

Nivedini

A Sri Lankan Feminist Journal

Vol: 1 No. 2 December 1994

Vol: 2 No. 1 May 1995

(Double Issue)

*Economic Empowerment
of Women*

Buddhism & Feminism

Patriarchy in Language

Violence Nature & Extent

Sinhala Cinema

Trafficking in Women

Pastoral Power

Women's Education and Research Centre

Our Objectives

To study and research the various aspects of women's subordination in Sri Lanka in order to sensitise men and women on gender issues.

To establish a forum for women to express themselves as writers, researchers, poets, and novelists; to publish their works in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

To disseminate information relating to women and create awareness and increase consciousness on feminist issues.

To strengthen the women's network locally and internationally.

To extend co-operation to and solidarity with other oppressed and marginalised groups in Sri Lanka (such as the refugees, the unemployed and the slum dwellers) with projects for rehabilitation and general upgrading of their lives.

To serve as a resource and documentation centre in Sri Lanka that will become part of the network of research and study centres on Women's Studies in the Third World.

What does 'Nivedini' mean?

Nivedini derives from a Sanskrit verb "-vid" - to know. It could mean either, that which is placed before you ritually and reverentially, or a carrier of knowledge with a female gender suffix 'ni'. We use it with the second meaning.



Women's Education & Research Centre

WERC

	page No
<i>Editorial</i>	1
<i>The Articulation of Gender in Cinematic Address: Sinhala Cinema in 1992 - Malathi de Alwis</i>	8
<i>Violence Against Women: Nature & Extent - Bela Nabi</i>	40
<i>Patriarchy in a Language - Eva Ranaweera</i>	51
<i>Socio Cultural Constraints and Their Gendered Patterns - A Case Study of a fishing village in Handale</i>	62
<i>Buddhism and Feminism - Elizabeth Harris</i>	73
<i>Trafficking in Women: Bangladesh Perspective - Ishrat Shamim</i>	95
<i>The Sack - Jean Arasanayagam</i>	118
<i>Statement of The South Asian Women's ^{Caucus.} Courses</i>	130
<i>Women and Economic Empowerment The Case of Pelanda - Vinodini de Silva</i>	134
<i>Pastoral Power: Foucault and The New Imperial Order - Patricia Stamp</i>	139
<i>Women in Political thought constructions, Subjective Notions and The Feminist Challenges - Selvy Thiruchandran</i>	155
<i>Oral Report Presented by the rapporteur for Violence Against Women to the Commission on Human Rights (51st Session) February 1995</i>	173
<i>Women Workers at Rubber Plantation In the Kalutara District - Jayadeva Uyangoda</i>	182
<i>Women's Rights as Human Rights Toward Re-Vision of Human Rights</i>	189
<i>Can Women be Leaders of a Nation? A Muslim Perspective - Jezima Ismail</i>	209
<i>Book Review</i>	220

The Editor Thinks Aloud

The views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the editor

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ISSN 1391 - 0027

The first issue of Nivedini for 1995 comes out when there is a change in the political climate of Sri Lanka. There are many promises in the air. The promise for peace however is our priority. With peace is linked a whole series of issues - the ravages of war have crippled many a family on both sides of the ethnic divide. The situation of many people languishing in the refugee camps in the North and East is pathetic - their basic needs are supposedly being met partially by the state and partially by the NGOs, but they are miserably inadequate.

Equally frustrating and sad is the condition of the families of the soldiers, generals and majors who are dead, crippled and psychologically traumatised. They are more often in unpleasant situations having been forced to unwillingly succumb to state orders to fight with those with whom they have no personal quarrels. Many a soldier would have been mortified when he had to strike at civilian targets, perhaps under orders.

The situation is very tragic. Cries for separate identity and for specific ethno-linguistic recognition may be neutral demands. They are not anti-state neither are they against the parameters of a civilian polity. But what we have witnessed in Sri Lanka are overt acts of violence and vengeance which have led to fierce fighting, blood letting and mass killings. Then comes the question of dignity, self respect and self esteem. The oppressed and the discriminated turn to a discourse of dignity and self respect. How can I be demeaned? How can I be the lowered other? How can they alienate me from the others? While the State glared impotently having encouraged and taken part in the act of annihilation of the subject. When the sons of the soil tried to uproot the sons/daughters of the other part of the soil - the Other becomes heroically violent - a violence that was not condoned but thought to be the legitimate expression of dignity and self respect. Tooth for tooth, eye for eye became

commonplace in the politics of ultra nationalism. Nationalism was relegated politically to an ideology, both Sinhala nationalism and the Tamil separatist nationalism. The teachings of the Buddha and Jesus Christ and great Hindu savants were given a back seat.

We are sure that neither Buddha nor the Hindu sages are going to be reborn in Sri Lanka. We are equally sure that "Jesus is coming" is not going to happen. The above statement may smack of atheism but the idea is not to hurt the religious sentiments of others. We know this is wishful thinking by men and women as the sign of the helpless human beings who are unhappy and oppressed. We share their feelings of helplessness. But we want more realistic, down to earth rational sermons. We appeal to the Sri Lankan state which has very characteristically shown signs of sanity and willingness to halt the deteriorating state of violence towards a solution which guarantees dignity and self respect to the minorities along with peace and to go ahead with their efforts towards a meaningful meeting point. We also appeal to the L.T.T.E. to take stock of the tremendous sacrifices the Tamil people have made succumbing to its orders and appeals. The Tamil people have demonstrated amply that they want peace - but not peace at any cost but a peace package that guarantees rights on a principle of equality which should ensure sufficient autonomy. Both the State and the LTTE for the first time have demonstrated a political will and that demonstration should yield results soon. The peace process should continue.

Why are we, women saying this in a feminist journal? We, as women are equally politically interested in the affairs of our country. We, as women are equally interested in the liberation of oppressed categories other than women especially caste, class and ethnic minorities. We, as women are interested in seeing the end of the politics of violence.

Besides, we are fully convinced that war which leads to socio-economic disruption affect women more than it does men. Wars of national liberation specially target women. Women as

wives and daughters are perceived as the property of men - as commodities. After having defeated and won the men in the war, to defeat the women and daughters by forcefully taking over their bodies is common, and as old as the human race - the victory then is complete. Women are seen as symbols of the land to which they belong. Raping the women of the soil is as good as raping and capturing the soil. The mass rapes that we saw in Bosnia recently is not a new phenomenon. It is a recurring phenomenon wherever there are battles fought in the name of national identity. There were cases of rape in the North and East by the Sri Lankan Army and by Indian Peace Keeping Force.

This is the violent and degrading aspect of the war for civilians who are non - combatants in the struggle. But there are also other aspects to it. There are many displaced families living in the so - called refugee camps which are sometimes upgraded by those who run them with names such as welfare centres. Usually the unequal status of the women in the family is replicated in these centres where the institution of the family is played in a smaller scale within a smaller space. Situation of poverty and socio-economic deprivation have not in any way diminished the status of the patriarch. The man continues to play the role of the head of the family while the wife and the female children are subjected to more heavy household chores. Water has to be fetched from a distant pipe, dry rations have to be collected from the cooperative stores often waiting for long hours in a queue. 75% of such queues were of women. Food has to be cooked in small, ill ventilated and smoke filled kitchens. Little children are seen harassing the mothers asking for food and demanding help. The place where they urinate has to be cleaned. Men do not help the wives or the young children. Either they are absent from the scene or seen as idling, sitting under trees. We are told that many of them go out on the pretext of finding jobs. The little money they earn by doing ad-hoc jobs is spent on alcohol. Alcoholism is a problem that affects many families in the camps. Most of the women attributed the cause for domestic violence and family feuds to alcoholism. These are some of

the findings after visits to the camps in the East and Vavuniya and seventeen camps in Jaffna. What is important to note here during situations of war and other conditions of socio-economic upheavals under which the normal life process is disrupted, women have to face a multiplicity of added burdens and traumas which often affect them both physically and mentally. In the camps there are no toilets or the toilets are inadequate. Men and women both go to the bushes to answer the call of nature. Women have to wait for darkness to fall to give them privacy and protection from peeping toms of the opposite sex of all ages who roam about. The biological need of the body for women has to be reordered in terms of time and space.

While not denying that men and women are affected by war and war should be stopped what we are charting here are the gender specific deprivations and the depressing elements in the whole scenario.

About the Issue

In our last editorial we spoke of the arguments for feminist research. In this issue we are, among other articles, giving some insights into some of the surveys we did in Pelanda, Obeysekarapura (Rural & Urban poor), a fishing village in Hendala and rubber plantation. The gender specific problems are identified in these surveys/research while the first two areas have been already entered by us with project towards alleviation of the problems that the latter two areas need to be attended to. Some of the problems, we identified are too huge for a small NGO like WERC to solve. State assistance is needed very badly for infrastructural facilities. Especially the Obeysekarapura resettlement scheme had to include a state aided package both for the men and women while the women's needs have also to be taken as a special task. We have brought this to the notice of the Ministry for Rehabilitation. We are happy to see that prompt attention was given to our communique and the Minister has alerted

the attention of the various ministries whose duty it is now to undertake projects. We hope that the infrastructural needs of the community are met with immediately.

We have also in this issue included Jean Arasanayagam's play - *Sack* - which takes us to a day in the communal riots of 1983. The usefulness of a sack temporarily illustrates the tragic uselessness of it at the end. The rest of the "Nivedini" takes up a discourse on women's rights as human rights which is reprinted for its topicality, so is the article on violence against women and trafficking in women both are connected to women's right to live as human beings - not as sub human as they are treated in many cases. Some women who do not want to give up religion totally take pains to see the liberating potentialities of religion. Elizabeth Harris explores such claims of Buddhism to feminism. Malati de Alwis's insightful de tour into the Sinhala Cinema which she undertook as part of the task of the media monitoring committee, is published here which we hope should create some debate among the film producers and film reviewers alike. This issue of "Nivedini" also carries a review of the book "Unbroken Chains : Explorations into the Jaffna Dowry System" by Adele Anne. Liberation of women as part of a national liberation in contemporary Jaffna is a topical issue widely discussed. The manifestation of this ideology is the ban on the dowry system by the L.T.T.E.

Hon. Prime Minister's Message

International Women's Day 08.03.1995

I am happy to note that this years' International Women's Day theme for Sri Lanka is "WOMEN'S CONCERN WITH VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY"

The high rate of violence against women committed in our society should be one of great concern not only to the political leadership but also to every responsible citizen. While it indicates the subordination of women in the society violence is known to manifest itself within the household, on the high way and also in the work place.

A glance at the present economic situation of Sri Lanka clearly indicate that it is the working women in the labour force who earn the bulk of the foreign exchange for our country. These young women working in the Free Trade Zones, garment factories and in the Middle East as housemaids migrate out of their villages to secure gainful employment despite the challenge of risks they have to face. Most of these workers being young women, they are easily subjected not only to physical and emotional stress but also to acts of harrasment and violence. The vulnerability of such women workers should ideally be cushioned by measure to provide them with physical protection and emotional support.

These women workers should not only be recognised for their contributions to the stability of our economy but should also be recognised by the employers and the factory owners, as a group of employees who rightfully deserve special facilities and protection. I do hope that these issues would receive greater attention in the future.

Although I am unable to be present, I wish to send my heartiest and warmest greetings for the success of the Women's Day Meeting.

Srimavo R.D. Bandaranayaika

We are happy to reproduce the message given by Hon. Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranayake on the eve of 8th of March 1995 Women's Day.

The Articulation of Gender in Cinematic Address Sinhala Cinema in 1992

Malathi de Alwis

Introduction¹

Feminist film criticism has been primarily influenced by semiotics -- the study of the split nature of signs, by psychoanalysis which has attempted to dissolve the veneer of surfacial meanings through the study of the human unconscious, and by Marxist analyses of bourgeois ideology and hegemony (cf. Brown 1990, Mulvey 1989b, Saco 1992). As a feminist Social Anthropologist, I am especially interested in exploring the production of sexual difference through a bourgeois and patriarchal cinema and in seeking ways to rupture such dichotomous and rigid forms of gender representation and 'reading.'

There has been substantial research on the representation of women in Sinhala cinema upto date (cf. Abeysekera 1988, 1989, Jayamanne 1981, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, Jayaweera 1979, Silva 1989, Somaratne 1988) with the main contribution to this feminist critique being from Laleen Jayamanne who wrote her PhD. dissertation on this topic. However, though the exclusive focus on the representation of women has provided extremely useful insights into the sexism prevalent in the Sinhala cinema, it has also tended to "unwittingly reproduce the patriarchal treatment of Woman as the

¹ I am grateful to Pradeep Jeganathan for discussing with me many of the issues raised in this paper and to Malani Dassanaikie and Bandara Menike for their companionship and their enthusiasm for the Sinhala cinema. This paper is dedicated to my father who instilled in me a love for the Sinhala novel and cinema much against my youthful anglicised protests !

defined (and thus deviant) sex and Man as the invisible (and thus normal) sex" (Ang & Hermes 1991: 314). This position then becomes problematic both theoretically and politically. What is required of feminist film criticism today is an understanding of the articulation of gender, of feminine as well as masculine subject positions that are on offer in the cinema. For as Michael Kimmel has argued: "Masculinity and femininity are relational constructs, the definition of either depends upon the definition of the other" (1987: 12).

One of the central aims of this paper then will be to analyse feminine and masculine subject positions that were made available through the Sinhala cinema during the latter half of 1992. I shall pay special attention to six of the seven films that were re-screened at the Sarasaviya Film Festival in March 1993: *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, *Malsara Doni*, *Okkoma Kanapita*, *Chandi Rajina*, *Umayangana* and *Kula Geya*. The Sarasaviya Film Festival is the only indicator of which films were popular during the previous year as it is based on box office returns recorded by the National Film Corporation (*Daily News* 3/20/93)².

However, before I move onto analysing the films I would like to briefly explore the socio-cultural engendering of male and female subjects.

Masculinizing Spectators and Authoring Subjects

Obviously, a conceptualisation of the 'audience' is crucial for a reading of any 'text' produced by the electronic media be it film, TV or radio. Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in 1975 played a pivotal

² In the past, the seven most popular films were chosen from the votes sent in by readers of the film weekly *Sarasaviya* which is a publication of the government owned newspaper group Associated Newspapers of Sri Lanka.

role in the analysis of the audience or spectator in the field of feminist film criticism. In her attempt to understand the 'magic' of the cinema, Mulvey argues that the spectator, controlled by the economy of the gaze and involved with the psychoanalytic concept of scopophilia (pleasure in looking) which includes voyeurism and fetishism, is 'masculinized.'

The extreme contrast between the "darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen" notes Mulvey, promotes the illusion of voyeuristic separation, "an illusion of looking in on a private world" (1975: 8). This positioning allows the spectators to repress their exhibitionism and project their repressed desires onto the performer (ibid). This desired object, the performer, is the fetishised woman who "stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (1975: 7). The woman is 'silent' because in a "world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female"(p 9). This passive and silenced woman is simultaneously looked at and displayed with her appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact. But her display also functions at two levels: "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen" (ibid).

Mulvey received a great deal of criticism for having 'masculinized' her spectator/audience and she attempted to reply her critics in another article in 1981.³ Here, she notes that the persistent question she received was 'what about the

³ "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)" in *Framework* 1981 and republished in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press 1989. I will be citing from the latter publication.

women in the audience' (1989a: 29). But one could also ask what about the homosexuals in the audience? This latter question illuminates another crucial issue that often gets elided when we talk about a gendered audience; the multiplicities of subject positions that exist within the categories of 'male' and 'female.' As Virginia Nightingale has remarked, "the qualities that divide women, like class, ethnicity, age, education, are always of less significance than the unifying qualities attributed to women, such as inability to know or say what they want, the preoccupation with romance and relationships, the ability to care for, to nurture, others" (1990: 25). Similarly, there exists a typology of essentialised male character traits that are invariably imposed on men (cf. Easthope 1986).

In Mulvey's reply to her critics, she also refers to another articulation of gender that is often naturalised and taken for granted: "In-built patterns of pleasure and identification impose masculinity as 'point of view'; a point of view which is also manifest in the general use of the masculine third person" (1989a: 29). This is a crucial point which I will return to later.

My major criticism of Mulvey is that she relies too much on psychoanalytic analysis which leads her to often make sweeping, universalizing and essentialising statements about human behaviour. She is unable to capture the polysemy of cinema audiences as her research is not socially grounded. I hope to rectify this absence in Mulvey by seeking to understand the sociological formulations of sexual identity and gendered subject positions through a post-structuralist feminist reading of sociocultural construction.

As feminists we take as our starting point the patriarchal structure of society. Simply put, the term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. For example, one of the fundamental patriarchal assumptions is that women's biological difference fits them for different social tasks. As Mary Poovey points out, the patriarchal

assumption here is not that women are not as important or valuable as men but that they are **naturally** equipped to fulfill different social functions, primarily those of wife and mother (1988). Being a good wife and mother calls for particular qualities, which are thought to be naturally feminine, such as patience, emotion and self-sacrifice. It is these expectations about women's 'natural femininity' that also structure their access to the labour market and public life. Therefore, it is taken for granted that women are best suited to the service industries and 'caring' professions such as nurses, teachers, housemaids while the 'aggressive' worlds of management, decision-making and politics are best left to the males.

It was the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, writing as early as 1949 who first introduced the revolutionary notion that "woman was not born but made." In her extraordinary book *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (The Second Sex) de Beauvoir was the first to attempt a total synthesis of the biological, psychological, cultural and historical destiny of the concept and situation of woman by disentangling notions of 'femaleness' from 'femininity'. Her central thesis was that throughout the centuries women have been forced into a secondary place in the world in relation to men through the imposition of 'natural' 'feminine' characteristics on women when in actuality these characteristics have been constructed for women by dominant patriarchal structures within society and have nothing to do with the biological make up of women.

To say that patriarchal relations are structural is to also suggest that they exist in the institutions and social practices of our society such as the family, the school, places of worship, the law, media, ceremonies and rituals etc. It is through these seemingly unconnected institutions and practices or 'Ideological State Apparatuses' as Louis Althusser calls them, that we become socialized into our appropriate subject positions. In other words, we become trained to play a certain role --to behave and think in socially acceptable ways. Althusser described this process as

'interpellation' (1971: 162-3). To interpellate can be thought of as the pushing or pulling of an abstract person into a particular role, a subject position. It is likened to hailing and "can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey you there!' "(ibid).

Of crucial importance here is the fact that this process of interpellation relies on a structure of recognition by the hailed individual of her/himself as the subject of ideology. As Weedon points out, this is also a process of misrecognition "in the sense that the individual, on assuming the position of subject in ideology, assumes that she is the **author** of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity" (1987: 30-1, emphasis author's). It is to this positioning that Teresa de Lauretis also speaks (albeit from a different theoretical approach): "The construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self-representation" (1987: 9).

Antonio Gramsci's somewhat scattered speculations on hegemony also illuminates the workings of misrecognition. The brilliance of the concept of hegemony is that it provides an explanation of bourgeois patriarchal rule as being effected not so much by sanctions and coercion as by the consent and passive compliance by subordinated classes and genders (1971: 12). As I noted above, this passive consenting may not necessarily be seen as such by the interpellated subject who may even derive a certain sense of power through her/his subject position given a specific context. For example, many of the young girls with whom I went to the cinema wanted to get married so that they could have a home of their own in spite of them being aware of the life of drudgery their mothers lead and that would in turn await them.

Yet, as Raymond Williams who has explored the operations of cultural hegemony has noted, hegemony also does not passively exist as a form of dominance. "It has continuously to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also

continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (1977: 112). It is in such a context that the medium of film can be doubly persuasive as an arena of audio and visual pleasure. The lure of the cinema, "its invitation to be a certain kind of woman" is best illustrated by film critic Laleen Jayamanne who notes that after watching several Sinhala films a day over a period of weeks, "I found myself moving and regulating my gaze in the manner of the 'good girls' of the Sri Lankan cinema" (1992a: 71).

The above example returns us to Mulvey's formulation of a 'masculine point of view' and Weedon's delineation of 'misrecognition.' The female spectator here not only unconsciously imitates a form of behaviour that she has learnt will arouse male desire, but she also derives a certain pleasure⁴ and power from such posturing through misrecognising that she is the author of this reproductive behaviour.

Formula Films & Heterosexual Desire

Sinhala cinema originated in the mid-forties and for about two decades its audience consisted mainly of the urban social classes (Savarimuthu 1977, Uyangoda 1989). Therefore, from its very inception, it was "ideologically stigmatized" by the nationalist intelligentsia as a "form of entertainment evolved from among urban folk of unacceptable moral values" and thus viewed "as a source of moral corruption and an agency of ethical degeneration and pollution" (Uyangoda 1989: 37). From the fifties onward there was a concerted move by the Sinhala intelligentsia, pioneered by the film critic Jayavilal Vilegoda to create a truly indigenous Sinhala cinema. Two important components of this "true cinema" was

⁴ Though she is aware that it is an oppressive pleasure and notes that the solution lies in not denouncing the pleasurable but that the task of feminists should be to "call for, work for, new kinds of pleasures that are not oppressive" (1992a: 71).

that (1) it should be 'realistic' and aesthetically refined and (2) it should be home-grown and thus, the antithesis of 'formula' films that merely ape the Tamil and Hindi cinema of India (ibid: 40).

Even today, almost all film criticism centres around analysing films according to the above criteria and consistently valorises the realistic while castigating the melodramatic formula film. Often, Sinhala film critics completely ignore formula films and only concentrate on reviewing films that appear on the fifth circuit.⁵ However, any cursory glance at the box office records will show that it is the formula films that continue to draw the largest crowds and therefore, I consider the study and analysis of these films to be crucial to our understanding of the Sinhala film audience and the articulation of gendered subject positions. It is heartening that much of Laleen Jayamanne's recent writings have been on the form of Sri Lankan melodrama "that is critically thoroughly disreputable" and which has been "castigated decade after decade by local film critics and intelligentsia" (1992b: 31). Jayamanne's work in theoretically and historically exploring the centrality of this genre in Sri Lankan popular culture has been invaluable.

According to Jayamanne, the formula film in Sri Lanka has certain "scenes of attraction" that are very predictably identified with it: Love scenes, Night Club scenes, Wedding scenes, Lullaby scenes, Crying scenes, Fight scenes, Rape scenes, Murder scenes and Deathbed scenes. These scenes form a repertoire from which various combinations can appear in a montage of attractions (1992b: 33).⁶ The audience

⁵ These are regarded as high quality films and receive a special certificate of approval from the National Film Corporation. They are also screened at only specific cinema halls which are reserved for the exclusive showing of such films eg., the Regal Cinema in Colombo.

⁶ The combination that is used by the two most prolific formula filmmakers today, Hemasiri Sellapperuma and Sunil Soma Pieris, weaves in family themes, romance and parental love, with songs, comedy and heroism (*Sarasaviya* 7/9/92). These two directors have

appreciation "of such a flexible structure is striking, and the formula's ability to effect instant displacement between reality and fantasy could certainly open the social field to cinematic refiguring" (ibid).

What also holds and keeps the Sri Lankan audience hooked on this formula has to do with the articulation and circulation of certain (hetero)sexual desires (Jayamanne 1992a: 59). The realization or failure, the "vicissitudes of heterosexual desire are articulated within a series of discourses to do with class, family, kinship, caste and religion...the element of spectacle *vis-a-vis* song and dance is central" (ibid).

Not surprisingly, the majority of spectators who view these formula films are the very epitome of heterosexual coupling. At any weekend screening of these films, the packed auditorium is a sea of boy-girl, girl-boy couples. From the point of purchasing the tickets (the girls decorously stand to one side until each of their partners in the line come to collect them) and the softdrinks and snacks (the girls sit and wait till its purchased and brought to them) to the strong male arm that creeps around the girl's shoulders as soon as the lights dim, the male is the chief actor.

This ritualisation of cinema viewing by young lovers has often been 'explained' with: "Oh, they just go to neck." Undoubtedly, the darkened cinema hall does provide a very conducive setting now that the Galle Face Green and Vihara Maha Devi Park is being policed at the behest of elite moralists who can afford the privacy of a hotel room. Yet, this explanation seems far too simplistic. A visit to the cinema is still a very special event and though the price of an O.D.C ticket is still below Rs 20.00 it tends to be a rather expensive venture when one adds on the cost of

got this formula down so well that they are able to make a film within 12 to 15 days (ibid).

transportation, snacks etc. The invitation "to see a film" by a 'boyfriend' is still considered to mark a transition from a casual friendship to something more serious. As one girl in my neighbourhood confided in me: "I don't go to the cinema with any old boy. Goodness, one never knows what they will do to you once they get you inside...Of course, the fact that you are surrounded by other people is a big comfort."

If cinema viewing is so much a part of the courtship ritual in Sri Lanka, does the contents of the films really matter? Let me preface my speculations with an anecdote. One of the films screened at the 1992 Sarasaviya Film Festival was titled *Madhusamaya* (Honeymoon). Obviously, the film title had fed many youthful fantasies and the cinema hall was absolutely jam packed with couples that day. However, as the film progressed, I noticed an unusual restlessness among the lovers. There were no song and dance scenes and no meaty fights either. Rather, this black and white film centred around the sober theme of a happy marriage gone awry due to the impotence of the husband as a result of an accident and his subsequent imagining that his wife was committing adultery with his best friend. Soon after the intermission, when the relationship between husband and wife got progressively worse, there began a steady attrition of couples until the auditorium was half empty by the time the film ended. What was the reason?

I suggest that it was not merely the paucity of the most popular 'scenes of attraction' such as song and dance and fight sequences but the fact that this film dealt with impotence -- the absolute negation of virile masculinity. Impotence here disrupts the in-built patterns of pleasure and identification that impose masculinity as 'point of view' (cf. Mulvey 1989: 29).

Let me return to my earlier point about the multiplicity of gendered subject positions on offer in the cinema and connect it to Raymond William's formulation of hegemony. I would

like to suggest that though a multiplicity of subject positions are offered to the spectator, there are some positions that dominate over others. This domination may not just work across genders i.e., male over female, but also within genders. It is this kind of articulation that Connell (1987) defined as "hegemonic masculinity." Robert Hanke who explored this notion further has argued that hegemonic masculinity refers to the "ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that operates on the terrain of common sense and conventional morality that defines 'what it means to be a man,' thus securing the dominance of some men (and the subordination of women) within the sex/gender system" (1992: 190).

In addition, I would like to suggest that paralleling this articulation of hegemonic masculinity is an hegemonic femininity; its chief feature being that it is hierarchically subordinate to an hegemonic masculinity but in turn subordinates other subject positions of femininity and subordinate masculinity. These two formulations of sexual difference are constantly defined and re-defined *vis a vis* the other subordinated positions in the Sinhala formula film. In the following section, I shall explore the unfolding of hegemonic masculinity and femininity in some of the formula films I viewed in 1992.

Hegemonic Masculinity & Femininity

Sinhayangeth Sinhaya (Hero of all Heros) directed by Sunil Soma Pieris and *Malsara Doni* directed by Hemasiri Sellapperuma, both of which were shown at the '93 Sarasaviya Film Festival, were excellent examples of hegemonic masculinity on display. The hero in both these films (played by Sanath Gunetilleke) is young, handsome, good, confident, competent and fully in control. He usually operates alone and achieves results through violence and action epitomising what Connell describes as a sure

requirement for the sustenance of patriarchal power: "a hypermasculine ideal of toughness and dominance" (1987: 80). The heroine is his love interest who usually is the cause for this display of valourous action, and the final prize. She is young, innocent, beautiful and nubile and often falls prey to the "damsel in distress syndrome" (Pecora 1992: 70) which climaxes with her being rescued by the hero. As Mulvey has reminded us, "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle" (1975: 9).

In *Malsara Doni*, Tina (Geetha Kumarasinghe) who is a tough, sharp witted pickpocket who has survived many years in the very den of vice --the shanty, suddenly becomes helpless when she is kidnapped by the boss of her crime ring (who she has manipulated all this while) and is saved by the hero just before she is raped. In *Okkoma Kanapita*, these heroics are taken to a ridiculous extreme. The heroine (Sabitha Perera) and her baby have to choke in a smouldering hut for at least 15 minutes (while several other characters just stand around tearing their hair and looking helpless) until the hero (Sashi Wijendra) fights all the 'bad guys' and finally comes to her rescue. In *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, Mahesh Pieris (Sanath Gunetilleke) is the ultimate hero, rescuing a variety of 'damsels in distress.' His first conquest is a young mother who is about to walk into a bank that is being held up at gunpoint. The audience literally held their breath as they watched him fight off the robbers while trying to stop the baby's pram rolling all the way down the steps. His next conquests are two female university students who can't swim and fall into the swimming pool. Then it was the turn of his sister who was abducted by a rival gang. He manages to prevent her rape but has to go to jail for clubbing her would be rapist to death. Finally, he rescues the heroine from her kidnappers and later, the ecstatic couple decide to move to Trincomalee⁷ so that the hero can start life afresh. The heroine's wishes do

⁷ The choice of Trincomalee is rather ambiguous in the context of the war in the North-east, especially as Mahesh had exhibited a desire to join the army before he was unfairly framed by an unscrupulous policeman.

not count as of course, all she wants in life is to give up her job as a popular singer and be with her dream man. In *Malsara Doni*, it is once again the hero who controls the heroine's future. When Tina is offered the opportunity of becoming a filmstar; Janaka scoffs: "Mata thamai wada, eyata gedara" (employment for me, domesticity for her).

However, the heroine's rescue can often extend beyond the merely physical. In *Malsara Doni*, Tina is not only saved from her mafia boss but also from a life of moral degradation. Luckily for Janaka, Tina is not all 'bad.' Flashbacks of her "innocent youth" show her in a *lama sari* holding lotus flowers and dancing with her younger sister, and selling flowers at the village temple in order to support the family after her father's death. She is then tricked into coming to the big bad city and in her attempts to escape from a brothel, falls into the clutches of Akbar the thug who teaches her to become a pickpocket. Her greatest achievement is that she has managed to keep her virginity intact and she chides Janaka for thinking that she is not *Ahinsaka* (innocent). In *Okkoma Kanapita*, the heroine who is a domestic servant is not only rescued from a burning hut but also from a life of poverty and exploitation by her lover who is one of the heirs to the *walauwa* she works at.

In both *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya* and *Malsara Doni*, the heroine is a commodity of visual and erotic pleasure before she comes under the control of the hero. Rohini in *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya* is a popular singer who strides about the stage in a slinky black dress and high heels pleasuring the audience with her sexy figure and voice. Tina in *Malsara Doni* mesmerises her drunken mafia boss and cohorts with a flamboyant and sensuous dance. Their commodification comes full circle when they are 'exchanged' between the 'good' hero and the 'bad' guys after an extended fight sequence. The hero's discontinuation of the heroine's opportunities for 'public' spectacles then is understood as being quite natural' and 'right' for she should now only be accessible to her husband's 'private' gaze; she is his property.

In *Chandi Rajina* (The Rowdy Queen) directed by Somawansa Pieris, the eroticisation of Nalini (Sabitha Perera) as a sensuous dancer in a night club is also used to counter her other more ascendant persona in the film which is that of a skilled martial arts exponent who struts about in trousers, high heeled boots and a bandana, and is even tougher than her male 'assistants.' The reason for her masculinization is legitimised by the fact that her main mission in life is to avenge her parents' deaths. However, this is understood to be a temporary phase as she also has a macho policeman boyfriend who not surprisingly, first saw and fell in love with her as she provocatively danced around him at the night club. At the end of the film they are paired together suggesting the familial trajectory of their future.

The hegemonic masculinity of the male hero is also foiled by his friends who are 'good,' and his enemies who are 'bad.' In *Malsara Doni*, Janaka's two closest cohorts are comical ineffectual men. One of them, Liganaga, is a thin effeminate man who constantly wrings his hands and speaks in a high accented voice. He is a continuous source of mirth through his inability to pronounce Sinhala words which is the usual stereotype of Tamils in Sinhala films and theatre. These comic characters' failing attempts at fighting the 'bad' guys who set upon the hero or heroine accentuates the machismo and prowess of the male hero and often provide comic relief in these usually lengthy fight sequences.

The male hero also often has other male friends who either look up to him as a role model (*Malsara Doni*) or fight beside him but never quite match up to him. The best example of this latter friendship and male bonding was evident in *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*. Mahesh and Dhananja (Ranjan Ramanayake) become friends in the university and belong to the same male clique that spends most of their time ogling girls. However, Mahesh proves his prowess over the others at an early stage when he takes a Rs 500/- bet that he could get "one of these snobbish university beauties" to fall in love

with him. The fact that he is a swimming coach is an added advantage. His strategy is to evince interest in one pretty girl so that the girl he really wants to attract --Rohini, becomes so jealous that she will do anything in her power to make him love her even to the point of jumping into the pool in the hope that he will rescue her and making the other girl's life so difficult that she leaves the university. However, Mahesh's plans go somewhat awry when Rohini confronts him boasting about his methods of conquest at the party he has thrown for his friends with his winnings. In order to placate the now irate Rohini who refuses to speak to him again, he 'attempts' suicide by jumping from a building in the university. When Rohini who is now distraught rushes to his side all her anger forgotten, the spectator realises that this is once again a trick that has been hatched by Mahesh and his friends as he has been able to jump straight into their outstretched arms and is thus quite unscathed.

This male bonding at the expense of a woman is taken to an extreme when Mahesh later collects Rs 50,000 for rescuing Rohini from her abductors, rejects her, and seeks out Dhananja and his garage gang who had helped him in the rescue.⁸ He gifts the money to Dhananja so that he can "open a decent garage without having to put up shop under various trees." Be it Rs 500/- or 50,000/-, Rohini once again becomes the terrain for monetary transactions between these males.

Mahesh and Dhananja's friendship is strengthened through another kind of transaction as well. When Mahesh goes to prison for killing his sister's would be rapist, it is Dhananja who volunteers to look after his sister during that year and at the end of the film, the suggestion is that he will be marrying her. The friends will soon have a tie of kinship binding them as well.

⁸ It was probably this blatantly callous treatment of the heroine and the extensive fight sequences that led one female spectator to grumble that this was "a man's film" (overheard in the Ladies' Toilet).

The 'bad' guys encountered by the hero could be divided into two categories.

- (1) middle or upper class men who are propelled towards crime and corruption primarily through greed.
- (2) lower class men who are either hired by the former or whose 'evil' deeds have been thwarted by the 'good' hero.

The men in the first category are usually older to the hero -- often the father or uncle of his love interest (*Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, *Chandi Rajina*) who epitomise the degradation of the middle and upper classes. They usually drink (foreign alcohol) excessively, womanise and treat the women and servants at home very cruelly. In *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, Rohini's uncle lives off the wealth he accrues through her singing and locks her up in a room without food when she refuses to continue to do so. In *Chandi Rajina* it is the fathers of both Nalini's lover and Sarath's love who had killed their parents and continue to be involved in wide scale fraud. However, in the ensuing battles that occur between these men, great effort is made not to have them killed by the hero and would be son-in-law. In *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, Rohini's uncle is killed by a repenting henchman of his and in *Chandi Rajina*, just as Sarath gets ready to shoot his intended father-in-law, his sister Nalini jumps in front of him and does the job herself.

