

THE DILEMMA OF THEORIES
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE



Selvy Thiruchandran

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FOREWORD

This is a modest attempt on my part to put together some thoughts that have emerged over the years on the "women's question". These are separate articles which were written at different points of time and two of them were already published. The first one on **Feminism Faces a Dilemma. Is it a Western phenomenon?** was published in *Lova, Newsbrief No.2, 1984*, a journal of the feminist anthropologists in Leyden, Holland.

The one on **Women within Nations and Across Nations** was published in the *Logos* vol. 27, No. 1 March 1988 by the Centre for Society and Religion. I want to thank both of them for giving permission for reprinting. Though separate the articles are not totally unlinked. The linkages among them run on a common thread of the controversies that arose on the topic of feminism. The challenges, the concept and practice of feminism had to face from the mainstream protagonists are many. They had their reservations on the theme of feminist discourse.

Then there are the progressives, the nationalists and the Marxists who had a great deal of ambivalence in their propaganda material. My essays attempt to examine them.

The first paper argues that feminist consciousness is universal and does not fit into claims of regionalism or into the North South divide. Theories on feminism are perceived as western for various reasons. Many women who are essentially feminists deny it and say they are only fighting for women's equal rights. There is a phobia built up on the word feminism by some women who would be happy to take it away from the vocabulary of women's movement. This is a social psychological problem tied with wrong

notions of culture and tradition. Our cultures are rampant with strong feminist consciousness. While being blind to it we are disclaiming it by giving wrong interpretations to the concept of feminism. The second and third sections of the book also deal with the theories and their general contradictions in the applications of the theories. Theories are not dogmas and hence there are always inconsistencies and they are at times inadequate.

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Feminism Faces a Dilemma. Is it a Western Phenomenon?

The dictionary definitions of concepts and ideologies are very often inadequate and fall short of certain basic features. The assumptions, implications and the underpinnings of the ideologies that have been acquired in the process of time are omitted in the definitions. Ideologies have geographic limitations and dimensions added through historically specific contexts. If feminism as it originated in the late 18th century is taken to encompass the whole ideology of contemporary feminism one is certainly mistaken. Feminism today does not mean only "a doctrine that advocates or demands for women the same rights granted to men as in political or economical status". (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language).

In fact, what led to the dismissal of feminism as a western aberration and an ideology of the "decadent" west, is the development of the whole question of the theories surrounding feminism today. The different schools of thought with their diverse theories and analyses, have led to a short-sighted vision of the very idea of feminism, to be rejected in the east either partly or totally. It has come to be viewed as incompatible with eastern culture or the Asian way of life.

I propose to discuss initially the different schools of thought within feminism briefly, as it is essential to understand why feminism was received as a western phenomenon in the east and in the other developing countries. The second part of this paper would take up the discussion that feminism is not an alien concept. It was very much in the thoughts of easterners. Feminism in different forms had existed in China, Japan, Egypt, India and Indonesia at different times in history, but was not sufficiently documented.

The classification

The classification of contemporary feminist theories is problematic. There are for instance differences and disagreements, not only in assigning the reasons for the subordination, exploitation and oppression of women, ranging, from biological essentialism and social constructionalism to economic determinism. The differences and disagreements are not only in how to find solutions but also in the specific strategies to be adopted for the solutions.

Liberal Feminism

Contemporary feminist thought can be classified into liberal, classical Marxist, radical and socialist. The liberal ideology of the French revolution era was extended by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1791 to the women's question basically taking up equal rights for women. This was later to encompass the right to vote, to education and to employment. The liberal view was later taken up by Betty Friedan (1963). The National Organisation of Women in America and the Equal Opportunities Commission in England also subscribe to this school of thought. Basically it was bourgeois ideology, bent on eliminating discrimination on the grounds of sex, enabling women to compete in the free market. Free access to birth control, (Eastman 1920), maternity leave (Friedan 1963) and public child care (Rodman 1915 and National Organisation of women, 1967) are typical of such demands.

Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminists, though accepting the above areas as needing attention and the demands as reasonable, want to emphasize that sexual division and inequality can be accounted for in terms of their relationship to the capitalist mode of production (Griffiths & Sagara 1975). They further argue that these rights alone do not guarantee emancipation for women. Equal right for employment in itself does not guarantee jobs and equal pay. Liberal demands are good but not adequate. They fall short of real equality. Classical

Marxist feminists' central points of explanation and reasoning stem from the 'bourgeois family'. For them the "historical defeat" of women was not the problem of biology but a problem of private ownership of property and women, necessitated by the creation of surplus. Men wanted to own women to ascertain paternity, to pass down private property acquired through the creation of surplus. They agreed with Engels that women's entry into social production would be the precondition for women's emancipation. The solution to women's problems by implication and as explicitly stated by a few of this group of feminists is the abolition of the bourgeois institutions like the family and private property and the setting up of communal institutions. They essentially draw their arguments from the classical Marxists and try to explain contemporary sexual inequality in Marxist analysis.

Radical Feminism

The radical feminists argue that women's subordination stems not from the mode of production but from the women's role in reproduction, and its extension in child rearing and confinement to household activities. Hence revolution and not reformation is needed. The revolution could go as far as producing babies technologically, outside a woman's womb (Firestone 1974). The radical feminists label their movement as revolutionary, claim that it draws on the materialistic and dialectical philosophy of Marxism. They at the same time reject Marxist analysis of the sexual division of society. Marxism, according to Firestone, is inherent with male supremacist attitudes. They further stress that men's physical strength, aggression and capacity for violence, reinforce women's oppression and create women's subordination (Redstockings 1969, Millet 1984).

Cultural feminism

Cultural feminism, which is paradoxically a theory within radical feminism, seeks to celebrate women's culture, explaining that it is not necessarily the biological fact, but the psychological

construction of it that determines the subordination of women. Cultural feminists are of the opinion that biology has endowed women with certain feminine traits like consciousness for others, self-reliance flexibility, non-competitiveness co-operation and maternalism (Roxanne Dunbar 1970), which are desirable and should be celebrated for the good of the community. Who said feminism devalues motherhood and destroys feminine qualities? Cultural feminists also consider men as their enemies, like the radical feminists who at times flirt with such ideas.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminists have common grounds with radical feminists on their opposition to liberal and Marxist feminists in their analysis of sexual inequality; their opposition stems from the attitude of the traditional left-wing groups to the treatment of the women's question as of secondary importance to the main stream proletarian question (Rowbotham 1979). However, they are willing to compromise with Marxism and the sexual division in society (Eisenstein 1978 Kuhn & Wolfe 1978). They have pointed out the inadequacy of Engels's thesis linking "the historical defeat of women" to the mode of production. They assert that sexism predates capitalism and postdates socialism and that it exists in the proletariat which do not own private property. Their argument, while rejecting biological determinism, partly accepts the social construction of biology as the reason for women's unequal status. In other words the social construction of biological sex differences contributes to the reproduction of patriarchy and the existing sexual distinctions in society (Janet Sayers 1982). Wages for household labour were advocated by a few from this group, which led to a series of debates for and against; it has drawn both men and feminists into endless arguments trying to define household labour, viewing it from diverse perspectives.

These in short are the brands of contemporary feminist theories as they have developed and grown from a simple doctrine that advocated equality of status for women and men. Does this lead to a reasonably accepted notion of the definition of feminism?

Definition of Feminism

A few attempts have been made to define feminism in the contemporary context. Feminism was defined as "an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society and conscious action by women (and men) to change this situation. Feminism is seen as going beyond movements for equality and emancipation which agitate for equal rights and legal reforms to redress the prevailing discrimination against women. It should also then tackle the basic issues of women's subordination in the family and challenge the prevailing economic and political system". (Jayawardena 1986:3)

At a seminar on feminist ideology in Bangkok in 1979 feminism was defined in terms of two long-term goals. Freedom from oppression involves freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives within and outside of their homes. The second goal of feminism is the removal of all forms of inequity and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally. This means the involvement of women in national liberation struggles, in plans for national development and in local and global strategies for change. The second goal of feminism in my opinion is broad based and does not in reality fall within the confines of feminism.

A national struggle could reasonably be an activity of feminists, but it certainly does not mean that all women who are involved in national struggles and liberation movements are feminists. It only goes to prove the revolutionary potentialities of women, not necessarily from feminist perspectives. The history of third world national liberation movements against western imperialism has amply proved that feminism as such was a far cry from national sentiments. Nationalism needs to be separated from feminism if one has to be objective in one's analysis.

This is not to deny that the first wave of feminism in the third-world countries occurred at the same time as the rise of nationalism. It is paradoxical, however, that with the rise of nationalism, the national leaders evoked feminist sentiments and at the same time

glorified the indigenous past and the indigenous culture, emphasizing the traditional moulds with the women's role as central to the old system. This paradox would in a way, though not in detail, explain the reasons why feminism was looked down upon as a western phenomenon.

Why is it Western ?

