on for nearly fifty-five years after that, but she does not make too many references to these years outside the foot-lights.

Unlike the other narrators (A,B,C,) who are all rich and well born and who remember their rural childhood with nostalgia, Binodini introduces us to a stark and bleak world of deprivation. As a child, she lived in an urban slum, where her mother and grandmother sold their possessions one by one to buy the daily necessities. When there was no money left, Binodini's five-year-old brother was married off to a two-and-a-half-year-old child so that the boy's family could receive a few pieces of jewellery. Those lasted for a little while. Then this brother died in a charitable hospital, and there is a frightening description of how the mother ran down the steps of the hospital holding the dead child close to her because she believed that the hospital authorities would take away the body. The mother went mad, and the grandmother gave the ten-year-old Binodini away to her neighbour Ganga Baiji to train her to sing. Gradually this led her to the stage where she immediately made a mark for herself.

These early years are recalled by the mature Binodini without

rancour or bitterness. She remembers her mother and grandmother as 'images of affection and kindness'. There is also a vague recollection of a boy who was her husband but who never returned to her. The memories of her pre-theatre days are recounted in eight or nine pages. The rest of the book deals with her training as an actress, and the various roles through which she learnt to realise her potential.

Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912), the famous actor and intellectual of the time and a generation older than Binodini, became her teacher and mentor. Not only did he explain the plays patiently and carefully to her before asking her to memorise the lines, he told her 'stories about English actresses, and about famous English writers like Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and Pope.' She admits to an expansion of her perception:

Thus I learnt to act through intelligence and understanding. Whatever I had learnt earlier was a parrot-like skill. I could not understand anything deeply or argue about my views. Now I began to comprehend my roles better. I use to be eager to see the foreign actors and actresses when they came to Calcutta. The proprietors of the theatre also took the trouble of taking me to see these English plays. After I came back, Girish Babu would always ask—tell me what you have seen. I would tell him whatever I could understand. Sometimes he would correct me and explain further.

These were the early years of the theatre in Bengal, and her memoirs give the impression that there was a dedication, and excitement, a sense of doing something new, that bound the theatre people together. Binodini was once asked to give up acting by the rich young man who 'kept' her and he was willing to give her in return everything she needed, but Binodini could not think of life without acting. The young man then suggested that she could act but not take money for her work. Binodini took Girish Chandra Ghosh into confidence and asked his advice. She was too much of a professional by then to think of acting merely on an amateur basis. Girish Chandra advised her to tell the young man that she would not take any payment but he arranged to send her salary to her mother:

Although deception is the constant companion of our wretched lives, still this made me unhappy. In spite of being a prostitute

condemned by society, I had received a noble education and I hated deceit from the bottom of my heart . . . But I had no way but to accept Girish Babu's suggestion.

There is a constant note of self-flagellation in her account of herself. She calls herself a 'fallen woman' a 'hated prostitute' 'an insect of hell'. She sees her life as a constant struggle between her stage aspirations and temptations of other kinds which drag her down:

I am the daughter of a very poor family, my understanding and intelligence are limited. On the one hand my ambition prevents me from self-debasement, on the other the glittering images of temptation beckon me. How long can I resist? . . . Even when I have yielded to these temptations I never paid less than full attention to my acting. I could not. Acting was the most cherished part of life.

There are long passages about her apprenticeship and education. She remembers how the stories told by Girish Babu of Mrs Siddons and Ellen Terry occupied her mind; how she read and thought about literature. Her introspection made her more reflective as an actress because she could throw herself completely into a character. She describes in detail several important roles in her life, but her role in *Chaitanya Leela* seems to have been the most memorable. She was taught to meditate to make her fit for the role. She became a devotee of Krishna and her performances were characterised by truly-felt bhakti and mystical fervour. In very moving prose she describes the experiences of one night when in an excess of devotional ardour she lost consciousness on the stage.

A writer can be read and appreciated after her death. Today even the voice of a singer can be preserved and the acting of a film star appreciated long after his days of glory are over. But for a nineteenth century stage actress time was the greatest enemy. To fight her inevitable fate of oblivion, Binodini in her memoirs quotes copiously from the rave reviews she received in the newspapers, and refers to the high praise she received from the distinguished men of the time. This is not vanity, but an attempt to salvage that area of her life which was most precious to her and which was already receding from public memory. Her acting abilities were what distinguished her from the other so-called fallen women, and gave her identity.

Binodini's education gave her a glimpse of a higher purpose in life. She knew that in order to achieve a level of excellence she needed commitment, concentration and constant self-improvement. Her autobiography is shot through with an ambivalence between her two self-images; a fallen woman, the lowest of the low; and an artiste who can transcend temporal and social constraints to be the peer of the greatest. The first, one suspects is part of the accepted rhetoric of the age. Here she submits to society's valuation of herself. The second is the role she created for herself aided by education and she considered it to be the realisation of her individual self. She valued her education and when her daughter, who was born to her later in life, could not be admitted to a school because of her illegitimacy, it broke her heart.

VI

The writer of text E (*The Diary of a Housewife* by Manoda Debi) must have narrowly missed seeing Binodini on stage, because she mentions her first fascinated experience of the theatre (as different from the traditional *jatra* common in rural Bengal) when actors like Ardhendushekhar (whom Binodini also mentions as a colleague) came to their town to perform.

Manoda Debi's memoirs are chronologically the most recent, and predictably she got the kinds of opportunities for education that the earlier writers had lacked. She went to the Eden School in Dhaka for two years, learnt English and won prizes, an experience that she enjoyed thoroughly not so much for the intellectual stimulation, but for the freedom and friendship and fun it provided. School also meant friendship with girls outside the family; choosing of companions entirely on one's own. She was very dejected when she was taken out of school to prepare her for marriage. Her mother wanted her to continue her education at home and brought her many books—'but my English got neglected'.

Although recollected at the age of seventy-five, these memoirs refer only to the first ten years of the author's life and end when negotiations begin for her marriage. It is more the chronicle of a family, than an autobiography written in order to give her personal experiences a coherence and a form. Meandering descriptions of marriages, rituals and festivals spread over many pages, and although occasional references are made to public issues like the

Brahmo-Hindu conflict or a famine in Orissa, the major part of the narrative centres around the family seen through the child's phenomenological vision.

VII

These five texts, variously described as diaries or journals or memoirs cannot all be categorised as autobiography because an autobiography is supposed to affirm identity.

The autobiographer, attesting his existence by the fact of his writing lives through his explanations, tacit or explicit, of how he come to be the person he is (Spacks, 1976).

But when 'the sense of being a person' itself is absent the need to analyse or explore one's past to explain one's self also automatically disappears. What remains are certain unspoken assumptions, and gaps between the lines which add up, by a process of elimination to a kind of self-image each narrator unconsciously wants to project through her reminiscences.

In my discussion I arranged the text in a chronological order and I am surprised to find another kind of order emerging as well. In text A the narrator sees herself primarily in the role of a mother, in text B as a wife (the diary ends with the death of the author's husband) and in text C as a daughter. In text E a child's impressions are recorded without actually focussing on the narrator. It is only in text D, (*Amar Katha* by Binodini Dasi) that a sense of self emerges sharply. Unsupported either by family or by society and undefined by kinship terms, Binodini is forced to consider herself as an individual. There is a duality in her self-image. When she castigates herself as a 'wretched fallen woman' she is accepting the rhetoric society uses to describe a stereotype. But actually she is quite conscious of her superiority over the general run of women and also of the fact that her unique education has her turned into an introspective and reflective person who cannot fit into any given mould.

What these texts tell us about their authors and the society they lived in is important, but even more important may be the omissions. Some of the most important aspects of their lives are glossed over without explanation. Binodini Dasi never tells us why at the age of twenty-three, when she must have been at the peak of her dramatic career she chooses to renounce the theatre. Prasannamayee Debi

never mentions the fact that her husband was insane, and after the first two years of marriage she never lived with him. The biological aspects of life are carefully avoided by all the writers. Consciously or unconsciously, in the act of remembering, the narrators are being governed by a social code. My attempt in this paper has been to deconstruct the texts in order to examine what perceptions of self emerge in spite of the encrusting conventions.

Footnotes

1. From Pratapchandra Majumdar's *Life of Keshub Chandra Sen* (English), quoted by Benoy Ghosh in *Vidyasagar O Tathaleen Banga Samaj* p.227.

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TABLE 1

Author	Title	Life-span	Points of beginning and ending	Time covered in the account	Identity	Locale	Education	Dominant concerns
A. Saradasundari Debi	<i>Amakatha</i> (An Auto-biography)	1819-1907	Begins in childhood. No definite point of ending. Random reminiscences.	Not chronological.	Mother of Keshub Chandra Sen, the famous Brahmo Samaj leader.	A village in Bengal, then Calcutta. Also pilgrimages to Hardwar, Kurukshetra, etc.	Taught by her husband at home. Her reminiscences are orally transmitted and recorded by the husband of her granddaughter.	Religion, pilgrimages, joint family history of marriages, deaths and property matters.
B. Kailashini Debi	<i>Janaka Grihabadhu</i> <i>Diary</i> (Diary of a Housewife)	Birth not mentioned Marriage 1840 Death 1895	Begins with the death of the author's infant son, and ends with her husband's death.	1847-73	Her husband Kishorichand Mitra was part of the Young Bengal group-later became a major social reformer. He was the City Magistrate for Calcutta. Also edited <i>Indian Field</i> .	Several district towns where her husband was posted; then Kashipur in Calcutta. A brief visit to Benares.	Most of her education she received from her husband. She refers to English books. An English governess is mentioned who taught her English and needlework.	A happy and fulfilled marriage. Travels with husband. Friendships and filial love.