The lower class 'bad' guys or 'thugs,' invariably live in shanties, go around in gangs and drink excessively (usually kasippu) and womanise. Like the ubiquitous mercenary, they have no morals and are ready to do anything for money. The human side of these thugs are rarely seen as their main function is to facilitate the fight sequences which are essential to establish the machismo and 'goodness' of the hero who is always on the 'right' side. The grand finale of most formula films is the fight between the hero and the gang leader which provides the opportunity for the most

spectacular displays of fighting. For though it is a foregone conclusion that the hero will be the victor, it is also acknowledged that the gang leader is the most skilled fighter next to the hero. In *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, an interesting class dimension was also added to this battle. Mahesh Pieris who is very much a middle class kid turned 'bad' due to an injustice that had been done to him, is actually encouraged by the police chief (who had been an acquaintance of his parents) to bash Cheena the thug leader to pulp so that he can get his frustrations (*lodiya*) out completely. The irony here is that though it was a corrupt police officer who had framed Mahesh, it is the lower class thug who has no 'connections' who has to bear the brunt of Mahesh's frustrations.

The role of the police in many of these films is also very interesting. In *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya*, the hero encounters both 'good' and 'corrupt' senior police officers while in *Chandi Rajina*, the heroine's lover is an upstanding macho police inspector whose father unknown to him is a corrupt crook. However, it is the lower rungs of the police force -- the lowly sargeant on his beat, who often provides much comic entertainment. Though they never engage in fights with the hero, it is made blatantly obvious that they are in awe of him and recognise him as being more macho than them. This was best illustrated in a scene in *Sinhayangeth Sinhaya* where two police officers on the beat (played by comic actors Freddie Silva and Bandu Samarasinghe) are looking for a dangerous thug called Podda (the hero). When they actually meet Podda and realise that he matches the photograph they are carrying they become terrified and comically cringe and fawn over the hero until he coolly takes the photograph from them and defaces it by drawing on it. The two policemen are now completely reassured that this is not the man they are seeking and merrily go on their way.

Interestingly, in Roy de Silva's *Okkoma Kanapita* (Everything Inside Out), which was advertised as a "Comedy for the Entire Family," the hegemonic masculinity

of the hero was continuously paralleled and parodied through the portrayal of an infantilized and homosexualized masculinity. Freddie Silva who is a stereotyped comic actor, plays the role of the mentally retarded eldest son from a wealthy walauwe. His faithful man servant, Kanapita is also played by another stereotyped comic actor in the Sinhala cinema --Bandu Samarasinghe. It is Kanapita who washes and dresses Freddie and follows him around all day. The two men are constantly seen hugging and cuddling each other and on Freddie's wedding night Kanapita is found sleeping under his master's bed. When the bride's overtures get too steamy, the master seeks refuge with his manservant under the bed. Freddie has failed as a student in the nursery and he fails again in marriage. Though he desires a woman, he can never consummate his marriage due to his 'fear' and 'shyness.'

On the other hand, Freddie's younger brother (played by Sashi Wijendra) is a handsome, tall young man who returns home after a ten year stay in London. Within a few days, he manages to captivate and charm the beautiful domestic servant in their house and even makes her pregnant. He goes back to London but manages to return in the nick of time to beat up all the 'bad' guys, save his sweetheart and son from a burning hut and settle all the outstanding family problems.

The brothers' choice of women is also interesting. Freddie's wife (played by Sumana Amerasinghe) is a tough, independant young woman who has married him on the condition that she be allowed to control his wealth. She bears all the markers of a 'westernized' women: wears expensive dresses, make up, high heels and sun glasses and drives her own car. When the long lost second son arrives from London, it is only she who can converse in English with him. She constantly bosses her husband and his parents and is capable of even beating up some of the 'bad' guys. However, she is a failure as a woman as the only man who would marry her is an imbecile who cannot impregnate her. In one of the song and dance sequences, this 'retarded' couple

is shown getting vicarious pleasure by holding the younger brother's baby.

In contrast, the younger son's sweetheart (played by Sabitha Perera) is a beautiful nubile young woman who is hotly pursued by many men. She is innocent, loving, obedient and always decorously dressed in *redde* and *hatte* or *osariya*. She is also the perennial victim and 'damsel in distress.' As a domestic servant, she is at the beck and call of everyone at the *walauwe* including the older servants, one of whom sexually harasses her. She falls in love with the second son of the *walauwe* who impregnates her and then has to rush back to London leaving her to bear the brunt of her employers' fury. She and her baby are kidnapped and locked up in a hut which is later set on fire. However, her fertility and faith in her master is rewarded when he comes to her rescue like a 'real' man.

All the formula films I have discussed here have focused on heterosexual love exemplified through the youthful passions and posturings of the hero and heroine. Laleen Jayamanne has described this sub-genre as the 'Girl-Meets-Boy Formula' where the plot is structured around boy-meets-girl -- conflicts -- resolution of conflicts (1992a: 58).⁹ The Sinhala formula film is not only formulaic in its plot structure and combination of 'attractions' but also in how it codifies the bodies of its actors and actresses. Mervyn Jayatunga always plays the role of a 'bad' guy while actors such as Freddie Silva and Bandu Samarasinghe are perennial comic figures. Sabitha Perera has become the quintessential nubile heroine¹⁰ while Sanath Gunetilleke and Jeevan Kumaranatunga (nephew of the now legendary filmstar Vijaya Kumaranatunga) battle it

⁹ The other sub-genre she describes as the 'Formula of Marital Life': married life -- conflicts -- resolution of conflicts, seems to have been absent here.

¹⁰ She however, continues to face competition from the somewhat aging stars like Malini Fonseka and Geetha Kumarasinghe and younger, up and coming actresses such as Sangeetha Weeraratne, Dilhani Ekanayake and Dilani Abeywardene.

out for the role of the ultimate macho hero. This rivalry now seems to extend beyond the silver screen as Sanath Gunetilleke appears as one of the UNP candidates for the Western Province (Kotte) and Jeevan Kumaranatunge appears as one of the Peoples' Alliance candidates for the Western Province (Kelaniya) in the forthcoming Provincial Council elections.

Counter-hegemonic Masculinities and Femininities

Raymond Williams has pointed out that hegemony not only has to be consistently renewed and defended but that it is also continually resisted and altered (1977: 112). The renewal and reiteration of hegemonic masculinity and femininity was clearly visible in the Sinhala formula films I discussed above. Unfortunately, they did not promise anything further and I had to look to the fifth circuit films to discover any creative re-working or challenge to this hegemony. Two such films that deviated from the formula film model were *Sisila Gini Ganie* (The Cold Catches Fire) and *Kula Geya* (The Family House). The former incidentally, won the OCIC¹¹ award for the best film of 1992 while the latter won the Sarasaviya award for the best film of 1992. Interestingly, both films dealt with how men get corrupted albeit in an extremely clichetic fashion. In *Sisila Gini Ganie*, Harris Makalande (Sanath Gunetilleke) the handsome and amiable lawyer from a 'respectable' Kandyan Sinhala family gets corrupted when he joins politics. In *Kula Geya*, Mervyn an honest, hardworking *papadam* salesman is lured by the grasping, luxurious world of business. However, unlike the macho and infallible heroes of the formula films, both these men are shown to be not only strong and dominant but

¹¹ This Catholic institution has contributed greatly to train competent and sensitive film personnel and to encourage the propagation of the Sinhala art film in Sri Lanka. An award from this organisation is the highest honour a film could receive in Sri Lanka.

susceptible to many weaknesses and shortcomings as well. The pursuance of power and wealth leads both men to become extremely selfish and tyrannical and to forsake their families and good morals. However, the moral degeneration of these two men is very problematically exemplified through their extra-marital relationships and their respective mistresses are posited as erotic signifiers of their 'fall.'

In *Sisila Gini Ganie*, Annette (Sabitha Perera) is a 'half breed' (part Sinhala, part Burghur) Christian woman who until she falls in love with Harris, ridicules marriage and its encumbent imprisoning familial ties and merrily flits from one relationship to another. While we are informed that the politician's name is Harris Makalande from the inception, his mistress Annette is rarely mentioned by name.¹² Rather, she is primarily defined in terms of her (sexual) practices and attire. When Harris first sees her on the dance floor and inquires who she is, his friend smirkingly replies "Oh, she will grab onto anyone who will dance with her...everybody around here knows her..." As the plot thickens, she becomes known as the 'woman in the white dress.'¹³

This sexually loose half breed's 'other' is Harris's, long suffering wife Kumari, who like him is from a well established Kandyan Sinhala family. While Kumari is always impeccably groomed in rich Kandyan sarees or a decorous housecoat, Harris's mistress only wears dresses and in one scene, just a sheet. Kumari is also the perfect wife and mother while the mistress becomes too demanding of Harris's

¹² Annette herself draws our attention to this after she has sex with Harris for the first time: "What sort of woman must you take me for, you don't even know my name..."

¹³ Annette appears mainly in white dresses in this film which is a disruptive signifier in her characterization of a 'loose' woman. I am grateful to Pradeep Jeganathan for suggesting that this colour coding may be an attempt to signify her innocence in the context of the crime that is committed in the film rather than her moral/sexual innocence or purity.

time and though she now longs to get married to him and have his babies she fails miserably in this task. While Harris sets his mistress up in a beautiful house and garden in which she happily plays the devoted housewife -- decorating, cooking, gardening and serving tea, she lacks the final binding link to Harris which is the bearing of a child. We are treated to a rather extended shot of Annette lovingly hanging a painting of a mother and child in her sitting room and various scenes of her vain attempts to befriend Harris's son.

In all fairness to Sanath Gunatilake the scriptwriter and producer of this film, the characterization of the half breed *femme fatale* is done quite sympathetically. Harris's mistress has much more spirit and personality than his wife. While Kumari rather despairingly and passively accepts the fact that Harris has a mistress, Annette refuses to be sequestered in Harris's beautiful house for days on end without seeing him in order that his political campaign can continue smoothly. When a furious Harris hits her for 'abducting' his son she hits back and fells him to the ground.

However, once in police custody she becomes the victim of various forms of abuse. Her private diary is 'edited' and used to the advantage of her previous lover, the Police Inspector. The media in turn uses her as the pivot of a massive sex scandal. One of the most insightful moments of the film for me was the conversation between a journalist and his newspaper editor, towards the beginning of the film. The journalist is having a hard time collecting 'facts' about the disappearance of Harris's son until he begins to realise that a woman is involved in this case. When he reports this suspicion to his editor, the immediate reaction is "excellent, this will add to the mystery...let us headline the story 'beautiful woman...' at which point the journalist interjects that he has no details of the woman and is not sure whether she is beautiful or not. This leads the editor to launch into a very perceptive exposition on how people's curiosity is better

captured by a reference to a **beautiful** woman irrespective of the fact of how she actually looks.

Though some critics of *Sisila Gini Ganie* have described it as a nihilistic film which ends with the question "What is the truth?" I felt that there was a calculated attempt to establish the innocence of Harris's mistress¹⁴ and thus a certain 'truth,' for the spectator, despite the fact that the accused may not receive a similar judgement from the law or the media in the context of the film. However, I was disappointed that the only way the spectator's sympathy for this spirited and passionate woman was enlisted was by reducing her to that of a victim of patriarchy. From a carefree woman who cogently criticizes the patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family, she is reduced to being a frustrated housewife who longs for the gilded cage that she had evaded for so long. When confronted by the highly fanciful deductions of the police inspector she can only weep and call upon God as her witness.¹⁵

The establishment of 'truth' was also the connecting thread that tightly bound *Kula Geya* together. The pseudo detectives here are a newly wed couple on their honeymoon who seek to unravel the truth behind the breakup of the bride's parent's marriage. The daughter (Vasanthi Chaturani), who had all this while blamed her mother for leaving her suddenly begins to realise that there is another, more seamy side to this story which is related through flashbacks. This 'seamy' side of the story is exemplified by Ramya (Veena Jayakody) who first appears as Mervyn's best friend's mistress. She is an attractive and suave businesswoman who bears many markers of 'westernization': she lives alone with a female servant, speaks mainly in

¹⁴ All the flashbacks the spectator was privy to were the mistress', version of the events, the conclusive one being the episode of the children's picnic near World's End in the fast encroaching mist.

¹⁵ Much of this analysis has been excerpted from a previous article, see de Alwis 1992.

English, drinks alcohol and comfortably converses with a roomfull of males. Her most memorable lines in this film are: "Some women love chocolate, I love men." Ramya helps Mervyn to get a much needed loan and becomes a partner in his new firm. She soon abandons Suri (Mervyn's best friend) and becomes Mervyn's mistress.

Mervyn until then, had been a happily married man with a beautiful wife and two lovely young daughters. His devoted wife Edna is played by Sriyani Amerasena --"her clean features and womanly demeanor fitting her role" (*Sunday Island* 12/6/92). More comfortable in a humble cottage, Edna becomes more and more a prisoner in the fancy houses Mervyn builds around her but never has time to share with her. Unlike her ambitious social climber husband, she seeks "nothing but family unity, warmth and love which cannot be bought with money" (*Sunday Observer* 9/6/92). Yet, this is not to be for Mervyn's mistress has begun to encroach upon the family nest first through numerous phone calls that summon Mervyn to her house as soon as he gets home from work and later, by ordering changes in the new house that is being built by Mervyn and Edna. Edna's tolerance snaps when she sees Mervyn in bed with his mistress. She writes a cryptic note that she is "sacrificing the present for the future" and abandons her family and home. She finds comfort in the arms of her cousin (Tony Ranasinghe) who in contrast to Mervyn is a simple, non-smoking, highly principled school teacher who is always clad in a spotless white national.

Kula Geya has been heralded by many critics as being an example to all womankind. The reason for such enthusiastic praise stems from the fact that this film sympathetically and sensitively highlights the plight of a woman whose husband is having an extra marital affair. Unlike many other films that have dealt with this theme by valorising the long suffering wife who suffers in silence, *Kula Geya* shows that she has another option; she can leave her family and home and still find some happiness for herself. In this sense, it is an extremely important and progressive film and

marks a significant advance in Sinhala cinema. Such sympathetic representations of women is central to *Kula Geya* director H.D. Premaratna's work observes Laleen Jayamanne and "brings in a new realism in its refusal to melodramatically punish the woman who breaks the norms of sexual conduct thought proper to women" (1992c: 29). This film is also a "dream fulfillment" of Sriyani Amerasena who had for a long time wanted to produce a film that women could relate to and derive strength from (*Sunday Observer* 9/6/92, *Sarasaviya* 11/26/92).

Many critics of *Kula Geya* also praised it for "avoiding pitfalls such as painting people stark white or black, directing our sympathy in toto to the wife or making the man the villain of the piece" (*Sunday Island* 12/6/92). Yet, they conveniently ignored one character that remained black from beginning to end --Ramya, the "sorceress" (*Island* 12/22/92), the "man devouring...hedonist woman" (ibid), the "prostitute who craves the adulation of men" (*Sarasaviya* 11/26/92). Sriyani Amerasena, who conceived this story also totally denies the culpability of Mervyn by pointing to Ramya as the sole villain who has no compunctions about hurting a fellow woman in order to satisfy her hitherto unfulfilled desires: "Edna's life is sacrificed in order to make Ramya happy. There are many women like her in our society. They are the cause of innumerable broken families today" (quoted in *Sarasaviya* 11/26/92). It is unfortunate that in order to highlight the plight of one woman, the characterization of another should be treated so insensitively and stereotypically. In both *Sisila Gini Ganie* and *Kula Geya*, the urban 'westernized' woman remains the site of loose morality and is thus unable to transcend this good woman/bad woman dichotomy that is so inherent in the Sinhala cinema.

Two films that had women as the chief protagonists and provided counter-hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity were *Umayangana* (Subterranean Queen) directed by Ananda Fonseka and *Roomathiyay Neethiyay*

(*Beauty and the Law*) directed by Mu Arukgoda. *Umayangana* one of the few existing Sinhala films that deals with the supernatural centres around the greed for property. Elizabeth (Malini Fonseka) is murdered by her three uncles so that they can become heirs to her father's estate. Her teenaged daughter Theja (played by Malini's sister Damayanthi Fonseka) witnesses this brutal murder but is struck dumb from shock. She becomes possessed by her mother's spirit which relentlessly drives her to take revenge on the perpetrators of the crime. The contrast between this passive, silent and almost catatonic daughter and the sorrowful but violently powerful mother who works through her set out an interesting tension. The film's message was clear as even amateur film critic Carlo Fonseka noted: "Elizabeth is no feminist, but she is seen in practice to be working on the premise that in a fiercely patriarchal society, women will win their rights only if they are strong enough to fight for them" (*Sunday Island* 8/30/92).

Almost all Theja/Elizabeth's encounters are with men. What especially delighted the women who watched this film with me was how Theja/Elizabeth dealt with sexual harassment in two scenes. The first occurs when she escapes from the asylum and hitches a ride on a container truck. A few minutes into the trip, the truck driver strokes the young girl's thighs and attempts to move his fingers under her dress only to find his fingers held in a vice like grip and her beautiful face transformed into an old woman's (Elizabeth's). He is so horrified that he crashes the truck.

After the crash, Theja/Elizabeth 'happens' to walk into a farm which is being run by two male studs, one of whom is her uncle/cousin (Sriyantha Mendis). The two young men starved of female company are delighted to have such a beautiful young girl visit them. Left alone with her uncle/cousin who does not know her, Theja/Elizabeth sits on his bed and sensuously raises her dress up her thighs paralleling the gesture of the sexy young woman in the painting above his bed. The suggestion that the woman of his fantasies is now

physically here is too much for this stud who hastily gulps down an entire glass of water much to the merriment of the audience. The young girl he had been ogling all this while with the thought of imprisoning her for his enjoyment (despite his more decent friend's demurs), suddenly turns the tables on him and plays with him in turn. When he returns in the night to extract what seemed to have been promised that morning, Theja/Elizabeth claws his face tearing out an eye. Amidst the gasps of horror at the sight of his gory face, my friend turned to me and sighed: "I wish we could all have an Elizabeth to protect us from such molesters."

Another refreshing change from the formula films was the more balanced treatment of the 'bad' guys in this film. The three uncles, the nephew and his friend all had distinct personalities which were however, somewhat stereotyped in order to make comic. The systematic humbling and ridicule these strong, macho men face at the hands of a mere wisp of a girl was an interesting disrupter of hegemonic masculinity. The only 'real' man in this film was Elizabeth's father (Joe Abeywickrema) who is portrayed as a dignified and aging patriarch who relents his earlier harsh action of chasing his only daughter out of his house and re-instates her as his rightful heir after her husband's death only to have her brutally murdered. His subsequent gentle nurturing of his now mute granddaughter was a moving performance.¹⁶

Though *Roomathiyay Neethiyay* was not a Fifth Circuit film or even shown at the Sarasaviya Film Festival, I thought it was the most progressive film that was screened in 1992. The film's chief protagonist is played by veteran actress Malini Fonseka. Her lifestyle is interestingly quite independent and 'westernized' but the film does not censure her for this: she lives alone with her younger sister and a manservant, wears shorts, drinks orange juice and uses an exercise bicycle. With a devoted boyfriend --Ashok (played

¹⁶ Incidentally, Joe Abeywickrema won the Sarasaviya Award for Best Actor for this portrayal.

by Sanath Gunetilleke) whom she plans to marry soon, and a flood of modelling jobs coming her way after her spectacular win in a beauty pageant, her life seems to be pretty secure except for one jarring note --she has acquired another admirer (played by Jeevan Kumaranatunga). Unlike Ashok, this man is wealthy, bold and flashy. He throws an extravagant party for her and showers her with expensive gifts all of which are accepted by her with a youthful naivete. However, her admirer becomes incensed when he realizes that she is quite unimpressed by his courtship and truly loves her boyfriend. He cruelly rapes her in her own bedroom and ruins her life forever.

However, Malini is determined to take her rapist to court as she "owes it to the other women in this country." She is ably defended by a tough female lawyer (played by Sumana Amerasinghe) who declares in court that she too can feel the anguish of a raped woman. Though Malini's boyfriend along with his parents, worries about the undue publicity she will have to face, he respects her determination to fight her rapist and is supportive. However, the defense cleverly manipulates the facts and Jeevan is acquitted. Photographs of a beaming Malini with Jeevan are put forward to establish their 'intimacy.' Another key exhibit of the defense is a painting of a scantily clad, shackled woman that hung over Malini's bed. Jeevan uses this painting to expound on the sexuality of women insisting that Malini too had wanted to be shackled and forcefully taken by him because that's how a woman gets optimum pleasure. While he celebrates his acquittal with a bottle of scotch and a belly dancer, Malini and her sister leave town. She refuses to marry Ashok saying she cannot smile anymore.

Two years later, Malini's sister on her first day of employment as a personal secretary is raped by her boss who turns out to be her elder sister's rapist --Jeevan. When Malini hears this, she confronts Jeevan at his office and shoots him. At his murder trial she points out that the reason she took the law into her own hands was because justice was not done

to her two years ago. She is acquitted of manslaughter and the presiding judge gives up his robes to register his shame at the ineffectuality of the system of justice.

This film marked an important advance from most other Sinhala films for many reasons.

- 1) No other Sinhala film has made the rape of a woman the central focus of its plot
- 2) Few Sinhala films have provided this much agency to a woman. Like Theja/Elizabeth in *Umayangana*, Malini "makes things happen in the sense of acting (doing) rather than simply suffering" (Jayamanne 1992a: 75). She has the "will to resist and change existing forms of terror and oppression" (ibid).
 - (i) Except for a brief lapse into helplessness right after she is raped, Malini is the one who makes all the decisions for herself and her sister. It is she who decides to go to court against the wishes of her fiancé and future in-laws; she refuses to marry Ashok and moves to Colombo without informing him.
 - (ii) Malini does not resort to becoming a female bandit and tracking her rapist down (which is the usual course of action taken by avenging females in formula films) but rather, seeks legitimate legal recourse. (iii) In court, she eloquently speaks for herself and takes counsel from a female lawyer
 - (iv) She is not interested in taking revenge which is the usual and only legitimizing sentiment that could have propelled a female to action in a formula film eg., *Chandi Rajina*.
 - (v) Her main reason for exposing herself to derision and sexual slander by the defence is to stop her rapist from hurting other women.
- 3) Very few Sinhala films have attempted a critique of the judicial system especially going to the extreme of having a judge give up his robes.

Unfortunately, the progressive message of the film was marred by sloppy direction and editing. In addition, there were quite a few instances where the director had attempted to entice the audience by objectifying the female body in a very crude fashion. For example, the film begins with a beauty contest that featured entrants from the nine provinces in Sri Lanka. The spectator was treated to a tantalising array of women modelling a variety of clothing styles such as maxi, mini, midi, Indian sari and the *osariya*. The results of the contest were indeed revealing in its feeble attempt at ethnic harmony: the first runner up from the Eastern Province was dressed 'Muslim style' with the sari draped over her head, the runner up from the Northern Province was dressed 'Tamil style' with her waist chain, *pottu* etc., and of course the winner was from the Central Province decorously dressed in the 'Kandyan Sinhala style' of the *osariya*. The winner of this contest never wears the *osariya* again during the rest of the film, but the point was driven home that this is the symbol of the pure and noble Sinhala woman.

Though the treatment of both rapes were somewhat sensitively managed, the rape scene that was enacted in silhouette along with the title credits at the beginning was problematic. It didn't really depict what actually occurs in the film but rather, seemed to cater to the voyeuristic pleasure of the 'masculinized' audience with an erotic segment of a woman being disrobed of her saree.

Conclusion

In the previous sections, I discussed the hegemony of a particular notion of masculinity and femininity prevalent in Sinhala formula films and the possibilities of subverting this hegemony through more creative non-formula films. I also suggested that the reason Sinhala film audiences continue to

remain 'hooked' on the more clichéd formula films is because they epitomise the articulation of heterosexual desire which forms the bedrock of patriarchal social relations. This gendered articulation refers to the process of "establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). In other words, it is in and through the very practices of media consumption --and the positionings and identifications they solicit-- that gender identities are recursively shaped, while those practices themselves in turn undergo a process of gendering along the way (cf. Ang and Hermes 1991: 318). Laclau and Mouffe also remind us that this articulation is a dynamic process which is historically contextual and has no ultimate fixed meaning (1985: 105).

The notion that articulation is a two way process is crucial for it points us to view spectatorship in a new and broader light and provides us with a theoretical frame that can account for the ways in which spectators may consciously resist as well as modify dominant cinematic address. Laleen Jayamanne's anecdote of how a group of rural women 'read' Malini Fonseka's film *Sthree* (woman) is very revealing in this context. This film which was about the trials and tribulations of an old woman and her bull was "read as an allegory of our recent violent history" (1992c: 26). The vengeful killing of the cattle thief by the old woman was perceived "as an allegory of a mother's fierce and absolutely justifiable anger at the disappearance and brutal murder of her bull/son" (ibid). Janice Radway was one of the first feminists to recognize the importance of such nuanced readings of audiences. In her now well known study *Reading the Romance*, she claims that "the analytic focus must shift from the text itself, taken in isolation, to the complex social event of reading...in the context of...ordinary life" (1984: 8). 'Reading' is itself "an active, though not free, process of construction of meanings and pleasures, a 'negotiation' between texts and readers whose outcome cannot be dictated by the text" (Ang and Hermes 1991: 310). This line of argument surely suggests the increasing relevance of ethnography in the study of media consumption.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment occurs every day : on the streets, in public vehicles, in schools and in the work place. Tacitly, it has been acceptable for men to sexually harass and taboo for women to confront it, even on a personal level. In the region (Asia-Pacific) sexual harassment is perpetrated by the existence of free trade zones, drug abuse, tourism and prostitution.

What is Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, most broadly defined, refers to the unwanted affliction of remarks, requirements, invitation, gesture or other verbal or physical behaviour which is sexual in nature or has sexual undertones. Such harassment is a manifestation of relationship of unequal power distribution: between men and women, in the general case, and between employers and employees in specific cases.

There is a spectrum of behaviour which is defined as sexual harassment. The mild and common form of sexual harassment is the wolf & whistle which classifies the woman as sex object. Other common forms are pinching, touching also instances in the workplace where the employer makes an indecent proposition backed by the threat of losing a job or position and forced sexual relations.

Violence Against Women: Nature & Extent*

Bela Nabi

Violence against women is a pervasive and prevalent problem all over the world irrespective of developing and developed countries. But the forms of violence vary from country to country on the basis of traditions and culture.

In the context of South Asian countries violence against women has become matters of grave concern of women groups. Since the last decade women's movement in Bangladesh has been able to highlight the gender violence as an issue because violence is alarmingly high. It exists among all strata in society. By cultural tradition, norms and religious beliefs, women possess lower status compared to men. The socio economic structure of the country is also responsible for the subordinate status and lower social values.

Causes of gender violence can be categorized as:

1. Polygamy
2. Early marriage
3. Wanton divorce
4. Dowry
5. Rape
6. Forced prostitution
7. Trafficking

* Paper presented at the Regional workshop on South Asian platform of Action held at Koitta, Bangladesh.

A table given below shows the various types of violence committed in this country during 1993 which were being reported in the news media.

Types of violence	Nos.
Murder	270
Dowry	240
Kidnapping	167
Rape	124
Family violence	103
Trafficking in women and children	88
Acid throwing	85
Victim of violence for request to marriage proposal	59
Husbands illicit relationship	55
Second marriage	24
Drunkard husband	8
Total	1223

Source: Daily Newspaper of January to December 1993, Sangbad, Ittefaq, Banglar Bani, Lal Shabuz, Banglabazar, Sangram, Khobar, Dainik Bangla and Observer.

However, it is to be mentioned that the exact figure of violence against women are not available. Therefore, violence against women only denied the women's basic rights but it is also violations of basic a human rights. In the context of Bangladesh, following are the various categories of violence:

1. Domestic violence
2. Social violence
3. Violence in workplace
4. Trafficking and forced prostitution
5. Violence under fundamentalism
6. Political violence

Domestic Violence

Family is the major site of violence. The discriminating treatment in the family towards the girl child starts from the very birth and remain through the different phases of life. In the aspects of education, health, nutrition, food intake, and recreation, the female child is the victim of utter discrimination and deprivation. A female is so vulnerable that even before birth, the female foetus is terminated without any hesitation. It is nothing but a manifestation of degradation towards women. Women are treated as burden not as human being.

Demands and harassment of dowry by husband and his kin are most unfortunate events in our country. It follows harassment, physical torture, suicide and even murder. This type of crime is perpetuated both in urban and rural areas.

Polygamy, early marriage and wanton divorce also cause immeasurable miseries to women. Wife beating is a common phenomenon and it is considered as husband's right. The incidence of incest and sexual abuse in the family also exist in our country.

Social Violence:

Rape, group rape, child sex abuse, abduction, acid throwing out of vengeance, forced sexual relation with domestic maid are identified as social violence. Sometimes family squabbles often render brutality to young girls and wives. Often rape follows murder. Refusal of marriage age also causes violence.

Violence in Workplace

Since women's decade, the number of working women has increased. Workplaces can be classified into two groups:

Government sector and Non-Government sector. For the government service, 15 per cent quota for women has been reserved. With growth of industry the number of women labour force has automatically increased. In many industries a good number of women work, particularly in the garment industries, the rural women breaking the social barriers are working for survival. At present, there are about ten million women who are working in the garments factories.

In the workplace, we can categorize violence into two types. One type of violence includes sexual abuse, molestation, physical violence, blackmailing, deprivation, threat of loosing job, etc. The other one includes violation of the covenants of Universal Human Rights Declaration, such as negative attitudes towards ILO Convention, low wage, denial of proper wage for extra labour and denial of maternity leave with payment, and other fringe benefits. Even social security is not guaranteed.

Garment worker Nilufar, daughter of Abdus Satters was deserted by husband and she has a son. While coming back from workplace in the late night, she was caught by police on 20th October 1993. Suspecting her a floating prostitute, she was produced to Thana Officer and was sent to vagabond centre for rehabilitation. The police did not believe her statement. In the meantime, her other colleagues informed her father who could not make any headway to rescue her.

Nilufar's father reported this to the legal aid cell of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and gave a prayer to rescue her on 24 September 1993. After processing the long procedure of the Social Welfare Department Nilufar, was released from the vagabond centre on 3 June 1994.

Another garment worker named Najma of Sabujbag Thana was harassed. With recommendation of local member of Parliament she got this job. Her bosses used to tease her and finally proposed for sexual relation which she declined boldly. However, she was ultimately discharged with the charges of

incompetence. But again she procured the same under the pressure of recommendation. But she was ill-treated in the factory. While going home, she was manhandled in the street. When she complained this incident of misdeed to the administrator, she was sacked again.

In this regard, Mahila Parishad and Ain-o-Shalish Kendra jointly pursued this incident and filed a case in the Sabujbag Thana. Afterwards, the accused persons agreed to settle the matter through mediation.

Trafficking and Forced Prostitution

Perennial poverty forces the rural women to leave house and tradition and advanced towards towns and cities to procure job for survival. The traffickers catch hold of these unfortunate women and forced them into prostitution, bonded - labour, cheap - labour, slavery and servitude in the guise of marriage. Some of them are transported to India, Pakistan and Middle East for immoral purpose.

Trafficking women and young girls has increase in Bangladesh alarmingly in the last two decades. It is very difficult to get the actual number of prostitutes but according to police estimate about 30,000 in the capital city and about 15,000 in Narayanganj. As of 1985 reports 800 minor prostitutes were trapped in Tanbazar brothel (Narayanganj) alone.

There are different categories of prostitution such as: brothel prostitutes, floating prostitutes, hotel prostitutes rental houses are used for prostitution.

The following are identified as the causes for prostitution

1. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of job opportunities;
2. National calamities and landlessness;
3. Kidnapped and raped girls;

4. children born and brought up in the brothels; and
5. Husband's bonding the wife for his own fortune.

Firoza of Motherganj was deserted by husband and used to live with the borther's family. After the bitter quarrels with brother's wife, she left home and came to Dhaka alone. She was trapped by the traffickers and sold to Tanbazar brothel. One of her kind hearted customers rescued her with the help of women's organization called the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. He was a foreigner and married Firoza. This incident occurred in 1990.

In the year 1992, police rounded a brothel of Dhaka and rescued 32 minor girls sent to jail for safe custody. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad gave a prayer to the court to be the custodian of these 32 girls and the court granted the prayer. All of them were interviewed. It was found that none of them accepted this profession willingly rather it was forced upon them. Most of them came to Dhaka for getting a job and were lost.

One of them came to Dhaka for a visit. It shows that due deprivation, maltreatment in the family these minor girls had left home in search of better life. The interesting part of this incident is that none of them expressed their willingness to go back home. The reasons given are:

1. Society will not accept them.
2. What they earn is enough for them.
3. Feel secure in the bonded area.
4. Within limits they can exercise their independent will.

source: Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Violence under Fundamentalism:

Religious leaders called Imam enjoyed for ages a very

dominant status in all social and family affairs particularly in the rural areas. The Imams and Mullahs are mostly illiterate and do not have proper education to interpret religious creeds. As a result, misinterpretation of religious resulted in many anti women sentiments, being expressed. Recently there are several incidents where the judgement from the Imam are found to be brutal and reminds us of the medieval age brutality.

A poor man's daughter, Nurjahan in the remote village of Moulavi Bazar, Sylhet was deserted by husband several years ago. The local Imam expressed his desire to marry her. But she refused to marry him and rather she married one Motaleb. This outraged the Imam and out of vengeance arranged a 'Shalish' (Mediation Council) with the local chiefs and gave decision that this marriage is improper and corrupt. They passed panel sentence for Nurjahan only. Her husband and parents were ordered to dig waist-deep hole to put Nurjahan there. Afterwards she was pelted by 101 pieces of stone by her husband and parents in the presence of villagers. This awful action humiliated Nurjahan and instigated her to commit suicide.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad persuaded this case and at the end, culprits were sentenced to seven rigorous imprisonment years with fine.

Similarly a teenage Firoza of Satkhira was charged that she has fallen love with a non-Muslim boy. She had to suffer 101 broom strokes and afterwards committed suicide. Legal procedures is in the process.

Sapnaha, a teenage girl of Kasba, Bramhanbaria was raped and fatwa issued penal sentence with 101 strokes. Because of her pregnancy, the sentence was not carried out and they waited until delivery. Sapnaha was rescued by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and given shelter to its destitute home. The legal procedure is in process.

