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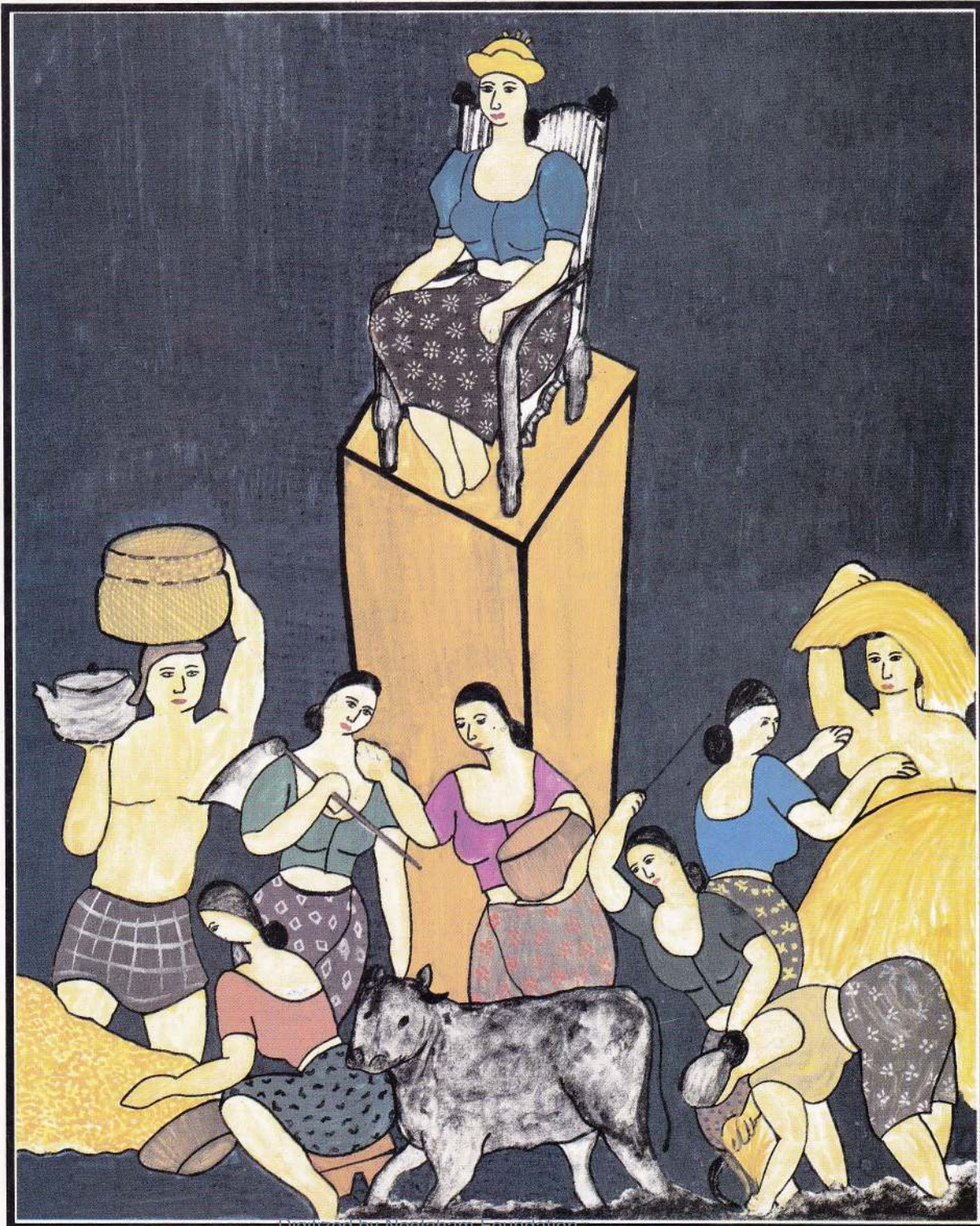
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SPECIAL ISSUE ON WOMEN & AGRICULTURE



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HISTORY EMPOWERS WOMEN

SW The *Women and Agriculture* issue, we have gone far back into history with the help of Maria Mies and Evelyn Reed to reveal the status of women in the period before 5000 years, before the descent of the patriarchal cloud upon us. These two women feminists have clearly shown the institutional structure and power base of the early men as agricultural and technologists.

Evelyn Reed says: 'Ancient women were not objects to be petted, lulled, manipulated or exploited. As producers and promoters they were acknowledged leaders in a patriarchal society and were held in the highest honour and respect by men.'

'Narrowing our lives to a husband, home and family is the ultimate crucifixion of womanhood to a second sex, which is marginalised and ridiculed for its natural functions in life.'

How did we come to this? How do we get out of it? These are important questions we face today. With the widely spread problems of rape, incest, batter, and indignity many women face, force us to look deep into the problems to make women's lives more meaningful and dignified.

Besides these two articles, we have plenty of good indicators for the future. Agriculture is a field where women worked the hardest and remained unacknowledged for centuries. Today in Sri Lanka women engaged in agriculture have gained some recognition in spite of social and cultural obstacles. Nevertheless, a farmer is a male and a woman remains a helper or a garden grows in most surpluses.

The rest of the articles are small indicators of achievements of women farmers in Sri Lanka followed by an evaluation study on the quantity of women's participation in agricultural productivity villages.

Eva Ranaweera

Women-First To Grow

CONTENTS

Maria Mias

In the course of their history, women have observed the changes in their own bodies and have acquired, through observation and experiment, a vast amount of experiential knowledge about the functions of their bodies, about the rhythms of menstruation, about pregnancy and childbirth. This appropriation of their own bodily nature was closely related to the acquisition of knowledge about the generative forces of external nature, about plants, animals, the earth, water and air.

Thus, women did not simply breed children like cows, but appropriated their own generative and productive forces; they analysed and reflected upon their own and former experiences, and passed them on to their daughters.

Today we have sufficient evidence at our disposal to allow the conclusion that, in pre-patriarchal societies, women knew better how to regulate the number of their children and the frequency of their births than do modern women who have lost this knowledge due to their subjection to the civilizing process of the males.

Gatherers and hunters and other primitive groups practiced, and still practice various methods by which to limit the number of births and children. Apart from infanticide, which

was most probably the earliest method (Fisher 1978:202), women in many societies have used various plants and herbs as contraceptives or to induce abortions.

Another method of birth control used widely among contemporary gatherers and hunters is a prolonged period of breastfeeding.

Women's production of new life, of new women and men, is linked inseparably to the production of the means of subsistence for this new life. Mothers who give birth to children and who suckle them, necessarily have to provide food for themselves and for the children. Thus, the appropriation of their bodily nature, the fact that they produce children and milk, makes them the first providers of daily food, be it as gatherers, who simply collect what they find in nature—plants, small animals, fish, etc., or as agriculturists. The first division of labour by sex, i.e. that between the gathering activities of the women and the sporadic hunting of the men, most probably originated in the fact that women necessarily were responsible for the daily subsistence, from the beginning, the gathering of plants, roots, fruits, mushrooms, nuts, small animals, etc. was a collective activity of women.

It may be assumed that the necessity to provide the daily food,

and long experience with plants and plant life, eventually led to the regular cultivation of grain and tubers. According to Gordon Childe, this invention took place in the Neolithic Age, particularly in Eurasia, where wild grains were first cultivated. Childe and many other scholars attribute the introduction of cultivation to women who also invented the first tools necessary for this new mode of production: the digging stick—which was already in use for digging out wild roots and tubers—and the hoe (Childe 1976, Flucq 1975, Boserup 1975, Thomson 1980, Challopadyaya 1973, Parentels 1941, Briffault 1952).

The regular cultivation of food plants, mainly tubers and grains, signified a new stage and an enormous increase in the productivity of female labour which, according to many authors, made surplus production possible for the first time in history. Childe calls this transformation the "neolithic revolution," which he attributes to regular cultivation of grain. On the basis of recent archaeological findings in Iran and Turkey, however, Elizabeth Fisher argues that people had already been able to collect a surplus of wild grains and nuts in the gathering stage. The technological precondition for the collection of surplus was the invention of containers, baskets of leaves and plant fibres, and jars. It seems plausible

sible that the technology of preservation preceded the new agricultural technology, and was equally necessary for the production of a surplus.

The difference between the two modes of production is therefore not so much the existence of a surplus, but rather that women developed the first truly *productive* relationship to nature. Gatherers still lived in a society of simple appropriation, but with the introduction of plant cultivation we can speak for the first time of a 'production society' (Schulz - Bethel 1970). Women not only collected and consumed what grew in nature, but *they made things grow*.

Women's objective relationship to nature was not only a productive one; it was also right from the beginning, *social production*. In contrast to grown men, who could gather and hunt only for themselves, women had to share their products at least with their young children. In other words, their specific objective relationship to nature (to their own bodily nature as well as to the external environment), namely, to be able to let grow and to make grow, made them the inventors of *the first social relationships*, those between mothers and children.

Many authors have come to the conclusion that mother - children groups were the first social units; not only units of consumption but also units of production. Mothers and children worked together as gatherers and as early hoe cultivators. Such authors are of the opinion that grown

men were only temporarily and peripherally integrated or socialised into these early matrilineal or matrilineal units (Bilhault 1957; Reed 1975; Hanson 1960).

Martin and Voorhies argue that matrilineal units coincided with a vegetarian phase of human evolution: 'Adult males would maintain no permanent attachment to these mother - child units - except to the unit of their birth' (Martin and Voorhies 1975, 1976). The permanent integration of males into these units therefore has to be seen as a result of social history. The productive forces that developed in these first social units were not only technological in nature, but increased also and above all, the capacity for human co-operation. The ability to plan for tomorrow, to anticipate the future, to learn from one another, to pass this knowledge on from one generation to the next and to learn from past experiences, in other words, to constitute history.

Women's objective relationship to nature, as this developed over time, can be summarised as follows:

(a) Their interaction with nature, with their own nature as well as the external environment, was a reciprocal process. They conceived of their own bodies as being productive in the same way as they conceived of external nature as being productive.

(b) Although they appropriate nature, this appropriation does not constitute a relationship of dominance or a property relation. Women

are not owners of their own bodies or of the earth, but they co-operate with their bodies and the earth in order to let grow and to make grow.

(c) As producers of new life they also became the first subsistence producers and the inventors of the first productive economy, implying from the beginning social production and the creation of social relations, i.e. of society and history.

The Myth of Man - the - Hunter

Women's productivity is the precondition of all other human productivity, not only in the sense that they are always the producers of new men and women, but also in the sense that the first social division of labour, that between female gatherers (later also cultivators) and predominantly male hunters, could take place only on the basis of a developed female productivity.

Female productivity consisted above all in the ability to provide the daily subsistence, the guaranty of survival, for the members of the clan or band. Women had to assure the daily bread necessary not only for themselves and their children but also for the men if they had no luck on their hunting 'expeditions', because hunting is an economy of risk.

It has been proved particularly by the critical research of feminist scholars, that the survival of mankind has been due much more to women (the gatherers) than to 'man - the - hunter' in contrast to what is preached by social Darwinists of old or new. Even

among existing hunters and gatherers women provide up to 80% of the daily food, whereas men contribute only a small portion by hunting (Lee and de Vore 1976, quoted by Fisher 1979: 48). By a secondary analysis of a sample of hunters and gatherers from Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas*, Martin and Voorhes have proven that 58% of the subsistence of these societies was provided by gathering, 25% by hunting, and the rest by hunting and gathering together (1975: 181). Tiwi women in Australia, who are both hunters and gatherers, got 60% of their food by gathering, 30% by hunting and 20% by fishing. Jane Goodall, who studied the Tiwi women, said that bush hunting and collecting was the most important productive activity. The women not only could but did provide the major daily supply of a variety of foods to members of their camp. Men's hunting required considerable skill and strength, but the birds, bats, fish, crocodiles, dugongs and turtles they contributed to the household were luxury items rather than staples (Goodall 1971: 169).

It is obvious from these examples that among hunters and gatherers hunting by men is not the economic importance that is usually ascribed to it, and that women are the providers of the bulk of the daily staple food. In fact all hunters of big game, when they want to go on a hunting expedition, depend on the supply of food by their women which is not produced by hunting. This is why the aboriginal women had a voice in decision making on war and

hunting expedition. If they refused to give the men the necessary supply of food for their adventures, the men had to stay at home (Loebuck 1978:19, Brown 1970).