In the east many people have rejected feminism. The media, the traditionalists and the conventional women's organizations do so on the plea that it is a western ideology, a symptom of a declining society gone bankrupt in culture and human values. The reasons are not far to seek. I will sum up the reasons which are mainly socio-economic and socio-cultural, and the discussion in the second part of this paper on third world feminism would further prove my point.

Ideology of the Family and the Institution of Marriage

The family as a central unit performing various functions relegating roles and duties to the society was over and over reinforced by religion, by older literature and by the contemporary mass media. Eighty percent of the population still live in rural areas amidst the remnants of feudalism. If Marxist feminism has traced the oppression of women to the bourgeois family and wanted the family removed from the scenario, such a proposition meets with opposition. It is the same with the institution of marriage. Heterosexual, monogamous marriage was viewed as a solution to women's problem in polygamous marriages and marriages that are contracted conveniently by men without a legal sanction and who have abandoned women and children. The sanctity of the man/woman relationship within the marriage is upheld as a dharma and as a way of life, to relationalise the structure of the family. Men and women in these societies could go as far as recognising the legal annulment of the marriage, giving the woman the right to divorce, to seek remarriage legally, but not to destroy the institution of marriage. The monogamous family and the idea

of its indissolubility coupled with the idea of the family as a "haven in the heartless world" are rather a complex phenomenon, having an array of arguments for the continuance and the sustenance of the system.

Setting duties and obligations to humanity, which started with religion was perpetuated by age old literature (epics) and legitimized by contemporary mass media (novels, short stories, films, plays etc). Successive generations have been nurtured with an ideology and a value system that the oppressor is conditioned to accept the oppression as natural. So in the east we are confronted with a peculiar situation. One has to raise the consciousness of the oppressed to the reality of the situation by explaining that it is not natural, it is not their duty and obligation to suffer from inequality by virtue of their sex.

Here feminism faces a dilemma by overlooking the secondary gains of the family provided in the context of the many third world societies where state support is non-existent or inadequate. For non-wage earning women, the family provides the economic, social as well as moral needs. A bad husband is even better than none. A state of subordination and oppression is even better than starvation. Hence it always leads feminism into a blind alley to talk about immediate changes without providing a workable alternative.

Tendencies of sexual separatism and man hating introduced by feminism are again problems for an eastern society. The closely knit family structure and the relationships between family members, even of two or three generations, is conditioned by warmth and strong emotional bonds not easily disrupted. Sister-brother, father-daughter, mother-son relationships are 'mutually emotional' (Maria Mies 1980). Patriarchy has its two facets of male domination and male protection, which is at times extended, with a great deal of self-sacrifice, love and affection by men (fathers, sons, brothers, grandfathers, nephews). The emotional bonds between members of the family are deep-seated. When we talk of exploitation and oppression of the working class the situation is purely economic. The alienation for the working class is complete. The patron-client relationship of the peasants and landlords can be easily discussed

in terms of economics. But family ties are different in a closely-knit family unit which is still the norm in many societies in the east.

Sexual Permissiveness and Lesbian Separatism

Feminism in the west is linked with sexual permissiveness and lesbianism. Both these traits are looked upon as unhealthy symptoms of an uncivilised culture in eastern societies. In many societies sexual purity is still a virtue to be guarded and cherished. Monogamous marriage is the norm. Extramarital affairs for men are ostracized, though not with the same measure of antagonism as for women. Feminism has challenged the double standards of morality for men in the east. Ideas of chastity of women were not challenged and the argument is to extend it to men also.

Feminism rightly or wrongly is associated with western habits and mode of dressing. I have an interesting episode to elucidate this point. "Voice of Women" had a seminar on "why a feminist press?" where editor of *Courage* (a feminist journal in Germany) was present. The mainstream media reporters were invited by the Voice of Women to get an idea as to how the message was received. The discussion was open, lively and covered many areas like lesbianism and rape. The woman editor of a national newspaper reported the seminar on the following Sunday. She referred to the chairperson as "trouser-clad and chain-smoking".

The reporting was as expected critical of feminists, but not a word about lesbianism. Lesbianism is taboo in Sri Lanka, in the Sri Lanka newspaper what mattered was "the smoking and trousers".

Motherhood

The ideology of motherhood is a sensitive issue. For many women it is a personal experience. Feminism is identified with throwing away all the web of emotional love and affection and care of a mother in order to gain certain rights for material benefits (like employment). Motherhood is not believed to be oppressive. And

most women find it an interesting emotional experience. The child care is shared in an extended family by other family members. The psychological and physical health of a child are the mother's responsibility and they feel that relinquishing the duties and privileges of a mother is not worth the gain they get by fighting for their rights. With such deep-rooted sentiments widely prevailing in these societies one could guess what the response would be to Firestone's suggestion of technological reproduction.

However, the adverse propaganda carried out by the media and the other traditionalists never speak of the feminists' claim for sharing child care and household labour by men and women. In all national women's conferences utmost care is taken to structure the discussion within limits. Often mothers' and women's traditional roles are emphasized lest somebody forgets them, and western feminism is projected as destructive to our society. Hence it is not surprising that under such a cultural climate feminism is rejected as western and dismissed as "incompatible with our culture" and has to be discouraged from infiltrating our society and contaminating our way of living.

Recent Trends

Modern trends in Iran and Pakistan, reverting back to the fundamentalism and receding religious dogmatic sanctions for keeping women in isolation and seclusion are quite in keeping with the same trend. But the recent phenomenon of dowry murders in India is not really a reversal to the cultural past - it has no connection with sati - but an emergence of capitalist consumerism and instant accumulation which exploits the woman.

To back through all these barriers and to make men and women of the east accept feminism seems an uphill task. There is an underlying rejection of all that is western, perhaps an unconscious rejection of the past memories of imperialism and receding indigenous identity. The situation is aggravated by the attitude of western feminist imperialism.

Cultural Imperialism

Western feminists express solidarity with the women in the east, but at the same time lack an understanding of the problems that the east faces. They look down upon the situation in the east as backward, uncivilized and barbarian. Often there is a western observer bias and a complete lack of understanding of the socio-economic factors necessitating certain habits and practices. For example the western feminists isolated the issue of female circumcision from its history when they condemned it as barbaric. They have forgotten all about the chastity belt and its placement at a point in history in the west. The totality of the situation in any country has to be taken, to correctly view the perspectives of the issues concerned. If not, this could lead to a tendency of viewing the east as reactionary and repulsive, bordering on racist attitudes of western superiority. The lack of scientific rigour in research can be dangerous. Women in the third world are very sensitive to this

That is why one has to be alert to and conscious of the historicity of the concepts of eastern feminism too. The 19th and 20th century feminist movement in Europe was the product of the time converging mostly on liberal ideas and reformative in character. It was not very different in its theme to the eastern feminism of the time. But the gap between them widened with time. The new wave of feminism in the west in the sixties developed into a set of radical ideas. The conditions for the emergence of this type of feminism were not equally prevalent in the east. The rapid industrialisation, the increasing technological innovations, the emergence of the nuclear family, the western individualism etc. have created peculiar problems for the women, increasing their burdens and their isolation in the modern life styles. All this necessitated some changes in the structures. Feminism was an expression and a manifestation of the sufferings of these women.

In most of the countries in the east, on the contrary, the extended family system, community living and collective responsibility for family life (grandparents and relations in-law etc.) still continue to exist for a good majority of the people. This set of values and norms continued to exist maintaining the traditional structures intact

in a big way. Hence those conditions did not necessitate a violent or radical breaking point.

This goes to prove that the deeply ingrained patterns of socialization alone do not explain the situation totally. The concept of the sacred family with its related ideologies of sanctity of marriage, virginity, chastity and motherhood were equally strong forces during the Victorian era, successfully upheld by the church and the state. Successive changes have subsequently eroded into these ideologies in the west, but not in the east as yet, at least not with success. As I have discussed above, technological development, urbanisation and the fast penetration of capital have broken down a few traditions in the west.

The feminist demands in the east are a reflection of the contemporary state of inequality and urgent problems that the women face in their countries. Equal pay for jobs, problems of dowry, wife beating, repealing of discriminatory laws against women entering into professions, customary laws, adequate provisions for women's education, granting of equal job opportunities, questioning the image of women projected in the media, action against rape, against purdah (in Muslim countries) and the highlighting of super-exploitation of women in the free trade zones in the periphery, are a few to mention. The demands are symptomatic of the socio-economic conditions.

The development of feminism in the third world should strengthen the arguments I have brought already in the discussion so far. One common factor in the countries which I am going to deal with is that either they have been colonies of the British Empire or they have faced some such foreign aggression, e.g. Egypt, Iran or Japan. The rise of feminism in these countries is again a part of the wider movements, influenced by western liberal ideas, like the movements against monarchy and feudalism, and the rise of the doctrine of freedom of the individual etc. In this context one could find two interacting forces in many of these countries. On the one side the missionaries and the imperial administrators saw in the indigenous culture elements of "savage past" and "barbaric practices" but realising what tradition meant to these people they

did not want to stir them up by their interference. Meanwhile the local bourgeoisie became enlightened to those elements and took up the challenge to change the indigenous culture of their "savage past". To this category of reforms belong the abolition of sati (widow burning) and foot binding in China. Hence feminism really remained a bourgeois phenomenon, limited to liberal reforms of a particular nature and initiated mostly by the men of letters in the society, essentially a product of the history of the times (late 19th and early 20th century) in many third world countries.