A teenage daughter of poor landless labourer was raped on 24 September 1994 and Shalish was held on 25 October 1994 headed by the Imam of the local mosque. She was sentenced with 80 strokes. The poor Hazera was seriously injured. Ain-o-Shalish Kendra and Human Rights Organization with ADAB went for spot visit. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad sent a deputation to the relevant higher authority. A case has been started under the pressure of women's groups.

Regarding state violence, we have the lacunae of the existing laws which fails to protect women's rights and dignity. Violence for political purposes, custodial rape, communal violence and militarism, have further worsened the law and order situation in the country.

In the last Session of the Parliament, strong demand from the members was raised to resist and take legal action against the unjust and illegal behaviour of the religious fanatics.

Recommendations

1. All women's organizations and NGOs under WID programmes are to be united in one platform to combat gender violence.
2. To raise the consciousness of the women of all classes about their social and legal rights.
3. Public education programmes are to be introduced to build up public perception to support women's issue.
4. To develop pro-women attitudes, all media are to be utilized.
5. The UN Convention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women should be fully ratified withdrawing the reservation. At the same time, necessary steps

should be taken for the proper implementation of the Convention.

6. To amend the existing laws which fail to protect basic human rights of women.
7. Necessary measures are to be taken to implement The Child Marriage Restraint Ordinance, 1985.
8. Polygamy is to be prohibited.
9. Uniform Family Code irrespective of religion, caste and class should be enacted.
10. Special Ordinance is to be enacted so that Village Shalish (Arbitration) follow the existing laws of the country.
11. To give verdict in the name of religious fatwa that causes violence against women is to be prohibited. In case of violation stringent measures supported by legislation are to be taken.
12. Independent Family Courts should be set up and dismissals of cases under Family Court should be done within the shortest possible time.
13. To introduce Para-legal training at government levels.
14. Law enforcing Agencies should be imparted special training to deal with gender violence.
15. Special police force including women police official is to be recruited in order to deal with cases of gender violence.
16. Protection of the battered women are to be guaranteed.

17. International Tribunal is to be set up to deal with sensational cases of gender violence.

Not a Creature

Did you hear the cry
Of the lonely woman
Trapped within duties, service and sacrifice
Searching for her soul
Lying within layers of walls

Did you feel the pain of the woman
Bruised and battered by night
As she stretched out her body
To another day of woe and misery

Did you see the woman
With that look in her eye
That expressed the desperate plight
She lay within

Did you stop by to think, to admire
That SHE - "A Woman"
Had endured, had persevered
To show the world
That she too, was "a created being".

Sakunthala Muthaiah

Patriarchy in a Language

Eva Ranaweera

This paper attempts to decipher the concept of patriarchy, its power base and its manner of operationalisation through the various structures in the society. It also argues that the legitimisation it seeks, through the language leads to state oppression as well. The role played by language however, is the thrust of the deciphering exercise.

According to the Chambers Dictionary, Patriarchy is governing or ruling by paternal right; and patriarch is one of the early heads of families from Adam downwards to Abraham, Jacob and his sons. Continuing in the same context of religion, Chambers says patriarch is a bishop ranking above primates and metropolitans, The heads of certain Eastern Churches, a father or founder, leader of a flock. (Patriarchs - patria, family - pater, the father, arche rule)

Oxford dictionary defines "patriarchy as a system, society, or Government, rule by man and with descent through the male line.

I use both these meanings of patriarchy in combination.

These meanings are based on the acceptance of a rule by patriarchy and it is logical to state woman as opposed to man, the ruler is ruled by man through the system of patriarchy. Thus each patriarch, each father or potential father is a ruler or an anticipated ruler and each woman is a subject of the ruler.

We believe that any system that is dependant on subjugation does not work for the benefit of the subjugated. No form of domination is healthy or desirable. Based on this it is logical to consider that patriarchy exists for the benefit of the patriarch and his male descendants.

A patriarch's power lies in his supportive system for domination, in the form of its ideology and its implementation through the family, the religion, literature, social and cultural heritage, behaviour patterns, the language etc. There are many more forms in the supportive system but I limit myself to these, leaving out the huge patriarchal system of economy, its monopoly and its administrative infrastructures. Over the years, this system has been accepted by the majority female who in turn sees to the strict adherence and propagation, just as the majority in a colonised country accept and propagate the ideology and views beneficial to the colonial power. But, unlike in a colony the subjugated woman is far from being able to form a common front or for considering ways and means of releasing herself from the fetters of patriarchy as she is imprisoned in the patriarchal family unit in violation from each other, physically and ideologically. When she meets other imprisoned members she is indoctrinated to carry out her discussions and problems within the framework of the ideology of patriarchy and the family unit, because she knows only that and is unable to visualise another state outside it.

In the examination of various forms of implementation and propagation of patriarchy, a powerful system carries out its subjugation and humiliation of the woman. at times so subtly and deceptively that the victim is truly unaware of it and considers herself a free person in a `democratic' society.

Patriarchy is the right of the patriarch to rule because, he has inherited it by descent. It is a divine right similar to the divine right of Kings. It is not to be questioned, and it is to be accepted. From this arises the assumption that the woman is lost without the protective base of patriarchy.

She carries the brand mark of the family in the form of the surname, which is changed after marriage when she enters the home of another patriarchal family. Note the male child's surname does not change after marriage. His descendants will carry his surname which he inherited from his father. Under the Sri Lankan custom the majority of females did not/ do not change their surnames at marriage and continued/continues to use the surname of the father.

The patriarchal family unit is supposed to provide protection to the inmates of the house. This protection wards off threats of violation to the subjects within. Nevertheless, it is often revealed, how this claim to protection falls apart inspite of the patriarchal family unit and it's close relations with the police force in the infrastructure earlier referred to.

I will look at the family unit briefly because it was in the institution of the family that the free female individual lost her place and position and this was the beginning of women's subordination of subjection to a patriarchal order.

In the family the female soon became the second class citizen, burdened with the family chores, the bringing up of children, running of the house, seeing to the correct implementation of the patriarchal system according to the worldly instructions given to children as declared in ancient patriarchal wisdom and propagated through literature and religion which created a highly prejudiced state pushing the woman to a lower position. Here I cannot resist quoting a folk song which as usual hits out at the dignity of a woman. This particular one goes a step further and targets Brahma's Wife.

Wherever they go, the meritorious one heaps homage
The sinners gather but disgrace.

On the heads of the meritorious Maha Brahma inscribed
And on the heads of the sinners, his wife did the inscribing.

The set pattern of thinking, woman baiting is exposed.

"If marriage is the basis of the family, then this supposedly individual and freely chosen form, has a state instrument at it's heart" say Michele Barret and Mary Macintosh.¹

They continue

"Those who defend marriage as what people want and need, must explain then why it has to be so massively privileged by social policies, taxation, religious endorsement and the accolade of respectability.

When the family unit breaks down for what was expected to be the end of all problems in life for the female it turns out to be a hell and domestic privacy then becomes an autonomy. An enraged man may beat his wife and it will become a "Private Matter".

"The bond between them is seen as so special that the outsider should not presume to take a stand, even when it is quite clear that what is happening is an extreme form of physical violence".

"The privacy of the family is cast in a new light if we realise that one quarter of reported violence is wife assault and that a very large proportion of rapes are carried out by men who know their victims as well,

The Anti Social Family.

often husbands, boy friends, fathers and uncles"².

The mythology around the woman and the family unit, its sacredness, its romance lead us astray from our set purpose, the exposure of patriarchy in a language and we hasten to stop myself from wondering around in my own prison looking into its dark nooks and corners, for the presence of at least traces of a family unit and its sanctum".

Language

The second part of this paper deals with language. I will examine how patriarchal ideology is operationalised through the language.. Language is described as a variety of speech, a body of words and idioms, mode of expression, a manner of expressing thought or feeling; communication. These descriptions of a language do not take into consideration the dominant effect of patriarchy which cripples and at times keeps away women writers from using it in a sense of equality. In a patriarchal society language is not simply a means of communication. It is one of the main instruments of patriarchy that obstructs the development of women intellectually and thereby creates a sense of inferiority. Patriarchal hegemony in a language is hidden under credibility obtained from the use of a terminology which describes patriarchal thought and expressions as scientific, unemotional lucid, factual etc. I will explore this point later in detail. Language the intellectual manifestation of patriarchy, has a deep social function. It is the main convenor of the ideology described earlier. It is also the most effective instrument or propagation of this ideology. It denies the marginal groups their adequate expression by,

- a. typification
- b. mystification

² Rape crisis Centre Report London 1977.

- c. establishment of a structural society in which the marginal groups find themselves unable to voice their needs (somebody's voice and my need).

We will not go into details about typification which categorises women as obedient, good, kind, generous, pretty etc. which itself is a means of enslaving and tying her to certain expectations such as the above.

2. Mystification-Elevation into a mystery, use of the feminine mystification which hides her reality in a patriarchal society which has defined the women as the mysterious other.
3. Establishment of the marginal groups into the concept of the second sex.

"The patriarchal elite defines reality through a selective language usage so that the present power structure is maintained, whilst disruptions to the established order are averted. The powerful (that is the main stream men) have no desire for social changes, therefore they do not need to engage in critical reflections and thus have little use for flexible language systems. The society is their construction and they work to maintain it so as to preserve their status This then is the power of the patriarchal language"³.

Patriarchal society has created a technical language which embodies the power structure of Politics, Economics, Management, Commerce and other disciplines and is outside the availability of the marginalised in society.

The conventional language, which is the male language in use today, has proved itself inadequate for the marginalised to

³Notes of the Tyranny of Language Usage by Andrea E Goldsmith

voice their sufferings.

Going back to my reference to terminology, I present here a list of words which describe the male superiority in the language as opposed to the female inadequacy. This terminology is closely related to typification of woman and is discrimination.

Male Language	Marginalised Language
----------------------	------------------------------

objective	subjective
scientific	unscientific
logical	illogical
intellectual	chaotic
systematic	unsystematic
credible	incredible
real	unreal
critical	hysterical
detached	introspective
powerful	stupid
broad	narrow
distinctive	womanly

In Sanskrit grammar obvious gender consciousness is revealed. Words associated with knowledge or wisdom *Prajna Vidya and Parijna* are feminine words while words associated with emotive states such as compassion and love *Preman and Sneha* are masculine.⁴

Burdened by criticism and labelled as mediocre the early women writers (English medium) concealed their identity and used pseudonyms and published their works anonymously. They used masculine names George Sand, George Elliott, Currer, Ellis, Action Bell. The attire of George Sand was masculine, in a vain attempt to claim equality.

⁴Mother Wisdom Father Love by Jose Ignacio Cabezon.

They suffered from the danger of reading their fiction as autobiography. They feared but defied the critics who were men armed with male language.

"Many brilliant and competent women had so completely accepted the myth of female inferiority that they had no faith in their own sex and considered themselves superior exceptions. George Elliott and Elizabeth Barret Browning, or example approved of feminism in theory. But could not believe that Victorian women were ready to assume the responsibilities of equality. Mrs Browning a political liberal who wrote against American slavery and for the Italian liberation, and whose verse novel Aurora Leigh was attacked as propaganda for women's rights wrote nonetheless, that she was not a very strong partisan of the rights of Women side argument." *I believe that considering men and women in the mass, there is an inequality of intellect, and it is proved by the very state of things of which gifted women complain and more than proved by the manner in which their complaint is received by their own sister hood.*⁵

Woman writers were termed blue stockings, unwomanly, tough, aggressive, pedantic, vain and ugly.

In a letter written by Robert Southey, the poet Laureate, to Charlotte Bronte in 1837, we find in tolerance and prejudice towards women writers.

"Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and recreation."

Note - "proper duties". Her writing was an accomplishment

⁵Women writers and the Double standard by Elains Showalter.

and a recreation"only".

Her reply to this letter is noteworthy

I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed for sometimes when I am teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing: but I try to deny myself and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation".

Proper duties were teaching and sewing but "She would be reading or writing" and not carrying out her proper duties, Towards which she had no inclination. The manner in which these women began to use the male language to assert themselves from the oppressive conditions was both courageous and defiant. The quotation from the barbed pen of Thomas Moore addressed to Harrie Martineau reveals the extent of oppression exercised. (Showalter's Women Writers and the Double Standard.)

Blue Love Song & Women Writers

Come, be with me, and I will write
My Blue of Blues, from morning till night
Chased from our classic souls shall be
All thoughts of vulgar progeny etc.

It implied Blue stocking women writers were barren and unsexed.

Criticism & Women Writers

Earlier references to women writing under masculine names and pseudonyms illustrate their fear of criticism, if they used pseudonyms they hoped to receive impartial reviews. They

were but keeping their "poor" femininity in hiding. Coming down to later times "On naming the oppressed or what Woolf avoids saying in A Room of One's Own" by J.Christine Salem notes Woolf's desire to protect herself from male criticism in her conspicuously pervasive choice of sentence structures where the agent is masculine or is deleted.

Obvious patriarchal domination of the language is seen in the use of generic masculine words e.g. man/mankind denotes man and woman as would be the term human or chairman.

under natural disasters **man** survives, one expects justice to be meted out to **him** (man and he are synonyms).

Fellow of the Royal College of FRCS etc.

Generic masculine bias is accepted by the male and female in society, a dog is a male dog; lawyer/male bias. House wife but no house husband.

The third sector of the paper is on sexist words used in anger for the purpose of abusing and humiliating woman to break her and make her submissive. Foul words, dirty words, obscene words are all sexist. The woman is an obscene product. Gender specific terms considered obscene are body parts and functioning of the female body. Anger is most felt when mother, the big female is invoked on a connotation.

A woman is a bit, a cunt, a screw, a piece, a pussy, a prude, a whore a girlie, a dame a hussy. She is also referred to as a nymph, blue stocking petticoat (petticoat government) prostitute, strumpet, skirt, tart, tit, virago, vixen.

Because of a woman's vulnerable position in a patriarchal society she is considered a protected thing, thereby becoming feeble and weak. Thus her voice will be feeble and weak. Nevertheless she is held responsible for the house.

In conclusion I would say

- * Woman is a prisoner in a patriarchal family unit
- * The powerful instrument of male language is inadequate to voice feminine needs.
- * Women's oppression is legitimatised by the conventional language forcing her into a role of acceptance.
- * Obscenity in the male language is gender oriented.

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Socio Cultural Constraints and Their Gendered Patterns

A Case Study of a fishing village in Handale

A gender specific survey on the village of Medawatte was undertaken by Women's Education and Research Centre. This village was chosen because the Women's Education and Research Centre has been involved in starting a Women's Crew among the fishing women and also a small school which functions on Saturdays. After working with the Women's Crew and the school, it is realised that there are social economic problems prevalent among these people and that they effect women much more adversely than men. This research helps to ascertain their conditions of living and also to see what improvements could be made in their standard of living. The initial facilities for starting this school was provided by one of the director of WERC on her own initiative and resources.

Medawatta located, 2 1/2 miles from Wattala is a beach village consisting of 47 families. For the purpose of the research, 30 families were visited and interviewed. The observations are based on queries, discussions, layout of the village, sanitary facilities, living conditions and also on the life styles of the villagers.

Most women living in this village can read and write having had the opportunity of attending school during their childhood as they are not permitted to go out to the sea. Only 5% of women are illiterate in contrast to the 30% of husbands who have never been to school. This is because boys

have had to go out to the sea with their elders at a very young age to assist them and also to gain experience in their future occupation. Only 2% of the parents have achieved the highest level of education which is the Advanced Levels (Senior Secondary School Examination).

10% of the children have never been to school although their parents are more than willing to send them. This is due to the fact that the parents are unable to obtain a birth certificate; This is compulsory as the school authorities insist that regulations do not permit them to have a child admitted to school without one. Since most children are born at homes, only village women and not qualified midwives help the mothers at childbirth, they are not inclined to issue a note to record the child's birth for fear of having failed in some legal obligation to register as midwives. They feel that they may have to face prosecution. A requirement for the issue of a birth certificate for a child is that the birth should be officially recorded by an informant. Some children do not have certificates while in other cases the parents are illiterate and have not attempted to obtain one.

Health

Local women who act as midwives in difficult conditions without the necessary equipment to handle delivery are fortunate that there have been no mishaps so far. This is one of the main reasons why the mothers prefer to have their babies at home rather than be admitted to a maternity home a few miles away. The economic factor is also pertinent here. In order to enter a maternity home, one would have to be admitted a few days prior to the delivery which means travelling back and forth daily and most often taking meals from home, bribing the minor staff of the institution for small favours and also hiring a vehicle to take the mother to hospital and bring her back with the baby. Usually, the neighbours rally around the mother to assist her in every

possible way.

Women's Employment

Women of the village of Medawatta are engaged in all types of work to supplement the income of men. 10% of the wives work in government factories and earn Rs. 2,000.00 to 2,500.00 per month.

10% of the women earn an income of around Rs. 7,500.00 to 2,500.00 per month by preparing string hoppers, pittu, sweets, pickle and manioc to be sold to tourists, visitors as well as neighbours.

6% of the wives have left the island to work as housemaids in the Middle East and earn between Rs. 4,000.00 to 6,000.00 every month and remit the money home to support the family.

10% of the wives are vegetable sellers and 2% have small boutiques catering to the villagers themselves. Their income is very irregular. On certain days they earn more than Rs. 300.00 whereas on other days they earn very little.

4% of the women in the village earn money through dressmaking. Some even use their own sewing machines to make garments for women and children while others utilize sewing machines of neighbours.

8% of the women earn an irregular income by rearing poultry, pigs and goats. They also sell eggs, chicken, goat milk and occasionally some pork.

There is a particular woman who earns more than Rs. 5,000.00 per month by packeting nuts, tea and spices with the help of her daughter-in-law.

The other 49% of the women are not employed and look after the children while attending to the housework. Although they are prepared to work, it is difficult for them to find any form of employment. They are also unable to invest in coir, sewing and weaving machines due to economic difficulties. Going out to the sea for fishing purposes with or without their husbands is taboo, although they are not afraid of the sea or of the darkness. They dare not seek the consent of the husband as he totally opposes it.

Family Planning

The husband usually decides as to how many children they should have after consulting the wife. The parents of the husband and wife prefer to have many more but the husband's decision is final. Although there is no discrimination shown between boys and girls, there is a preference for boys.

Mothers and mothers-in-law are very attentive after childbirth. They care for the child and also wash the mother's as well as the child's clothes, and the bed linen.

The wife generally attends to all the housework. Most husbands do not do any work around the house during the day when they are awake. There are a few exceptional instances where they help their wives with the cooking, washing, cleaning and the children.

Many families live in the husband's paternal home where the wives consider themselves ill treated. These families are compelled to live with their parents or in laws although they prefer to be independent.

The wives who live with the husband's family are compared to a coin which has no value whatsoever, as she has to comply with the wishes of her parents-in-law.

Taboos

Fried food in the first three months is taboo for the pregnant mother as it allows the demons to enter her spirit. Yet another belief is that pregnant mothers should refrain from bathing at 12 noon and at 6 p m as it is the time that the devil roams about and take possession of the mother.

There are brave women who dare go out to the sea without men. It is a pity that the parents, husbands and others do not encourage them to do so. Although they are allowed to go to the shore to collect fish, they are unable to go out to the sea to catch fish. Some fishermen do not even allow their wives to do any work connected with fishing. Women do not mend fishing nets, boats and other equipment as men keep these for themselves. They fear that women who handle such equipment during their menstrual periods will make the yield go down. There is also a belief that the sea is very dangerous when women are nearby. It is said that if a woman takes a boat out to the sea it will be drawn to the sea. Thus there is a traditional belief that there is antipathy between the sea and the woman.

Chastity

The belief that one should preserve virginity until marriage is very much prevalent among these villagers. Pre-marital sex for women is taboo. If she fails to prove her virginity on the wedding night, not only will she be subject to assault by the husband but also face further insult and abuse by the parents-in-law, resulting in a broken marriage.

Some husbands who do not disclose to others the condition of the wife on the wedding night, punishes her for the rest of her life by subjecting her to a life of cruelty and degrading slavery in her own home. On the contrary there are no such severe restrictions on the males. Moreover there is no way of

detecting whether they have had sexual relations prior to marriage or not. These women believe that if they do not prove their virginity on the wedding night they have to face the consequences. This belief is engrained in them to such an extent that they do not even consider claiming equal rights as the males.

Divorce is taboo except for a few, all the wives interviewed are of the opinion that they would have remained single had they been aware of the drudgery of life they have had to undergo.

Wives are often subjected to frequent beatings and quarrels although they eventually make up. They attach great importance to the legal status of marriage and have no desire to break away. The main reasons for this are.

1. Divorce is considered a social taboo.
2. Children's welfare
3. Economic dependence
4. Disapproval by society

If parents are separated the problems of looking after the children arises. The mother who takes custody of the child has to work in order to provide for him or her. It is difficult for the mother to see to the child's up bringing. Likewise, the father who takes care of the child is faced with the same problem. Particularly because in the case of separation of the parents, the in laws refuse to take care of the children and intervene to patch up their differences. Matrimony is also one of the 'sacraments' of the Roman Catholic faith and the couple are expected to live together in whatever trying circumstances. Divorce is permitted by the church in very exceptional circumstances. Thus, they are compelled to live together although there is a desire for separation. Divorce without the permission of the church results in excommunication, debarring from all religious rites, even death rituals. They would not be permitted to be buried in the Catholic cemetery which is considered 'holy ground'.

A woman living on her own is looked upon with contempt and is considered unlucky by the villagers.

Much reluctance was shown in divulging extra marital affairs. One of the women, relating her story recalls how her family had maintained cordial relations for a long time with a neighbouring family. On hearing rumours regarding her husband and the neighbour, she had followed both of them to the Kotahena Church where she had been beaten not only by her husband but also by his mistress. When attempted suicide by drowning herself, she had been rescued by others. Even now her husband lives with her while continuing his relationship with the other woman.

30% of the husbands are wife beaters which is usually after alcohol. Others rarely do so, except for a few verbal quarrels. One woman who used to be beaten frequently by her husband for no apparent reason had one day retaliated with the broomstick. After this incident, the man had finally stopped assaulting her but instead had started beating the children.

The wives are generally beaten by the husbands with their hands and feet. The wife who is not stronger than the man reciprocates this by scratching his face, which is the most common form of attack made by women.

It can be concluded that the men beat their wives for several reasons. Some of these are when one of the two has an extra marital affair, and the refusal to have sex when the husband needs to. Some times when the children quarrel in the house and the men cannot continue to sleep it is looked upon as the mother's fault. When the food is not considered tasty by the husband who cannot even savour it after drinking alcohol that too is also looked upon as the fault of the wife.

Recommendations for rehabilitating women

1 Campaign to help children to school.

a. The problem of admission to school could be overcome if the parents are able to persuade the women who act as midwives that there is no risk involved in notifying that assistance was given to the mother at childbirth. These women do not bother to maintain any such record as they are unaware of its significance. In the absence of records being maintained by them, the date of birth of the child could be easily obtained from records made by the Parish priest at the church. Being Roman Catholics, Baptism is one of the seven 'sacraments' to which a Catholic is bound and the ceremony is usually performed by the Parish priest who baptizes the child recording the date of birth of the child, his or her name, home of the parents etc. A copy of the Baptismal certificate could be obtained from the church.

b. The practise of having a child admitted to a school on the production of a baptismal certificate did exist during colonial times although it has been abandoned now. It is necessary to persuade the educational authorities to grant children of this village the concession of being admitted on their baptismal certificates as a special case due to the ignorance of the parents, and also educating the parents on the importance of having a child's birth officially recorded by the state.

c. It would be much easier if the Parish priest could be given the responsibilities of informing and forwarding the particulars to the Registrar of Births, once the Baptism is performed.

2. Recreation of women and children

An ideal form of recreation for the children would be to conduct a Saturday school to suit the dual purpose of engaging a form of recreation that would also be educational. It is necessary to teach them the basics of reading and writing and at the same time training them in useful handicraft, hobbies and in gardening.

3. The need for creche facilities

A creche is of great importance, so that the children of parents who are working during the day can be looked after perhaps for a fee that can be paid to one or two villagers who would also find employment. Cod liver oil plus other vitamins could be distributed to these children while regular medical check ups are also carried out.

4. Trips for women and children

The lives of these women and children are confined only to the village. Periodical trips and excursions would help them to see beyond the confines of the village and the outside world enabling them to improve their present living conditions and ways of life.

5. Obtaining of loans from the local bank for the purchase of sea going craft has proved futile as the element of risk is considered too great and they have no collateral to offer. There is a possibility of overcoming this situation if some insurance company is prepared to insure the boats for a low premium and the bank is prepared to accept this consideration as the guarantee.

6. For the purpose of enhancing the income of fishermen by saving the money that is paid to the middleman and ensuring their safety at sea a fishermen's cooperative society could be organized along with the assistance of state banks and insurance companies. The insurance corporation could cover the insurance of the craft in case of disasters, while the banks could finance purchase of

the craft on minimal interest rates, and hold ownership of the craft until the payments are completed. The fishermen's cooperative could undertake to dispose the catch at reasonable prices maintaining a refrigeration unit to store the excess or unsold fish. The cooperative could also give on easy payment terms, life saving and communication equipment which would ensure the safety of the seafarers and help them earn a profitable living.

7. Arrangements should be made to appoint a government midwife or public health nurse to oversee this village. The midwife would pay periodical visits and also educate the mothers on the risks involving emergency in childbirth due to the non availability of emergency facilities in the village. It would be best to have a health care centre in the village which would help maintain records of the births and also notify mothers that the vaccines for the children should be given on the due dates.

8. At least a number of communal lavatories should be constructed one for the males and one for the females or have the local authority reimburse the dwellers for the construction of lavatories in their premises (as had been done in other villages). This would induce the villagers to have them constructed to make use of them.

10. Literacy campaign for women.

11. An income generating project for women.

12. Campaign to raise environment consciousness about:

a. cleanliness of beaches

b. cleanliness of roads

c. prevention of erosion

13. A vegetable growing project.

14. Consciousness raising and gender sensitization programmes for the men and women are urgent needs

considering the overt forms of domestic violence and convert forms of unequal and living domestic life system.

The survey was carried out by Prarthana Gamaarachchi under the supervision of Dr. Kumari Jayawardena. We have drawn attention to the major gender specific constraints of the social living patterns of the women. We would like the ministry of Women's Affairs and environment to take this up as a project. Assistance is needed by the state and other social organisations for the structural improvement in the quality of life of these women.

Editor

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Buddhism and Feminism

Elizabeth Harris

Are Buddhism and feminism compatible? Many women brought up as Buddhists have judged that they are not. They have rejected Buddhism because both its hierarchy and its apparent message have seemed to them overbearingly androcentric, even misogynist. But a feminist voice within contemporary Buddhism is arising. It is a minority voice but it is asserting that the core of Buddhism can be reclaimed as a liberative tool for women. In this paper I intend to look at this movement - the textual and historical issues which call for its existence, the positive doctrinal elements to be reclaimed, significant contemporary voices. I draw both an encounter with Buddhist women, particularly in Sri Lanka, and my own research into the Buddhist texts and their historical development.¹

Women are faced with contradictory images when delving into the Buddhist Scripture. Feminists who have left Buddhism because of its patriarchy do not have to look far for textual evidence to back their claim that Buddhism forces women to internalize negative images of themselves. In the Pali Canon of the Theravada tradition, words such as these are actually placed in the Buddha's mouth:

Women are uncontrolled, Ānanda. Women are envious, Ānanda. Women are greedy, Ananda. Women are weak in wisdom, Ananda.²

Monks, I know of no single form, sound, smell, savour and touch by which a woman's heart is so

enslaved as it is by the form, sound, scent, savour and touch of a man. Monks, a woman's heart is obsessed by these things.³

Monks, a woman, even then going along, will stop to ensnare the heart of man; whether standing, sitting or lying down, laughing, talking or singing, weeping, stricken or dying, a woman will stop to ensnare the heart of a man.⁴

Monks, if ever one would rightly say: it is wholly a snare of Māra - truly, speaking rightly, one may say of woman: she is wholly a snare of Māra.⁵

In these passages, woman is cast as inherently weak and sexually uncontrolled. She appears as the archetypal temptress and as the embodiment of Māra, the devil. Of a different, but no less disturbing nature for the feminists are some of the perspective on marriage found in the texts. The Buddha is said to have given this advice to young women about to marry:

Girls, train yourself in this way: To whatever husband our parents shall give us for him we will rise up early, be the last to retire, be willing workers, order all things sweetly and be gentle-voiced.⁶

Similarly, texts such as the *Vimānavatthu* hold up as normative an ideal of wifely behaviour based on subordination, repression of emotions and complete obedience. This is what women who find themselves in heavenly mansions say of the virtues which brought them such bliss:

When I was human, young and innocent
Serene in heart I delighted my Lord
So by day and by night I acted to please
A virtuous woman in days of old was I
Utterly chaste in body, I lived in purity...⁷

When I was human, living among men
A faithful wife with heart for no other was I
I sheltered my Lord as a mother her child
Even though angry I spoke no rough word...⁸

Most often cited as proof of Buddhism's patriarchy, however, is the story surrounding the start of the *Bhikkhunī* Order, the order of nuns and the question of whether a woman can become a Buddha. Records show the Buddha repeatedly refusing *Mahāpajāpatī* Gotami, his aunt and foster mother, when she asks him for ordination. He relents only to lay down eight rules, *gurudhammas*, binding nuns to pay homage to monks regardless of seniority and to refrain from any criticism of their activities. Adding to the incident's androcentrism is that the Buddha is seen to prophesy that the entrance of women into the Sangha would shorten the life of the Buddhist tradition by 500 years. As for the question of women and Buddhahood, the Buddha is traditionally seen as having physical traits pointing to his Buddha nature. A sheathed penis is one of them. The usual interpretation of this is that a Buddha must therefore be a man, that a female bodhisattva must undergo a sex change in her final birth, that a woman's body is unfit for the highest role. Added to this, throughout Buddhist history, has been the popular belief that because a woman's life is harsh a female birth is the result of bad *kamma* or action in a previous life.

The evidence I've quoted could lead some feminists to declare that Buddhism, as many other religions, is irretrievable. To restrict feminist discourse to these examples alone, however, is academically unsound and unjust to Buddhism. It succumbs to the fundamentalist position that all religious texts bear equal weight and to the temptation that they can be extracted at random to justify previously held positions. There is another side.

In the *Therigatha*, the poems of the early nuns now part of the Pali Canon, the Buddha is recorded as saying to a nun:

Come, O Dhīrā, reach up and touch the goal
 Where all distractions cease, where sense is stilled
 Where bliss dwells; win thou nibbāna, win
 That sure Salvation (yogakkhema), which has no
 beyond.⁹

The Buddha urges Dhīrā to reach the highest religious goal Buddhism holds out. There is no hint that gender is an obstacle. In such passages, enlightenment, the supreme wisdom which penetrates to the heart of reality, is stripped of gender specificity. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism is not shackled with an ultimate Reality couched in gender-specific terms. At Buddhism's core, lies nibbāna, release from suffering and psychological victory born of wisdom, realizable in this life. All Buddhist traditions link both the feminine and the masculine with it.

In the Pali texts of the Theravada tradition come pictures of strong, liberated women who renounce India's patriarchal social structure, which could only offer them the roles of wife or whore, to enter an Order in which they could be respected simply as spiritual teachers. For, in spite of the gurudhammas examples can be found in the texts of nuns teaching men and being accredited with speaking the word of the Buddha.¹⁰ In Early Buddhism, enlightenment was not a patriarchal preserve and the Therīgāthā witness to this. Another reading of Buddhism is that it was a pioneering voice against patriarchy. This interchange from the Bhikkhunī Samyutta of the Anguttara Nikāya certainly suggests confrontation between Buddhism and androcentrism. Māra, symbolic here of society's dominant voice, tries to stop a nun meditating by saying that because she is a woman she can never hope to progress. Her reply is:

What should a woman's nature signify
 When consciousness is tense and firmly set...
 To one for whom the question does arise:-
 Am I a woman (in these matters) or
 Am I a man, or what not am I then?

To such a one is Mara fit to talk.¹¹

In Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, woman is connected with nibbāna by becoming part of the conceptualization of the transcendent in terms of wisdom and compassion. The development of Mahāyāna was marked by the flowering of the bodhisattva ideal, expressed in devotion to a spectrum of enlightened beings who were believed to have deferred Buddhahood out of a compassionate concern that all beings should enter nibbāna. In India and Tibet, Avalokiteshvara, with his thousand arms of compassion, is the dominant bodhisattva and he is definitely male. Yet, in China and Japan, he becomes the female Kwan Yin or Kwannon. The epitome of compassion becomes a woman. This does not mean that Tibet is bereft of a feminine symbol of compassion. It has the bodhisattva, Tara, pictured as youthful woman, combining the ideas of virgin, goddess and earth mother. As for wisdom, research shows that, particularly in India in the 8th Century CE, the wisdom literature of the Mahāyāna tradition, Prajñāpāramitā, was visualized as a mature, maternal figure of that name. A parallel can be found within Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana where the two pillars of wisdom and compassion are often portrayed as a woman and man in an erotic sexual act. The woman represents wisdom and the man, compassion and locked together in union they become symbol of the ultimate. In both Mahāyāna and Tantra, this conceptualization is undergirded by the belief that the arising of Bodhicitta, Buddha nature or Buddha mind, a word synonymous with enlightenment, is not gender specific but lies potentially in all beings.

The Buddhist interpretation of everyday reality can also be seen in a userfriendly way by women. The Buddhist texts do not glamourize the role of woman as wife and mother within contemporary Indian society. Pregnancy, the risks inherent in giving birth and the difficulties involved in entering a new family as wife are not glossed over but are seen as part of dukkha, the pain which characterizes existence according to the First Noble Truth. The exploitation of women, sexually

and emotionally, is also not alien to the Buddhist vision since **dukkha** is seen to be caused by craving (**tanhā**) either in the individual or society. **Tanhā** covers grasping for sensual pleasure, the wish for power and possessions, as well as the urge to manipulate and oppress for selfish ends. When expressed through **tanhā**, human sexuality becomes shot through with danger. In fact, the Buddha is once recorded as saying that if shame and the fear of blame did not protect the world:

then there would be seen no mother or mother's sister, no uncle's wife nor teacher's wife, nor wife of honourable men; but the world would come to confusion - promiscuity such as exists among goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals.¹²

Such an analysis might seem unnecessarily pessimistic to the comfortably placed. To women facing sexual violence, harassment, manipulation or impenetrable patriarchal institutions, it is realistic and can even be positive, since it attempts to isolate cause and, when combined with the doctrine of **patriccasamuppāda** (dependent origination), insists that change is possible if the cause is eradicated.