C.	Prasanna Kumar (About Earlier Days)	1856(?) -1939	Begins with the writer's father's birth and ends with her father's death.	Dates not specifically mentioned.	Mother of Priyambada Debi and sister of Pramatha Chaudhary. both well- known writers in Bengali.	Different villages and towns of East Bengal.	Detailed references to a three-phase education: 1: in the village, 2: systematic education from her father in Dacca, 3: a series of English governesses. She was expected to appear for matric, but began to write poetry instead.	Social and family history. Kulin Brahmin system Education— and the regret of not achieving her full potential.
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D.	Amur Kumar Binodini Dasi (My Story)	1863-1941	Early childhood memory takes up about 10 pages. The main narrative is concerned with the 12 years of her	1874-88	Famous stage actress of Calcutta from 1874-88. Had her training with Girish Chandra Ghosh.	Mostly Calcutta (there is one chapter describing her theatrical tour to the north: Delhi, Lahore,	She learnt from fellow actors like Girish Chandra Ghosh. References to Shakespeare, Byron and many others.	Different roles in plays. She seeks her selfhood through these roles. Her education. Pride in her acting ability
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acting career.
She retired
from the stage
at 23.

Lucknow, etc.

co-existing
with a self-
deprecatory
humility about
her moral
character.
Sadness and
introspection
about the
meaning of
life.

E. Manoda Debi	Janaki Grihabandhu Diary (Diary of a Housewife)	1883-1963	Mostly an evocation of childhood memories. Ends when she is 9, and about to get married.	1883-90 (Approx.)	Born in a large propertied family in East Bengal. Grand- father was the Deputy Magistrate of Barisal.	A village in East Bengal Dhaka and Barisal.	She studied in the Eden School in Dhaka. Two years later she was taken out of school for marriage.	Childhood memories mainly connected with the family and school.
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Walking Erect with an Unfaltering Gaze: The Educated Woman in Modern Tamil Literature

C.S. LAKSHMI

To be women is to accept suffering. Suffering ennobles. Endurance is part of femininity. Woman is patient like the earth—she can accept all the trampling. Myths perhaps, but myths that have a strong hold on a culture.

Kannagi sees the severed head of her husband. He has not exactly been loving. The major part of his married life has been spent with a dancing girl. Kannagi has endured all this. What she cannot endure is the royal injustice that has beheaded him. With her ankle-length hair let loose, with tears streaming down from her large, beautiful eyes, she walks towards the king's court. Later, she opens up the sluice-gates of her anger so far under control, and the city of Madurai burns. What prevented Kannagi from seeking similar justice when her husband forsook her? Why does she lose her temper when a non-loving, cold husband dies? This is because suffering within the marital framework is considered 'normal'. It is part of being a woman.

Nallathangal's story is suffering of a different kind. After being harassed at her marital home, she pushes her seven children into the well and jumps in herself. The last one to be pushed in, slightly older than the others, runs around the well crying out that he does not want to die. Nallathangal succeeds in catching him and pushing him down the well. But her suffering has ennobled her, given her another lease of life. Nallathangal is another symbol of suffering, endurance and ennoblement. Her name is synonymous with suffering. Her story is told not with anger but with admiration.

Amravathi—a princess. No cruel husband, no poverty, no starvation. No seven kids to feed. But something else can also bestow suffering. Love for a man. Amravathi gets beheaded along with her

lover and becomes a legend. Wife, mother, beloved—whatever her status, suffering is a part of it. A woman cannot reject, forsake or escape from suffering. It would be falling out of step. Epics have been made by suffering women. Happy women do not make history.

Into this moralistic atmosphere that allotted suffering to woman whatever her role, came the educated woman of the forties. So far whatever was generally written about women was within the familial framework. Child-wife, ugly wife, neglected wife, ill-treated wife—these were common portrayals. The problems of the women so depicted get resolved because of the essential 'goodness' of their nature. These portrayals were about how to overcome suffering and oppression through one's own good qualities. Endurance pays. Essential goodness can make even an ugly wife desirable. These portrayals were very much in keeping with the archetypal Kannagi, Nallathangal and Amravathi images. The educated woman was a new factor to deal with. The poet Bharati had already heralded her arrival many years ago. He had said she would walk erect with an unfaltering gaze and would be a slave to no man. Many liked the poetry but probably did not think it would be a reality. Although education of women had begun much earlier, by the middle of the forties, it was clear that the educated woman was here to stay. This created a variety of reactions. A sense of collapse was felt by many who saw in the educated woman both disaster and hope. They saw in her the ultimate ruin of a culture if she 'misused' her education; they also saw in her hope for a revival of tradition if the education gave her strength to nurture tradition with all its definitions of womanhood. The educated woman had to be told in no uncertain terms to fit her educated self into the traditional mould. Education was to accept tradition gracefully and not to question it. This paper will attempt to explain the reaction to the educated woman as reflected in Tamil literature.

A lot of surmises and snide comments were made about the physical appearances of a modern educated woman. Her physical appearance was viewed as the first outward sign of breaking away from tradition. Vai. Mu. Kodainayaki Ammal, a prolific writer from the twenties onwards, described an educated woman thus in one of her fictional efforts:

... No vermilion mark on the forehead; the parting line in the hair would be at the side She put on stylish saree,

transparent blouse, slippers for the feet all the times ...¹

In 1967 when a writer had to describe an educated modern woman she resorted to almost similar descriptions. She described her as someone who wore high heels, dark glasses and chattered away in English.² This ridicule of physical appearance is a permanent characteristic in Tamil literature. Initial fears of the twenties when the first modern woman appeared in fiction, were more in terms of her questioning the Hindu culture and taking to Christian ways. The forties went at the educated woman hammer and tongs. In the twenties and thirties the educated woman was teased, advised and cajoled. She was not yet a total threat. But the forties exhibited considerable fears of the family structure crumbling and much appreciated social norms being flouted. Since the forties, this effort has continued, to bring the educated woman over to the side of tradition. And the most important effort in this direction has been to associate femininity and good qualities with a certain kind of dress. Printed sarees, georgettes and chiffons were considered, at that time, symbols of the educated modern women. Now it is any dress other than a saree that is the symbol of the educated woman. The implication is that the 'really educated' woman—one who uses her education to nurture the traditional culture—will not require these symbols. Although outwardly this seems like a differentiation just in terms of choice of clothes, in actuality it is the age-old discussion of the kind of education women must be given, that is being renewed. In short, the question that is being asked is: who is an educated woman? What is her education for? Ever since the forties these questions have kept reverberating.

Apart from physical appearance, it was assumed that an educated woman would be arrogant, defiant, sociable and boyish. Many such characters have appeared since in various novels and short stories. In a novel, an educated woman who wants to fraternise with men gets punished in the end by ending up in a Home because her husband goes to jail. The heroine of the same novel is also independent and assertive—in fact she resents being pushed into marriage—but she is still within the safe bounds of femininity. But the other woman who is presented as the vamp wants justice and fair play. That is stepping out.³ In one of my own early stories, I introduced an educated, defiant woman as someone who received letters from boys. The truly educated elder sister who wants to wallow in her widowhood frowns

upon this behaviour of her younger sister.⁴ A novel written in 1953 presented a modern, educated woman as someone who considered her tennis important and who behaves in such a manner that she does not look feminine any more.⁵ The educated woman also does not know how to adjust within a marital situation.⁶ Her constant defiance can ruin a marriage. This anticipated defiance led to a situation where threats were held out that an educated woman may never be able to marry. There are some portrayals where an educated woman has to 'hide' her education in order to get married.⁷ Women who could not get married because they were educated were ridiculed in some stories.⁸ These efforts were almost in the direction of making women feel apologetic about being educated. It was as if marriage would be denied to them if they did not say: 'I am educated. But I shall forget it.' Even today when a working woman is a common figure, constant assertions are made that a woman gets educated and works—but only to support her family. She herself gets no individual pleasure out of it. Not to deviate but to conform, that seems to be the trend of looking at an educated woman.

Moralism being such a dominant aspect in the culture, it was expected that apart from denying definitions of femininity the first thing an educated girl would do would be to flout the moral code of chastity. Stories of educated girls who flouted this code and suffered immensely began appearing quite regularly and to this day they are 'punished' in one way or the other. Vai. Mu. Kodinayaki Ammal took it upon herself to write about such women and she meted out a variety of punishments to them. Her 'wayward' characters got pregnant, killed themselves by jumping into wells or were run over by military trucks. Sometimes they died on the streets like beggars repenting their various acts of 'immorality'.

By the early sixties, the college-going, working woman was an everyday reality. The market for fiction was by now a multiheaded monster invading every sphere. Cinema was something the market had to keep pace with. The market was not just satisfied with bodies in the well or under military trucks. It wanted twists and turns and for good measure, a bit of blood. Not for it copious tears and long farewell letters with a hundred and one points of advice to women telling them not to go astray. It wanted something to gloat about. And as always, the educated woman who had stepped out of the house offered tremendous possibilities. For one thing, she got pregnant in no time at all. Some of these women who got portrayed as characters

who desire marriages of their choice and happen to fall in love with the wrong person got punished quite brutally. In one story, a widowed teacher who dares to fall in love loses her lover— he gets bitten by a snake. In another story by the same author, the pregnant heroine gets trampled to death by an elephant.⁹

Around this time when elephants and snakes were running amuck, a male writer, Jayakantan, wrote a story about a girl who gets seduced and how her mother tells her to forget about it. Actually the story did not alter the notion of punishment and purification. The mother bathes the daughter and tells her that the water is Ganga, the sacred river, that has purified her. The women writers by now used to much more gory deaths were aghast that the college girl of Jayakantan's story who had dared to take a lift from a stranger, had got away so easily. They wrote stories with gusto to counter the original one. In one, the girl burns herself to death and in another she survives the burning episode to turn ugly and later meets the villain and sure enough, marries him.¹⁰ Losing one's chastity is still the most persistent threat that is held out to an educated girl who has other than traditional notions.