Feminist Movement, A social movement

The feminist movement in India, as any other social movement, is characterised by three salient features : collective mobilisation, ideology and orientation to change. Though I am not going to deal in depth with the women's movement in India, the feminist ideas as such, how they originated and manifested and worked into concrete reforms, could be well illustrated with the above framework. Orientation to change was provided by the western liberal ideas offered through western education. Here again the status of women was initially the concern of men. The ideology took shape by a realisation of the repressive and barbaric practices performed in the name of the religions of the people, (Hinduism and Islam). The status of women was inseparably linked to both these religions as they were practised.

Politicization of the Movement

However, two questions need to be answered objectively : what is the ideology behind feminism at this time? Can the role played by Indian women in the freedom movement also be treated as part of the feminist movement or vice versa? The Indian feminism at this time, as should be expected, was mainly reformist in character, concerned with social uplift - strictly a bourgeois phenomenon meant to modify the life styles of the members of a group. It was not a violent challenge to existing patriarchal structures. The traditional images of mother and wife were constantly used to

ensure that women stayed within the limits of tradition and Indian heritage. However, this is not to underestimate the feminist ideas in the whole context. Chastity being demanded only from women, the right for a widow to remarry and for a woman to divorce, are well documented feminist ideas, eloquently debated by both men and women.

The call of Mahathma Gandhi to women to come out and fight for Indian independence at this juncture had the desired effect. Women's 'dharma' was now extended to freedom fighting from the traditional areas of spinning, weaving, teaching and serving. The other angle to this whole question of mobilising women is to realise the revolutionary potentialities of women who went out in hordes against imperialism, marching the streets, fasting and fighting a battle, forgetting their domestic roles.

It has to be emphasized that both the freedom movement and the women's movement advanced progressive theories, but essentially and fundamentally retaining the traditional social structures. One has to still take note of the conflict between nationalism and feminism within the first wave of feminism in India.

Conclusion: Feminism's Political Redefinition

Feminism is not western. It is both a theory and practice advocating equality against a series of oppressive systems manifested in diverse forms. Economic survival, physical safety and security, reproductive and sexual self-determination, equality of status in all spheres of activities are the essence of what feminism stands for. But its expression has found many forms with cultural and geographical limitations. It has also found diverse manner of expression. Some of those who expressed it are angry, some very angry, few are moderate and few more are more analytical, depending basically on what their experiences had been. But its ideology as such runs through all countries, eastern and western, as reaction to existing and varying structures and value systems with their particular laws, conventions and traditions in the socio-economic and socio-political systems.

Utopias of Feminism and Utopian Socialism

It has been said that contemporary radical feminism offers an utopian vision of the future for women. To determine whether radical feminism is utopian or not and why the early socialists of the 19th Century were called utopians one needs to know and understand the implications and the underpinnings of the concepts linked to the ideology of utopia. I see three meanings for utopia. Firstly utopia means a condition of perfection, it also means an idealistic goal. Thirdly, the idealistic goal of perfection is meant to exist only in fantastic visions implying that it is not practical theory or thought. Sir Thomas Moore dreamed of a 'Utopia' for the first time in 1516 an imaginary island, a seat of perfection in social, moral and political life. Utopia can mean either a 'good' place or 'no' place deriving its meaning from the Greek word utopia (Eu-god) or utopia (ou-not) (topos place).

A further interesting point that need to be clarified is whether utopias act or function as complimentary, and help furthering the stages of achieving the perfect goals or do these completely negate the very idea of the perfection and throw them away as impractical fantasies. They do both these functions depending on how high are the goals one is trying to reach.

The early socialists of the 19th Century were called utopian socialists in terms of a comparison with the Marxist socialists, whose brand of ideology was scientific by their deeper and analytical theories and with an equally important set of strategies for transformation. However, an analytical treatise of the utopian socialism in relation to the women's question would be a fruitful exercise to begin with. I propose then to analyze the main features of radical feminism and compare them with the utopian socialist theories as far as the women question is concerned. My method then would be to analyse radical feminism in terms of a Social Movement and show to what extent the strategies fall short of practical solutions for women's liberation.

However this should not lead one into believing that scientific socialist analysis of the women's oppression is fool proof. Viewing the women question purely from economic reality is seeing only part of the problem. Radical feminists have gone beyond the economic reductionism of Marx and Engels and clearly proved that women's entry into social production alone would not liberate women from the patriarchal social system and its related institutions.

Utopian Socialism and women

The early 19th Century saw different types of exploitation in Europe. Social unrest, rebellions and revolutions were the manifestations of the exploitation and oppression of the many by the few. The exploitative and religious institutions lead a few men and women to evolve a new system of life where love, reason and justice would prevail over the existing socio-economic and socio-political evils. Reason and justice would triumph eventually over the greed, lust, avariciousness, selfishness etc. of human beings if in a classless society people's needs are met adequately. It was thought this would eliminate haves and have-nots, and bring about an equalitarian society where what is available is shared and men and women would be supremely happy. These ideas which were underground (Ernest Block) came to the surface perhaps as an extension of the French revolution ideology-equality, fraternity and liberty. This was also symptomatic of the age of enlightenment.

The women's question significantly was part of the whole utopian socialist ideology. Robert Owen (1777-1858) Charles Fourier (1771-1837) Saint Simon were the original utopian socialists followed by Suzanne Violquin (1830-1848), Desiree Veret, and Flora Tristan. Robert Owen envisaged a society where there would be no private property, no monogamous marriages, no nuclear family and in that society all should work, all should get education and income should be shared equally - what is important is to realise the nature of the radicalism of these views, and the direct link of these views to the emancipation of women. The **Book of the new moral world** had very aptly laid bare the hypocrisy of the existing marriage

system in which property consideration was the main criterion and the net result was the enslavement of women. "Child care", he urged "should be in the hands of the community as a whole and children should be separated from the parents, around the age of two". On his lectures on marriage he was emphatic and the attack of the middle class nuclear family which is based on private property and selfishness. In the "new harmony" that he tried out replacing the family which a scientific association of men, children and women. The children were looked after in the creches. The parents especially the mothers were relieved of the burden of child care. Free love was not advocated however by Owen, but he insisted on the right of the couples to divorce and children would be taken care of by the community.

Charles Fourier's ideas of utopian socialism was a step further as far as the "women question" was concerned. He was more analytical and more specific on the nature of the problems women faced. The enslavement of women under patriarchy enforced by the system of monogamous marriage for women, thereby resulting on a double standard of morality for men and women was seen by him as the most oppressive system. His attack on sentimental love and the artificial division of love into physical and sentimental love whereby women were expected to suppress the physical love which is ugly and sinful and the property relations involved in the system of marriage are worthy of mention as they strike similar chords to the "romantic idealization" of Shulamith Firestone (1974). The sexuality of women to which radical feminism paid attention in detail was also seen in a somewhat same perspective by the utopian socialists.

"That women are sold like commodities and as minors by the fathers to the husband" was correctly seen as conferring a subservient status on her.

Thirdly Fourier was the first to see the 'mystique' of housewifery which was conveniently delegated to women. "Woman", he says "has only one goal i.e. of becoming a housewife and that aim", he says "is too low". The Bourgeois civilisation, according to Fourier, has systematically brought down women's status to slavery and a

secondary position in society, through an ideological conviction that women are now not aware "of their due". His utopia of 'phalances' with workshops and dancing to their passions where women are free from 'household bondage' and child care and where women have sexual and emotional freedom never did come true.

The Saint Simonians are the followers of the Saint Simon who propagated a theory of political, social and religious emancipation for women. They did not attack love or monogamous marriage, but they tried to elevate woman's position within the existing social structures to a status of equality with men. The bourgeois marriage which depended on money and inheritance came to be attacked by them. They did not hesitate to call it 'legalised prostitution' and advocated equal rights for women. In the new social organisation women's emancipation was a prerequisite. Maria Mies (1981) thinks that first authentic feminist movement in France originated with the Saint Simonians. This is very important as the ideology propagated by Saint Simon very clearly was not for anarchy, not for free love and a life based on passion.

The Saint Simonian cult had many followers from the women as his theory on women's emancipation was important from the point of view of the new radicalism that was introduced. So far, the women's question as part of the early socialism was taken up by men. For the first time women have entered the movement. Two important aspects of this movement were the development of a feminist press as distinct from the main stream media and plea for autonomous women's organisations *La femme Libre* (The Free Woman) for which Suzanne worked and of which she became later the editor was changed into *La Tribune Des Femme* (the Tribune of Women) when *Enfantin* declared that women should be excluded from the decision making offices in the 'Family' these women realised the need to form separate autonomous associations. The organisation was formed around the new journal *Femme Nouvelle* (The New Women). This was followed by associations for the education of women. The importance of these organisations would be seen from the fact that they became

centres for feminist and socialist debates and centres for mobilising and organising women.