Some feminists would accept that the core of Buddhism is not patriarchal but claim that Buddhism's historical development has rendered the liberative core meaningless for women. For, Buddhist feminists not only have to deal with negative textual images but a historical tradition which, in most Buddhist countries, has seen the triumph of patriarchy. The very texts themselves are a product of this. Tradition says that almost immediately after the Buddha's death a Council of eminent monks was held to record and systematize the Buddha's teaching. No mention is made of nuns being present, although the Bhikkuni Order was certainly in existence. If they were not present, resistance to women renounces must have been present at a very early stage; if nuns had been present, the expunging of any reference to them within a couple of centuries shows how rapidly the tentacles of androcentrism

gripped the early Buddhist movement. Whichever option is chosen, it meant that the Pali texts were largely mediated through men with the consequence that the challenge Early Buddhism posed to traditions concerning the role of women in Indian society was weakened.

The following developments flow from this, each antagonistic to the liberative elements within Buddhism, proving that feminine images of ultimate reality or enlightenment do not guarantee justice to women in society. The Buddhist message that there is danger of greed and exploitation in sexual relationships between men and women becomes - the woman is the cause of the male "falling" into sexual activity; she is the temptress. The realistic, empirical strand within the Buddhist message which refuses to idealize a woman's role within society but sees it as fraught with hardship becomes - a birth as a woman must therefore be the result of bad action (**Kamma**) in a previous life. This is one of the most pernicious beliefs women throughout the Buddhist world have internalized. In practical terms, it means temples filled with whiteclad devotees eager to gain the merit which will release them from the role they were born into. It leads to women internalizing the role of receiver of religious teaching rather than teacher or realizer of religious truth and to the entry of concepts of purity/impurity. For instance, although menstruating women are not debarred from entering a Buddhist temple, they are rarely seen carrying relics at any time in their cycle.¹³

A further development which must be noticed is the loss or absence of the Bhikkhunī Order in many Buddhist countries. Only in the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese Mahayana traditions are women now able to gain Higher Ordination, the right to follow the complete monastic discipline of over 300 rules as laid down by the Buddha. Higher Ordination was never brought over the Himalayas from India to Tibet, probably because of the harshness of the journey for women. Within the Buddhist tradition, it must be remembered, ten fully ordained nuns are needed to confer Higher Ordination

on others. Tibetan nuns can go no further than the stage of novice. Not even novice ordination reached Thailand but today there are between eight and ten thousand maejis, women renunciants who wear white, shave their heads and hover between the lay and ordained worlds.¹⁴ Burma and Sri Lanka possessed a Bhikkhunī Order but in both countries it died and was not reinstated. Both countries possess women who have left the lay life but they remain firmly subordinate to the monks. To take Sri Lanka as an example, the Bhikkhunī Order was brought to the island as part of the missionary outreach of King Asoka of India (c 272-236 BCE). A vibrant, influential Order developed, strong enough to make international contacts. The current Bhikkhuni Order in China owes its existence to Sri Lanka. In 429 and 433 CE nuns from Sri Lanka travelled there to instate it. After the 10th Century CE, however, mention of the Sri Lankan Order fades. That it died is not surprising given the political turmoil of the time. What is significant is that it was not reinstated by bringing from another country the number of fully ordained nuns necessary for an Ordination Ceremony. In the mid-eighteenth century the Order of Monks lapsed, succumbing to corruption and division.¹⁵ But it was reinstated from Thailand. That the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka was not born again through its daughter in China witnesses both to the triumph of patriarchy and the crushing of Mahayana influence in the country.

That there are Sri Lankan women who wear orange robes is due to Catherine de Alwis, a Sri Lankan convert from Christianity who brought a ten precept ordination from Burma at the beginning of this century. She gained the patronage to begin a nunnery and now there are some 4,000 *dasa sil matas* or *Sil Maniyos* stretched over the country. As in Burma, they lack official status, although steps have been taken to improve the educational opportunities open to them and to organize regional meetings,¹⁶ In fact, they risk the accusation that they have no right to wear orange, although in material terms they have renounced far more than those who enter the well-endowed Bhikkhu Sangha.¹⁷

This historical evidence seems to create another impenetrable barrier for the feminist who has rejected Buddhism. But again there is another side. The situation of nuns in the Buddhist world isn't uniform. Ordained nuns in both Korea and Taiwan now outnumber their male counterparts. Although the root cause may be economic - commerce is now a more attractive option for men than Buddhist robes - women have become respected religious leaders. There is also evidence that in Theravada countries, women have had more social and legal rights than in societies dominated by other religions. Kandyan Law in Sri Lanka, for instance, granted women the right to dissolve her marriage and to retain complete power over all her possessions and property during marriage and in the case of divorce.¹⁸ Lorna Devaraja has used this data and favourable comments by western observers of Sri Lankan society from the 17th to 19th Centuries to write:

The social freedom that women enjoyed in Buddhist societies, above everything else, has evoked from western observers the comments we have quoted... It is not so much the equality of status but the complete desegregation of the sexes, that has distinguished the women in Buddhist societies from those of the Middle East, the Far East and the Indian subcontinent (Devaraja 1991)

Contemporary Women in Buddhism

During the nineteenth century, European imperialism created the conditions for Buddhism to spread far beyond Asia and the influence of this on Buddhism as a whole has been great. Sir William Jones, editor of *Asiatic Researches* at the end of the eighteenth century, Alexander Csoma de Koros of Hungary, Rasmus Rask of Denmark, Brian Houghton Hodgson of Britain and Eugene Burnouf were among the early European names connected with the exploration of Buddhism and collection of manuscripts. At this stage, the beginning of the nineteenth century, western accounts of

Buddhism stress story and mythology. Buddhism is seen as remote, exotic and rather irrational. Later in the century however, with the growth of scientific rationalism and the challenge of Darwin, Buddhism comes to be projected as an ally in the campaign against Christianity. Under the influence of Pali scholars, it is presented as a rational and scientific philosophy unshackled by blind belief or a Creator God. As such, it begins to appeal to the West and the first converts to Buddhism appear.¹⁹

Parallel with this development is a shift in the way educated lay and ordained Buddhists in Buddhist countries view their religion. To take Sri Lanka again as an example, the late nineteenth century Buddhist Revival was a result of the barrage of humiliation heaped on Buddhism by Protestant missionaries. It sought to counter the missionary accusation that Buddhism was irrational and unscientific by insisting on the logic, rationality and scientifically sound nature of its principles in line with western scientific rationalism. The Pali texts were creamed for their rational content and this was put forward as the heart of Buddhist practice.²⁰

This historical legacy has been a mixed blessing for Buddhist women, particularly those who would call themselves feminist. On one hand, it has meant that lay people, including women, have re-claimed practices previously reserved for the Sangha. Meditation as a proactive discipline of mental culture is now part of the agenda of Buddhist women in many countries, counterbalancing rather than destroying older devotional patterns. Yet, in terms of the transposition of Buddhism to the West and the renewal movement in Asia, the early mediators were men, governed by the search for scientific clarity and logical reasoning.²¹ Rita Gross, an American Buddhist feminist whom I will mention again, claims that because of this the Buddhist feminist scholar has a quadruple androcentrism to fathom: the initial compilation of documents after the Buddha's death; the later ignoring of stories concerning women which did make their way into the Canon; the androcentrism of most western Buddhist scholarship; the

androcentrism of contemporary Buddhist practice both in the West and the East (Gross 1993 : 18). The Buddhism which many westerners have been attracted to in recent decades has fallen within parameters drawn by men, sincere and committed men who have had the courage to embrace a new framework of thought but who have nevertheless been restricted in their appreciation of gender issues.

In this context, women are challenging tradition in at least four areas: pressure for the ordination of women in Theravāda countries; the forming of Sakyadhītā - an international association of Buddhist women; women teachers of meditation; Buddhist feminist scholarship seeking to reclaim and reconstruct Buddhist doctrine for post-patriarchal society.

In 1984, Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh published her doctoral thesis: *A Comparative Study of the Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*.²² This compared the Bhikkhunī Vinaya or rule of discipline of Theravāda schools with those which formed the basis of Mahāyāna. Her research showed that the difference between the schools was negligible and that contemporary Mahāyāna nuns were following a rule of life very similar to that which Theravada nuns would follow if Higher Ordination was allowed. Her aim was to demonstrate that those who opposed the idea of Mahāyāna nuns giving Higher Ordination to Theravada women on the grounds that the Mahāyāna monastic discipline for women was different from and more decadent than the Theravada were resting their argument on untenable premises. Academics in Sri Lanka such as Dr Hema Goonatilake were pointing out the same thing and claiming that nuns from China could be brought to Sri Lanka, as Sri Lankan nuns once travelled to China.²³ Western nuns, some of whom chose to train in Tibet or Sri Lanka but then had to travel to Taiwan for Higher Ordination also joined the discussion. The First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns held in Bodhgaya, India, in February 1987, resulted. Organized by Dr Kabilsingh, Ven Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American nun trained in the Tibetan tradition, and Ven Ayya

Khema, a German-born Theravādan nun, it brought together women from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet and the USA.

The subjects for discussion at the Bodhgaya Conference covered living conditions for nuns in the countries represented, nuns in the community, education for Buddhist women and prospects for an International Bhikkhunī Sangha. Sakyadhīta (Daughters of the Buddha), an international association of Buddhist women was born from the Conference. Among the objectives drawn up for it at Bodhgaya were: foster world peace for all sentient beings; work in harmony with all Buddhist Sanghas, traditions and communities; establish a system of communication between Buddhist women all over the world; research into woman's role in the Buddha Dhamma; improve education for Buddhist women; establish an international Bhikkhuni Sangha organization, introduce the Srāmanerikā, Siksamānā' Bhikkhuni ordination where they currently do not exist.

It is significant that Higher Ordination was not placed first among the objectives. The need to educate nuns, undertake research into the monastic rule of discipline and create an international network which could strengthen and motivate women were more important. There was a general feeling that reclaiming the right of all Buddhist women to work towards Higher Ordination should be worked for but not through confrontation or militancy.

Since the Bodhgaya meeting, two further Sakyadhita conferences have passed: Thailand in 1991 and Colombo in 1993. The theme of the Sri Lanka conference was "Buddhist women in Modern Society". Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, currently President of Sakyadhita, touched the nerve of the Conference with:

What is the purpose of our coming together? We want to go forward in sisterhood. There is only one

word that I can describe - faith. Faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the key word that will enable us, sisters, to work together for the upliftment of our sisters and Buddhism as a religion.²⁴

The question of ordination was a contentious one at the Conference's planning stage. Voices within the Sri Lankan Buddhist hierarchy opposed the meeting fearing militancy on the issue. In sensitivity to this, it was not allowed to become central but one plenary addressed the question head on by outlining six possible ways of reinstating the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka.²⁵

Sakyadhīta is not a feminist organization, although there are feminists within it. It is a woman's movement seeking to create a network across cultures, different Buddhist traditions and divergent attitudes towards feminism. The uniting factor is commitment to encouraging an articulate woman's voice within Buddhism and an unwavering faith in the universal relevance of the Buddha's message.

Sakyadhīta's membership contains meditation teachers, spiritual counsellors and directors of Buddhist centres and nunneries. It is not unusual now, in the West and in Sri Lanka, for women to be spiritual teachers and guides. Two pioneer directors of meditation centres present at Bodhgaya were Ven. Ayya Khema and Ven. Pema Chodron. Ayya Khema established Parappuduwa Nuns' Island in Sri Lanka in 1984. Her aim was to provide a place in the East where western women could practise Buddhism. Yet, she also drew a following of English-speaking Sri Lankan women who made the choice to meditate under a nun rather than a monk. Political upheaval caused Ayya Khema to leave Sri Lanka in 1989 but the work of the centre has continued under a Sri Lankan committee and now through two more nuns, one Sri Lankan and one foreign.²⁶ Pema Chodron, a Canadian, received Bhikkhunī Ordination in Hong Kong in 1981 and later established Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia as a place where both nuns and monks could train and practice and lay

people come for private retreats.²⁷

In Sri Lanka, it is rare for a woman meditation teacher to draw many men to her sessions. Pema Chodron's initiative sets up a different pattern. So does Amaravatī Buddhist Monastery in Hertfordshire, UK. It follows the Thai Theravāda tradition and is home to a community of monks and ten-precept nuns. Both monks and nuns share the responsibility of leading retreats for lay people. At one I recently attended, a nun took sole charge of a large group, half women, half men, for four days. What is evident of both East and West, however, is that Buddhist women are teaching and leading, although their presence is not as visible as their male counterparts.

To pass now to Buddhist feminist scholarship, numerous articles have been written about Buddhism and women. Anne Klein, Christina Lang, Diana Paul and Nancy Schuster are among the few who bring a specifically feminist perspective to this.²⁸ However, I would like to take as examples two committed Buddhists I've previously mentioned: Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Rita Gross. Both are academics. Chatsumarn studied at Santiniketan, McMaster University in Canada and Magadha University in India. She now teaches Asian philosophy and religion at Thammasat University, Bangkok. Rita is Professor of Comparative Studies in Religion at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. Chatsumarn was brought up a Buddhist. In fact, when she was ten years old, her mother, Voramai Kabilsingh, became a nun and established her own temple, the first in Thailand established for women by a woman. Rita moved to Buddhism from a monotheistic tradition. Both refuse to separate their academic work from their feminism or their religious beliefs. They know one another and have given each other mutual encouragement.

I've already referred to Chatsumarn's research into the *Bhikkhunī Pātīmokkha*. In 1991, she published "Thai Women in Buddhism" - a collection of essays stretching over seven

years and covering four main areas: the history of Buddhism in Thailand and the place of women within it; feminist approaches to the Buddhist texts; the contemporary situation for Thai women who become "nuns"; social issues such as prostitution. When looking at the Buddhist texts, she rigorously exposes the androcentric nature of their formulation and transmission but insists that a distinction can be made between core Buddhist doctrines and those which have been affected by social context. Texts with gender bias she firmly places in the latter but she is also able to admit that the Buddha himself, although enlightened, was influenced by social and cultural context and therefore could have displayed values which might have appeared "strongly prejudiced from a modern standpoint" (Kabilsingh 1991 : 25).

The question of the *gurudhammas* is tackled by quoting scholarship which suggests that they were later additions. Some of the values internalized by Thai women, she attributes to brahminical influence in the country. Permeating through Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's writing is the awareness that Thai women have been shortchanged throughout history by structures which have forced them to downplay their spiritual potential. Going directly to the texts, she finds ample evidence to construct another paradigm based on the witness of the early nuns and the gender-neutral nature of enlightenment. Her core attitude is summed up in the last paragraph of her chapter on "Buddhist Texts from a Feminist Perspective":

Concerned Buddhists must study closely the Scripture to glean from them the pure message of the Buddha, which is otherwise clouded by the imposition of cultural values and gender bias. Seemingly negative passages must be examined critically and not allowed to become barriers to the spiritual development of women. Conversely, positive passages should be brought to light to confirm and encourage women today. Buddhism cannot fully blossom if half the world's population is not given its full right to express its religious commitment. Oppression within any

religion reflects badly on those doing the oppressing and limits its effectiveness and vitality. (Kabilsingh 1991 : 34)

In 1993, Rita Gross published "Buddhism after Patriarchy - A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism". Her aim is a feminist reevaluation of Buddhism in the belief that, although massive prejudice exists, the tradition is not irreparably sexist. In first attempting to find an accurate and usable past for Buddhist women, she discards as not usable androcentric stories which contradict core Buddhist doctrines and concentrates on the positive images from all traditions. In her later reconstruction of Buddhism, she insists that Buddhism and feminist method share similarities: both begin with experience and then move to theory, which becomes the expression of experience; both are willing to go against the grain in order to hold to insights of truth; both use the former two attributes to explore how mental processes can block or enhance liberation; both speak of liberation as the aim of human existence (Gross 1993 : 130-132) It is the lack of prophetic voice, however, which she pinpoints. Acknowledging the influence on her of the monotheistic traditions, she writes:

This prophetic voice is the missing element that has allowed Buddhists to tolerate with ease the combination of lofty and extremely refined teachings about compassion, including some theoretical understanding of gender equity, with often extremely repressive social regimes, not only regarding gender, but also regarding politics and economics (Gross 1993 : 134).

She continues:

I most certainly am not content to accept the status quo of gender arrangements in most of the Buddhist world. In fact, if I had to be a Buddhist woman under the conditions that exist in most parts of the Buddhist world, Buddhism would not be the religion of choice.

Only an auspicious coincidence of Buddhism and feminism, central to my vision, permits the internal dialogue (Gross 1993 : 135).

From this point Rita begins to reconstruct. She surveys the implications for gender issues of some major Buddhist teachings such as *anattā* (no self) and *suññatā* (emptiness), finding positive tools within them for feminism and then looks towards a post-patriarchal future which would mandate the building of gender equality into the fabric of Buddhist life and institutions changing the androcentric into the androgynous (1992 : 221). She challenges current patterns of family and parenthood, which often strip women of the time for Buddhist practice and create possessiveness within relationships. She puts forward guidelines for creating monastic communities in which women train with men rather than as second class inhabitants of the Buddhist world. She insists that interdependence, community and relationality lie at the heart of Buddhism rather than the western stereotype of buddhism as a path of individual withdrawal - a "hypermasculine and highly alienated" concept in her eyes (1992 : 263). Then, she encourages a reinterpretation of the word Sangha and a breaking down of the usually accepted gulf between lay and ordained people. Lastly, she speaks of the need for a Buddhist spiritual discipline which roots people in the reality of experience, rather than takes them into ethereal realms, and connects them with the earth and other human beings:

To become sane, to live in community with each other and our earth, is to experience freedom within the world - the mutual goal of feminism and of (post-patriarchal) Buddhism (1993 : 288).

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Rita Gross are pioneers, challenging Buddhism from within. Their styles and methods are different but feminist consciousness infuses the work of both. They are witness that feminist tools can be brought to religion not only to criticize but to reconstruct.

All religions are now being forced to redefine their relevance. Unity within religion is being challenged as conservative, accomodatory, liberal and radical attitudes to issues such as patriarchy, global injustice, war, racism and ecological rape touch and clash. The feminist voice is central to this. In Buddhism, it has come later than in Christianity and covers a spectrum of perspective from those rooted in the ancient monastic tradition of the Bhikkhunī Order to those informed by western feminist, academic method. Unity lies, however, in the unshakeable belief that religion is not an expendable form of human experience but can motivate the struggle for a more humane, post-patriarchal future for the world.

End note

1. Reference can be made to the following articles by Elizabeth Harris: **The Female in Buddhism** Dialogue Vol XIX-XX 1992-3 pp 36 - 60; **To be Buddhist and Equal** - Pravada Vol 1 No. 6 June 1992 pp14-16; Report on the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, Bodhgaya 1987 - Dialogue Vol XVII Nos 1-3 Jan-Dec 1990 pp107-112; Report on the 1993 Sakyadhīta Conference in Colombo - forthcoming in **Dialogue; Re-claiming the Sacred - Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka** - paper given at the 40th Anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions, Bristol, September 1994
2. AN IV VIII 80
3. AN I I 9-10
4. AN V VI 55
5. AN V VI 55
6. AN V IV 33

7. Vimānavatthu 31
8. Vimānavatthu 11
9. Therī verse 6
10. See **Cūllavedalla Sutta** MN I 304-305 in which the nun Dhammadinna teaches her former husband and is credited with answering exactly as the Buddha would have done; SN Text iv X I - Sister Khema is given the same credit
11. SN V. 2
12. AN II I 9
13. See Nirmala S Salgado; **Custom and Tradition in Buddhist Society: A Look at some Dasa Sil Matas from Sri Lanka in Relation to the Concept of Women in Buddhism**. Monograph at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies Colombo p.15
14. One on the best studies of the Maejis has been done by Chatsumarn Kabilsingh in **Thai Women in Buddhism** (see book references).
15. A good study of this and Buddhism during the British period is: **Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900** Kitsiri Malalgoda University of California Press 11976 pp 49-69
16. This has been done through the Ministry of Buddha Sasana. Funds have been made available to allow nuns to take exams in Buddhist doctrine. In some districts monthly meetings have been arranged for nuns to improve communication and leadership skills
17. Ven. Walpola Rahula, Chancellor of Kelaniya University, at the BMICH in July 1991 claimed that

dasa sil matas were not qualified to wear a yellow robe, since they were still lay people. *The Island* 25 July 1991

18. See Le Mesurier and T.B. Panabokke: *Niti Nighanduva or the Vocabulary of Law as it existed in the last days of the Kandyan Kingdom* Government Printer Sri Lanka 1880
19. See *Crisis, Competition and Conversion - The British Encounter with Buddhism in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* as yet unpublished doctoral thesis Elizabeth Harris Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka 1993; Peter Almond *The British Discovery of Buddhism* Cambridge University Press 1988
20. Many studies have been made of the Revival in Sri Lanka. A useful general account is: George D Bond *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka - Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* University of South Carolina Press 1988 & Motilal Banarsidass India.
21. Women were involved in Buddhism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, especially through the theosophical movement but the majority of publications on Buddhist doctrine were by men. But see: Mabel Bode *Women Leaders of the Buddhist Reformation* Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland 1893 pp517-566, 763-798.
22. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh *A Comparative Study of the Bhikkhuni Patimokkha* Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi, India 1984
23. Hema Goonatilake *Vinaya Tradition in China is Theravada* Sunday Observer, Sri Lanka, May 14 1986.

24. Said as part of her paper *Maintaining Human Values at a Time of Rapid Change*.
25. The second plenary presentation was by Senarat Wijayasundara. His paper was headed: *Women in Theravada Countries with Special Reference to Nuns: Problems and Solutions*. The daily programme billed it as: *The Order of Buddhist Nuns - Its Revival: Arguments For and Against*. No arguments against were given.
26. *Parappuduwa Nuns' Island, Dodanduwa, Sri Lanka*.
27. *Gampo Abbey, Pleasant Bay, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia* BOE 2PO, Canada.
28. For example:

Anne Klein: *Finding a Self: Buddhist and Feminist Perspectives*. In *Shaping New Vision: Gender Values in American Culture* ED. C W Atkinson, C H Buchanan, M R Miles, A Arbor MI: UMI Research Press USA 1987.

Karen Christina Lang: *Lord Death's Snare: Gender-Related Imagery in the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā*. In *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* II:2 Autumn 1986 pp 63-79.

Diana Paul: *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition*. Lancaster-Miler Inc. USA 1979

Nancy Schuster: *Yoga Master Dharmamitra and Clerical Misogyny in Fifth Century Buddhism*. In *The Tibet Journal* IX:4 1984 pp 33-46

Abbreviations

D	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
AN	Anguttara Nikāya
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
Therī	Therīgāthā

Book References

Devarajah Lorna: **The Position of Women in Buddhism with special Reference to Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka** Paper submitted to the Third Sri Lanka Conference Amsterdam 3-5 April 1991.

Gross Rita: **Buddhism after Patriarchy A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism** State University of New York Press 1993
KABILSINGH Chatsumarn **Thai Women in Buddhism** Parallax Press, Berkeley, California 1991 August 1994.

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Trafficking in Women: Bangladesh Perspective

Ishrat Shamim

In recent years, the international women's groups and human rights movements have achieved that traffic in women and children is recognised as a problem of our modern society. It has reached such an extent it must be analysed in terms of structural inequality between Third World and industrialised countries. Due to marginalisation processes and structural inequality at a global level, there is a growing awareness that many poor young women and children in Third World countries are potential victims of this traffic and slave trade.

But there is no way to determine the actual incidence of such trafficking. Although now and again, "traders in flesh" importing women are arrested, these reported cases must be viewed as only the tip of an iceberg. Given the unreported and under-reported practice, the United Nations report (1975) on "Traffic in Women" emphasized that the number of cases in traffic in women and children which have never come to the attention of the authorities is quite high. Sex slavery is a practice that is controlled and dominated by highly skilled, heavily armed, and very menacing gangs and individuals who have been able to buy police protection in most countries.

Distinction have been made by United nations(1975) between "traffic in women" proper and "disguised traffic" to highlight the reality and severity of forced prostitution. While traffic in women is with a view to making her engage in prostitution in a country other than that in which she usually resides;

'disguised traffic' is the act of hiring women in one country with a view to making them engage in certain types of employment in another country as dancers, cabaret artistes, barmaids, etc. and in conditions in which they are subjected, incited or exposed to prostitution. Taken as such trafficking is a potential outcome of labour migration. However, to address the issue in its proper context, trafficking in women would include all acts involved in capture and acquisition of women for trade and transport with the intent to sell, exchange or use for any illegal purpose, such as, servitude in the guise of marriage, bonded labour or sale of human organs. Trafficking takes place by a variety of means such as promises of jobs or marriages, and at times, even by physical violence and kidnapping.

In 1974, the General Secretariat of the International Police Organisation prepared and submitted to the United Nations a report on the "Traffic in Women". It concluded that there is an east Asian market which recruits women and children—mostly from Thailand, but also from the Philippines and sends them to other countries (United Nations, 1975). The traffic in women and children depends upon a market. Procurers work in the poverty-stricken countryside of Third World nations as well as bus and train stations of major cities, acquiring girls and young women. They maintain a constant supply to serve the market. In India, for example, poverty, illiteracy and backwardness are the main reasons for the increase in trafficking in young girls and children. Wholesale clandestine markets or *mandi* are to be found in big cities such as Calcutta, Agra, Bombay and Hyderabad where young girls are sold (Chatterji, 1984).

In a recent report submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 48th session, Prof. Muntarhorn outlined the type of sale and trafficking of children worldwide which are:

- * Procurers and criminal organisations sell children to brothels either in a country or abroad;

- * Procurers and criminal organisations supply children to clients;
- * Individual paedophiles acquire children for their own use; and
- * Paedophilia organisations acquire children for their members.

As a whole, it may be said that the numbers are highest in Asia. However, the problem is to be found everywhere, and bearing in mind the demand and supply in regard to transnational prostitution, the issue is relevant to all countries. Much of the exploitation of children arises precisely because material values have overtaken those which place a premium on human life and development. Shamefully, the human rights of the child may be violated because the child is viewed as a factor of production, as an investment for economic returns, rather than as a entity vested with substantive rights and inherent dignity (Muntarhorn, 1992:5).

The United nations predominantly base their approach to international policies on nineteenth century abolitionist views, judging by the UN Convention. The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956. And possibly under the impact of the UN Convention the abolitionist approach is reflected in the law and legislation of several countries. Measures to suppress traffic in women and children are usually ad hoc ones, fragmentary or biased and in direct contrast to the needs and interests of women and children themselves. Measures often only consist of deportation of the victims as they usually have no legal protection under international law both in the countries of origin and destination. In the countries of origin, there are few possibilities of protection against procuring agencies. On the other hand, because of illegal way in which they usually reach the country of destination, victims of traffic in women and children may also be deported as illegal and criminal

migrants and end up in prisons. Therefore, instead of only "saving women", attention should be increasingly centred on the general responsibility of society as a whole for the existence of traffic in women and children.

The Root cause of Trafficking

The problem of unemployment, underemployment and abject poverty has led to the international trafficking and labour migration of women and children. In both instances, they are being transferred as commodities from one place to another. As they are mostly the lowest strata of the society and in their search for alternate opportunities, they fall into more critical vulnerable situations. In some areas, it has been the exploitation of young girls and children who are often lured from their village homes with the promise of jobs in towns and cities. Where there is massive poverty, such promises hold new hope for better life for the whole family. But the employment is usually not of the kind anticipated. They often become unwitting and unwilling victims of prostitution exploiters. Women and children from the Asian region are traded and exported to the industrialized world. A "surplus of women and children" in these countries renders this possible. Thus trafficking of Asian women and children is flourishing. When young women and children are forcibly detained, runaway or escape from the hands of procurers or are rescued by the law enforcing authorities, only then trafficking in women and children becomes a known fact or else it is a "hidden" phenomenon.

Extreme poverty, economic disparities and exploitation have led thousands of innocent girls and women from the South Asian nations of Bangladesh, India and Burma to believe brokers' promises of a "bright future" and ultimately end up either as prostitutes or as cheap bonded labour in Karachi and some other cities of Pakistan.

According to estimates by human right activists, 200 to 400 young women and children are smuggled every month, particularly from Bangladesh into Pakistan, and the numbers have been on the rise since the mid-1980s. In most cases, known persons are the procurers. Once they gain confidence, they can easily entice or lure young girls and women to leave home for better jobs and marriage. Moreover, people do not suspect if the person is known to her and her family members. As such, women and children willingly go with the procurers, without even knowing the consequences. When they are trapped, they either try to escape or end up in prostitution. Traffic in women and children has certain outstanding features (gul, 1991)

There are networks of traffickers and brokers, mostly Pakistani and Indians with links that extend from Bangladesh, through India into Pakistan where the corrosive practice of slave trade goes unchecked;

Traffickers recruit girls and women through their regional contact persons, promising them highly paid jobs;

These women and children are handed over to clients in Karachi who sell them on to interested individuals and groups running prostitution dens or as bonded labour;

Young women and children are sold as commodities at high rates, ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 dollars, depending on the age, beauty and perceived desirability of customers; and then there are several women accompanied by children who try to enter on their own and, if unable to bribe immigration officials at the borders, are either raped or sent to jail for illegal entry.

Ways of Procuring Young Girls and Children

Various ways are practised to procure young girls and children for the purpose of trafficking and sale. One such practice is procuring young girls through marriage. There are men who are being employed outside the country and they in turn come back to their village home to get married. After marriage the young wife accompanies the husband to his place of work and since then, no trace can be found of these young girls. Even the police cannot arrest husbands who are travelling with their legally married wives to other countries. After sometime, they may come again to remarry for the second time. There being no religious bar against having more than one wife, villagers overlook the issue that these men have previously married. Even poor parents agree to such marriages, with the hope that their daughters will have better prospects in future. Only when several incidents happen, that villagers become suspicious of the whereabouts of the girls, who never return to their village home. But then it is too late to either punish the procurer or rescue the girls being victimized. Most of them are by that time either sold in India, Pakistan or on their way to the Middle East.

Kidnapping of young girls is another way of procuring. Sometimes traffickers entice young girls that they would provide with jobs and better prospects in neighbouring countries of India and Pakistan and the Middle East. Mostly these Young girls and women come from poor and illiterate families and sometimes they suffer from malnutrition, poverty and problems at home. It is also reported that some of them have been sold to brokers by their own parents, guardians and husbands to evade poverty and hunger.

In cases where women with children are enticed into the trap of going abroad for better jobs and prospects, they even pay between 3,000 to 5,000 take to the traffickers in the hope that they will get a reasonably good salaried job. And if a mother

wants to take her child along with her, she has to pay an extra 1,000 to 1,500 take per child. Mother and child kept together during the journey. But as soon as they reach their destination, mother and child is separated with the pretext that the mother cannot work keeping the child with her, as such it is better that the child goes to an orphanage which will be arranged by the agents. On the other hand, without the knowledge of the mother, the child is sold off at a higher rate. The child is an extra bonus for the traffickers.

Trafficking Routes

There are many land routes along the border areas of Bangladesh and India where trafficking of women and children are in rampant (See Box 1). Usually border areas of Kulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahmanbaria and Sylhet are land routes of trafficking to West Bengal, Bombay, Punjab in India and Karachi and Hyderabad in Pakistan. However, it seems that Jessore and Satkhira border areas are most susceptible to children and women trafficking to India by land routes. As it is well connected by bus and train, procurers can easily reach Calcutta where they are sold. For a long time, Calcutta has been well known for prostitution and selling of children and women and there are well organized agents to take them to Bombay and Karachi in Pakistan. (See annex No. 1)

Source : Field visits and information collected from local residents of the districts.

Satkhira is one of the border areas being investigated. Although it is used as the land route for trafficking, women and children come from various parts of Bangladesh. However, local women and children sometimes cross over to India but if they are apprehended by the border forces, they usually say that they are going to come back after meeting friends or going for a short visit. Mostly these women and

children are accompanied by other family members. In incidents such as these, agents are not involved. But in situation where they are procured from different places all over Bangladesh, especially from the poverty-stricken areas of Comilla, Barisal and Noakhali, organised agents are involved. There is a network of agents starting with Bangladesh, India, and extending till Pakistan and the Gulf countries.

Transaction is done in three different currencies: the Bangladeshi agent gets in Take, the Indian agent in Rupees and in Pakistan, in Pakistani Rupees. From Bangladesh, the trafficker takes the children till the border, then they are sold and handed over to the Indian counterpart to take them to Pakistan through India, where they will be sold again to the Pakistani agents. In both India and Pakistan, children are being sold to pimps or brothel owners. In the slave market of these countries, Bangladesh children and young girls are sold as commodities; the price depends on the age, beauty and virginity of the girl.

Magnitude of the Problem

As for Bangladesh, the existing research data are insufficient, except for some reports, mostly of a journalist nature, but really adequate scientific research is practically lacking. The lack of empirical studies on the issue has withheld exposure to the magnitude of the problem and denied the necessary legal protection and sanctions. However, police sources revealed that between January 1979 and August 1983, there were 823 women and children, while between May 1987 to December 1989, the number increased to 880, who were to be sent to neighbouring countries or have escaped and had been apprehended by the law enforcing authorities. Among them, many women and children were brought from Burma and had crossed into Bangladesh to be sent to other countries.

The number of cases and the rescued women and children from 1988 till 1992. (See Annex 2)

A report published by the Lawyers for Human Rights and legal aid in 1991, gives a vivid account of the way the girls are being brought to Pakistan and sold to the pimps of brothels. One thirty years old victim Noor Jehan told the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid that after being married for seven years she came to know that her husband is a pimp who is involved in the flesh trade. Her husband brought her to Pakistan three years ago along with fifty/sixty girls and twenty-five/thirty men from different parts of Bangladesh. They all crossed the border illegally from Benapole to Amritsar and from there to Lahore in the dark by foot. They were taken to a secluded place in a jungle before crossing the border under police custody and were asked to stay there till dark. The border officials keep the girls who are pretty and sexually abuse them and keep them until the other lot of girls reach then the previous ones are released.

Several other victims related the same experiences. Some are sold as they enter India or are given work on temporary basis for a month or two and then are dislodged again or some are brought directly to Pakistan without staying in India. They enter Lahore and from there, are brought to Karachi by trains or buses, to the places known as Bengali Paras meaning colonies. The main Bengali Paras are in Ayesha Manzil, F.B. Area, North Karachi, Nazimabad, Gushan-e-Iqbal, Machchar Colony, Karachi.

Recently, the Boston Globe (2 April 1992) reported that the Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid in Pakistan stated that about 2,100 Bangladeshi women and girls are now under detention in the Pakistani jails under its Hudood Ordinance and Illegal Entrance Act. Of these Bangladeshis, 80 Bangladeshi women are now under detention in Karachi jail, 20 in Larkhana, and a total of 2,000 women in other jails in Pakistan. It further reported that around 200,000 women between the ages of 12 to 30 have already been sold by their

captors.