Simultaneous with threats of punishment for the 'wayward' woman began attempts to woo the modern woman to play the home-loving, strong, powerful-through-her-endurance role that has always been intended for her. Her traditional power derived out of patience and endurance was recalled often telling her that her great work was still inside the home. A father who gets his intelligent daughter married tells her:

... Seeing your eagerness to study, many including the headmaster told me 'Susheela should have been a boy. Don't get her married. Let her join the college. Let her study further and work.' But did I get you educated for a career or to reduce your marriage expenses? I got you educated because woman must have the intelligence to row the family boat. Women must use their education in a disciplined and proper manner. They should not use their knowledge to tell the husband that they can take care of themselves and will not be slaves¹¹

This advice from a father was given in 1953. The heroine of the novel reiterates her father's advice later. This tone of moralising which this author adopted in her first novel, has been caught on by

many although the author herself has evolved as a writer differently in her later works.

In recent times, the suffering of women has been made a saleable proposition. The problems of working women are now seen as something she did not opt for. An alternative to exploitation as a working woman is seen as the home. After dealing with rape, physical exploitation etc., in the most sensational manner possible thus proclaiming a concern for women, the circle has now ended again in the home as woman's rightful place. In a meeting of more than ninety women's organisations held in December 1983 in Madras a male speaker told hundreds of women who had gathered there not to bother about things like commercialism and exploitation of women. These will be there. It would be better for them to bother about matters such as Vaishnavites marrying Shaivites and widow remarriage etc. The rest was for the men to bother about. The audience did not even get angry. There were several so-called humorous plays where women returned after attending meetings and husbands asked them to please not forget the house. The finale was a play with Bharat-Mata telling her daughters how to behave. A woman elaborates her duties in a household. Asked what her rights are by Bharat-Mata, she says with a smile that her duties are her rights. A young girl comes and tells the audience that if her career interfered with her home, she would give up her career.

In a recent issue of a women's magazine, a women's group discussing who a modern woman is, gave this definition:

One who is full of affection and love with all the qualities of femininity, who is willing to serve others . . . One who can at the same time strike like lightning and burst like a storm when degraded or when she sees injustice . . . One who has not gone away from tradition but has accepted modernity and one who wants to progress and wants to elevate her society. . . .¹²

Taken at face value there does not seem anything wrong with the definition. It is of a complete woman who is loving and giving and who has understood what to take from tradition and modernity. But what the definition connotes is something totally different. It is actually talking of a non-aggressive woman who can combine what is traditionally expected of her in the home and the society. The good wife, mother and the social worker. 'Striking like lightning and

bursting like a storm' are mystical notions of the power that is normally attributed to the mother goddess.

Such meetings and definitions are reminiscent of the women's meetings that were held during the freedom struggle. The resemblance becomes all the more real because many of these meetings are headed by women who have played a prominent role in the social reform movement and the women's movement that took the charity path. This strong, justice-seeking angry woman who is still traditional in many of her expectations is the present dominant portrayal. A male writer wrote a serial where an educated girl marrying against her parents' wishes, goes to her husband's place where she wants to continue and complete her studies so that she can work for three years and acquire a fridge, a grinder, a mixer and other household items that a girl brings as dowry so that she would not feel inferior to anyone else in society. For all these efforts are part of the attempt to sustain the family, a great institution, the girl feels. Instead of education helping a woman to eradicate exploitation within the familial system, here it makes her accept the system with all its drawbacks, for the family should be nurtured at whatever cost. It is a peculiar logic that makes the modern girl feel that upholding tradition is the most modern activity of an educated girl. It gives a romantic aura to the institution of family and the familial role of a woman. In yet another serial, the same author presents a woman with a 'past'—nothing more sensational than two boy-friends—who is guilt-ridden and marries an understanding husband. Her past is seen more as an aberration for her natural role seems to be that of the original woman, nurturing. At one point her husband addresses her thus while giving her a present:

To my love, to my wife, to my prostitute, to my servant maid, to my motherly woman . . .

That about sums up the current attitude towards what is expected of an educated woman. Although written by a man, these descriptions have the wholehearted approval of most readers and many women writers themselves. In their own serials they present this combination of a goddess-like woman who is full of unleashed power, but is tender enough to be the nurturer.¹³

This harking back to tradition and the more important familial role has coincided with the backlash of Hindu revivalism that has followed the atheistic movement. This revivalism has not only given

a new character to hitherto forgotten temples of mother goddesses and more powerful roles to religious leaders, but has also reached the woman. It has caught the woman at that point where they have understood and perceived oppression outside the home but are as yet powerless to fight oppression both at home and outside. At this moment, calls for utilising education to strengthen traditional roles can start looking almost attractive. That it may be yet another chimera may be overlooked. In the name of strengthening the culture the women may go back to the philosophy of endurance, suffering and power. The following conversation in a story by a woman writer bears ample proof of that :

... if we have to get back the old quality and standard, women must get out of the illusion which they are getting from their education and modernity that men and women are equal When I say that men and women are not equal I don't mean that the woman is inferior It is because a woman is superior to man that all the qualities of sacrifice, giving in, patience and true love have been given to her. That is why our elders stressed all these codes for women

So you say a woman is greater than a man. For this empty pride you want her to give up her lawful rights

Pankajam, if women are patient, men themselves will struggle and get them their lawful rights. In this country there are many men who have fought for women. Don't forget that

So men should be forgiven for whatever they do?

Yes. The greatness of human nature lies in forgiving and forgetting The greatest punishment one person can give another is forgiveness¹⁴

Footnotes

1. Val. Mu. Kodanayaki, *Veera Vasanta*, Madras, n.d., p. 20.
2. Kullit Rameswari, *Vazhai Pinnal*, Madras, 1967, pp. 18-9.
3. 'Lakshmi', *Penn Manam*, Madras, 1970.
4. 'Ambai', *Irulil Nizalgal*, *Anandavichithan*, 9 January 1966.
5. Rajan Krishnan, *Penn Kural*, Madras, 1954.
6. 'Anuthama', *Arpa Vethayam*, Madras, 1955.
7. 'Lakshmi', 'Paditha Manavi', *Anandavichithan*, 23 June 1940.
8. K.N. Lalitha Subramaniam, 'Miss Hemalatha B.A.', *Bharatamam*, March 1946.

9. Vimala Ramani, 'Andavan Thirpu', *Anandavikatan*, 10 July 1966; Vimala Ramani, 'Ninaivirukiradha Sarayu?' *Dinamani Kadir*, from the personal file of the author.
10. Jayakantan, 'Agni Pravesam', *Anandavikatan*, 20 November 1966; from the personal file of Vimala Ramani; K. Jayalalshmi, 'Karpu Nilai', *Kanni*, October 1967, pp. 29-32; Vimala Ramani, 'Agni Pravesam', *Jingli*, June-July 1967, from the personal file of the author.
11. *Penn Karal*, p. 93.
12. *Mangayar Malar*, January 1985, p. 69.
13. Balakumar, 'Ullam Kavar Kalvan' *Kongumam*, 4 November 1984, pp. 62-9; Karaiyora Mudalaigal, *Anandavikatan*, 18 November 1984, p. 85; Siva Sankari, 'Karuai Kolai', *Anandavikatan*, 15 April 1984.
14. Joytirilata Giriya, *Varingal Toduvargal*, Madras, 1983, pp. 138-41.

Gender Ideals in Science Fiction: The Case of Star Trek

PRABHA KRISHNAN

Aspects of socialisation

Socialisation is regarded by many scholars, feminists among them, as getting children to learn and enact what are seen as desirable attitudes (Stanley and Wise, 1983 : 66). To the extent it helps girls to act as girls and boys to act as boys, the process can be seen as sexual orientation (p. 71). Primary socialisation, i.e. socialisation of very young children occurs largely within the family. Here, the values, norms, expectations and ideologies of society as a whole are internalised by individuals; the family turns individual egos into social beings (p. 86). Socialisation thus appears as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', a self-perpetuating system which goes on from generation to generation (p. 87).

Yet other feminists see this perception as unnecessarily deterministic; they reason that a theory which holds feminists themselves, together with men who do not believe in sexism as well as homosexuals, to be 'deviants' to be explained away on the basis of 'mal-socialisation,' as non-reflexive. Such a theory leaves unexplained the political basis of labelling homosexuals and other types of 'aliens' as 'deviants'. It should be noted also that in building such a theory, adults have placed their own construction of meaning on a child's life.

In general even feminist ideas about gender roles (especially role-taking) appear deterministic; socialisation becomes a process by which little girls and little boys become stereotypically feminine and masculine. (p. 100). But as enquiry continues, it becomes apparent that the generalisation does not often hold. For instance Mirra Komarovsky in her research on the masculine stereotype found 50 per cent of her sample uncomfortable in the typically masculine role.¹ Some feminists would therefore concur with E. Goffman when

he asserts that gender as a role exists, and is expressed by individuals sometimes.² Such expression actually reflects not the differential nature of the two sexes but their common readiness to subscribe to the conventions of such display.