Suzanne was very emphatic that women's emancipation had to be brought by women alone and rejected the programmes and plans worked out for women's emancipation by men. When she says "we do not need you as the guardians of our happiness and we deny you the right to touch anything which is our concern" (Mies 1981) we see a striking similarity with the separatism of the radical feminists. When she accuses the men of being disorderly and calls the laws as "Your laws" and justice as "men's justice" and compares the men's concern for women's emancipation to the wolf, in the fable of wolf and sheep we see a similar chord of man hating that the radical feminism constantly subscribes to.

Disiree Veret was an ardent supporter of free love and organised the autonomous organisation. However, she and Flora Tristan (1803-1844) though subscribing to the cult of Saint Simonism initially, were more interested in the workers conditions of living and later organised workers writing about their deplorable working conditions.

Utopian Versus Scientific

Though the scientific socialists considered the fantasies of the early socialists as utopian they have acknowledged their debt to them in no uncertain terms. "German theoretical socialism will never forget that it stands on the shoulders of Saint Simon, Fourier and Owen, three men who despite their fantasies and utopianism are to be reckoned among the most significant minds of all times for they anticipated with genius countless matters whose accuracy we now demonstrate scientifically" (Engels 1959). The anticipation with genius let me add, includes also the attention they paid to the women's issues. They dealt with issues such as private property, bourgeois family, double standards of morality, religion, and treating women as minors and as property within the household. They boldly declared that the level of progress in any society can be testified or measured by the extent to which it has liberated

women and put them on the same equal footing with men.

However it is my contention that the utopian socialists were not totally utopian as to write them off completely. More so, when you analyse their stand on the women's question their ideas were not purely fantasies. The limitations to those were imposed by the period in history to which they belonged. The kingdom of reason and internal justice based on rationality and logic could not be achieved due to many external reasons. The ideology as such was not utopian.

Engels had said that it was necessary then to discover a new and more perfect system of social order, and this has to be imposed upon society from without by propaganda and whenever it was possible by model experiments. The new social system he reiterated was foredoomed as utopian, the more completely they were worked out in detail the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasies. (Engels 1959 : 114) This statement needs to be relooked at specially from the point of view of women's liberation. Engels's contention was from the point of view of a more general social system based on the mode of production, class struggle, class antagonism, dictatorship of the proletariat etc. But as far as the women's liberation is concerned even the scientific socialism propagated by Marx and Engels still remains an inadequate analysis. Women's entry into social production has not liberated women. The dictatorship of the proletariat and 'the withering away of the state' are yet to happen in the Socialist Countries. What is important is to organise the on going process, and the continuation of the struggle towards the end goals. However, what the utopian socialists realised for women in tracing the oppression of women to the family, religion and private property and the subsequent formation of autonomous groups by women and the setting up of a feminist press arguing vehemently that men could not fight for the liberation of women are concrete steps, realistic approaches and remarkable realisations. What significantly lacked on the part of the utopians was the much needed consciousness raising and what Engels called "the propaganda".

Secondly implicit in the argument of the utopian theory is the impracticability of the system. Absolute truth, reason and justice are the noble concepts on which the utopian socialists based their social system. Humanity, it has been constantly emphasized, is full of contradictions like frailty, dishonesty, jealousy etc. The kind of social organisation which Owen, Fourier and Saint Simon envisaged had a society which would be clean and would have got rid of all human frailties. This state of development humanity would not achieve, they say. Men and women are competitive by nature they insist. But it is interesting to note that the ultimate stage of the 'withering away of the state' is also based on such a kind of contention when every body's needs are satisfactorily and adequately met there need not be the organ of the state to organise and do the policing activities as people then behave as perfect human beings. This has yet to be seen. The further it is removed from our vision the more utopian it would appear - an idealist vision of an ideal state of affairs. But the wishful thinking continues elevating human endeavours to lofty ideals.

Feminism and its Radicalism

The next major task and a difficult task would be to define the concept of radical feminism in a reasonably adequate manner and say this is it. There are different trends of thought in radical feminism from the biological reductionism to french structuralism. Though to sum it up would be difficult, radical feminists base their arguments on patriarchy as a system which places men and women in inferior and superior positions - Besides they reject the economic reductionism and envisage a "feminist revolution". The most radical exponents of radical feminism are Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet (*The Dialectics of Sex* and 1974 and *Sexual Politics* 1971).

Women's sexuality was analysed completely "Personal is political" is their slogan. While analysing the psycho social reasons for women's oppression they are clearly of the opinion that the feminist and sexual revolutions that are needed for a social transformation would finally set right the inegalitarian structure.

Though they rejected the economic reductionism of Engels, accepted on principle the analysis of Engels with regard to patriarchy, marriage and family as the oppressive institutions - To this both Engels and Marx, are again indebted to the utopian socialists. The Red Stocking Manifesto which also falls within the confines of radical feminism was not categorical in defining their demand "We do not ask what is radical, revolutionary reformist or moral but what we ask is, is it good or bad for women." Later in 1975 they published the feminist revolution which was a collection of essays. Here again one finds that female sexuality is the basis for the feminist revolution.

However to analyse whether radical feminism offers an utopian vision of the future for women one needs to go deeper into the more specific contents of radical feminism. Shulamith Firestone views the family and the institution of marriage as oppressive. According to her the patriarchal male bias is embedded in these institutions. She advocates living together which would eradicate dependence. Instead of the nuclear family she envisages a larger household on the lines of communal living where waste of resources and repetitive household chores can be avoided and the drudgery eliminated. One could perhaps see the basic similarities of the utopian socialism to Firestone's feminism. In these aspects though one sees the radicalism of the issues raised they are certainly not utopian in the sense that they amount either to fantasies or being impracticable; nor can they be reduced to idealism. Firestone's most controversial theory is the technological reproduction. Biology is women's curse, menstruation, menopause, pregnancy, painful child birth, nursing, child care responsibilities, are the female evils, which have condemned the women class to a dependent (subordinate) class on males (Fathers, husbands, brothers and sons). The long dependency state of infants on mothers limit the role and activities of women. Hence the need to be liberated from the reproductive role - the biological basis of women's oppression - to ensure her the freedom of movement, choice of jobs etc.

Technological Solution

Her answer to the problem is technological reproduction. Elimination of sex class, necessitates a revolt of the under class (ie. women) to seize the means of reproduction, restoring thereby to women, their own bodies, control of their fertility, and the related social institutions of child birth and child care. Genital and cultural differences between human beings would no longer matter nor would it have any meaningful say. This would eventually eliminate the tyrannical system of marriage, biological family and with it, the "psychology of power". Her argument for the overthrow of the "natural conditions" and their cultural reinforcement which according to her stem fundamentally from the biology of women, is strong.

Could one call this utopian? If yes, in what sense is it utopian? As far as the practicality of the technological innovation one need not doubt, as modern science bears witness to many test tube babies. It is not fantasy. Artificial insemination, gynogenesis, pathogenesis, cloning etc. are the scientific alternatives for natural reproduction. Whether technological reproduction is itself liberating and whether it would be a prerequisite, a totality in itself, for women's liberation, is a question that need to be answered analytically. Perhaps a more important question would be how many women who choose to be mothers other than for reasons of malfunction of reproductive organs would choose technological reproduction, on the argument that natural reproduction is oppressive.

One need not question the validity of the alternatives suggested by her, in the form of communal living, living together etc. on theoretical level but how could it be practiced? What about the legal structure with its inheritance laws, property ownership, etc.? Besides one should be able to differentiate between a few individuals living in communal households and living together, from the communal living becoming as part of general social system in a wider context. This is what precisely the utopian socialists did and the system disappeared. From this point of view one could ask aren't the radical feminists utopian? Without focussing attention on the entire, socio-economic and entire socio-political

phenomenon, can one speak of women's liberation in isolation? It would very well be utopian if, we do not perceive a Marxist revolution and a feminist revolution, simultaneously. The general trend now among radical feminists is to talk of a feminist revolution on a theory of separatism. Marxists think in terms of a worker's revolution first; feminist revolution later, assuming that worker's revolution will automatically solve the "women question". Both these need to be questioned.

Androgyny

The concept of androgyny has been employed by the radical feminists to destroy the image of male superiority which is overtly derived from the so called masculine characteristics of strength, rationality, logic, reason and physical prowess. By propagating androgyny radical feminists provide a vision of a social change, whereby sex role can be eliminated. Androgyny is seen as an alternative to the social construction of the biological differences which have now assumed the qualities of being natural to women and men. Men and women form one part of human nature and should unite to form a whole human nature by playing their incomplete behaviour roles. The incomplete half ascribed to women is that of a lesser mortal. Androgyny according to radical feminism is a vision which rejects complementarity but sees wholeness, masculinity and femininity in both males and females. "genital differences will no longer matter culturally" said Firestone in the *Dialectics of Sex*. Gelpi (1974) defines it as a psychic unity either potential or actual conceived as existing in all individuals"

Strategies for the Androgynous ideal are varied. Unisex life styles in clothes and hair fashion (Bird 178) abolition of the nuclear patriarchal family norm, abolition of sexual division of labour, sharing of child care by the society, technological reproduction (Firestone).

