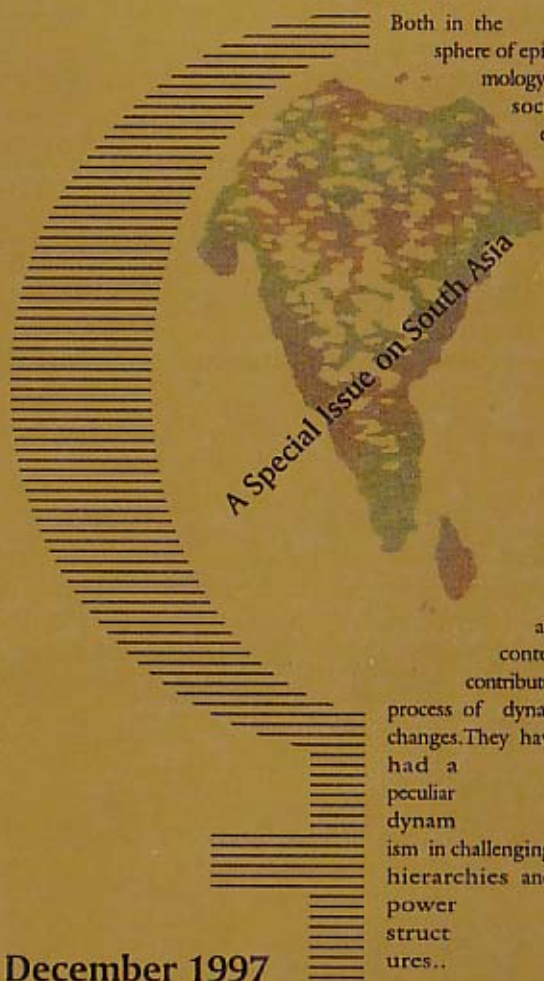


Nivedini

A Journal on Gender Studies



A Special Issue on South Asia

Both in the sphere of epistemology and social movements the latter half of the twentieth century has witnessed a series of dynamic developments. Women's Studies as a discipline, feminist research as conceptualising new theoretical insights within the academe and the women's movement both with its social and political content have contributed to a process of dynamic changes. They have had a peculiar dynamism in challenging hierarchies and power structures...

December 1997

Vol. 5 No.2

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 sensitize men and women on gender issues.

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

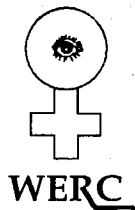
To strengthen the women's network locally and internationally.

To extend co-operation to and solidarity with other oppressed and marginalised groups in Sri Lanka (such as refugees, unemployed and 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. It could mean either, that which is placed before you ritually and reverentially, or a carrier of knowledge with a female gender suffix 'ni' (derived from the verb vid, to know.) We use it with the second meaning.



Women's Education and Research Centre

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From the Editor

Both in the sphere of epistemology and social movements the latter half of the twentieth century has witnessed a series of dynamic developments. Women's Studies as a discipline, feminist research as conceptualising new theoretical insights within the academe and the women's movement both with its social and political content have contributed to a dynamic process of change. They have had a special dynamism in challenging hierarchies and power structures. There are other issues as well which the feminists have taken up. New internationalism expressed through the slogans such as "sisterhood is global", "solidarity and support for women across nations" (which is distinguished from the workers internationalism and solidarity), the focus on peace and disarmament as part of an agenda on gender and equality of the women's movement are issues that have political thrust as well.

This issue of the *Nivedini* covers a range of subjects on gender in the South Asian region. It was indeed a great effort to get across to the South Asian feminist scholars and get them to contribute to this issue. Fax, telephone and e-mail had to be used to expedite the process. The initial postal service channels of access did not meet with success. Most of them, it seemed are working hard to meet dead lines for submission of papers preparing and attending seminars or conferences locally and internationally. However, various strategies were followed and the need to empathise and the need to cooperate and express solidarity with us were subtly conveyed. The note of urgency conveyed by the modern forms of communication such as the fax and e-mail finally worked to our advantage!

Despite the socio cultural differences among the women at a global level there are a great deal of similarities in the forms and manner in which women face difficulties across the globe at the level of gender constructions. For the South Asian women there are indeed great similarities. The commonalities are rendered even more similar due to the overall cultural ideology and religious tenets, which often determine the social existence of men and women. Despite the commonalities the economic and political developments in the countries have also contributed to various levels of different gender specific deprivations though they work on the same ideology which is in the background. While Hinduism and Islam are practised in all the countries, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan in addition to their Hindu and Islam adherents also have Buddhists. Ethnic chauvinism and religious fundamentalism have become the post-colonial legacy in these countries. Various forms of violence have erupted in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh. They affect women specifically. Women are widowed, rendered homeless, raped and driven to refugee camps, while the men are also killed and maimed. The brutalisation of politics has resulted in various new social phenomena: life in the refugee camps, trauma afflictions, orphans, population shifts, voluntary migration and migration forcefully effected through ethnic cleansing. The war widow syndrome has resulted in the emerging phenomenon of female headed households. Socio-economic disruptions have even led scholars in South Asia to review the old theories of nation-state nationalism and concepts such as Traditional Homelands. The resulting discourse is a widening scholarly exercise limited only to the intellectuals while the common people - the victims - continue to suffer.

Political leadership in South Asia suffers from a lack of statesman'ship. Amidst these uncertainties and anxieties there has emerged another factor in South Asia simultaneously and that is an awareness that women are under-represented in the political structure at all levels. While there are efforts both socially and constitutionally to work towards increasing women's participation in politics there is implicit in the arguments among some that women in politics means clean politics - with less corruption, less violence, more participation and therefore more democracy. The entry of women into Indian Panchayats (local councils) has been found to be a success story, in support of women's positive creative politics.

In our opinion, this factor cannot be generalised as universally applicable to all situations, though we welcome increasing the political participation of women towards a transformation of politics into ethical politics.

In South Asia today, women are asking for reservations/ quotas with a view towards gaining equal participation and equal representations. What is stressed in this whole exercise is the argument on a principle of democracy, to seek representation for that segment that is under-represented and that has specific needs and wants on its agenda with clearly articulated programmes for gender equality.

Rounaq Jahan's (from Bangladesh) paper on Transformative Politics argues for a transformation in the practice of politics. The word politics she says is defined as the "total complex of interacting, and usually conflicting relations between men living in society (Websters New International Dictionary). However, the worldview of politics has always been connected with words such as "power, control, deceit, corruption and manipulation."

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin speaking of the plight of the widows during the time of partition call them "the widows of partition". These women are also victims of the construction of nation states. They are divided, maimed, widowed and raped because of nationalism, ours and yours, because of your nation and my nation, ours and yours because of your religion and mine. The war widows in Sri Lanka have (and are) undergoing the same experience at the same ideological level though there is no partition. It is a long ethnic war.

However, it was the same situation when Bangladesh was constructed as a nation.

V. Geetha's paper deals with the contemporary issue of women's vulnerability to religion in the present Tamil Nadu situations despite the different history that Periyar attempted to create for Tamil Nadu in rejecting religion perse, while identifying the Hindu religion as the most oppressive one to women.

Mary Hancock's paper is also on the Tamil Nadu situation and is also on religion but on an ethnographic approach to Hindu rituals and women's agency. Based on a series of narratives, she has discovered the

rather vividly how changing socio-economic patterns have not contributed to an improvement in the situation of women but has further reinforced patriarchal attitudes and actions at the level of the family and at the workplace.

However, the emphasis on peace and disarmament and belief in the principle of democracy as its political ideology have brought the feminist into confrontation with the national liberation struggle and the newly emerging nation states which emphasise cultural, religious and ethnic identities - National oppression is given priority over gender oppression and armed struggle over democracy and pacifism. Even facism and the cult of heroism expressed through violence is legitimised as a necessary evil towards national liberation. National States have identified other oppressors: ethnic chauvinism, religious chauvinism, state terrorism. Male chauvinism though acknowledged is not prioritised.

The confrontation continues and for the feminist of the national minorities it is indeed a dilemma, being oppressed by the state and the chauvinists and in conflict ideologically with violent and fascist political ideologies and structures.

The Uncertain Subject(s) of Femininity: Ethnographic Approaches to Hindu Practice and Female Agency

Mary Hancock *

It was May, 1987. I had been in Chennai (formerly Madras) for two months, and like all fledgling anthropologists, my pencil was poised to record whatever shards of "data" fell my way. In my eagerness, and with faltering Tamil, I accosted anyone capable of speech for nuggets with which to fill my newly acquired, Lakshmi-embossed notebooks. My neighbors complied with what they genially regarded as my eccentricities, though most shrank away, deferring to unnamed priests, and to that omnibus of authoritative knowledge, the sastras. I was ill at ease, therefore, when my Brahman landlord (an affluent architect) inquired about my work, "Are you making any progress?" My vague response encouraged him to enlarge upon the flaws of my approach. "You must go only to the monastery (*matam*) for authentic information. Those temple priests are crooked, and ordinary people don't know the real meaning behind the rituals they do." He went on, "I do puja daily, but it is only recently that I have begun. It's for my own peace of mind and it's not at all elaborate. it's for my *ista teyvam*, *Murukan*. It was my mother's devotion to *Murukan* that drew me." This was all beginning to sound like transcribable data to me, so I encouraged him to continue, offer-

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ing that I had noticed that many women seemed very active as ritual performers “Yes, that’s so”, he agreed, but went on dismissively, “but so much of it is just one cult or another. They’ve picked things up here and there, some [rituals] started in the north. “By this point, he had become exercised, starting with conviction, “women are not fit to do puja. In our house, I do puja, not my wife! Once you have started a puja, it must be done daily, but for women, daily puja is impossible.” Sensing my confusion, he added, “Several days out of each month they cannot bathe, so you see, it’s the men who must do.”

Things did pick up for me eventually, and my quest for information was soon rewarded by a whole shelf of notebooks crammed with my scribbles. Much recorded those very “cults” so roundly dismissed by my land-lord. Still his cautionary words stayed with me, particularly as I reflected on the double bind in which South Asian women seem often caught. As mothers, women are extolled, indeed the India of Hindu nationalism, past and present, is a mother (often a Mother Goddess), with implication that mothers are synonymous with India. On a related note, Tanika Sarkar (1995) has pointed out that the current Hindutva movement foregrounds the militantly communal woman in a variety of ways consistent with the goals/imagery of bourgeois feminism - self-reliant, strong, independent. By contrast, restrictions on women’s actions and subjectivities are often underwritten by broadly framed cultural constructions of female sexuality. Associations with blood, inferiority and desire, make it, at best the site of volatility, though more often women’s sexuality is associated with uncleanness, danger, and even death. One need only look to popular understandings of the “pollution” of menstruation (*tittu*), and controls on female chastity to see how some prescriptive discourses confirm this (e.g., Wolf 1991; Lakshmi 1984). Femininity is simultaneously margin and centre, and women’s everyday lives, though mediated by the structural inequalities of caste and class and by specificities of domestic politics are negotiated at this junction.

What this paper addresses is the way that this double bind was played out in the interconnected biographies of two specific women - one a middle class Brahman, and the other a Harijan, who had become prosperous in her 40’s. My questions have been shaped by my observations of the ways that women’s interactions with each other were mediated by ritual practice and by talk about those activities. Through ritual, women fashioned complex and non-unitary identities. They encountered, merged with and argued with goddesses, they negotiated complex and precarious relations with other women, they reconfigured their sexuality, and they rewrote ritual syntax.

In the first part of the paper, I present a series of fairly long narratives. All are translations from Tamil origins and all were prepared with the help of my assistant, Minakshi. The passages included here were extracted from the detailed notes that I took during my conversations with these women. I present these narratives in an order that follows the sequencing of their original delivery. This is to emphasize that the stories that these women told about themselves and each other were delivered over time, and that while they described a process - a life history anchored by ritual practice - they also were events that shaped that process (cf. Narayan 1995). The variegated, and somewhat choppy, result reiterates, formally, a point that I explore in the paper’s second section. The stories are biographical records and sites for agency - they are modes of action and intervention in social life. As such, they describe the concatenating effects of gender, caste and class positioning, and they contain traces of multiple and heterogeneous axes of consent and resistance.

The content of this paper, as well as its form, are intended to problematize female (and feminist) subjectivities. My aim is to show the uneven, unfinished process of disclosure in which I was positioned as instigator, as interlocutor and as observer. I hope that this will provide an opportunity to conceptualize subjectivity - as negotiated by and coded in ritual - as both dynamic and intersubjective. This will further disrupt the imagery of culturally sealed “personhood” that anthropological studies of life cycle rituals often convey, and in so doing to disrupt the tendencies to see both caste and gender as overdetermined dimensions of identity. It will enable me to frame subjectivity as both historical and historicized, and as emergent in arenas of political praxis, ranging from the household to the spectacles of state. Finally, it carries epistemological implications. Enabled by current debates about feminist ethnography, I focus on the relational contexts that are sites for and objects of anthropological knowledge - here shown to be embedded in historically sedimented relations of force, and in struggles around authority/authorship.

Sunithi, Sarasawati and Karumariyamman

Let me begin by introducing the women. Both had living husbands, were in their late forties and had passed menopause. Both were locally renowned as mediums for the goddess, Karumariyamman.¹ Each became possessed by that deity regularly and proffered advice and predictions to clients. Both operated out of shrines that were connected to the houses where they

lived with their families. Sunithi, the Brahman, lived in an apartment with her husband, son and widowed mother. Saraswati, the Harijan, lived in a joint household, with her husband, married and unmarried children, children's spouses and grandchildren². Saraswati's wealth had come as a result of people's donations to the goddess for whom she was a medium, though other adult members of her family were employed in conventional jobs. Sunithi accepted devotees' donations as well, though she had been a medium for a shorter time than Saraswati and the family was primarily supported by the husband's and sons's earnings.

Sunithi's initial appearance in my fieldnotes was on July 9, 1987. I had been to a temple that morning with my research assistant, a married Brahman woman named Minakshi. There, we had run into one of Minakshi's sister-in-law. That woman, a neighbor of Sunithi, told us about the elaborate pujas that Sunithi performed. She also told us that the goddess "came to" Sunithi, and that she had performed miracles. A few days later, we went to visit Sunithi. We arrived in the late afternoon, and were greeted by Sunithi and her mother. After we introduced ourselves and explained why we had come, Sunithi offered to tell us more about her experiences and invited us into the room where the household shrine was set up. Sunithi's receptiveness took me by surprise. Later, she told me that the goddess, Karumariyamman, had instructed her to expect my visit.

The room containing the shrine was empty of all other furniture. In most respects, the shrine was typical of those seen in Hindu homes of southern India. It comprised framed and garlanded pictures of deities and saints, including Sathya Sai Baba, small figures (*vikkirakam*) of deities, and trays, bowls and other utensils. It differed from other shrines in its centerpiece, Karumariyamman's silver *mukam* (a mask-like icon of the deity's head), surrounded by fresh flowers and displayed on a raised platform.

Upon entering, Minakshi immediately approached the shrine and prostrated before it. A bit unsurely, I followed suit. Sunithi told us a bit about her childhood and her marriage at age 17, and then described her first encounter with the goddess:

After we married, I did not do any pujas, nor did I take vows or keep fasts. I did not even go to the temple regularly. I put no trust in omens, I went for rational explanations. If something broke, it was because of clumsiness, not the *rakukkalam* ... Things changed when I was 35. I had been unwell - experiencing heavy, painful menstrual periods - so I went to an allopathic doctor who gave me medicine, but did not wish to operate on me. But even before I had gotten that doctor's advice, the devi had told me the same thing. It

was like this: my servant knew of my problems and tried to persuade me to go to the Karumariyamman temple nearby. I saw no need for such things, but still she tried to convince me, saying that other Brahmans were going to that temple and having their problems solved. Still, I refused. You see, I had no belief in such things, and I also was not in the habit of going about in such neighborhoods [i.e., the slum where the temple was situated]. So that servant took things into her own hands and went to the temple and offered a lime to the devi on my behalf. At the temple, the *amman* [the Harijan woman who was the goddess's medium] told my servant, "Take that lime back to your mistress and give her its juice to drink". The servant did so, and I agreed to drink it. Once I did so, I felt that I must leave the house and go myself to that temple - this even though I did not know the way. My neighbors were astonished, but I had never before felt such a force. I had to go. Once I got to that temple, the *amman* with the tangled hair³ told me that my health problems would cease for the next five years, and that no knife would cut me until then. I was told this before I received the doctor's advice.

Five years later, in 1981, my problems began again, just as that *amman* had predicted. I went to the clinic, and the doctor there prescribed a hysterectomy. I went again to the temple, and the *amman* [speaking as the goddess] said, "I will come to you during the operation. It will take only a half hour, and you will have no problems thereafter". It happened just this way, but even then I did not begin to do any pujas for the devi, but only kept some pictures and *vikkirakam* out for festivals. I only started doing pujas some time later.

At this point a few other women entered the room. They were neighbors and clients of Sunithi, and had come to pray and make offerings at her shrine. They joined us, and listened to Sunithi's narrative, occasionally confirming points that Sunithi made, or asking for elaboration. Sunithi continued:

During the first week of August in 1984, my mother, a Muslim friend and I were sitting in our front room, and a beggar woman approached the door.... That woman was clad in a white cloth. She was quite dirty, and she had long tangled hair which she had not tied or wound into a knot. It was around noon, and that beggar entered the house and just stood, staring at us. I said to my mother, "Just give her some money and send her off." but my mother said nothing. The beggar then said, "Stop, I don't want idli, I don't want rice, I don't want money. I've come to give *uttaravu* [Tamil: divinely inspired predictions, advice]". She went on, "All under this roof have good hearts, whoever comes is fed and satisfied, their is no *vittam*

[menstrual pollution] in the house.” All this was true, but I still felt some hesitation, I did not want to invite her in. This woman then asked for camphor and a match. I gave her the camphor only, and sent her off.

Later, that same day, I went into our *puja* room. In my heart, I asked whether that incident was a good event, an auspicious event. I saw, on the picture of Kamakshi, *amirutam* [divine nectar] and that, I knew, signified good... Some days later, I saw that beggar woman again... she repeated the words she had spoken here, “I don’t want idli, I don’t want rice, I don’t want money”, and opened her hand to show that the camphor was exhausted... That very night, while I was sleeping, I awoke to see a snake coiled around the clothes line in our house.... later I saw a young girl, well-dressed and with jewels, carrying a basket which held a snake... The next day, while I was resting, I had a dream. In it, I was walking through that *cheri* [the neighborhood where the temple was located], and people along the road were speaking to me. There were Brahmans and Sudras among them, and they were trying to provoke me. One Sudra woman said, “There is some damage in my wall, I want you to repair it”. I replied, “Are you kidding? Am I a mason? Ask someone else.” That woman then took my hands into her own and said something that I cannot recall. After I awoke, my son arrived at home, and I suggested to him that we go to the temple.... When we got there, the *amman* told us that the devi had told her that we would come. Then, the *amman* spoke with the devi’s voice, and told us, “I have come in different forms, and have called you. I want to speak with you. I came to your house, but you did not let me in. I called affectionately, but you did not come: so I had to scare you with the snake to make you come to me.” The *amman* still speaking as the devi said, “I wore that dirty sari because I want to get me a new one.” As we left, my son commented that we should get her a sari, but said that he did not know how much should be spent. I decided that we should spend about 200 rupees.... We presented a sari to the devi on the first Friday of *Navarattiri*..... Since then, however, I have not gone to that temple, but I continue to donate money. I also make *cakkirapponkal* [sweetened rice] on the first Friday of each English month and have my servant take it to the temple as an offering.

I asked Sunithi why she had stopped going to that temple. By way of explanation, she pointed to the small goddess, the *mukam*. “The devi is here. Once I welcomed her, there was no need to go to that temple.” She also pointed out that, in her house, the devi was with her “family” - her husband Siva, and her sons, Murukan and Pillaiyar. I asked her about the source of the *mukam*, and she explained that her mother’s mother had given it to her

in 1959, shortly after her marriage to use in an annual observance, Varalakshmi nonpu, that Smarta women perform for the welfare of their husbands and families. But, this particular icon had been radically transformed by the goddess’s entry into Sunithi’s home. It had begun to change gradually, and according to Sunithi, miraculously. These alterations had the appearance of surface oxidation, and Sunithi’s mother and some of her neighbors attributed the changes to a spontaneous emergence of *viputi* [sacred ash]. Sunithi was initially skeptical, thinking that their devotion had “warped their judgement”, but she was persuaded after the Harijan medium intervened.

On the next Friday [about a month after the changes began], our servant went as usual to the temple to offer *cakkirapponkal* to the devi. The *amman* asked her whether any miracles had taken place in the house. Our servant told her about the *viputi* on the *mukam*, and told her, as well, that I did not believe. The *amman* replied in the devi’s voice, “I am there already, in spite of that she still refuses to believe. In four weeks time, I will make her believe in the power that exists and many people will start to visit me in that place.” After that, we noticed gradual changes in the *mukam*. First, there was only *viputi*; the next week, some spots of *kunkumam* were there. This news spread and people started to come in, wanting to see this *mukam*..... One day, I put a betel leaf under her face and some *kunkumam* fell on it. I put some on my own forehead, and then offered it to the people who were there. Those who took it did so with great devotion and brought it back to their homes. During the third week, there was a light rose tinge and the smell of sandalwood. By the fourth week, my doubts were gone, and I believed that there was a great power in our house. By then, our servant had informed us of another directive from the temple *amman*, “Do not touch my face; let me dress as I wish. I will change my appearance as I wish”, So I do not touch her face, I only decorate her by placing flowers around.

One of the other women present turned to Minakshi and I, and told us that Sunithi performed very special, elaborate pujas for the devi; “I have been here many times for those functions. So many people are coming, some from great distances.” She encouraged Sunithi to elaborate on this, which Sunithi did, describing the first three or four *apisekams* in detail. In her narrative, she concentrated on the progressive and conjoined changed in rituals’ forms and in her subjectivity, emphasizing the gradual shift from performer to performer/medium.

After the third *apisekam* and up to the ninth or tenth, I spoke to no one during the performance. Since then, I have begun to speak, but I have

no awareness of the outside world at those times, and I don't remember what has been said.

Her ability to describe events subsequently was because her family recounted things to her, and during the previous year, her husband had recorded some of the proceedings on audio-cassette.

By this time, it was dark. We had stayed much longer than planned and so prepared to leave. Sunithi invited us to return the following day, to continue her story. When we arrived on the next day, she returned to the subject of her relationship with the *amman* at the local temple: "I want to tell you something else about that *amman*". She then returned to the subject of her initial visit to that temple. The woman and her family were, at that time, very poor.