I would personally accept that feminists and homosexuals are deviants, not from reality, but from ideals and that many more of us would express our 'deviant' selves if the penalties for such expression were not so harsh. The growing liberalisation of laws and attitude towards homosexuals, divorcees, unmarried mothers and cohabiting couples points to the growing numbers of such people, but this liberalisation had been prefaced by a multitude of lonely battles against an oppressive system. From their own experiential background, most women would agree that pressure to conform to ideal female and male roles can be heavy indeed. Those individuals who may have escaped being typecast as children, perhaps because the parents recognised the debilitating effects of such moulding, find themselves, out of the family context, labelled 'deviant'. Some feminists have argued that holding the mother responsible for such socialisation amounts to blaming the victim in that women themselves socialise coming generations of females into acceptance of female subordination (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 90). My own reading of the matter is that while women do not formulate the policies which govern the structuring of ideal roles, they do, from a position of powerlessness, implement these policies, and more important are held responsible for doing so. Family, media, religion all insist that the primary socialisation of the child is the mother's responsibility and that both parents live out idealised lives in order to provide role models for the children.

Idealised roles for women and men exist, and are constantly recycled by media. But before we examine elements of ideal male and female roles, one last point should be noted. Such structural explanations as the theory of socialisation may enable individuals to avoid taking responsibility for their own change (p. 107). By awaiting a coming revolution (economic or political) and positing this as a prelude/substitute for self change, such women negate the feminist principle that the political is an expression of the personal.

Ideal roles

Society is embedded in a matrix of patriarchy. Socialisation patterns ensure the continuing dominance of 'male' values over female ones.

The impulse to project masculinity/femininity as the basic duality in life leads each sex to reject the values of the other, and to affirm the attributes of the self. While theoretically this rejection-affirmation is supposed to lead to the construction of a mutually supportive and complementary dyad, in actual practice we find that what is set in motion is the dynamic of dominance-subjugation and hence of oppressor-oppressed.

Let us examine in some detail the attributes of the ideal man and the ideal woman.

Ideal Man

Powerful, creative, intelligent, rational, independent, self-reliant, strong, courageous, daring, responsible, resolute, temperate, cautious, sober, honest, forthright, lives in mind, self-affirming, confronts world, authoritative, decisive... and more in the same vein (Ruth, 1980 : 593).

Ideal woman

Nurturant, supportive, intuitive, emotional, cunning, timid, fragile, capricious, child-like, ebullient, exuberant, evasive, tactful, artful, lives in heart, self-abnegating, withdraws from world, compliant, submissive.

The acceptance and affirmation of such ideals leads to a situation where each person lacks the capabilities of the other. Thus, in effect, instead of a dyad we get a unit composed of two half-persons. Such an arrangement may have been useful to women when marriage or pair-bonding was only for *social* goals; as a *personal* arrangement it tended to weaken women. Those values/attributes retained by men are praised by society and ensure survival or even success with dignity. Those values/attributes retained by women are devalued by society and they ensure that women remain dependent on male protection, male charity. In this society men take care of themselves, women take care of everyone *but* themselves (Ruth, 1980).

When male and female are seen in opposition to each other, the easiest way to affirm masculinity or femininity is to deny the attributes of the other. The emphasis on strength for men and the corresponding emphasis on timidity, fragility and submission for women, leads to a situation where violence, physical, verbal, attitudinal becomes the distinguishing characteristic of the masculine

male. The first, and indeed the life-long recipient of male violence is the female.

All women are held in thrall by the threat of male violence. Even in the so-called chivalry of men, there is a built-in component of violence; while to Sita, who embodied the female ideals, Lakshman was protective and supportive, to Soorpanakha, who represented the deviant woman, he was violent. Thus women who step out of the barriers of male-decided ideals, are aware that at any time they can invite male violence.

In the world beyond the family, the capacity for violence is accepted as part of the personal image of the ideal male. This also makes men resort to it faster as a tool of public policy; such masculist/martial ideals are uniformly destructive. Analysing the public speeches and private memoranda and other papers of three American presidents—John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, Marc Fasteau showed how each president was impelled by the necessity to be thought 'not-sissy', 'not-womanly', 'not-feminine', 'not-soft', to continue to pour men and money into the Vietnam war (Fasteau, 1980). Each president seems to have decided that to be reasonable, humanitarian, (values which they touted publicly) would also be thought feminine and hence not acceptable to the self-image of the male.

Man's drive to 'master' in the sense of dominate, extends to every field—harnessing all natural resources to his own goals; in the short period following the Industrial Revolution, man has sought to humble Nature, only to create a world of immense tension. Meanwhile women, having internalised their dependent and supportive status, find themselves echoing masculist doctrines. Where they have sought to question such doctrines, they have been able to make significant contributions. But by and large, both men and women seem to uncritically accept violence to the environment and the human community as a necessary price to pay for 'progress'. The degradation and decay of planet Earth is a given in many science fiction stories—and explorers seeking to colonise new planets and galaxies are the heroes of the future.

Apart from family and the formal education process, media influences are important in buttressing and perpetuating differential gender ideals. Mass media have become dominant elements of popular culture. The television and video boom has made these media part of the family socialisation process; in so doing a piquant

aspect has been introduced to the process. Discussing this, Joshua Meyrowitz points out that very often parental control over what children absorb through electronic media is feeble; the widespread use of TV is equivalent to a broad social decision to allow children to be present at adult interactions like war, funerals and seductions (1984 : 19-48).

Doordarshan's heavy dependence on commercial feature films and imported programmes permits us to extrapolate Meyrowitz's comments to the situation facing children and parents today in Indian metropolitan towns. Thus in any given week children can absorb a variety of messages and images—Ray's *Sadgati*, a story of a poor man dying of hunger, can be followed by an advertisement for a cooking range producing one exotic dish after another. A documentary on orphanages where the inmates are largely children of socially unacceptable liaisons, can be followed by a feature film celebrating the nuclear male-headed legitimate family. Taken together these last two instances can endorse male protectors as the norm and single parent families, parentless children or childless parents as 'deviants' to be viewed with pity and as a subtle warning. An exploration of environmental degradation is followed by a film extolling the rags-to-riches story of masculist linear endeavour—a way of life which results in precisely that sort of environmental disaster the earlier film was warning against. And relentlessly, women are depicted as existing in two varieties—the exemplary family-centred mainline variety who wins in the end and the deviant, the questioner, who soon sees the error of her ways and conforms.

The discussion following will focus on the genre which theoretically at least permits the construction of an alternate social structure, science fiction, and it will be based on the science fiction series *Star Trek*.

Predictive history or the last frontier

Beyond
The rim of the star-light
My love
Is wandering in star-flight
I know
He'll find in star-clustered reaches
Love;
Strange love a star-woman teaches

I know,
This journey ends never
This Star Trek
Will go on for ever
But tell him
While he wanders his starry sea
Remember, remember me.

Theme song from the *Star Trek* series.

Science fiction is often described as predictive history. The technical aspects of space exploration would appear to have been well anticipated by da Vinci, Verne, Wells; contemporary authors build on present achievements and often fiction appears to be one step ahead of NASA. What about social organisation? Science fiction being predominantly a male activity we find that the social systems of the future are embedded in the same matrices of patriarchy, capitalist, socialist or fascist as are the present-day systems. For men the present systems provide a nurturing environment for their progress, their creative energies are expended only in exploring technical frontiers. *Star Trek* is a science fiction series currently being telecast for one hour every Sunday morning.³ Each hour is a complete story in itself, with a core group of characters providing continuity. This group is the crew of the United Space Ship the *Enterprise*. The space ship is on a five-year mission to discover new civilisations.

The *Star Trek* series has devoted followers in Delhi and other cities. This is evident from personal impressions as well as letters to editors of newspapers and magazines, to Doordarshan as well as critics' comments. The series had an enormous impact and following in the land of its birth, USA. We will revert to this point towards the end of this section.

The discussion that follows is based on personal monitoring of the series for over six months as well as on a number of published sources which will be cited in the relevant places.

The *Enterprise* crew is led by Captain James Kirk. He appears to be a fine example of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male. He is unmarried, and in several episodes is shown having romantic interactions with women. The second-in-command Mr Spock is part Vulcan (a non-human, green-blooded alien). Spock's characteristics are a logical unemotional mind, soaring eyebrows and pointed ears.

These last two features combine to give him a Satanic appearance which appears to have irresistible fascination for women, both in the series as well as among audiences and visitors to the sets when the series was being filmed; this fascination is referred to as Eve's fascination for the devil/evil (Whitefield and Roddenberry, 1968 : 125) Spock's cold, computer-like personality, however, belonged earlier, in the pilot modules, to a woman, referred to as No. 1 (p. 128).

In the pilot modules, the creator of the series, Gene Roddenberry, wanted a woman as second-in-command to the Captain. She was to have a cold, distant personality, be technically superior to the Captain, and have important command responsibilities. Audience tests, however indicated that audiences though they appreciated the actress playing the part, were repelled by the character itself—their reactions ranged from disbelief to resentment. The twentieth century audience found this twenty-third century woman too domineering (p. 128).

So the role and its characteristics went to Mr. Spock while the actress was retained to play the part of Nurse Christine Chapel.