This does not however specifically throw any meaningful devices in terms of concrete solution for achieving the state of androgyny. It lays bare the negative consequences of child socialisation into

boy and girl behaviour roles. It deals with one aspect of patriarchy but doesn't take into consideration the whole ideological and material bases of women's subordination. The historical factors that determine women's social status finds no place. It deals only with the biological aspect. It does help to negate such theories of "instrumental and expressive" of the functional sociologist and the theory of complementarity. But this is at the level of theory. How does it work as a strategy? Can this be achieved as a collective political programme? Moreover I think women need to be liberated while they are women, retaining their femininity. It's a case of recognising the right to be woman, the right to be the natural self and the need to be free and equal, honourable and dignified. It is the social construction of womanly inferiority, subordination and slavery that we need to fight. We need not give up being a woman to acquire equal status. Being androgynous doesn't help to change social attitudes and the social behaviour of the vast majority of men and women. Harris (1974) correctly calls it a sexist myth in disguise. Pyke (1980) is emphatic that, femininity/masculinity duality is perpetuated in an androgynous image. She is of the opinion that femininity/masculinity whether existing in a unity or in separation is not the question but sex roles should transcend. Apart from the structural inadequacy of the theory there is also an element of being utopian limiting the practicability as a universal strategy.

Matriarchy

Radical feminists also have in their agenda a concept of matriarchy which they think would be an ideal state for women to live with dignity and honour free from any kind of oppression or exploitation. The very fact of grounding their argument in archaeology, anthropology, history and mythology to dig out data of prehistoric matriarchy casts doubt about the practical use of this theory "the world historical defeat of the female sex" (Engels) is now history. Ehrenfels (1941) in his *Mother Right in India* had identified the origins of matriarchy in the Indus Valley civilization. Debriprasad Chattopadhyaya (1959) and Sharad Patil (1982) have argued for matriarchy during the time of primitive

communism in India. This however is a restructuring of the matriarchate theory of the early anthropologists such as Bachofen (1861), Morgan (1871) and Engels (1884).

However evidence to the memory of a prehistoric matriarchy conceptualised as women controlling the means of production, base cannot be identified. Women's exclusive ability to conceive and the early nurturing by mothers have led to conceptualising mothers as powerful.

Hence matriliney which only meant female inheritance pattern and evidence of a socially equal status, absence of overt discrimination and oppression have provided the arguments for matriarchy.

The reversal of the order after two thousand years of patriarchy and undoing the universal structure with all its institutions and systems, is an utopian vision. Establishment of mothers' right and female sexual autonomy are the pre-conditions for matriarchy and female power. What would be needed really is a restructuring of the power bases to divide power equally. It's not a fight for female power over males or female rights over male non-rights. What feminism stands for should be equalitarian, socio economic and socio political structures to enable women to exercise the freedom and autonomy to lead a life of dignity and honour with equal human rights and privileges. Collective household use value system as against exchange value system, doing away with assembly lines, child care responsibility to be shared by the community, deschooling, society health schemes with radical midwives, radical nurses, bare foot nurses, centers for women, soft technology (being in favour of ecology) free love, free sexuality, lesbians and homosexuals to have their rights, women to appropriate the means of conceptualizing time - to base it on the natural phenomenon - (moon) and not on the birth of Jesus Christ - are some of the preconditions for matriarchy. These though are on principle similar to the utopian socialist vision, does not explain the strategies to achieving the desired goals.

Nostalgic memories of matriarchy are fine. This helps to unravel the mystery of the woman's so called natural qualities which has

acquired the submissive characteristics by constant and conscious manipulations. But how does the example of matriarchy be shown as something which can be of help now. We are ignoring the historical determinants and the present realities. It's wishful thinking to dream of a matriarchy. The ideology as such is beset with an inadequacy and a contradiction. Women's power and authority - matriarchy - should substitute patriarchy is the implication of the matriarchy school of thought and this is a utopian vision.

Other than going on these flights of fantasies radical feminism has very deeply analysed the women's subordination and very categorically described the various dimension of patriarchy as a social system and its extension to the political. In fact this is what Kate Millet does in *Sexual Politics*. The ideological, biological, sociological and economical bases of patriarchy have been systematically analysed in *Sexual Politics*. It's a down to earth clarification of the reality. One doesn't find utopias here. It, in fact does help one to understand the feminine mystique which has been shrouded in half truth and coated with patriarchal myths and legends. But what one should keep in mind is the need for an analysis of a totality of the women's problems - reproduction as well as production, wage labour and household labour, public and private economy and family. That indeed is complex.

Social Movements

My final task would be to analyse the radical feminism and utopian socialism in terms of a social movement and show how and why utopian socialism failed and whether radical feminism has the same tendencies.

Utopian vision is always radical because it presents one order contrasting it with the prevailing order which is stagnant.

Firstly the utopian socialists were too radical for their times. Their ideology had the limitations of the epoch. The family and the institution of marriage and monogamy with its heterosexual moral code were sacred laws both written and unwritten validated by

tradition, strong and inflexible. A scientific exposition of their invalidity and hypocrisy though eloquent appealed to a selected few. This was far removed from the 'dominant ideology' of all classes of people. The lack of suitable methodology for mass mobilisation further aggravated the problems of ideology gaining recognition. The sanctity of marriage and family were strongly embedded in the religious ethics of the time and state was to safeguard them and perpetuate them. Anything said or done against them amounted to sacrilege and even punishable by law. Hence the only strength of the utopians should have been the mass support which to a great extent depended on the mass appeal of the theory propounded. Otherwise the propagators are alienated from the people who condemn the radicalism and the revolutionary ideas as destructive to the rhythm of the smooth functioning of society. It was an uphill task to work against the church, the state and the people. Genius and intellectual understanding of the social problems should trickle down through organised consciousness raising campaigns. This is precisely what was lacking with the early socialists

Could we class the radical feminist ideology also within the same category from the point of view of a social movement? One point we should keep in mind is the difficulty of the women's movement, to come up as a viable movement on the same platform as the other social movements. The environmental, the human rights, and the national liberation movements are on a better footing. The oppressors are identified and could be separated as the enemies. Consciousness raising is easy, mobilisation is quicker and action programmes more localised. But women's movement faces a lot of problems. The tasks ahead are difficult as the oppressors are not only the men but the state, the church, social institutions (Capitalist patriarchy) socio political institutions, developmentalists and two thousand years of socialisation embedded deep in manners, customs, tradition, speech and thoughts. Having this in view how could we evaluate the ideas thrown by radical feminism? Does talking of androgyny, matriarchy and technological reproduction convincingly convert men and women to feminism? They are thought provoking nice arguments one could sit and fantasise. But could we go to toiling mass of women in factories and farms with such an ideology? How does this help the activists

in the women's movement in terms of a theory? Like the French feminist ideology, it's a radical theory - arm chair feminism - with in built inadequacies as strategies with its limitations for mass mobilisation.

Women Across Nations and within Nations, Attitudes and Assumptions of Imperialists and Nationalists: A Few Glimpses.

It is generally assumed that women form one category of analysis. As a result there is a tendency to make sweeping generalisations about woman across cultures and nations. This has led to ethnocentric biases and arguments based on racist attitudes. Ethno-centrism is different from racism. Ethno-centrism is due to limited visions - a failure to understand that the levels and kinds of women's subordination vary according to class, caste, ethnicity, religion and nationality. Another reason could also be attributed to ethnocentrism. Researchers have a tendency to treat problems singly and in isolation without placing them in the wider socio economic and socio political and in historical perspectives. However the assumption of women as one category stems from the obvious reason that women, to whatever ethnic religious, class or caste group they belong are universally subordinated to men in the roles they play. If we have to understand in its totality the various mechanisms which sustain the subordination of women we have to come to grips with all the above factors that divide women from one to another. This understanding is a prerequisite for transforming society and doing away with the hierarchical structures, which are specific to different cultures.

The National Question

This paper attempts to analyse the women's question against the national question. In the process I want to highlight the theoretical contradictions and the ambivalent attitudes of both the imperialists as rulers and nationalists as co-citizens of the polity towards women. One cannot accommodate the comprehensive theories of nationalism in one definition. One could formulate a fairly descriptive idea of nationalism if we take the four criteria of

nationalism as a useful beginning to understand the concept, vis-a-vis. Common territory, common economic life, language, historical psychological make up. This can be summed up in contemporary political terms as cultural identity and traditional homeland theories which are logically linked to establishing a nation state. The people in these nations are subjected to discriminatory practices and oppressive treatment and to even physical violence legitimised on the numerical strength of the majority community. At times they are oppressed by a militarily superior, foreign power. This kind of oppression is a significant reality in shaping the consciousness of revolt and resistance to chauvinistic and imperialistic regimes.

However, Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" deserves to be mentioned here. At the outset I want to argue that the various theories that place primacy on one or the other social group have to be re-examined. Marxist theory would recognise the existence of class as more important than ethnolinguistic or religious groups consisting of nations or groups based on gender identity. This theory would hold that religious, ethnic and gender categories are not primarily important, but secondary phenomenon artificially manipulated by the ruling class and that they have material bases.

One would think that classical Marxism would summarily dismiss the cultural identity crisis with the argument that culture as part of the ideology is determined in the last instance by the economic base or to be more pragmatic by the manner in which the use value is organised. That the classless society would see the end of the cultural identity crisis would be an argument. However one cannot rule out the fact that Marxism has recognised the progressiveness of nationalism and nationalist movements, though a kind of ambiguity ran through the lines. Marx, supported Irish nationalism. But he made a plea to subordinate nationalism or rather renounce nationalism and to join the English proletariat.

Lenin's thesis on imperialism as the highest state of capitalism and its connection to uneven development - connects imperialism to capitalism. Hence the major trend could be summed up as economic and as a process of revolts and resistance against feudal or imperialistic powers. These theories took no notice of the

cultural identity demands of the oppressed nations. It could be also added that Marxism while laying special emphasis on internationalism treats nationalism as a historical precondition towards completing the bourgeois democratic revolution or completing the capitalist development.

The divisions that exist across classes on the basis of ethnicity, religion and nations and between the sexes and the reality of the violent experiences in the present context are staring so nakedly that one cannot come to grips with them within the confines of Marxism. The tendency has been now to fight out separately the specific oppression and subordination. One cannot speak of only feminist separatism today. Male violence and male domination are issues to be treated equally with racism, imperialism and majority chauvinism (either religious or ethno linguistic). The Internationalism still remains an utopian vision both for Marxism and feminism. The above, pre-supposes that there are two dimensions to the national equation. The right of the nation for self determination as a decolonising process from the shackles of foreign imperial powers which systematically drained off the economic resources of the many countries in Asia and Africa is one. This clearly is a power relationship of military strength and technologically superior armaments a phenomenon of international and political violence

The second dimension is the rise of nations within single nations of plural culture which were decolonised by the imperialist regimes and which have been politically and administratively unified under one central government. The European powers were led by wrong concepts of nationality. Often the independent states with ethnic diversities, with independent nationhood, of the pre-colonial times were regrouped with artificial geographical boundaries. Due to this reason the pre-independent era in many South East Asian and African countries saw many a secessionist and separatist nationalist movement on ethno linguistic and religious identity. Often the oppression or dominance of the majority ethnic or religious groups have resulted in minority ethnic or religious tactics. However, it is urged that their aspirations fundamentally spring from the deprived chances of having an equal share in the

struggle for power status and wealth. The limited economic resources (uneven development?) in their economically stagnating states were disproportionately shared with the majority (ethnic/religious) community having the major share. The oppression has led to politicization. The politicization is channeled and mobilised into struggles on the lines of cultural identity. The dissatisfaction and disappointments of the ethnic/religious minority have erupted in national liberation movements with demands for decentralisation, self determination and regional autonomy. The fruits of independence or freedom, and the right to self-determination which have been reaped initially by an elite of mixed ethnicity who were instrumental in the organising of the independence movement - the bourgeois nationalists - gradually fell into the hand of the majority community.

It is pertinent here to link this factor with two of the Marxist thesis vis-a-vis that, cultural identity crisis having as its fundamental cause the economic deprivation (status, power and wealth) of the ethnic group. This is in conformity with Marxist thesis that the ideology is determined in the last instance by the economic base. It is with the second that one has to quarrel with Marxism. The experience of these countries have shown that the plums of independence, the socio-economic benefits are unequally divided in the post independent states on ethnic lines and not necessarily on class lines. This does not however imply that the upper class among the economically discriminated minority (oppressed) groups did not have their privileged positions. But in spite of this they did not hesitate to ideologically identify with their own linguistic or religious groups apart and against their own class interests and class identity. India, Pakistan, China (Emerson) and Indonesia it is prophesied will break into smaller units based on language and regional attachments or some other formula than on any existing or foreseeable sense of common identity, which would bring voluntary mergers. In these countries we are speaking not of minor variations of same culture but with two, quite distinct cultural systems which have produced mutual antagonism by mutual contacts, co-ordination and co-existence within one nation polity.

This takes us to the concept of nation state, which is a misnomer. A nation state, presupposes a common political and cultural polity which was sadly lacking in the decolonised states. The ethnic factor (by ethnic I mean cultural, linguistic and religious composition) has emerged as a reality. The ethno-linguistic nationalism has been articulated in various forms, such as passive resistance and militant armed struggle. Class consciousness has been temporarily put back. The economically exploited and the socially oppressed could join with the economically exploiting bourgeois and the socially oppressing high castes on the ethnic consciousness. Though one could not speak of a concretely articulated feminist consciousness in these cases, even committed feminists have joined these men, in the national liberation struggle with or without maintaining their autonomous status.

Moreover it was argued that with the universalization of culture the separate cultures which create conditions of separate allegiance would disappear. It was stressed that the national question has no importance for manual workers. It was important only for the bourgeoisie that made a living through language. (Can the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have the same culture though speaking the same language?) Can the exploiters and the exploited constitute a common culture through common experience? These are legitimate questions. However Marxists and Neo Marxists have failed to realise the reality of nationalism projected through the cultural affinities of groups who share a common language, common living patterns and common social habits. As part of living together and sharing the common experiences (despite class contradictions) and sharing the cultural idioms and symbols they have developed a consistent, continuing, powerful consciousness. The idiom, phraseology and the proverbs they speak in the language are created and shaped by the fauna and flora, by the climate and the seasons and by the general ecology. They are regionally specific and inseparable from the consciousness. The contentment and the sense of belonging men and women have in this context cannot be explained totally by a theory of economic deprivation.

Neither can this consciousness be explained as false consciousness. I hasten to add I do not by implication subscribe to any theory of racism or superior or inferior notions of culture. But to each there is a uniqueness in his or her culture. Esperanto is no answer. It will not create internationalism. Creative human beings across regions would create a multitude of dialects of Esperanto for personal communications.

Class variations in the ethnic consciousness is a reality. The cultural patterns differ from even the modes of speech (dialects) to modes of religious worship. Anthropologists have called them 'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition', which are not only class based, but also caste based. But these are essentially within the same cultural systems, the variations are not mutually antagonistic to each other. There is autonomy in the practice of these cultural variations and they are indeed overlapping.

It is pertinent to add that the national liberation ideology has of late, incorporated a clear vision of social liberation in its agenda. Class, caste and gender equality are forcefully propagated. Liberation of working class, peasants, women and low castes are combined with national liberation adhering to socialist transformation on Marxist lines. National liberation, they argue, is a pre-condition for socialist transformation.

I would like to end this part of the paper, by linking my thesis to that of Benedict Anderson (Imagined Communities). His thesis can be summed up as follows. The uniqueness of one's culture which is often a claim of the rising nationalist sentiments is a romantic expression linked to a sacred language. This is a development of print capitalism in Europe and North America. The print through the mass media created "imagined communities" which were continuously sustained by communication technology. The ideology of nationalism as such has its roots, in the 18th century western nations. Development of vernacular languages, local historiography which dealt with dynasty, sovereignty and nation helped to develop nationalism among the intelligentsia, who had the monopoly of the communication systems. They knew the indigenous local languages and were the custodians of "high culture". Though one

sees his analysis as scientific, logical and convincing, a further point that need to be clarified is to ask how real are the feelings, and sentiments of the imagined communities? Alternatively does one assume or conclude that the national consciousness is also imagined? Anderson gives a partial answer. The new class or the "class coalition" (as apart from the single category class of landed aristocracy, capitalist class, working class and peasantry) that he referred to in the national movements in the Third World point to a new dimension to the whole question of nationalism. The old theories (which are not dogmas) are being re-evaluated in the objective realities of contemporary nationalism and its vitality.

Having made an attempt to clarify the dynamics of nationalism and its contemporary thrust in the political situations, I will now deal with how women have been perceived within the currents of nationalism. This will be done from two perspectives first from within nationalism as against colonialism and imperialism - second from within national liberation struggles within nations. Women have played and continue to play important roles both in the independent movements against foreign imperialism and against oppressing nations as part of national struggles. However throughout the struggle and after the struggle their position has been characterised with an ambivalence and a certain amount of uncertainty with regard to perceptions and attitudes.