They did not have enough to maintain a buffalo and cow, and still feed themselves. I asked devi why she did not improve that lady's life. The devi spoke [through her medium], saying that she could do it, but that once done, the lady would become arrogant. Well, over time that lady did start to prosper... and she continued to give advice to people. I also continued to go to her. Then one day, I went and found a poor couple waiting to see her.... That *amman* invited me in, but she ignored those people waiting for her. I was shocked by her conduct. I approached the couple and offered them some money. They had spent all they had on travel. I then went to the entrance of the temple and I announced that if such as the treatment given to devotees, then I would no longer come there.

Sunithi then resumed in the same vein that her discourse of the day before had followed. There were more anecdotes about miracles and visions, and more specifics about the *apisekams* she had performed. Before we left, she invited us to return for the puja that she planned to conduct for her sons' 27th birthday. We did attend, are in fact spent quite a bit of time with Sunithi in the subsequent months. What was striking to my Brahmin assistant was the unorthodox and unpredictable qualities of Sunithi's ritual performances. Each was different, in some way, from its predecessor. The directives for these changes were generally issued by Sunithi, speaking as the goddess. On one occasion, the goddess asked that her shrine be moved into the front room. Another, more radical intervention, came when the goddess declared that menstruating women and couples who had recently had sex could enter the shrine.

I want to cut off Sunithi's story at this point, and switch over to

another story, that of the Harjan medium who helped initiate Sunithi to mediumship. This story stands in counterpoint to Sunithi's, showing edges, oclusions and refractions in the imagery of femininity that Sunithi drew on and reworked.

About six weeks after meeting Sunithi, Minakshi and I went to the Karumariyamman temple near Sunithi's house. The temple occupied the ground floor of a large house; the medium lived in the temple portion of the building, while her husband, children and other relatives lived in the remainder. When we arrived, we were greeted by the medium. She was in the temple and was preparing to perform *apisekam*. Her name, we learned, was Saraswati, and she had long matted hair, which she had wound into a topknot. She invited us into the temple, saying, "I know you were coming. I know who you are, also". She invited us to stay, though she pointed out that she did not ordinarily allow visitors to watch her performing *apisekam*, commenting, "when you bathe, you do so alone. Shouldn't it be that way for the devi?"

We watched her perform *apisekam*. After sluicing, anointing and dressing the deities, she applied a thick layer of turmeric and large daubs of vermilion to the devi's face. Her daughter, who assisted her, applied similar decorations to another icon, a large silver *mukam*. Minakshi later described her style of decoration as "Sudra-taste".

When Saraswati had completed the ritual, she told us that the devi had first come to her in 1972. At that time, there was no house here - only a hut. The devi came then as a snake, in that very spot [pointing to the platform on which the deity figures stood]. After that happened, people started coming for predictions. They donated money, jewels, saris - all that see here - and with that, the devi's reputation grew. Now, the devi has provided us with all these conveniences, a car, electricity, television, and her shrine has been built up into a permanent structure.

She asked us how we had come to know of her, and we told her that Sunithi had described her to us. She then began to speak of Sunithi in a very flattering way. She recalled that Sunithi had sent her an invitation to her son's wedding. She also pointed out that Sunithi donated to the temple each month without fail, and continued,

She [Sunithi] was not prepared for the devi. It was I who brought that power [sakti] out and convinced her the *amman* would come to her house. At the beginning, when she came here, she was very nervous, very unsteady. She fainted the first time that she viewed the place where the snake

had come... When the *amman* first came to her house, she tested Sunithi and it was I who counseled her. I was the only one able to help her with her medical problems.

Saraswati told us more about her own past when we visited her on subsequent occasions. Although there is not time to present her narrative in detail to day, I want to relate one anecdote that, like Sunithi's pejorative comments about Saraswati, injects complexity into these women's interactions. During our second visit, Saraswati had alluded to an argument that she was having with the *devi*. She was inconsolable over the recent deaths of two family members (her daughter and grandson), and she had challenged the *devi*, wanting to know why these things had happened. Having said that, she then mentioned that when her daughter had been ill, she had called on Sunithi but had not been treated well by her. I was curious about this, because Sunithi had made no mention of any such visit. During a later visit to Sunithi, I asked her about it, and she told me,

Saraswati had come one day while we were eating.... My cousin was visiting, and he opened the door. He brought her in, and once we had finished eating we came into the front room to meet her. Saraswati said that she herself had received the *devi's* *uttaravu* telling her to seek my advice about her daughter. I told her that she should return on one of the days that the *amman* comes [referring to the regularly scheduled times mentioned earlier by Sunithi]. Saraswati was shocked. She expected the *amman* to come right then and there. 'But when it is I who have come!', she exclaimed.... She continued to press me.... saying that she should not have to join the throngs who come at those times.... I simply told her that she might do as she liked. Now, during the next *apisekam*, [my] mother asked about Saraswati's daughter. The *amman* responded, saying that for those who are so arrogant and full of ego, there is no answer. Again, mother asked, pleading that they had to send word to Saraswati about her daughter. The *amman* remained firm, saying that there is no need to reply to arrogance.... The daughter was dead within ten days.

The Anthropologist Observed

These tragedies did not mark the end of their relationship or their entwined stories; accordingly my conclusions will remain partial and provisional, serving more as points of departure than final pronouncements. In this paper, I have probed the "muting" of women presumed in Hindu practice. Following others (e.g., O'Hanlon 1988; Ramanujan 1986; Raheja and Gold 1994; Trawick 1990; Visweswaran 1994), I have suggested that while muting reproduces gender inequality, it also offers a zone of free play and contestation. I argue further, however, that differences among women - differences especially of class and caste - may be enacted within the creative subversion that these "zones of free play". In short that universalized conceptions of womanhood are simultaneously emancipatory and oppressive. The women's enactments of femininity through improvisations on Hindu practice speak to the dilemmas of everyday life and to the societal architecture of power and authority in which these dilemmas arise. They speak, as well, to these women's own creativity, and thus to the importance of religious imagination as it appropriates and invents culture.

The narratives evoke Foucault's (1978:92-102) vision of the capillary nature of power: its productiveness, prolixity and instability, as well as the inseparability of force and resistance (see also Gramsci 1971). The women's stories conveyed prescriptive images of Hindu womanhood, as well as creative and often nuanced resistance to those notions. Consequently, they invite questions about the stability of local notions of gender identity and difference (cf. deLauretis 1987; Butler 1990; Grosz 1990; John 1996; Mahoney and Yngvesson 1992; O'Hanlon 1992; Riley 1988; Scott 1988, 1991; Tharu and Niranjana). Like some cultural and feminist theorists, I find these approaches, (allied generally, but not homogeneously with poststructuralism) appealing because they open the possibility for more nuanced and context-sensitive views of agency, enabling us to set aside the either/or trappings of "social constraint vs. individual will" and "structure vs. agency" (cf. Kumar 199x; Willis 1977). Life history narratives related by or about particular individuals, even the partial stories that I have presented here, are particularly illuminating sites for exploring these issues. Further, these materials opportunities to connect the often unremarked practices of daily life to collective and institutional forms of domination and hegemony (Behar 1990, 1992; Sangari 1990, 1993), such as caste and class. For me, this is the juncture where feminist ethnography might be most usefully formulated (Abu-Lughod 1990 a,b, 1992; Stacey 1988; Visweswaran 1994).

Fractured Womanhood

Caste, class and gender intersected in the women's narratives. The stories and the context in which they were told suggest how discourses of womanhood both militated against and mediated differences among women. The heterogeneity of women's possession experiences suggested, on the one hand, that there were a variety of ways to perform femininity, all of which were intelligible to a broad spectrum of Hindu women. Women's participation in goddess devotion, moreover, was not restricted to any caste or class. This may be the case because it is a way of dealing with issues that affect many women, such as menstrual and reproductive problems, childrearing, sexuality and marriage. The association of some goddesses with particular diseases like measles, tuberculosis or typhoid only strengthens this. Thus, Saraswati and Sunithi understood the goddess as a being who invited all women into the goddess's presence.⁴ Their own interdependence, precarious as it was, suggests how ritual practice and universalizing images of femininity may foster connections among women.

Different models of and for womanhood, however, could articulate with other forms of social inequality. Saraswati, the Harijan medium, inspired and guided Sunithi, a Brahman. Sunithi, in turn, selectively appropriated images and behaviors that for her had non-Brahman associations, for example opening her household shrine to women during their menstrual cycles. Sunithi, however, also used Saraswati as a boundary marker, as the negative case that demonstrated Sunithi's own authenticity as the goddess's oracle. Saraswati's "Sudra" tastes were seen as consistent with arrogance and commercialism; they were the codes that placed her outside the ambit of normative femininity as understood by Brahmans. Sunithi's choices about how to display Karumariyamman's image in her shrine exemplified these kinds of distinctions. By placing the goddess with her "family" - Siva, Murukan, Ganesa - she emphasized Karumariyamman's interchangeability with the Sanskritic goddess, Parvati. That presentation was strikingly different from the large goddess image that, by itself, dominated Saraswati's shrine. In the end, Sunithi attempted to discount Saraswati's power and effectiveness as a medium by faulting her womanliness - linking her failure as a ritual adept to her arrogance and thus her inadequacy as a *cumankali*.

Though the differences to which I refer can be analytically distinguished as caste or class related, the ways that women talked about and enacted difference shows the extent to which they operated within a socially situated "common sense" where caste and class identities interpenetrated, and where

markers of respectability could refer simultaneously to class privilege and to caste superiority. Each woman's stories revealed less about the institutional constraints on her than about how institutional forms and institutionalized representations emerged"... as constructs out of [the] experiences[s] presented in her story." (Behar 1990:229). In everyday talk, discourses of taste, style and aesthetic preference are constructed and circulated: conversational and narrative practices produce and reproduce distinctions and these modes of discourse should be considered in making sense of the ways that privilege is understood and delimited in society (Bourdieu 1984). In India, caste exists bureaucratically in the institutionalized discourses and practices of state authored reservations policies. It is present, also, in the visceral realities of torched squatter settlements and gang rapes. I contend that it exists as well in everyday discourses of aesthetic judgement, desire and identity. The ways that the women framed their narratives (and commented on those of others) were in no sense reducible to caste/class positioning, though they did reveal the extent to which caste identity was negotiated, intersubjectively, as part of an everyday politics of identity, in which the stakes were the wealth, good name and moral integrity of human persons and deities.

Feminist Theory and Ethnographic Practice

Anthropological knowledge, textualized as field notes, ethnographic monographs, articles and essays, is constructed in and through intersubjective relations. These relations are not stable - they shift over time, they are geographically complex, and they are shot through with power. I have commented on how this looked among women, but these comments and lines of argument demand that I problematize my own presence. Before closing, then, I want to reflect on and raise questions about how and why I entered the fields of discourse that I have described here, and with these issues in mind, consider the dilemmas that define feminist ethnography.

Let me begin by considering my positioning. I was recognizable in some contexts as a woman, though I was ambiguous and even transgressive of some images of feminine normativity in other contexts. Despite the fact that we were all women, the dynamics of power militated against any comforting assumptions of our common identity. What did they make of me as a woman, and as a white woman? Sunithi as goddess created a space for connection by indicating the conjunction of Mary (a double reference to me and to the Christian, Virgin Mary) and Mariyamman; and by suggesting

that I was Karumariyamman's vehicle for spreading her renown abroad. Similarly, their willingness to disclose sexual/medical details about their lives was contingent on my being assimilable to some common core of images of womanhood. Even my landlord's dismissal of my work interpellated me in this way, for even more than my non-Hindu background, it was my femininity that limited my understanding of Hinduism. Like his wife, I was unfit, morally and physiologically, to participate in religious practices.

My biological femininity, thus, was no guarantee of common interests or experience. My presence in Madras, as an ethnographer depended on histories of conflict and conquest. Area studies programs and curricula were developed as part of post-World War II development and modernization projects initiated by the U.S. government and private foundations, such as Ford and Rockefeller (Hancock 1997). My graduate education was supported, in part, with funds provided by the U.S. Department of Defence through the FLAS (Foreign Language Area Scholarship) program. Saraswati's prior experience with an anthropologist had given her clear ideas about the information that I wanted and provided it with little prompting. That information had pre-established boundaries, and was perceived by Saraswati as a commodity. Saraswati's narratives were, to some extent, the means by which she informed me of who I was in her world and what she expected of me. Her disclosures also suggested a possible reason for Sunithi's receptiveness to me, and Sunithi later confirmed that she knew of the anthropologist's relationship with Saraswati.

In more immediate terms, there were assumptions, idioms that often went unremarked among my friends, but that remained difficult for me to comprehend or accept. Ironically, though my research interests owed something to my interest in feminist theory and to my sympathy toward what I defined as feminist politics, I never ceased to feel discomfort at what I, regardless of how I tried to overcome or conceal it, viewed as their disinterest in, or hostility toward, feminism. At the same time, the everyday experience in India, of being/not being a woman invariably caused me to question what had been hitherto less problematic for me as a white, middle-class American woman. Here, I am referring to the ability to see my own concerns/politics as derived from a generalized feminine experience and as representative of a generalized feminist stance.

My feminine identity was problematic for me and for my acquaintances and friends. Women distanced me because I was *not* a woman in some situations (e.g., as a dinner guest I was often treated as honorary man), or because I was a woman whose qualities could endanger their

womanliness, mar their auspiciousness, and finally, make them accountable for its loss. For regardless of my actual behaviour or intentions, there were undesirable and dangerous attributes, like independence, sexual licentiousness and boldness that were associated with white American women. Merely being seen with me could damage a woman's reputation. To some degree they counteracted this by designating me as a *bhakta*, a devotee, like themselves. With this they softened my foreignness and my academic association, and created, provisionally, a common space of experience - derived not from femininity but from religiosity.

Our interactions were thus grounded in a micro-politics of knowledge. My presence, academic status and the *bhakta* designation together marked me as a person who sought knowledge, though they also recognized me as an interrogator with whom they may or may not comply.⁵ Sunithi and Saraswati both attempted to mitigate my control over the situation by presenting pre-packaged information, narratives already in circulation in fairly fixed forms. Another counterweight to my power (and to each others') was to establish clear boundaries on their authority to speak, for example, displacing authority to the goddess or referring me to other, supposedly more authoritative persons. One woman, watching me take notes during one of Sunithi's performances, cautioned me about "testing" the goddess: I could record information, but should not cross-examine the mediums.

They recognized implicitly that for me, knowledge was alienable. As an anthropologist, I participated in a system that designated some persons as "informants", as vessels from information had to be extracted, and others as "participant-observers", quirky characters in local dress who toted tape recorders, notebooks and typewriters. For me, it was impossible to sustain my relationships with others in terms of those categorical identities. Such failures, however, were always countered by my equally forceful desire to complete my work, and thus achieve a professional identity. This was the source of many of the struggles I experienced privately, and in my dealings with others. I knew that simply by recording information in my notebook, I was taking it away, evaluating it according to exogenous standards, reconstructing it. Moreover, I was committed to this, partly because of my training, but also in the interests of preserving whatever shreds of autonomy and independence that I could.⁶

As much as I tried to develop a sympathetic understanding of what it meant for them to be *cumankalis*, I could not adopt that identity myself. Married but childless, self-supporting, traveling alone and speaking imperfect

Tamil: I was an oddity to say the least. They recognized this before I did and offered me an identity, as *bhakta*. For them, being *cumankalis* meant tolerating my presence with affection, and trying to teach me, by example. They had an acute and practical understanding of the issues of “difference” about which feminist theorists writes, though they also understood permeability. They lived in a world of unexpected connections between apparently unlike things, of border crossings and blurred boundaries.

We found both common ground and differences in our recognition that the knowledge each of us sought was inseparable from the relationships in which it was created. For Sunithi and Saraswati, this knowledge emerged in their relations with Kurumariyamman; it was never “finished” nor was it alienable. It was always subject to interpretation, to repossession and to retraction; it sustained a variety of different relationships. Borne in talk and in stories, knowledge was the stuff of connections with others, and of reputation. For me, the knowledge, while derived in relations, is transcribed, ultimately, in texts. A book, edited, revised, printed enters circuits as a commodity and as credentialing instrument. As it moves, it may occasion argument, fond recollection or embarrassment. It cannot be undone, however, or remade.

Judith Stacey (1988), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990a), Kamala Visweswaran (1994), and Mary John (1996) have described dilemmas stemming from these conditions, pointing to them as ethical binds. An ethnographer’s commitment to feminist politics does not, in itself, disrupt or eliminate the arrangements of knowledge and power that ethnographic practice enacts. In fact, such arrangements may be reinforced because of the ways that feminist research conceals those relations of power. While I cannot offer a simple way out of this ethical bind, I’ve tried to extend the debate by linking discourses on ethnographic reflexivity with those of ethnographic description. In representing the women’s narratives, I found it necessary to disclose how my position, as woman ethnographer, shifted as they told their stories to and around me. With this, I revealed the tensions between authority and marginality as phenomena that are embedded in ethnographic practice.

What my friends will do when I present them with copies of this paper is hard to say. Because I have written about goddess, devotion and saintly lives, they may keep it with their shrines. They will, I am sure, question some of my interpretations. What I hope is that they will recognize in it, albeit through my sensibilities, their own religious imaginations and boundary crossings, for it was their creativity that made it possible for me to imagine this paper. I hope, also, that I have given readers a way to comprehend not

only the persistent inequalities/differences among women, but the intelligence, generosity and imaginativeness that their shared notions of womanhood might generate.

Notes

1. Karumariyamman is considered by Tamils to be a form of the goddess, Mariyamman, a volatile figure usually represented without a male consort. She is a "village goddess", that is a non-Sanskritic deity associated with rural, non-Brahman populations. The various forms of Mariyamman are closely identified with febrile diseases, such as measles, smallpox, typhoid and tuberculosis; such diseases are considered manifestations of the goddess's presence, hence she is propitiated to relieve the suffering that they cause (Trawick 1982a).
2. After completing my fieldwork (1987-88), compared the data I collected about Saraswati with Margaret Trawick Egnor's (now Trawick) published studies of a Tamil priestess (1982a, 1982b) because I had been told by Saraswati that she had spoken with an anthropologist about ten years prior to our meetings. In 1988, I wrote to Dr. Trawick to inquire. In her response, Dr. Trawick indicated that she felt quite sure that the woman I met and the woman she had described were one and the same. Readers are advised to consult Trawick's excellent work for more extensive and detailed analyses of Saraswati's life history.
3. Matted hair, jata, is a feature associated with the god, Siva and is often taken as a visible sign of the cakti, or divine power, that has accumulated in a person because of their asceticism and intense devotion.
4. This was sometimes conjoined with an explicit avoidance of male mediums who were often perceived by women as sexual predators.

5. This situation blurs the conventions - studying "up", "across" and "down" - with which anthropologists often categorize their interactions with informants in "complex" societies, i.e., industrial, class stratified nation-states (Cole 1988). I was studying "across" in that I was dealing with educated members of the urban bourgeoisie; though I was studying "up" in that my status (as a non-Hindu and as a student) was inferior to that of all of my Brahman acquaintances, especially those of high academic or professional standing (see also Sheehan 1993).

6. My experience echoes, in part, the tensions among different subject positions that Dorine Kondo (1990) describes with both wit and eloquence in her book, Crafting Selves.

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Women's Work and Status Enhancement : A Study of Punjabi Immigrant Women in Canada

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The migration of Asians in general and Punjabis in particular to Canada dates back to the beginning of this century. The entry of the immigrants largely remained restricted owing to many social and political reasons. In the 1970's there was a phenomenal increase in the immigration due to the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy. During the last two decades there has been an unbroken chain of migration of the Punjabis to Canada. Most of these Punjabis hail from the rural areas of Punjab. The immigration Act, 1974 has a social significance as it encourages the earlier restricted family reunification. We find that the first stage of migration was dominated by the economic consideration of male labour, whereas the women are recognised as an essential and potential force in the second stage.¹

This article examines the Punjabi immigrant women's work placement and its consequences on their status in the family as well as the community. The study has three sections. The first section focuses mainly on the theoretical formulation of the problem, in addition to the objectives and methods used for the study. The empirical reality has been presented in the second section, while the third provides the conclusions.

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At present about half the number of people who immigrate to Canada each year are women. According to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 51 percent of all people who immigrated to Canada in 1992 were females, a percentage that has remained relatively stable over the past three decades. The largest share of women immigrating to Canada entered as family class immigrants. Since, most of the women migrated under the family class regulation, it is not necessary to explain their reasons for migrating in terms of the usual pull and push factors used by most of the studies on the topic (Helweg, 1986; McLeod, 1989 and Judge, 1994). They migrate as dependents. They either migrate to marry/join their husbands or accompany their parents or husbands immigrating to Canada. Judge's (1994) study provides an account of the pattern of migration of the Punjabi men to Canada, but there is a paucity of studies on women's migration. It is important to mention that they have been migrating to Canada as wives, sisters and mothers implying that in certain terms their subordination to men is inherent in the logic of migration. However, it is with the migration of women that the formation of family, kinship network and community life begins which perpetuates the traditions, norms and values of Punjabi society in Canada, thus providing them an identity in an alien culture.

The family formation in Canada corresponds to that of Punjab. The family with a structure of roles constitutes a cohesive unit. In the patriarchal family the male member is the head of the household and has authority. He dominates in the entire family affairs. There has been a shift in the gender relations in Canada. This has become possible because women are facing discrimination at work place. Whereas in family situations the levels of patriarchal domination has decreased. The Punjabis live in three forms of family which are as follows:

1. Family starts with the immigration of the young wife from India; the man was earlier living alone or with close relatives.
2. This nuclear family soon extends when either of their parents or brother/sister immigrates. This is the most common type of family in Canada.
3. The young bride joins the extended family. The woman has higher status in the first category and she is relegated to a subordinate position in the extended family.

The newly immigrant woman soon faces challenges of adjustment within the family, community and society at large. She begins to experience loneliness, isolation, dependent status and high cost of living in the advanced society. She starts exploring for a meaningful life. Work provides her with both a meaning in life and social acceptance. The work is available in an office, factory or in any organisation - a place different from home. Here, work means paid work, which generates an income. Duffy and Pupo (1992) analyse women's entry into paid employment in terms of pushes, pulls and facilitators. Foremost, pushes are economic necessities and increase in women's educational and employment qualification. While it could be possible due to low fertility rate, late marriage, reduction in housework with technological innovations, such as dishwashers, washing machines, microwave oven etc. Men also slowly begin to share more in domestic work and child care. Finally, the increased availability of child care has facilitated women's paid work. With the expansion of the service sector, numerous women's jobs have been generated. Thus the availability of jobs has remained a major pull for women to work. Work apart from meeting economic needs also performs social functions and gives emotional rewards. It provides a personal identity and a sense of achievement. As a matter of fact it is work which regulates all our behaviour and activities in daily life.