Elizabeth Fisher gives us further examples of foraging peoples among whom women are the main providers of the daily food, particularly in the temperate and southern zones. But she also argues that the gathering of vegetable food was more important for our early ancestors than hunting. She refers to the study of coprolites, fossil faecal excrements, which reveals that groups who lived 200,000 years ago on the French Riviera, mainly survived on a diet of shellfish, mussels and grains, but not of meat. 12,000-year old coprolites from Mexico suggest that millets were the main staple food in that area (Fisher 1979: 57-58).

Although it is obvious from these examples, as well as from common sense, that humanity would not have survived if man the hunter's productivity had been the base for the daily subsistence of early societies, the notion that man - the - hunter was the inventor of the first tools, the provider of food, inventor of human society, protector of women and children, persists not only in popular literature and films, but also among serious social scientists, also among Marxist scholars.

The 'cultural' achievement of these human hunter primates seems to be that they have risen (or 'evolved') from the stage of rape to the stage of exchange of women. The exploitative dominant relationship

between man and woman has been ingrained into the 'biological' infrastructure of the hunting behaviour: men are the providers of meat, for which women have a craving. Therefore, the hunters were able to subject and subordinate the women permanently as sexual objects and work-bods. What gave the hunters this tremendous advantage over women was, according to these authors, the 'bonding principle', which evolved out of hunting in groups. Tiger advanced the idea of the 'male bonding principle' as the root cause of male supremacy in his book *Man in Groups* in 1960, when the USA was in the middle of another adventure of man - the - hunter, the Vietnam war. Although Tiger knew, as Evelyn Reed points out, that meat - eating constituted only a tiny portion of the baboon diet, he claims that hunting and meat - eating constitute the decisive factor in our human primate evolution and that male bonding patterns 'reflect and arise out of man's history as a hunter.' So, in the hunting situation, it was the hunting group - male - plus - male - plus - male which ensured the survival of the entire productive community. This was the male - male bond as important for hunting purposes as the male - female bond was important for productive purposes, and this is the basis for the division of labour by sex (Tiger 1969: 122, 126).

The man - the - hunter model as the paradigm of human evolution and development has been the basis of numerous scientific works on human affairs and has been popularised by

the modern media. It has influenced the thinking of millions of people and is still constantly advanced to explain the causes of social inequality. Feminist scholars have challenged the validity of this model on the basis of their own research and that of others. They have unmasked it, including its basic premises of the male bonding principle, the importance of meat as food etc..., as a sexist projection of modern, capitalist and imperialist social relations into pre-history and earlier history. This projection serves to legitimize existing relations of exploitation and dominance between men and women, classes and peoples, as universal, timeless and natural. Evelyn Reed has rightly denounced the hidden fascist orientation behind the model, particularly in the writings of Tiger and his glorification of war (Reed 1976).

Although we are able to demystify the man-the-hunter hypothesis and to show that the great hunters would not have been able even to survive had it not been for the daily subsistence production of the women, we are still faced with the question why women, in spite of their superior economic productivity as gatherers and early agriculturists, were not able to prevent the establishment of a patriarchal and exploitative relationship between the sexes.

The earliest tools of mankind, the stone axes and scrapers, were of an ambivalent character. They could be used to grind, smash, and pulverize

grains and other vegetable food and to dig out roots, but they could also be used to kill small animals, and we can assume that they were used by men and women for both purposes.

The digging stick and the hoe were the main tools for gathering as well as for early agriculture. Women must have continued with their technology while some men developed specialised hunting tools.

What is important here is that women's technology remained productive in the true sense of the word: they produced something new. Hunting technology, on the other hand, is not productive, i.e. hunting equipment proper cannot be used for any other productive activity-unlike the stone axe. Bows and arrows, and spears, are basically means of destruction. Their significance lies in the fact that not only can they be used to kill animals, but also to kill other human beings. It is this characteristic of the hunting tools which became decisive in the further development of male productivity as well as of unequal exploitative social relations, not the fact that hunters as providers of meat were able to raise the standards of nutrition of the community.

The emergence of a specialised hunting technology, therefore, only implied the possibility of establishing relationship of dominance and exploitation. It seems that as long as the hunters remained confined to their limited hunting-gathering context they could not realise the exploitative

potential of their *predatory mode of production*. Their economic contribution was not sufficient; they remained dependent for survival on their women's subsistence production.

The productive forces of the hunters could fully be released only at the stage when pastoral nomads, who domesticated cattle and women, invaded agricultural communities. In other words, full realization of the productive capacity of this predatory mode of production presupposes the existence of other realy productive modes, like agriculture.

Elizabeth Fisher considers that patriarchal relationships between men and women were established only after man had discovered their own generative capacities. This discovery, according to her, went hand-in-hand with the domestication and particularly the *breeding* of animals as a new mode of production. They discovered that one bull could impregnate many cows, and this may have led to the castration and elimination of weaker animals. The prime bull was then used at periods that the pastoral nomads considered to be the most appropriate for impregnating the cows. Female animals were subjected to sexual coercion. In other words, the free sexuality of wild animals was subjected to a coercive economy, based on breeding, with the object of increasing the herds. It is plausible that the establishment of herds, the kidnapping and raping of women, the establishment of patriarchal lines of descent and inheritance, were part of this new mode of pro-

domen. Women were subjected to the same economic logic and became part of movable property, like cattle.

This led to a change in their relationship to nature as well as to a change in the sexual division of labour. For pastoral nomads, women are no longer very important as producers or gatherers of food, as is the case among hunters. They are needed as breeders of children, particularly of sons. Their productivity is now reduced to their fertility, which is appropriated and controlled by men (cf. Fisher 1979: 248 ff.).

In contrast to the hunters' and gatherers' economy, which is mainly

appropriative, the economy of the pastoral nomads is a 'productive economy' (Sahl-Belzli). It is obvious, however, that this mode of production presupposes the existence of means of coercion for the manipulation of animals and human beings and for the extension of territory.

Agriculturalists

It is therefore probably correct to say that the pastoral nomads were the factors of all dominance relations, particularly that of men over women. But there are sufficient data available which suggest that exploitative men-women relationships existed among agriculturalists, not only after the in-

troduction of the plough, as Esther Roserup believes (1975) but also among the hoe-cultivators in Africa, where even today farming is done mainly by women. Meillassoux (1975) points out that in such societies, which he characterises as *economies domestiques*, the old men were in a position to establish a relationship of dominance over younger men and women, because they could acquire more wives to work only for them. The marriage system was the mechanism by which they accumulated women and wealth, which in fact were closely related.

(Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour)

Galle Face Brown And The Night Of The Painted White Faces

When day was giving up its ghost
on Galle Face Brown
He was stalking
looking for a happy catch

The sea sent wet breeze signals
of welcome to visitations from sweat
faced heags gaily decked
and carrying painted white faces
to walk in Paradise

At Galle Face Brown
he saw

She was filled with joy
doubling in size
ballooning
and the salt wind
filling the skirt

under the now dark sky

whirlled in by the dozen
the stars in the heavens
and the door confined
by black magic Raymond,
tight lidded in the tropic heat
colours the blue of the sky
fell into the water

before the dying dissolution and
before the making of a blue night woman
in a wind-filled skirt
for him
a hastily made blue woman

from a merciless mind
creak quietly
in the black of the night

It was then that the gentle wind began
birthing

every being a hero
and every being a heroine
it was a great night
as every night was
giving birth to the heroic

When he was stalking Galle Face Brown
catching her in his butterfly nets
she stood stony-eyed and bowdlered;
the night was lovey
every being a hero
and every being a heroine
in the black of the night
dancing on the Brown
like shattered glass from a wind screen

Shining diamonds of heroes and heroines
in the stony world of Galle Face Brown
and of the night of the Painted Faces.

Eva Ranaweera

Half Moon-Full Moon

Punysakante Wijensike

I sit on a low stool while my elder sister, my Loku Akka reclines on the bed we share at night. Beside the bed is a large basket of flowers, all different shades, with a card of congratulations attached from Amma and Thatha. Beside it lies a single red rose with no card. Sonali has just passed her Advanced Level Examination with two A's and two B's to her credit. She has jumped a major hurdle. I have baked a cake for her with pink roses. But that I will give later.

It is a day of celebration and achievement for all of us. I am so happy I could cry. I am only fifteen years old and will be sitting my Ordinary Level next year. My sister's good results give me fresh hope and courage. Then suddenly I realize she is not talking about her success at the exam. She is talking of something else.

"Now I am free," she is saying. "To be myself."

I gaze at her non-plussed.

"I was waiting until the exam was over to show my love for him," she said. "with all that cramming I had no time to be with him. He too has passed well and yesterday we celebrated our results, alone."

"Are you talking of Ravindra?" I asked.

"Who else?" replied Sonali. "Happily."

Was this Sonali talking, Sonali, my beloved elder sister?

I looked at his picture pasted on the wall of our room along with pop stars and film stars. I had accepted him as just another face on the wall and had never imagined my elder sister could have been in love.

"Aren't you happy that we are all proud of you?" I faltered.

"Cherish, don't talk like a babe. Of course I am glad I have made everyone happy, but the passing of the exam has a special meaning for Ravi and me."

Ravi. She called him Ravi, not Ravindra.

Was this my sister or a stranger?

"Passing the exam opened a door for him and for me," she said.

"I don't understand," I said slowly and stubbornly, refusing to acknowledge this new person who had taken my sister's place. "Opened what door? I know it means of course that you can now enter University and he is free to fly abroad to qualify as an engineer, as he always wanted to. Two doors have been opened, not just one."

Ravindra lives down our road and I have often tagged behind, bored with both of them talking in whispers. I thought they had been discussing work, both sitting their Advanced Levels together.

"Listen to what I say." She was

speaking very seriously, now, and very slowly, as if it was way below her level of understanding. "When you reach my age and come to love another person, you put him first before anyone else. Even before your parents and family and your best friends. Suddenly he is the most important and only person that means everything to you. He becomes father, mother, sister, friend and, most of all, your lover. He is you and you are he. Once you were half and now you are whole. He and I struggled to pass the Advanced Level because we needed to jump that hurdle first. Now suddenly we have passed, crossed the line, the bridge of uncertainty, and from being anxious children dependent on the opinion of others, we have turned into adults no longer afraid of doing what we want to do."

"Are you going to tell Amma and Thatha about him? Get their permission to become engaged?"

Sonali tossed her head impatiently causing her long mane of hair hold by a ring comb to shake like a horse's tail.

"I ask Chachi. You don't understand what I am saying. But soon you will be sitting the Advanced Level yourself and then you will know. Why should we tell or ask permission from anyone? We don't want formal engagements and commitments that turn a relationship between two people into a situation where there will be inquiries and investigations into who is who and whose property will belong to whom. Next year na hopes to go abroad to qualify and I hope to enter

University here to become a doctor. But I then our love will be a bond and secret between ourselves alone.

I relaxed suddenly. There were no secret plans then to change our lives.

"We will not wait for consent and marriage. Signing a register or standing on a poruwa holds no meaning. Yesterday we got 'married' as you name it, in the real sense. I gave him all I had to give him. I surrendered my virginity on his bed, when his parents were out of the house, in his room behind a closed door."

I opened and closed my mouth like a fish thrown out of water.

"You know about virginity, don't you little sister? Text books teach you don't they? And didn't Amma herself tell you when you grew up, to be careful after attaining age? Did she not hide you in a room not letting any male, not even father, see you until after the first bath?"

"You mean.... you mean you did THAT with him? But suppose it makes you pregnant? I decided to hit her bluntly as she had hit me.

Again she tossed her head defiantly. I felt she was not addressing me, she was addressing the world. Amma, Thatha, her school teacher, relatives, friends.

"I see you have read your books. If I get pregnant Ravi won't desert me. He gave me that promise along with his gift."

She pulled it out, where she must have hidden it all this while. A silver half moon hung on a black cord round her neck. It must have been nestling warm and moist between her breasts.

"He gave me this in return for what I gave him. When he saw virgin blood on his sheet he was startled. It proved I had turned him into a man. More than passing the exam, that proved his manhood. I will treasure this half moon

"But if you get pregnant how will he go abroad to qualify?"

I was being cruel. I knew, but somehow I felt I had to drag my sister back to reality.

She did not answer for a moment.