Liberalism in Contradiction with Imperialism

When India was under the British, India's backwardness was spelled out in terms of India's culture. The caste systems, the religious superstitions and the status of the Indian women became the parameters of India's backwardness. The Indian women within purdah and within such social rituals like sati which were inseparably connected to Hinduism were pointed out as "Indian Backwardness". - The Indian conscience was pricked. The new consciousness was articulated by men of letters whose mission it was to cleanse Hinduism (Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade). Some of them became apologists and sought to revive Hinduism with orthodox purity of the Vedic times, arguing that the Vedic age was

a "Golden Age" as far as women were concerned. However the women's question was later picked up by the national movement (Nehru & Gandhi). The national movement quickened the consciousness of the nation, both men and women up to realisation of the inegalitarian relationship of men and women and men and men (gender, caste and imperialism). In this process women drawn in numbers to the national movement, became active participants and supporters of the Congress against British imperialism. At this phase the Indian women blamed the culture as the cause of their unequal position and not the men as such.

The priority for women was to fight imperialism. Joanne Liddle and Rama Joshi (daughters of independence) argue that the status of women in India with specific attention to sati, and prohibition of widow remarriage have been used by the British in India as an argument that India was not fit for self rule. In the same vein they argued that though they introduced nine major laws directly connected to women, such as forbidding female infanticide, sati, child marriage, raising the age of consent, lifting the ban on widow remarriage their real stand on these issues were ambiguous. Ram Mohan Roy had to complain to the privy council about the refusal of the British Governor to make sati illegal (p. 27 - Joanne Liddle & Ram Joshi). It is not difficult to rationalise this. The British though prompted by a liberalism of the time, was careful not to upset the indigenous people by introducing changes or reform into the sensitive areas. This could lead to jeopardising their imperialist aspirations. Between their liberalism and imperialism they chose imperialism.

Male Dominance in India - Justification for Imperialism

This kind of ambiguity is further compounded when one realises how the women's question was used later as a justification for not granting 'swaraj' to India. Katherine Mayo through her book *Mother India* (1927) justified the continuance of the British rule on the grounds that India was not fit for self-rule because of its backward socio-religious practices. *New Statesman and Nation* reviewed the book with the following remarks:

"The degradation of the Hindu woman is unequalled even among the most primitive African and Australian savages".

Mayo, makes the claim for swaraj seem nonsense and the will to grant this almost a crime (p. 30). This is clearly a case in point of not ethnocentrism but racism. When the witch burning and the chastity belt are yet fresh in the memory of European history - "of liberal Europe" - only Indianness was found to be primitive and savagely.

Women in the Colonies affected by Imperialist Patriarchy:

It is ironic that in a few instances the Victorian ideology of the west was in contradiction with the more equalitarian structures of the colonies as far as women's rights were considered. Matrilineal succession, women's individual right to property and existence of polyandry, loose marriage ties where divorce was easy, were part of the social arrangements in India and Sri Lanka, where male dominance was not absolute. For example in Sri Lanka, (Obeysekera) the imposition of Roman Dutch Law by the British between the period 1803-1833 has altered the more equalitarian structures in three major areas:

- 1 The notion of communal property was introduced at marriage, which did away with the customary notion of separate estate of woman and has given way to man's control of wife's property. Thus men became the legal custodians of their wives' property.
- 2 Altered the strictly bilateral rules of inheritance.
- 3 Changed the texture of the more liberal divorce laws of the Sinhalese and introduced the patriarchal ideology of the Roman Dutch Law, which granted divorce only on two grounds - adultery and malicious desertion.

The same kind of anomaly is seen in the *Tesawalamai* the traditional customary laws of the Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka. That

the Tesawalamai did not recognise the principles of a full community of property in 1705 and the fact that subsequently the principle of separate estate is eroded by the husband's power of administration over the community of property was traced to the impact of the Roman Dutch Law (S. Goonesekere).

In India Nayers of the Kerala State had a matrilineal kinship structure where the women had enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in the selection of marriage partners and where the patriarchal family system of father as the head of the family had to provide and maintain and control the woman was totally absent. In this more egalitarian system the British introduced concepts like, "man the provider", "father the head of the family" and "monogamous marriage". Henceforth marriage could only be dissolved by law (not by mutual consent) and women's sexuality was controlled by men.

As much as the British condemned sati and prohibition of widow remarriage, they condemned the local structure which gave women considerable independence and autonomy both in the family and economic relations. The sexual freedom of the Nayar family was seen as promiscuity and matrilineal inheritance rights, the easy divorce etc., were not in conformity with their own Victorian ideology of morality. These were also considered "backward" by the imperialists who had taken on themselves a mission "of civilising the colonies". Patriarchy was the hegemonic ideology in the west at the time when they expanded their empires in the colonies. Now women's movements in the east have to fight for some of the rights which the British did away with.

Gender Inequality within National Liberation Ideology:

The woman's question remained in the same ambivalent position even within the national movement. Women formed a substantial section in the national movement. While the national liberation ideologies took note of overt discrimination on caste and gender lines they remained uncompromisingly chauvinistic on the issue of personal or family laws. On the issue of women's suffrage they

tendered their co-operation, perhaps with the additional reason (besides it being non familial, and non personal), that this would tilt the political power of the Indians to their advantage in terms of their national aspiration. The demand of All India Women's Conference to change the Hindu Code in the areas of marriage, divorce and inheritance was opposed by the men of the national movement. Where ever the patriarchal control in the family and domestic situation needed to be undermined so that gender equality could be real, those demands met with opposition. But to a kind of liberal ideology of equal rights in employment, education and right to vote, their support was forthcoming. It was not surprising that they used patriotic and nationalistic arguments to support their case. They argued that the sponsors of the proposals were influenced by western education (implied here imperialist) instead of Hindu (which is Indian) and thereby had become unpatriotic.

An exception:

The women's question had a different treatment in the Dravidian movement in South India. This was a post independence movement where a good part of their energy was directed to the problems of women in addition to other social problems relating to caste, class, religious superstitions, and archaic rituals. Further more this movement questioned the ideological legitimization of the irrational socio-religious and cultural customs of the mythologies and the epics. In short the ethno linguistic nationalism argued for liberation from primitive and out dated institutions. This phase of the movement characterised no ambiguity as far as the women were concerned. They were categorical, consistent and convincingly action orientated. Widows were remarried, anti dowry marriages were conducted and rituals were done away within the marriages they conducted. They emphasised the principle of "self respect" on the rational and mutual consent between man and woman. Education for women was organised. They were not advocated on paper, but the leaders of the movement went about leading people into action. They made a distinction between "thinking reformer and the courage of conviction reformer" (Ram).

They sought very violent radical measures. However one should not miss the interplay of other factors in this Tamil Nationalist Movement. Without getting into an indepth analysis of the controversial interpretations that have come up regarding the content and typology of this movement (Eugene Irschick, Marguerite Barnett, Suntharalingam) as progressive nationalism or cultural nationalism etc., one could discover the dominant factors of the movement. Basically it was a protest movement against the Brahmanical hegemony (caste and class). Administrative, political, socio-economic and socio-religious dominance was in the hands of the Brahmins. This was identified as the Aryanisation of a Dravidian culture (religion, language and social habits).

Without missing the economic factor one could say that the Tamil language, its Dravidian origin, with the uniqueness as one of the oldest living languages, was effectively used to come together on a political platform, to fight against the imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu. In their search they identified that the chattel status that their women suffered in the socio-religious life was due to Brahmanical (Aryan as against the Dravidian) culture having penetrated into their Dravidian Culture. Aryanization was identified with the Brahmanical laws such as Manu and the great Sanskrit epics of India - Ramayana and Mahabharata and the collection of Vedic texts etc. This was a clearly progressive effort as far as seeking the causes and origins of women's subordination in the ideology and from the hegemonic ruling class culture. Having their motives in view one could argue that, whenever the culture of a nation has to be reformed, revitalised or revised women have to come into the picture as different from men as part of the equalitarian structures or oppressed group in society. They are often being used as parameters for setting new standards of reformation and revival.

Religious Identity versus Gender Identity:

Religion, as centrally determining the ethnolinguistic nationalism has played a very regressive role towards women. The cultural identity phenomenon within the national movements had a conservative and backward effect on women. The reaction to the

Age of Consent Bill in India in 1891 which raised the age of consent for marriage of girls, was typical of this trend. Even Tilak the foremost nationalist said in Maharatta (Yogendra Singh: 1973:74) "we are very sensitive and we feel nothing so much as an attack on our national character. That the Age of Consent Act will write in the statute book the character of the Indian nation in the blackest letters is our grievance..... so long as this certificate of bad character remains on the statute book we can enjoy no rest". This type of nationalism and a plea for cultural identity is expressed against a reality of the situation where in 1881, 14% of all Hindu girls of the age of ten in Bengal and 10% in Bombay and 4.5% in Madras were either married or widowed. He opposed the bill because he felt that the British should not be allowed to interfere in the Indian Culture.