A new culture of work is said to be emerging in Canada associated with the shift from a manufacturing to a service or value-added economy. The Canadian economy is largely a service economy. Nearly 73 percent of all Canadians are employed in the service sector (Lowe, 1995). Enough jobs are available at the lower level, such as restaurants, hotels, personal services and tourism. Jobs available in these avenues are low-waged and part-time. Women tend to be concentrated in these jobs.² Statistics show that more than 70 percent of all working women are in clerical, service, sales, processing and fabricating jobs, doing "women's work" in offices, banks, stores, private homes and factories (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1983).

Studies on immigrant women in Canada show that they are concentrated in the upper and lower echelons of occupational hierarchy. (Anderson & Lynam, 1987). The women who have migrated from developing countries are visible minorities. They undergo double disadvantages of being both women and immigrant and often work in marginal jobs. Different provinces provide different occupational statistics depending on the overall nature of their economy. There are regions marked by manufacturing industries while others are agricultural. In British Columbia, as shown by Das Gupta (1994), a sizeable proportion of women work as farm workers.

In Atlantic Canada, according to 1986 census data, 41 percent of South Asian women are in managerial and professional work and 31 percent are in clerical and sales work.

There are three reasons for the majority of women from developing countries ending up in lower levels of occupational hierarchy. First, their education and previous work experience are not recognised by Canadian employers. Even those women who worked in professional and technical occupations have to take lower positions because of this lack of recognition of their qualification and credentials by the Canadian government and employers. Women with professional degrees and expertise in their fields are denied the opportunity to work until they pass the examination designed to limit the foreigners into Canadian professions. Secondly, lack of knowledge of French or English pushes these women towards employment in the lower positions of industries, hotels, restaurants, cleaning, janitorial services and food processing. In these occupations proficiency of language is not required. Such jobs carry low wages and low status and are generally not protected by labour legislation. Lack of knowledge of the dominant language also reduces the chances to unionize. However, Anderson and Lynam (1987) have shown in their study that Indo-Canadian women in comparison to Greek women tended to be better educated, worked full time, held unionized jobs and drew a higher wage. Finally, immigrant women usually find their jobs through friends, relatives and kinship networks. As a result one finds concentration of a community in one particular kind of work. Women are usually found working together with other women of the same ethnic background which also provides them an opportunity for social contacts. It however, reduces the chances of occupational mobility.

The Majority of Indo-Canadian women worked for 7 to 10 hours a day. Anderson and Lynam (1987) explain the way these women had arrived in Canada more recently and were in the process of buying homes and getting their families established. Full time work could very well have been seen as a necessity. In Canada, immigrants tend to earn more, on average, than the native-born. Recent immigrants tend to earn considerably less than the established residents. Maxim (1992) has found that the difference is often a consequence of putting in more hours or holding down two jobs.

Work provides social status and economic resources for the family and sets limits on its standard of living. It also provides opportunities for social mobility and threats to economic security (Mortimer and London,

1984). Women's employment has consistent effects on their status and influence on family decision making. The independent financial base provided by employment gives woman an increased sense of competence, more power within marriage and increases her influence in decision making. In a situation where both husband and wife work, they are more likely to share decisions about major purchases and child rearing (Nieva, 1985).

Anderson and Lynam (1987) have shown in their study that the majority of women feel that their economic position has improved in Canada. These women live in extended families with their mothers-in-law, and have a low status. By making a monetary contribution to the family they have been able to gain status. Most of the married women stated that they had money of their own and shared in the financial decision making with their spouses. Working for pay outside the home gave women a feeling of selfhood and confidence in their abilities as women. In the process they have earned much more participation in the family decision making. The wife whom Anderson and Lynam (*ibid*) have observed as an active participant in the family affairs had relatively a very small role to play in the family in Punjab.

Siddique (1977) has shown an overall joint pattern of decision making characteristics. For instance, the decision regarding the location of residence, buying a house, furniture and car and going on or planning vacation were a result of a joint decision among more than 75 percent families. He is of the view that her ability to take independent decisions and to share with her husband in decision-making, shows a clear direction of change towards greater egalitarianism. Ames and Inglis (1973-74), however show an altogether different aspect of women's life in Punjabi Sikh family. It can be summarised by stating what a young wife said: "Women are held down".

It may be pointed out that most of these studies were conducted in the 1970s and we expect a lot of changes since then. In a recent work, Judge (1994) has examined the status of Punjabi immigrant women in Canada from the perspective of patriarchy. But the status of women should be linked with her economic activities. Women do not constitute a homogenous group in terms of their age, education and work status. The moment the economic capacity is combined with her other status, the gender perspective becomes more relevant.

Gender is a social construction not a biological inevitability. Feminist theorists used the term 'gender' to label the socially constructed differences between women and men to draw attention to the non-biological origins of women's subordination. Gender is what is socially recognised as

femininity and masculinity. (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990) From this perspective gender is the major factor explaining women's work.

The structuration theory (Giddens, 1981) provides insight into the reproduction of practices in the duality of structure. The duality of structure refers to the essential recursiveness of social life as constituted in social practices. Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices. Social practices do not reproduce themselves, social agents do, and from the stand point of this theory social agents are always seen to retain the capability to act otherwise than they do. There is no guarantee that agents will reproduce regularities of conduct as they previously have done. All reproduction is contingent and historical. Hence, there is a possibility of innovation in social conduct. Giddens conceives the possibility for change as inherent in every act of social reproduction. "If there is any continuity to social life, actors must be right most of the time" (Giddens, 1984: 90). The work and status of Punjabi immigrant women in Canada would be discussed from the structuration perspective.

Before shifting to the empirical situation, it is essential to discuss precisely the Punjabi society in relation to these aspects. As a caste divided society the Punjabi society exhibits two unique features. Firstly, the Jats form the dominant caste and secondly, most of them are Sikhs. As a distinct society with its religious composition dominated by Sikhs in social, political and religious life, the Punjabi society has failed to imbibe the egalitarianism of Sikhism. The Jats are middle peasants and are dominant in villages. They also form the majority among the Punjabi immigrants in Canada. In a way, the work and status of Punjabi women ultimately equals that of the Jat Sikh women. The status of Jat Sikh women is to be understood in terms of patriarchy, according to which their moral behaviour is strictly watched. Any violation may evoke violent reaction. The recent economic changes and development of education have affected the conditions of women, but the paradigm within which her position is perceived continues to be patriarchal. Thus we have the following features which characterise the Punjabi woman's status:

1. The parents take decisions regarding her education.
2. She has to marry the boy the parents have arranged for her.
3. All matters related with the family have to be decided by the husband.
4. Even if she is gainfully employed, she has to do all the domestic work.

5. Generally, most of the women belonging to landed peasantry, irrespective of their caste background, remain confined to domestic work and the bearing and rearing of children.

The Methods : It is of great relevance to examine the work and status of Punjabi women in Canada. The objective of the study is to assess whether the immigration of Punjabi women to Canada and their taking up of work in any way have improved their status in Canada. For the purpose, the following enabling objectives of the study were identified.

1. Socio-economic background prior to as well as after immigration.
2. The working status prior to and after immigration.
3. The problems at the work place.
4. Participation in the decision making process of the family.

The study was conducted in Edmonton city of Alberta state in Canada. The sample consists of women who are immigrants and are active in the work force. An interview guide was prepared and interviews were conducted personally. In all thirty Punjabi immigrant women were interviewed. The respondents were selected through the snow-ball technique. Most of these women were found located in Millwood area of the city. Further, in order to have better insight into their personal and social life, the researcher participated in their family functions like birthday parties and wedding ceremonies. Besides, the social and religious gatherings of the community were also attended.

1. Background : (i) Personal

The respondents were relatively younger in age, only two of them were of more than sixty years of age. The average age of the women under study is 40.17 years and the median age is 39.5 years. Only five women are Hindus, all others are Sikh by religion. As stated earlier, a large majority (22) of them are Jats. Other caste groups, Khatri (4), Bania (2), Rajput (1) and Sindhi (1) are also represented. Except for a divorcee and a widow, all women are married. Most of them got education in India. There was one illiterate woman, six each of the following categories: Matriculates, Undergraduates, Graduate and Post Graduates. Five respondents whose parents migrated quite early got some education in Canada out of which

one graduated and the rest studied up to grade 10 and 12 and obtained some professional diplomas.

(ii) Family

It is important to find out their family composition in both India and Canada which may have significant repercussions on their choice of work and status in the family. The joint, extended and predominantly nuclear types of family systems are prevalent amongst them in Canada. In India the majority of these women had been living either in extended or joint families. The main occupation of the families of Jat women was farming. While others were involved in small businesses. Only a few belonged to families where the members were doing white collar jobs. None of the respondents' mother was working outside the house in India. These are the types of personal characteristics and family background of the responsibilities. Why do these women migrate to Canada?

(iii) Migration

The most notable decade of women's migration was 1975 to 1985 when nearly one half of the women in their twenties migrated to Canada. Except for two women who migrated to work in Canada, other (17) moved on marriage basis and in the case of eleven women it was a family immigration. The range of time taken to reach Canada for the respondents was from three months to a little more than one year. Most (22) of them have a rural background. Only eight have urban linkages in India. Most of these women belonged to the central Punjab, mainly to Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar districts.

2. Work Placement

These Punjabi immigrant women were probed on various issues relating to their work. As conjectured in the earlier part of the study, after some years of stay, these women develop a sense of meaninglessness in their lives in the alien culture. To seek a meaningful life, they move out to the world of work. Contrary to their expectations, these women started working immediately after reaching their destination. Ten women joined the work-force even within a few days of their arrival. One may discern that they came prepared to work in Canada. The other nine women joined

the work force after sometime and 11 respondents started working after a little longer time. Therefore, it was not just to pass the time or kill their boredom (2), rather one half of the respondents worked to earn money for work becomes an economic necessity and their is an easy availability of jobs (2), motivation provided by other women from network (5), an urge to be independent and self - sufficient (5) these remained significant factors for quite a number of women to take up work.

The older women work to purchase gold and clothes as their daily needs are fulfilled by the sons with whom they are living. In fact, most of these women are seen wearing a lot of gold jewellery in their daily lives. Old women feel privileged as the State has given them a lot of facilities, like old age pension, unemployment allowance etc. Older and uneducated women usually work on the fields, most often to pluck berries etc. which is a seasonal job. For the rest of the time they get money from the unemployment insurance.

The girl who migrated to Canada on a marriage basis leaves a great ray of hope for the migration of her close kins. The sooner she becomes economically independent, the quicker the process of migration of her brothers and parents starts. Her choice to work is not simple to explain in terms of economic or psychological needs. It has socio-political explanations as well. In 1991, 62 percent of female immigrants aged 15-64 were employed (Statistics Canada, 1995).

Going further into the exploration of their work, a few questions arise: 1) Do they accept any type of available job? 2) Do they remain on the same occupational ladder through out their working lives? 3) Were these women working in India before immigration? 4) What is their orientation towards the work? 5) Do they face discrimination and problems at the work place?

(i) Nature of work

The nature of their work reveals that to begin with they take up any type of job, (even menial) which comes to them. Most of these women are involved in various low level service activities. They are largely engaged in housekeeping (1) cooking, catering in restaurants, hotels (6) and hospitals (4) besides working as sales persons (5) in departmental stores. Four women are also doing government office jobs. Two of them are at clerical levels while one is a nurse in a hospital and the other is an Executive Director of an Immigration Centre. Some women are also successfully running their

business. Two of them are running beauty parlours, another is running a store dealing with computer printing in the world famous West Edmonton mall. Yet another woman who earlier was in a government department later started her own business. At present she is running 80 daycare centres for children in the city and surroundings. The other respondents are engaged as factory worker, farm worker, baby sitter, college teacher, assistant and technologist (one of each category).

The nature of work and type of work activities they undertake has an association with their level of education, their time of arrival and duration of stay in Canada. All those women who studied in Canada, who got some training or diploma could procure better jobs. The major problem women faced in the work market in Canada was the derecognition of their educational qualifications. A number of them also faced deprofessionalization. But women work because they 'have to' as well as they 'want to' (Hall, 1975). In market economy, women need money to obtain food, clothing and other services, and money is derived from the wages of labour-force work.

(ii) Occupational Mobility

Most of the women remain stagnant in almost one type of job throughout their lives. Vertical occupational mobility is absent though the horizontal mobility is quite common. They change the company/organisation frequently but move into the same types of jobs. For instance, one women with B.A., B.Ed. qualification from India migrated to Canada on a marriage basis in 1960's. Throughout her life she worked in various departmental stores as a salesperson, though her wages increased from \$ 3 to \$ 10 per hour, over the years. Similarly, in many other instances, women engaged in catering, cooking and housekeeping services frequently move from one concern to the other considering the distance from house, friends working there, better working conditions, etc. However, there are a few women who have been working with the same concern for ten to twenty years.

(iii) Working Time

Full time working is 40 hours a week. In government hospitals it is 37.5 hours a week and the part time hours are 15-16. The working time

and period varies with the nature and type of work in which one is engaged. Nearly 67 percent of the women are working from 7 to 8 hours for five to six days a week. Usually Sunday is an off day. Most of the women have one holiday a week. Quite a number of them are doing part-time jobs at two or more places or are engaged in double shifts at one place of work. Business women have adjusted their work timings according to their convenience which may vary from 4 to 10 hours a day. No doubt, the earnings of business women are much more than those in service.

(iv) Earnings

It was found on inquiry that the range of their earnings is wide in accordance with the diversity in the nature of their work. Minimum wages are \$ 53 per hour in Canada. One half of the women are earning wages between \$ 5 to \$10 per hour. Ten respondents earn between \$ 10 to \$ 15 per hour. Five women can be bracketed in the high income group, that is, earning upto \$ 1 lakh annually. Amongst them, three are entrepreneurs and two are in high status government jobs.

(v) Work in India?

Those women who joined the work immediately after reaching Canada and started earning around \$ 250 per week had never worked in India except for five respondents. One woman was working as a typist in an office while the other two were teaching in colleges and two were school teachers. India, being a developing country does not offer a wide variety of work for women particularly in Punjab which is predominantly an agricultural state. Teaching at school and college levels is the most preferred job for women as it is considered respectable in the society.

Their working hours in India ranged from 6 to 8 hours a day. While the salaries show a wide disparity between their work in India and Canada. The salary of a typist was equivalent to \$60 per month in 1980s at the time she migrated. Around the same time, a school teacher was getting \$ 80 per month and the same amount of money was paid to college teachers in the late 70s. In this context, it is significant to look into their attitudes to work. What expectations do they bring to the place of work?

(vi) Orientations

Is work a source of self-fulfilment or is it merely a means of obtaining money to buy other satisfactions? Do women go to work just for money, 'just for company'? or/is work inherently satisfying and enriching? Different people attach different meanings to work which may change over time. Results from area studies 1983 and 1988 in Edmonton, suggests that only a minority of the population expresses instrumental (means to an end) sentiments. Krahn and Lowe (1988) in their study also conclude that instrumentation is not the only reaction to work exhibited by Canadians. Some people have more intrinsic orientations to work. However, to a large extent it is the work people do or the work opportunities available to them, that influence their work orientations.

Looking into the orientations of Punjabi women towards their work reveals that orientations are dynamic or flexible. In the beginning, for most of these women (17) work was an instrumental source of satisfying needs. For one third of the total women, work had an expressive as well as instrumental meanings. In contrast, at present two third of the women perceive work as a way of earning income as well as providing them with a sense of fulfilment and meaningfulness. There were only six women who replied that their work was a means to generate income. Contrary to expectations, women enjoy doing work. Except for two respondents, all were satisfied with their work. Reasons might be traced in their willingness to choose work. They have knowingly taken up the jobs involving certain deprivations. Accepting the hard fact of their being women, migrant and members of a minority, women tend to derive satisfaction with the type and nature of work available to them.

(vii) Discrimination

Work is not always fulfilling, challenging and creative. It also generates tensions, conflicts and deprivations. Discrimination is defined as treating people unequally because of personal characteristics that are not related to their performance (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Employers have openly discriminated on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, and national origin around the world throughout history. The experience of Punjabi Immigrant women also reveals that they do face discrimination at work place in one or the other way. The most frequently repeated type of discrimination was the preference or priority given to others over them whenever they ask for

leave, change in work shift or in timings. Women working at the sale counters have experienced feelings of dislike, and frowns from their customers. Yet two other women experienced discrimination by the teachers while taking professional courses as students at the University. Later on one of them was even called 'Paki' by one of her students in a high school.

Another woman narrated how she was denied admission to Ph.D. on one pretext or another some twenty years back. In the social life also almost all women experienced discrimination in different forms, may it be taking a house on rent, or visiting the stores. In spite of discrimination faced from the employers in the form of preferences, almost all the respondents were appreciative of their employers (mainly whites) for their being kind, considerate, helpful and fair in dealings.

(viii) Problems

The women with rural background who immigrated to Canada on marriage basis. On reaching Canada, did not confine themselves to the inner world of household. They soon moved out to the world of work. Their work environment tends to be completely segregated from the non-work life. One may ask how these women from different social and family backgrounds could adjust to the world of work - work which is external and dominated by men. Do the women face problems with regard to conditions and quality of work life in the beginning as well as later?

The major problem all women faced in the beginning was language and the accent. The speed and hours of work were also found as a problem by two thirds of the respondents. One half of the women were hesitating and found it difficult to work along with men, particularly with foreigners.

Presently, excluding three women, all others have got used to the work processes and now they do not find any such problem at work. The language was a barrier in the beginning. After their stay of a few years they were able to communicate and interact with others at work. Respondents believe that knowing English is important. If one can speak and understand English, Canadians are helpful, cooperative and considerate. Otherwise they take them as traditional, conservative and non-assimilative. Two Indian women were working together in a restaurant and one knew English while the other did not. The employers and colleagues were nice and friendly to the English speaking and were hostile towards the non-English speaking woman.

The foregoing discussion on work leads us to conclude that the immigrant Punjabi women took to work by choice. They get attracted towards available jobs. Soon they become economically independent. Now the question arises as to whether their financial security and independence have made them acquire a higher status. Do they participate equally in the decision making process of the family? Studies have shown that economic participation of women has enabled them to achieve higher social status. Indo-Canadian families are also moving towards more equal participation in the decision making process of the family.

A study in Saskatoon reveals that 70 percent of the female respondents replied that they and their husbands jointly made important decisions in the family. Only 24 percent said that their husbands made those decisions alone while 6 percent mentioned they made them alone (c.f. Basran, 1993).

The tendency towards more egalitarianism in Indo-Canadian families is the result of a number of factors. Basran (1993) opines that some of these families come from upper or middle class background. Employment gives them economic security and resources to influence decision making. Their work also provides them an awareness of gender inequality.

3. Decision Making Process

All the respondents, except one, actively participate in the decision making process of the family. They influence in making purchases of valuable goods, such as a new house, car, and furniture. They also contribute towards decisions about the education and marriage proposal for the sons and daughters. Despite this, in the Indo-Canadian families the male member is the head of the household and the final decision making power rests with him. Most of the time the man of the house prevails upon the important decisions. Household and routine decisions lie exclusively with the woman. For instance, the grocery, utensils, clothes and toys are the exclusive shopping domain of the woman. Age hierarchy has socially become less significant. Previously, elderly parents held a great deal of decision making power within the family; today they are often marginalized and isolated, because of their inability to speak in English which minimizes their social influence (Hoffman and Westwood, 1979). One woman in her sixties is staying with her son's family, thus she does not participate in family decision making but takes all decisions of her own.

Can these women plan to visit their relatives in India and in Canada

on their own? Ninety three percent of the women replied that they plan their visits to relatives. Owing to the problems of children and other family responsibilities, they have to decide it mutually. To reorganize the household schedule the consent of the husband is necessary. Only 6 percent of the respondents remain subordinate in the family decisions.

What do these women do with their earnings? Do they keep it with themselves or hand them over to their husbands? Excluding four women who have bank accounts in their own names, all others operate joint accounts with their husbands. Either of the two can operate the account. On probing into the practice of joint account kept by the majority of the women it was learnt that the practice of keeping joint account is convenient and practical. Even if one goes for divorce, the deposits would be divided into two equal parts as per the rules. There is a small proportion of women who are solely responsible for the purchase of grocery from their salaries while all other bills are paid by their husbands.

4. Achievement of Status after Immigration to Canada

It is significant to explore how women themselves perceive their status after coming to Canada. An available study on Indo-Canadian families by Basran (1993) reveals that 46 percent perceive that their status is better in Canada, for 45 percent it was the same and 9 percent thought that their status was lower in Canada. In the case of Punjabi women nearly 80 percent have experienced improvement in their status after coming to Canada. Only 17 percent believe that in Canada their status has lowered down. The main reasons they identify as reasons for the improvement in their status, is their work and earning power. Work has provided them with a sense of being independent and autonomous. In addition, the prevailing egalitarianism, justice, law and order in the society have contributed to the enhancement of status.

To explore further into the issue of status, women were asked what would have been their status had they been in India? Only four women replied that it would have been higher whereas three-fourth of the respondents were very sure of their low status in India. Thirteen percent of them were unsure about their status had they been in India. It is quite obvious from the information that the immigration to Canada has improved their status. Their equality and also domination in certain spheres points towards their raised status. In comparison, most of the women in India have subordinate positions in these spheres (Bajaj, 1995)

It is relevant to mention that in spite of their active participation in family affairs these women experience status dissonance (Sabarwal, 1990). At the work place they largely have more autonomy and experience equality, thus higher status. While in the family (particularly extended families) they have a relatively lower status and their position remains subordinate in the family. Therefore, work is more fulfilling, enriching and satisfying to them.

Punjabi women do not take work as a burden but a routinized reality, where doing some kind of work is taken for granted. They find dignity of work in Canada. The type of work they enjoy doing in Canada would have never been performed by them had they been in India. Thus, the meaning of work changes from time to time and place to place. In this sense, the meaning of work is socially constructed. It is significant to mention that none of the women felt embarrassed or hesitant to disclose the nature of her work to the researcher.

Punjabi women's houses are well furnished with modern amenities. Almost all of them have their own cars and go to work, driving their own vehicles. They have retained their Punjabi dress and food but for work they usually change to pants with shirts and skirts. The get-together of a family or friends on Saturdays is a common feature of their social lives. The occasion may be a Birthday, a wedding anniversary or when a close relative from India pays a visit. They throw a party where two or more close friends' families are invited. What would be served, who would be invited all such decisions lie with the woman of the house. It is the lady who organizes and carries on the whole show, this is a perpetuation of traditional Indian values in a modern family where both man and woman are working and contributing equally to the economic and social status of the family. An illustration of any such weekend party would highlight the status of women and also the type of values being inculcated into the young ones.