During the visit at Sarsa thana in Jessore , police officials stated that there has been a recent case of three young girls being rescued from a brothel in Calcutta and have been repatriated to Bangladesh through Benapole. The three young girls namely Feroza, Hashi and Parveen were sent to the Mirpur Centre in April 1993 and from then on they are staying at the Centre, but they were reluctant to speak the truth. Given below are their experiences.

Feroza khatun presently fifteen years of age, is the daughter of Abul Hashim who is a petty shopkeeper. The family used to stay at Rupsha ferry terminal in Khulna. She is the eldest daughter and has two younger brothers. Seven years ago, while she was playing with her friends in the street near the ferry terminal in the morning, a lady approached her. She wanted Feroza to accompany her and pulled her hand forcefully. Feroza was taken to her house and remained locked up for the whole night. Although she cried, there was no one to rescue her. The next morning she was taken by car to Benapole and from there she was taken to India by van. As she was only eight years old at that time, Feroza could not recall the names of places they passed. When she reached Calcutta, she was still crying so loudly so that it caught the attention of the police. The woman trafficker left the place. The police took her to the thana and later she was placed in the Liluah Home in Howrah where she stayed for seven years.

Hashi presently six years of age, is the daughter of late Akbar Sheikh. She used to stay in the fringe area of Jessore city with her mother who is a domestic helper. They are a large family of six sisters and four brothers, of which she is the fourth among the sisters. A woman who stayed in India frequently visited their house. In this way she became quite known and friendly to the family. Three years ago, the woman approached Hashi's mother and offered to take Hashi to India to work as a housemaid. With the knowledge of her mother, Hashi accompanied by her second sister was taken to

India through Benapole. After they reached Calcutta, Hashi was employed as a housemaid as promised. After two days, she escaped and was rescued by the police who took her to the Liluah Home in Howrah where she stayed for three years. At one time, during the discussion, she disclosed that she can sing and dance, but afterwards she denied the fact she narrated.

Parveen presently fifteen years of age, used to stay with her maternal uncle in Noahpara in Jessore. Her father Faiq Mollah died when her mother was expecting her first child. Her mother remarried the second time and Parveen now has three step sisters. In her uncle's house she used to do all types of household work and treated as a maid. In the meantime, a woman who used to sell saris visited their house frequently. One day she proposed to take Parveen to India for a short visit. They crossed the border through Benapole along with other women traffickers. Although the border police interrogated her along with the traffickers, still they managed to go to Calcutta. After reaching Calcutta, the traffickers told her to wait in front of one of the shops, while they went to buy some essential goods. Somehow they never returned. At last when she could not find them, she willingly surrendered to the police. Finally she was also taken to the Liluah Home in Howrah.

Two other young girls, Sofia aged fifteen and Hamida aged thirteen years were in the same home in Howrah. They are both first cousins. Sofia's mother works as a domestic help in Khalishpur, Khulna. About one year ago, a woman procurer proposed to take her to India and provide her with a viable job. At the same time, she cautioned her not to disclose the matter to anyone, not even to her mother. In the meantime, Sofia went to Gopalganj to bring Hamida to Khulna. During the early hours the next morning, both of them set off with the woman without the knowledge of the mother. They both vividly remember the whole journey to Calcutta which took place during day time. Various modes of transport were used : rickshaw till the bus stand in Khalishpur, from there by bus

to Jessore bus stand and again by bus to Benapole border post, and lastly crossing over to India by van. Another male trafficker introduced as the brother of the woman, accompanied them till Calcutta. In Calcutta they went to stay with a woman, who was introduced again as the sister. In that house they started working as domestic help. On the fourth day, they both lost their way to the house while bringing tea from an outside stall. At last they ended up at the police station and ultimately placed in the Liluah Home where they stayed for ten months.

Slave Trade and the Plight of Women and Children in Pakistan

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, about 50 thousand people had gone to Pakistan in search of various livelihood activities, usually from the lower classes. They have formed a vicious circle of procurers and traffickers in children and young women who have links with their rural homeland in Bangladesh while working and staying most of the time in Pakistan. Thousands of children and women are sold by this "mafia" which is deep-rooted in police and administration in Pakistan and also the border officials.

The number of smuggled young women and children run into thousands and they live in slums and shanty towns in Karachi and other parts of Pakistan. Various dens have been discovered in the slum areas in Karachi where these women have been confined. At times, police raid these dens, usually when their bhatta or protection money are stopped by the den operators. It is alleged that the border security forces of all three countries - Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are involved. When these women are arrested they relate stories of horror and shame.

In 1991, sixteen Bengali women were arrested from one of the leading prostitution den of Sher Khan near Aisha Manzil in

Karachi. After their acquittal, these women described their journey from Jessore in Bangladesh to Benapole in India, then on to Calcutta, Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore, Kasoor and finally to Karachi. They said that they crossed the borders on foot during night. While inside India and Pakistan, they travelled by trains. They revealed that the agents have set transit places at Jessore, Benapole, Calcutta, Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore and in Karachi. One of the girls a fifteen year old Yasmeen was a resident of Chittagong, had come to Karachi to work and earn money. But unfortunately after arrival she was severely tortured to obey the orders and indulge in prostitution. She arrived at Sher Khan's den 16 days before the raid. Sixteen years old Rahima lamented that her aunt had left her at Lahore station with a man who brought her to Karachi. Rahima's father had taken Rs.5000 loan from his sister for the marriage of his eldest daughter. When he was unable to pay back money in time, his sister asked him to let Rahima stay with her for some time which her father agreed. The aunt took her to Dhaka from where they left for Pakistan, as she was a regular visitor to Pakistan. In Karachi she landed at Sher Khan's place, where she stayed for the past five months before the raid (Bhagawandasa, 1991).

When the young women and children are brought to Karachi, they are kept in the dens of the flesh traders whose wives and daughters also help them in keeping an eye on these women and children. They are not given proper food and are overcrowded in a small room. During their stay in the den, their duties are distributed like, cooking, washing, laundry etc. They are abused, in the meantime, pimps arrange buyers for these girls. They are then prepared for Nikkah ceremony (registered marriage which usually is a farce). The couples are mostly unmatched because the so-called husbands indeed buy the girls but then again sell them to someone else with a profit. Either the girl is sent to some brothel where she becomes a permanent source of income for a longer period. The rate of the girl depends upon the age, beauty, virginity, education, etc. The victims relate their humiliating and disgusting sale experience. The pimp takes one girl by hand

and shows her to the buyer saying she is physically fit, can walk, can work; then shows her face from different angles continuously using abusive obscene language, pinching her flesh. The girl has to bear the lecherous looks, the lustful touch, the ridicule, the contempt. She is asked to walk. She staggers and they all laugh at her. If she is fortunate (or unfortunate) enough, she is selected. Then she passes through the process of bidding and ultimately she is purchased, the buyer takes her with him, (Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, 1991). Shahid and Khan (1990) also documented that Karimabad, Gulshan-e-Iqbal and North Karachi are marked areas of operation where Bengali girls are sold in the name of marriage and under cover of religion and morality. They go from one lord to another and thus get "married" again and again (Shahid and Khan, 1990).

The whole trade is in the knowledge of police and it appears that the police is party to it. In a report published in Jang's mid-week magazine in Pakistan, the writer concealed her identity but gave accounts of the interview she had with one of the pimps. She particularly inquired about what happens when the pimp buys a girl and she gets caught by police. The pimp reassured her that police would never touch her, not only in Karachi but wherever she would go in Pakistan; instead if she mentioned the name of the pimp to police, they would drop her in their safe custody (quoted in the report of the lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, 1991)

Several dozen Bengali women and children have so far been sent back to Bangladesh, but several hundred Bangladeshis, mostly young girls and children, are still sitting in lockups awaiting legal and monetary assistance for release and repatriation to their homeland. When there are police raids, many women and children are being arrested, while the main culprits are left behind. The victims are sent to jail under immigration Act and Hudood Ordinance and are detained. The pimps with the help of jail authorities meet these victims and harass them that they are their only saviours and no one would come to their rescue but once they are released they

have to obey the pimps. Victims who have been released on bail through these pimps are again trapped in the same vicious circle. Some detainees are further detained despite completing their detention periods. Police file cases even against children of six to ten years of age who are unable to understand the implication of the law.

During detention, people are generally allowed to meet the women and children and are left at the mercy of pimps and traffickers. If they are acquitted, which is quite often because of loopholes in the prosecution case, they are forced to revert to flesh trade. Above all, trials and even convictions do not help to end trafficking in women and children, which continues to flourish (The News, 5 April 1991)

Laws Addressing the Issue of Trafficking in Women and Children

The issues regarding trafficking of women and especially of children have been incorporated in various acts and laws that have been enacted from time to time. The Penal Code of 1860, modified in 1991, contain provisions of kidnapping, abduction, slavery and forced labour. The Penal Code specifies two kinds of kidnapping: kidnapping from Bangladesh and kidnapping from lawful guardian (section 359 of The Penal Code). The law relating to kidnapping from Bangladesh is contained in section 360 of the Code which lays down that "whoever conveys any person beyond the limits of Bangladesh without the consent of that person or of some persons legally authorised to consent on behalf of that person, is said to kidnap that person from Bangladesh." From this two essential ingredients of kidnapping ensure: conveying of any person, beyond the limits of Bangladesh; and such conveying must be without the consent of that person or of some persons legally authorised to consent on behalf of that person.

The law relating to kidnapping from lawful guardian is contained in section 361 which lays down that "Whoever takes or entices any minor under fourteen years of age if a male, or under sixteen years of age, if a female, or any person of unsound mind, out of the keeping of the lawful guardian of such minor or person of unsound mind, without the consent of such guardian, is said to kidnap such minor or person from lawful guardian." The punishment of kidnapping is imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall be liable to fine (section 363 of the Penal Code)

In addition, section 370 of the Code relates to slavery, "Whoever imports, exports, removes, buys, sells or disposes of any person as a slave... shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for seven years and fine." The following section 372 relates to the sell, hire of minors under the age of eighteen for prostitution or for other immoral purposes and shall be punishable for ten years and fine. Although The Penal Code deals with some of the major aspects of kidnapping, abduction and slavery still one of the oldest act on the problem is The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933 which lays more emphasis on prostitution than on trafficking. However procurement is dealt with in Section 9 which states, "Any person who induces a female to go from any place with intent that she may, for the purposes of prostitution, become the inmate of, or frequent a brothel, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for the term which may extend to three years, or with fine which may extend to three years, or with fine which may extend to one thousand taka, or with both and if a male person shall also be liable to whipping." (The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1933).

More recent is the Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance 1983 which specifically provides punishment for kidnapping and trafficking in women. Section 4 of the Ordinance states penalty for kidnapping or abduction of women: whoever kidnaps or abducts any women of any age.

With intent that such women shall be employed or used for the purpose of prostitution or for any unlawful or immoral purpose or knowing it to be likely that such women shall be employed or used for any such purpose; or

With intent that such women may be compelled or knowing it to be likely that she will be compelled to marry any person against her will; or in order that such women may be forced or seduced to illicit intercourse, or knowing it to be likely that she will be forced or seduced to illicit intercourse; shall be punishable with transportation for life or with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to fourteen years and shall also be liable to fine.

Section 5 of the Ordinance specifically states the penalty for trafficking in women: whoever imports or exports, or sells, lets to hire or otherwise disposes of, or buys, hires or otherwise obtains possession of,

any women of any age with intent that such women shall be employed or used for the purpose of prostitution or illicit intercourse with any person; or

for any unlawful and immoral purpose, or

knowing it to be likely that such women will be employed or used for any such purpose;

shall be punishable with transportation for life or with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to fourteen years, and shall also be liable to fine.

As trafficking of women and children is on the rise, recently the cabinet approved in principle the draft bill on prevention of cruelty to women and children. Provision of deterrent punishment like death sentence and life imprisonment for offenders of women and children trafficking was one among

other offences to have been suggested in the draft of the bill. The bill also suggest to take necessary steps to complete the trial of such offences within a stipulate period of 60 days and constitute special tribunal as and when required (Morning Sun, 2 June 1992).

However, the implementation of the above acts and laws is questionable in the present state of trafficking of women and children mainly due to the fact that trafficking is a regional problem, involving different countries. As such it has to be solved regionally. But so far there had been no international law which has been accepted by the countries involved in slavery and trafficking of women and children in the region, especially the sending and receiving countries.

Conclusion and Strategies for Future Action

Trafficking of women and children is mainly for the purposes of prostitution, sexual abuse, forced labour, cheap labour, bonded labour slavery and marriage. Furthermore, measures against the agents of trafficking and the government's failure either to recognise the problems or to afford the young women and children the required protection aggravates the situation.

Several pertinent issues are identified as interrelated for the development of effective strategies for future actions in relation to trafficking in women and children in the South Asian region. These are:

invisibility of the problem of trafficking in women and children owing to the nature of its illegal nature;

lack of legislation on trafficking in women and children addressing regional trafficking among countries;

lack of proper and timely prosecution;

vulnerability of the victim under the legislation of the receiving countries that penalise the victims themselves;

use of women and children as economic commodities by strong vested interest groups and lack of state interventions in this regard;

powerlessness of the victims especially because of their gender and age; and

societal attitudes which condone trafficking in women and children.

Strategies for future action

Based on the above identified issues, the following are recommended:

more studies should be undertaken to fill up the information gaps and to develop the necessary data base for a comprehensive overview of the problem and to formulate action programmes;

awareness raising campaigns at national and regional levels through the educational systems, community organisations, mass media, legal aid, women activist groups and human rights organisations;

amendment of the existing legislations and measures regarding the issue of trafficking of the South Asian countries to develop a uniform law within the region to prevent the present discriminatory treatment to victims of trafficking;

incorporate provisions of international instruments while amending, in particular those dealing with slavery, forced labour and children's rights like Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery Convention for the suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child;

Strengthening the role of the national and regional organisations to monitor and take preventive measures and actions for proper rehabilitation and facilitation of their safe and prompt return to their home country, instead of detention in prisons awaiting trials and follow-up actions. In this regard, women and children legal aid groups can play an effective role;

Governments of the South Asian countries should be made aware of the present situation and strong lobbying groups of activists, journalists and parliamentarians should be organised both in sending and receiving countries;

traffickers should be punished without delay;

police should act in accordance with the law;

journalists should let the public know the true incidents of trafficking, instead of making them sensational news;

establishment of temporary shelter homes for the safety of the rescued and victimized young women and children both in the sending and receiving countries before arrangements are made to send them home; and

legal provisions should be there for those who want to stay back and earn a living after being rescued, because once they are legally allowed to stay as migrant workers, they will not fall prey to police harassment and violence.

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Land Routes of Trafficking in Women & Children				
District in Bangladesh	Thana	Trafficking Route	Mode of Transport	Destination in India
Satkhira	Satkhira	Bhomra Agardari Kushkhali Taligacha Dubli	Bicycle	Itendia Bashirhat Amudia Same as above Kaijuri
	Kolaroa	Kagdange Madra Hizoldhi	Bicycle Van	
Jessore	Sarsa	Benapole Putkhali Dhannokhola Shikarpur Shalkona Kashipur	Bicycle Van	Bongoan Same as above Kurulia Same as above Same as above Boyra
	Chaugacha	Kabilpur Shajatpur	Bicycle Van	Boyra Same as above
Meherpur	Meherpur	Mujibnagar Shalika Sholmari	Van	Batai Not available Not available
Kushita	Daulatpur	Mothurapur Pragpur Taragunia	Bus Van	Not available Not available Not available
Chapai	Chapai	Barharoa	Van, Bus	Boydderbazar
Nawabganj	Nawabganj		Horsecart	
Dinajpur	Hakimpur	Hili	Train, Bus	West Hili
Kurigram	Rahumari	Islamari	Boat	Makarchar
Lalmonirhat	Lalmonirhat	Mogulhat	Train, Bus	Gitaldoho
	Patgram	Charabanda Dohogram	Train, Bus Boat	Same as above

Number of Rescued Women and Children			
Year	No. of cases	Women	Children
1988	60	168	81
1989	30	88	31
1990	16	101	33
1991	12	33	29
1992	20	41	47

Source: Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D), Dhaka Headquarters.

The Sack

Jean Arasanayagam

SCENE: Dead of night. Remote village. Sounds of dogs beginning to bark. Dense darkness shrouds the huts. Suddenly, sounds of screams pierce the air. Cries. Panic. Rush of figures in the dark. Flames rise out of the darkness. Everything is re-enacted on a screen. Shadow play. Music harsh, grating. Figures tumble and fall. Run. Other figures converge on them, hands upraised. Wails. Cries.

Woman drags a figure along the stage. He is grievously wounded. Her hands touch him as she kneels beside him. Looks at her hands. Covered with blood. Tears strips of cloth off her garments and tries to bandage the wounds. She cannot staunch them. She tries to lift him up....

WOMAN: Where are the others? Where's everybody - escaping, escaping. No one to defend us. They came in the night. How could they know who we are? They don't know us, they know nothing about us. As we know nothing about them. They see only the terror on our faces. We are not human beings to each other - every one of them, mortally wounded inside of them - they've lost people too. They know they'll never come out of it. They're already dead. My son speak to me... I'm left to save you. I'll do it alone even if no one comes to help me. What did you do to anyone before this...? what did you ever do to hurt anyone in your life. Your father left me alone to bring you up. Water? Do you want a sip of water...? from where can I get you

water? The huts have gone up in flames, the water pots smashed to bits - blood, water, everything flowing together - the tributaries mingle. Help! Someone please help....

Figures continue to flit by cries of the dying are heard. The mourners have begun their dirge-like wail. Children cry, a baby, young children, women.... sobs....

WOMAN: Son, my son, wait, I'll see whether there's anyone to help me carry you out of this carnage. You need to be taken to the hospital. That's the only place where you can be saved. Your body, gashed, bleeding. I cannot staunch the wounds. I'll try again....

Tears more strips of cloth and binds them across his chest.

WOMAN: You must live. You must live. I'm already an old woman. Worn out. A few years more and you would have brought a wife into the hut. She would have helped me.. no, no, I can see that there's no one who can help me at this moment.... I can recognise my neighbours... but they have their own problems. They need help too....

Calls out.

Friend! Friends! Aunt... cousin... what...? Dead? Your whole family, all of them? Only you escaped? Hacked to death? My son... hurt badly. I have got to take him to the hospital. There's only one way. Through the forest. But how? But how, dear God?

Figures cross, re-cross the stage. Gestures of despair. Music dirge-like, mourning wails rise in the air as backdrop to the movement of people who are fleeing, carrying their dead, searching... Woman keeps on appealing. They are preoccupied

with their own dead and dying. Some of them pause. Speak a few words. Throw up their hands in despair or gesture in other directions. Some hold out their children to them. Woman starts back.

It is a scene of turmoil, upheaval.

WOMAN: Your only son is dead? Your wife, your children, all dead? Your parents. Your brothers, your sisters? No one left? Everything destroyed? All your possessions lost? Where are you fleeing? My son is wounded terribly, my husband dead. My son still has life. I've lost all the others.....

Returns and kneels beside the son. Cradles his head on her lap.

Son, Son, can't you speak....

Son groans.

I'll take you out somehow, out of this carnage. I'll take you out of this village. Let me think, how can I do so? Carry you. No, I can't. Not for long. I've carried you within my womb... did not feel it a burden then. The other children too. They're lost to me. Thank God that your sister is far from here, living in the other village. Safe for the moment. I've carried you on my hip even when you were able to walk, stumbling around or playing at my feet. You remember the great snake that came crawling out of the forest when I left you to play... I was going about my household tasks... it never harmed you. Your time had not yet come. I was always busy... boiling the paddy or weaving a mat or washing clothes. You stretched out your hands to touch the Naga. You thought it was a friendly creature. I snatched you up just in time and bore you away. This time I could do

nothing to save you. Wait, let me think. There's not a cart in the village left but there must be some way. Yes, the empty grain sacks... that's the only thing I can think of. I've carried heavy sacks of grain myself but this time it will be different. I'll have to carry you in one of the sacks - tough, strong, they won't give way, those sacks. I'll drag you through the forest. I'll find the tracks... wait... I'll run into what's left of the hut...

Woman lays her son's body gently on the ground and runs to the right wing of the stage. Returns in a short while. People still running in all directions. No one had a thought for anyone other than their own. Woman returns.

WOMAN: The grain was still in the sack. I emptied it. No use to us now. I'll lift your body into the sack. That's the only way. Drag the sack through the forest. I'll get you out of all this. There may still be a chance... for you to live... It's dark but I'm not fearful. We'll be together. Wait, I'll bring some of that oil that the priest gave me. I'll rub it into your body... where it has not been gashed. And my amulet. Let me put it around your neck.

She runs back to the right wing again. Emerges with a small vessel in her hands. Pours out oil. Rubs it with the flat of her palm on his forehead. Shudders at his wounds. Takes the amulet off her neck, puts it round his. Prays with hands clasped.

WOMAN: This is the only way... Son, my son, the strength of my arms and my will must take us both through this forest. I must not underestimate the difficulties. I've got to discover new tracks, the way out to reach help. It's the only way for us both. Not a soul to help. I have got to do it alone. If only I

could have carried you, somehow, it would not hurt your wounds, but again, I cannot. My strength is in my mind, my will. I'll have to drag you in this sack. A rough track - stones, roots, thorny bushes. My feet will have to seek out a way. They'll explore the earth. I'll knock off some of the heavier stones, the thorns, to make it easier. Didn't I bring you forth into the world, out of the cave, into the dazzling light. But first there was a long, long, darkness. But when you were born, with your first breath you crowed with delight and crushed the shadows with your baby fist. Wait... be patient, I'll try not to cause you pain.

Takes up the sack, appears to measure its length against her body. Shakes it out thoroughly, lays it on the floor. She begins to lift the body painstakingly, which is limp and groaning. She holds down one edge of the sack with her foot and half lifting the body, she helps it into the sack, first each leg and then the rest of it tucking the arros in. She settles the body in the sack, adjusts the shoulders and the head, tries to give it more support by holding up one end of the sack and then bunching the edges in her hands. She now straightens her body and slowly, half lifting, half dragging the weighted sack offstage.

Lights dim. Bodies flit about. Disappear into the wings. Woman emerges from the right wing.

The forest. Crisscrossed with shadows. Light. dark. The woman moves slowly, dragging the body in the sack.

WOMAN: Just a few stars. I'll have to tread carefully - if I step on a serpent we will both perish. During the day the forest is familiar to me. A place to search for firewood, pluck wild fruit, herbs. It's now a changed place, used for so many purposes. Death comes out of it often...

we're taken unawares... and it's quite common to take refuge here too... Oh my son, can you hear me? Are you listening? You answer me only with groans... that also will help me, yet the sack feels damp to the touch. It's not the night dews alone... I know what it is... it's the blood from your wounds leaking through the sack. What terrible wounds. Mortal wounds. The others... they must be preparing the bodies for burial, those who are left. It's as if a terrible death wind swept through... and the saplings snapped in two... even the tall, strong trees, mown down. Axed down. The sack grows heavier. The sack that carried all that grain from the harvest. Grain from the chena, from the fields... our golden land, our golden land. When, when ever can we return to our golden lands?

Pauses for an instant. Peers into the darkness of the forest. Takes the end of her towel. Wipes the forehead of her son.

Which path?

Steps on one side.

Untrodden. I feel our presence here is an intrusion. I remember how we must always break a coconut to Skanda before we enter into his sanctuary. These are not human preserves. Son, are you listening? Does my voice bring any comfort to you? The animals know this is their home. Their lairs lie deep inside the forest. That slight rustling sound of leaves, twigs. I can sense the movement of something slithering through. I am being watched... watched. Look, yellow eyes. Nothing frightens me. I have a purpose. Only

one purpose. Let us go.

Lifts up the sack and begins to drag it, sometimes helping to support the body with one of her hands. Takes a few steps towards right.

WOMAN: No thorns here, or rocks. It's very dense here. I can't take you this way. The other path... I'll try that.

Touches his forehead.

You're cold, yet there are beads of perspiration on your forehead. Those wounds, gaping... like so many open mouths yearning to talk but no voices emerge. Not a single voice. Still, silent tongues, heavy and clogged with blood. It's your life blood that's flowing, ebbing away. Your eyes, keep them closed. Imagine you are asleep... yes, asleep. I'll croon to you. I'll croon...

Begins a dirge-like crooning which sounds mournful in the eeriness of the forest.

Yes, sleep, rest. When you awake the stones would have ceased to chafe your skin. It's sore, lacerated. But be patient. I'll take you carefully. You're in a boat. We're on the river. Floating. Feel the current against your body. Water. Just water.

Drags the sack

Water. Just water. In the boat. Rocking. Soon, soon, you'll lie on a smooth surface. No rough stones to blunt their edges against your body. This path seems easier. Trodden by the animals. Perhaps a herd of elephants

even. Listen, the wound of all those insects. Voices speaking. Nature voices. No harm. No threat. Warning each other, I suppose, of our presence. We were helpless. Couldn't do a thing to defend ourselves. The huts must be smouldering into ashes. A skeletal village. And that smell. For miles and miles the wind will carry it. The smell of death. The smell of blood. Can we ever drink the water in our well. Polluted by the stench of death. Oh, everybody is bereaved. Yes, every family in the village bereaved. In mourning. Ah, remember what they told us, those survivors from the other villages. It had been just after the New Year. 'The oil was still in the pans. The new pots still had vestiges of milk and rice. The huts whitewashed for the season were charred and burnt.' There, too, so few survived. Even little children. No one will return. Everyone goes away. Desolation is all that's left. And the grain grows wild. The birds grow fat on the ungathered harvests.

Looks anxiously in all directions. Pauses. Summons her strength and begins to drag the sack again.

If only I could carry you in my womb again and give birth to you a second time. I would willingly go through the agony and pain again because at the end of it there would be life... For the first time I am beginning to think of life, of re-birth. Immortality is not what simple folk like ourselves can ever look forward to. This is my karma. This is your karma. How far can memory take us back into the past. I have never had profound thoughts about life and death. Nor did you. We lived in this remote village and this was the only world we knew till the war came.

And what is this war? None of us in the village really understand. And who are our enemies, and why? No one tells us clearly. When do I return? From what well will I take water again. Are you thirsty, my son. There are little rainwater pools in the rock. Small water holes where the animals come to drink. If only I can find one.

Leaves the sack propped up against a tree and searches for water.

WOMAN: The leaves are damp here. Moist. The earth feels trampled here. I'll walk a little further but I mustn't get lost. Ah, I knew it. A small water hole. Not too deep.

Takes the end of her towel off her shoulders and dips it in the water.

Cool. So cool.

Wrings it out and wipes her face. Then shakes it out and wrings it dry. Dips it in the water and gropes cautiously towards the sack. Takes the towel and wipes the son's forehead, his face.

Cold. So cold. And yet so hot. Hot with fever. And chilled. Women like myself have got to be strong. Even when the men were able and alive. I know what it is to feel my body scorched, burned, drenched by sun and rain. How quickly I became old. Like an old tree, and yet it's not time for me to fall or be cut down. It's you and all the other young ones who fall. Your flesh cut like tender sapling wood. 'Why did it have to be my son, my daughter.' Isn't that what every mother says?

Begins to drag the sack along once more.

WOMAN: It's always someone else's child if it's not your own. It's always someone else's son or daughter who carries those knives. They are never going to stop at that moment of plunging the knife into flesh, to think whether someone else's mother or father will mourn for the dead. That there'll be a wife, a husband, a brother, sister. Kith and kin. How the blood gushes out. The only seed that will sprout up will be what the birds drop... devastated land. You groan, my son, your wounds, I know they hurt. I'll clear the path a little more.

Kneels down, tears out the thorny plants and throws them aside, rocks, stones, with her hands.

For a little while, at least, let me make your passage easier. Why did it have to be you and not myself? The sack.... think of it as the womb where you were close and safe... think of it that way... this time it's your blood that's shed. It will feed the trail of ants that follow it. The ants will feed on its sweetness. Your blood will nourish some form of life and you will live briefly in those minute creature bodies to become part of that act of rebirth. That speck of blood will live in another body and sustain its life. Your blood will sink into earth, reach some obscure root and nourish it. The fruit will be sweet perhaps for someone to enjoy... you will become part of that great cycle, but all this I say only to console myself because, if you were to die, and I have hope that you will live.... if you were to die, you would still live. One day you will be born to another woman. Your life on

this earth is not yet complete. You will be another woman's son. Or I will be born again and your life, if its lifespan has not yet been completed, might come to me again. Our lives we will fill like merit bowls, with good deeds. There was so much hope at your birth. Didn't we tempt the gods by so much hope? Did we believe that there would be others who shared the same hope that I had, your father had? We thought your birth was a great event. We saw you as someone destined to be great. Hoped that you would grow up to excel in whatever you did. But our greatest hope was that one day you would inherit this land and make it more fruitful. When did we come here? I have felt that we have always lived here. We knew the spirits that belong to the earth, rock, tree and forest. We carry on as your grandparents and their parents have done, the same rites and rituals. The great Naga with the jewelled hood was our protection. Our guardian... The trees seem to be thinning here... there's more light at last... we have come out of the forest... there's the path out, I'll take it... the road that leads to the township... the hospital is there... son, just a little while longer.

Lights brighten. Woman, weary, is seen with the sack still clutched closely in her grip.

I'll walk... the road seems lonely.. perhaps I'll see a cart... but I wont wait for it... I'll walk, keep on walking.

Woman reaches the hospital still dragging the sack. Walks through the compound to the building. Nurses, attendants, come out, lay the sack carefully on the ground. Lift the body out of the sack like a new-born babe. Lays him on a stretcher.

Lifts stretcher. Everybody looks at woman. Pitying glances. One of the attendants goes up to her, holds her by the arm.

ATTENDANT: Mother, where do you come from? Did you drag your son all the way through the forest from that other village. We have got the news....

The stretcher is taken in. A nurse comes out after a while.

NURSE: Mother, he lies on the bed like a new-born child. But he has ceased to breathe. His wounds were mortal. He has bled too much. What can any of us do? So many others too. They will be buried today in the village, wont they? Mother, will you return?

Woman shows her grief by clasping her hands across her breast and sitting down wearily. She leans head on her hand.

WOMAN: Let me see him. I promised him that I would bring him here. That I accomplished. I have that consolation. I tried to save him. I tried.

The sack lies at her feet. She stands up to take it, folds it carefully with its bloodstains and stands ready.

WOMAN: I'll take the sack back with me. But first, let me go to him.

Statement of The South Asian Women's Caucus

We the women of South Asian have long awaited a regional forum where our common realities can be shared and articulated. The Bangladesh national preparatory Committee towards Beijing NGO Forum '95 took the initiative of starting this critical process by organizing a South Asian Platform of action at Koitta. The caucus was represented by NGOs from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. Unfortunately Maldives and Bhutan could not attend. The genesis of this group traces back to the Jakarta Draft Plan of Action which made it evident that the uniqueness of our region needs to be reflected in a regional Platform.

This Forum reflects the need of women of this region to have both a collective and a country specific voice. While the Beijing Conference in effect initiated this process. This Platform hopes to evolve beyond Beijing as a consolidated women's force in the region. We envision a comprehensive networking of issues. Groups and strategies leading to bilateral and regional action plans. We have much to share and even more to struggle for together.

The forum currently called "The South Asian Women's Caucus" nominated Bangladesh National Preparatory Committee as its first secretariat.

This meeting looked at five major regional issues affecting women :

1. Economic and Empowerment

South Asia was once a self sufficient, self reliant region with surplus for less endowed neighbouring areas to draw in yet within the space of two centuries.

Mostly following colonisation, the region has been depleted of its natural resources. At the cost of detrimental consequences for the poor of the south, with women being doubly disadvantaged countries of this region have followed economic policies and financial mechanisms geared towards growth and benefit of the North.

Given the rich bio-diversity in the region, it is crucial to protect these from environmentally devastating mega projects and to ensure that patenting of genetic resources by MNCs and other international agencies be effectively prohibited.

2. Political Empowerment of Women

"Women stand for clean and green politics
women stand for empowerment of the people"

The major barriers to women's political empowerment are :

- a. Women's unequal access to political power, reflected in their social and economic positions.
- b. Discrimination in employment, property rights, social rights, education, health and at all levels of decision making.
- c. Fundamentalism, criminilisation, communalisations and the increasing flow of money are the biggest barriers for women's entry into politics.

3. Violence against Women

Violence against women includes all forms of oppression, coercion and cruelty against women, ranging from the home to the state. It also includes

social discriminatory attitudes which affect her throughout her life as well as fundamentalist and communal forces which unleash their worst violence against a woman.

4. Trafficking in Women

The malignant growth of trafficking and forced prostitution not only have hindered development but also have given birth to many a clandestine trade. Yet, it remains one of the invisible, unacknowledged and unaddressed issues.

These traffickers often decide the political fate of individual countries. They are hardly brought under the laws of the land.

Hence, there is a need for a comprehensive standardised definition of trafficking for the South Asian Region.

It is also necessary to make appropriate amendments to the existing legislation on trafficking and to ensure the strict enforcement of such laws.

There is a further need to have a GO-NGO collaboration to fight this menace nationally and to establish a strong networking of the South Asian Region to address this issues.

Forced/manipulated prostitution is a flagrant violation of human rights and the dignity of the person which threatens the cohesion and welfare of individual, family and the community at large.

Laws need to be enacted and enforced to protect these distressed women.

5. Religious Fundamentalism and Ethnic Chauvinism

Both these elements have manifested themselves as part of an identity crisis which in effect should be understood as the politics of discrimination, deprivation and uneven development. Women are particularly targeted as the politics of discrimination, deprivation and uneven development. Women are particularly targeted as the preservers and symbols of cultural and religious identities and thereby become objects of control. This process has led to the reversal of the rights of women and to seek the original culture, which in many cases, are oppressive.

The critical areas of Health, Media, Culture and Education could not be addressed adequately at this meeting. We realize that issues like Health of the women in the region especially because of the recent pressure on governments on population control, requires immediate and comprehensive regional efforts. This group has decided that these areas will be taken up in detail in the national and regional follow-up meetings.

The future plans discussed at the meeting include NGO and civic organizations meetings at the national levels. Meeting prior to the 2nd Preparatory Committee meeting in March and preparation of holding of South Asian events during the Beijing World Conference.

The Caucus will also be active at all UN and World Conferences including the following Social Summit and SAARC meetings.

Women and Economic Empowerment

The Case of Pelanda

Vinodini de Silva

The women in development paradigm's main focus has been in the income generating activities. There had been very many cases where income generating activities have failed as the ideology of subordination was not dislodged in the social process. The critique of the developmental phenomenon has resulted in an abundance of such literature mainly in the sphere of agriculture. Women's organisations have been alerted to the lapses. However, despite the specific problems faced by the income generating projects, economic empowerment should form the base for other empowerment processes. Monthly, day to day income, saving habits and the power to decide on a day to day life processes are found to be the means of confidence building for women. Being dependant on men, husbands, fathers, brothers and parents have psychological constraints on the personality development of women. By being economically independent, women can make their own decisions and that becomes their power base for other kinds of moral and psychological empowerment. However, all attempts and activities towards economic empowerment should take into their framework certain pre-requisites.

a) While the economic activities are planned, measures should be taken simultaneously to create awareness and sensitise men and women as partners in the process of development. The planners as well as and developmentalists should be aware of the power of the ideology of gender subordination and its powerful base in the psychology of both

men and women.

b) Constant monitoring and efforts towards sustainability should be in built into the programme activities.