A Muslim woman claiming maintenance from a deserting husband is un-Islamic non-Muslim non-traditional and it is a sacrilege. Shao Bano's claim for maintenance was granted by the Supreme Court in India. The Muslim fundamentalists raised objection to the ruling that, the Shariat the Muslim personal law has been divinely ordained and cannot be altered by humans. A mere maintenance to a divorced woman raised upheaval in the country. Half a million Muslims came out in Bombay with slogans which said "Islam in danger". Maulana Abdul Lais, Emir of the Jammat-c-Islami said "for Muslims today the imminent danger, is to their **Culture and Identity** rather than to their lives and property" (India Today - January 31, 1985). The arena of personal laws is a major sensitive area where secularism cannot be effectively introduced.

A uniform civil code cannot be introduced in India or Sri Lanka. One has to confront statements of violations of the principle of freedom to practising one's religion and social habits. As a result though women have expressed a desire for a uniform civil code in India (Report of The Status of Women in 1975) it could not be achieved as yet. They have argued that continuance of different personal laws, grant discriminatory privileges to men and infringement on the principle of sexual equality and the principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution of India. However, the nationalists and culturalists here could define secularism as non-

interference with the religious sanction of the laws allowing freedom in the practice of such religious laws. Hence sexual equality - another principle enshrined in the Constitution stands violated in the process - in preference to religious freedom, with which these personal laws are connected. But what do the women who are affected by them feel about them? Has there been an attempt to find out their consensus? The ruling parties do not want to upset the equilibrium. This could tilt their political power by the cultural chauvinists withdrawing their support. Secular rationalism gives way to sectarian sentimentalism. Injustice to women continues in the name of cultural identity. The personal laws relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of the children are determined by the religious and ethnic practice and differ from one community to the other. These are discriminatory to women. In fact the ideology of patriarchy stems from this private realm of family and extends to public roles that woman plays. Women's public roles and their secondary status are legitimised, sustained, restructured and recomposed from the familial role of the private. Hence any changes that are deemed necessary for women's emancipation are meaningless without first effecting changes and improving the basic and the fundamental structures. Laws should be viewed as tools of social change and not as static inviolable sacred codes. "Offering religious sentiments" is politically used to such an extent that even enlightened political opinion is helpless against the majority conservative fundamentalists. It is argued that one's culture however backward and feudalistic has to be upheld - because that is the national culture and any change introduced is an alien factor which would erode into the national character of a system.

Antipathy to Westernisation as part of National Liberation Ideology and How It Exclusively Affects Women

This phenomenon can be explained, though not rationalised. There is in some quarters a rejection of modernisation was attributed to westernisation. This has resulted in the practice of projecting one's culture against westernisation which has alien values. Such an attempt while clouding the vision of reality prevents the eradication

of the hierarchical and the repressive features in the cultural system. They affect peculiarly the women in many societies. As against westernisation or the remnants of colonialism tendencies of resanskritisation and traditionalisation have been noticed by Yogendra Singh. He describes this process thus "a formerly westernised or modern group discards many of the cultural symbols of modernisation such as dress, spoken language, food habits... and revert to traditional Sanskritic symbols and belief". This tendency was found more among the great traditionalists. Muslim women revealing themselves and Hindu women in Indian and Buddhist women in Sri Lanka reverting to more traditional modes of dresses, habits and customs are instances of reseeking their traditions. Seeking legitimisation in sacred books of olden days of the golden age of women is also in keeping with similar trends. The golden age of women in India is traced to the Vedic scriptures and the Tamil Sangam age - during which periods of ancient India woman supposedly enjoyed equality of status with men.

In the same breadth feminism in some countries in Asia is branded as a western concept and as incompatible with the indigenous cultural values. Such parochialisation became an inherent characteristic in many liberation struggle. In the North and East of Sri Lanka there is a national liberation struggle by the minority Tamils against the majority. The armed struggle is directed towards a separate Tamil State with claims of traditional homeland. (This paper was written in 1988) this national liberation struggle is an ethnolinguistic typology free from any trace of religious fundamentalism or claims to any religious affinity. The Tamil speaking Hindus, Christians, Catholics and Muslims have jointly projected an image of Tamil nationalism. The national liberation has simultaneously laid claims on caste, class and gender equality and socialist transformation. There is also a strong feminist component within the movement, which brings out separate feminist periodicals. An analysis of the feminist ideology as such of this movement will be a study by itself not beyond the scope of this paper. But limited material and limited access to women who are involved in this movement at the present juncture have made me postpone such a task. I am presently drawing attention to one

aspect of the general trends. In the wake of crumbling socio-economic traditions amidst the large scale devastation and destruction in Jaffna by the ongoing war between the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan army and navy, there is an alarm that traditions are breaking up. Caste, class and gender divisions are transgressed. There are serious violations of Tamil conventions. The more conservative and the old have been whispering in private about the undesirable elements of these violations. Women's militancy and women's non-traditional activities - (violations of the social norm - peculiar to the Tamil culture) have become targets of open criticisms. A leaflet titled "Warning to Tamil Woman" signed by "Well Wishers of Tamils" appeared recently. This has listed the behaviour pattern that Tamil women should adhere to. The cultural dictums on women included that older girls should wear long skirts, should not wear immodest garments like nighties, married women should not go out on bicycles except with their husbands and should not appear in public when not necessary. If they do, they should be beaten. It also included an uncultured crude Tamil proverb which said "girls or women not more than ten are chaste or they are chaste only till they are ten years old". The leaflet has also warned parents that if they do not teach good habits to their daughters they will be punished.

It is not known whether the authors (the well wishers of the Tamils) are from the conservatives of the nationalist movements or from outside. In short what it means is that women's dress, their behaviour and their morals need to be controlled to preserve the culture. Long skirts, up to the toes and women's seclusion within the private realm of home are the traditional, cultural norms of Tamil women, short dresses, nighties and riding bicycles are western. Women in the streets as political and social activists are unfeminine. Hence women's femininity has to be preserved against cultural erosion. It is no concern for the 'Well wishers of Tamils' if men adorn western style trousers and other western habits. It is nobody's concern to find out how many men are responsible to make 90% of the women unchaste.

Women as Property

The whole psychology of this trend is linked to the concept of women as the property of men. Women are perceived and in fact treated as belonging to men as daughters, wives and sisters of men. Not only are battles fought to recover land and territory but also to recover 'their women' and to regain their loss of honour. The same psychology extends itself rather brutally and violently when as taking revenge or expressing their victory or an expression of plunder, women of the enemy are raped. This is considered the highest form of revenge. Women for Peace Group in Sri Lanka has highlighted the increasing number of Tamil women who were raped by the Sinhala soldiers as an act of revenge for the militancy of their sons and husbands. During the communal riots, in addition to plundering and destroying property, women were raped and gang-raped. Women's sexuality, vulnerable at all times, at all ages becomes an object of plunder during times of war.

Women as Mothers of Heroic and Patriotic Sons

Heroic war songs are not matters of the past warring tribes or primitive societies. They have not ceased with the epics. Mothers are producers of sons of valour and heroism of might and strength to defend the motherland. Motherland serves the function of producing sons to defend patriotism in Sri Lanka, e.g. the collection of male authored "Battle Songs" (Rana gee) to defend the motherland. The Sinhala soldiers are encouraged to do their duty to the mother by protecting the motherland - Cats Eye. the feminist column in Lanka Guardian (Vol. 8 no. 18 Jan. 15, 1986) had aptly described this in the following manner.

"The glorification of war and violence perpetrated in the name of patriotism and motherhood by male military culture is the pervasive theme of the twelve battle songs. Mother's milk is equated with blood "with my blood turned milk I nourished you to defend the country and the nation" says one such song.

The Process and outcome of the Revolution

As the concluding section of this paper I want to point out a further contradiction with regard to women's experience in the national liberation struggles. During the period of revolutions both socialists and national liberators have urged women to come out of homes, out of wifehood and motherhood as full citizens to fight the liberation war together with men. During these periods of crisis women have carried arms, messages and were involved in other unconventional heroic deeds. But when the revolution was completed, women were sent back to their traditional roles, even to go to the romanticized cultural good old days, maintaining their subordination. While many reasons could be attributed to this, one reason is fundamental to the situation. It is basically a failure to seek structural transformation with a commitment to the ideology of gender equality. Women's change of roles during the revolutions are circumstantial and were demands imposed on them by the situations created and not by change of ideology. The contemporary situation where women have their autonomous sections in the national liberation movements with clear visions and programs based on feminist understanding should create a different situation for the future.

The mother country as is referred to in nationalistic terms is often metaphorically symbolised as a woman. Jerusalem was referred to as Maiden (Old Testament) De Gaulle referred to France as his "princess". India was referred to as "Mother India" and worshipped as "Vande Matharam" - an expression which evoked a great deal of romanticized sentiments, which culminated in this being chosen as in the national anthem of India. The plunder and destruction of one's country by the enemy is metaphorically called 'rape'. Assimilation of a foreign culture, or foreign customs and co-operating reasonably with the enemy is contemptuously compared to prostitution. This ideology is the logical outcome of the expectations of women as the custodians and propagators of culture. They are expected to be pure and safeguard the culture as a chaste woman who should avoid pollution of her own culture. Men stand outside, as chastity is a virtue only for women.

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