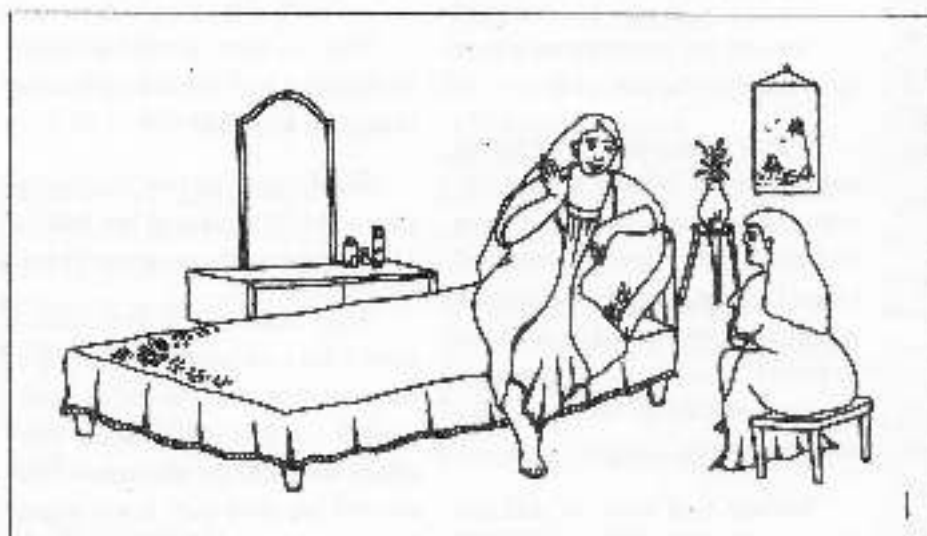
I gazed, hypnotized by the half moon as it lay crested now in my sister's palms. Suddenly it turned from a symbol of maturity into a threat. I don't know why but suddenly the black cord from which it hung brings to my mind the cyanide capsules hanging around similar cords round the necks of young rebels in the north. They too are brain washed into committing their young lives to a cause that holds no future.

She senses my sudden hostility, my withdrawal from her. She tries to convince me, and perhaps herself too, that she knows what she is doing. "Now don't breathe a word to anyone about what I have confided in you. I

have prepared you for the time when you will reach the age of understanding, the age of consent. When you are an adult you decide on your own life."

I breathed a deep, deep sigh of relief. Not because I may become like her one day but because I am only fifteen and still waiting to pass Ordinary Level Exam. I am glad I don't have to turn away from my parents and make my own decisions. I am glad time is yet before me.

She moves to the telephone. I hear her making a new date to meet him. She moves with confidence, speaks with confidence.



Was she mocking? Why was she hurting me? Did it mean that when you passed the Advanced Level you had the liberty to hurt?

as a promise, of the full moon he will give me on our wedding night. after we have both qualified in our different fields."

"I can tell Amma that I am spending the night with Naula. Don't worry. I will warn Naula to confirm my lie in case Amma decides to check up on me. She cannot seem to accept that I am almost eighteen, and still tries to protect me."

I go out of our room. That way I will not know what she is doing and I will not be compelled to lie. But what if she does get pregnant? Will Ravindra sacrifice his career abroad and stay home to mind the baby? Will his parents permit him to? If she knows so much why doesn't she take precautions not to conceive? Yes, I have studied my text books although she may not have. I can warn her but that would mean I am collaborating with her, being disloyal to our parents.

If she gets pregnant will they destroy the life they created?

When we were younger I remember my elder sister helping me save drowning ants from a wash-basin. But overnight she has changed. Now only Ravindra matters, not even herself. She is not worried about her future, the glorious promise of an examination well passed.

I can still hear her whispering into the telephone. Does love make you blind as well as selfish?

I will ask Amma to let me move into the spare room, next to their room, for a while. I will tell her I need to study for the Ordinary Level and I can't do so without her disturbing me talking to her friends on the telephone. That way I will not be betraying her, nor will I be lying either. And I will not be involved in anything that may happen in the near future.

I ain't deserting my sister but then, hasn't she deserted me?

I feel sad for her. She has tumbled down from the pedestal upon which I had placed her, worshipped her. How can it be that at the Ordinary Level I am able to see so much more than she after passing the Advanced Level? Her head is in the clouds. Passing the Advanced Level does not mean you know about life itself. How can one person block your view of the rest of the world? Can a half moon throw sufficient light on the situation? Isn't it better to wait for the light of a full moon to be able to see clearly?

I think of the single red rose lying on her bedside table with no care from the sender. To me it appears cloudy to be writing.



Dawn of Technology

Evelyn Reed

The quest for food is the most compelling concern of any society, for no higher forms of labour are possible unless and until people are fed. Whereas animals live on a day to day basis of food-hunting, humanity had to win some measure of control over its food supply if it was to move forward and develop. Control means not only sufficient food for today but a surplus for tomorrow, and the ability to preserve stocks for future use.

From this standpoint, human history can be divided into two main epochs: the food *gathering* epoch, which extended over hundreds of thousands of years; and the food *producing* epoch, which began with the invention of agriculture and stockbreeding, not much more than 8,000 years ago.

In the food-gathering epoch, the first division of labour was very simple. It is generally described as a sexual division, or division of labour between the female and male sexes.

(Children contributed their share as soon as they were old enough, the girls being trained in female occupations and the boys in male occupations.) The nature of this division of labour was a differentiation between the sexes in the methods and kinds of food gathering. Men were the hunters of big game - a full time occupation which took them away from home or camp for longer or shorter periods of time. Women were the collectors of vegetable products around the camp or dwelling places.

Now it must be understood that, with the exception of a few specialized areas in the world at certain historical stages, the most reliable sources for food supplies were not animal (supplied by the man) but vegetable (supplied by the woman). As Otis Tufton Mason writes:

"Wherever tribes of mankind have gone, women have found out that great staple productions were to be their chief reliance. In Polynesia it is taro, or Breadfruit. In Africa it is the palm and rapeseed, millet or yams. In Asia it is rice. In Europe, cereals. In America corn and potatoes or acorns and pineapples in some places."

Alexander Goldenweiser makes the same point.

"Everywhere the sustenance of one part of the household is more regularly and reliably provided by the efforts of the home-bound woman than by those of her roving hunter husband or son. It is, in fact, a familiar spectacle among all primitive peoples that the man, returning home from a more or less arduous chase, may yet reach home empty-handed and himself begging for food. Under such conditions, the vegetable supply of the family has to serve his needs as well as those of the rest of the household." (Anthropology)

Thus the most reliable supplies of food were provided by the women collectors, not the men hunters.

But women were also hunters - hunters of what is known as slow game and small game. In addition to digging up roots, tubers, plants, etc., they collected grubs, bugs, lizards, molluscs and small animals such as

hares, marsupials, etc. This activity of the women was of decisive importance. For much of this small game was brought back to the camp alive, and these animals provided the basis for the first experience and experiments in animal taming and domestication.

Thus it was in the hands of women that the all-important techniques of animal domestication began, which were ultimately of mixed in stockbreeding. And this domestication had its roots in maternity. In this score, Mason writes.

"Now the first domestication is simply the adoption of helplessness in infancy. The young kid or lamb or calf is brought to the home of the hunter. It is fed and caressed by the mother and her children, and ever nourished at her breast. Innumerable references might be given to her caging and taming wild creatures... Women were always associated especially with the milk and food-giving species of domestic animals."

While one aspect of women's food gathering activity was thus leading to the discovery of animal domestication, another aspect was leading to the discovery of agriculture. This was women's labour in plying their digging sticks - one of the earliest tools of humanity - to procure food from the ground. To this day, in some backward areas of the world, the digging stick remains as inseparable a part of the woman as her baby. When the Shoshone Indians of Nevada and Wyoming, for example, were discovered, they were called "the diggers" by the white men, because they still employed this technique in securing food supplies.

And it was through this digging stick activity that women ultimately discovered agriculture. Sir James Frazer gives a good description of this process in its earliest stages. Using the natives of Central Victoria, Australia, as an example, he writes.

"The implement which they used to dig roots with was a pole seven or eight feet long, hardened in the fire and pointed at the end, which also served them as a weapon of offence and defence. Here we may detect some of the steps by which they advanced from digging to systematic cultivation of the soil.

"The long stick is driven firmly into the ground, where it is shaken as to loosen the earth, which is scraped up and thrown out with the fingers of the left hand and in this manner they dig with great rapidity. But the labour in proportion to the amount gained, is great. To get a yam about half an inch in circumference, they have to dig a hole about a foot square, and two feet in depth. A good scrubber portion of the time of the woman and children is therefore passed in this employment.

"In fertile districts, where the yams grow abundantly, the ground may be riddled with holes; literally perforated with them. The effect of digging up the earth in the search for roots and yams has been to enrich and fertilize the soil, and to increase the crop of roots and hares. Winnowing of the seeds on the ground which has thus been turned up with the digging sticks would naturally conduce to the same result. It is certain that winnowing seeds, where the wind carried some of the seeds away, bore fruit."

In the course of time, the women

learned how to aid nature by weeding out the garden patches and protecting the growing plants. And finally, they learned how to plant seeds and wait for them to grow.

Not only were quantity and quality improved, but a whole series of new species of plants and vegetables were brought into existence. According to Chappel and Coon:

Through cultivation, the selective process had produced many new species or profoundly altered the character of the old. In Melanesia people grow yams six feet long and a foot or more thick. The miserable roots which the Australian digs wild from the ground is no more nutritious than a cigar. [Principles of Anthropology]

Mason sums up the steps taken in agriculture as follows:

"The evolution of primitive agriculture was first, through seeking after vegetables, to moving near them, weeding them out, sowing the seed, cultivating them by hand, and finally the use of farm animals."

According to Gordon Childe, every single food plant of any importance, as well as other plants such as flax and cotton, was discovered by women in the pre-civilized epoch.

The discovery of agriculture and the domestication of animals made it possible for mankind to pass beyond the food gathering epoch into the food producing epoch, and this combination represented humanity's first conquest over its food supplies. This conquest was achieved by women. The great Agricultural Revolution, which provided the food for beast as

well as man, was the crowning achievement of woman's labour in buying their digging sticks.

To gain control of the food supply, however, meant more than simply relying upon nature and its fertility. It required, above all, woman's reliance upon her own labour, her own learning and her own capacities for innovation and invention. Women had to find out all the particular methods of cultivation appropriate to each species of plant or grain. They had to acquire the techniques of threshing, winnowing, grinding, etc., and invent all the special tools and implements necessary for tilling the soil, reaping and storing the crop, and then converting it into food.

In other words, the struggle to win control over the food supply not only resulted in a development of agriculture, but also led to working out the first essentials in manufacturing and science. As Mason writes:

"The whole industrial life of woman was built up around the food supplies. From the first journey on foot to procure the raw materials until the food is served and eaten, there is a line of trades that are continuous and born of the environment."

The first division of labour between the sexes is often described in a simplified and misleading formula. The men, it is said, were the hunters and warriors; while the women stayed in the camp or dwelling house, raised the children, cooked and did every thing else.

This description has given rise to the notion that the primitive housewife was simply a more primitive counterpart

of the modern housewife. While the men were providing all the necessities of society, the women were merely puttingter around in the kitchens and nurseries. Such a concept is a gross distortion of the facts.

Aside from the differentiation in food-getting, there was virtually no division of labour between the sexes in all the higher forms of production - for the simple reason that the whole industrial life of primitive society was lodged in the hands of the women. Cooking, for example, was not cooking as we know it in the modern individual home. Cooking was only one technique which women acquired as the result of the discovery and control of fire and their mastery of directed heat.

All animals in nature fear fire and flee from it. Yet the discovery of fire dates back at least half a million years ago, before humanity became fully human. Regarding this major conquest, Gordon Childe writes:

"The mastery of fire meant controlling a mighty physical force and a conspicuous chemical change - for the first time in history a creature of Nature was directing one of the great forces of Nature. And the exercise of power must react upon the controller... In loading and damping down the fire, in transporting and using it, man made a revolutionary departure from the behaviour of other animals. He was asserting his humanity and making himself. [Man Makes Himself]

All the basic cooking techniques which followed upon the discovery of fire - broiling, boiling, roasting, baking, steaming, etc. - were developed by the women. These techniques

involved a continuous experimentation with the properties of fire and directed heat. It was in this experimentation that women developed the techniques of preserving and conserving food for future use. Through the application of fire and heat, women dried and preserved both animal and vegetable food for future needs.

But fire represented much more than this. Fire was the tool of tools in primitive society; it can be equated to the control and use of electricity or even atomic energy in modern society. And it was the women, who developed all the early industries, who likewise uncovered the uses of fire as a tool in their industries.

The first industrial life of women centered around the food supply. Preparing, conserving and preserving food required the invention of all the necessary collateral equipment: containers, utensils, ovens, storage houses, etc. The women were the builders of the first caches, granaries and storehouses for the provisions. Some of these granaries they dug in the ground and lined with straw. On wet, marshy ground they constructed storehouses on poles above the ground. The need to protect the food in granaries from vermin resulted in the domestication of another animal—the cat. Mason writes:

"In this role of inventing the granary and protecting food from vermin, the world has to thank women for the domestication of the cat. Woman tamed the wild cat for the protection of her granaries."