The process and the result of the economic empowerment can be illustrated by a case study of a project that Women's Education and Research Centre has undertaken to elevate the position of women in Pelanda a rural area Pelanda in Sri Lanka.

The village of Pelanda had previously been featured in a government poverty alleviation programme. (Janasaviya). The families covered however failed to improve their economic and social status. Research among Janasaviya programme beneficiaries have shown that the required guidance and training essential for the success of the programme were lacking. Families that attempted to enhance their economic scope by taking loans were unable to fulfil their ambitions owing to the lack of education with regard to markets and also due to the serious lack of transport to and fro from the village. Some of these families are now in debt to the state. The Janasaviya programme briefly uplifted the purchasing power and thereby increased the nutritional intake although it has had very little lasting benefit. The women in particular were virtually in the same state as they were before, particularly Muslim women, who traditionally have very little social integration. While Sinhalese women have some responsibility in household finances, the overall control was still held by men. The Janasaviya programme has been implemented impersonally and this seems to be the main cause in its failing to achieve its objectives in an unsophisticated and isolated village. The programme commenced in October 1993 covers females from different families.

Twenty five miles east of Kalutara Nestled among the hills is the village of Pelanda. A sixty minute ride by bus from Matugama takes you to a dozen or so shops which is the

"town". From here a gravel road takes you past a few wattle and daub houses into the interior where houses become more and more scarce. Acres of tea, rubber and in strips of terraced paddy fields provide a pleasing and peaceful view. Peace however is not the issue there, as poverty is.

Janasaviya scheme has given them hope, as well as some cash, but it was no answer to their problems. The village is not easily accessible. There are only two buses operate each day. One in the morning and one in the evening. When the monsoon arrives the bus can make it only half way due to floods. Either you walk the rest or stay at home. Women's Education and Research Centre formulated an ambitious plan funded by Canadian International Development Agency to do something worthwhile, some thing lasting that would elevate the life styles of a hundred of the most needy families who live without hope.

From the beginning it was realised that nothing could be accomplished until the chosen, one hundred women were taught that the road to success begins with them. They were assembled and the projects discussed. Groups were formed, focusing on the difficult projects which ranged from home gardening to dairy farming. Government trainers from the agricultural and animal husbandry areas working in the vicinity were recruited. Soon the training sessions began. The women were informed that the first part of the project, be it ground preparation for plots or sheds for poultry, cattle or goats, must be undertaken by them. Women's Education and Research Centre would supply the materials where construction was needed but the women had to first demonstrate their commitment. Poultry was the first to get off the ground with many of them previously being stay-at-home Muslims, showing great keenness. Women's Education and Research Centre provided the chicks which were both broiler and layers. Free inoculations from the government veterinary office were arranged. The project is now fully operational and self sufficient with no further help from Women's Education and Research Centre required. Women now purchase their

own chicks and liaise with the government officials for any advice they need.

The project covers the following areas:

Tea, Banana cultivation, Goat rearing, Gem cutting, Poultry, Bee keeping, Handloom, Sewing, Cinnamon, Home gardening, Dairy cows, Retail shops.

Trainers used in this project are all government officers trained in their particular fields. These officers while being fully competent are also familiar with the array of free government facilities available to the poor. These benefits previously unknown to the participants are now being utilised fully. The relationship that the participants are building up with these government officers and other government agencies indicate that in future they will be able to obtain further assistance and advice on their own.

Even in the relatively short period the project has been in operation, some changes in status and attitudes are evident.

The revolving fund is being operated through the Regional Rural Development Bank. The participants can obtain loans directly from the bank. The initial loans are guaranteed by WERC. The bank uses its own officers to monitor progress. The bank guarantee given by WERC will be withdrawn after three years. Subsequent loans would have to be given at the banks discretion. The guaranteed loans scheme through the bank (revolving) has brought the participants directly into contact with a lending institution. The bank officers who monitor progress and the participant borrowers are able to develop a professional relationship. At the end of the guarantee period the lending institution will continue to finance the participants with no security required. The lending rates too are negotiable. This relationship also eliminates the need for participants to borrow from money lenders at exorbitant rates of interest. The women were formed in to groups and the individual members take loans for which the

whole group would be held responsible. If any one person defaulted the group would get no further credit. By this individual as well as collective responsibility was established. Women have to do all their transactions at the bank on their own thereby familiarising themselves with the bank officials and procedures. This was also an avenue of developing independence and the necessity of planning their actions.

The groups have group leaders where leadership skills are vested in real life situations. All aspects of the project are now fully operational with the women and their families enjoying a regular source of income and being fully aware that now all that stands between them and a better quality of life is commitment and hard work.

Note : This project was funded by CIDA and a mid evaluation was done, by a team of University teachers

Pastoral Power: Foucault and The New Imperial Order

Patricia Stamp

"The most insidious dangers of social oppression are not the horrors done to me against my will -- though they are bad enough -- but the horrors I am made to desire."¹

Foucault's work is furnished with a number of doors that can be opened to Third World analysis. It is axiomatic that his almost exclusive focus on Western institutions is no barrier to the application of his ideas to colonial and imperial contexts -- the protestations of Marxists and anti-postmodernists notwithstanding. If there was ever a doubt about the powerful possibilities of Foucauldian applications, Edward Said with his famous application, *Orientalism*², long since laid them to rest. The door that I take is Foucault's concept of "pastoral power," devised by him to characterize the power relations attendant upon the "disciplining of societies in Europe since the eighteenth century."³ I argue that Western relations with the Third World in the past and present can similarly be characterized as a

¹ T. G. May, 'The Politics of Life in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze', *Substance*, vol.20, no. 3, 1991, p.31.

² E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979. See esp. pp. 3, 22-4.

³ M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', Afterword, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 129. Foucault develops his concept of pastoral power in the same article: see p. 215.

secular version of "pastoral power," and that this power, far from becoming more ecumenical in the postcolonial era, is in transformation to a more fundamentalist and orthodox form of discipline, surveillance, and control.

In exploring this pastoral power, I use Foucault's concept of a "'local center' of power-knowledge" to elucidate the relationship between aid expert (as scholar or practitioner, whether indigenous or foreign) and aid recipient (as individual or community)⁴. I embarked on this Foucauldian line of investigation in *Technology, Gender, and Power in Africa*, a survey and critique of the development enterprise in Africa⁵, and have been pursuing it since through investigations into themes of domination and resistance in contemporary African democratic struggles⁶. This essay draws on the insights gained on a six month sabbatical research trip through Africa and South Asia in 1994, as well as earlier efforts to analyze the construction of Third World people as objects of knowledge and subjects of imperial practices. include in these practices not only the political actions of Western states and the economic practices of multinational corporations, but the whole "aid" and "development" enterprise. Indeed, I see the pastoral power of development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs),

⁴ For an exposition of the concept of 'Local centre' of power-knowledge' see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, New York, Random House, 1980, p. 98.

⁵ P. Stamp, *Technology, Gender, and Power in Africa*, Ottawa, International Development Research Centre, 1989, Some of the discussion of pastoral power and local centres of power-knowledge are adapted from passages in chs. 6 and 7 of this book.

⁶ Stamp, 'The Politics of Dissent in Kenya', *Current History*, vol. 90, no.556 May 1991, pp. 205-8, pp. 227-9; 'Burying Otieno: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity in Kenya', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 808-45; and 'Mothers of Invention: Women's Agency in the Kenyan State', in J. Kegan-Gardiner (ed.), *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, forthcoming 1995.

and above all, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as constitutive of a new international political order, whereby the recently won sovereignty of Third World nations has been substantially eroded.

While the "Bretton Woods organizations," the World Bank and IMF, are the shapers of economic policy and the chief instruments of capital, it is the bilateral government agencies (such as the United States Agency for International Development and the Canadian International Development Agency), the sectoral agencies (such as the International Labour Organization [ILO] and UNICEF), and the NGOs (such as Care and Oxfam) who are at one and the same time the missionaries for the new imperial order, the gatherers of the necessary intelligence by which imperial power can be exercised, and the very engineers of the knowledge that underpins this power.⁷

At the heart of this massive economic and aid enterprise, however, is a deep contradiction, within which lies some optimism for resistance to the new imperial order. The hard line economic organizations and the development agencies of the hegemonic state are often at odds with the NGOs and social branches of the United Nations. To extend the missionary metaphor: like the 19th century churches in the Third World, the more progressive NGOs and agencies (such as Oxfam and the Interchurch Fund for International Development, or the ILO) provide their target individuals and groups with the means and the knowledge to resist the hegemony of the new order,

⁷ While I am identifying the period from the oil crisis of the early 1970s, and in particular the era inaugurated by the regims of Reagan and Thatcher, it is important to note that the seeds of millennial capitalism were sown at the conclusion of World War II, with the founding of international economic organizations that could intentionally and globally shape the course of capitalist development. See L. Harris, 'The Bretton Woods System and Africa', in B. Onimode (ed.), *The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt: The Economic Impact*, London, Zed Books, 1989, pp. 19-24.

precisely at the moment they discipline them to the subject position of aid recipient. In the same way that leaders in the anti-colonial struggle used the Bible as a weapon against colonial rule, many aid recipients today are adept in the novel use of development discourse to counter invasive policies, and in hijacking development activities for their own chosen ends. The tendency for the aid enterprise to interpellate its subjects in a contradictory and multiple ways provides the political and ideological space for resistance, even if in much development practice such a space is not occupied⁸.

At the end of the twentieth century, imperialism and anti-imperialist struggle are tightly configured by the current IMF crusade to convert dominated nations to the fundamentalisms of "structural adjustment" and "the market." Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have been the IMF's instrument of choice for fixing the Third World since the early 1980s, the assumption being that from economic retooling will flow political and social progress -- a recycling of the "trickle-down effect" espoused the decade before. Acquiescence to IMF supervision and control of global development by all sectors of the development enterprise, as well as many Third World governments, stems from this transitional moment. Briefly put, structural adjustment is the euphemism for coercive integration of Third World economies into the global free market economy in the context of a net capital flow from South to North. Financing of the punitive debts incurred under the previous era of aid and trade became conditional on Third World states agreement, in effect, to dismantle themselves. Health, education and social welfare expenditures were to be

⁸ Althusser's concept of interpellation remains a useful tool in Foucauldian analysis, enriching Foucault's concept of subjectivity with an articulation to class structure and process. See L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1971, esp. pp. 162-70.

cut, currencies to be floated and devalued, "bloated" bureaucracies to be divested of employees and programmes, and autonomous, state-directed economic initiatives to be abandoned in favour of production -- agricultural or branch plant -- for export rather than for locally defined priorities, such as national food self-sufficiency and controlled commodity prices.

Given the vital role of the Third World state as employer and provider of basic human services in the postcolonial era, the enforcement of these conditionalities has meant the disintegration of many Third World states, the drastic decline of living standards, and a frightening decay of the civil consensus. The genocidal collapse of Rwanda is but the most stark embodiment of this widespread phenomenon. Such is the decay of the Third World state that its basic functions are often now given over to an uncoordinated array of NGOs, local and foreign. The latter each have their own agenda determined by their funding constituency (middle class and charity-minded Western "foster parents" or Western environmental organizations, for instance). The former often provide services and even governance more in keeping with local needs, but national and regional coordination are practically impossible in this context. A recent news report encapsulates phenomenon.

"In the 1970s, Tanzania was an African model for social development, reaching almost universal literacy rates." but.... Meet the new African development. . . .In Tanzania, where the government once controlled almost every aspect of public life, from the press to the price of wheat, the Tanzanian Association of Non-Government Organizations has grown from zero to 140 members in six years. They range from groups of pastoralists demanding land rights to journalists concerned with the environment to women seaweed farmers building a day-care centre on the island of Zanzibar. . . .In crumbling states such as Zaire [NGOs] have become the only means of community survival. . . ."The government has no money to do these sorts of things," said Freda Chale, director of the Tanzanian

Home Economics Association, a group of former government employees ... Tired of watching their country erode, the women behind the home economics association took development into their own hands.⁹

This is not to say that Third World countries were not due for serious reexamination and reorganization; the point, rather, is that the changes imposed and their accompanying justifications disguise the causes of the problem, the imperialist purposes served by these changes, and the devastating societal destruction wrought by them. As the brilliant critic Samir Amin remarks;

World capitalist expansion has always had and still has a polarizing effect. From the very beginning it produced and perpetuated, in a variety of forms, a contrast between centre and periphery that was immanent in actually existing capitalism. In this sense, then, the development of the periphery has always entailed a never-ending 'adjustment' to the demands and constraints of the dominant capital. The centres are 'restructured', the peripheries are 'adjusted' to these restructurings. Never the reverse. . . . The phases of restructuring. constitute the moments of truth in the evolution of the system. Illusions vanish. The difficulties -- the danger of which had been denied -- become the means by which the dominant capital imposes its *diktat*. There is no more any question of dreams of independence; the law of profit reminds the 'underdeveloped' of the fate reserved for them: super-exploitation and subjection.¹⁰

⁹ J. Stackhouse, 'African States Ceding Development', *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 25 August 1994, p. 12.

¹⁰ S. Amin, Preface, in A Mahjoub (ed.), *Adjustment or Delinking? The African Experience*, London, Zed Books; Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 1990, pp. 2-3. The spatial metaphor of 'centre' and 'periphery' has been thoroughly critiqued, but Amin's critiques are particularly astute.

Structural adjustment in my view has consequences starker than any depredations of the slavery or colonial eras, and is the cornerstone of what I am compelled to call *millennial capitalism*. The culture and political economy of the present form of capitalism -- with its particularly virulent strains of both primitive and surplus accumulation -- elicit such a cataclysmic designation; analysts of the new imperial order cannot afford, like Foucault, to refuse the Marxist banner. Rather, the historical materialist method and a subtle understanding of the laws of motion of capital must inform any Foucauldian exploration of the new imperialism's constitutive power relations.

The pastoral power of development operates through local centres of power/knowledge. By these 'local centres' I do not simply mean sites of development activity; I mean as well the Washington development policy seminar; the disciplining head offices of the private foundations such as Ford; the higher reaches of World Health Organization decision-making in Geneva; and the dust-free Western offices, convention centres and university corridors where Third World scholars and practitioners lurk as petitioners, audiences, students or confessors. These are sites as much as the village visited by the church NGO, where the mud compound is swept and "the project" is spruced up and displayed for the gratification of the donors, and the villagers are turned out in their best Sunday clothes -- all contradictions, failures and troubling side-effects of "the project" carefully hidden from view, until the smart four-wheel drive Pageros and Rangerovers with their donor decals have departed for the five star hotel back in town.

As a transfer point of both power and knowledge, these "local centres," whether "at headquarters" or "in the field," produce the aid recipients as passive, problematic targets of aid activity; as "resources" to be mobilized, harnessed and managed; and, indeed, as obstacles in the path of their own "development." In the development discourse thus generated, and reinforced throughout the cycle of evaluation, feedback and policy making, the recipient as an active (often female) subject, embedded in

local relations of production and engaged in a dynamic relationship with the aid donor, often disappears from view. In this discourse, both the repressive effects of "development aid" and the strategies of resistance by Third World individuals and groups are also invisible.

Foucault gave examples of "local centres of power-knowledge" in *The History of Sexuality*:

"the relations that obtain between penitents and confessors, or the faithful and their directors of conscience. Here, guided by the theme of the 'flesh' that must be mastered, different forms of discourse -- self-examination, questionings, admissions, interpretations, interviews -- were the vehicle of a kind of incessant back-and-forth movement of forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge."¹¹

I am suggesting that this "back-and-forth movement" full of questionings, exhortations to master appetites and inclinations, inducements to confess inadequacy and commit to self-improvement, is precisely the microprocess that animates the relationship between aid donor and aid recipient -- as individual or community.

There is a certain sleazy intimacy to the posters tacked up in countless village community development offices, with their infantilizing charts and graphics showing how to feed baby, how to wash yourself, how to plant corn and keep your yard tidy. How did it become routine and acceptable that the mundanities of daily hygiene, personal and family maintenance became poster subjects, fit material for didactic instruction by people from other continents? While it is a characteristic of Western welfare agencies to assert and practice the right to intrude in the

¹¹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 98.

private affairs of their clientele, I cannot imagine a Canadian or an Australian accepting criticism and correction of their personal habits on the scale and intensity to which Third World people are regularly subjected. Unlike in our Western context, where independent individuals retain and defend fiercely their right to privacy, and only recipients of the state's largess such as welfare mothers and ex-workers on the dole are forced to forfeit it, whole populations are policed, the criterion for selection being whether one's community or demographic group has been targeted for an aid project. Once again, Foucault's words are prescient and transportable:

If sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it.¹²

To adapt this quotation, we can see that the recipient of development aid was "constituted as an area of investigation" because "relations of power had established it as a possible object." Conversely, people and communities could become a target of power relations because "techniques of knowledge" had developed which could construct them as 'aid recipients'. In other words, knowledge about Third World peoples as aid recipients constructed during the aid process in turn is used to inform, organize and expand aid both as a discourse of development and as a set of practices. A concrete example of this process can be found in the World Bank's late 1970s Land Development Program in Lilongwe, Malawi, described by Barbara Rogers in her book *The Domestication of Women*.¹³

¹² Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 98.

¹³ B. Rogers, *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1980, pp. 120-38.

Here she shows how knowledge about matriliney was constructed out of the relationship between the aid expert -- the World Bank -- and the aid recipient -- matrilineal Malawians. The World Bank report named matriliney as 'socialistic' and 'matriarchal' and this knowledge was then used to shape appropriate (i.e. anti-matrilineal) policies; as well, it provided the 'grid of intelligibility'¹⁴ into which any further information about kinship was inserted. The discourse and practice of development in the Lilongwe project thus both acted to suppress matriliney, a historical gender system of Africa, and seriously to undermine women's rights and control of resources.

How the aid donor-aid recipient relationship operates as a local centre of power/knowledge can also be demonstrated through recourse to Foucault's own words in another context. His characterization of the secular "pastoral power" that emerged in Europe since the 18th century reads uncannily like a description of development aid activities, and demonstrates the applicability of the concept of pastoral power to the new imperial order. The new 'pastoral power' according to Foucault resides in the state and other modern institutions, and like the ecclesiastical power that it has replaced, is salvation-oriented.

It was no longer a question of leading people to their salvation in the next world, but rather ensuring it in this world. And in this context, the word *salvation* takes on different meanings: health, well-being (that is sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents. A series of "worldly" aims took the place of the traditional pastorate....Sometimes the power was exercised by private ventures, welfare societies, benefactors and generally by philanthropists. But ancient institutions, for example the family, were also mobilized...to take on pastoral functionsFinally, the

¹⁴ Foucault, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 121.

multiplication of the aims and agents of pastoral power focused the development of knowledge of man around two roles: one, globalizing and quantitative, concerning the population; the other, analytical, concerning the individual.¹⁵

It is axiomatic in the planet's hegemonic discourses, whether popular, political or technical, that the majority of the world's people have a problem, need saving, and that their salvation is "development", to free them from the purgatory of "backwardness", "tradition", or "underdevelopment." The government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and do-good corporations who exercise power in the present dispensation are far more messianic, moreover, than the "private ventures, welfare societies, benefactors and .. philanthropists" Foucault was identifying.

Again the techniques of salvation described by Foucault -- the concrete means by which he saw pastoral power exercised -- could almost have provided the handbook to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as they figured out how to coerce citizens' compliance with Structural Adjustment across the Third World.

What is to be understood by the disciplining of societies in Europe since the eighteenth century is not, of course, that the individuals who are part of them become more and more obedient, nor that they set about assembling in barracks, schools, or prisons; rather that an *increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment* has been sought after -- more and more rational and economic -- between productive activities, resources of communication, and the play of power relations (emphasis mine).¹⁶

¹⁵ Foucault, *Afterward*, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 215.

¹⁶ Foucault, *Afterword*, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 219.

What distinguishes millennial capitalism and its attendant imperial order is "the increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment," the linking of culture, family, music, sports -- indeed the panoply of civil society -- to the development project. There is no aspect of Third World society that is exempt from formulation as a "development problem" or a "development opportunity." And it is the more invasive and transformative because of the overt, intentional and massive nature of the enterprise. The White Man's Burden of the colonial era was never like this.

How does this massive conversion of ordinary lives into a set of problems to be solved occur? To understand this, we must look at the institutional culture of aid. There is a whole bureaucratic language that converts the everyday field experiences and reports of aid workers into the "project cycle" of objectives, funding, evaluation, and conclusion. The very idea of a "concluded project" is problematic. To paraphrase Adele Mueller, the concreteness and ambiguities of field reports are "worked up" into a bureaucratic discourse that disciplines the unruliness of messy realities: it erases the ambiguities, elides cultural and historical specificity, and above all asserts the inevitability of closure on "the project."¹⁷ If the project is evaluated as unsuccessful, a flaw is found in the project "design," or more commonly, in the failure of the recipients to respond as predicted. The solution is to design a better project, or to devise means to retool the recipient. It is in this way that the very lives, habits, ways of being and doing, of aid recipients become a problem for development, and a barrier to their own salvation. Active, centred agents become spectators of, or even problematic marginal figures in, their own existence.

¹⁷ A. Mueller, 'Peasants and Professionals: The Social Organization of Women in Development Knowledge', Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1987.

An investigation of the forms of resistance to this pastoral power is beyond the scope of the commentary, as is a detailed theorization of such resistance. I would like, however, to conclude the discussion with some impressions garnered from recent fieldwork regarding the form such resistance is currently taking, and to suggest a direction for our conceptualization of resistance, that may lead us out of Foucault's rather quietist and static formulation of the relation between resistance and power. Given that it is life itself that the imperial pastoral power threatens, it is appropriate to elaborate the concept of pastoral power via a Deleuzian "politics of life", to go beyond the power/knowledge "grid of intelligibility" to a more dynamic conceptualization of processes, macro- and micro, whereby the new imperialism is produced and resisted. As May says in his excellent elucidation of the concept, "the two tasks of a politics of life are micropolitical analysis and micropolitical intervention,"¹⁸ because "it is not enough to engage in macropolitics alone. To change the grand social structures without releasing life from the micro- oppressions that sustain and in many cases give rise to them is to risk repeating the problem in another form,"¹⁹ as the recent experience of the ex-Soviet Union all too well exemplifies. Specifically, I think we can take this theoretical synthesis as a set of tools for analyzing both the "the micro-oppressions that sustain and in many cases give rise to [grand social structures]" (such as the IMF structural adjustment crusade), and the "lines of flight" by which the oppressed seek to subvert these "micro- oppressions." Foucault does tackle micro-oppressions through his concept of "local centres of power-knowledge" but the means by which life is "released" from them are hard to conceptualize within his framework. May encapsulates Deleuze and Guattari's notion of

¹⁸ May, p. 31.

¹⁹ May, p. 32.

"line of flight" as developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*.²⁰ (The translator's note points out that this does not mean flight as in flying, but "a flowing, leaking, disappearing into the distance").

In conceiving the line of escape, what are commonly called political structures must be understood not in the spatial metaphor of structure but in the temporal metaphor of coding or axiomatizing. Flows of life are coded, they are constrained into precise networks which act like gullies to divert them along specific routes and in specific directions. Kinship rituals in primitive societies are ways of coding sexual production And 'overcoding', a state process, is a way of making the various codes in different sectors of a given society 'resonate' together [ATP 433]. Finally, in capitalist societies, flows which are no longer subject to traditional forms of coding are axiomatized, administered by broad constraints that regulate whole areas of experience rather than specific flows.²¹

If we look at IMF SAPs not as structures, as the literature has done, but as such an "overcoding" of all the myriad cultural and regional specificities within and amongst Third World nations, on an overwhelming and heretofore unimagined scale, we can begin to understand the macro-context in which Third World peoples, collectively and individually, are made to desire the micro-oppressions of pastoral power. But through this metaphor we can also see how pastoral power contains within it the

²⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword B. Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. xvi. The translator's note points out that 'flight' here does not mean flying, but 'a flowing, leaking, disappearing into the distance'.

²¹ May, p. 32.

possibilities of resistance against it. Again from May:

Lines of flight are flows that break with both the axioms and the codes of a given society in order to create new forms of life that are subversive to the repressions of that society. They do not flow along regulated pathways, but are instead "transversal" to them, cutting across them and using elements from them in the process of producing something new, different, and most important, alive. It would be a mistake to say that the productions of a line of flight are prohibited by the society it arises from; its productions have probably never been considered for prohibition by that society. Instead, a line of flight is subversive; it does not break rules so much as it breaks regulations, allowing life to flow in different directions, and, in doing so, subverting life's attachment to the negativity of repressive social constraints. A line of flight is not an escape from society. It is an escape from the negativity of determinate social conditions within a society.²²

A concrete example of this statement taken from my recent experience in Ghana vividly demonstrates precisely such a line of flight that is subverting the patriarchal, millennial capitalist hegemony of the Ghanaian state -- the IMF's present wonder-boy. In March 1994, I attended a workshop organized by a lecturer at the Ghana Institute of Public Administration and the Presbyterian church's first woman minister, at the women's conference centre built by and for Presbyterian women in Ghana. Held for leaders from women's fellowships across Ghana, the Workshop on Empowerment: Taking Personal Responsibility for Change as it was called created the context for fostering collective strategies for women's rights on the one hand, and resistance to sexism and inequality in Ghanaian

²² May, pp. 32-3.

society on the other. Using language from the Bible, development discourse, liberal political philosophy, and Ghanaian political treatises, singing hymns and creating skits from the Bible to illustrate their oppression and what they should do about it (one participant playing a very fine Jesus), they broke with the "axioms and codes" of the contemporary IMF-dominated Ghanaian state, "using elements from them in the process of producing something new, different, and most important, alive." What they created was a way of being good citizens, mothers, and Presbyterians that is highly subversive of the patriarchal, millennial capitalist order, yet that, in its capturing of the very discourses used to oppress women and ordinary citizens, is irrepressible, reproducible, and under the right circumstances, potentially revolutionary. Overtly non-political, the conference was a profound act of liberatory politics.

What I observed was an amazing act of resistance against "the negativity of determinate social conditions" (and there is nothing more apparently determinate in the world today than IMF conditionalities and the hegemony of the contemporary patriarchal, capitalist state). In conclusion, this example demonstrates in my view the urgency of exploring imperialism not only on the macropolitical level, but at the level of local centres of power/knowledge, the transfer points of pastoral power, where one can examine both the micro-oppressions that Third World peoples, especially aid recipients, are made to desire, and the lines of flight that subvert those oppressions. Only in this way will we be able to grasp the optimistic possibilities for liberation.

Women in Political thought constructions, Subjective Notions and The Feminist Challenges

Selvy Thiruchandran

"Giving of the vote to the non-vellala¹ castes and to women was not only a grave mistake leading to mob rule but was an anathema to Hindu way of life (Ramanathan 1934:4)

"Can women advise you on knowledge, politics, and human nature?" (From Manimekalai, 425-428)

These quotations taken from different periods and from two different religious adherents are similar to the discourse on the "rational man" in the political theories of the west.

The former was said by a Hindu statesman of the colonial era in Sri Lanka on the eve of the granting of universal adult suffrage to Sri Lankans by the Donoughmore Commission (1934). The latter was from a second century (AD) Tamil Buddhist Epic. The irrational woman theory had persisted for nearly eighteen centuries perhaps reflecting the views of the two major religions in Sri Lanka. Men and women in political thoughts and in other discourses related to politics and state

¹Non-vellala castes; are lower in social ranking to the high caste vellala caste group.

craft have been placed rather unambiguously within dichotomous hierarchical divisions of value such as rational/irrational, public/private, family/state, political/personal. Plato while discussing the ideal city has classified women and children together with possessions. He refers to a "community of wives children and all chattels." Women, children and houses", he reiterates, "remain private and all other things are established as the private property of individuals" (Republic, 423e, 462e). Rousseau's argument to remain with nature and to accept natural things lead him to accept woman as passive, dependant, chaste, irrational or sub-rational, sensitive and caring, a process which would marginalise all women from politics.

Rousseau's theory of woman's nature is linked with her procreative function. It is an irony beyond comprehension that the person who sets out to philosophise equality and freedom should have legitimised hierarchal divisions more deeply between the two genders on grounds of nature. Woman, he urges, is the sex that ought to obey (discourse on Inequality p 166). While granting that god has endowed both sexes with "unlimited passions he has given reason to man and modesty to woman in order to restrain them (Emilie P694)

Aristotle maintains that women are "naturally inferior to men and that they are therefore "naturally" ruled by them. While taking note of the inequality, he asserts, that by way of compensation nothing can be done, as "political justice" can only exist between equals, between those who have an equal share in ruling and being ruled as fellow citizens. Having relegated women to a status of non citizens, he says a "metaphorical justice" can only be dispensed with to women. However, he could not clarify what is metaphorical justice but speaks of a household justice which is different from political justice.

The Asian thoughts are not in any way dissimilar to the western thoughts. Patriarchal minds have met. Gender ideology has cut across regions maintaining a uniformity that sometimes strikes parallel views expressed through similar terminologies. The

Hindu Law giver Manu has spelt out extensively on the inferiority of the female conduct, mannerisms, intellect and conscience, her innate nature which is wicked, lustful and lastly on her political incapacity. Women are not fit to be entrusted with state secrets and when on consultation on important state affairs, Manu advises the kings to remove the women as they are likely to betray high level secrets (Manu V11. 149-50). The same ideology persists in the legal administration also. "One man, Manu says, "who is free from covetousness may be accepted as a witness but not even many pure women because their understanding is apt to waver" (Manu V111. 77).

The 'maleness' of reason and rationality was emphasised all along which eventually lead to a process of deploying power to the rationality. The central focus of the feminist critique has been on the dichotomous divisions and the exclusions of the political from the domestic, familial and the private (Pateman 1983, Olsen 1983/4 Ellen Kennedy and Susan Mendus 1987). The assumption that women have some natural qualities and those should be harnessed to serve the so called natural division was also challenged by Okin (1991) who has reiterated that the divisions are defined functionally to serve the men's needs. That both the natural qualities and the natural divisions are constructions and they are then used to legitimise a lesser socio-political status for women, later to disqualify her from politics became the main feminist premise of the debate. Relegating the woman to the realm of the private family the men took over the functions of ordering the society and gendered both the family and the society. Political theories were drawn up from this gendered position to further legitimise the women's position resulting in the creation of an ideology of the political man and the private woman/wife.

Rationality treated as the highest expression of politics by the Greeks took a new turn in the discourse of liberalism and enlightenment. The dualism of enlightenment discourse which is defined by its masculine and feminine order has evidently a symmetrical nature. This dualism which excluded woman from rationality, no doubt has linkages to the exclusion of women

from politics. (Lloyd, 1984, Hardinge, 1984) Identifying women with irrationality and with the so called natural qualities in the meta narratives had serious implications to the role of women which robbed them of a series of gifts that personhood should have conferred on them. Politics, it can be argued, is one such gift.

However, the male constructionists are not alone in this. Womanly virtues such as passivity, sensitivity, of caring and nurturing, and non-competitiveness constructed as the natural qualities of women by the cultural feminists have dangerously brought into focus again the dichotomy, but this time, by the feminists themselves. But this time the values are tilted towards the woman's side. The debate however is not on the virtuous qualities as such, but on the dichotomy which is socially constructed. By arguing that only women have these qualities and monopolising on these virtues we are ridding men for ever of these qualities for posterity. Man changeth not and women have to bear the burden for ever is no plausible argument. Equally dangerous is the assumption held both by the cultural feminists and the political theorists that aggressiveness, competitiveness, individualism together with rationality and reasoning leadership and capacity for judgement are manly qualities and quite out of place for women. Increasing emphasis on these gender demarcating qualities and treating them as static and as explanations, for women's exclusion from politics which they are not, leads us no where towards a new theorising.

There is yet another dilemma in the feminist theorising. Strangely even McMillan (1982) after taking to task the dichotomous dualism of the modern political thoughts and the idea of the "man of reason" succumbs finally to the new version of dualism. She rejects the hard abstracted rationalism and argues that feelings and emotions and intuition should not be separated. She concludes that feminists by rejecting them have alienated women from their true nature (1982:118)d. This kind of confused thoughts and partial radicalism which rejects part of the notion of dualism and reinforces the other part is very similar to the cultural feminist and anti feminist stand. This

affinity with anti-feminist argument also has other implications of creating universalism and essentialism (Grimshaw 1986:17). The positing of an a-historical feminine and masculine nature as parts of human nature ends up perpetuating asymmetrical relationship between the genders. Asymmetrical nature and feminine inferiority are in built in the dualism approach and hence has to be challenged both theoretically and practically.

Transcending the value ridden dichotomy on the one hand, and rejecting the natural qualities assigned to men and women on grounds of sexual differences have both to be done simultaneously. Hence feminising politics or transferring the maternal thinking into politics (Gillingan, 1982, Sara Ruddick, 1980) are no convincing arguments. To argue that all women are passive, caring and non-competitive is like arguing that all black men are aggressive or that all black women are sexually more potent. If the both these statements smack of racism the latter is both racist and sexist. The futile exercise of relegitimising feminine qualities should be given up and political statements should be directed against questioning the so called constructed differences and the created capabilities based on gender, so that politics and home-making, law making and nurturing can be equally valued to be shared gender neutrally as powerful and socially necessary.

The problem with rationality

Along with postmoderns, postmodern feminists have also criticized the enlightenment concept of rationality. The rejection by post-modernism of the privileging of rational discourse as the sole avenue to truth, while rejecting the dichotomy of male/female thinking, also rejects the idea of rationalism per se as the ultimate truth. Does this mean for the feminists that to argue that women like men can be rational is futile, when the concept of rationality itself is devalued? It does create a dilemma for liberal feminists. However, the rejection and questioning directed against the meta narratives (which are

anyway sexist and gender based) and seeking a plural definition of truth should be in line with the feminist thoughts. Feminists should have no problem even in their project of politics to accept a view that all knowledge systems are rooted in contextual and historical situations incorporating the "prejudices" of our culture. The prejudices of the political theories also fall into the historical and cultural prejudices which have relegated inferior roles to women. While the dichotomy of rational/irrational is itself rejected, the man/woman lines of thinking and the privileging of one against the other is also equally rejected and dismissed in post-modernism. However, the attempt within post-modernism to privilege, as Gadamer does (1975) contextuality and relatedness as feminine is equally dangerous. This assumption is drawn again from the dichotomy of inferiority/ superiority which is feminine/masculine. Hence like dislodging the superior feminine maternal thinking of the cultural feminists, the superiority of feminine contextuality and relatedness have also to be dislodged from a feminist discourse. Substituting a feminist epistemology for a masculine epistemology is again falling in to the trap of dichotomy and forgetting the emphasis of the plurality. It ends up legitimising the Enlightenment epistemology after making so many concerted efforts to overcome it.