"On reaching the doorsteps of the host family a demarcation is created where the man is directed towards the drawing room and the woman towards the living room. Kids sheepishly slip into the basement of the house. Men are served whisky (usually of only one brand at all places) and women with tea. Snacks are mainly sent to the men and the left overs may be served to women once in a while. After two to three hours of gossip or chatting, the women, who by the time are tired and bored are requested to have dinner before the men are called. The table is laid for the men with the best of their crockery and linen. Women usually depend upon self help and suffice themselves in one serving. The main consideration of the hostess remains to save enough food for men. Women are treated as secondary

and men are given priority. Dessert is served only after the men have finished their food. This is repeated after Saturday in the majority of the Indo Canadian families. The children are least attended to and keep themselves busy by watching television while nibbling chips with coke. An outsider, would tend to forget that one is really in Canada and not in a remote Indian village”.

Before ending the discussion on the status achievement of women, the spatial perspective as put forward by Spain (1993) needs to be referred to. She in “gendered spaces and women’s status”, emphasizes that the physical separation of women and men contributes to and perpetuates gender stratification by reducing women’s access to socially valued knowledge. In fact, “Gendered spaces” in homes, schools and workplaces reinforce and reproduce prevailing status distinctions that are taken for granted. Girls are imparted training in cooking, childcare and housekeeping - a knowledge which is less valuable and carries little social status. The boys are imparted knowledge which grants them higher status. In those cases where women could acquire some socially relevant knowledge have acquired higher status.

Women in the study perceive that after immigration to Canada, they chose to work. This has given them a sense of independence, achievement and fulfilment. Through economic independence, even some of those Punjabi women who have trained relationships with their husbands and in-laws could overcome their problems amicably. There are cases of two women who underwent physical abuse at the hands of husband and his parents. On being pushed out of the house they approached the police and welfare organisations. After living on welfare for sometime they got well adjusted in their lives and society. It was their knowledge and work which became not only a source of livelihood but also gave them a meaning in life. Work provided them awareness and self-consciousness. A woman narrated that she was tortured physically and mentally by her husband to the extent that one day she gathered some courage and tried to ring up the police. She said to her husband “Look no more harassment, I have a phone number and I am going to call police and that was the end of my miseries”. It is the accumulation and distribution of knowledge which helped these women to adjust. The prevailing human values of social equality are so strong in the Canadian society that women even after having separated or divorced could never think of returning back to their families in India. Rather, they tried to gather more and more socially useful knowledge which they articulated through work. As a result they could live a dignified life in a foreign country.

Both space and institutions are socially constructed. Alterations in certain ideals and practices interact with and react upon others to produce new structures. Punjabi immigrant women are continuously making adjustments to ever changing social situations. The directions of change in status are partly towards equality and partly towards the persistence of traditional Indian values. Thus, the family structure and the economy, depending on the time and the place, interact to produce different status outcomes for women from men. As these are grounded in the structuration approach, the social institutions are expressed through daily activities even while those activities generate and reproduce structural properties of the social system. Institutions simultaneously shape and are shaped by individual agency. In so far as our living, schools and workplaces support unequal distribution of socially valued knowledge between men and women, they contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities (Spain, 1993). Yet in the process of structuring and restructuring the social system, there always remain a potential for an improvement in women’s status.

Notes

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1. For more details on the migration of Women to Canada please refer to 'Migration of Sikh Women to Canada : a social construction of gender' by Gurpreet Bal in *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 18, No.1, April 1997.

2. Kemp refers to these jobs as 'Degraded and Devalued' because the work is performed by women. The degradation of women's work carries not from the tasks women perform but from the social relations within which the work occurs. These social relations are simultaneously the relations of capitalism and patriarchy.

3. In this study, Dollar (\$) means Canadian dollar. The conversion rate of one Canadian dollar is equivalent to rupees twenty five.

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The Construction of Gender in the Social Formation of Jaffna: Some Thematic Observations*

Selvy Thiruchandran

Gender is a social construction. The idea of social construction is widely used in the discourse of almost all human and social science disciplines. The metaphor of constructions is used differently by different authors. By social construction I mean the creation of meanings of a given phenomenon through the inter-play of actors, institutions, habits and regulative ideals and behaviour. According to Bergger and Luckmann (1996:50) habitualisation leads to institutionalisation to which 'all human activity is subject'. The usage of the concept then should delineate the process of a certain phenomenon being institutionalised, thereby contributing towards the process of creating social reality. The social reality is thus legitimised through various processes and phases. A society forms its own unique construction from its own historical and economic situations. The field of gender studies has found this metaphor very useful, specially when the term sex is differentiated from gender.

Social formation here refers to a particular society with its inter-relations of socio-economic factors. The Tamils of the Northern province from Jaffna are mostly Hindus with a patriarchal ideology and practise the *saive-sidhanta* philosophy of Hinduism which though developed in South India could not be said to have emerged as the dominant philosophy there. The Jaffna Tamils by and large are *savites* as against the South Indian Tamils

among whom the vishnava cult is pre-eminent. There is a kind of separation even in the dialect from the South Indian Tamil language (Indrapala:1968) which was greatly influenced by the North Indian languages. In short the Jaffna Tamils developed a distinct culture of their own, different from the South Indian Tamil culture. It is a highly stratified society with a hierarchial structure, within which duties and obligations are most important.

The cast system is the most predominant institution through which the stratification is effected in Jaffna. Though the hierarchy and the stratification in principle are similar to the South Indian system, one notable absence in the Jaffna society is absence of the priestly hegemony of the Brahmins. The politics and the social life are dominated by the land owning *vellala* caste. The Brahmins are relegated and defined in terms of their priestly functions within the temples as performing religious rites. They do command respect but not power and authority. The philosophical and the religious foundations of the Jaffna people, significantly separated the Jaffna people from the South Indian socio-religious behavioural norms. The most important aspect of this is the absence of the brahmanical hegemony as stated earlier and the influence of *Dharmashastric* gender values (1) This had serious implications for the gender norms of the Jaffna people. Some of the *Dharmashastric* injunctions which curtailed the freedom of women in India did not affect the women of Jaffna in the same manner as they did their counterparts in South India. There are some overtly violent gender behavioural norms such as female infanticide, widow immolation, prohibition for widow remarriage and the severe restrictions placed on the widows' manner of dress and behaviour which are prescribed in *Manu Dharmashastra*. This type of the *Dharmashastric* injunctions are not practised by the Hindu women of Jaffna. These socio-religious norms pertaining to women's behaviour, it has to be emphasised, are spelled out in great detail in the *Dharmashstras* and held out as laws.

One interesting feature in the Jaffna Tamil social formation is the absence of a distinct Christian culture as opposed or different from the Hindu culture (Thiruchandran 1991). The attitude of the minority Christians in merging ideologically with majority Hindus on a cultural identity and subscribing to the overall Tamil culture emphasising their common belonging and common linguistic heritage have negated this difference. This has prevented any overt expression of anti-Hindu feeling and a formation of a sub-Christian culture with a different value system for Christian women.

*This is a part of the book titled "Spectrum of Femininity: A Process of Deconstruction" which is a publication in print.

Jaffna's social formation can easily be characterised as consisting of two opposing ideologies.

1. A defence of the socio-economic status-quo, often as criticisms covertly and overtly, of changes that would alter the stability of the social process.
2. The radical critique of the status-quo and the suggestion of new standards and values for the society.

A brant of nationalism, narrow and inward looking is co-opted into the former, while a progressive anti imperialist type is part of the second ideology.

Gender Construction of the System Maintaining School.

Despite the changing political conditions, some of the socio political leaders of Jaffna tried to maintain the socio-economic status quo during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. This has lead some social scientists and political analysts to view Jaffna, as comprised of a non-dynamic social formation or one replete with a unique conservatism. This aspect also was viewed as an explanation for maintaining the hierarchical system despite high levels of literacy and educational pursuits. The hierarchy that I speak of here entails a hierachy of caste, class and gender.

What I would call the system maintaining ideology was referred to by Sivathamby as the ideology of *saivism* cum Tamil language to the point of perceiving a Christian Muslim exclusion in Jaffna (Sivathamby 1993:94). In my view this conceptual framework cannot be taken as a continued and permanent entity for social science analysis. This was a short lived pre-colonial ideology which was subjected to a lot of transformation subsequently.

The system challenging ideology which is totally opposed to the status quo maintenance, was an egalitarian ideology first propagated by the Jaffna Youth Congress (2). The class caste hierarchy was vigorously challenged. It was part of their agenda to work for total equality and freedom. Theirs was a nationalism which advocated an all inclusive Sri Lankan identity against narrow local identities, such as Tamil or Hindu. Gender equality was not advocated vigourously as much as caste or class equality. But the important variation from the former ideology was that the Youth

Congress was not against gender equality. One reason put forward apologetically by the last surviving stalwart of the Youth Congress, Orator Subramaniam, who passed away on the 18th of February 1994 (3) was that gender equality in Jaffna did not need as much attention as in India. But action oriented programmes to combat the caste system were needed in Jaffna, where one section of the community was dehumanised by the system of untouchability, prevalent only among the Tamils, in Sri Lanka. The youth congress had to take it up as an issue of priority.

The gender analysis that follows falls easily into the conceptual framework of two opposing ideologies. The system maintaining ideology drew heavily from a narrow brand of nationalism. Nationalism here merely meant the indigenous practices versus westernisation, but they were not against a compromising attitude towards power sharing with the masters. Within the framework of system maintenance, Tamil gender ideology easily assimilated the ethos of the Western culture which spelled specific gender subordination. A content analysis of my source material will bring out this contradiction. This is a contradiction because while westernisation was usually rejected as alien or foreign, alien and foreign conservatism as regards the gender hierarchy was accepted.

Although I derive most of my data from past history I avoid periodisation but rather trace some thematic elements which go to construct some aspects of the gendered social reality. The data includes a collection of popular Tamil and English newspapers and weeklies published in Jaffna from 1800. Their contents are analysed. A thematically constructed gender ideology is built up. The periodisation of 1800 is incidental and is not indicative of any historical event. The inquiry does not cover the contemporary period, as access to men and women and material at a time of war in Jaffna has become a hazardous task. Normalcy in the socio-political conditions is necessary for any scientific inquiry. The normalcy I speak of here is the prevalence of settled and peaceful conditions, where the people have begun to interact with each other without fear and inhibitions.

The paper concentrates on certain attitudes, as part of the gender ideology, habits and customs practised by the people of Jaffna through institutionalised social sanctions. As a secondary process an attempt will be made to explain how and why certain process have taken precedence over others.

While doing these two tasks, the impact of various influences such as colonialism, which have shaped the content of gender ideology will also be highlighted. The themes picked up show continuity. This paper is in

effect an attempt at de-construction to arrive at the patterns of the construction of gender.

Newspapers such as *Hindu Organ*, *The Ceylon Free Press* and the *Jaffna Native Opinion* strove hard to stay within the Tamil cultural norms and tried to propagate them through their articles, editorials and news items and the specific interpretations they gave to the socio-political and socio-cultural events and incidents that took place in Jaffna. However, there was an exception to this. To this dominant ideology was added two shades of ideology which were dominant in alien cultures. The first was the brahmanical and the second was the Victorian. These two were progressively and systematically assimilated into the hegemonic Tamil gender ideology. Examples are picked up at random to show these trends. These newspapers while assimilating and accepting gender specific hierarchial notions of other cultures had also performed another task simultaneously of attacking and ridiculing the alternative progressive notions of gender equality of other cultures as inferior to their own. An otherness was constructed.

In the *Hindu Organ* of 22nd September 1897, there is a letter written to the editor signed "nationalist" addressed to "dear sisters". The letter advises the sisters to save the nation, rebukes them for wearing dresses. He laments, not only have the women given up their religion but also the caste system and the love for their nation. The letter is titled "The Ugly Dresses of Women of the *"Kaliyugaya"*" (4). The caste code, the religious codes and the spirit of nationalism are equated with the traditional saree clad women. On another level within the code of nationalism, caste, religion and women are embedded as equally sacred and inviolable.

The *Jaffna Native Opinion* of 08/04/1907 also treated women's dress as a national symbol. Here again it is a letter written by a person who had anonymously called himself "*Seeker of Good*" of the community). In his letter he classified women on the basis of their clothes. Women who dress like the ladies of the Masters (British). "The English *turai chami*", the village girl "*naddu vasi*", the town girl "*nagarappen*" the prostitute "*dasi*", the dancing girl "*kutumbapenn*" and like the women of the Northern country "*vadadesa penkal*" (India used to be referred as the Northern country (*Vada Desam*)). The women, the author emphasises, are dressed in various modes and fashions are not interested in temple worship. They go there to attract men and to show off their finery to other women. In the last part of the letter the "*Seeker of God*" lists some of the adornments used by the women such as hankies, woolen thread, bead chains and having classified them as unconventional forms, implicitly condemns them as non-traditional out-

fits for Tamil women.

Similarly the *Ceylon Free Press* of 18/07/1933 had published a speech made on the occasion of the old boys school day of Jaffna Hindu College by Mr. S. Natesan (5).

"Westerners admire the dress of our women folk. It is elegant, graceful and artful. It is a pity now, to see the poor type of dress worn by girls in their schools. He appealed to all ladies and gentlemen present to see that their children did not forsake the modest and graceful dress which was the object of other nations' envy. He hoped Rev. Bicknell who was on the stage would exercise his influence on the missionary schools and get their girls to look like Tamil girls (6).

Another way of keeping the woman within the national mould was to treat the Western women as the 'other' lowly, uncivilized manly and morally inferior. The 28th July 1897 *Hindu Organ* condemns the western women in its editorial as manly and disobedient to their husbands and fears, with reason, that over time these women would seek complete equality with men in social behaviour by entering into the sphere of 'men's' jobs. They are, he reproaches, riding bicycles fast, and that is fraught with all kinds of dangers.

On 14th July 1897, the *Hindu Organ* published a speech of Senator Beranger under the title "Morals of Europe". The Senator while calling the attention of the government of France "to the increase which is taking place in the various forms of immorality in France in general and in Paris in particular, has hardened man blush. As to their costumes, the skirts have given place to tights of a natural colour and of such a diaphanous texture that they do not appear to exist". The ideas and themes of Victorian morality are picked up by the editor of the *Hindu Organ* to his advantage placing them against the "time honoured customs and usages of Hindus". While doing this he emphatically denigrates the western women's morals.

He says,

"The morbid taste exhibited by men and women especially of the latter for reading sensational love-stories contained in the novels and other forms of light literature with which the west is inundated, the New Women who queens it over society and holds the man in abject subjection to herself directly giving the lie to the scriptural imprecation 'he shall rule over thee', the woman worship which is springing up in consequence of the New women's movement, the

ball dances in half dress all point to a state of things which has no parallel in the East”.

While the Western women’s dress, morals and their quest for equality are treated as belonging to an alien culture (which is the ‘other’), the *Hindu Organ* does not hesitate to place education also within the same other-ness. On 9th January 1895 the *Hindu Organ* ridicules the family life of a Mr. and Mrs. Cox. Mrs. Cox lap dog implicitly linked with her inclination towards bestiality, promiscuity and extra marital relationships is treated as part of a western value system. More importantly these habits are considered to be the results of women’s education. This short write up “on European married life” ends with a warning that it is detrimental to teach a western value system to Hindu women through education. The ‘otherness’ syndrome speaks, rather eloquently most of the time and rather implicitly at times, of certain dichotomous sensibilities and strange equations. The western woman -(though the reference is to actresses) is scantily dressed, therefore she is permissive and immoral. She is shameless, she reads sensational love stories. She is irreligious as she tries to join the new women’s movement by disobeying the Biblical dictum “ he shall rule over thee”. Education for women is equated with acquiring western values. These are the equations. The western women are dichotomously placed against the women of eastern culture with its time honoured values and customs.

Education for Women

Education for women was advocated, though such advocacies were more often characterized by an ambivalence, and limitations. Limitations such as those that would keep women within the traditional and cultural mores. The sanctions that were inserted within the discourses on education for women were done with a view to prevent women from transgressing the limits of their socio-cultural system. Education for women was a subject constantly taken up in the editorial columns. The Editorial of *Hindu Organ* on 28/10/1896 is an interesting example of a convincing ambivalence. The advocacy for education for women has many pre-conditions. However, it is interesting to note that the editor takes care to say initially that women’s education is not an alien or a foreign idea. Education for women, he urges is part of the traditional world -view. Women like *Avvaiyar* and *Karaikal Ammayar* (7) of the olden days were educated women. Second the editorial exhibits a fear that educated women may become im-

moral, the same was argued in the previous section as an equation. It would be of interest to link up another short write up on education for women, which appeared on the *Illankai Nesan* of 12/06/1879 on the same equation. It says that though women’s education is good and generally leads to a good life, happiness and towards attaining ethical standards, one woman who is educated had deserted her husband and children and eloped with a young man after having written to him. There is an additional equation here. If the woman is educated she will write love-letters to her illicit lover.

The editor of the *Hindu Organ* having seen the negative and positive aspects of women’s education talks about the benefits of education for women. All the arguments it has to be emphasized, are legitimised from the view point of how women’s education will benefit the man, the husband.

- a. Only educated women can fulfil the demands and desires of the husbands. An illiterate woman talks about the neighbours the jewels and her cloths. How can an educated husband tolerate such a wife? He, in due course will be influenced by the wife's illiteracy and her behaviour. He would then demean himself losing the benefits of the education he derived.
- b. Since education broadens one's horizons, knowledge and intelligence, the educated wife becomes an asset to manage the family. She will render great service and solace to the man she married.
- c. The children born to educated wives are generally more intelligent than those who are born to-non educated women.

Interestingly the editor, does not deny the ability and capacity of the women to study and grants that like men, women too are able to learn and pass examinations with merit. This is a significant variation from the Victorian ideology which saw women as sick and weak, unable to undertake hazardous tasks such as education. The other arguments are in tune with Victorian ideology. The advocacy for women's education is not within the discourse of women's rights to education, but for the benefit of their husbands in order to make the women more effective household managers and rear more intelligent children. Of greater significance is the last paragraph of this editorial. I quote in translation

"Now having taken into consideration, the situation in our country, our highly educated and religious elite should get together, and con-

vene an assembly and decide and do the needful, to ascertain as to how our women should be educated according to our religious mores and caste codes."

The consensus here fits aptly into my first conceptual framework of system maintenance.

On the theme of education for women there is an interesting debate (*Hindu Organ* 11/12/1895), which is symptomatic of a protest from a woman against the principle of education based on religious mores and caste codes. However, the complete debate cannot be reconstructed because the number on which this woman had written the letter is not filed in the archives, but there is enough substance to substantiate my argument that it is indeed a counter ideology that challenges the system. It is of significance that the debate is started by a woman who had to remain anonymous. The sequence of the debate can be reconstructed thus. To an article or a letter written by *Jaffna Tarisanan* (Jaffna Observer), (a pseudonym) a woman had responded and expressed dissent on the various patriarchal values, again under a pseudonym (one who is talking the truth). A third party, a man again under a pseudonym has taken up the argument of *Jaffna Tarisanan* and rebukes the woman calling her the "good sister" through an article. The title of this article is "*Anganakilasnriti*" name of an obvious brahmanical text which seems to be source material which he has used for the discourse on education for women.

The article opens with a statement that the behaviour of the women of a particular group sets the standards for the civilization of that group. The Indian epic-purana-famous women such as Sita, Savitri and Shakuntala are evoked as examples (8). It is reiterated that education for woman is not for earning a livelihood. He spells out the content and the reasons for women's education.

1. Women should be educated in religion, its codes and mores, so that they will not be converted by the Christian Missionaries.
2. They should be educated in Tamil literature, Hindu history and the geography of the Hindu country. They should not be exposed to the western system of education.
3. They should be educated in hygiene. They should know nutritional value of food items and how to nurse and care for the sick.
4. They should be educated in music (not dancing) so that they can please the husband and others in the household.

5. Physical exercise is also necessary for women because only children born of healthy women can be healthy.

The first part of the article ends with a plea that this kind of education for our women will only be suitable for our country. The demands of the ethno linguistic and ethno-religious nationalism which has picked up some strands of brahmanical ideology, one would note, here have not excluded western Christian views altogether. It has very carefully incorporated in its framework a conservative western ideology - the Victorian. Women seen primarily as wives and mothers have to be specialists on the vocation of home management - which included nursing, hygiene, knowledge about the nutrition levels in the food - these, summed up in the terminology of home science was an invention of the Victorian era in England.

Another intriguing phenomenon - a continuous theme - is to do with genetics coupled with the women's reproductive capacity. Earlier we have noted that education for women is advocated on the basis that only children born to educated mothers will be intelligent and resourceful. In the present discourse it is said that physical exercise should form part of the educational programme for women, as only children born of healthy women will be healthy. It is further said that only this type of education will benefit our country. One wonders not without reason, whether what is talked of here is eugenics. Though the idea of eugenics was found in the Old Testament, in Platos' Republic and in Darwins' theory, it was only in 1883 that Francis Galton coined the word eugenics in his Hereditary genius. In 1869 he has said that he has evidence for the belief that it would be quite practical to produce a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages over several consecutive generations. There is reason to believe that these nationalists too are talking of judicious marriages with educated and healthy women to produce better sons for the country.

A further point that needs to be highlighted is the reference to Sanskrit chaste heroines such as *Sita*, *Savitri* and *Shakuntala* and the Vedic Maitriye and the conspicuous absence of militant Kannagi of the Tamil epic. This is an indicator of the penetration of a brahmanical Hindu ideology of a submissive, passive chaste womanhood.

The discourse on women's education that was discussed above converges on a selective social conservatism which upholds the hierarchical system of caste, class and gender.

The second part of the article is about the debate and the protesting

woman and how she is rebuked and reproached for her critical dissent. To Jaffna Tarisanan the woman poses the question whether he would like women to be locked up like parrots in cages. The essayist defends Tarisanan by arguing that being locked in cages like parrots prevents women from being attacked by animals. Women, he says should adorn themselves with the four great virtues of bashfulness, chastity, fear and foolishness, and stay inside the cages so that they will not be seduced and men will not be attracted by then thus endangering their chastity. (He equates men with animals).