In the *Star Trek* mythology though, there are women leaders/commanders. For instance, one group of enemies, the Romulans are described as highly militaristic, aggressive by nature, ruthless in warfare (p. 256). In addition these bad guys believe in complete equality between the sexes—women are as often found in command of spaceships as are men. I had occasion to interact with a group of school children about characteristics of heroes and heroines. In the course of the discussion when I pointed out the presence of women leaders among the enemies of the *Star Trek* group, a young girl commented—they are made leaders so that they can be conquered. I am indebted to this thirteen-year-old for her devastating insight.

In *Turnabout Intruder*⁴ a woman who knows the indignity of being a female desires position and strength. She is Dr. Janice Lester, leader of an expedition to a remote planet. Dr. Lester is described as having an intense hatred of her own womanhood. Her ambition is to achieve starship command, which she feels is her just due. Her chance comes when the *Enterprise* team led by Captain Kirk lands on the planet. Pretending to be ill, she uses her skill at 'life energy transference' to transfer her person into Kirk's body, while Kirk's persona is forced to occupy hers. In the guise of Kirk she takes over command of the *Enterprise* but she 'does not merit it by temperament

or training'. Soon we see Dr. Janice Lester in Captain Kirk's body behaving like a 'typical woman'—he/she easily loses control, exhibits gestures of frustration such as brushing away hair from the forehead, preens in typical feminine fashion, etc. The worst is, he/she cannot lead. He/she alienates everyone in the crew and is seen 'red-faced with hysteria'.

When Kirk finally wins the struggle and entrusts the stricken woman to the care of her faithful lover-colleague, he says sadly: 'Her life could have been as rich as any woman's, if only....'. If only she did not aspire to leadership roles.

Other women characters, both core and incidental, display characters attributed to women in patriarchal society. The *Enterprise* crew features three women, Nurse Christine Chappell, Communications Officer Uhura, and Captain's Yeoman.

The nurse as we have seen, originally played second-in-command, but now plays a socially acceptable role, that of nurse and assistant to the male doctor, McCoy. Captain's Yeoman, though described as having pretty good equipment already, is provided with a neat over-the-shoulder recorder cum electronic camera, with which she can take log entries from the Captain at any time. Further this recorder-camera is described by Roddenberry as something that will make a good toy for female children (Whitefield and Roddenberry, 1968 : 169).

The Communications Officer is described as a desirable and attractive young woman, torn between the idea of some day becoming a wife and mother, and a desire to remain in service—at present her life is a battle between the 'female' need for the pleasant routine of her earth-bound home and family versus the personal challenge of star ship life.

The incidental women characters carry forward the theme of typical/ideal women.

In the episode *Cloud Miners*,⁵ society in Adana is divided into two groups. The intellectual artistic, refined leaders and the coarse, uneducated, menial workers. The patriarch of the leaders introduces his daughter to Kirk and Spock as the 'best art form in Adana'. This daughter, Droxine, is of course drawn to Spock's 'exquisitely shaped ears'.

In the episode '*Requiem for Methuselah*', we meet an elderly character, Flint; he is extremely learned, a scientist, artist, musician, etc. We meet his companion Rayna, who besides being extremely

beautiful, is learned and creative—she has the equivalent of seven university degrees in arts and science. Dr. McCoy, in evident admiration, says 'She's the farthest *thing* from a bookworm I've seen' (emphasis mine). We learn later that the beautiful 'thing' is an android, created by Flint, who has lived for 6000 years. She is to be the 'perfect' woman, who will be Flint's 'mate'; The only thing she lacks is emotion. This Flint seeks to infuse in her by getting her to fall in love with Captain Kirk. However, so torn is she between love for Kirk, and duty to Flint, that in the best film tradition, she collapses and dies.

Deela is a Queen on the planet Scalus, featured in the episode *Wink of an Eye*.⁶ We understand that she and her companions have drunk polluted water, with the result that their molecules have been so accelerated, that they vibrate beyond the levels of visibility of the human eye. They are thus invisible. To continue their species, they need to mate with outsiders. Kirk is the obvious choice and soon we hear the Queen asking her jealous childhood sweetheart to 'allow [me] the dignity of liking the man I select' and that she means to 'enjoy' her duty (i.e. mating and reproducing). The Queen, in time-honoured Mills and Boon style, finds Kirk stubborn, independent and irritating (and therefore lovable). When Kirk, stiff-necked as ever, refuses to accede, the Queen asks 'Do I displease you so much?'

In the episode *Whom Gods Destroy*⁷ the *Enterprise* crew are on the planet Elba II, which is in the mode of Elba on Earth, a detention centre, this time for the incurably insane. They meet on the planet, Marta, a skimpily-clad female inmate. She describes herself as 'the most beautiful woman on the planet and intelligent too'. She claims to love Kirk at first sight and uses her seductive wiles in obtaining from him a secret code. Woman-as-seductress is seen too in the episode titled tritely enough *Man-Trap*.⁸ Here an intelligent shapelifter assumes the form of Nancy Crater, archaeologist and old flame of Dr. McCoy. This individual needs salt, which it gets only from absorbing it from the bodies of men. There are many among the crew who succumb to her wiles. The woman is postulated as the Bad Mother with vampiric tendencies, literally swallowing up manhood.

In *The Savage Curtain*⁹ a certain Power wishes to examine the essential difference between good and evil. To do this, the Power 'recreates' figures from the past, Abraham Lincoln and Serak (a Vulcan), to represent Good, and Ghenghis Khan, and others,

including a woman, to represent Evil. Kirk and Spock are forced to fight the Evil Ones—they all use the same methods, but the Power gets to understand that while Evil Ones fight for personal power, the good ones fight for others' happiness. We learn too that Lincoln and Serak are portraits drawn from the minds of Kirk and Spock respectively, i.e. Kirk and Spock have internalised the 'goodness' of these people. What is remarkable in this instance is that in the long history of the human species, the creators of *Star Trek* could find no woman to personify Good, but could find one to personify Evil.

The discussion of Good and Evil brings us to ethics and religion as portrayed in the series. While every effort is made to keep religion as we know it today beyond and behind the *Enterprise* crew, the aliens they meet do exhibit adherence to various cults, primitive, horrific or whatever—again in the best film style.

However, the crew and those of the aliens shown to be on their side, personify adherence to the concepts of community good as we know it today—peace, hard work, quest for knowledge, following rules laid down by Star Fleet Command, following hierarchial lines of command, etc. Indeed the militaristic flavour of the *Enterprise* voyages come through quite clearly. The crew's uniforms, both everyday and ceremonial, their titles, etc. conform to present-day earth standards. At the top, i.e. the Captain, we find a man chosen for his leadership and management abilities, while he relies on the technical support of Spock, McCoy the doctor, and Scott the Chief Engineer. We understand too that space-service personnel undergo training similar to Sandhurst, West Point and the National Defence Academy (NDA).

More, the present-day inequalities as regards race and culture are reflected/perpetuated in this exercise into predictive history. Leaders, where good and wise are shown as white. Kirk as we have noted is a prime example. On board *Enterprise* itself we have other groups represented in various positions—Scott (of Scottish descent) is the Chief Engineer, Sulu a Japanese is Helmsman, Uhura an African is Communications Officer. Among the aliens we meet, we note the general propensity to present good/advanced as white.

Gender and race seem to govern employment opportunities too. We have already seen that women do not occupy top leadership positions, and this is true of non-Caucasians too. Visually too, this statement is made again and again. Alien beings, superior, benign, wise, etc. appear to be fair, blonde, aquiline-nosed, sometimes

shimmering with light. Occupations for women reflect present-day standards—women are shown as nurse, secretary, dogsbody. Among alien women too we see this one-step-down position, especially when the cause is just. In *Cloud Miners*, when the menial people rebel, the rebel leadership group contains a woman (young and personable) but not in top leadership position. Again, many alien women appear to derive a limited measure of power by virtue of their positions as daughter or wife of a powerful man, as for example in *Balance of Terror*.¹⁰

Predictably, romance, marriage and contraception, too, follow present-day earth standards.

The 'conflict' between home and work we have already noted. From what we have been told about James Kirk, we see more of this conflict and an endorsement of present-day double standards (Whitefield and Roddenberry, 1968 : 217). Kirk, we are told is 'married' to his ship (over which he is lord and master) but he has had three significant romances, first with a midshipman, who married someone else, then with a Lt. Commander, with whom he had differences in philosophy and lastly with a scientist. The scientist 'unfortunately' was as dedicated to science as Kirk was to space service. She could not give up her science career and Kirk could not resign from space service, so this involvement too came to nothing. Of the conflicts faced by Uhura and Christine Chappell, we have already heard. The incidental women characters also appear to go through these traumas of having to choose between something (career, conscience, duty) and marriage. Even unemotional Spock goes through these 'hassles' (p. 227)—we are told that Vulcans have a seven-year mating cycle; once in seven years, they become emotional enough to fall in love, and thus ensure the continuity of their race. In *Cloud Miners*, Spock, who is in Adana and in search of the element zeenite, has to leave behind, exquisite Droxine; in *All Our Yesterdays*¹¹ he has to leave behind Sarabeth.

By now it should be amply clear that the institution of marriage and the primacy of heterosexual relationships have survived well into the twenty-third century. This being so it should be of no surprise to learn that contraception and child-care are primarily the responsibility of women. Birth control is mandatory for unmarried females, voluntary for married females. In keeping with the advanced state of the medical arts as practised aboard the *Enterprise*, a single monthly injection would be administered—to women (Whitefield and Rod-

denberry, 1968 : 207).

The most visible impact the women of *Star Trek* have on viewers, is through their dress. The female crew members sport tight mini-dresses, but it is the alien women who give dress designer Bill Theiss full play for his imagination. The 'Theiss Theory of Titillation' postulated by this young man (p. 360), holds that insecure costumes are sexy. Alien women therefore are routinely clad in garments that threaten to come to pieces, affording meanwhile generous glimpses of bust, waist, thighs, etc.