The Anathema of the State for a Feminist Discourse, Theory and Practice

There are only a few studies on gender and politics, and feminist inquiry into politics has remained ambiguous for many reasons. To begin with, the feminists treated the concept of the state as alien to their discourse because they considered the state to be patriarchal (Agarwal 1988, Afshar 1987 Parpart and Staudt 1989). Mackinnon (1989:157) said that "feminism has no theory of the state", because the articulation of their arguments, in her view, remain inadequate and have undue emphasis on the negative connotations. Posing the civil society and the state within a dichotomous relationship, feminists have opted to deal

with the civil society and its gender relations.

However, their focus on the civil society by itself did not warrant any homogeneous set of theories, but the ambivalence they exhibited on the theories of power and authority have had a direct connection to the inadequacy of the theoretical stand they took on the question of the state. While they considered the state to be not gender-neutral and as an entity to be identified with power and coercion, they also viewed the state to be a monolithic and a uniform entity with a coherent ideology. Hence the state as an institution remained in a state of ambivalence for many reasons. Interventionist politics with the state was rare, though they have reviewed capitalist developments and have identified the gender bias in the policies and implementations of state aided projects.

Two reasons could be speculated for this. First, the state in most of the countries was identified as constitutive of power, authority repression and coercion and with an ideology of dominance. This kind of radical separatism from the state had lead many feminists, to have nothing to do with it or to take to oppositional politics. Hence they alienated themselves from the institution of state and the process of politics. Second, the demands that the women's movement and feminists made as part of women's rights and as part of human rights invariably got into conflicts with the status quo which the state had to uphold. Hence the state has become one of the institutions against which the women's movement has to struggle.

Apart from the conscious neglect of the state and politics at the level of theory and practice by feminists, a process of marginalisation has taken place unconsciously. By concentrating on the ideology and the structure of patriarchy at the socio-economic levels and pre-occupation with the tasks and strategies of challenging and correcting patriarchal institutions, they have marginalised the state and the political process. Such views were further legitimised by either the inactivity or the compromising attitudes of the state units created for women's development. The state sponsored units such as the Women's Bureau and the

Ministry of Women's Affairs are viewed as non-productive mouthpieces of the state, which have a cosmetic attitude to women's problems. Feminists were made to become more and more skeptical about these state organs when no meaningful pronouncements towards challenging patriarchal tradition were made by these state organs. In the words of Gugin, women's lobbies lend their support to women's issues and not to women, "to functional feminism not to ideological feminism" (1980:255).

That the state is patriarchal is a view that cuts across the various feminist theories such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical Feminism and Socialist feminism. Marxist feminism (McIntosh 1978) holds the view that oppression of women is supported by the state because it is functional for capitalism. Radical feminism simply maintains that the state is patriarchal and Zillah Eisenstein elaborates on a dual system theory where both capitalism and patriarchy both are mutually interdependent (Walby 1990 151-160). Patriarchy is used here descriptively to denote a system and relations which are constructed to subordinate discriminate and oppress women through particular socio-economic and socio-religious practices and patterns. State apparatuses also usually become the agents through which patriarchy is operationalised. It is the latter, the state apparatus that we are concerned with in the analysis of the patriarchal state. The state in most instances has acted in an anti-feminist manner in maintaining and making economic, legal and ideological interventions both towards legitimizing and reinforcing existing patterns and newly constructed regulations that affect women adversely. Property relations, wage differentials based on gender, unjust rules relating to marriage, divorce and rape are a few areas to mention, where the state has intervened both historically and at present. The so called developmental activities and policies which are state sponsored have an in-built gender bias.

The special concessions given to the Free Trade Zone factory ownership in terms of labour are different from the labour laws of the country. Modern technological changes have failed to bring in gender equality. They have adversely interacted with

the existing ideology of sexual division of labour with a much more rigid control system than before to create situations of worsening gender inequality. Women are particularly disadvantaged and there are recorded cases of oppression and exploitation suffered by women (de Silva 1994). The opening up of Sri Lanka as a tourist paradise for foreigners has made sex tourism a bona fide means for foreign exchange earning. The migrant women workers from Sri Lanka bring the second highest foreign exchange earnings. There have been instances where the women's bodies were sent back after having been sexually molested. The various studies done have highlighted the injustice suffered by women and have suggested remedial measures such as monitoring the process of employment by the foreigners through our foreign missions abroad, but the state has turned a blind eye. The state aided developmental policies are sustained by the explanation that they are bringing foreign exchange earnings to Sri Lanka. These actions and sayings are clearly manifestations of a patriarchal state.

However, state ideologies and actions change with the kind of people with which it is constituted. Many of the feminist scholars have emphasised the nature of the state as gendered. The state, however, is not a monolithic coherent entity. The state is itself a complex entity with multi-dimensional facets though one set of ideology may be predominant. The new emerging trends where the state is compelled to include gender neutral legislation are not studied adequately to decipher trends that may contribute to gender equality in some respects. The early studies have concentrated on the religio-social dictums which had the legal status as the laws of the country (Koran, Bible, the Dharmashastras) and on property relations (Holcombe 1975) and the Welfare state (Wilson 1977). The state is not merely an organ of coercion. Both coercion and consensus are used by the state either separately, alternatively or simultaneously. The easy collapsing of the political and the cultural into the arena of the state has been overlooked in the theories of the state which concentrated on the administrative and the constitutional. Gramsci's analysis of the political has coopted the civil society, the realm of religion culture and

kinship and this view is insightful in analysing the state within the patriarchal relations. Quoranic, Biblical and Dharmashastric (religious) tenets have acquired the force of laws by state regulations. The "moral regulation" (Corrigan and Sayer:1985,4,2) speaks of the cultural content of the state institution. More often the regulation of the culture of bourgeois civilization borders on a patriarchal control by the state. The civil society or part of the civil society collaborates with the state to give legitimisation to the hegemony that the state seeks.

In Sri Lanka the state had no specific policy directed towards women till the UN declared 1975-1985 as the decade of women. A complacency, attitudinally and structurally existed in Sri Lanka which explained the inactivity thus: the women of Sri Lanka are already liberated due to various historical reasons. The liberal attitude of Buddhism towards women and the historical factors such as the granting of universal adult suffrage to both women and men simultaneously in 1931 and the granting of free education to girls and boys in 1948, when the country got independence, are cited as reasons for not needing gender specific legislation. Till 1975 discrimination in the wage structure, property relations, divorce and rape laws were not considered as areas that need to be reviewed and revised. Of late due to overt pressure from the UN system and the donor agencies and covert pressure from the women's movement the state has responded rather ambiguously to a few demands to fulfill some of their expectations. As a result we have in Sri Lanka a women's Bureau, a Ministry for Women's Affairs and of late a Women's Charter and connected with it a Women's National Committee.

Within the above discussions it is important to realise the role of the state in collaborating with the civil society selectively with sub-national civil and political structures to consolidate and perpetuate repressive socio-economic structures. The power of the state begins to collaborate with the dominant groups. This "collaborative hegemony" (a concept used by Pathak and Sunder Rajan 1989) becomes detrimental not only for democratic

process but also to the general climate of human rights (Women's rights included) violations. Fundamentalist religious bodies and ethnic majorities can also dictate terms to the state on exclusionist lines which can further constrain women. In Sri Lanka cases of either Buddhist or Hindu fundamentalism which dictate against women is hard to come by. Muslim fundamentalism has raised its head with its very specific dictates for Muslim women. That the state is collaborating with it is brought out by the fact that it has neither condemned it nor paid any attention to it. The state treats it as a non-issue. Politically and culturally the veil has re-emerged as symbol of Muslim exclusivity. Taslima Nazrin's story is a case in point. Taslima's Book *Lajja* was banned in Sri Lanka due to the intervention of the State minister for Muslim Affairs, a case in point of the collaborative hegemony. This is clearly an example of the moral regulation and the cultural content of the state where the state minister for Muslim Affairs intervenes in the arena of another ministry, the ministry of Information which is in charge of books and publications.

Behind the reasons and equations of the feminist anathema of the state there is an unhappy implication. The Women's passivity has been accepted implicitly, when politics is assumed by others as an active force. Nature versus culture is again brought into the debate when politics and statecraft are treated as marginal to the project of feminism. This takes us to the old debate of private versus the public, where the public is viewed as the other of the private. Women are again placed within the powerless and nameless domains which are invariably devalued ideologically. If the state is perpetuating gender ideology, strengthening gender relations and seeking to foster patriarchal institutions and laws, then that should be the very reason for feminists to intervene. It is the state that has to be challenged to incorporate gender specific policies of economic development and socio-political changes in the polity.

The concept of power, political and civil

If the discursive project of politics and gender has in its agenda either certain implications or an imperative a question should be posed whether the women should be empowered and convinced to enter politics through a process of challenging those internalisations that have crept into the psyche of women and men that are instrumental partially to marginalise women from politics, then we are compelled to enter the arena of the discourse of power. Despite the extensive debates on power and authority by Foucault and others, there are neglected areas in the discourse of power. The concept of the political man commonly constructed by Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Manu and others such as Hobbes and Locke have within their theories wielded the concept of power as a male monopoly. The capacity for reason and public activities are equated with "moral agent" rational actor and political man and therefore powerful as well. The masculinist constructions of power are equated with a concept of power over others. Military duties, conquests, coercion, imprisonment and punishment on the one hand, which constituted the political power and the property ownership and control of economic resources on the other which constituted the base for socio-economic powers are both construed as powers over things and persons. The discourse of power has created subjects and objects. The modern episteme, in short has created a gendered construction not only of reason and rationality but also for a whole discourse of thoughts. Knowledge and power, subject/ object, inferior/ superior, active/ passive are the follow up subjectivities of the project of the rational man. The hierarchy of the dualistic thoughts though critiqued and challenged, continued to hold sway in the consciousness of men and women and the meanings created thereof continued to be deployed and experienced both in the common sense and intellectual parlance. Foucault's discussion of power has an innate ambivalence, which is both illuminating and defeatist. Though illuminating theoretically at a practical it level lacks insights for usage. Power, he emphasises, is pervasive, permanently repetitious and self producing. It exists in its

exercise. It is omnipresent he reiterates, by being present in the multitudes of institutions that constitute the society. It should be understood as "capillary (1980:95-98). But he has failed to name the individuals, the groups or classes of people who may wield power under specific situations or circumstances. This, however, fits with his scheme of the argument of the pervasiveness of power. His insistence on resistance does not offer a theory or a chance of corrective process. That the resistance has to be continued perpetually, leaves no room for much hope. However, there will be others who would go along with Foucault and argue that woman's subordination cannot be captured in essentialist universalist theories, Neither is it in a single institution. Hence solving one problem whether, it be the right to vote or women's entry into politics or equal pay, does not necessarily lead to total liberation. His failure to name the dominators whether they be men, employers, ethnic majority or the colonizers does explain the fact that even among the category of the dominated women, workers, ethnic minority and the colonized there are at various levels people who dominate others within their own groups that are placed dichotomously above. Though there is no doubt that the dominated do sometimes participate in their own domination what is more significant is to identify and single out the process of how consent was exacted for such participation in the domination. This is where Gramsci's theory of how both coercion and consent are used in the creation of the hegemony becomes more useful to understand the process of domination. Under the scheme of Foucault we may fall dangerously into the pitfall of blaming the victim. From the process of a perpetual resistance, we have to move to a process of empowerment of the powerless to achieve a status of equality. The process of empowerment should be perpetual always following the resistance. The empowerment to transform the existing social order is merely to seek power to and not power over. The power exercised by one particular group in power, which is gender blind can be extinguished and power taken over to challenge and resist and act towards the transformation of such institutions and society which are permeated with negative power, power which oppresses the dominated groups. Power is needed to resist and

oppose, the militant power that can effectively challenge oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

Power by itself, has connotations of a division within feminist discourse. Power with authority, coercion and repression is different to internal powers, powers of persuasion, power which subverts authority covertly and does difficult tasks without the power of fists. The concept of power had to be redefined and reconstituted not as power over but as power to influence and transform situations through consensus. This power I call the civil power as different to the political power which is coercive aggressive and physical. However, the question whether such expressions of covert power can make meaningful intervention in the process of state craft begs an answer. Can women be content and inactive with such a covert power base? The project of transformation, in the last analysis, should also transform the concept of the political power as well so as to create new meanings into the concept as emanating positive and constructive aspects.

Central to the question of power and repression is the argument that women's agency, both participation and representation may become a meaningful and tactical device for transformation towards democratic processes and structures. Agency then would also imply having the qualities of capability and knowledgeability, both required for any action of transformation. The power of domination can then be transformed into positive power to act as agents and as an enabling force. Women's agency, by which I mean women (for that matter all human beings) who have the ability and capacity of thinking and planning strategies for change and also effecting changes, should be re-examined and also used more effectively. Women are not simply beings but actors, for when women become agents and actors they are not passive. However, the change-effecting process is subjected to their position or placement within the categories of caste, class, race and ethnicity. There are different levels at which they act, hence women are not totally denied the space for acting though the traditional political theories have denied women this agency.

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Notes

Dharma Shastras are classical sociological code books with a religious sanctity written in Sanscrit they were the reference point for Hindu behaviour.

Quotations from Manu are taken from *Women in Manu and his seven commentaries* by R.M. Das, Kanchana Publications Bodh Gaya ,India 1961

Oral Report Presented to the Commission on Human Rights (51st Session) February 1995

*By Radhika Coomaraswamy
Rapporteur for violence against women.*

- 1) According to United Nations reports, in the year 1992 alone approximately 12,000 women were brutally raped as part of the on-going civil war in the former Yugoslavia.
- 2) In the United States a rape occurs every six minutes (Carillo p.5) and it is estimated that 85% of rapes are never reported to the police and less than 5% of the rapists go to jail.
- 3) In Papua New Guinea, in a sample survey, 67% of rural women and 56% of urban women are victims of wife abuse (APDC p.15).
- 4) In Santiago, Chile, 80% of women in a sample survey acknowledged being victims of violence in their homes (Carillo p.6)
- 5) In Canada, one in every four women can expect to be sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (Carillo p.5).
- 6) In rural Bangladesh malnutrition was found to be three times more common among girls than boys.
- 7) Annually, 8 - 10,000 girls are brought from Thailand to Japan for prostitution and trafficking.

- 8) Given the number of men in India and China, there should be about 30 million more women in India and 38 million more women in China (Carillo p.6). Female infanticide and malnutrition are seen as the causes.
- 9) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees data indicate that among Vietnamese boat people, 39% of the women were abducted and/or raped by pirates at sea.
- 10) According to the World Health Organization more than 100 million women have undergone female genital mutilation in Africa alone (Schuler p.400).
- 11) Every minute and a half, a woman is raped in South Africa, totalling approximately 380,000 women raped each year (Schuler p.339).

Statistics such as these point to the scale of violence committed against women in every part of the world. Such violence has shocked the conscience of the international community and has led to two significant events - the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, including its causes and consequences, by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its fiftieth session in 1994. It is important to recognise in this context that violence against women is not only an issue of criminal justice but a question of the violation of fundamental human rights. As the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights asserts "the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights".

Resolution

Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1994/95 entitled "The Question of Integrating the rights of women into the human

rights mechanism of the United Nations and the elimination of Violence Against Women" resulted in the creation of the post of Special Rapporteur on Violence Against women. This resolution invited the Special Rapporteur to:

- (a) Seek and receive information on violence against women, its causes and consequences from governments, treaty-bodies, specialized agencies, other special rapporteurs responsible for various human rights questions and inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations including women's organizations and to respond effectively to such information.
- (b) Recommend measures, ways and means at the national regional and international levels to eliminate violence against women and its causes and to remedy its consequences.
- (c) Work closely with other special rapporteurs, special representatives, working groups and independent experts of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and with the treaty bodies, taking into account the Commission's request that they regularly and systematically include in their reports available information on human rights violations affecting women, and cooperate closely with the Commission on the Status of Women in the discharge of its functions.

I have interpreted the resolution to involve three components. Firstly, reporting to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and consulting with other relevant United Nations bodies and agencies with regard to general policy issues relating to the problem of violence against women, including its causes and consequences. This is in pursuance of the resolution creating the mandate which included the question of integrating women's human rights within the mainstream United Nations

programmes and activities.

The second component involves fact-finding missions to specific countries to explore in depth some of the themes related to violence against women. The field visits will cover the five regions and the countries which will be identified accordingly.

The third component of my mandate involves the assessment of individual allegations of violence being committed against women, and the forwarding of complaints to Governments with the purpose of receiving clarification, and in dialogue with States recommend measures, ways and means at the national, regional and international levels, to eliminate violence against women. The complaints as well as the clarifications will be reproduced in the reports submitted by the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Legal Framework

In carrying out my mandate, I am bound by certain international standards which form the framework for my work. There have been specified in my report. They included :

- 1) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.1,2, 3, 5)
- 2) International Covenant on civil & Political Rights (ICCPR) (Art2, Art 6, Art 7, Art 9, Art 26).
- 3) International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (ICESR) (Art 3, Art 7).
- 4) The Geneva Conventions, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention and Protocols I and II (Art 27, where rape is considered an international war crime.
- 5) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms for

discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

General Recommendation 19 of the Committee implementing CEDAW formulated in 1992.

- 6) The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (December 1994).

Priorities of work Programme

The priorities of my work programme will relate to the history which resulted in the creation of my post. United Nations agencies, the global NGO movement, as well as governments have been perturbed and outraged by certain events and practices with regard to violence against women.

First, the problem of violence against women during times of armed conflict, especially with regard to recent events in the territories of the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda has been of central concern to human rights activists, many of whom are in this forum. Therefore, this problem will be an important aspect of my work programme.

In addition to situations of armed conflict, the international community is also concerned over issues of violence against women in the family, in the community and perpetrated or condoned by the State. There has been, for example, international concern over traditional practices which are harmful to the health of women, domestic violence, rape, the problem of traditional laws which institutionalise violence against women, trafficking and prostitution of women as well as violence against vulnerable groups such as migrant women, refugee women and displaced women, as well as indigenous and minority women. Since these were the concerns which informed the creation of the Special Rapporteur, they will be the concerns which will animate my research as well as my fact finding in the next two years.

Since the mandate involves such a wide spectrum of issues and events, I have decided to divide the work according to themes described in the United Nations Declaration. My first report before you today is a preliminary survey of issues, identifying themes and factors of importance to be followed up in my later reports. My next report to be submitted in 1996 will focus on issues with regard to violence in the family, and my final report to be submitted in 1997 will focus on violence in the community and violence perpetrated and condoned by the State. In this way I hope to cover the problems in greater depth focusing on different sets of issues with regard to each year's programme of work. In addition, I hope to submit comprehensive recommendations with regard to the elimination of violence against women involving both legal and non-legal strategies.

The mandate also refers to the problem of reporting on causes and consequences of violence against women. This is an enormous task which requires original research and analysis. I have already received the cooperation of international agencies and NGOs to assist me in this endeavour. Looking into causes and consequences recognises that violence against women is a result of history and the evolution of unequal historical power relations between men and women. My preliminary report, in its early chapters, surveys the existing information on the subject. The paragraphs are aimed at raising awareness of existing literature which explores the causes and consequences of violence against women.

Collection of Information

I have already begun the process of collecting information with regard to my future programme. On July 29th a note verbale was sent out to Governments, NGOs and United Nations bodies though the scale and quality of information differ widely. May I take this opportunity, to request member states to respond to this note verbale, if they have not already done so, and to send information as soon as possible so that it may be processed and

analysed for my next report.

While the governments have been reticent, the NGO movement, as well as United Nations agencies such as UNHCR and UNDP, have been extremely helpful. I have received a large amount of information, especially on the problem of violence against women in armed conflict, violence against women living under systems of special law, domestic violence, and trafficking in South Asia.

Despite this support, I must say there are large gaps in the information gathering, because, I realize that some regions of the world have less resources than others and have been able to communicate less effectively. I therefore urge all governments and NGOs working in these countries and regions to send me information so that my reports to the Commission will be truly global in character.

Resources

In the process of information gathering, I would like to join the chorus of voices led by special rapporteurs to complain to the Commission on Human Rights that the resources available are not adequate for the mandate expected from us. Though there is a great deal of funding available for my research from private donors in western countries, I do not want my reports to be challenged on the grounds of excessive reliance on donor countries. Instead, it is imperative that government extend their support to the centre for Human Rights and ensure, at the very minimum, that personnel assisting the Special Rapporteur remain with the rapporteur for the full term so that there is continuity and acquired understanding of the subject.

The preliminary report placed before you today does not contain any specific recommendations. Those will emerge during the course of the detailed studies I have outlined earlier.

However, the report does emphasise the need for governments to draw up national plans of action to eradicate violence against women in their societies as required by the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women. I hope that the Commission will endorse my recommendation by adopting a resolution which will specifically call on member states to draw up and implement National Plans of Action. These plans of action should, at their minimum, contain the strategies listed in the Declaration, i.e.:

- a) States should not invoke custom, tradition or religion to avoid the obligation to eliminate violence against women;
- b) They should ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, without reservations;
- c) They should enact laws and administrative measures to deal with the specific problems of violence against women such as domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment;
- d) States should ensure specialised care and assistance to women victims of violence;
- e) They should train police and judicial officials to more effectively deal with problems of violence against women;
- f) They should reform educational curricula, media policy and data collection strategies to better reflect the problem of violence against women;
- g) Finally, they should report to international bodies about measures taken to eliminate violence against women in their societies.

In this context, it must be remembered that all the above

commitments contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women were adopted by consensus by the General Assembly in December 1993.

I consider it very auspicious that my very first report should be tabled in the year celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and the founding of the United Nations. Auspicious, because the problem of violence against women during times of armed conflict is a direct responsibility of the international community and since I have received my mandate from that community, I have placed it as one of the major priorities on my agenda. I hope that during my tenure I will see the enshrining of the principle that rape and sexual slavery during armed conflict is an international war crime and that individuals who are victimised have the right to compensation.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, 1995 is the year of the Beijing Conference - the Fourth World Conference on Women, when women from all over the world will gather together to plan strategies so that women's rights will be meaningful in the real lives of women. I will personally ensure that my preliminary report is circulated widely at the Conference. I, as Special Rapporteur, will be present at the World Conference to conduct a series of activities at the NGO and official meetings. It is important that the Commission on Human Rights play a significant role at the Beijing Conference so as to underline the view emanating from Vienna 1993 that "human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights".

Women Workers at Rubber Plantation* In the Kalutara District

Jayadeva Uyangoda

A research project was undertaken by WERC in the Kalutara district the findings of the research are summarised here.

Women workers of rubber plantations still remain unrecognised in Sri Lanka's working class history. Despite a strong left movement in Kalutara and Galle districts, where much of the rubber plantations are concentrated, workers have not received the attention they deserve from groups sympathetic to the worker's cause. There are specific working class problems in the rubber estates although patterns of labour recruitment and control are similar to those at the systems in the tea plantation.

The rubber sector was not politicised as was tea in the wake of disenfranchisement of its workers, and the subsequent discriminatory policies towards plantation labour. A unique aspect of the rubber sector is the diversity of ethnic composition of workers. Sinhala village labour and South Indian Tamil labour coexist in the plantations.

*The research was carried out by Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda with the assistance of two research assistants attached to WERC, Padma Kodituwakku and Padma Dasanayake. The research findings are summarised by Mandalika Manjusri. We take this opportunity to thank them all. The book titled "Life Under Milkwood" will be out shortly.

This research is important within the broad perspective of labour in focusing attention on a neglected community of working class men and women. It further highlights gender specific conditions of work that are peculiar to women plantation workers. In fact what is significant about this project is that it is one of the few researches carried out on women workers in rubber plantations. It was carried out primarily with a view to launching an action oriented programme towards alleviating at least some of the problems faced by both men and women workers.

Labour Process and Female Labour in Rubber Plantations

The field survey for this study was carried out in March-October 1992 in seven different locations in the Kalutara district.

An important aspect of the rubber plantation labour is the absence of a clear sexual division of labour. In tea plantations, the plucking of tea leaves is the specific task of female workers. Rubber tapping is a highly labour intensive work, although both male and female workers are involved in this task.

Tapping rubber is a highly specialised occupation which requires skill as well as training. Usually, the estate resident Tamil workers get themselves trained by the parents when they are still young.

The Question of Village Labour

Almost half the labour employed in rubber tapping is recruited from nearby villages. While the official work day of a rubber tapping worker starts at 6.15 in the morning, the woman worker begins at least two hours before. This is the

result of the twin function of the woman as a housewife and also a worker. She would leave for work after the household responsibilities are over. Many women stated that often they would have time only for a cup of tea as they have to report to work by 6.15 am. To reach the factory office, it is necessary to walk about two to three and half miles after which they have to walk yet another 1 mile in order to get to the place of work. Women are required to tap around 250 trees a day. The tapping continues till 12 noon with a tea break at 10.00 am during which time some women have their breakfast, while others have plain tea. Breakfast for many consist of bread eaten with sugar.

Collecting latex is a highly labour intensive operation done soon after the tapping is over. This involves yet another round of walking of about one and half hours. Much physical energy is required to carry the latex bucket on the head as the terrain of rubber estates is hilly and very uneven.

If a worker fails to tap the required number of trees which may vary between 200-300 wages are reduced for half a day. Rainy days are not counted as working days although workers are entitled by law to receive a minimum of 25 days of work per month.

There are two categories of workers, in the plantations surveyed in this study.

- (1) Workers resident in the estate who are mostly Tamils.
- (2) Workers recruited from nearby villagers who are Sinhalese.

Socio Economic Background

Village labour is recruited from among the poorest of the poor. The small plot of land which they either own or occupy does not provide them with an adequate income. Those who

have occupational skills have found work outside the village. Thus the rubber plantations have absorbed the economically weakest section of the village.

Most village women have opted to work in estates after marriage due to economic difficulties.

The resident Tamil labourers have been equally poor for generations owning no private property except jewellery. In fact, the conditions of resident Tamil labourers are very similar to those of up country tea plantations, although they are better unionised.

The primary employment available for women working in the rubber estates is rubber tapping which is similar to tea plucking in the tea plantations. However men are employed not only as rubber tappers but also as manual workers and watchers.

Creche attendant and family health workers are the only other forms of female employment available for a few of these women.

Earning capacity of workers

The monthly earnings of rubber plantation workers always remain at a low level. Women are regular income earners in both the estate resident and village based families. The income of women are essential to the survival of the families. Families who belong to a slightly better income group generally have a member working outside the village.

Structural impediments to income generating capacity of workers

A major feature identified in this study is the fact that the

plantation regime does not offer any opportunity for the workers to earn an extra income. These limitations begin with the fact that workers usually do not get work for the entire month. As found in the survey, women workers in medium sized estates are not given work for more than fifteen days a month. Secondly, the limited opportunities for over time work further restricts the total monthly income of the worker. Even in instances where they manage to secure extra work, their additional earnings barely reach Rs. 100.00.

As a means of making an extra income, scrap rubber is collected by the labourers. However, the income from this is a very negligible sum, often less than Rs. 10.00 per month.

What is noteworthy is that the rubber plantation labour is confined to a certain structure which by negating opportunities for better income levels, reproduces poverty itself. Thus, continuous poverty of workers is not only a result but also an essential part of the plantation regime.

Health and nutrition

A striking feature of the health and nutritional standards among the families is that the working women are particularly prone to low nutrition as there is a tendency among them to skip meals. Women usually eat only one meal a day. A large number of families consume fish as rarely as once or twice a month. Food is generally devoid of protein. Meanwhile the work of a rubber tapper involves a lot of hard work. Thus the vicious life of a female tapper involves low income, low nutrition with much hard work. The unavailability of rice and vegetables in the estate as well as in the village either at a low price or free of charge is indicative of the changes in the rural economy that are hostile to the rural plantation proletariat.

Savings and Indebtness

As revealed in the study, indebtedness is prevalent among all households. It also confirms the usual pattern that women primarily bear the responsibility of obtaining credit and loans in times of financial difficulties and also manage the household affairs.

The savings habit is also mostly prevalent among women. One noticeable feature in the households is the very low amount of money left for saving. However the savings habit continues, irrespective of the amount saved. The 'seettu' system which is an informal method of saving, popular among rural women as well as urban low income groups, is fairly widespread among the estate residents and village based families. The tendency among men to spend or waste part of their earnings on gambling or on liquor is a consistent claim made by women.

There was however a notable exception in the sample studied. Not a single worker in Kallumale and Daniston estates had a savings account in a bank. Only three women had 'seettu' savings. This low standard of saving is primarily due to the fact that in these two privately owned estates, the monthly income of workers remain low as a result of the fewer number of work days available.

Major Issues Concerning Labour and Women

- (1) Both male and female rubber plantation labour remain totally neglected. The workers and their children have no way of escaping from the existing harsh conditions. The worst among these are the resident Tamil workers.
- (2) Technology of rubber tapping is manual and there is still no possibility of changing the technology so that working conditions can be improved. The female workers continue to wear throughout the day the same clothes stained with latex worn during rubber tapping. It is

extremely important to introduce hygienic working habits and conditions to the rubber tapping labour.

- (3) The workers leave no avenues for social occupations. To be a rubber tapper is an occupational trap which is particularly evident among resident Tamil workers. Working women are specifically subject to bearing the burden of continuous poverty.
- (4) The low country rubber plantation economy is totally neglected by outside agencies. Even where outside intervention has taken place (UNICEF and Women's Bureau) the results are negligible.
- (5) The worker families live in harsh conditions where housing, health and sanitary conditions are constantly deteriorating. Nearly sixty years of social welfarism and the rhetoric of worker emancipation have not reached these families.
- (6) Training programmes on nutrition, health and hygiene are absolutely necessary to improve the living conditions of these families.
- (7) The problem of poor health and malnutrition among working women and children need immediate attention from the state as well as from non-state agencies.
- (8) Unless a conscious rural development policy is implemented these families will continue to be poor.

Women's Rights as Human Rights Toward Re-Vision of Human Rights

Charlotte Bunch

Significant numbers of the world's population are routinely subject to torture, starvation, terrorism, humiliation, mutilation, and even murder simply because they are female. If this were any group other than women being maimed and killed, it would be recognized as a civil and political emergency and a gross violation of their humanity. Yet, despite a clear record of deaths and demonstrable abuse, women's rights are not commonly understood or classified as human rights. This is problematic both theoretically and practically as it has grave consequences for how society views and treats the fundamental issues of women's lives. This paper questions why women's rights are not viewed as human rights, looks at the policy implications of this separation, and discusses different approaches to changing it.

Women's human rights are violated in a variety of ways. Women, of course, sometimes suffer abuses like political repression in ways that are much the same as those inflicted on men, in which case the problem is visibility since the dominant image of the political actor in our world is male. Many violations of women's human rights however are distinctly connected to being female - that is, women are discriminated against and abused on the basis of gender. Women also frequently experience sexual abuse in situations where their other human rights are being violated, as political

prisoners or members of persecuted ethnic groups for example. Here I am addressing abuse where gender is a primary or related factor because this has been most neglected and offers the greatest challenge to the field of human rights today.

Human rights is one of the few moral visions ascribed to internationally. Its scope is not universally agreed upon, but it does strike deep chords of response among many and carries enough consensus as a goal to be a useful framework for seeking redress for gender abuse. Further it is one of the few concepts that speaks to the need for trans-national activism and concern about the lives of people globally. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed in 1949 symbolizes this world vision and defines human rights broadly. While not much is said about women, Article 2 does entitle all to "the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Eleanor Roosevelt and the Latin American women who fought for the inclusion of sex in the Declaration and for its passage clearly intended that it would address the problems of women's subordination.¹

Since 1949, the world community has continuously debated varying interpretations of human rights in response to global developments. Little of this discussion has addressed questions of gender however, and only recently have significant challenges been made to a vision of human rights that has excluded much of women's experiences. Human rights, however, like all vibrant visions, is not static or the property of any group; rather its meaning expands as people re-conceive of their needs and hopes in relation to it. In this spirit, feminists are re-interpreting human rights to address the degradation and violations of women. We must both add women's specific experiences that have been left out of traditional approaches to human rights - making women more visible, and transform the concept and practice of human

rights in our cultures so that it takes better account of women's lives.

I have observed four basic approaches in the effort to connect women's rights to human rights which I will describe in the second part of this article. However, first I will explore why it has been so difficult and why it is so important to address women's rights as human rights.

Beyond Rhetoric: Political Implications

Few governments exhibit more than token commitment to women's equality as a basic human right in domestic or foreign policy. No government determines its policies toward other countries on the basis of their treatment of women, even when some aid and trade decisions are said to be based on a country's human rights record. Among non-governmental organizations, women are rarely a priority, and human rights day programs on December 10th almost never include discussion of issues like violence against women or reproductive rights. When it is suggested that governments and human rights organizations should respond to women's rights as concerns that deserve such attention, a number of excuses are offered for why this cannot be done. The responses tend to follow one or more of these lines: 1) sex discrimination is too trivial, or not as important, or will come after larger issues of survival that require more serious attention; 2) abuse of women, while regrettable, is a cultural/private/individual issue not a political matter for state action; 3) while appropriate for other action, women's rights are not human rights per se; or 4) when the abuse of women is recognized, it is called inevitable or so pervasive that consideration of it is futile or will overwhelm other human rights questions. It is important to challenge these responses.

The narrow definition of human rights as only a matter of state violation of civil and political liberties adhered to by

many in the West impedes the consideration of women's rights. In the US the concept has been further reduced by some who have used it as a weapon in the cold war, challenging human rights abuses almost exclusively at the hands of communists, and even then ignoring much that affected women, such as forced pregnancy in Romania. Some important aspects of women's rights do fit into a civil liberties framework, but much of women's abuse is part of a larger socio-economic web that entraps women, making them vulnerable to abuses which cannot be delineated as exclusively political or solely caused by states. The inclusion of "second generation" or socio-economic human rights to food, shelter, and work (which are clearly delineated as part of the UN Universal Declaration of human Rights) is vital to addressing women's concerns fully. Further, the assumption that states are responsible for most violations of women's rights ignores the fact that such abuses are often condoned or even sanctioned by states even when the immediate perpetrator is a private citizen. I will return to the question of state responsibility after responding to other resistance to women's rights as human rights.