To the second point raised by the woman whether Tarisanan had not met women of wisdom and education, the writer's answer was an affirmative 'no'. He claims that the world is full of women:-

1. with lowly disposition, who imitate the western women in their manner and morals
2. who deliver speeches at houses, temples and public assemblies
3. who find their husbands by themselves
4. who treat their husbands as servants
5. who write letters and promise to marry a man, but marry another
6. who visit others on their own without their husband
7. who desert their husband and marry other men
8. who hold hands with the husband on the streets

No attempt is made to conceal the misogynist trends in the above account of the type of women he met.

Cultural Synchronisation at the level of Patriarchy

The woman writer has also raised a pertinent question as to why "*Jaffna Tarisanan*" is celebrating the customs and habits of the Indian nation which deprive the Indian women of their freedom and treat them like slaves. It appears that he had referred to some great Indian women in his letter.

The author of the essay does not answer the question but says that the woman who raised this question is a "paraiya" by caste while those Indian women are high caste elitists who are honoured by the British governor. The notions of high caste and high class belongings on the one hand

and subservience and loyalty to the British Government on the other are part of the same social conservatism which characterizes the system maintaining ideology which is also patriarchal and misogynist.

More significant from the point of view of the 18th century socio-political conditions in terms of the gender ideology and its counter ideology is the last section of this essay. The woman had alerted '*Tarisanan*' to a few books such as *Pen Mati Mali*, *Pen Manam* and *Pen Kalvi*. Translated literally they mean The Garland of Women's Wisdom, The Honour of Woman and Women's Education. The author, dismisses them as unheard of and wonders whether by reading those books the woman had come to this state of raising gender specific inquiries and whether in these books there is a recipe for making black women white. The woman together with the books that argue for women's rights are scoffed at. But he goes on to advise her on Biblical dictums since she is a Christian woman. As a Hindu nationalist he is not rejecting Christian values. As long as they are patriarchal he has no qualms about quoting them. He quotes chapter and verse:

Chapter I

- 3rd sentence : If Jesus guides the men, a woman should be guided by man..
- 6th sentence : If a woman doesn't want to wear a veil let her shave her head. If she is shy of shaving her head let her wear the veil.
- 9th sentence : The man is not created for the woman but it is the woman who is created for the man.
- 31st sentence: In assemblies let women not talk, to talk they have no rights.
- 12th sentence : To advise and preach to men and to (2nd Chapter) exercise authority. I have not given women the rights. (sic) (Implication - she as a woman has no right to say what she had said to Jaffna Tarisanan) (9).

The author of this long essay after having stipulated conditions for the kind and content of education for women, has taken to task rather unkindly the woman letter writer for her dissenting ideas and notions of protest. Noions of caste codes and high class belonging have also been easily inter-woven into patriarchal ideology as a precept for women. The continuity of this comprehensive ideology can be seen later, when Sir.

P.Ramanathan (considered a national hero in Sri Lanka) opposed the granting of universal adult suffrage on the ground that to grant the right to vote to non-vellalar men and the women would lead to "mob-rule" and that it was an anathema to the Hindu of life (P.Ramanathan, 1934:4,14).

Brahmanical Penetration

The *Jaffna Native Opinion* which came out in 1990 seems to have had more access to brahmanical Hindu Texts. The flow of reading material from India had become steady and the influence is very visible in these papers. Looking up to Hindu India to counter the spread of Christianity, at a time when India was awakened at the national level to the archaic Hindu customs which ill treated Indian women is indeed a paradox of history.

Three strands of thought can be identified in the short stories editorials and in the essays and articles published in these papers. The good wife is extolled and qualities of such a virtuous wife are listed. Qualities central to a good wife's character are service, subservience and sacrifice, not only to her husband but to his entire clan of household members, the father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law. To speak of obedience and service to the husband's clan in matri-local society, in fact is evidence enough to show that alien ideas are being brought through cultural exchange.

Second, the qualities of a bad wife are told to us in the JNO of 11/03/1907, 27/05/1907, 17/06/1907 and 08/07/1907. The bad virtue-less wife is compared to death, treachery (qualities), demon and donkey, (non-human species). On 11/03/1907 a few stories are discussed to illustrate the wickedness of a wife. The issue of 26/11/1906 gives the story of the chaste Sita. The sentiments and notion of *Manudharama Shastra* which are misogynist are the third type. The fickle-mindedness, the innate nature of women to be unfaithful to the husbands, women's intellect being dull and her obligation to be always dependant on the man and follow his foot steps are given as facts of life on 13/01/1908.

The *Jaffna Native Opinion* of 28/10/1907 quotes *Manudharma Shastra's* famous dictum, that a woman should act like a prostitute while on bed and be a counsellor like a minister when he is in despair. Despite this ideological infiltration, it is a matter of doubt whether, such ideologies have successfully entered the consciousness of the people and has lead to specific behaviour patterns in Jaffna. It appears that the Tesawalamai ideology has acted as a counter ideology as will be discussed later.

Strange Combinations and a Comprehensive Theory

The *Jaffna Native Opinion* of 30/11/1935 quotes Hitler as saying that the woman's most important duty is to look after her husband, her children and her home. Hitler's saying is compared with a couplet in the Tamil Tirukural (10) and the author marvels at the wisdom of these great minds who have agreed on women's decorum and her profound duty. Having quoted Hitler, a Westerner, the author strikes a note of caution.

"However, today in our country, we know that women are talking about equality of men and women. This is one of the evils of blindly following the Western civilization".

While chastity was always included in the repeated discourses on family on 09/12/1907, 23/02/1907 and 28/10/1907. "The state of Chastity" has been the title of short essays with quotations. Quotations are illustrated both from *Manudharmma Shastra* and *Tirukural*. These are clearly attempts to combine various shades of the hegemonic gender ideology in order to arrive at a comprehensive theory for women's behaviour. In the dominant gender ideology in India, ideas of motherhood are dormant (Thiruchandran, 1997:42).

The role of the wife and her characterization are the major components. In the theory formation in Jaffna, however, this was different. Motherhood was equally a part of the gender ideology (Thiruchandran: 1991). Two reasons could be speculated. First, the social formation of Jaffna which remained largely uninfluenced by the brahmanical socio-religious hegemony has also largely rejected brahmanical gender ideology. Second, the ideal of Victorian motherhood was implanted by missionary education. Christian journalism which reflected this process steadily picked up some of the negative images of women as did Hindu journalism from the Indian sources. The educative process seems to have influenced the social process. The part played by the hegemonic English educative process in Jaffna is also a contributory factor in this process.

The Christian Tamil/English newspaper called the *Morning Star* has reproduced the motherhood idea. The *Christian Hindu* rivalry found expression through the columns of the *Hindu Organ* and the *Morning Star*. The *Morning Star* founded in 1841 was the first newspaper in Tamil in Sri Lanka. The *Morning Star* (*Udaya Tarakai* in Tamil) published in Tamil and English gave extensive coverage to Christian activities and had special

columns in Christian religious discourse. In many of its columns motherhood ideas were propagated and often compared to godliness. The editions of 27/0/1845, 13/03/1845 and 25/09/1845 had short columns with titles on "Mother's love" and "What is Faithful".

"The patriot expects fame, the friend sympathy, the lover pleasure, but maternal affection springs from the breast un-invoked by the touch of interest".

What is so firm? Time, misfortune, penury and persecution, hatred and infamy may roll their dark waves successively over it, and still it smiles unchanged. A mother loves and loves for ever.

Morning Star, 27/01/1845.

Her watchful care protected you... in infancy... nourished you with milk. Taught your lips to move and your tongue to lisp its uniform accents.

Morning Star, 13/03/1845.

A man's mother is the representative of his maker.

Will not desert him, when he suffers.

Will not listen, when he is slandered.

Will solace him in his sorrows.

Her affection knows no ebbing tide

It flows from a pure fountain.

Morning Star, 25/09/1845

The sentiments and style of the above verse are representations of the Victorian ideology of motherhood. The Indian gender ideology gave a dominant place in its composition to wifhood and its virtue, chastity being the highest. Chastity in Indian literature was elevated to godliness. *Pattini* and *pativarata* are godly terminological. In the Tamil region of Sri Lanka especially in Jaffna, motherhood and wifhood are blended, in an easy co-existence in the totality of gender ideology. The restrictive and overtly regulative strictures placed on the Indian wife found no place. Journals like the *Morning Star* and other Christian and English literature were the source for the infiltration of the motherhood ideology of the Victorian era.

A Counter Ideology in Action

The dominant ideological content was not always the driving force. Women, we have already witnessed have protested through the letters to the editor columns as was the case of the "truth-telling woman", who challenged "*Jaffna Tarisanan*" with convincing arguments. There were a few instances which spoke of a counter ideology.

The *Intellectual Perceptor* of March/April 1886 has a news item of a woman which is thought provoking. A woman by the name of Marimuthu has informed the public that her husband has taken away the jewels and the deeds of her dowry property against her will, when she refused to sign, to enable him to mortgage the property. She says she hereby informs the public that she did not agree and that she well not agree to sell, mortgage or rent her property and her husband has threatened to forge her signature. This is a case in point where a woman has acted contravening the *Manudharma shastra* Tirukural and Biblical dictums of unquestioning obedience and subservience to one's husband. Even if we assume that her natal family was behind her to protect the daughter's inheritance, the fact is that social norms such as family honour and the notion of unity within the family have not stood in the way of her making a public declaration.

The woman, it would appear has laid claims to her property rights as exclusively hers, within the conjugal relationship. She has acted within the Tesawalamai ideology of stridhanam - woman's wealth (Seetanam is the corrupted from used colloquially) (11). Dowry was traditionally viewed as exclusively the woman's property.

Another incident reported in the *Jaffna Native Opinion* of 30/11/1908 is also symptomatic of the above spirit though expressed differently. The episode titled "*big tali*" (12) relates an incident. It has a prologue which says that the bride's party nowadays, are very keen to get a thick *tali* chain and a big *tali*. They, the writer says, usually insist on a certain number of sovereigns being used to make the chain and the *tali*. This, they do, as soon as all arrangements are finalised for the betrothal.

In an incident which was reported below, he says when the mother of the bride found fault with the size of the *tali* and made an issue of it, the bride got up and ran away, thus ending the matrimonial rites. Whatever the reason, the bride and the mother had the right to reject the marriage.

However, the reporter advises all concerned to give up the demand for big *talis* and concentrate on the ritual values of marriage. The incident signifies the power relations between the bride's party and the bride groom's

party. This factor is a significant variation from the present day situation where considerable amount of moral and social pressure is exerted on the bride by her natal family not to pay heed to insignificant details, but to view the social status marriage confers on her. In the social hierarchy today the bride and bride's parents are placed lower than the bride groom and his parents. It is a common occurrence, that marriage viewed as the ultimate goal in a girl's life, she is persuaded, emotionally blackmailed and even threatened by her parents and by elderly relatives to consent to marry against her will as a social and a family obligation. That this bride and her mother could refuse a marriage is an indicator of different socio-economic conditions in Jaffna in the early 19th century.

A further news item can also be brought as evidence for this kind of attitude. The *Catholic Guardian* of 02/07/1881 expresses sympathy with the attempts made in India to get six lakhs of widows remarried. The paper wishes that the prohibition on widow remarriage be lifted and the widows be married again. Since widow remarriage was not prohibited in Jaffna either legally or socially (Tesawalamai legitimises remarriage), this kind of sympathy was symptomatic of rejection of the brahmanical ideology by sections of people. This kind of incidents and attitudes are pointers of a middle class Tesawalamai ideology.

Dowry and the Idea of Women's Wealth (Stritanam)

Sociological and legal opinion about the concept of dowry in Tesawalamai have often (Perinbanayagga 1982: 168, Tammbiah. S.J. 1973:111-137, Tambiah H.W. nd) viewed the dowry as woman's exclusive right to property. In fact this aspect was also seen as the matrilineal system of Jaffna society, which has culturally connected the people of Jaffna with the Kerala people in India. However, the ideological status of dowry is different from the way it is practically operated in Jaffna. Dowry negotiations over time, have frequently degenerated into business bargains. The woman is the weaker party, socially inferior, despite the fact that she is bringing property into the alliance. The socially inferior status of a woman is constructed on the social need of a husband for a woman. There are two cases reported in the *Jaffna Catholic Guardian* which are symptomatic of the present day dilemma of the 'dowry' for women.

The *Jaffna Catholic Guardian* of 6th August 1881 has this to say of dowry.

However poor the parents are they are forced to find dowry to get her daughter married. Giving dowry is more hazardous than bringing up children. Though the parents are willing to give as much as they can as dowry to their daughters the bridegrooms insist on getting more, and even force the parents to get a share from their elder sons and they do succeed.

This is perhaps the origins of the system of 'donation', which is currently practised in Jaffna, where the sons set aside a portion of the dowry brought by their brides by mutual agreement, towards their sisters' dowry. This arrangement is done, mutually by both parties in a society, where the conventions within the system of the family as part of the socio-cultural norms demand that the well being of the sisters are part of the brother's responsibility. On another level this is also a part of their responsibility to their parents-to-reduce the financial and the mental stress of the parents by helping them to find husbands for their daughters. These demands are usually explained away within a code of obligatory and mutual duties.

Dowry appears to have been a major social evil from what the paper of 27/08/1881 says. In one of the letters to the editor, a reader had responded rather satirically to a previous reporting of the sympathy expressed to Indian widows. (02/07/1881). The latter is titled rather poetically with implied meanings, "Widowhood and Virgins" anonymously signed as "seeker-after benefits". While affirming his sympathy and extending his best wishes to the Indian widows, the "seeker after benefit" says that since widow remarriage is customarily accepted in Jaffna we need not bother about it. But in Ceylon (read Jaffna or Tamil areas), there are thousands of virgins to be married and they could not be married because the parents say"

- 1) Why should we give dowry.
- 2) If the bridegroom is willing to accept what we give as dowry let him marry our daughter, if not let my daughter stay with us.

The author of the letter is in sympathy with unmarried virgins, who are deprived of a normal married life and calls upon Ramanathan (Sir.P. we presume) to take up the issue in the legislature so that action might be taken against the parents for keeping them unmarried. Alternatively he suggests that the daughters should be given the freedom to find their own suitors. Surprisingly there was no suggestion from him/her to abolish the

system of dowry. Since there was no reason for a man to remain anonymous on such an issue we could infer that the author, is one of these virgins or a woman who is in sympathy with the virgins. It could very well be a social taboo for women to say either get us married or give us the freedom to choose our husbands.

The problem of dowry continues to haunt many parents in Jaffna, even today. Despite other egalitarian structures and property rights and equal access to education and other markers of socio-economic status, dowry has continued to undermine the status of women in Jaffna.

System Challenging Ideology and its Linkages to Gender Ideology.

If the system maintaining ideology stood unequivocally for maintaining the hierarchical structures based on caste, class, age, gender and on narrow ethno-linguistic consciousness, the Youth Congress ideology challenged the same hierarchical structures with a broader progressive nationalist aspirations seeking total liberation from the shackles of British imperialism. They had a political agenda and a social agenda. Within their social agenda the Youth Congress, did not have elaborate plans for gender equality unlike the Indian nationalist movement which had an active campaign against the overtly exploitative and discriminatory socio-religious practices, which kept Indian women in servitude. However, women's issues were not ignored. In one of the resolutions passed at its annual sessions in 1925 the Youth Congress called for the abolition of the dowry system (Jane Russell, 1982:27). When the report of the Donoughmore Commission was published, the executive committee of the Youth Congress passed the resolution that the:

"Congress disapproves the retention of communalism and the non-extension of franchise to women between the ages of 21-30. (Kadiragamar, 1980:49).

At the 6th annual session in 1930 the Youth Congress passed among other resolutions that this Congress hold: that no nation can rise to the fullest measure of its destiny as long as women do not take an active part in the civil life of the country and appeals to the women of our land to come forward to share with men the responsibilities in the building up of the nation. (Kadiragamar 1980:69).

The Congress gave further legitimization to their views on gender, by inviting Kalyayasundaram Mudaliyar and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya from India, who were at that time involved in the women's rights discourse

in India through their speeches pamphlets and books. Since no systematic records were kept on the Youth Congress, it is difficult to know the contents of their speeches. The presidential address, on the occasion of Kamladevi's session has said that her presence was a challenge to the women of Ceylon to serve their country: Kadiragamar re-assures that the Youth Congress session was not a totally male-dominated one. There had always a few women been present at the session (1980:82).

Gender Specific Attitudes of the Youth Congress

Kesari and *Elakesari*, the papers edited by the Youth Congress activists in fact became the official voice of the Youth Congress for a long time. It would be of interest to know that a content analysis of *Kesari* had clear visions on their attitudes towards gender. Subramanya Bharatiar's revolutionary poems and songs including his radical feminist idea were first published in 1930 in the *Elakesari* weekly by the treasurer of the Youth Congress, at a time when Subramaniya Bharatiar was little known even in India (Kadiragamar, 1980:70). The *Kesari's* views on gender were a challenge to the prevailing conservatism. Indira Nehru, (before she was married to Gandhi) had on 12/02/1942) authored an article titled "Women in the U.S.S.R." In the article she quoted the socialist leaders.

"There can be no talk of any sound or complete democracy, let alone of any socialism until women take their rightful and permanent places both in the political life of the country and in the public life of the community in general."

She quotes Lenin as well to say how conscious, he was of women's roles in the revolution. A few more examples, are given below to show the coverage *Kesari*, has given, to the women's question. The *Kesari* of 20/03/1942 has reported the annual meeting of the Ceylon Federation of University women held at the Women's Centre are Maruthanamadam where the president Mrs.R.R.Chelliah read a paper on Women and the Brave New world.

The 7th November 1946 *Kesari* has given one full page coverage to the "Women's International Democratic Federation which represents today women of 23 countries". This organisation was formed as an anti-fascist democratic organisation of the people for safeguarding peace. The conference, it is said demanded the right of women to fully participate in

the new governments coming into being after the war. An article written by Hajrah Begum on the same page has reported "Indian delegates, Impressions on the Women's Conference in Moscow."

Bicycles and Women

The January 22 issue of 1942 has an interesting section under "our Colombo letter" with the title "Bicycle meant for all". A sub section poses the question why Tamil women do not cycle (in Colombo). 'Worm', who is author of this section claims that he asked a Tamil mother of four daughters why she did not permit her girls to cycle." One of the daughters is married, one a graduate, another in training college and 4th in 'Varsity'. The mother 'Worm' claims was brutally frank.

"I have no objections to cycling as such. It is a difficult thinking to get the girls married. As it is, dowries have to be found and numerous other demands met. If I permit my girls to cycle it will be more difficult to get husbands for them. My girls will be branded as shameless or forward hussies. The fact that one girl has graduated and others are going to the University and training college has made matters worse than they would have been. Young men are afraid of educated girls. How much more would they be of educated girls who dare to cycle on public highway".

Mr/Ms Worm concludes,

"I could not find an answer, for she spoke the truth. The narrowness of the conception of life, the rigid and prudish fetters that bind our society are only too well known."

However, Mr/Ms. Worm speaks rather eloquently of the counter ideology in the next paragraph.

"I could only crack back at her, send your girls on bicycle to find husbands. Of course the girls are furious, they are nagging the mother to death. They say "Old (emphasis in the original) people think that our only job is to get married to particular (emphasis in the original) husbands who are afraid of education and cycling".

Worm sympathises with the daughters. "My sympathies are entirely with the young people whose freedom of movement is thus fettered".

The ideology that was expressed in the Jaffna Native Opinion and The Catholic Guardian was taken over by the Ceylon Free press in the 30's. While criticising the boycotters and the "swarajists" (those who advocated a sovereign status for Ceylon) of the Youth Congress as silly idealists, The Ceylon Free Press on 29th July 1933 has called Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya "the political mother of the boycotters" striking a note of ridicule and abuse.

While what has been expressly stated by the progressive ideologues is documented for analysis and critical treatment, what they did not say is also equally important. In the midst of the currents of religious obscurantism and emerging ethno nationalism in Jaffna as witnessed in the columns of the *Hindu Organ*, the *Catholic Guardian* and the *Morning Star*, which had revived the national within very passionate idioms and created an otherness for the other cultures, the Youth Congress ideology remained secular with no notions of otherness. The Youth Congress rejected imperialism but not the western thoughts and philosophy. This is important for gender construction because of the fact, that despite having Tamil pundits and Saiva *siddhantists* among them as those needed for intellectual discourse, they did not recreate a Tamil or *savite* gender ideology based on Tirukural, Silapatikaram (13) or on any Saiva texts, as other nationalists and social reformers have done. Neither did they reject western ideas of women's liberation.

However, the post-colonial period in Jaffna has not seen any radical social movement which challenged the patriarchal structures in a meaningful manner. The continuation of the radical ideology found expression through another channel, the progressive Tamil writers. Influenced by the writings of Periyar and Subramaniya Bharatiar a radical stand of thought emanated from the Tamil writers. Around 1942 there were many writers who had been sensitized to gender inequality. The manner of expression of the gender sensitiveness had two outlets. One was to challenge the patriarchal ideology in the ancient Tamil literary productions and the other was to create new ones on a principle of gender equality. An example of the former were the attempts made by Saravanamuttu (in pen name Saratha) in the poems titled *Nyaya Vatam* (The debate on the Principle of Justice), and *Shakuntalai Tuyar* (Shakuntala's Distress). The collection of these poems are now published in the book called *Kavichuvadu*. The former challenges Rama for banishing Sita to the forest for fear of public opinion. The latter talks of the unjust episode of the king Dushyanta forgetting Shakuntala

and disowning the son born to them in the forest. Both these episodes are given sympathetic treatment from a woman's perspective.

An example of the second trend which is symptomatic of the radicalism of the writers is found in the collection of short stories by Varathar. In the collection called *Kayamai Mayakkam*, in the short story titled

"The Woman of the Modern Era (*Putuyugappen*)", the author makes the heroine shoot the drunkard womanising old husband. The author concludes the story saying that she did not kill the husband, but she shot at the age old *Puranic* idea that a woman should worship the feet of the husband taking them on her head, however immoral he is. The author makes special mention of this story in his Foreword and regrets how the readership has missed the moral of the story. While the progressive praised his attempt, the traditionalists labelled the heroine a husband murderess. The author makes a point by being critical of the gendered position of the society which demands meticulous codes of restraint from women. While the author's motive and the reception by the traditionalists are clear indicators of the social phenomenon, the traditionalists versus the progressive, another important factor which is worth pointing out is the outright attack on the particular verse in *Manudharma shastra* which says that.

Even though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.

Manudharma Shastra Verse 151

The author is clearly rejecting brahmanical Hinduism and its influence.