The impact of the *Star Trek* series must be seen in the light of the credibility and respect it commands in the US and elsewhere. The first episode of this series appeared in 1966 in the US, and soon acquired a cult following. Fan clubs sprang up all over the US; fans were called 'trekkies' and included scientists like Isaac Asimov. Most technical people were impressed by the sheer credibility of the innovations pictured in the series; a builder asked about the fast opening doors and a hospital requested recordings of the 'alert' sound for use in its cardiac arrest ward (p. 199). Members of NASA are firm fans of Mr. Spock; in January 1985 Leonard Nimoy who plays Spock was asked to open an exhibition centre at its Space Shuttle Base.¹² When USA was preparing to launch its first space shuttle President Lyndon Johnson was deluged by letters requesting that it be named *Enterprise*. In 1968, when the NBC network planned to discontinue the series, they were flooded with letters of protest; student protest movements were organised, and on Rockefeller Plaza, picketers marched up and down, carrying placards, handing out leaflets and bumper stickers, publicly protesting the cancellation. This was a staggering example of viewer opinion. The series ended in 1969, and was released again in 1971. In 1979 the first *Star Trek* film was made; *Star Trek II* followed, and now *Star Trek III* is being made. We have already noted its wide appeal in several cities of India. What should concern us here is the total absence of any negative comments in the way women are portrayed in the series. It appears to be taken for granted that well into the future men will lead and women will continue to follow, not because they are intellectually or otherwise inferior, but simply because they are women.

The theme song itself, though we do not hear the words on TV is indicative of the way things will be. 'My love' will wander in Star-flight, finding strange love taught by star-women; his trek will go on for ever and 'all I ask is that he remembers me'.

The survival of marriage, heterosexual relationships governed by present-day notions of licit and illicit; the burden of contraception and child-care still on the women—this essay into predictive history has nothing very different to say for women of the future.

How does the genre of science fiction fare in the hands of feminist writers? Ursula K. Le Guin, prolific science fiction writer and winner of coveted Nebula and Hugo awards for science fiction writing estimates that only one in every thirty SF writers is female (Le Guin, 1979). It does not follow however that these writers are all feminists. Only a few women SF writers have made the attempt to construct alternate societies—Joanna Russ in *Female Man* (1975), Naomi Mitchison in *Memoirs of a Space woman* (1962) and Le Guin in most of her works (Nicholls, 1979 : 661).

Le Guin, states flatly that the status of women in science fiction is very low (1979 : 97). Just as there are the Social Alien, the Cultural Alien, the Racial Alien so too there is the Sexual Alien. Since most SF is androcentric the Sexual Alien becomes Women. By denying affinity with another person or kind of person, Le Guin avers that we deny spiritual equality, and human reality and in effect we alienate ourselves. She further points out that the only social change presented in American science fiction is towards authoritarianism, the domination of ignorant masses by powerful elites, which is sometimes presented as a warning, but mostly offered complacently. American SF has assumed a permanent hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, with rich ambitious, aggressive males at top, then a great gap, then faceless masses of the poor, the ignorant and all the women. Thus, alienation becomes a curse. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. The dualism of values with its constructs of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, is destroying us.

Thus we see that even through science fiction, what we are offering our children is a celebration of male dominance and the perpetuation of the ethic of violence; the electronic age while it empowers man completely marginalises women. The process of 'development' has become a process of colonisation—including that of one sex by the other. Unable to question any aspect of the science and technology policy, the depoliticisation of women is accelerating. Women, already on-lookers in the age of technology appear poised to become the robots of the future. On Indian television we have no other example of science fiction. *Star Trek* has meshed into the

overall ideology of Doordarshan, that is of locating the women firmly in the home, with only token presence in fields such as science and management, industry and finance. Through feature films, advertisements, discussions and health programmes, news coverage, and lately the TV serial, viewers get a picture of a totally man-dominated world. When this sort of programming is supported by essays into predictive history such as *Star Trek*, viewers get a portrayal of an unchanging and unchangeable world, a society in which women remain forever beyond the pale.

Footnotes

1. Mirra Komarovsky. Some problems of role analysis. In *American Sociological Review* no. 38, 1973. Quoted in Stanley and Wise, 1983 : 103.
2. E. Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*. Quoted in Stanley and Wise, p. 105.
3. At the time of writing this paper, *Star Trek* was being telecast every Sunday morning on the National Hook-up.
4. Personal monitoring.
5. Personal monitoring.
6. Personal monitoring.
7. Personal monitoring.
8. Personal monitoring.
9. Personal monitoring.
10. Personal monitoring.
11. Personal monitoring.
12. Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* fame. In *Evening News*, New Delhi, 1 December, 1984.

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Education and Socialisation of Professional Women

The Case of Women Entrepreneurs

PUSHPA SUNDAR

Introduction

At first glance, Mrs. Manju Bhattacharya seems a typical Bengali housewife in her white sari and sindhur-smeared parting. But instead of discussing the rising prices of fish, Mrs. Bhattacharya prefers a different set of mathematics as she rattles on about production, turnover and costing. Looks are certainly deceptive, for Mrs. Bhattacharya, apart from being a busy housewife is a busier business woman in the midst of having a very enterprising and fast developing fan industry in Calcutta (Gupta, 1979).

While most other women begin their day preparing breakfast, Mrs. Bharti Mehta prepares to go to her factory at Rakhial where she produces armatures of portable tools.

Mrs. Mehta received a fair amount of practical training from Nippon Electrical Industries where she had worked for some time and she acquired her administrative knowledge at the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development in Ahmedabad. Mrs. Mehta has 15 employees working for her and she says with great pride, that she has a turnover of Rs. 50,000 every month. Her grand success has enabled her to pay off half of her loan of Rs. 1.6 lakhs from the State Bank of India, in a very short time. She is now planning to expand her factory (Chowdhry, 1981).

Jitender Kaur is a post-graduate in zoology. In 1977 she started the Oriental Food and Bottled Products with seed money provided by Delhi Small Industries Development Corporation and raised the rest of the money from the Punjab and Sind Bank. Today her investment is about Rs. 2.5 lakhs (Sundar, 1983).

The three case studies quoted above illustrate a new phenomena in India : the emergence of the woman entrepreneur. A decade ago the woman entrepreneur was a species almost unheard of, bar an occasional Sumati Morarji to prove the rule. In February 1984, about 700 women entrepreneurs from different parts of the world and from all over India attended and participated in the Third International Conference of Women Entrepreneurs organised by the women's wing of NAYE (National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs) in Delhi, and NAYE estimates that there are approximately 50,000 women entrepreneurs in the country today, running enterprises ranging from management of hotels and computer services to manufacture of garments, processed foods, chemicals, electronics and engineering goods.

The significance of this phenomena is not that Indian women are now participating in the work force in larger numbers than before, but that for the first time women are entering what was hitherto considered an almost exclusively male preserve. It also indicates the growth of a pool of urban based educated and technically skilled women workers, for though Indian women have always participated in the labour force in large numbers they have been concentrated largely in the rural areas and in low-paid, low-productivity, low-skilled jobs, whether in the urban or the rural sectors. This becomes obvious from the following figures.

Out of a total female population of 330 m. according to the 1981 Census, approximately 45.9 m. women are main workers and another 20.4 m. are secondary or marginal workers, giving a total of 66.3 m. and a work participation rate of 20.98 percent,¹ as against 53 per cent for males. Of this 58.6 m. or 88 per cent are employed in the rural sector and only 7.4 m. or 12 per cent work in urban areas. Whereas in the rural areas a majority of women (60.4 per cent), are self-employed, in the urban areas, most work for wages and only 44.2 per cent are self-employed. However, the bulk of these are self-employed in low-income occupations in the informal or unorganised sector and operate on a very small scale, employing either only themselves or family labour, and cannot be termed entrepreneurs, if an entrepreneur is defined as one who shows enterprise, has an eye for opportunity, a willingness to take risks, a commercial acumen and who through her enterprise creates substantial employment for others. For, though the low-income women take risks in producing and selling for the open market, their scale of operation is too small

to create significant employment for others. Since entrepreneurship as defined above is likely to be exercised largely by educated urban women, this paper is limited to this strata. Though exact estimates are not available it is obvious that the number of women entrepreneurs cannot be very large because educated women on the whole are only 18.58 per cent of the labour force (Sixth Plan figures), and educated self-employed women will be a very tiny fraction of this.

University enrolment figures for 1982-83 show that per year, approximately 32,000 women go in for medicine, about 6,000 for engineering, about 1,800 for agricultural and veterinary sciences, and 14,900 for law (UGC, 1983). Though there will be some dropouts, the figures represent the *flow* of women to other professional careers *per year*. Contrast this to the one estimate we have, of 50,000 women entrepreneurs as the *current stock*. The question then arises as to why, when women have taken successfully to other professional careers, their entry into the field of entrepreneurship was so late? What is it in the education and socialisation of women which has prevented women from taking to business? Conversely, what motivated those who did? What are their backgrounds in terms of age, marital status, caste and class? What circumstances contributed to accelerate the pace of women's entry into entrepreneurship? What role, if any, did government and others play in this acceleration? Why are there so few women entrepreneurs even now? What problems and constraints do they face? What needs to be done to remedy the situation? These are some of the concerns of this paper.