The most insidious myth about women's rights is that they are trivial or secondary to the concerns of life and death. Nothing could be farther from the truth; sexism kills. There is increasing documentation of the many ways in which being female is life-threatening. A few examples:

Before birth: amniocentesis is used for sex selection leading to the abortion of more female foetuses at rates as high as 99% in Bombay, India; in the two most populous nations, China and India, more males are born than females even though natural birth ratios would produce more females.²

During childhood: The World Health Organization reports that in many countries, girls are fed less, breast fed shorter periods of time, taken to doctors less, and die or are physically and mentally maimed

by malnutrition at higher rates than boys.³

In adulthood: The denial of women's rights to control their bodies in reproduction threatens women's lives, especially where this is combined with poverty and poor health services; in Latin America, complications from illegal abortions are the leading cause of death for women between the ages of 15 and 39.⁴

Sex discrimination kills women daily. When combined with race, class and other forms of oppression it constitutes a deadly denial of women's rights to life and liberty on a large scale throughout the world. The most pervasive violation of female is violence against women with its many manifestations from wife battery, incest, and rape, to dowry deaths, genital mutilation, and female sexual slavery. These abuses occur everywhere from the home to the streets, workplaces, campuses, prisons and refugee camps, and in every country. They cross class, race, age, national and other lines; and at the same time, the forms that violence against women takes often reinforces other oppressions like racism, able-bodiedism, and imperialism. Case in point: in order to feed their families, poor women in brothels around U.S. military bases in places like the Philippines bear the burden of sexual, racial, and national imperialism in repeated and often brutal violation of their bodies.

Even a short review of random statistics reveals that the extent of violence against women globally is staggering:

In the U.S. battery is the leading cause of injury to adult women, and a rape is committed every 6 minutes.⁵

In Peru 70% of all crimes reported to police are women beaten by their partners; and in Lima (a city of 7 million), 168,970 rapes were reported in 1987 alone.⁶

In India, eight out of ten wives can anticipate some violence either of battery at home or among the least fortunate being murdered for a new dowry or being buried alive.⁷

In France, 95% of the victims of violence are women; 51% at the hands of a spouse or lover. Similar statistics from places as diverse as Bangladesh, Canada, Kenya and Thailand demonstrate that over 50% of female homicides were committed within the family.⁸

Where recorded, domestic battery figures range from 40% to 80% of women beaten, usually repeatedly, indicating that the home is the most dangerous place for women and frequently the site of cruelty and torture. As the Carol Stuart murder in Boston demonstrated, sexist and racist attitudes in the US often cover up the real threat to women; a woman is murdered in Massachusetts by a husband or lover every 22 days.⁹

Such numbers do not reflect the full extent of the problem of violence against women, much of which remains hidden. Yet rather than recognizing this as a major world conflict, this violence is accepted as normal or even dismissed as an individual or cultural matter. Georgina Ashworth notes that: "The greatest restriction of liberty, dignity and movement, and at the same time, direct violation of the person is the threat and realization of violence... However violence against the female sex, on a scale which far exceeds the list of Amnesty International victims, is tolerated publicly; indeed some acts of violation are not crimes in law, others are legitimized in custom or court opinion, and most are blamed on the victims themselves."¹⁰

Violence against women is a touchstone that illustrates the limitations of a narrow concept of human rights and highlights the political nature of the abuse of women. As Lori Heise puts it: "this is not random violence; the risk factor is being

female".¹¹ Victims are chosen because of their gender. The message is domination: stay in your place or be afraid. Contrary to the argument that it is only personal or cultural, such violence is profoundly political. It results from the structural relationship of power, domination and privilege between men and women in society. Violence against women is central to maintaining those political relations at home, at work, and in all public spheres.

Excluding sex discrimination and violence against women from the human rights agenda also results from a failure to see the oppression of women as political. Female subordination runs so deep that it is still viewed as inevitable or natural, rather than seen as politically constructed reality maintained by patriarchal interests, ideology, and institutions. But I do not believe that male violation of women is inevitable or natural, and I consider that a narrow and pessimistic view of men. If such violence and domination is understood as politically constructed reality, it is possible to imagine deconstructing that system and building more just interactions between the sexes.

The physical territory of this political struggle over what are women's human rights is women's bodies. The importance of control over women can be seen in the intensity of resistance to laws and social changes that put control of women's bodies in women's hands: reproductive rights, freedom of sexuality whether heterosexual or lesbian, objection to laws that criminalize rape in marriage, etc. Denial of reproductive rights and homophobia are also political means of maintaining control over women and perpetuating sex roles and power which have human rights implications. Abusing women physically is a reminder of this territorial domination and is sometimes accompanied by other forms of human rights abuse such as slavery (forced prostitution), sexual terrorism (rape), imprisonment (confinement to the home) or torture (systematic battery). Some cases are extreme such as the women in Thailand who died in a brothel fire because they were chained to their beds. Most situations are more

ordinary like denying women decent education or jobs which leaves them prey to abusive marriages, exploitative work, and prostitution.

This raises again the question of the state's responsibility for protecting women's human rights. Feminists have shown how the distinction between private and public is a dichotomy largely used to justify female subordination in the home. Governments regulate many matters in the family and cultural spheres. For example, human rights activists pressure states to prevent slavery or racial discrimination and segregation even when these are conducted by non-governmental forces in private or proclaimed as cultural traditions as they have been in both the South of the U.S. and in South Africa. The real questions are, who decides what are legitimate human rights and where the state should enter and for what purposes. As Riane Eisler argues:

the issue is what types of private acts are and are not protected by the right to privacy and/or the principle of family autonomy. Even more specifically, the issue is whether violations of human rights within the family such as genital mutilation, wife beating, and other forms of violence designed to maintain patriarchal control should be within the purview of human rights theory and action... the underlying problem for human rights theory, as for most other fields of theory, is that the yardstick that has been developed for defining and measuring human rights has been based on the male as norm.¹²

The human rights community must move beyond its male defined norms in order to respond to the brutal and systematic violation of women globally. This does not mean that every human rights group must alter the focus of its work. However it does require examining patriarchal biases and acknowledging the rights of women as human rights. Governments must seek to end the politically and culturally constructed war on women rather than continuing to

perpetuate it. Every state has the responsibility to intervene in the abuse of women's rights within its borders and to end its collusion with the forces that perpetrate such violations in other countries.

Towards Action: Practical Approaches

What gets classified as human rights is more than semantics because it has practical policy consequences. Human rights are still considered to be more important than women's rights. Their separation perpetuates the idea that the rights of women are of a lesser order than the "rights of man", and as Eisler describes it, "serves to justify practices that do not accord women full and equal status."¹³ In the United Nations the Human Rights Commission has more power than the Commission on the Status of Women in hearing and investigating cases, more staff and budget, and better mechanisms for implementation of its findings. Thus it makes a difference in what can be done if a case is deemed a violation of women's rights not of human rights.¹⁴

Determination of refugee status illustrates how what is defined as human rights matters for people's lives. In their pioneering efforts to get sexual persecution and violence against women seen as grounds for such status, the Dutch Refugee Association found that some European governments would take sexual persecution into account as an aspect of other forms of political repression, but none would make it the grounds for refugee status per se.¹⁵ The implications of such a distinction are clear when examining a situation like that of some Bangladeshi women raped during the Pakistan-Bangladesh war were facing death at the hands of male relatives to preserve "family honor". Western powers expressed outrage but did not offer asylum to these victims of human rights abuse.

I have observed four basic approaches to linking women's

rights to human rights. These are presented separately here in order to identify each tendency more clearly. However work done from these often overlaps, and while each raises questions about the others, I see them as complementary. These approaches can be taken in relations to many issues, but I will illustrate them primarily in terms of how they address violence against women in order to show the implications of their differences on a concrete issue.

- 1 Adding women's specific needs into consideration of the already recognized "first generation" human rights of political and civil liberties is the first approach. This involves both making visible the women who suffer violations similar to those of men and calling attention to particular abuses women in these situations encounter because of being female. Thus, issues of violence against women are raised when they connect to other forms of violation such as the sexual torture of women political prisoners in South America.¹⁶ Groups like the women's task force of Amnesty International have taken this approach in pushing for that organization to launch a campaign around women political prisoners that addresses the sexual abuse and rape of women in custody, their lack of maternal care in detention and the resulting human rights abuse of their children.

Documenting the problems of women refugees and developing responsive policies is another illustration of this approach. Women and children make up over 80% of those in refugee camps, yet few refugee policies are specifically shaped to meet the needs of these vulnerable populations who face considerable sexual abuse. For example, in one camp where men were allocated the community's rations, some gave food to women and their children in exchange for sex. Revealing this abuse led to new policies that allocated food directly to the women.¹⁷

This approach is a useful starting point for many human rights groups because it enables them to recognize the specificity of women's experiences of human rights abuse in areas where they are already working. However it also raises contradictions that reveal the limits of a narrow civil liberties, view such as defining rape as a human rights abuse only in state custody but not on the streets or in the home. Or calling it a violation of the human right to free speech to be jailed for defending gay rights, but not considering it a human rights abuse to be incarcerated or even tortured and killed for homosexuality. Thus while this approach of adding women and striring them into existing first generation human rights categories is useful, it is not enough by itself.

The second approach adds women's particular plight into the "second generation" human rights issues, that is socio-economic rights to food, shelter, health care, and employment. This is the frequent course of those who see the dominant Western human rights tradition and international law as too individualistic and identify women's oppression as primarily economic.

This tendency has its origins among socialists and labor activists who have long argued that political human rights are meaningless to many without economic rights as well. It focuses on the primacy of the need to end women's economic subordination as the key to other issues including women's vulnerability to violence. This has led to work on issues like women's right to organize as workers and opposition to violence in the workplace, especially in situations like the free trade zones which have targeted women as 'cheap' unorganized labor. Another focus of this approach has been highlighting the feminization of poverty, or what might better be called the increasing impoverishment of females, since

poverty has not become only female or feminine, but rather females have become a higher percentage of the poor.

Looking at women in development is another stream reflecting this approach. Third World peoples have called for an understanding of socio-economic development as a human rights issue. Within this demand, some have sought to integrate women into development and have examined women's specific needs in relation to areas like land ownership or access to credit. Among those working on women in development, there is growing interest in violence against women as both a health and development issue. If violence is seen as having negative consequences for social productivity, it may get more attention, but a narrow economic measure should not become the determining factor in whether such violence is seen as a human rights concern. The question of violence as a development issue is linked to the need to understand development as not just economic but also as a question of empowerment and human growth.

One of the limitations of this second approach has been its tendency to reduce women's needs to the economic sphere, implying that women's rights will follow automatically with third world development and/or socialism. This has not proven to be the case. Many working from this approach are no longer trying to add women into either the Western capitalist or socialist development models, but rather seek a transformative development process that links women's political, economic and cultural empowerment.

The creation of new legal mechanisms to counter sex discrimination characterizes the third approach to women's rights as human rights. These efforts seek to

make existing legal and political institutions work for women and to expand the state's responsibility for the violation of women's human rights. National and local laws addressing sex discrimination and violence against women are examples of this approach to giving women legal recourse in fighting for their rights. The primary international illustration is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Convention has been described as "essentially an international bill of rights for women and a framework for women's participation in the development process... (which) spells out internationally accepted principles and standards for achieving equality between women and men". Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, the convention has been ratified or acceded to by 97 countries which theoretically obligated them to pursue policies in accordance with it and to report on their compliance to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).¹⁸

While the Convention addresses many issues of sex discrimination, one of its shortcomings is failure to address the question of violence against women directly. However the CEDAW Committee passed a resolution at its 8th Session in Vienna in 1989 expressing concern that this issue be on its agenda and instructing states in their periodic reports to the Committee to include information about statistics, legislation, and support services in this area. The Commonwealth Secretariat in its manual on the reporting process for the Convention also interprets the issue of violence against women as "clearly fundamental to the spirit of the Convention", especially in Article 5 which calls for the modification of social and cultural patterns, sex roles and stereotyping, that are based on the idea of the

inferiority or the superiority of either sex.¹⁹

The Convention outlines a clear human rights agenda for women which if accepted by governments would mark an enormous step forward. It carries however the limitations of all such international documents in that there is little power to demand its implementation. Within the UN, it is not generally regarded as a convention with teeth, as illustrated by the difficulty that CEDAW has had in getting countries to report on compliance with its provisions. Further, it is still treated as women's rights (read secondary), not human rights, by governments and most non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, it is an useful statement of principles given legitimacy by the UN around which women can organize to achieve legal and political change in their regions.

Transforming the human rights concept from a feminist perspective so that it will take more account of women's lives is the fourth approach. Placing violations of women's rights at the centre of its attention, this approach then asks how these relate to what has been seen as human rights and how that must change to respond to women. For example, the GABRIELA women's coalition in the Philippines simply state that "Women's Rights are Human Rights" in launching a campaign last year. As Ninotchka Rosca explained, they saw that "human rights are not reducible to a question of legal and due process... In the case of women, human rights are affected by the entire society's traditional perception of what is proper or not proper for women"²⁰ Similarly a panel at the 1990 IRAW (International Women's Rights Action Watch) conference asserted that "Violence Against Women is a Human Rights Issue". While work in the three previous approaches is often done from a feminist perspective, this tendency is the most distinctly feminist with its woman-centered stance and

refusal to wait for permission from some authority to determine what is or is not a human rights issue.

This transformative approach can be taken toward any issue, but those working from this approach have tended to focus most on abuses that arise specifically out of gender, such as reproductive rights, female sexual slavery, violence against women and "family crimes" like forced marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and female mutilation. These are also the issues most often dismissed as not really human rights questions. This is therefore the most hotly contested area that requires breaking down barriers between what is seen as public and private, the state and non-governmental responsibilities.

Those working to transform the human rights vision from the perspective can draw on the work of others who have expanded the understanding of human rights previously. For example, two decades ago there was no concept of "disappearances" as a human rights abuse. However, the women of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina did not wait for it to be so declared, but stood up to demand state accountability for these crimes. In so doing, they helped to create a context for expanding the concept of responsibility for deaths at the hands of para-military or right-wing death squads which, even if not carried out by the state, were allowed by it to happen. Another example is the development of the concept of "hate crimes" as a way for racially motivated violence (and other forms such as homophobic or anti-Semitic violence against a person for being a member of a particular group) to be seen as violations of a person's civil rights. Many accept that states have an obligation to work to prevent such human rights abuses, and getting violence against women seen as a hate or bias crime is worth pursuing.

The practical applications of transforming the human rights concept from feminist perspective need to be explored further. The danger in pursuing this approach is the tendency to become isolated from and competitive with other human

rights groups because they have been so reluctant to address gender violence and discrimination. Yet, most women experience abuse on the grounds of sex, race, class, nation, age, sexual preference, politics, etc. as inter-related, and little benefit comes from separating them out as competing claims. The human rights community need not abandon other issues but should incorporate gender perspective into them and see how these expand the terms of their work. By recognizing issues like violence against women as human rights concerns, they do not have to take these up as their primary tasks. However they do have to stop gate-keeping and guarding their prerogative to determine what is considered a "legitimate" human rights issue.

As mentioned before, these four approaches are overlapping and many strategies involve more than one of them; all contain aspects of what is necessary to achieve women's rights. At a time when dualist ways of thinking and views of competing economic systems are in question, the creative task is to look for ways to connect these approaches and to see how we can go beyond either/or views of what people need in their lives. In the words of an early feminist group - we need bread and roses too. Women want food and liberty and the possibility of living lives of dignity free from domination and violence. In this struggle, the recognition of women's rights as human rights can play an important role.

Courtesy: Social Scientists' Association

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**Beijing World Conference on Women
(September 1995)**

Areas of Concern for Asia & the Pacific

- * **Increased feminization poverty**
- * **Unequal access to, and participation in, economic activities**
- * **Lack of recognition for women's role and concerns in environment and natural resource mangement**
- * **Unequal access to power and decision-making**
- * **Violation of Women's Human Rights**
- * **Inequalities and lack of access to health**
- * **Negative portrayal of women in the media**
- * **Inequalities and lack of access to education and literacy**
- * **Inadaquate mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women**
- * **Lack of recognition for women's role in peace building**

Can Women be Leaders of a Nation, A Muslim Perspective

Jezima Ismail

The scenario in Sri Lanka and the Region today, presents a significant visibility of women, especially at the top. This is a source of satisfaction, although some important issues concerning women still need attention. However, the focus of my article is on women as leaders of the nation. Sri Lanka is being described to ad nauseam level, with little or no action to promote it, as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country. As such, it would be interesting to consider the perspective of the different communities to this question, vexatious as it may be to some members of some communities.

Naturally, being a Muslim, it's the Muslim point of view I am projecting. When Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was the choice of the People's Alliance as the president there were murmurs, kept for obvious reasons at a low level, whether a woman could be a head of a state and whether Muslims could vote for her. Destiny engineered by human forces assassinated Mr Gamini Dissanayake and then the choice was Srma Dissanayake. Now one woman became two women and there was consternation in the 'yard'. Though Muslims form only an 8% of the population, yet they are a significant minority.

What do the scholars say, using the primary and secondary sources of Islam, about a woman being head of state? A brief examination of Rafiq Zakaria's book - 'The Trial of Benazir Bhutto - An insight into the status of women in Islam would

be interesting; quoting from the preface "The emergence of Benazir Bhutto, a 35 year old modern, western educated, unveiled, sophisticated, beautiful Muslim woman as Prime Minister of the most powerful Muslim state in the world, created quite a stir in November 1988. It was generally believed that a woman could never be allowed by the faithful to assume political power, certainly not in a Muslim state and most certainly not in Pakistan, the bastion of Muslim orthodoxy. But it happened".

So it was thought by the writer that the Muslim view point as discussed by eminent scholars would be not only interesting, but may also serve a useful purpose in promoting some kind of understanding of what Muslims conceive of women and leadership, especially in today's context. Furthermore, there have been many articles particularly in the print media that give many constructions to the rituals, folk customs and community's rites and if Sri Lankans are to live in one country as one people, it would be necessary to understand how the communities live and think.

It is not my task here to discuss the status of women, but as indicated by the heading (Can a Woman be a Ruler of the State?) only the question of 'Leadership' will be addressed in this paper. The final judgement as portrayed in the book by Zakariya, pointed out that what must be taken into account is the totality of the Prophet's (S.A.L.) approach, and not by isolated Hadith. The equality of the sexes is definitely the thesis of the Quran although there is only a near - equality in family affairs, but this no way signifies that a man is superior to a woman. There is no specific injunction in the Quran that prevents a woman from participation in public life. Consider the activities of the Women in Islam:

Hadrat Aisha (wife of the Holy Prophet - S.A.L.) participated in discussions pertaining to affairs of the state, and in the battle of the Camel she lead the troops against the Caliph, Hadrat Ali. She also actively participated in major political developments.

Hadrat Fatimah, the daughter of the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) was actively involved in the campaign to make her husband the Caliph.

Asma, the daughter of Hadrath Abu Bakr (The first Caliph of Islam) stood unflinching by her husband in the war against the Umayyad Viceroy. Hadrat Umar (one of the Caliphs of Islam) appointed a woman to one of the key posts in his administration - Shifa bint Abdallah controlled the markets in Medina.

Fathima Mernissi in her book "Can We Women Head a Muslim State?" - (Simorgh Publication 1991) lists 16 Women Heads of State in Muslim

In Arabic texts alone, 16 women acknowledged as having been heads of state with Khotba (the official sermon in the mosque on Friday) their names as well as money coined with their titles are found with:-

1	Razia Sultan	634/1236	Delhi
2	Chajarat ad dur	648/1250	Cairo
3	Kutlugh Turkan	655/1257 - 681/1282	Mogul dynasty
4	Padish Katun	691/1292 - 694/1295	" "
5	Ab'sh Katun	662/1263 - 686/1287	" "
6	Dawlat Khato	716/1316 (25 years)	" "
7	Sati Bek	739/1339	" "
8	Sultana Tindu	714-814	Baghdad
9	Sultana Fatema Begum	1679-1681	Central Asia
10	Sultana Khadija	1347-1379	Maldives
11	Sultana Myriam	1379-1383	"
12	Sultana Fatima	785/1383-790/1388	"
13	Tadj Al Alam Saffiyat ed Din Shah	1641-1675	Indonesia(Sumatra)
14	Nur Al 'Alam Nakiyaat ed Din Shah	1675-1678	

- 15 Inayat Shah
Zakkiyat
ed Din Shah 1678-1688
16 Kamalat Shah 1688-1699

In the prayer or Khutba in the name of Sultan Khadija, who was the Sultan of Maldives, the Khatib used to say (on Fridays and on other days) "Allah make her triumph, your slave you have knowingly chosen among the entire worlds and made her a blessing for all the Moslems. (Sultan Khadija, daughter of Sultan Jalal-Ad din Ibn as Sultan-Salah -Ad din - from 'Rihla', Ibn Batuta, Dar Beyrath - Beirut 1985 Edition p.580).

In Sri Lanka, Maulana Maududi of Pakistan, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, is held in great respect and it would be useful to know his attitude. His contention was that a woman could not head a nation, because if she were to become a ruler she would neglect her familial responsibilities. In Islam, he maintained that there was a functional distribution of work according to sex and in accordance with this distribution, politics and administration come within the man's sphere of activities. However, in the election of the president of Pakistan in 1962 he supported Fatima Jinnah the sister of Quaidi-Azam against Ayub Khan. The author of this book concludes that this support was based on political expediency and not adherence to any rule of the Shariah".

According to Afghani there was no strict segregation of men and women and according to the Quranic injunction (24 : 30-31) all Muslims both male and female were expected to behave decently and the Quranic injunction is clear on this point. He concludes that he sees no justification either in the Quran or the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) to keep women out. He categorically upholds equality of opportunity for men and women in every activity including politics. An awakened woman he adds, will be the best safeguard against a corrupt man.

Afgani quotes :

'Javid Nama (the allegorical poem of Allama Iqbal)

Man alive in heart, do you know what thing life is?
On seeing love that is contemplating duality :
Man and woman are bound one to the other,
they are the fashioners of the creatures of desire.
Woman is the guardian of the fire of life,
her nature is the tablet of life's mysteries;
She strikes our fire against her own soul
and it is her substance that makes of the dust a man.
In her heart lurks life's potentialities,
from the glow and flame, life derives stability;
She is a fire from which the spark breaks forth
body and soul, lacking her glow, cannot take shape.
What worth we possess derives from her values
for we are all images of her fashioning:
If God has bestowed on you a glance aflame
cleanse yourself and behold her sanctity."

A further reference to women and leadership could be derived from Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the noted commentator of the Quran. In Surah Namal (27) in verses 15-44 there is a reference to a woman named Bilqis, the legendary Queen of Sheba (1100 to 800 BC). At the same time ruled in Palestine, King Soloman who was a mighty King renowned for his goodness and wisdom. His belief was in one God and he was in fact a Prophet and the son of Prophet David. After a series of encounters, Soloman was able to spread to Bilqis the divine message of truth and she embraced the faith. She was referred to as a noble woman, ever solicitous of the welfare of her subjects and ruled by consulting her Council.

Abdullah al Badawi (1801-1873) another commentator on the Quran regarded by some Muslims as the best, holds that in his understanding of the Quran - Allah has preferred man over woman and leadership - even the privilege of electing

Chiefs is denied to her, but Abu Muhammad Abdal Malik Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) refers to the Holy Prophet (S.A.L.) as the greatest mover and shaker of the world. He said, 'The Quran warns us that 'God never changes the condition of a people unless they change it themselves'. Ours is a brotherhood which does not believe in any form of inequalities - tribal, racial or sexual. In fact Islam came to level things and change should not be resisted in the light of the spirit of the Quran.

What does Asghar Ali Engineer, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay, an internationally reputed scholar and theologian of Islam who has written books, research papers and articles on Islamic theology, jurisprudence, history, philosophy have to say?

He says that there is no Quranic provision or prophetic sunnah against a woman becoming head of a state! The Quranic revelations more often than not are responses to situations that arose but in the Holy Prophet's time no such situation arose, nor did anyone raise such a question. Reference has already been made to queen Sheba earlier in this article - Asghar Ali Engineer adds that 'Had Allah disapproved of a woman as the head of state or had a woman's rule been disastrous the Quran would have painted the Queen of Sheba in an adverse light and would have shown her inferior to her male counsellors. But it did not and Sheba was spoken of as a legitimate ruler and shown to be wise and sometimes she would overrule her male counsellors and take political decisions which are indeed wise ones.

About the Prophet's hadith which is often used by theologians to argue against a woman becoming a head of state - Asghar Ali Engineer says " When news reached the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) that the Iranians had made the daughter of Cusroe their ruler, he observed " that a nation can never prosper which has assigned its reign to a woman" (Sahih Bukhari Vol.2 pg.1053).

It should be noted that the above hadith is from (Ahad) that is an isolated one and not mutawatir i.e., one repeated by more than one companion of the Prophet (O.W.B.P.). It is a well known principle that the former (Ahad - an isolated one) is not binding and it is not necessary to act upon it. Again this author points out that Maulana Uman Ahamad Usmani shows that this hadith existed before the battle of Camel in which Hazrath Aisha, the wife of the Prophet participated and assumed command of the army against Hazrath Ali the fourth Caliph and its strange that it was remembered only after the battle started. In fact the army had many illustrious companions of the Prophet (S.A.L.), and even Abu Bakra the narrator of the above hadith. All this men should have deserted Aisha had they been convinced that the Prophet (S.A.L.) had prohibited women from being leader or head. However, many disciples abstained from participating in the battle because it was in the nature of a civil war and it could divide the Muslim ummah (community). They stood by this principle that it was against the teaching of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) to take part in a quarrel that would cause internecine strife. It was only Abu Bakra the narrator of the hadith, who made the sex of one of the opponents the reason for his refusal to take part in the battle, after the defeat of Hazrat Aisha - (Fathima Mernissi -)

Asghar Ali Engineer asks - " How could it be said that a woman cannot become leader of a government when her leadership was accepted by such eminent companions of the Prophet ? Apart from the Quranic reference to the Queen of Sheba - the Quran says "And the believer both men and women - they are friends of one another, they enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the purifying due and obey Allah and His Messenger. As for these Allah will have mercy on them. Surely Allah is mighty and wise (27 : 32-35). "Now the determination of what is wrong and what is right, is one of the basic duties of the State and here men as well as women who are protectors of each other, have been enjoined to perform this task. How can women then be excluded from being leaders of the state?" asks Asghar Ali

Engineer. In fact he continues that both Imam Malik and the eminent exegetist and historian Tabari hold that women could become quadi, quazi (judge). Many women held prominent positions in the administration of an Islamic state. As Philip Hitti says (History of the Arabs 1958) "Not only do we read of women in the high circles of that early period achieving distinction and exercising influence in state affairs but of Arab maidens going to war and commanding troops, composing poetry and competing with men in literary pursuits....."

There is also the instance of a woman becoming head of state during the early 5th and early 6th century hijrah. Harrah Malikah Arwa bint Ahman headed the administration of the Province of Yemen on behalf of the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt. She was held in high esteem and even given the highest religious offices under the Fatimid hierarchy. Many such instances can be given from history - Raziyah Sultan, Chand Bibi, Nurjahan whose ability to govern and administrate have been recognised by all historians.

There is hardly any sector or profession in the Arabia of those days in which women of the Prophet's time did not participate. In so far as Muslim history is concerned, there is no doubt that "Women have been heads of state in Muslim nations and khutbas in their names have been read in mosques and coins have been struck, bearing their images and titles".

Conclusion :

In this paper the case for women's leadership is argued from the writings of some of the foremost scholars and those with wisdom. In Sri Lanka a goal sought by citizens is a Sri Lankan identity and how can this amidst rigid unbending communal obsessions and preoccupations. How does a communal identity overreach, bend, expand to embrace a Sri Lankan

identity? It is not impossible - one concrete step would be to understand the difference and explore what links there are to fasten them in a close, but loose union. Rights, rituals, customs are looked at from different perspective and those perspective should be clarified and exposed for a clear understanding.

The objective of this paper is to present one such perspective of leadership from the view point of some leading Islamic scholars. Islam has given women equal rights although there are passionate debates going on about the varied rights of women in all sectors - political, economic, social and cultural. To day there is a tendency among powerful people, to label women who claim democratic rights as confusedly aping western ideas with the view to alienate the community from its traditional purity. This attitude exaggerated by the Western media which thrives on the fact that all Muslim fundamentalists are reactionaries and obscurantists. The truth of course lies elsewhere.

For Islam, however, from its inception 'decadence is despotism accepted in silence' and articulation of opposition and dissension to denial of rights is healthy, because Islam is for 'adala' this is equality and justice for its women as well as men (Imam and Kathib of Al' Utba al Khadra mosque, Cairo -1943).

As regards "riassa" or state leadership, Sheikh Ghazali, Head of the Religious Council of the Amir Abd Al Qadir University, (Algiers - 1971), author (As Sunna an Nabawiya) of the Traditions of the Prophet - (1990) wonders why "all these well intentioned Muslim men are busy quoting a hadith stating women's inferiority, instead of referring to all the verses of the Quran where the equality of the sexes is made crystal clear....."

The new Islamic era meant a new status for women. The verse about Queen Sheba (Quran V.23, S.27) raised high the aspiration of women by providing them with the role model of

woman as head of state. Fathima Mernissi in *Can We, Women Head a Muslim State?* says many women in Muslim history did aim that high and were successful in their endeavours'.

Eileen Basker Memorial Prize

The Eileen Basker Memorial Prize was established by the Society for Medical Anthropology to promote superior research in the area of gender and health. The award is made annually, in memory of Eileen Basker, to scholars from any discipline or nation, for work (book, article, film, exceptional Ph.D.thesis) produced within the preceding three years. Past winners include Emily Martin, for The Woman in the Body, Joan Jacobs Blumberg for Eating Girls, Faye Ginsberg for Contested Lives, Nancy Scheper-Hughes for Death Without Weeping, Barbara Duden for The Woman Beneath the Skin, Margaret Lock for Encounters with Aging, and Margarete Sandelowski for With Child in Mind.

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Submit letter of nomination with three copies of the work by July 1, 1995 to: Robert Hahn, Ph.D., M.P.H., Epidemiology Program Office, CO8, Centres for Disease Control, Atlanta, GA 30303.

**Book Review : Unbroken Chains:
Explorations into the Jaffna Dowry system.**

By Adele Ann, Malathi Press, Radha Lane
Vannarpannai, Jaffna, 1994 pp 64

Selvy Thiruchandran

This small publication, in two parts, is about the dowry system in Jaffna. The first part deals with the textual aspect of it. The first part deals with Thecawalamai and its limitations on the matrilineal system with which the Thecawalamai is associated. The second part is about the aspect of dowry system as it is operationalised in the Tamil society in contemporary Jaffna. Adele Ann admits that she is dealing with one of the most complex issues of the Tamil people of Jaffna. While disclaiming any pretensions of a comprehensive socio-historical theoretical analysis, she promises to do much in this short publication. They are: an examination of the specific socio-cultural and historical elements, the historical origins and the social relations, and the various sociological mechanism involved in the phenomenon of Thecawalamai with special reference to the dowry system.

However, she emphasises that the central theme of the work is to show that the practise of dowry in reality constitutes to the oppression of women. She fails however, to take note of the difference between the text and its operational de-merits and limitations.

She draws heavily from H.W.Tambiah in tracing the history of Tecawalamai but fails to take note of some of the unique feature of Tecawalamai to which Tambiah draws our attention (Such as the manner in which dowry is kept separately in the women's name). While tracing the origins and the manner of codification others (Gunasekara) have argued that while being

codified, Tecawalamai was transformed assimilating the patrilineal heritage pattern of the codifiers ie. the Dutch. That the wife has to get the written consent of the husband to sell or mortgage her immovable property, is argued as an anomaly to the Tecawalamai concept of female property. This clause may well have been added by the Dutch. Adele Anne has taken great pains to understand the Jaffna society. However, at times she has drawn conclusions which are questionable. While arranged marriages are viewed with contempt, to say that women become "helpless victims of a conspirational agreement that crucifies their freedom of choice" is certainly an overstatement. When a woman marries her cross cousin, usually she is aware of such an arrangement. If marriages are contracted with outsiders, the woman/girl is consulted or her permission got before marriages are finalised. The mother's elder sister and aunts act as go between and dissent is always communicated and often such a dissent is honoured. Very rarely is a marriage forced on a daughter and if the young woman is educated and employed, she certainly has a greater say in her acceptance/rejection of marriage partners.

Moreover, Addle Ann gives the reader the impression that individual mate selection is a total taboo in Jaffna. This is far from the truth. "Love marriages" as they are called are common like any where else. It is indeed a glaring mistake to assume as she does (in p 4) that in arranged marriage system there is a tendency to ignore young women's education, employment, career and social interest when marriage proposal get under way. On the contrary the mate selection for a young woman is done taking into consideration meticulously the women's education, employment and career, if not her social interest. Women in Jaffna, as she claims are not "voiceless objects" (p42). Though there is no dispute that patriarchal values determine a woman's life, Adele Ann has not comprehended sufficiently how the institution of family operates and I think the major flaw of this work is her inability to comprehend the intricacies of the institution of family as it operates in Jaffna. Often fathers and bothers have to undergo a lot of sacrifices for the welfare of their daughter

and sisters. While I have no quarrel with Adele Ann that the dowry as being demanded by men and supplied by woman's parents is a social evil and need to be eradicated the concept of matrilineal property should be maintained. Her view (p 38) such as that the kinship system and the social sanctioning of cousin (it is cross cousin) marriage fosters an extremely parochial system borders on ethno-centrism. Anthropologists (Gananath Obeyesekera) have in this same system of cross cousin marriages identified liberating potentiality for women. Cordiality, familiarity with the kin group, strong affective ties between the kin (mother-in-law, father-in-law sister-in-law) - which negate the alienation that a young wife experiences in her life after marriage, are some of the advantages for a new bride.

Adele Anne speaks of a total lack of social relationship of men and women before marriage. (p 41.) One wonders how she came to such a conclusion of the Jaffna society. She views the Jaffna society as one with compartments divided into gendered units. Co-education at school level was introduced at a very early stage and Universities and Medical Colleges, schools and colleges with co-education have given the girls and boys enough opportunities for social interaction. Men and women do have premarital social relationships at all class and caste levels and it is clearly visible for any sociological analyst then and now. And as she claims it is no moral debate. One is free to discuss any social issue with the necessary data. Jaffna is not peculiarly "parochial" as she claims. Such an isolation of issues from the general socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions which determine the man - woman relationship turn to be half truths and leads to unscientific and partial conclusions.

What I would call the serious lapse of the author is that she has based her work solely on observation which is not participant and not on any field research as far as the second part of the book is concerned.

Her cultural distance from the community has not lead to the

desired objec^t distance promises. Neither is
mine an insid^{er} bias of either trying to be an
apologist or see^{ing} progressive trends within my culture and
defend the culture to which I, belong. By this critique I am
not however, questioning her concern for the progress of the
Tamil women. I am merely a critical insider who shares her
broader visions and convictions as far as gender issues are
concerned.

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