The *Tamil Makal*, (the Tamil Woman) perhaps the first women's journal in Sri Lanka was published in 1923. It is indeed difficult to ascertain the kind of gender equality and gender sensitiveness that this journal was adhering to as copies of this journal are difficult to come by. There was only one single issue (the second issue, 1952) in the National Archives which is co-edited by Mrs.M.Mangalaammal and Miss.M.Puvanesvarithevy. There are indications that the authors were influenced by the first wave of feminism in India and by the Indian nationalist movement. There are clearly inherent contradictions in the views expressed in this issue. Chaste women, worshipping the husbands are praised and very radical views of the revolutionary poet Subramaniya Bharatiar are also forcefully expressed with clarity of thought (p 21 and 15). Femininity with its subservience and service attitudes and compassion and the great qualities of chastity are praised

both in the editorial and other articles and the authors want the other women to draw from the principle of shakthi (p 16,31). The article on *Pennulakam* (A Woman's world) is very typical of these contradiction. It advocates education for women, praises the ancient Tamil women whose primary virtue was chastity, condemns those women, who, demand equality like the women of the foreign countries (meaning the Western world). The author urges that the greatest service is service to Siva and admonishes women for demanding equality of rights.

Subaltern Constructions

The discussion so far, concentrating on the mainstream construction of gender of the hegemonic bloc has not taken note of the subaltern construction. The hegemonic elite consisted of the two like minded groups with consciousness of two types. The first being the local indigenous consciousness grown on the native land. And the second being the one which was influenced by the imperialists and foreign modes of thought. Interestingly then both point to an inward looking conservatism. Both these groups were looked upon as cultured groups who knew the cultural heritage based on classics and the religious mores and values of the so called "Great tradition". Below them there were people of the low caste and low class. It is generally assumed that these people also had a folk wisdom that they acquired out of empiricism and experience. This stock of knowledge, it must be emphasised also contributes immensely to the reconstruction process of the gendered society. However, it is a matter of doubt, whether all the proverbs in use are creations of the subaltern groups. It could very well be possible that others also used this form of expression. In those instances the language and the idioms used become the tools for identifying them as whose creations they are.

My analysis of the above however, is limited to proverbs alone (14). I have not included folk stories and folk songs. Random observations of behavioural norms of the subaltern groups, however, reveal a sense of gender equality, where the codes of submissiveness, passivity and seclusion are dispensed with in the social arrangement. And their social freedom is not limited by either written or unwritten gender conventions. Proverbial wisdom however, seems to suggest just the contrary. The male bias and the sex stereotypical constructions that are found are not merely exceptions.

That women are vain about their looks and are unduly preoccupied with their mode of dress is emphasised in a proverb which says "*Iraval*

pudavaiyil nalla oru koiyakamam". With a borrowed saree she has made a beautiful *koiyakam* is the pleated end of the saree that is tucked up at the waist behind. This mode of draping the saree was fashionable in olden days. That this proverb is related as a quotation from someone is suggested by the expression "it seems". This adds to the satirical note.

"*Urukul natakum visayam yarruku terium? Ulle irukum kumariku terium*". Who will know what is happening in the village? The young maiden inside the house knows them all.

"*Pen vala pen porukamattal*". (Usually) A woman is jealous of another woman who is happily married.

"*Penkal kudinal sandaikal peritituum*". Where women gather, there fights will be multiplied.

That women are by nature prone to gossip, that they are inquisitive, jealous and quarrelsome is the constructed wisdom of these three proverbs.

That secondary status of the women who are generally considered a burden is brought out in the proverb which concludes that to be born a woman is sinful. So it is, to be born with woman. "*Pennaipirapatum pavam, penodukudi pirapatum pavam*".

A woman's silence and quite mannerisms are argued for in the following proverb with a warning. "*A tobacco leaf is lost when it is opened*". (Has no value if the aroma is lost in the process) So is the woman who laughs.

On gender discrimination as part of an observed social reality, a proverb says that a son's child is carried and a daughter's child is walked.

An unmarried woman (virgin is the word used here) is like fire is a proverb, which subtly metaphorically speaks of the sexual vulnerability of a woman and the need to get her married. The saying "*Vala kumar mula nerupu*" (a virgin who is not living with her husband is (like) fire that is not glowing) also implicitly argues that her passion has also self destructive properties (by her going astray or wrong). It also says that her sexuality may give an appearance of being contained but in reality it is not so. Hence the metaphor of the fire not glowing. This kind of proverbial knowledge is used to limit and at times curtail the freedom of movement of young girls and even to get them married young and to force marriage on girls against their will.

It is of interest to know the meaning a simple word *vall* (to live) has acquired. The word has acquired a gendered social dimension far removed

from the original meaning the root connoted. In the two proverbs the word is used to mean to live with the husband or in the state of being married. The construction implies a meaning that life for a woman is meaningless if not lived with the husband. From this process of gendered signification, the word *vaalavetti* has been derived for a widow. This word has derogatory and inauspicious connotations. Translated literally it means one who leads an empty and a meaningless life (by the husband's death).

It appears that a barren woman and a divorcee are viewed derogatorily. These women are stigmatised by society both at the hegemonic level and at the subaltern level.

The proverb warns us that "*Enapen iruvvar kudinal kaya varahu, nira pobum*". If two barren women get together the *varahu* (a type of grain) which is kept in the sun will turn to chaff.

"*Setavan Pendilai Kattinalum
Vittavan Pendilai Kattakutatu*"

Marry, you may a woman whose husband is dead (widow) but not a woman who has been separated from her husband. The proverb argues rather eloquently that a woman deserted by a man has been found unfit for marital relationship by him, hence no other man should marry her. That the onus and responsibility of the unsuccessful marital relationship is totally due to a woman's lapse is implied.

The above proverbs, though a few, have demonstrated a striking resemblance in their meanings and expressions to the hegemonic construction of the dominant groups. The subaltern gender images speak the same ethos of the status maintenance group. One would perhaps wonder what is at stake for the subaltern group also to speak in similar language and express similar meanings to those of the status maintenance groups. This is a case of further evidence to show that gender discrimination cuts across class and caste. The males who probably authored these proverbs have probably done so at two levels, they could very well have been the observers of the social gender phenomenon which is discriminatory and exploitative at all levels. They could also have been males who could gain by being dominant over another group-i.e. the females. On another level which is equally significant, these sayings testify to the process of the hegemonic values being copied by the lesser social groups as a process of sanskritization. It could very well be also due to the consent given by the subaltern social groups to the moral and intellectual leadership of the historical bloc, in

Gramsci's parlance (1971:61). The moral and intellectual leaders in any society were/are anyway a male biased group - the consent to build a particular social order for the dominated by their organisational role in society - the proverbs are indeed an expression of their consent to the moral and the intellectual reforms effected through a "pedagogic process" (1971:350).

This paper has made an attempt to pick out a few thematic observations mainly from the news papers and oral tradition as part of the subaltern consciousness to show the construction of gender. There are indeed patterns of a gender hierarchy and patterns of a patriarchal culture with an ambivalence. The content analysis has brought to light various shades of the same ideology through the channels of English education, the imperialists versus the natives. The brahmmanical Hinduistic penetration and looking up to India for examples, on the other hand, are the productions of a counter ideology which tried hard to imitate a system which appeared akin to the indigenous system through the linguistic link. This was a pseudo nationalistic reaction. This was neither the part of the Youth Congress ideology nor the Arumuga Navalar (15) activities for reassertion of culture as far as the gender relations are concerned. The system maintaining school of thought essentially had a social conservatism which incorporated into its agenda motifs of a narrow inward looking nationalism and hierarchies of caste class and gender, while cooperating with the imperialists on the agenda of system maintenance, the disintegration of which they thought, would jeopardise their socio-economic status. The repressive ideology has also found its way into the subalterns patterns of construction.

An equally significant phenomenon both politically and culturally is that the demand for equality for women has always been a part of the radical and progressive agenda, but the implementation of it - unlike the demand for class and caste equality - has always been left to the women themselves to strive for and achieve.

Notes

I would like to thank two people, Maeve Bhavan and the late Orator Subramaniam, the former for useful comments and suggestions from which I benefitted and the later for answering my queries about the activities and publications of the Youth Congress. Since it was his wish that I should direct my attention to the unresearched Jaffna women, a task now partially fulfilled, I dedicate this paper to his memory.

1. Dharma Shastra, Manu Dharma Shastras

The classical socio-legal code books in Sanskrit authored by the Brahmins, of which the *Manu Dharma Shastra* is the most quoted as the legal and religious authority for the injunctions on the social and the familial behaviour of women.

2. Youth Congress

The Youth Congress, originally called the Students Congress was founded by some radical youths in Jaffna in 1920s. Influenced by the liberal western ideas and by the nationalist movement across India their first target of attack was imperialism. However, the inequalitarian and the hierarchical socio-economic structures based on caste, age and class soon became subjects for critical analysis. The ideology and activities of the youth congress was to have a great impact on politics of Jaffna and the youth congress was the beginning of left politics in Jaffna.

3. I had the opportunity of meeting Orator Subramaniam in Colombo, in early February. He was able to answer all the questions that I asked

him and was particularly happy that I have embarked on this project.

4. **Kaliyuga**
According to the *Hindu Purana* there are four ages (*yuga*), and *Kali yuga* is the last in which there is general deterioration.
5. Mr. Natesan was the principal of Parammeshwara College, and is the Son-in-law of Sir P. Ramanathan. He was one of those who was keen on maintaining the Hindu way of life in Jaffna and was an active supporter of the cultural revival and worked against the Christianisation of Jaffna.
6. Rev. John Bicknell was the principle of Jaffna college founded by the American missionaries. He was a man known for his liberality of thought and many past pupils of Jaffna College lay special emphasis on the kind of freedom they enjoyed in the school by way of speech, thought and action. Perhaps Mr. Natesan was here critical of Rev. Bicknell for letting his girl students wear western dresses.
7. **Avvaiyar, Karaikal Ammayar**
Avvaiyar was a female poet of the *Sankam* period. She was credited with poems of exceptionally high standards. She was also revered and respected for her wit and wisdom with which she rebuked kings and poets alike with ease and charm.

Karaikal Ammayar
Karaikal Ammayar was a female poet saint of the *Pallava* period. Her real name was Punitavaty. As was the custom those days her place name Karaikal was added to her acquired name. Ammayar means mother (*ammai*) with the honorific suffix "ar" added to her name. She was credited with three sets of long hymns in praise of lord Siva. Both these women are considered to be exceptionally talented poets.
8. *Puranas* and *epics* are religious texts in Sanskrit dealing with the myths of gods and goddesses and sages and humans with godly qualities. Later they were either adapted or translated into the regional languages in India. Savitri, Sita and Shakuntala were virtuous

wives of men. Their primary virtue was chastity, while untold sufferings at the hands of their husbands and destiny were supposed to have enhanced their womanly virtues as qualities of obedience and conjugal fidelity.

9. The quotations given here are not found in the Bible in this order, nor are they a true rendering. They are perhaps reproduced from a Tamil translation of the Bible.
10. Tirukural is a Tamil text of the post Sankam period. The couplets are noted for their brevity and clarity of expression and thought, usually hailed as a text of great wisdom and quoted for any type of discourse.
11. Stridhanam is a Sanskrit word, the meaning of which is women's wealth
12. *Tali* is a ritual ornament, a symbol of marriage for women. *Tali* is usually mistaken for the chain worn by many non-Tamils in Sri Lanka. The chain on which the *tali* is hung is called the *Tali kodi*.
13. **Silapatikaram**
This is famous Tamil epic which immortalised the concept of chastity through its heroine Kannaki. *Pattinni* the Sanskrit word for a chaste wife was conferred on her. This was later to develop into a cult which was brought to Sri Lanka as the cult of *Pattini deiyo*. In contemporary Sri Lanka she is a common deity both for the Tamils and Sinhalese connoting two ideals, those of justice and chastity.
14. The proverbs are selected from the popular proverbs used in Jaffna from the collection of M. Ramalingam's book titled (trans). The Proverbs of Jaffna in Conversational Usages (see primary sources).
15. **Navalar**
Arumuga Navalar popularly known as Navalar (one who has a powerful tongue) is credited with having played a major role in the Hindu revival movement, which was intended to stall the spread of Christianity in Jaffna. He was also responsible for building up a tradition

of Tamil prose. He is viewed as a Tamil nationalist who revived both *saivism* and Tamil and prevented these from being dominated by Christian and western values. The fact that he was from the high *vellala* caste and his conscious projection of his caste-belonging inevitably had led to a *vellala saiva* hegemony in the social formation of Jaffna during the colonial period.

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Glossary

Illara dharm
Kannaki

Kula makal/Kutumpatupen
Nitya sumankli
Sankam
Sumangali
Tevaratiyal/Tevaratiyar

A code of ethics for household practices
The caste wife of the hero in the epic Silapatikaram who was celebrated later as the Goddess of chastity (Pattini teivam)
Woman who belongs to the family
Perpetually auspicious
Association or assembly of poets
An auspicious woman, usually married
Woman/women dedicated to the temple, literally means the servants/slaves of gods

A Roar on the Other Side of Silence

A Note On Reading And Translating The Poetry of Attiya Dawood

Bold, different, defiant, feminist --- Attiya Dawood is the new and exciting voice in Sindhi poetry. A voice suggesting new choices, drawing out powerful relationships, hinting at elusive mysteries. Choose love, she writes in a poem addressed to her daughter, even if "they" condemn you to be a "kari", the blackened woman. Do not let love turn into a collar around the neck of a slave, she writes in another poem, but talk to me just as you talk to your friends. I weigh heavy on the shoulders of father, brother, husband, son --- bathed in the name of religion, nailed to the coffin in the name of traditions, I am buried in the graveyard of ignorance. All my life I kept walking on the "Pul Sarat" of respectability built by others. I have travelled across centuries to know myself. You cannot keep this voice locked up inside the "kot", it will not be silenced. It announces firmly that "my hands reach out the door latch."

Slowly a trembling hand moves towards the heavily barricaded doors. This gesture does not come easily. In one of her poems, Attiya Dawood writes that belief were written "throttling my mind and dipped in my body", law were framed "assuming my status as a sub-human" and society built on "the skulls of what were once my ambitions." Coming out of the background of oppressive silence, solitary confinement in a "kot" and walking over the narrow "Pul Sarat", Attiya Dawood is "the other voice" in Sindhi poetry. In her introduction to "The Other Voice: Twentieth Century Women's Poetry in Translation", the iconoclast American woman poet Adrienne

Rich speaks of "the great flowering, affecting the themes available to women we are only now beginning to know as materials and experiences becoming legitimized that were formerly discounted as women's subject -- therefore trivial or scandalous." In Rich's terms, Attiya Dawood is a "special woman", since she is "one of those who somehow found her voice and moved out of the silence or the un-written verbal tradition of women into the glare and vulnerability of print." Attiya Dawood is acutely aware of this eerie silence. For each woman poet who has come into print, there are several others who are lost to silence. She has prepared interviews and write-ups on women writers and their problems, and she ruefully describes several instances. "One of them published her poetry under several fictitious names, all of them rather neutral sounding so as not to reveal the fact that she was a woman. She became a recluse", she narrated to me. "I know some young girls who were forbidden by their fathers or brothers from writing, even though they came from educated families", she recites a poem and mentions that it was frowned upon by the girls's brother.

The journey has not been an easy one for Attiya herself. When the poem addressed to her daughter asking her to choose love above all was published on the literary page of a newspaper, there was a flurry of angry, protesting letters. Attiya is not intimidated by controversies and can defend the feminist stance of her poems as the proper subject for poetry.

"There are some of my friends who say that it was alright for you to write some poems around these themes, but now you should write about other things", she laughs as she has no intention of following this or any other advice. She feels that she has not acquired a "fashionable" idea which can be adopted as a "politically correct pose", but she is writing about what she passionately believes in, and passion is at the heart of poetry.

Attiya Dawood was born in a small village called Moladino Larik near Kandiaro in district Naushehro Feroze, but has spent many years in Karachi where she currently works at an office job. She is married to Khuda Bux Abro, a well-known painter and photographer, and is the mother of two daughters. She does not have a prolific output and her poems can be contained in a volume as slim as this.

This is what Asif Aslam Farukhi says of Attiya Dawood in the Foreword to the book of her poems titled *Raging to be Free* - (Translation).

We are publishing two poems from her collection "Raging to be Free."

In Search of the Truth

My journey in this desert
Continues from so many centuries,
Bearing my cross of truth
Across this treacherous earth, I kept on walking
One eye says
all is truth
The other says
every thing is a lie.
Between this truth and lie
I kept swinging like a pendulum.
I know that the water shimmering in the distance
Is nothing but a mirage,
But still, with hope in my heart
I kept running in that direction.
I know that in this blazing sunlight
My companions who journey with me
Are nothing but my shadows.
But taking their companionship as the truth
I continue my journey with them,
One eye says
all is truth,
The other says
everything is a lie.

A Strange Thing

Whoever gets to hear of it
Is shocked.
Today a girl
Has refused to place her head
On the sacrificial butcher's block,
She wants to live.
Angry, mocking, stones in hand
People have come out to stone her to death.
She has refused to accept
Her husband as a surrogate god.
She has blasphemed.
She wants to live.
For bread and home
She has dared to come out,
She has refused to accept
A life doled out as charity.
Her reins
She has tried to snatch away from the hands of others.
Considering herself to be human
She has demanded the right to choose.
She wants to live.
The centuries old slave collar she wants to take off.
For a single ray of light
She has tried to jump over rituals.
She wants to live.
Whoever gets to hear of it,
Is shocked
Beyond words.

Women, Religion and the Problem of Memory in Tamil Nadu

V. Geetha *

The busts and statues of E V Ramasamy Periyar which adorn many a road, street and by lane in the Tamil country announce with a measure of defiance and glee, that there is no God and whoever believes in God is a fool. During this past decade, when the rest of India has been witness to riots, involving Muslims and Hindus, these roadside icons have served as veritable guardian deities, protecting Tamil polity and society from the communal ire which wracked the nerves of the citizenry elsewhere and moved them to fitful, often, violent action.

Yet all is not well in the state of Tamil Nadu, especially with respect to the sphere of religion. In spite of the generalised disinterest in communal politics, of the variety sponsored by the Hindutva parties in India, and the concomitant absence of a carefully cultivated hysteria over temples and mosques, religious fervour marks and defines Tamil social and cultural behaviour at the present historical moment in a rather unprecedented fashion. Wayside temples spring up by the day and come the month of *Aadi*, local musclemen go about collecting money from any and every house and shop in the neighbourhood to celebrate this or that *Amman* festival. An elaborate patronage network, involving local politicians, traders, musclemen and those members of the public whose piety cannot distinguish their own good faith from the uses to which such faith is inevitably put by those who derive their power from organising faith and fervour into spectacle, has developed in most parts of urban and moffusil Tamil Nadu. There is something

positively menacing about this public spectacle of faith, involving as it does a great deal of intimidation directed against those who are not interested in these temples or who do not wish to support them. Even those who live in the city's slums are not spared such threats and have to pay up, whether they wish to or not, and whether they can afford or not, for the conduct of these events.

Anthropologists and historians will, no doubt, tell us that the phenomenon I have described is by now means new and that, historically, such has been the nature and alignment of religious and secular power in the Tamil country.¹ But it seems to me that what is happening at the current moment is not a mere conjunctural modification of tradition. What we have is an attempt to render the sphere of religion, and the power and authority derived from it, impermeable to the criticisms of civil society. Not only is local, political and economic power rendered into expressive forms through the modality of the spectacle, but the spectacle, as such, casts an aura around its material correlates, that their covert political intent is overwritten by a script redolent with piety and fervour. Besides, in the wake of privatisation of communication networks, there has emerged a veritable market for spirituality, with private television affording space for any number of self-styled godmen. Thus, the language of faith, suitably charged with the idiom of television broadcasting, has entered into, not only middle class, but even working class homes and is thereby granted a kind of intimate visibility which is at once seductive, as it is dangerous.

In the Tamil context, this marks a serious moment in history, for one of the far-reaching achievements of the Dravidian movement has been the creation of those ideological conditions which made it possible for civil society to demand a measure of accountability from the peddlers and practitioners of faith. Now, it seems this significant legacy is being threatened and, more than anything else, this bodes ill for women. As a woman activist, speaking on *The Changing Nature of Sexual Assault*, at a meeting called to examine and suggest changes to the existing law on rape in India, observed: "These days throughout the year people observe fasts and visit temples. Men wear the sacred *mala* for any and every temple visit and most importantly for us, expect their women to serve their so-called spiritual needs in any number of arbitrary ways: women have to bathe at least three

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1. See, for instance, Appadurai, *Arjun Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule, A South Indian Case*, Cambridge University Press, 1981; Presler, Franklin A, *Religion Under Bureaucracy: Policy and Administration for Hindu Temples in South India*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

times, cook special food and skimp and scrounge on their and the children's needs to enable the men keep their pilgrimage vows. This religious madness robs our women of whatever free time they may have, and worse, subjects them to those very religious codes which ordain their secondary status and subordination.²²

My concern in this paper is two fold: I hope to present evidence of the gradual erosion of the space of civil society with respect to women and religion, and secondly, I wish to recall a critique from another time, the Self-respect Movement's critique of religion, for the lessons it may hold for women today, in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere.

The Evidence

Two events have occurred over the past 3-4 years which raise important questions about the nature of religious faith and what it does to women. One is sufficiently well known, having to do with the sexual abuse and assault of women at the ashram of Premananda, a godman from Sri Lanka who made Tamil Nadu his home nearly a decade and a half ago. The second is more recent and, again, has to do with an ashram, this time, in Nagercoil, run by one John Joseph, a former Catholic priest who, like Premananda, is believed to have sexually abused women. The Premananda case was set to rest recently with the Pudukkottai Sessions Court convicting him of serious and wanton sexual crimes and sentencing him to 36 years imprisonment. The verdict has been welcomed by women's groups and civil rights activists everywhere, but before one could savour the fullness of this judicial victory, the news of the purported sexual crimes at Nagercoil were brought to light. The accused is at present in prison, awaiting his trial.

What is noteworthy about both these instances is the nature of the crime: sexual abuse. The abuse practised - allegedly, one must add, in the Nagercoil instance - has been of a systematic nature and the victims, it is clear, at least from the Premananda story, were lulled into believing that this was perfectly in consonance with the nature of spiritual life at the ashram. It was only after the victims, all of whom were legal minors when they were implicated in this sordid business, acquired a sense of their own violation, grew into a measure of self-worth, that they managed to flee the ashram and lodge a complaint with the police. To this day the mothers of

2. This meeting was organised on September 12 & 13, 1997 at Tiruchy in the wake of the verdict issued in the infamous Premananda case (of which more below).

some of the victims refuse to believe that Premananda had assaulted their children and insist that a larger conspiracy is afoot, of which the children, all of who are now adults, are the hapless victims. The point is, the religious legitimacy granted to, and which inheres in the very concept of an ashram, has enabled Premananda to practise a systematic violation of several women's bodies, of their bodily integrity with ease.