It was the women, too, who separated out poisonous and injurious substances in foods. In the process, they

often used directed heat to turn what was inedible in the natural state into a new food supply. To quote Mason again:

"There are in many lands plants which in the natural state are poisonous or extremely acid or pungent. The women of these lands have all discovered independently that boiling or heating drives off the poisonous or disagreeable element.

Mariage, for example, is poisonous in its natural state. But the women converted this plant into a staple food supply through a complicated process of squeezing out its poisonous properties in a basketry press and driving out its residue by heating.

Many inedible plants and substances were put to use by the women in their industrial processes, or converted into medicines. Dr. Dan McKENZIE lists hundreds of homeopathic remedies discovered by primitive women through their intimate knowledge of plant life. Some of these are still in use without alteration, others have been only slightly improved upon. Among these are important substances used for their narcotic properties:

Women discovered, for example, the properties of pine tar and turpentine, and of chaulmoogra oil, which today is a remedy for leprosy. They invented homeopathic remedies from acacia, alcohol, almond, asafoetida, balsam, betel, caffeine, camphor, cayenne, digitalis, gum, barley water, lavender, linseed, parsley, pepper, pomegranate, poppy, rhubarb, senega, sugar, wormwood, and hundreds more. Depending upon where the natural substances were found, these

inventions come from South America, Africa, North America, China, Europe, Egypt, etc.

The women converted animal substances as well as vegetable substances into remedies. For example, they converted snake venom into a serum to be used against snake bites (an equivalent preparation made today from snake venom is known as "antivenin").

In the industries connected with the food supply, vessels and containers of all types were required for holding, carrying, cooking, and storing food, as well as for serving food and drink. Depending upon the natural environment, these vessels were made of wood, bark, skin, plaited fibres, leather, etc. Ultimately women discovered the technique of making pots out of clay.

Fire was used as a tool in the making of wooden vessels. Mason gives a description of this technique; and it can be easily understood how the same technique was extended to the manufacture of the first canoes and other sailing craft:

"They burned out the hollow part, keeping the fire carefully checked and controlled. Then these marvelous jills-of-all-trades removed the fire and brushed out the debris with improvised brooms of grass. By means of a scraper of flint which she had made, she dug away the charcoal until she had exposed a clean surface of wood. The firing and scraping were repeated until the dugout assumed the required form. The trough completed, it was ready to go to the boiling for the family as soon as the meat could be prepared and the stones heated."

In this remarkable conversion, a substance, wood, which is ordinarily consumed by fire, was fashioned into a vessel for cooking food over fire.

The industries of women, which arose out of the struggle to control the food supply, soon passed beyond this limited range. As one need was satisfied, new needs arose, and these in turn were satisfied in a rising spiral of needs and new products. And it was in this production of new needs as well as new products that women laid down the foundation for the highest culture to come.

Science arose side by side with the industry of women. Gordon Child points out that to convert flour into bread requires a whole series of collateral inventions, and also a knowledge of bio-chemistry and the use of the micro-organism, yeast. The same knowledge of bio-chemistry which produced bread likewise produced the first fermented liquors. Women, Child states, must also be credited with the chemistry of potmaking, the physics of spinning, the mechanics of the loom and the botany of flax and cotton.

Cordage may appear to be a very humble trade, but cordage weaving was simply the beginning of a whole group of industries which culminated in a great textile industry. Even the making of cordage requires not only manual skill, but a knowledge of selecting, treating and manipulating the materials used.

'The weaving of bark and grass fibres by primitive woman is often so marvelous that it could not be imitated by man of the present day, even with the resources of machinery. The so-called Panama hats, the best of

which can be crushed and passed through a finger ring, are a familiar example' (The Mothers)

Women were not only the skilled workers of primitive society. They were also the haulers and drayers of goods and equipment. Before domesticated animals released women from part of their loads, it was on their backs that primitive transportation was effected. They conveyed not only the raw materials used in their industries, but entire households of goods being moved from one place to another.

When women began their labour, they had no one to teach them. They had to learn everything the hard way through their own courage and persistent efforts. Some of the first hints they probably took from nature itself.

But because women began their labour in so humble a fashion, many historians have presented women's industries as merely "household crafts" or handicrafts. The fact is that before machines were developed there was no other kind of craft than hand craft. Before specialized factories were developed in the towns and cities, there was no other factory but the "household". Without these household and their handicrafts, the great guilds of the Middle Ages could not have come into existence. Nor, indeed, could the whole modern world of mechanized farms and streamlined industries have come into existence.

When women began their labour they pulled mankind out of the animal kingdom. They were the initiators of labour and the originators of industry - the prime mover that lifted humanity out of the ape-like state. And side by side with their labour there arose

speech. As Engels points out:

'The development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by multiplying cases of mutual support and joint activity... the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one. First comes labour, after it and then side by side with it, articulate speech.'

While men undoubtedly developed some speech in connection with the organized hunt, the decisive development of language arose out of the labour activity of the woman. As Mason writes:

'Women, having the whole round of industrial arts on their minds all day and every day, must be held to have invented and fixed the language of the home. Dr. Burton, in a private letter, says that in most early languages not only is there a series of expressions belonging to the women, but in various places we find a language belonging to the women quite apart from that of the men.

'Savage men in hunting and fishing are kept alone, and have to be quiet, hence their taciturnity; but women are together and chatter all day long. Apart from the centres of culture, women are still the best dictators, talkers and letter-writers.'

What labour and speech represented, first of all and above everything else, was the birth of the human collective. Animals are obliged, by nature's laws, to remain in individualistic competition with one another. But the women, through labour, displaced nature's relationships and instituted the new, human relationships of the

labour collective. Thus the crowning achievement of women's labour was the building and consolidation of the first great human collective. In displacing animal individualism with collective life and labour, they placed an unbridgeable gulf between human society and the animal kingdom. They won the first great conquest of mankind - the humanizing and socializing of the animal.

It was in and through this great work that women became the first workers and farmers; the first scientists, doctors, architects, engineers, the first teachers, nurses, artists, historians and transmitters of social and cultural heritage. The households they managed were not simply the collective kitchens and sewing rooms; they were also the first factories, scientific laboratories, medical centres, schools and social centres. The power and prestige of women, which arose, out of their maternal functions, were

dimmed in the glorious record of their socially useful labour activity.

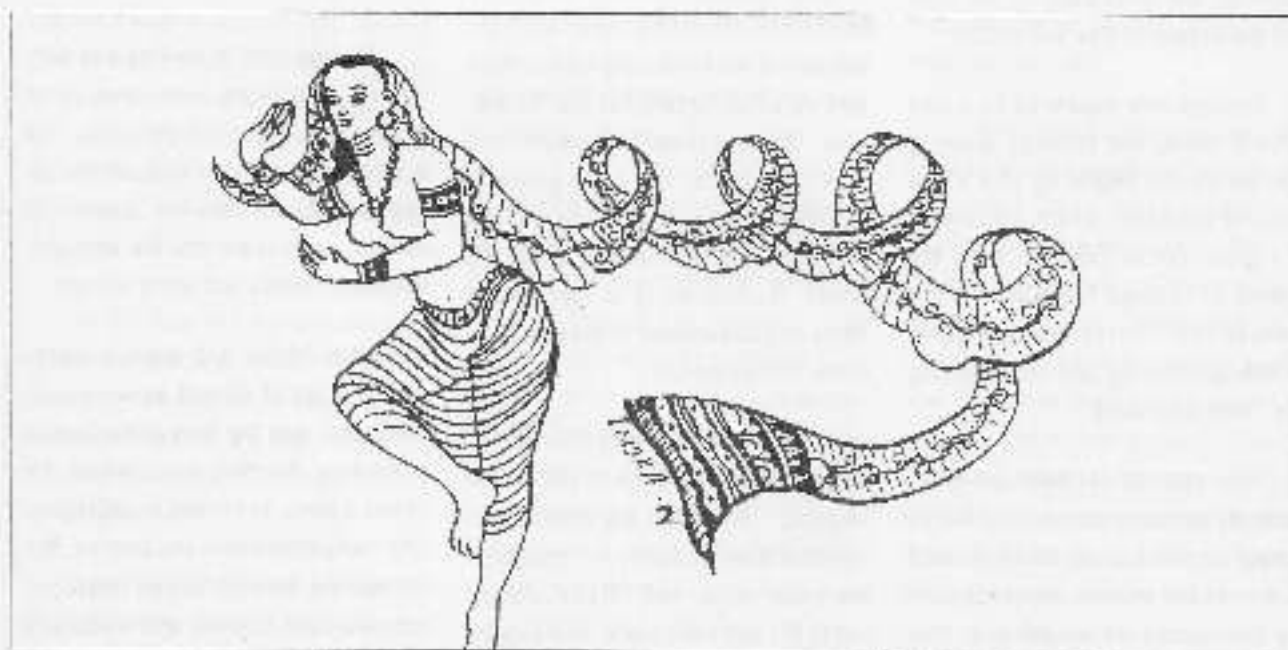
The discovery of agriculture by the women, and their domestication of cattle and other large animals, brought about the emancipation of the men from their hunting life. Hunting was then reduced to a sport, and men were freed for education and training in the industrial and cultural life of the communities. Through the increase in food supplies, populations grew. Nomadic camp sites were transformed into settled village centres, later evolving into towns and cities.

But unlike the women, men did not have to start from last beginnings. In a short time, they began not only to learn all the skilled crafts of the women but to make vast improvements in tools, equipment and technology. They invented a whole series of new inventions and innovations. Agriculture took a great step forward

with the invention of the plough and the use of domesticated animals.

But the Agricultural Revolution, brought about by the women, marks the dividing line between the food-gathering and food-producing epochs. By the same token, it marks the dividing line between Savagery and Civilization. Still further, it marks the emergence of a new social system and a reversal in the economic and social leadership role of the sexes.

The new conditions, which began with food abundance for mounting populations, released a new productive force, and with it, new productive relations. The old division of labour between the sexes was displaced by a new series of social divisions of labour. Agricultural labour became separated from urban industrial labour, skilled labour from unskilled. And women's labour was gradually taken over by the men.



CULTIVATING TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Vishakha Hirdelage

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Women's contribution to agriculture in Sri Lanka has always been high. But until recently this contribution was undervalued mainly because it was looked at as "helping the men in their work." Thus, women's work in the fields was seen as an extension of their domestic duties. *"A woman takes the tea or lunch to her husband and while he rests, she works in the field. Women, of course, do the harvesting but then it's enjoyable work for them, this is how they survive. Women anyhow collect water for the home. Of course she will water the vegetable plot too....."* Such opinions disregarded the contribution women make in the agricultural sector. What was even more devalued was the contribution they made by processing agricultural produce. In many crops, one link in the process is often handled mostly by women. Drying green gram pods, decorticating cashew nuts, preparing and storing seeds for the next cultivation, and planting of most highland crops are some examples.

Over the years, through in-depth studies, the understanding of the time women spend in agriculture related work and the nature of the work they do has improved. It is now accepted that women's contribution to the agricultural sector is very high.

Parallel to this runs the develop-

ment of technology in the agricultural sector. Until recently the agricultural sector was totally dependent on the traditional technologies. One has to accept that most of the traditional technologies were based on the concept of *managing* nature rather than *utilising* nature. Making use of birds to control pests, using water levels to



control growth of weed in paddy fields, and the use of agricultural residue as fertiliser are some examples. However, with industrialisation, machines invaded the agricultural fields - machines that were developed with little sensitivity to the concept of *managing* nature. The primary aim of many machines was to increase productivity by helping farmers do more work in less time.

Once again, over the years people have realised the adverse effects of using inappropriate machinery. Now, the agricultural sector is more conscious of the need to develop appropriate machines and technology processes that help farmers meet the market demands of the present economy, as well as help them manage their resources better.

This case study from the Agro Processing Programme of Intermediate Technology Development Group, Sri Lanka (ITSD) examines women's contribution to sustainable technology development in one section of the agricultural sector, and the challenges women face in this. The case study is drawn from the technology development work with small scale cashew processors.

The industry.....

Cashew is a seasonal crop, spanning over three to four months starting from March - April to June - July. Cashew is found in abundance in the dry zone. During the off season of cashew, a few other cash crops like green gram, cowpea, water melon, chillies and corn are cultivated on the same land. But the main incomes of many families in areas such as Venthavilawa are from cashew-related work.