The traditional situation

The most basic factor which inhibited women from taking to entrepreneurship till recently was the attitude of society towards a woman's role and place in society. These social values and attitudes were reflected in the education and socialisation of girls, and in the institutional arrangements of society. Traditionally, a woman's reproductive role was considered her primary role and her role as producer secondary, unless, as in the low-income classes, economic necessity forced a woman to support the family. This was particularly so in the case of women from the educated, middle and upper middle classes from which most women entrepreneurs are drawn. Coupled with this was the idealised image of the woman as one who

subordinated self to the family, gloried in motherhood and regarded her husband as god.

Women were socialised into accepting these role definitions, and expectations through an upbringing on stories from mythology, epics and folklore which glorified women who conformed to the ideal image. Thus women were conditioned to sacrifice their own goals and ambitions, deny themselves their legitimate space and surrender any resources which might have contributed to their independence. They were always told to adjust, accept, accommodate and be dependent on men for support. This was hardly conducive to the development of self-confidence, initiative or willingness to take risks—characteristics absolutely essential for entrepreneurship.

These values and attitudes also meant that girls were often given less education than boys, and even when girls were educated up to school-leaving level or beyond, the aspirations of the parents and even of the girls themselves were lower both as to educational attainments and future prospects. For a young girl marriage and children were considered the only life-long activity and education was imparted either to make her a better wife and mother or to secure a better husband, since husbands preferred educated wives.

These attitudes reflected too on the courses and curricula offered to women. These were not designed to equip girls with specialised training for a job or career. If employment was at all considered for a woman, it was seen merely as a temporary occupation till marriage. This conditioned not only women's own aspirations but also their judgement of their capacities, choice of occupations or training. It also coloured the attitudes of all who had an influence on this choice—parents, teachers, heads of schools and training institutions, employers and policy makers.

Compounding these social disabilities were the economic constraints faced by women. To start a business venture, initial risk capital is essential. Traditionally women did not own any property in their own name, apart from their 'streedhan', which could be mortgaged or used as collateral to raise money; nor did they have any independent sources of income. Access to institutional capital, either from money-lenders or banks was out of the question as they would reject outright any women's ventures as unworthy or risky. Male relatives or friends would not consider financing a woman's venture either.

Over and above the attitudes specifically inhibiting to women,

were the attitudes engendered by a stagnant, non-expanding economy which made *all* job seekers, men and women, prefer safe, secure, wage-employment, however poorly paid, to self-employment involving risks and venture into uncharted areas. In sum, both by education, socialisation and economic circumstance, women were inhibited from venturing into entrepreneurship.

The Old Order Changes

Today, fortunately, the scene has changed, women entrepreneurs, though still very few in number, are successfully operating ventures with investments ranging from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 5 lakhs and employing from ten to several hundred employees. Though many have started ventures using women's traditional skills in cooking, stitching, knitting etc. and have set up units manufacturing processed foods, readymade garments or offering beauty-care services etc., there are others who have gone into very non-traditional fields, using diverse technical skills and are competing with men successfully. Thus, there are women operating shipping, electronic tools, radio and TV parts, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. etc.

Characteristics

There are no definitive studies to show the age, marital status, educational and class/caste backgrounds of the women who have taken to business as a profession, but some analysis done by an entrepreneurship development programme² shows that a majority of the women selected for training as entrepreneurs as well as those already established, are graduates and post-graduates and only about 30 per cent have completed high school. In terms of economic background, most are from the middle class, with a few from the lower middle and a few from the upper middle class. Many belong to families with a business background. Most often it is married women with grown children who take to entrepreneurship rather than unmarried girls or young married women because domestic responsibilities of the former group of women have eased.

The same programme reports that women entrepreneurs are less aggressive and more emotional and tend to get emotionally involved in situations where men would not, but with experience learn to be more objective. They also do not take as many risks as men do, especially in the initial stages. Their projection of capital costs,

business opportunities and sales are very much more realistic and sometimes very low. Though this prevents an ambitious expansion, it also prevents disappointment resulting from over-estimation. Finally, women who succeed do so because of strong family support in the form of finance, business know-how and freedom of movement (NAYE, 1984).

Motivation

What motivates women to take to business ?

A study by the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, Ahmedabad classifies women entrepreneurs into three categories, viz. chance entrepreneurs, forced entrepreneurs and created entrepreneurs (NAYE, 1984). Chance entrepreneurs are women who have gone into business just by chance, without any preparation and due to fortuitous circumstances, in contrast to forced entrepreneurs where women were forced to take to business because a husband or father died and did not leave an heir. Created entrepreneurs are those who underwent training and planned to start business as a career.

Motivation to take to business is either economic compulsion, a desire to utilise space and time and make money (these women usually start a small industry in their home or nearby) or a desire to take up a challenging task. Those who have technical education are from the middle class. They often have both capacity and financial means and are highly motivated to go into non-traditional areas in business and industry. There are others who have wanted to go into business but could not due to family responsibilities, and lack of technical expertise or money. Once these pressures have eased they are highly motivated to go into training, use all government incentives and start work. These women are the largest in number and from the ordinary middle class. Women coming from industry or business backgrounds have a natural advantage and flair. But the prime motivating factor in all, is the desire for economic independence and the need to prove oneself through overcoming a challenge.

Factors of Change

A number of factors have contributed to unleashing women's potential in the last decade. One of the most important is the tremendous expansion of educational opportunities for women.

Female literacy has steadily gone up to 34.8 per cent in 1981 as against 18.69 per cent in 1971. Even amongst literate women, the percentage of women at various educational levels has gone up between the two census periods as shown in the table below

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Female literates by Education Levels

	1971	1981
Graduates and above	1.35	2.96
Matric and high school	7.93	12.48
Technical Diploma	0.16	0.29

Even in higher education there has been a spectacular growth in the number of women enrolled. In the past 30 years or so, the enrolment of women has gone up by more than 20 times³, while the proportion of women to men has increased about threefold during the period in 1981-82; there were 40 women per 100 men compared to 14 in 1950-51. As a percentage of total enrolment, enrolment of women in higher education has increased from 22.7 per cent in 1971-72 to 28.5 per cent in 1982-83. The number of colleges meant exclusively for women has gone up by nearly 27 per cent over the period 1974-75 to 1982-83 and in 1982-83 there were 643 colleges for women alone. Significantly, there has been a steady increase in enrolment of women as a proportion of total enrolment in the faculties of medicine, agriculture, law, commerce, engineering, technology and veterinary sciences, with faculties of commerce registering the maximum increase from 3.6 per cent in 1971-72 to 15.0 in 1982-83 (UGC, 1983). The figures speak for themselves about women moving into non-traditional education and explain the increase of women in business. With education has come confidence and motivation to use one's potential. The general spread of education has also aided the process, so that parents are now willing to give girls an education equal to that of boys, and are more willing to let them take up professions and to pursue a career.

This last is, at least in part, due to inflation and economic pressures, which has forced society to reassess women's roles.

Inability to make ends meet has forced women, especially in the lower middle classes to enter the work force, often at the initiative of parents and husbands. Parents realise that an economically independent daughter can offer them security in old age, as much as boys did traditionally. Economic pressures have also accelerated male migration from villages to towns and from India, abroad, forcing parents to turn to daughters for support. The paths trailed by women leaders in various fields, most notably by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, has also helped change attitudes towards women's capabilities.

A third factor, apart from education and inflation which has helped women to take to entrepreneurship, is planned development. With acceptance of planning it became evident that if development was to be accelerated, the economy could not afford to ignore the potential for contribution by half the population. Hence efforts were made to involve women in the development process. Also, creation of employment came to be one of the key goals of planning, and since the potential for creation of new employment by the organised sector was very low, due to its very low rate of growth (only 3.4 per cent per annum) the emphasis from the Fifth Plan onwards came to be on promoting self-employment, including self-employment of women. Self-employment for women was promoted on the additional ground that it enabled them to combine better their dual roles of home maker and producer.

Two developments contributed greatly to this focus on women in the planning process. The UN declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1975-85 as the Women's Decade, can be considered to mark a watershed in matters pertaining to women. All over the world it brought into sharp focus women's problems and needs as well as their potential. Debate and research led to a re-examination of women's roles in society and in development and to a demand for measures which would help them realise their full potential and so contribute to society. Action was initiated on several fronts, but most notably on health, education and employment, by national and international, government and non-government agencies.

The focus on women coincided with changes in development theory, which now postulated that a trickle down of benefits of the planned process to the poorest and weakest sections of society could not be presumed and that specially targetted programmes were necessary along with measures to raise the rate of growth. Women

were considered one such disadvantaged group to whom special attention needed to be paid.

Role of Government

The Government began its efforts to promote women's self-employment around 1978 with a series of measures which included both skills-training and provision of services and facilities in the area of credit, material supply, marketing, product development etc. In 1978, the new Industrial Policy Resolution for the first time recognised women entrepreneurs as a special group needing support and assistance. Several government and non-government organisations launched vocational training and entrepreneurship development programmes for women. While the first concentrated on building up skills in particular occupations like catering, designing, printing and electrical assembly, the second was concerned more with motivation, developing entrepreneurial aptitudes and giving the know-how for starting a new business or industry. The Kerala Government was perhaps the first to start a full-fledged Women Industries Programme in 1978 with a woman officer in charge. Apart from training programmes it offered a number of incentives to women to start new ventures, such as exemption from sales tax for six years from date of commencement of production; marketing assistance, government participation in shares of new ventures, subsidies towards staff salaries, equipment purchase and rent of premises etc. As a result, by 1984, 619 units have been organised by women: 123 industrial cooperative societies, 421 proprietary concerns, 4 joint stock companies, 33 partnership firms and 32 ventures by charitable institutions.