In the Nagercoil instance, a large number of women continue to gather at the ashram, praying for their spiritual (sic) leader, and many of them refuse to believe that the ashram may have been home to one who indulged in acts of sexual assault with impunity. In this instance, too, it is clear that a certain practice of faith and the sanction accorded to it has fudged up notions of right and wrong, consent and assault.

For my purposes, what seems important is the manner in which both these events have been received by civil society. Here, I intend to comment very briefly on the reports which have appeared in the popular media for over three years now on the Premananda case and which continue to appear with respect to the Nagercoil ashram. Since the media may be taken to be a fair index of what the public, by and large, thinks, even if this mirroring is often a self-fulfilling prophecy which serves the media well, I consider the ideas implicit in these reports to reflect the opinions of the citizenry at large.

I am concerned here chiefly with the Tamil media, dailies, weeklies and fortnightlies. Ever since Premananda was arrested the Tamil newsmedia has kept pace with the unfolding of events. From quite early on, it adopted a semi-ironic tone, with respect to Premananda, which allowed it to parody his assumption of spirituality, without seriously calling into question either his credentials, or the institution of religion which he had used to his advantage with such consummate ease. Later, and this has been the case over the past year, (1996-97), one can evidence a shift in tone. As the court hearings continued to be held, the irony became more playful and Premananda became a sort of media favourite and was often referred to as 'Prem's', a term of endearment that incensed his victims. Secondly, the media never tired of deriving a measure of voyeuristic delight from its crude and salacious references to his sexual misdemeanours. As a feminist activist put it, "the media interest in Premananda was, from beginning to end, voyeuristic. On one hand, one is inclined to grant that it was because they kept up their interest in this case that it never dropped out of the public gaze; yet on the other hand, it is clear, going by the media reports which revel in their descriptions of his lust, that their so-called exposes betrayed

chiefly a 'sour grapes' mentality. It was almost as if they were a little bit sorry that they could not do what Premananda did."³

However, harsh this judgement may be, the truth of it may be easily evinced by even casually turning through the brittle leaves of a Tamil daily or weekly. For instance, in writing of the Nagercoil case, all papers, without fail, reported in their editions of Sept. 13, (*Malai Malar, Malai Murasu*, to give a few examples), that a woman from Kerala who had spent time at the ashram had subsequently written a letter to John Joseph, in which she confessed how he had helped her experience a great deal of, and hitherto unknown, sexual pleasure. The letter writer is also believed to have stated that while she feels guilty because she played false to her husband, she could not but do anything else, for such had been the commandment of God. This news story got reported with screaming headlines that reproduced the woman's admission of pleasure. What seems particularly significant about this story and others like this is the teasing vision it provides of the woman: is she victim or accomplice?

Then again, in the Premananda case reports often referred to the victims of sexual assault as beauties. This, of those young women who were forced to cope all at once with the trauma of police interrogation, court room appearances and media attention, besides re-living the horror they had left behind each time a story was flashed in the newspapers and weeklies.

It is clear that such reports and stories, as appeared in the media, had very little to do with the actual, structural matrix, within which these sexual and misogynistic crimes occurred; nor were they concerned with those ideologies of faith which enable the perpetration of such crimes, or with the perversion of trust within the space of a custodial institution, and one which assures the public that it can regulate its human affairs without those laws which secular institutions abide by. Of course, various groups which claim Periyar's legacy have protested the going-on at the ashram and called the power of religious leaders to account, but such protests were far and few between, besides being routine diatribes against religion.

It was as if civil society was paralysed, struck dumb with its own lassitude, and hence unable to mount an effective protest against the growing and arbitrary power assumed by religious leaders. As for religious institutions, *mutts*, trust and charity houses, they have been zealous in distancing themselves from the 'false prophets', but none of them seem to

3. *Subathra, Personal Communication.*

have thought it fit to call to account their brethren. (In fact the victims in the Premananda case have expressed their surprise and chagrin at this strategic silence on the part of religious institutions).

Predictably enough, the most vocal protests have come from women's groups and many activists feel that what is at stake for women is not merely justice, but an enabling political space. For, if those cultural conditions, which enable and justify the widespread practice of sexual assault, continue to exist unchallenged, and most women consider religious faith an essential aspect of these conditions, then women will not really be able to meaningfully intervene and act, though it is their bodily integrity which is vulnerable to abuse. Thus, many women's groups have expressed the need to think seriously through matters of faith, sexuality and power.

However, these past few years, beginning from the mid-eighties, have been so completely captive to the language and power of religion, as foregrounded by Hindutva leaders, that even critics of this unholy alliance of political power and the hysteria of a whipped-up faith have not been able to sustain a critique of that faith from outside those terms of reference outlined by the Hindutva ideologues. Secularists, for instance, have been driven to look for creative and tolerant practices of faith in history and in popular practices of Hinduism and Islam, while Muslim religious and political leaders have become more introverted and concerned with questions of faith and identity. Only the far left and a few militant dalit groups have sought to criticise Hinduism as inherently oppressive and representing hegemonic economic, social and political interests, but these voices, while robust and imaginative, are, by that token, marginal as well. However, this may be, questions regarding faith and citizenship were rarely raised or answered and this has proved most trying for women.

Since communal riots render women even more vulnerable to sexual assault and hurt, feminist groups have kept up a consistent critique of religious fundamentalism, with the qualifier that majority (Hindu) fundamentalism and minority reaction (Muslim, Sikh or Christian fundamentalism) cannot be equated. While this has enabled feminists to forge a broad coalition with groups of various sorts, and carry out relief work during riots, as well as support work for victims of sexual violence, it has also meant that women do not raise the question of the denial of women's rights in particular religions, especially if these are minority faiths in the Indian republic. The women's questions has become folded into the imperatives of a politics of identity, making it increasingly difficult for women to assume the countenance of citizens who may chose, in some instances,

to hold religious institutions and religious strictures and laws, even if, of minority faiths, to critical scrutiny.

While in Tamil Nadu, such apprehensions regarding religion have not been publicly voiced, as they have been by feminist groups in Hyderabad and Mumbai, for instance, there is yet a reluctance, a certain intellectual resistance to interrogating religion. Even the much debated issue of evolving a gender-just civil code which will be available for use by women of all religions, should they wish to appeal to civil, rather than personal law, has not really attracted much attention or even interest in Tamil Nadu, as it has elsewhere in India. This disinterest in matters of faith may be partially attributed to the absence of those communally volatile conditions which exist in western and northern India. It is also the case that religion and religious practices are so implicated in everyday practices of culture that it has not been easy for women, without the enabling presence of an insistent social or cultural anxiety, to address either these practices or the faith that inform them.

Perhaps, it is also the case that the one tradition of critique which did address religion in the Tamil country, both in its quotidian as well as ideological and symbolical forms, has failed to attract the attention and interest of women. For a complex of reasons, the Self-Respect critique of religion and its defence of a creative and self-conscious atheism has all but disappeared from the Tamil public sphere. The radical Self-Respect agenda with respect to gender and women's rights has become a historical memory, something which provokes nostalgia and serves well those who wish to claim for the Self-Respect movement its rightful historical legacy. It is in this context of a troubled and, it seems to me, a problematic silence with respect to questions of faiths and gender that I wish to recall into this narrative, the Self-Respect movement's observations on gender and religion.

The Past as Witness

Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement's understanding and critique of religion were fashioned in the tumult of Gandhian and nationalist politics, rather, in response to that curious mixture of politics and piety embodied in Gandhi's thought, which, in several instances, directed and influenced the political practice of the Indian National Congress.⁴ Any consid-

4. This is oft-repeated theme in S.V. Rajadurai and V.Geetha, *Periyar: Suyamariyathai Samadharna, Vidiyal Padipagam, Coimbatore, 1996.*

eration of the Self-Respect movement's attitudes to religion has to, necessarily, take into account the exact nature and range of the differences which existed between Gandhism and the philosophy of Self-Respect.

Where Gandhi looked to an abiding and deeply felt religious faith, experienced by him, at least, as an ineffable inner voice, an instruction from a morally sensitive conscience, to sustain political and social activism, Periyar trusted to Reason. Defined by him as an intelligence which sought to splice apart and critically examine all sorts of phenomena, this Reason existed in his lexicon as an adjunct of a fearless, questioning self; a self which was determined to claim its autonomy and dignity in a society which, for centuries, had subjected it to the brahmin's cunning power, divisions of caste and to notions of intellectual and ethical lowliness. Describing his epistemology, as it were, Periyar once observed that he had always tried to go beyond appearances to get at the truth behind phenomena. As far as he was concerned, it was his power of rationality which helped him do this (V.Anaimuthu, 1974: 2009).⁵ It was for this reason that Periyar praised and upheld the example set by the Buddha. He remarked that the Buddha had counselled men to use their minds and follow the dictates of their intelligence. He had also asked men to exercise their freedom to reject what their rational minds could not comprehend or accept, such as Heaven, Hell, Salvation, and differences between human beings, such as brahmin, shudra and panchama (Anaimuthu, 307). The Buddha's creed seemed particularly significant to Periyar, given the context of caste Hindu society where any and every act and thought and speech was camouflaged in the deceptive and alluring language of faith.

Thus, what was 'truth' to Gandhi, directing him to offer satyagraha in various instances was sophistry to Periyar: for, as he observed, the "truths" which the Mahatma claimed for his own cannot be considered given and universal. For Periyar, truth was essentially relative and subjective and he did not imagine that there existed a surefire test that would help one ascertain what was truth and what was not in any given instance. The "triumph of truth" Periyar argued, represented, more often than not, a triumph of cunning and authority. For one was as likely to submit to a regimen of truth, as to be convinced of it. For his own ideas, Periyar made no absolute claims and insisted they were to be accepted or discarded by subjecting them to

All quotations and paraphrases from Periyar's writings and speeches, unless stated otherwise, are from V.Anaimuthu, Periyar E Ve Ra. Sinthanaikal (Thoughts of Periyar) in 3 volumes, Sinthanaiyalar Kazhagam, Tiruchirapalli, 1974. The numbers in brackets refer to page numbers.

rational and critical scrutiny at various moments in time. If Gandhi rested his "truth" in a transcendence he believed to exist, Periyar refused to rest his arguments in anything, but the claims of the oppressed in the here and now (Kudi Arasu, 6.9.31).

Where Gandhi demanded penitence and sacrifice, as for example, with the practice of untouchability, and insisted that only a morally active and repentant self can bring about social reform, Periyar advocated resistance and struggle, often urging his self-respects to bring to the fore, those antagonisms and contradictions in caste society and act on them. Where Gandhi communicated through complex metaphors drawn from the language of faith and devotion, appealing to the meditative self, Periyar spoke as a pedagogue, a teacher, who sought to expound ideas and encourage discussion, debate and dialogue. Periyar was given to concluding his addresses with an entreaty: his listeners were to think through whatever they had heard at the meeting and decide for themselves if there was reason and justice in the things which had been told them.

Where Gandhi looked to Tolstoy, the righteous prophet, Periyar invoked Socrates; to the ashram with its experiments in truth, was counterpoised the agora, that public and civic space to which all manner of people could claim access and rights. The Self-Respect Movements in fact caused the agora to come into existence for hundreds of ordinary people; adi dravidas and women not only attended Self-Respect meeting in large numbers, but took part and addressed the movement's several conferences.

Gandhi imaged the socially conscious and active subject of history as a devout upper caste Hindu, essentially noble and pious, who would, of his own volition, surrender his privileges and usher in change, conferring, as it were, equality and Self-Respect on those whom, until recently, he had imposed his logic of difference and exclusion. This subject was to attain his own in history through conscious re-making of his subjectivity through specific acts of penance and sacrifice. He had to discover the untouchable in himself, suffer his indignity as his own and thereby cleanse himself of disgust, prejudice, fear and hatred. Likewise, by spinning, wearing khadi and working with his hands, he was to acknowledge and make his own, the labour and life of the Hindu peasant and weaver. At another level, he was expected to re-examine his sexual identity, since it was a particular deployment of masculinity, premised on desire, its satiation and the eruption of desire again, which forced men to think dark thoughts, bred incontinence in all aspects of life and, thereby, urged them onto unethical action. The brahmacharya vrata, which Gandhi counselled to his male disciples, why

even to Congressmen, rested on a particular vision of femininity: if men were to renounce desire, and forswear the excess and violence which desire propelled into existence, women had to rework the terms of conjugality. They were to transform the passive virtues, conventionally associated with them, patience, sacrifice, rectitude and suffering, into active ones and use them in the cause of the nation. Women, for Gandhi, were the ideal satyagrahis, natural political subjects in the Gandhian narrative of satyagraha. They were not to be bound by their domesticity, but neither were they to discard their duties. In effect, they were to assume responsibility of the nation, as they did for the home and family.

Periyar worked with and through different notions of identity and sexuality. For him the lowest of the low in caste society, adi dravidas and women, were the natural subjects of history. But their emancipation and self-fulfilment in history was possible only if the entire social order of caste was stood on its head. That is, Periyar did not trust to the enabling power of individual consciousness alone to bring about transformation. Consciousness was for him always already collective. Entire communities of the oppressed, all those non brahmin communities which stood shamed and humiliated by Brahminism and caste, and women everywhere, were to create their own history, by responding in anger, in defiance and in unison, in full knowledge of what held in thrall to an unjust social order. On one hand, this meant a renunciation of caste with all its privileges, an abjuring of that religious faith which legitimized caste and a re-making of society along non-hierarchical lines. On the other hand this required a re-making of masculine and feminine subjectivities, so that the much desired Self-Respect, mutuality and freedom Periyar sought out as the defining premises of his utopia, could be grounded in primary human relationships. Thus, reason and critique, desire and freedom, mutuality and reciprocity constellated into a figuration for Periyar, in which could be traced those new structures of feeling he wished to cultivate in his fellow beings. For him, the emergence of social order rested as much on such structures of feelings, as they did on transformed material structures and social relationships.

How did women in the Self-Respect movement interpret and practise this creed of Self-Respect, which required not merely an abjuring of faith but the cultivation of a critical Reason? Reason was interpreted by women to mean an aspect of a probing, curious and active intelligence and one which would enable them unravel the meaning of all those religious rituals, customs and everyday practices which bound them to a life of Un-

knowing and domestic servitude. Reason was to enable them question themselves and reflect on the choices they made, even if these happened to be merely quotidian ones. As Minakshi, as self-respecter and popular columnist in the movement's journals, passionately expostulated in the course of her critique of civil disobedience:

“Sisters, reflect for a moment on the horrors you endure in your day-today life. You borrow money because you wish to observe a custom, practise a ritual, you borrow for a funeral, a pilgrimage ... Consequently, poverty, humiliation, debt, police warrant, mortgage, the misery that visits your children, unbearable sadness and the rebuke of others: one follows the other. Why must you do this? To preserve a convention, an orthodox custom? To appear virtuous in the eyes of others? Do you not realise your [minds] are diseased... stricken with barbarity and afflicted with degenerate rituals...” (Kudi Arasu, 6-3-32).

More generally, women would uphold the claims of Reason against the dictates of faith and religious norms and the rules of tradition. Thus, Ranganayagi Ammal, speaking at the Coimbatore District Self-District Self-Respect Conference, observed with some exasperation that no longer can the orthodox and the learned afford to beguile women by nothing that ‘Ignorance becomes a Woman’; ‘Do not heed a woman’s words’; ‘Silence is a woman’s true adornment’. Women were now ready to claim the powers of reasoning for themselves and were ready to examine not only literary opinions and reflections on women but also inquire into those ill-opinions men held of women (Puratchi, 26.11.33). D.Rangammal writing in Puratchi drew attention to the wastefulness of religious festivals, of the debauchery which accompanies them and of the plight of young women in pilgrimage towns, especially during festival times, when they were teased and near molested by feckless and rude young men (Puratchi, 28-1-34)

Such questioning of religion and faith - and these may be found in all Self-Respect magazines - were enabled and inspired by the Self-Respect Movement's general recklessness and courage with respect to matters of faith. Self-Respecters were critical of all religions and refused to accept that religion and faith could help constitute a viable identity and community. For strategic reasons, and in particular contexts, as when Gandhi and Congress insisted that adi dravidas were also Hindus, Periyar exhorted the lower castes to convert to Islam, and secure their freedom and Self-Respect

in a general Islamic brotherhood. But this was no general policy and at other times, Islam was as much criticised by the self-respecters as other religions. The practice of purdah, for instance, came in for a sustained critique and, significantly enough, Islam's definitions of female identity and freedom were debated vigorously by several Muslims. Aa. Mu. Mohammed Qasim Bhakavi wrote a long article in Puratchi titled, ‘Contraception and the Prophet’ (Puratchi, 24.12.33). Al-Haj Subahu Mo. wrote an impassioned piece titled: ‘Why Did Women Become Slaves? Muslim Women are also Slaves’ (Puratchi, 28.1.33). M.K.M. Khader wrote on how it was absolutely essential that women be liberated, if a socialist republic was to be established (Puratchi, 15-4-34).

Such reasoned denunciations of religion helped constitute religious ideas and practices as legitimate objects of analysis by not merely civil society, but also the State. In fact, the trajectory of the self-respecters' critique of religion traced a curve which led them, inevitably, as it were, to demand that the State intervene in matters of religious custom, when these proved demeaning to women. In such instances, the State appeared to the self-respecters as embodying an intelligence and a rationality, clearly different from and superior to the logic which informed religious rituals and practices. The self-respecters objected to the devadasi system for several interlined reasons. For one, it seemed a deplorable instance of debauchery sanctified by the priest and the temple and rendered hoary by convention. Besides, the fact that devadasis were all inevitably from non brahmin castes and that they were consecrated as temple dancers, in service, not merely to the deity, but to the deity's patrons, be they brahmin priests or men of wealth irked women (as well as men) self-respecters. Then, again, the system presented itself as a desirable vocation, so much so that women who felt “dedicated” into it did not really seem to understand the vicious logic which held them captive. For women self-respecters, religion, caste and the claims of masculine sexuality seemed to exist in a complex and unholy articulation in the figure of the devadasi (Anaimuthu, 170 - 173)

It is not to be wondered at then that women like Ramamrithammal, a devadasi who opted out of the devadasi system and joined the Self-Respect movement, were driven to fair degrees of self-denial and self loathing, as they spoke and wrote against a vocation which was not theirs by choice. Ramamrithammal wrote a novel, *Dasigalin Mosavalai* (The Devadasis' Web of Deceit) (1936), which warns ingenuos, but rich, young men of the lure and power of the *dasi* on one hand, and which reprimands *dasis* for squandering their self worth and their very lives for the love of

lucre. The novel betrays a certain puritanical will to 'cleanse' the diseased devadasi of her powers of seduction and in doing so ends up blaming the victims, as much as the victimiser. Yet the novel makes it clear that within a system which chooses certain women to serve the lust of upper caste and wealthy men, and which sanctifies this choice as a God-given vocation, questions of female desire are inherently problematic: whether one damns the *dasi* or calls attention to her 'autonomy', as some *dasis* did, during this period, not wanting to surrender their rights as '*nityasumangalis*', and their conventional rights to property and ritual rights.

It was because they sensed the problematic nature of desire, rights and freedom, as these were understood and experienced by the devadasi, that self-respecters were convinced the rights of the devadasi cannot be thought through clearly within the confines of a system, which seemed to grant them sexual autonomy but which restricted them to the service of the powerful and wealthy. Thus they wished to do away with the system altogether and constitute these rights in a different context. This context was to be framed by the punitive powers of the State, which the self-respecters were clear, ought to be used to cleanse the body politic of social diseases, as well as by their vision of a new civil and social order (Anaimuthu, 173-76). In other words, the law was to guarantee and enforce rights which were to be grounded in everyday practices, in those new structures of feelings, the self-respecters looked to create and re-create.

Reasoning against faith, and working to build an egalitarian, caste-free society, women self-respecters viewed themselves as the citizens of the future, as harbingers of the millennium. This millennial urge informed the movement's perceptions of itself to a great degree and Periyar and others often proclaimed themselves as revolutionaries who not only wished to stand caste society on its head, but who were doing so, in the knowledge that no one or no movement, since the time of the Buddha had attempted such a thing. For women this millennial imagery translated itself as an invitation to citizenship, to a community of comrades.

It is this invitation to citizenship which seems to hold promise for women who desire to render religion and religious institutions accountable to civil debate and concerns. For it is clear citizenship implies a certain stance, a defined social space from where one may articulate a critique of religion. Besides, in a context, where both civil society and State seem willing to accommodate the claims of religions, the terms of the social contract forged by the citizens of a democratic republic with the State are in danger of being fudged and it is clear that women stand to lose a great

deal if this comes to pass. For, in the absence of such a contract, women may not hope to claim a civil identity and one which would enable them to demand their rights as citizens who are sovereign, not only with respect to the State and civil society, but also with respect to themselves. Women would die a civil death, should the terms of the social contract come to be informed by the tenets of religion. The memory or the Self-Respect movement should help us circumvent and eliminate such a possibility.

PARTITION WIDOWS: *The State as Social Rehabilitator**

*Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin**

With tears in her eyes, a few days ago, a refugee woman went to see Pandit Nehru at his residence. Before India's partition, she belonged to a prosperous family in Pakistan, but now she was homeless, with no money to buy food and no relations to comfort her in her distress: her only hope was her country's Prime Minister.

"I want a job," she pleaded with Panditji. The Prime Minister recommended to the Women's Section of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation that she should be given a sewing machine. In addition, he paid her a sum of Rs.20.

"Almost every day Pandit Nehru receives such appeals and there are hundreds of women in free India with the same tearful demand.

"The Women's Section has opened destitute homes and relief centres for such women, but then there are other problems worse than 'unemployment.' To find a solution for some of them would be a difficult task.

"What shall I do about utensils?" asked a destitute refugee woman who came to the Women's Section the other day. Her son had been shot, her husband murdered and daughter abducted. She did not know where to turn for support. The Officer-in Charge of the Homes for Destitute Women and Children offered to help her.

* Previously published in *Martha A. Chen and Jean Dreze (eds). Widows and Well-being in India (Delhi :Sage Publishing House- 1997)*

"You will have a place to live where you will be provided with utensils and you can cook your meals," said the officer.

"But how shall I cook my meals with these hands," the woman replied weeping, showing her right hand which had been chopped into half during disturbances. The woman is now at one of the Homes for Disabled Persons started by the Women's Section.