Cashew processing in Sri Lanka is carried out mainly as a micro level cottage industry. Nearly 99% of the cashew processors are women and

they use traditional processing techniques.

When ITSL intervened in this sector, most of the women in Gampaha and Vanathavillawa (these are the project sites) work as hired hands for middlemen who have contacts with the markets. About five percent processed cashew as a self-employment. They bought raw nuts from middlemen and sold the shelled nuts also to middlemen.

Working with these small-scale cashew processing women, ITSL was able to discern the key features that affect the small-scale cashew processing sector. Some of these are:

The women were using traditional/basic technology to shell cashew

This meant sun drying in the open and then shelling it. The cashew nut liquid shell causes skin irritation. But the only protection the women used for their hands was a wrap of rags. Their hands were often tainted brown. Nearly all the women had a very resigned attitude towards this discomfort/healthness in this process.

Use of low-quality devices to obtain a higher price -

Once sun-dried, the shell of the raw nut is kept on a large stone half buried in the ground and beaten with a small iron rod to open it. If not handled properly this damages the nut, at times breaking it in two or three pieces. Who the nuts fetch a higher price. The women are encouraged by the middlemen to paste the broken nuts to make it seem whole. The women use flour, saag or even glue

and chemicals that may be harmful to the health of the people for this. Many were more skilled in pasting techniques than in shelling techniques.

Cashew processors are unaware of role in the market

Over 99% of the small-scale cashew processors are women. But these women were unaware of their strength as a group. Each was seeing herself as one person undergoing so many difficulties to eke out a living. *"Of course her neighbour had the same problems..... but what could they do....."* The women who worked as hired hands saw the process of selling the shelled cashew as a task that is beyond their capacity. As they saw it their task was to shell as many nuts as possible - everyday.

The few women who shelled cashew for a self-employment often handed over the shelled nuts to a male member of the family who took it to a middleman in the area. There have been instances where the son who handled the market link, bought a motorcycle when the sales increased, while the women in the family who spent hours shelling cashew did not get any extra benefits.

The cashew industry itself recognised the middlemen upwards.

Women's technical capacity in this industry was undermined, both by women and the other key actors in the industry -

Women who carried out the technology process of preparing the nuts to meet market standards were not given due consideration. The women themselves were unaware of their

technical capacity. Very few recognised their skill of processing cashew as a technical capacity. This created a lack of interest, among women, to develop their skill technology in this work.

Poor access to information that can expand their growth in the industry

Information on technology that can help ease their work, and credit facilities that are more favourable to them did not reach the women processing cashew. The information flow on the technology and market aspects were anyhow informal, and often came from export dealers to middlemen. Since women were not involved in marketing they had no access to this information.

Technology development.....

ITSL began experimenting with a tray dryer that can be used in the cashew industry in early 1983. A dryer developed by ITDC, the mother organisation of ITSL, for small-scale food processors of Latin America was adapted for this. The technology was tested and further adapted with the small-scale cashew processors in Gampaha and Vanathavillawa.

The first request for 'a technology on evening' came from Gampaha through the credit programme of Sarvodaya. Inquiries into this request showed the Agro Processing Programme of ITSL that the need was actually a technology to dry the cashew. Thus, the tray dryer was set up in Madelgamawa in Gampaha - a site selected by the small-scale cashew processors who are mainly women. Experiments were carried out

and women were shown how to use the dryer.

However, after a while we realised that the women were not using the dryer, but had turned back to the original method they were using earlier. Discussions with them gave us an insight into the problem.

The women had decisive technology preferences. We had disregarded this

1. The women wanted an oven and we gave them a dryer. We explained the difference and the need for this choice. But perhaps we did not explain enough. We know what was technologically better and expected them to take our word for it. But the women had their own perceptions. Space should have been created for them to voice their doubts of our choice. Space should have been made available for them to examine the practicality and profitability of their idea.

The women had limited market contacts and a marginal profit. They were not in an economic position to be active participants in a technology development experiment.

1. We used a kerosene stove for the tray dryer. The women were afraid the smell of kerosene will be absorbed in the cashew and thereby lower the quality of the cashew. This would spoil the markets they already have and they wanted to sell as much cashew as possible.

2. The tray dryer was different from the small sophisticated ovens used by the businessmen in the area. It was larger and did not look as sophisticated. This gave the impression that the technology of the machine may be

questionable. The women processors did not want to risk a financial loss if the cashew dried in the new dryer became spoilt. The project was ready to reimburse the cost of possible spoilage. But this information was not shared with the women because they were expected to participate in the project on an equal basis.

In our discussions, later, with women on technology development needs we realised that we were not sensitive enough to their responsibility & commitment to have the pot of rice boiling in their homes everyday. This commitment was often the basis of their decision making. *"Will the new ways increase our income... or will we lose what we already have...?"*

Once these gaps were detected, ITSJ further developed the dryer to meet the newly identified needs. The tray dryer acquired two very significant developments identified as a result of the very accurate and honest feedback from the women's group in Gampaha.

These features were

- The size of the tray dryer was reduced. The new model was only one third of the original size.
- The dryer was now equipped with two stoves that used paddy husk/saw dust. This also cut down the operational costs by using waste material. Thereby it contributed to improve the environment in the area. (Paddy husk/saw dust usually is collected in heaps by the roadside, often becoming an environmental hazard).

Identifying Opportunities

The Project seized to

Vanathavilluwa in 1994. Cashew is the main crop that is grown here. Over 90% of the families in this area are dependent on cashew related work for their livelihood. Vanathavilluwa, in the north of Pattalam district is part of the dry zone of the country. Poor rainfall, lack of irrigation facilities and poor soil conditions make the area unsuitable for paddy cultivation.

In Vanathavilluwa, shelling cashew is a relatively newly acquired skill for women. Until about 10 years ago men and women in the area were selling raw cashew nuts to traders who came mainly from Gampaha. These middlemen shelled, roasted or dried these and sold them at a higher price to larger companies and export dealers. Thus, the middlemen in Gampaha thrived on the sale of cashew while the families in Vanathavilluwa were earning a meagre income on this.

The skill of shelling cashew spread to Vanathavilluwa when a resident from Gampaha settled down in Vanathavilluwa. This informal spread of technology took some time to take root. Around 1983, about fifteen people were shelling cashew in Vanathavilluwa. However, they still sold their produce to the traders from Gampaha who had the market links. As cashew processing began to develop, middlemen set up business in Vanathavilluwa. They employed women to work as hired cashew processors. This was time consuming, back breaking mono-tonous work. And the women received only a meagre pay for it. A hired processor was paid about thirty rupees for one thousand cleaned nuts. An experienced worker earned about one hundred rupees a day.

More women did want to start cashew processing as a self-employment but they did not have enough money to purchase a stock of raw cashew during the season. It was then that the Rural Regional Development Bank (RRDB) stepped in and encouraged women to form into small groups and access financial support from the bank. This credit programme, Isuru, gave 5000 rupees for every member, every year, to purchase raw cashew during the season. This, they hoped, would help the processors to maintain a stock of cashew with them through out the year, which they could process and sell during the off season, when the prices are high. Given at an interest rate of 14% in 1994, this loan was considerably low when compared with the commercial rates. A maximum loan of 20,000 rupees were available to those who showed a high repayment rate.

Isuru was indeed a very useful credit facility for the women who were totally dependent on this as capital for purchasing cashew stocks for self-employment. But problems cropped up. 5000 rupees was not enough to purchase a stock of cashew large enough to spread over the year. When the stock was over, the women were once again compelled to work as hired hands for middlemen. This meant that in the long term nothing had really changed.

More problematic was the issue of the loan in two instalments. By the time the second instalment was released, it was nearly end of July - the end of the cashew season. The women had no opportunity to buy the raw nuts at a low price. Their profit from selling shelled nuts was marginal, and therefore they saw no point

in purchasing raw nuts at an off-season rate.

ITSL came to Vanathavilluwa at this stage. We soon perceived this as a situation where a technology intervention can spin off a series of positive developments. It is with this aim that the tray dryer to dry cashew was introduced in Vanathavilluwa. The tray dryer would help the small scale processors to dry the nuts they shell and sell these directly to large companies or export market dealers.

ITSL began working with the RRDB and the small groups activated by the bank. A number of discussions were held with the small scale processors about the cashew processing sector in Sri Lanka and internationally. Our experience in Gampaha had shown us the value of discussing all aspects of the project with the community who will be our partners.

Seventeen processors decided to try out the tray dryer and a large number was watching the results. Contributions by the village group and ITSL were discussed and decided on. The villagers would find a land suitable to install the dryer and put up a shelter for it. ITSL would provide the technology and assist the villagers to operate it. ITSL would also bear the cost of possible spoilage of cashew during drying. Together, both groups will monitor the outcome.

Appropriate for whom?

The Vanathavilluwa group comprised mainly of women. But they selected the only two men in the group to operate the dryer. The dryer was actually installed in the house of one family where both the husband and

wife were members of the association that carried out the project. However, only the husband operated the dryer. Although ITSL would have preferred the women to become familiar with the technology of the dryer, we decided not to intervene at this stage. The dryer went into operation.

As the initial group began to benefit from the use of the tray dryer, more women became members of the society that was set up for the project. Their capacity to process high quality cashew increased vastly, so much so that they soon began to hire people from the area to work with them. Their latest figures of production is proof enough of their success - from April to December 1997 this group processed 7593.4 Kg of cashew and earned an income of Rs. 2,118,335.00.

Parallel to the economic success runs the story of technology development and the women's contribution to it.

In Vanathavilluwa, the tray dryer was operating well. The users were satisfied with it except for two problems. One was identified by the users and the other by the project staff.

The users' problem was the double stove mechanism of the dryer. Operators found it difficult to monitor two stoves while keeping an eye on the loading and unloading of the trays as well. They had to use two operators and thought this was a waste of labour. This problem was rectified by introducing a single stove that did not affect the heating. Other modifications such as redesigning the tubes and pipes for easy manoeuvring were also carried out. This increased the efficiency of operation.

● The problem of the project staff was not purely 'technological.' But a technology adjustment had the capacity to move the project in the right direction. The problem was that only the two men in the group were operating the machine. The Vanathavilluwa group were quite happy to let things be this way. But we were concerned. Discussions with them showed that the women found it difficult to operate the machine because it was too tall. The dryer was higher than the height of an average woman. They also found the trays too heavy to carry when loading and unloading. This was immediately set right by reducing the height of the dryer and making the trays less heavy. Women in all project sites are now capable of operating the dryer themselves.

This experience clearly demonstrated that technology / machinery can be operated by women. Judging by their physical capability they were considered unsuitable. This can be set right by designing machines that can be used by women. To make machines that fit the physique of men and then to comment on the incapability of women to use technology is a mistake technology developers make frequently. The Vanathavilluwa group showed us that it was not women's lack of confidence or poor understanding of technology that had prevented them from using the new machinery. It was that the machine was not designed with the women in mind, and as a result they were marginalised from mastering the machine, right from the beginning.

What helped us, as an

organisation, to identify these problems without undue delay? It was, I think, the involvement of both men and women in the technological aspects of the project. We may have, initially, been less aware of the nature of technology requirements of these women. But we kept the communication channels open, encouraging women's honest feedback on the technology we introduced. We did not disregard women's views on the technology although often this feedback was not articulated with 'technological words' as men's comments were.

When the design of the machine was changed to make it appropriate for men and women both, we found that women were equally capable of using the tray dryer. They were no longer dependent on the men.

Capacity for innovations.....

With an opportunity to market a large quantity of cashew, the group was becoming more conscious of the techniques they used in the whole flow of processing cashew. Earlier, their effort was to paste as skillfully as they could, the broken halves of cashew and try to get the highest price possible. But now more was at stake, their name as cashew suppliers was involved. They looked to ways to improve the shelling techniques, learning from one another. By participating in awareness raising programmes of the project they realised that pasting or other devious methods were actually detrimental to maintaining their markets.

They looked at ways of using more efficient, less cumbersome methods

Methods such as using a solar dryer, to which they disagreed were now looked at more favourably and found that this was helpful.

A very innovative development was devised by the women to clean the cashew nut while maintaining a high production quality. The inner skin of the cashew nut is peeled off after drying. The earlier method was to take a handful of dried nuts into a dish and scrape off the skin. But this exposed the dried nuts to open air and moisture was absorbed in these. Moisture affects the shelf life of the nuts. A longer shelf life brings credibility to the suppliers.