It would be impossible to describe here in detail the various entrepreneurship development programmes that have been initiated, but I will mention a few of the major agencies that are working in the field. The Small Industries Service Institutes (SISI) of different states run motivational training, and entrepreneurial development courses and also undertake follow-up activities. The State Bank of India, and various other banks, the Small Industries Development Organisation (SIDO), the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, Ahmedabad and the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad, the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development, Delhi, all run ED programmes for

women. The Small Industries Extension Training Institute, Hyderabad (SIET), does entrepreneurship motivation development programmes for trainers of promotional agencies and also entrepreneurial motivation development programmes for potential entrepreneurs. It has run 62 programmes so far. The Central Social Welfare Board, the Directorate General of Employment Training (DGET), Ministry of Labour, Government of India, All India Handicrafts Board and the Khadi and Village Industries are also involved in vocational training for women.

Typically, these entrepreneurship development programmes (EDPs) are of about three months' duration and cover subjects like entrepreneurial qualities, opportunity guidance, products selection, sources of information, procedures for setting up a unit, schemes of assistance, market survey techniques, achievement motivation, costing and cost consciousness, production planning and control, taxation and budgeting, and effective communication. It includes factory visits, practical in-plant training and project report preparation. Many ED programmes give follow-through assistance till a woman actually sets up a unit. Thus they recommend the woman entrepreneur for a bank loan, and arrange for technical advice if necessary.

There is no all-India data on the number of women who have undergone EDP training, nor of the impact of these programmes in terms of the success or failure rate in terms of women actually setting up and running an enterprise over time, nor any analysis of their background in terms of class and education, the products selected and motivation. This is one major area which future research needs to address.

Disabilities and constraints

Though efforts have been made, women entrepreneurs still face a number of disabilities and constraints, which are partly due to the fact of being a woman and partly general to all trying to set up a new venture in a controlled economy. The constraints therefore are partly attitudinal and partly physical.

Attitudinal barriers

There is an entrenched belief that women are not bread-winners and what they do is supplementary activity, and that they should

therefore take up those kinds of activities with which they are traditionally familiar such as making pickles or papads, doll-making, knitting etc. Also that they should run such units at home and this generally means run a cottage industry. Since they are conceived to run the business as a pastime or a spare time activity it is presumed that they lack seriousness and commitment (Chatrapathy, 1984).

This attitude is reflected in statements made by even serious policy makers. I quote from the speech of Mr. N D Tiwari, then Minister for Industry and Labour, giving the valedictory address at the Second International Conference of Women Entrepreneurs in 1981:

While there is no basic difference in the fundamental factors making for entrepreneurs, there are some special disabilities which particularly affect women coming to the fore to take up self-employment opportunities or emerging as entrepreneurs. These relate to questions bearing on how to choose the right product and the skills needed to develop new products, the development of appropriate technology usable in working conditions within the home, the development of viable hand-held tools which increase productivity and reduce drudgery etc. Considering the multiple roles that women will *continue to shoulder at home and for the family, any technology framework, especially intended for them must reckon with the fact that the home itself will have to be the work place for a large number of them engaged in self-employment*. I am sure that in this complex task our scientists and technologists would engage themselves in order to devise suitable productivity-increasing and fatigue-reducing technology and tools [emphasis mine].

In many instances, agencies promoting women's entrepreneurial development identify certain projects as suitable to women and believe women cannot set up every type of industry, i.e., there is stereotyping of attitudes of what women can do.

Also, though it is true that often women entrepreneurs are only fronts to get the various concessions in credit etc. given to them, and it is actually the men who run the business, it is also true that if a woman receives any assistance from a man, it is immediately construed that it is the man who is actually running the business.

Society's lack of confidence in a woman's ability is also reflected in reluctance by the family to finance a woman's venture; in a closer scrutiny of her application for assistance by financial, industrial and government organisation; and in comparatively harsh guarantee

terms by banks in sanctioning loans. Often a woman must produce a man guarantor before a bank is satisfied. While the more educated high level staff of promotional agencies are helpful to a woman entrepreneur, it is difficult for her to cope with the lower staff who refuse to accept women in the role of entrepreneurs. Social and familial disapproval of contact with members of the opposite sex, which is inevitable if a woman is to set up business, also inhibit women from going into business. Not only is she unable to mix freely with professional peers, but is also unable to resort to bribes or socialising which a man may do to get things moving in a controlled economy.

Other constraints

Due to her many responsibilities a woman has less time than a man to spend on the arduous legal and procedural formalities that have to be completed before setting up a business. There are at least seven or eight major agencies involved in obtaining the various permissions, and as many as twenty-seven in some cases, for obtaining suitable industrial sheds, power connections, various licenses and registrations, loans and raw materials. To make matters worse there is also a lack of information about facilities available, procedures to be followed, raw material sources etc. Women also lack expertise in identifying viable products, in formulating a credit-worthy project, or in marketing accounting and management.

The lack of a single agency which can be approached for all assistance, and for guidance; the lack of training facilities in management, production and marketing; and the absence of nodal points in various administrative ministries to deal with problems of women entrepreneurs, all add to her problems. Further, women are seldom included in trade delegations or exhibitions abroad and thus are not exposed to new technological developments, or new markets. (Vaid, 1984).

—And all these difficulties still prevail after six years of government effort on behalf of women!

We shall overcome

But there are glimmerings of hope and these are that women entrepreneurs have at last decided to help themselves. To fight stereotypes, negative attitudes and other problems, as well as to

provide support services, women entrepreneurs have begun to organise themselves into professional associations.

In Karnataka, women entrepreneurs have formed AWAKE (Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka) to lobby for special incentives, amongst them 5 per cent reservation of industrial land and sheds, subsidy on project reports and know-how investment and relaxation of margin money requirements. They have begun a systematic identification of women entrepreneurs so as to enlarge their community. They have succeeded in getting a special women's cell set up in the Technical Consultancy Organisation of Karnataka (TECSOK).

The National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs has set up a Women's Wing which organised the International and National Conventions of women entrepreneurs but unfortunately has done very little constructive follow-up work, such as identifying investment opportunities, development of management and industrial production capabilities, getting better access to capital, infrastructure, and markets; taking up grievances with appropriate authorities, exposing members to domestic and world markets by sending delegations, enabling their participation in exhibitions and fairs etc.; and lobbying in the press and parliament; all activities which they had mandated for themselves but not achieved.

A new offshoot of this organisation is the Indian Council of Women Entrepreneurs in Delhi which was set up only in 1984. It is too early to say whether they can rise to the challenge.

Desiderata

What more needs to be done?

The first and most important task remains changing the attitudes, of girls and women themselves, and of parents and society towards women's roles and duties. Both, women themselves, and society at large, need to gain confidence in women's abilities to tackle non-traditional work. This can be done through the formal education system as well as through public education.

In schools and colleges, guidance services could be set up to offer information to women on training opportunities, job opportunities and facilities and incentives available for women entrepreneurs. These centres could, through counselling sessions, make young girls understand the implications of a decision not to take up a career, or

to leave the employment market mid-career. They could also arrange for meetings and group discussions with successful women entrepreneurs both to motivate the girls as well as for guidance. For such women as have left the employment market, these centres could provide guidance for re-entry.

So far, the vocational content at school-leaving stage is designed purely with wage-employment in mind. This needs a review to see how entrepreneurship can be encouraged by modifying the content. Curricula can be reoriented to include instruction in practical application, e.g. in biology and chemistry teaching, a course could be included on how to set up pathological laboratories, or how standard pharmacological material can be produced. Agricultural Universities and Home Science Colleges could introduce a course on the economics and management of food-processing, dairying, sericulture or poultry units.

A well-coordinated public education campaign using all the media, could go a long way towards changing social attitudes towards women entrepreneurs. The media could carry interviews with women entrepreneurs, feature success stories, give information on facilities and incentives available, etc. Favourable public opinion regarding women entrepreneurs will result also in the evolution of an institutional framework to create opportunities for women.

Secondly, to enable more effective designing of training and support programmes for women entrepreneurs, research is needed on the background, motivation and attitudes of women who take up entrepreneurial activity. Also necessary is careful monitoring and evaluation of existing training programmes and facilities to highlight reasons for low rate of utilisation of incentives and facilities, or to gauge the success rate of training programmes, so that they can be adapted to felt needs.

Simultaneously, experimentation must continue on the most effective ways of delivering support services to women in the area of credit, marketing and product development, given that women have different problems and needs from men.

Third, promotional agencies must build up a shelf of project profiles, suitable for women so that much of the technical spade work is done for them. In building up such a shelf of projects, the link between national welfare programmes for women and possibilities for women entrepreneurs meeting these programme needs can be kept in mind.

To expose women entrepreneurs to new technological development at home and abroad, as also to expose them to new markets, women entrepreneurs should be included in national and international trade fairs, and delegations.

Finally, women's professional organisations need to become more active on behalf of their members, both for advocacy and technical support, providing the kind of services mentioned earlier. They could also offer fellowships to young women graduates to do business administration, or entrepreneurship development training; or to mature entrepreneurs to improve their skills by attending these courses.

One looks forward to the day when the woman entrepreneur will no longer be a rare hot-house species, but as common as the hardy hibiscus.

Footnotes

1. Sixth Plan figures put the work participation rate at 28 per cent for females.
2. Run by the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India, Ahmedabad.
3. In 1982-83, the estimated enrolment in universities was 893,000 as against 40,000 in 1950-51 (UGC, 1983).

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