The women developed a very simple mechanism to overcome this need. They took a piece of bamboo and sealed one side. The other side had a small opening that can be closed when necessary. Now the dried nuts are put in this bamboo cylinder instead of in an open dish. The contact with the open air is minimum and the chances for absorbing moisture is minimised. The initial idea of this was discussed by the women with the technology development staff of the project who helped them to actually produce this device.

They are now looking at innovative ways to capture the local market. With the help of the project staff they are in the process of assessing the market for tinned and packaged cashew nuts.

The technology spread.....

This project showed us the women's capacity to use new technology, give accurate and useful feedback on the technology, and develop

technology. It also clearly demonstrated their capacity to spread technology.

The success of the Vanathavilluwa group has now begun to spread. There have been requests from nearby areas such as Karuwalagaswewa and Kuluweligoda for assistance to start similar work there, and use the same technology to improve their cashew processing. ITSL no longer visits new sites to inform the villagers of the technology, its opportunities and limits, and the procedure that has to be initiated to acquire, operate and maintain this

technology. Now, Sujeeva or Monica of Vanathavilluwa goes to these villages and motivates the community, tell them of the technology and help them learn this process.

Vanathavilluwa borders the war-torn area in the East and was twice attacked by the LTTE. Traveling is extremely difficult due to security threats and severely limited transport facilities. But this does not deter Sujeeva or Monica in their effort to spread the technology. In doing so, they not only spread the technology. They also help women in these re-

mote villages to become technology developers by motivating them with enthusiasm and confidence.



A Woman Speaks Out

"Shame for the Whole Society"

We have received this letter from an Australian woman visitor to this country. Her experience cannot be ruled out as unusual. Earlier we had the occasion to publish another sexual harassment a foreign woman was subjected to. The silence which followed the exposure was deadly.

In this other incident, a group of schoolboys at Maradana offered her money and she brought it to the notice of the school authorities. We regret no action was taken. Child maketh a man.

I hope the following paragraphs on my experience at the Savoy are useful to you. In October, the Sunday Island, reviewed a new movie that came out of India. Mira Nair - a director whose reputation is well established in the West through a string of successful films - had offered the Kama Sutra up to audiences as an

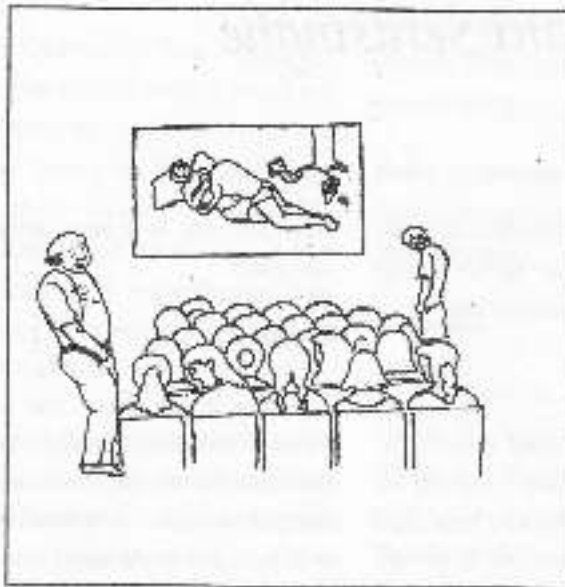
examination of women's sexuality in India.

I went with two female friends and one male friend and a bad experience started even before we got in the door. The queue was full of rowdy men who felt it their right to harass and harangue us as we waited to buy

our tickets. But this is nothing out of the ordinary in Sri Lanka and we persevered, determined to see this movie.

My two friends and I were the only women in the cinema and were noticed immediately by every last member of the crowd. There were comments and stares and "ss... ss..." noises, and attempts to attract our attention. But we three have been living in Sri Lanka for some time and have learned to live with this sort of thing, if not accept it.

Then the movie started and within the first half hour there was a scene with full-body nakedness. The crowd was unable to control themselves and raised the roof with noise and thrown objects and more stares at us. Then



the reel broke and the lights came on and we were again subject to the attention of the entire cinema. Every where we glanced were eyes trying to catch ours and make some low comment. In the balcony above us, a man exposed himself and all the crowd watched us to gauge our reaction. Other men were removing their shirts and prancing around before each other in what we can only assume was some sort of homo-erotic display. The air was charged with hatred and it was directed at us. We were infuriated, but accepted the fact that we would have to leave. We decided to wait until the movie began again and leave discreetly in the dark.

But the next scene involved a young woman coming out of the marriage chamber after her wedding night. She was crying and seeking comfort with older female relatives after what was obviously an unpleasant introduction to sex. The reaction to this scene was unbelievable. The noise and laughter and general feeling of male power that reverberated through the cinema was much stron-

ger than during the sex scene. These men were enjoying the portrayal of male dominance over women. We began to feel more than uncomfortable, and were actually under threat.

The next thing that happened will re-

main in my mind forever. The reel broke again and we were plunged into pitch darkness. We knew that there was a mob mentality running through the crowd and that if one member of the audience attacked us, the entire cinema would be upon us. I had my umbrella raised and in my mind was a fully developed plan of action. Fortunately the lights came on before anything happened. We immediately got up and left to a standing ovation of jeers and displays of male power. The entire audience of 500 or so men gloated at their victory over us as we walked back up the aisle to the foyer.

I think this sort of thing should be a source of shame for the whole society. The one difficulty many foreigners note above all others is the level of sexual harassment in Sri Lanka. Things are not like this in the rest of the world.

In most countries acts of blatant sexual harassment are not condoned. Admittedly there are men who still harass women, but when they are confronted they at least feel a sense

of shame. In a crowd of 500 men there may be a handful of individuals who have a warped view of women, but there will always be a vast majority of men who will not stand for this kind of anti-social behaviour in their companions. In Sri Lanka the reaction is more likely to be laughter, even, I'm sorry to say, by women.

Unfortunately this reflects the amount of tension between the sexes in Sri Lanka. It is impossible to have a healthy attitude to sex and an enjoyable sex life while these barriers separate men from women. I don't know why men feel so proud of flaunting their sexual incompetence for all to see by harassing women they don't even know. They are merely showing that they have a very limited knowledge of women which is not likely to increase. They are adults letting everybody know that they cannot even behave in an adult manner.

"Afraid of the Mob"



Ecological Feminist Irangani Serasinghe

Irangani Serasinghe is committed to the protection and maintenance of the environment in a clean and healthy state. Her love of trees and vegetation, and her concern for animal life and all living things, make her one of the most sensitive people we know.

It is no surprise then that Irangani is a founder member of the environmental group Huk Rakeganna (Protectors of Trees) founded in 1975. This organization continues to educate people through its newsletters bearing the same title as the organization, and its related activities. The newsletter is printed in English, Sinhala, and Tamil. A regular feature in the newsletter is an article on an endangered tree or a threatened species of tree, or a common tree important yet not widely known.

We recently spoke with Irangani on her work in the field of environmental awareness, and we would like to share her knowledge and experience from this interview with our readers.

Irangani, being one of the senior film stars and stage actresses, finds time for environmental activities and spreads the message that trees mean life, and life means the continuation of species on the earth. So, we relate to trees and human life in the same network.

Voice of Women:

We are intrigued to know the reasons for starting Huk Rakeganna in

1975, that is more than two decades ago when your acting career was at its peak with your youthful zest.

Irangani:

Because I travelled around Sri Lanka and saw the forest burning for chena cultivation. I also saw huge gaps in the forest because of people felling trees. I belonged to a wildlife conservation group, but this largely focussed on animals. I want to save animals also, but I cannot go to certain people, as animals ruin cultivation. You cannot go to certain people to save leopards and elephants. In a society, you can save forests, air, climate and animals. The identifiable enemy, the animal, is 'left out'.

I got hold of some friends and we started the organization in 1975. The majority of members are women. We were dubbed 'sentimental tree lovers.'

In my school days the population of Sri Lanka was six million. Now it is eighteen million. Some land is used over and over again, as in chena cultivation, and you cannot use this same system. In my youth enough land was left fallow for a year to regenerate. With today's population and limited land space this is not possible.

I believe that forests should be made a national resource.

Voice of Women:

Did you notice any gender oppo-

sition creeping in to your environmental fight?

Irangani:

There is the notion that women are sentimental and cannot think scientifically, hence the branding 'sentimental tree lovers'. One time we went to the Irrigation Ministry and were accused of being anti-agriculture. We were trying to tell them about the need to preserve the forests for water, otherwise there will be no agriculture. In the Dry Zone the forests are irreplaceable for water retention. You cannot replace forests by planting a new forest. The people at the Irrigation Ministry would not listen to us.

Voice of Women:

What was your role in the organization?

Irangani:

At the start I acted as secretary. One time I was president, now I am a committee member. We keep rotating. We have young members, which is good.

We have seen societies where one person stays on as president, and it's not right. We had more women members in the past, as they had more time as they had more domestic help in those days.

Voice of Women:

Which species of trees are endangered in Sri Lanka?

Iranganie:

The Calamander Tree in the wet zone is now virtually extinct. It was cut for its timber for use in tea chests and furniture. During the Dutch period we lost a lot of timber and tusks. The Sand Wood Tree in the dry zone is also rare. Ebony trees are endangered as their wood is valuable. Trees are also cleared in the war areas.

During the British period, the entire tea plantation areas were burnt to plant tea bushes. There are some introduced species there now. We don't even know what original trees were there. The planting of the tea bushes has ruined the top soil. You have to be careful when planting introduced species, for example the Mimosa. Some interfere with natural species. The British planted the eucalyptus tree in the plantation areas, and those trees suck a lot of water.

In the paddy fields, the traditional way of planting was to terrace the plants and grow things on a concave. The original tea bushes were planted in straight rows which led to soil erosion. Now they plant on the concave to hold the soil together.

Voice of Women:

Have you seen a connection between gender and the environment?

Iranganie:

Women have to fetch water and firewood. The women forage for food. Our biodiversity enabled us to forage like that - to collect yams and leaves. Women have to be conscious that there should be a supply of these.

Our population has increased. We are running out of land space. Water sources have now become polluted. Fish are dying.

Voice of Women:

During the past year, has the organization grown?

Iranganie:

We have a special Women's Centre. We find it easier to work with women as they are much more motivated. Our newsletter is popular. Women need income, so we combine this with conservation. Firewood and medicines are renewable.

In Mahaweli we appealed to the people to use the forest as wind barriers to protect their crops and animals.

Voice of Women:

Are there any visible changes in attitude?

Iranganie:

People start talking about trees now, particularly since we have had a drought. It is acknowledged that birds and animals have disappeared.

Voice of Women:

What are the local effects of global warming on the planet?

Iranganie:

Forests and animals are dying. We can see this in Sri Lanka when we look at Horton Plains.

Voice of Women:

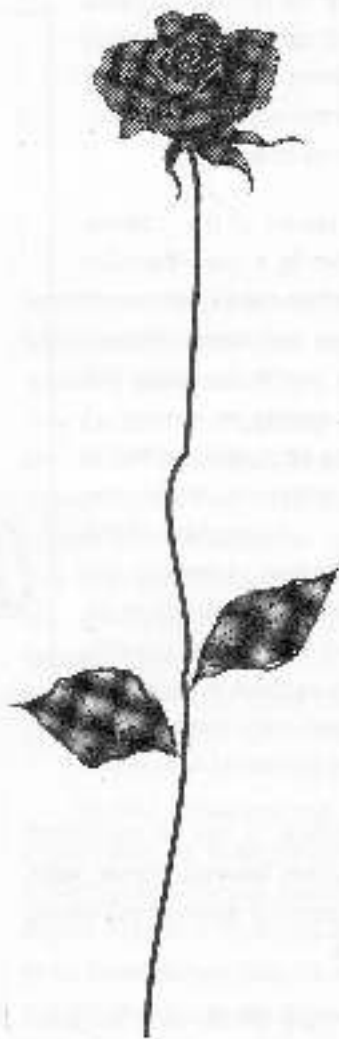
What is the role of the women in environmental protection?

Iranganie:

She is the planter and gardener. She should be very much aware of soil erosion measures and how these can be combatted. She should also try to plant indigenous species and go back to the traditional diet and medicines. Not wasting water is very important and the making of compost is vital. It is also important for women, who are the consumers, to re-use plastics.

Isabel Guymer

Eva Ranawansa



WOMEN FARMERS DOMINATE THE DRY ZONE

R.K. Wimalasuriya

A Detailed Farming Systems survey was carried out in 1981 to determine the present status of crop and livestock farming of the tank-based communities of the dry zone of Sri Lanka. The objectives of the study were to explore the possibilities of introducing a sustainable farming system to the rain-fed uplands of the dry zone, in which crops and ruminant livestock will play a complementary role in enhancing incomes of farmers.

The results of the survey carried out by a multi-disciplinary team from the Department of Agriculture and Animal Production and Health, covering 274 families owning an average of 2.25 acres each, revealed that in the Anuradhapura District, the full-time involvement of the family members in farming activities were as follows; in 38 percent of households, the wife alone was involved; in 84 percent the husband alone; and both took part in 79 percent of households.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in farmer families, women were more dominantly involved in farming than men.

Farming in the dry zone has been traditionally centered around man-made reservoirs, commonly referred to as 'tanks.' The tank-based

agricultural settlements exhibit a three fold land-use system comprising (1) the irrigated paddy land; (2) the homestead; (3) the rain-fed upland.

The uplands are located above the level of the tank, and are known as the chena, where shifting or slash-and-burn cultivation is carried out. In this system, the tall forest trees that give

coarse grains, grain legumes, spices, condiments and vegetables are cultivated for several seasons without fertilizer inputs, and then when yields begin to fall due to depletion of soil fertility, the land is abandoned to a long fallow of more than 10 years before it is re-cultivated. Meanwhile, the farmer repeats the process on another piece of virgin land.



light shade are left intact for the purpose of protecting the soil, and the low growing vegetation is slashed and burnt. With the advent of the monsoon rains, seeds are sown into the 'burn' with minimum soil disturbance. Erosion is controlled by the logs and debris which are piled in rows across the slope, and by the branches of the tall trees, which break the impact of the raindrops on the ground. Various

creates the conditions for causing it up to soil erosion, because the safeguards of the *chena* system are no longer in place. This has resulted in the degradation of the soil, poor crop yields and low farm incomes, and has prompted the Government to declare slash and burn agriculture illegal.

The survey also revealed that only 22 percent of chena farms were

However, this system of sustained low-input agriculture has been given a bad name as the fallow period has been narrowed down due to pressure on land by population increases. The natural rebuilding of soil fertility does not have sufficient time to occur. The farmer has to resort to high cost inputs like fertilizer and agro-chemicals. Furthermore, the farmer ploughs the land and

established on mature forest fallow - which is the local practice. Most farmers engage in continuous cropping of their chena lands. In such a situation, the role of small and large ruminants in maintaining soil fertility and also contributing to the income of the farmer, assumes importance.

The dry zone of Sri Lanka has an estimated one million hectares of rainfed uplands out of a total of about four million. Seventy percent of the annual rainfall is received in this region during the period October to mid-January Maha season (North-East monsoon) and the rest falls in the yala

season (South-West monsoon) during mid-March to mid-May. There is a long dry period of four months in between the two seasons.

Livestock such as cattle, buffaloes, and goats are kept on homesteads, grazed on common grazing areas and fed on crop residues. The present contribution by livestock to farm income falls far short of its potential.

Results suggest that farm incomes could be significantly increased through crop-livestock integration. Further, it will ensure the sustainability of

settled farming on the rain-fed uplands. The productivity of high-value crops grown in the lowlands during the Yala season and in the uplands in the Maha season could be increased through the use of farmyard manure.

The livestock component farm yard could serve as a means of effectively optimising use of family farm labour and partially provide the farm power requirements for tillage and haulage. Furthermore this would improve the nutritional status of the farm community through milk and meat consumption.



Beyond Beijing: International Women's Day 1997

The average woman in Sri Lanka can expect to live 74.2 years. She is educated, but received only 6.3 years of schooling, while her brothers had 8 years. She is not involved in paid employment, although she works hard in the home. Mrs Average married when she was 25 years old and has 2.3 children. During her pregnancies she suffered from anemia, and her daughters were of a lower birth weight than her sons.

The Sri Lankan woman has not attained an equal footing with the Sri Lankan man, however she is not the most disadvantaged woman in the world. In the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report 1996*, 157 countries are

ranked according to the status of their women. Sri Lanka achieved a rank of 82.

In fact, in terms of income, Sri Lankan women are at the top of the scale. In 1994, the average working woman in Sri Lanka was receiving 89.8% of the average men's wage. While this is not ideal, it is the fourth highest percentage in the world and is much higher than many developed countries such as Switzerland (67.6%) UK (69.7%) USA (75%) New Zealand (80.6%) and Norway (86%).

However, this statistic loses its shine when we learn that only 29% of Sri Lankan women are involved in paid employment, and the figure is dropping. The total female labour force in Sri Lanka has declined in absolute

terms from 2.16 million in 1990 to 1.94 million in 1995. And when we look at women's occupations, we see that they are mostly in unskilled and low paid work. For example 84.8% of the workers in the Free Trade Zones are women. Only 8% of cabinet ministers, 11% of University chancellors, and 3% of executives in broadcasting are women. Clearly, there is a gender equity problem in Sri Lanka that needs to be addressed.

'Human Development, if not engendered, is endangered' states UNDP's 1995 Human Development Report. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga adds, in her special contribution to the same report, 'Human Development' should mean the development of both women and men, ideally on a basis of equality while

eliminating the existing gender disparities in all areas of human endeavour..... It is known that socio-economic disparities, poverty and deprivation accentuate the gender inequalities in all societies. Therefore, our major concern should be to address poverty with special sensitivity to gender issues.'

Development work is becoming increasingly sensitive to the needs of the world's women. Each country must assess the particular status of its women, the areas where women are disadvantaged, and the areas where women are achieving equality. With this information, programmes can be tailored to the specific needs of the country.

'In the areas of education and health, Sri Lankan women are not so disadvantaged, compared to similar countries,' says Arno Ustian, Resident Representative of UNDP Sri Lanka. 'But the economic and political life is where we need to make extra efforts and women's issues have to be mainstreamed as concerns. That's got to be our policy.'

Increasingly, gender issues are not being addressed through separate programmes for women, but rather incorporated into all development projects from their inception, to ensure that the project benefits both halves of the population. 'The important thing is to bring a greater awareness of gender issues into all development activities,' says Ofstae.

This includes incorporating women's needs into grassroots projects. In a UNDP project aimed at

strengthening grassroots organizations, project officers found that women spontaneously came forward to participate. Eight of the ten federations of Community Based Organizations are comprised solely of women. However, the women within these organizations need to be motivated and assertive to keep the organizations strong. Their leadership was given training and encouragement to represent the interests of their groups at high level meetings.

'The women leaders have really come up,' says UNDP's Taper Zornier. 'Village women have been empowered and they are now really capable of talking to government officials at all levels, up to the provincial council.'

Empowering women to take on non-traditional roles is crucial to the gender and development strategy adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka after the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. At the Conference a Platform of Action was adopted and 12 critical areas for action were identified. Nations pledged to follow up on the Conference by implementing their own Action Plans.

In Sri Lanka, two UNDP-supported workshops were held in May and July 1996 to develop a national strategy on women. UN Agencies, senior government representatives, bilateral donors and non-government organizations decided upon seven areas which they felt to be crucial for women in Sri Lanka. These are Violence Against Women, Women and Health, Women and Education, Participation in Political Administration and

Decision Making, Institutional Strengthening, Women and the Environment and Women and Conflict.

In each area, strategies for change have been identified, but many of those boil down to changing the attitudes within the society.

In the area of political administration, for example, UNDP's Women's Focal Point Manel de Silva says one of the problems is that women are not going into politics because it is an area that is perceived as tough and cut-throat, in other words, no place for a woman.

'Women are not prepared to take up the challenge in Sri Lanka, she says. 'There's a lot of stigma attached to women in politics. There's definitely a gender bias. The women who do come forward all come from the middle class. So women play a minor role. When you take part in politics you should be prepared for mud slinging and to work day and night, with all sorts of people. And you have to sacrifice your domestic life with your husband and children.'

Although both the President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka are women, there are only 11 female members of parliament out of a total of 225. Only 4.7% of members of Provincial Councils are women. Thus women's issues are rarely voiced in governmental debate.

De Silva says Sri Lanka's Action Plan is designed to change these grim statistics in three ways. Firstly to develop leadership skills and empower women. Secondly to reduce the de-

domestic burden on women of caring for children and the elderly and doing household chores. Thirdly to sensitize decision-makers on gender issues.

'It's not a problem of women's capabilities. It's only this gender bias,'

she says. It's difficult to change cultural values, unless you sensitize men to women's issues. It will take some time to change men's attitudes, and also change the attitudes of women. Women need to stop playing a submissive role'

It will take a partnership between both sexes to overcome the inequalities faced by women.

Root of Development

Eshani Wijesekera

The Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development (IAWID) conducted a detailed evaluation study on the quantum of women's participation in Agricultural Productivity Villages (APV) in Sri Lanka.

The pilot APV project was launched in 1991. The main objectives of this project was village-level development through training, credit for income-generating micro-enterprise activities, and upgrading of village infrastructure to meet the needs of agricultural production and marketing. Improving the social well-being of the people of the village as a whole was a top priority.

The pilot effort was implemented in 25 villages in different parts of the country, one in each province, ensuring a representative sample of different socio-cultural-religious groups: Suman-kulam, close to Vavuniya, in the Northern Province; Mawatha-wewa at Anuradhapura in the North Central Province; Niripola, a coastal village in

the North Western province; Kurukelagama in the Uva Province; Welakadeniya, in the Central Province; Matramagoda near Kegalle in the Sabaragamuwa Province; Hiyara in the Southern Province and Niripola in the Western province.

The duration of the study was limited to one month, with the objective of understanding the relevance of gender issues which have arisen or which are likely to arise in the future.

Findings

The field findings indicated that socio-economic factors which influence the participation of women are similar in many ways. However, a number of important differences existed in each village that was surveyed. The current basic understanding is that APV works well at village level through Community-based Organizations (CBO) like Cooperatives. Their main function is to create wealth for its membership and for the community as a whole being the 'spin-off' of their thriving activity.

Gender issues were given least consideration in the original APV project cycle, namely, in the identification, design, appraisal and implementation. Women were however found to be active participants in the implementation of micro-enterprise projects. Furthermore, approximately 85 percent of the women were directly engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry activities on a regular work basis.

The investigations revealed the way gender issues manifest themselves. Religious backgrounds of women appeared to be much more prominent than ethnicity. **In villages with a Christian background, women make their opinions heard. In Buddhist and Hindu villages, women are in general agreement with the decisions of their male peers. In the Muslim community, the men make all the decisions.** The opinions of women are not taken into account, not even where they hold membership in an organisation.

Women who were actively

involved in farming operations had decision making roles as well as influence over matters concerning management. Yet they had no involvement regarding investment decisions. The greatest involvement of women was found to be in transplanting, weeding, and harvesting activities. A significant number of women were involved in water management as well. Animal husbandry activities are numerous and are predominantly handled by women. Farm-gate marketing of the produce indicated that women were more economically prudent. This enabled them to expand the farming activity, educate the children and also to contribute towards the family savings.

- It was observed that when the village level organisation determines the priority for infrastructure and micro-projects development, there has been no formal processes by which the opinion of women are taken into account. There are no programmes to involve fairly educated unmarried adult women in the APV project and this has resulted in young women seeking paid employment outside the village.

Very few men and women have a desire to enter the commercial banking system as practised in this country. This is not to say that one could see saving money for a bad day has low priority. 'Sathi' Clubs are thriving. Money from this source is often utilised to purchase agricultural inputs or jewellery to a daughter, which could be sold or mortgaged in times of need.

Recommendations

Consequent to this study, IAWID

made several recommendations. These, if implemented, will not only raise the standards of village women but also result in their further emancipation and ensure acknowledgement of their importance in society—a condition which, even at the end of the twentieth century, leaves much to be desired.

- One of the recommendations is that rural women be encouraged to play a greater part in economic and social development at 'grass roots' level of the country. As a first step in this direction, ADA appoints a qualified woman to the position of a Director or Deputy Director of the Authority, functioning as a Programme Director. She should ensure the full participation of women in all ADA programmes and project activities at the local and village level.

- Another recommendation of significance is that the role of women as agricultural producers and community organizers should be given greater recognition. Rural women in particular should be stimulated to take an active part in village organizations like the Co-operatives, Producer Associations and even small marketing Companies.

There should be a special reservation in the Co-op for women, so that when she is recognized and supported by male siblings, she will gain confidence and become progressive.

- AWID also reports that in the

SAMANKULAM - CREDIT DISBURSEMENT - NO. OF LOANEES

Micro Projects	Women	Men	Total
Ouch	18	25	43
Sexing Machine	6	-	6
Blackgram	14	15	29
Paddy Cultivation	10	13	23
Ullie	24	-	24
Potato	12	-	12

WETEKEDENIYA - CREDIT DISBURSEMENT - NO. OF LOANEES

Micro Projects	Women	Men	Total
Goat Rearing	5	21	26
Cattle Rearing	3	19	22
Poultry	14	34	48

NIRIPOLA - CREDIT DISBURSEMENT - NO. OF LOANEES

Micro Projects	Women	Men	Total
Coconut Oil	-	1	1
Poultry	10	17	27

building up of village institutions the idea of family membership should be introduced, so that every member of a family, over 18 years of age, could have access to the privileges and resources of any institution created by the project.

- In all investments, the opinion of women should be given weightage, whether they be a minority or not.

● AWID has also stressed the need to conduct a Commodity System Assessment Methodology Workshop to bring about improvements in agricultural production and marketing in the village. This can result in the elimination of the middleman, who all too often, keeps prices down to suit his own purpose. It has been found in some cases that the middleman pays a price much lower than the cost of

production and the producer has to accept it or be left with an unsold product, only to perish.

● The setting up of private sector for 'transfer of technology' institutions (Extension services) at grass-roots level is another recommendation if any headway is to be made in bringing women to the forefront of rural development.

● Training of women in various agriculture related activities in the APV has been highlighted in the study. For this purpose a Field Specialist (training) should be recruited who would ensure that APV training programmes incorporate components designed to meet the needs of women.

SAMANTHURAI - CREDIT DISBURSEMENT - NO. OF LOANNEES

Micro Projects	Women	Men	Total
Brick Making	1	29	30
Metal Work	18	12	30
Vegetable	9	47	56

KURUKUDEGAMA CREDIT DISBURSEMENT - NO. OF LOANNEES

Micro Projects	Women	Men	Total
Pottery	3	22	25
Tomato	3	6	9
Brick Making	1	4	5

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE STORY OF SELESTINA DIAS

by Manel Tampoo

The Story of Selestina Dias is a fascinating recounting of what a strong woman could achieve with wealth and a free hand to use it. She did use the wealth inherited from her husband wisely, filling the needs of the nation, caste, and womanhood.

At a time when English Girls Schools were rising with Christian and Missionary dominance, how she founded the Buddhist Girls College later called Visakha Vidyalaya is a story worth reading.

She was an early example of a successful Sri Lankan businesswoman. Manel Tampoo says she had qualities of mind and character which enabled her to successfully manage the business ventures that were

left to her by her husband. She adds that the social history of the Karawees is a legitimate part of Selestina's story. She was the respected head of a thriving brick business and a Buddhist activist however contradictory the name sounds. Gradually she switched on to the plantation sector. The book is published by Social Scientists' Association.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

A collection of essays on Contemporary Muslim Society published by Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum/WUJWL. This is a collection of three essays on Contemporary Muslim society. They are

1. *Circumstantialisation of Muslims in Sri Lanka: An Historical Perspective* by I. Zekariya and N. Shanmuganathan
2. *Ethnic Identity, Religious Fundamentalism and Muslims*

3. Impact of Religious Revivalism on Formal and Non-Formal Education Among the Muslim Community in Sri Lanka by Jozeima Ismail.

In the Forward, Farzai Zarkariya says: 'Muslim Communitarianism has its internal specificities as highlighted and analysed in the first two essays of this volume. These essays also address the often-neglected gender dimensions of ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism. The third essay attempts to examine how revivalist movements through educational institutions at both the formal and non-formal levels, function as contested sites for accumulating and legitimising multiple messages.'

She adds: 'The cry for decolonisation and genuine power-sharing is gaining strength by the day and this volume is a modest contribution to that cry which needs to be sustained in the name of sanity and civilisation and for the sake of our future generations.'

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

This publication is an outcome of three workshops held on the above subject by Vikasha, a Committee for three women's NGOs. The workshops were held in Sinhala, Tamil and English, and were attended by scholars, feminists, human rights activists, and representatives from NGOs. *Women's Rights are Human Rights - An Overview*, is written by Wilma Fernando. The book contains the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action June 1993 which is the formal document that came out of the world Conference on Human Rights, and thirteen paragraphs especially concerned with the rights of women and girls is included in this volume. The publication was sponsored by NORAD.

TRADITIONS VERSUS MISCONCEPTIONS Publisher: Social Scientists Association (1997)

This slim volume is an interview with Namita Chaper published in *Manushi* and reprinted in book form by SSA with some beautiful illustrations. Some highlights from the publication:

- 'What we regard as tradition today may have been invented four or five generations ago. Nothing comes to us in a completely pristine form through the centuries.'

- I also don't think I am being unduly hysterical when I say that there is an element of fear of female sexuality, apart from other factors, in encouraging women to become saints. Female sexuality is suppressed by holding out the idea that a woman will become at least a saint, if not a deity, by immolating herself.

- Attitudes towards women are complex. They range from a subordination of women in reality to a world of fantasizing in the spheres of supernatural belief. Situations of the subordination and oppression of women, especially in social practice, are known from the past. But the comprehension of such a situation must seek for more than just a single plane of explanation.

- The goddess cult is a very fundamental cult of religious belief and practice going back to earliest Indian society. Some would even argue that at another level it is very important for the psychological and mental make-up of the Indian male. Perhaps for some there is balance in placating the goddess while you beat your wife.'

TOWARDS PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WOMEN'S CHARTER

There is a big effort launched by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and National Committee on Women to achieve the objectives of the Charter. The strength of the Charter will be in the number of women who are aware of its existence and realize what it means.

The latest effort of the National Committee on Women headed by Dr. Wimala de Silva is in the publication of a trilingual book of five short stories in Sinhala for children. They are well illustrated by Sybil Wettasinghe, and bring the Charter home to households starting from the child herself.

The stories are written by Vidali Goonesekera and translated by Kusum Chandrasekera and A. Sivarama.

In Dr. Wimala de Silva's own words the stories cover different aspects highlighted in the Women's Charter. Each of the stories at the end raise a number of questions to help the reader to understand in greater depth the specific issues and related matters.

The "Reunion" deals with the effect that a divorce

father has on a poor family making all the females - wife and two daughter - domestic servants and the possibilities available in society for rehabilitation.

'Born to her mother in Kuwait' describes the plight of a teenage girl affected by armed conflict and having to look after her two younger brothers when the mother goes to Kuwait for employment.

'Is this Equal Opportunity?' relates the problem that girls face in trying to follow non traditional technical

courses. 'The Dowry' as the title indicates, is the story of how the requirements of a dowry affect the life of a young woman.

'Partnership' tells the story of a young couple who are true partners, the decision the husband is subjected to for the help he gives his wife in the household chores and the final acceptance of the situation by his family.

The project is funded by CIDA
(Canadian International Development Agency)

Feeding the Nation

Isabel Guymer

In the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, it was declared that **"Women as key food producers in many regions of the world, play a central role in the development of food and agriculture, participating actively in all phases of the production cycle, including conservation, storage, processing and marketing of food and agricultural products. Women, therefore make a vital contribution to economic development, particularly in agriculturally based economies, which must be better recognized and rewarded."**

According to the above, women should be given recognition for their work. But are they? Traditionally, women have always made a large contribution to agriculture, but development projects in the past have been

largely aimed at men - such as the provision of tractors and reaping machines, and the use of planes to spray insecticide. How have these development projects helped women who were the agriculturalists? Women's role in agriculture during this phase of economic development was overlooked, and women were relegated to lower status and wages. This is despite the fact that women made, and continue to make, a big contribution to food production.

Throughout the world today, women still make a considerable contribution to agriculture. In many societies, work is treated as unpaid family labour, self-employment, or as wage labourers on farms or plantations. In developing countries, a large percentage of women work in agriculture, and it is the efficiency and productivity of agriculture which determines a country's economic growth. The involvement of women in the development process, then, must be fully

recognized as a factor in sustainable economic growth.

Contribution

In Asia, 50-60% of food grown is by women. In Africa, 70% of food grown is by women, and in Latin America, 30% of food grown is by women. Although women perform all of this agricultural work they only own 1% of the world's property. Patriarchy ensures that women's inheritance is minimal, their work hours long, and their education and income restricted. Women not only actively work in agriculture, but also have to find and carry drinking water and fuel for cooking and warmth. Women also perform household duties, so their working hours are longer than a man's.

Women play a key role in the fight against hunger. Not only do they grow food crops, but they are the food preparers for their families. The best agricultural land is reserved for cash crops which fall under the control of

men who are considered wage earners. Women work in subsistence agriculture, but they must also assist in cash crop production. The poorer the household, the more work for women.

Women have less credit, capital and land as their male counterparts. They are increasingly cut off from the means of production. In some countries, women must sell the surplus of their own fields.

In many societies which practice subsistence agriculture, men clear the land and turn the soil, and women plant, weed, harvest, store, and process the crops. They are also responsible for marketing the crops. In many societies, women take care of the livestock, which may involve collecting fodder for domesticated animals, keeping poultry, goats and milking cows. In times of drought, men may migrate to cities to search for work, leaving the women behind to care for the family.

Women's traditional roles are affected as changes in social patterns and the introduction of new technology occur. As men seek work in towns, women's workload in agriculture has increased. Women are now more involved in cash crop production than previously.

Casual Labour

The Green Revolution and the introduction of high yielding varieties of produce, has led to the employment of women as casual labour. However, in areas where mechanisation has been introduced, female labour has fallen. The use of herbicides to control weeds has also made women's labour redundant. Women are invis-

ible to their Governments.

Sri Lanka is an agricultural country. It has fertile soil and sunshine all year round. The traditional farming systems have been replaced by new ones. In Sri Lanka, women make up more than half the labour force on plantations, but receive lower wages than men. There are coconut, tea, and rubber plantations.

Rubber production is an economic venture undertaken by many rural women in Sri Lanka. Coconut husks are soaked and the hair removed and spun into rope. Hair is also used in mattresses, car seats, mats and wall hangings. Women earn less than men who soak the husks. Women spin the hair into rope and the labour is considered to be less, even though the men and women jointly make one article. Coconuts are also used in rural economies in the making of copra, or dried coconut. Coconuts are also made in the production of cassia which is usually a family venture. Women may not only help with the making of these products, but also with the selling.

Plantation life in tea estates is isolating, and having one day free from tea plucking, little time is left for family bonding, making travel anywhere difficult, time consuming and thus infrequent. Women on tea estates, are vulnerable to the oppressive structures that confine them to their subordinate status. They live in a closed society in which the caste system is reinforced due to lack of opportunity and interaction with the outside world.

On rubber plantations women work hard in the home and then go to work. The labour on rubber estates

is hierarchical, as is the air and tea estates. Rubber was introduced as a plantation crop nearly a hundred years ago. Women do tapping, and their work can sometimes be hazardous. After reporting for work, they must walk a distance to their plots. The latex they collect is carried in heavy aluminium buckets. Sometimes workers are bitten by snakes. There are a set number of trees to be tapped - between 200 and 300, and wages are booked if these are not all done. Also, wages are not paid on rainy days because these are not counted as work days even if tapping has already begun.

Women in general have limited access to knowledge due to social constraints. This means that projects need to be culturally sensitive when transmitting information on family planning, technology, marketing and management. Women's health in agricultural communities has been neglected. The use of pesticides on crops have detrimental effects on health. Many women work during the late stages of pregnancy, and return to work almost immediately after birth, sometimes carrying their child with them on the backs. Breastfeeding is thus interrupted or neglected.

Women's role in economic development demands that women be treated as equal partners, with all rights to participate in decision making at all levels. Women's work in agriculture is productive and reproductive. Without complementarity between women and men, there is no hope for successful sustainable development, and women's important role in agriculture needs to be fully recognized.



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FOLDING THE SHEETS

(This beautiful poem is sent to us by Dinali Fernando)

*You and I will fold the sheets
Advancing towards each other
From Burma, from Lapland,*

*From India where the sheets have been
washed in the river
And pounded upon stones:
Together we will match the corners.*

*From China where women
on either side of the river
Have washed their pale cloth in the white
Stone Shallows
'Under the shining moon'*

*We meet as though in the formal
steps of a dance
To fold the sheets together, put them to air
In wind, in sun over bushes, or by the fire.*

*We stretch and pull from one side and
then the other-
Your turn. Now mine.
We fold them and put them away until
they are needed.*

*A wish for all people when they lie down
to sleep-
Smooth linen, cool cotton, the fragrance
and stir of herbs
And the faint but perceptible scent of sweet clear water.*

Rosemary Dobson (Australian Poet. b. 1920)