"... Employment is another problem. Two types of refugee women come to the Women's Section for jobs. First there are those who are uneducated and in their original homes depended on their husbands for a living. Then there are those who are educated and were working as teachers and nurses in Pakistan. Very few of them could be placed as teachers and nurses, for the scope for such employment is still very limited.

"Uneducated women are being trained in different trades and it is found that the majority of these women prefer the craft of tailoring. The Women's Section has provided them with sewing machines at its different centres, but the number of such machines is too small to cope with the situation.

"There are six relief centres each having 400 women on its roll but the total number of sewing machines at the disposal of each centre is not more than eight. It is believed that more machines could be had if sufficient funds were available. Lack of funds is a great handicap to the Women's Section.

"For children, the Women's Section has schools, the biggest being in Purana Qila, where the number of students is over 400."¹

In 1988, forty years after the partition of India, we found eleven widows still living in the Mahila Ashram in Karnal. They each had a room to live and cook in, and received subsidised rations and a stipend of Rs.100 a month. If they wished, they could continue to do the occasional item of embroidery or tailoring for the ashram and get paid for their labour; if not, they were not obliged to work in order to avail of the ashram's facilities --- as Partition widows, they had a right to stay for the rest of their lives.

The large-scale dislocation of people that took place in 1947 - 48 as a result of the massive exchange of populations in border states of India and Pakistan, also made for a phenomenon without precedent: mass widowhood. As families got separated in the upheaval, and the food-caravans, trains and road convoys were ambushed, men from all communities were slaughtered, leaving thousands of women destitute, homeless and widowed. Many were eventually reunited with their families or claimed by their next-of-kin from camps and homes: but very, very many lived and

worked for years in ashrams and rehabilitation centres, where they brought up their children and strove to attain some kind of social and economic equilibrium.

The scale and incidence of widowhood at that time was so immense -- as was the related task of resettling and rehabilitating refugees -- that it resulted in the Indian government setting up what was to be its first major welfare activity as an independent state: the rehabilitation of what is called "unattached" women. Never before in the country's experience had a sarkar (government) either feudal or colonial, been called upon to take social and economic responsibility for a circumstance as problematic as widowhood: ritually inauspicious, socially stigmatised, traditionally shunned. It is true that the colonial State had been compelled by social reformers to address the issue of widow remarriage and child widows and so intervene in social and cultural practice, but that exercise was qualitatively different from what the Indian State was now called upon to do.

In a note dated December 1949, Rameshwari Nehru stated that the number of "unattached" women looked after by the government in October 1948 was 45,374.² Although not all of these women were widows, a very large percentage of them were; indeed it was the very size of this category that persuaded the government to set up a special section within the Ministry of Rehabilitation to administer to their needs. Rameshwari Nehru, who had been looking after the evacuation of women and children from West Punjab during the worst disturbances, took over as Honorary Director of the Women's Section in November 1947, responsible for the "care, maintenance and rehabilitation of uprooted women and children from Pakistan".

In a sense, the Women's Section of 1947 can be seen as a forerunner of the many government agencies that now exist for the welfare of women and children, for the disabled, for disaster victims and for the destitute. But it had an added, and important, dimension as part of the government's programme of resettlement. Apart from being an immediate and urgent necessity in the aftermath of widespread violence and loss of homes and livelihoods, this rehabilitation was a crucial aspect of the State's perception of itself as benign and paternalistic, and in its definition of itself as socialist, democratic, welfarist --- and secular. Stephen Keller, who did extensive fieldwork among Punjab's refugees in the 1970s has observed that: "In Punjab and other areas of North India, government has always been characterised as mai-baap (mother - father). As such, it is duty-bound to provide a rich, warm, nurturant relationship (the mai part). In times of na-

tional disaster, particularly, the more maternal aspect is emphasised."³

It was obviously such an event that galvanised the government into responding; but having said that, it is worth examining both the conceptual dimension of the project of rehabilitating widows and, its implementation, to arrive at some understanding of how, through government intervention their status underwent some change.

The critical shift that took place was that the widows of 1947 became the responsibility of the State. In acknowledging this, and by stepping in to mediate their reabsorption into the social and economic life of the country, it had, simultaneously, to perform two functions: that of custodian and guardian - *parens patriae* -- in the absence of actual kinsmen; and of an apparently benign, neutral and secular agency which could not be seen to be subscribing to or reinforcing traditional biases against widows. This is not to say that in the course of rehabilitation traditional patriarchal attitudes were suddenly and miraculously found to be absent; nor that taboos regarding the sexuality of widows were not reinforced; merely that the unusual relationship that widows found themselves in with a distant, but deciding, authority made for some uncommon changes in their situation.

Since the widows of 1947 were, ironically, widowed by history -- or, as the government put it, "victims of a struggle that might well be regarded as a war" -- it was proposed they be classed as war widows and treated as such. This particular definition of widows, and of the circumstances of the partition, enabled the government to deal with the crisis as a national emergency, and more importantly, to look upon the widows not as individual women inviting social ostracism, but as a community of hapless survivors to be accorded the same status as other refugees. They were so classified with some important distinctions, however.

In addition to being classified as "war widows" they were further classified as (a) those whose husbands and sons and other breadwinners were killed during the riots, and (b) those who, though "unattached", had relatives alive, who having lost their jobs and possessions were unable to maintain them. These two categories were to be treated differently: the responsibility for the first had to be shouldered by the government for the rest of their lives, while that for the second could extend either until the time they became self-supporting or till their relatives were able to maintain them. Further, those in the first category who were not willing to lead the regulated (read restricted) life of the Homes should be given allowances sufficient to maintain themselves because, it was thought, there would be very few of them.⁴

When the first onrush of destitute women and children poured into the country from West Punjab, there was no single agency that could cope with the urgency of the situation. Voluntary workers of all descriptions -- from Gandhian to missionary, Arya Samaji, the Indian National Army (INA) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) -- organised themselves to assist in any way possible, but most immediately with food, shelter, clothing and medical aid. The government itself encouraged such assistance in particular (and predictably) from the All India Women's Conference, the YWCA and the Gandhians.

The Congress appointed a Central Relief Committee (with Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani as Secretary) and a United Council for Relief and Welfare (with Lady Mountbatten as Chairperson). These associations operated in various refugee camps and relief centres and cooperated with the government in setting up schools, hospitals, and production and training centres. In September 1947 the government appointed a small advisory committee of women social workers, attached to the Ministry of Rehabilitation to direct the programme - this was the Women's Section.

In the initial stages, the purview of the Women's Section extended to the whole country but it found its time and energies taken up primarily by displaced women in Delhi. Regional organisers were therefore appointed for Bombay, Ahmedabad, Saurashtra and Rajputana to organise work in those areas. But this system proved to be ineffective and it was then felt that work in the states should be handed over to state authorities. Accordingly, at a Conference of Provincial Chief Ministers held in Delhi in July 1948 it was decided that where the number of displaced or destitute women was sufficiently large, separate women's sections should be set up to deal specifically with their rehabilitation.

With this revised policy, it became necessary to bifurcate the functions of the Delhi Women's Section, and in March 1949, the Women's Advisory Section became an integral part of the Ministry of Rehabilitation. It was under the guidance of this Section that the rehabilitation of widows and other displaced women took place. The general pattern was:

- i. the establishment of homes and centres
- ii. programmes of education
- iii. giving orphan children into adoption
- iv. arranging the marriages of young women
- v. financial aid and employment.

"Sometimes when the women got together to bemoan their fate, their crying and wailing were almost unbearable. They would wear red dupattas and sit down and wail in different voices... from Multan, from Muzaffaranagar, Dera Ismail Khan, the Frontier. They cried so bitterly we never knew whether we would be able to sleep in peace."⁵

The eleven widows who still live in the Karnal Mahila Ashram are all mothers of daughters, only. Without husbands and without sons, many of them thought of themselves as being doubly widowed. Rather than live their old age out with their daughters -- despite the extreme and extraordinary course their lives had taken -- and too mindful of the social conventions against prevailing upon the indulgence of sons-in-law, they chose (if one can call it that) to stay on in the ashram. As more than one of them said to us: "Putran waliyan dhar gaiyan, thiyan waliyan mar gaiyan." (Those with sons have been able to settle themselves, those with daughters are as good as dead.) Although, in fact, these widows had brought up their daughters as if they were sons, educated them and sent them out to work, they couldn't actually expect to be looked after by them in the same way as if they had been sons. "Bete vale ghar chaliyan gaiyan" they told us, "beti waliyan ashram vich hi maran giyan."⁶ (The ones with sons, they've gone home, the one with daughters will die in the ashram.)

Widows with sons, saw their plight as temporary. In time, the sons would start earning, get married, even get dowried, perhaps, and things would begin to look up -- and they themselves would at last be able to feel "settled", physically, emotionally, psychologically and hopefully, financially.

In a Report on the work done by the Women's Section from 1947 - 1949, Rameshwari Nehru noted that, "At the very outset the Section realised that rehabilitation is an intricate process and can be achieved only if adequate attention is paid to the psychological, educational and emotional needs of the women. It is of utmost importance to make them self-reliant and self-supporting and restore their sense of dignity and worth." The way to do this, in its view, was to treat them to a course of occupational therapy, to pay attention not only to their physical needs but to "their intellectual and vocational development."⁷

Without wishing to belabour the point or to put too fine a construction on stated intent, we would like to put forward the view that it was such an approach that in fact enabled a large number of widows to be drawn into some form of economically productive activity. Despite the many shortcomings in the actual workings of the rehabilitation programme, especially after the mid-1950s (and indeed, Rameshwari Nehru herself

resigned on a point of principle in 1949) the formal recognition of the fact "the care and maintenance of destitute women is a task in social reconstruction" indicates the second critical shift in conceptualisation - in marked contrast to prevailing practice today, for instance, when they are considered a "liability"

The first endeavour of the Women's Section was to free the widows from economic dependence. It was hoped that, in the long term, specially planned women's settlements would develop, embracing not only the refugees of partition but other categories of destitute women as well. State and Central governments were therefore requested to make available suitable land, open and extensive, near the large cities for this "new experiment": it was a matter of some conviction that, with proper facilities, the women (note that the official documents do not refer to them as widows although the majority of "unattached" women were just that) could be prepared for dairy farming and agriculture and for those "advanced industries which require meticulous training and skill in execution". Underlying this conviction, or experiment, was the hope that they would be absorbed into the economic reconstruction of the country. Renuka Ray, member from West Bengal, made the point in the Legislative Assembly thus: "I want to note some specific points with regard to the rehabilitation of women. I do not think that the establishment of homes where some little occupation is given is enough. In this country there is a very great dearth of women who come forward to be trained in different fields of nation building ... This great tragedy has left thousands of women homeless and alone ... The opportunity should be taken to train (them) to become useful and purposeful citizens. Tinkering with the problem by doing a little here and there will not be sufficient. What is required is a properly planned scheme of vocational training on a long-term basis."⁸

Women with some educational qualifications were offered training in "useful professions" like nursing, midwifery, teaching, stenography, accounts and office management. Those with very little or no literacy could take up the usual embroidery, tailoring, minor handicrafts, and so on, although it was well understood that the scope for economic independence through such skills was quite limited: the market was already glutted with fancy leather work and luxury articles. This excess of produce opened the way to exploitation of women's labour and they were paid ridiculously low wages for their work. But the women's own inclination had also to be considered, and as the Report notes, "despite our best efforts, it was not possible to enlist women's interest in any other work."

Women who were able-bodied and able to do some physical labour were to be settled in what were called "agro-industrial" settlements. It was proposed that the settlements be built up on a few acres of land outside towns and cities, and women be trained in vegetable and dairy farming, oil-pressing, etc. A beginning was made by giving sixty acres of land near Kilokheri to the Kasturba Seva Mandhir. In all the work of training and engaging women in vocational skills, the Women's Section worked with a range of training centres, academic institutions, voluntary and social work organisations including the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the Vocational Training Centres of the Ministry of Labour in Bombay and Delhi, the Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust and Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi. An Employment Bureau was set up, in cooperation with the Employment Exchange of the Labour Ministry for placing women once they were trained. In March 1949, the Report noted that 500 women had secured employment through the Employment Bureau.

III

From an age-wise break-up of 400 widows in the Gandhi Vanitha Ashram in Jalandhar. We learn that the oldest was 70 years and the youngest, 15.⁹ By far the greatest number were in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, many with very young children. Since there is no desegregated data on widows available -- and most of the records of the homes and ashrams in East Punjab are now untraceable -- we have had to rely on verbal accounts and some official documents to get a general impression of their background. Most of the women in homes and ashrams came from urban areas, from petty trade or very small landholding families. By and large, those from rural backgrounds resettled with some male members of their family in India when their land compensation claims came through. Of those who initially came to homes and ashrams from the camps, many were reclaimed by their relatives within a couple of years --- between October 1947 and December 1948, the number dropped from approximately 73,000 to 45,000. Again, not all may have been widows, but a great many were.

Here is Maya Devi's (not her real name) story of her own experience as a young widow with three daughters.¹⁰

"I was 20 or 21 years old when my husband died. I came to Delhi to train -- My own family and my in-laws were still in the camps, my father brought me here. I lived in Western Court for a year. We were two to a

room, which was free, and the government gave us a stipend of Rs.45 a month. There were about 250 of us learning typing, pickle-making, basketry, tailoring --- all kinds of skills were taught. We were all refugees, they didn't accept anyone else.

"There were many like me, young widows, in the hostel ... we cried together, shared our stories, talked till late at night. My daughters, including my youngest who was six months old, stayed with my in-laws. I was apprehensive at the time, not sure about what would happen after the training, whether I would ever get settled.

"After I got my diploma, the government gave me a cheque for Rs.10,000 to start a tailoring shop in Lajpat Nager (the normal capital grant was Rs.3,000 and a sewing machine). I don't know how, but I lost that cheque and had to look for a job. They sent me to Meerut but I didn't stay there --- I didn't like it, there were too many Muslims -- so my father took me to Jalandhar where I started working with Gandhi Vanitha Ashram. I used to teach embroidery. My daughters were still with my mother-in-law.

"In 1950, when the Karnal Ashram was set up I applied for a job there and came away. My in-laws were still in the camp but because I now had a job and a room of my own, my daughters came and started living with me." Maya Devi worked in the Karnal Ashram till she retired from service in the early 1980s.

Maya Devi may not have been the typical rehabilitated partition widow -- or she may have. It's not easy to know. In the course of her working life, she married off her two sisters-in-law, got her share of 12.5 acres of land when their claims were finally settled about six years after Partition. But, according to her, the land never fetched her much of an income: Rs.300 a month sometimes, at other times less. She educated her daughters, built her own house where she now lives and, according to her, never thought of remarrying. We asked her what course her life would have taken had she not been widowed, remained with her husband, perhaps had more children; after a long while she replied: "I think that life would have been more difficult." Her greatest satisfaction, she says, lies in the fact that "maine kisi ke age haath nahin phailaya" - "I asked on one for charity" - not even her own family.

It would be incorrect to hold (perhaps even to expect) that the rehabilitation programme of the Government of India in fact accomplished all it set out to, either in spirit or in letter. In our interviews with women still resident in ashrams in Karnal and Jalandhar, there was enough disquiet to

suggest that, over the years, bureaucracy and budget cuts - and withal, an absence of urgency on the part of new social workers - vitiated much of the spirit that characterised the earlier phase.¹¹ But there was also enough remembrance of things past for them to underline the difference between women like Premvati Thapar, Kamla Mehra, Krishna Thapar and others, and those who followed, for it to merit brief mention in this discussion.

Financial allocations apart, the entire responsibility for implementing the rehabilitation of destitute women was in the hands of women who were not cast in the mould of government employees;¹² rather they were themselves either personally (many had been similarly widowed themselves) politically, or vocationally impelled into a kind of social work that they recognised as being difficult and demanding, and complicated by extraordinary factors. This called for grit and dedication, of course, but it also required an ability to innovate, to be flexible, to use every opportunity to advantage and, if necessary, the conviction to overturn precedent. It is entirely likely (and elsewhere we have discussed this aspect in some detail)¹³ that in the bargain they simultaneously reinforced certain social biases regarding widowhood, remarriage, even women's subordinate status, but we would argue that this has to be seen as a two-way process: of attempting to free women from their disability and destitution through economic sufficiency and imbuing them with a sense of worth, and restoring them to social "acceptability" through a repetition of restrictions on sexuality (permissible only through remarriage if the woman was still in the ashram's charge), interaction with other males, socialisation of children and mobility. But even here, as we were told by many social workers, flexibility was preferred. "Of course we realised that they had their 'needs' and there were those who struck up friendships with men they met outside the ashram. To them we used to say, 'Stay outside the ashram if you insist on continuing your relationship. We'll still give you work but we can't allow this kind of freedom if you're living with us.'"¹⁴

Underlying some of this regulation was an understandable concern that the women would be drawn into prostitution, and a strong desire to provide them with the "security" of a simulated "family" - the female community of the ashram and its overseers. This extended to providing childcare while the women worked or were being trained, special nurturing of those who were more traumatised than others (we were told how, often, such women would move into the ashram superintendent's living quarters till they felt able enough to cope on their own), and so on. At least four social workers told us that, to this day, they receive letters or visits from women

they helped rehabilitate immediately after Partition; and indeed, we met several of the women who spoke warmly of the support and special strength they derived from them.

Those were extraordinary times, and theirs was an extraordinary task, made all the more so by the extreme circumstances surrounding the mass widowhood they had to deal with. The disruption of life and livelihood, post-Partition, made for another more far-reaching disruption as far as the women who were widowed were concerned: loss of family of residence; of community, of social and economic status. But this very disruption meant that ritual and customary sanctions against widows were temporarily suspended, in the absence of family and social constraints, and even though the State stepped in as guardian and pater families to speak, the nature and scale of rehabilitation compelled it to facilitate their re-assimilation into the economic and social mainstream as expeditiously as possible.

There is an appreciable difference in the role played by the State as social rehabilitator of widows in post-Partition India, and what the government sees as its function today, as provider of social security. The critical difference, we suggest, is that earlier, the rehabilitation of widowed was considered to be a necessary part of social reconstruction; whereas later, and currently, it is more akin to handing out a dole, with all its demeaning implications -- implications that its recipients are a burden on the government and society. The widows have to, therefore, "prove" their worthiness to receive the minimum social security offered by both. In an ironic reversal the State today re-stigmatises through an approach that tacitly endorses traditional patriarchal attitudes towards widows and their dependence on male support. The post-Partition State, by contrast, facilitated their entry into the economic mainstream and into dignified self-hood."

Notes

1. -Hitavada, 22 May, 1948.
2. Rameshwari Nehru Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
3. Keller, Stephen (1975) Uprooting and Social Change (Delhi: Manohar Book Service).
4. Rameshwari Nehru Papers, Op. cit.
5. Personal conversation with a woman social worker in charge of the Karnal Mahila Ashram (Haryana) for over twenty years.
6. Personal interviews.
7. Report of the Women's Section, Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, 1947-49.
8. Constituent Assembly Debates (March 1948) 3 (5) Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
9. Records of the Punjab Government, Dept. of Social Welfare.
10. Personal interview.
11. See for instance the report by the People's Union for Democratic Rights on refugee women workers in Delhi, Sudda Hak, Ethey Rakh (Delhi: 1989) which details the situation in the Union Territory of Delhi.

12. In Delhi, the executive authority was vested in the Honorary Director who was free to develop her work as she chose. In Bombay the work was carried out by a women's committee of honorary members who had executive powers and worked under the Rehabilitation Department of the state government. The same was true of U.P. and West Bengal; only in East Punjab was the Director of the Women's Section a regular salaried official of the state government. At the Centre, Rameshwari Nehru, Begum Anis Kidwai, Mridula Sarabhai, Sucheta Kripalani, Mrs. John Mathai, Hannah Sen, Raksha Sen and many others, all worked in an honorary capacity with executive authority.
13. "Her Body and Her Being: The Dispute over Abducted Women in Post-Partition India", Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds.), Borders of Being (forthcoming).
14. Personal interview.

Practice of Transformative Politics¹

*Rounaq Jehan**

With what qualities are women entering into the political arena and public life in a world where politics has been characterized by ills such as corruption, nepotism, dishonesty, sectarianism? Are women coming in to endorse and fit in the system or we are coming in with human qualities such as kindness, love, sympathy, peace, reconciliation, which have been lacking all this time especially in Africa? Only when politics is played differently shall we show that society has been missing women's participation all along. Women should come in politics and public offices to clean them, to bring "light" in those otherwise "dark" fora. Women's entry into politics and public life should bring a ray of hope for the people. Otherwise our entry will be in vain.

(Miria Matembe, Member of Parliament, Constituent Assembly, Uganda, Plenary Session on **Governance, Citizenship and Political Participation**, NGO Forum, Huairou, China, September 3, 1995).

Whenever women from different parts of the world gather in conferences and describe their struggles to gain a voice in governance, they insist that they stand for not simply gender parity in numbers, more significantly through participation they want to bring to the forefront a dif-

¹ *This paper is based on the author's forthcoming book on Democratic Governance and Political Participation: A Gendered Perspective to be published by Zed Books in 1998.*

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ferent sets of concerns - a more humane and people centered agenda and a different way of doing business. For the feminists, particularly those from the South, the vision of equality and transformation go hand in hand.

From the beginning, there has been a consistently clear message from the women's movement: women want equality in numbers, in power and in responsibility. But they want to use power differently. They want to transform the agenda, values, process and institutions. Women's movements has always insisted on transforming politics as we know it because the movement believes that true social transformation can only be brought about when all power relations are transformed.

While the feminist vision of political transformation has been articulated in different fora including the previous congresses of Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), the examples of actual practices of transformative politics are less well known. This paper will attempt to provide a few examples of practices of transformative politics not so much as definitive case studies as points of departures for debate and discussion in the workshops. The paper is divided in six parts. Following the introduction, Section two gives a brief historical overview of transformative politics, theory and practices. Section three describes the key elements of the feminist vision of transformative politics. Section four provides a few recent examples of transformative politics form different countries. Section 5 argues how the Beijing '95 process can be viewed as an example of practice of transformative politics. Section 6 is the conclusion which lists a few key issues for debate in the workshops.

1. Transformative Politics: Theory and Practice

The term "politics" has been variously defined by English language dictionaries. For example, Webster's New International Dictionary defines politics as "the total complex of interacting and usually conflicting relations between men living in society!"¹ the relation between men usually concerned with governing or with influencing or winning and holding control over a government... the relations between leaders and nonleaders. Politics is also defined as "as the art or science of government: a science dealing with the regulation and control of men living in society." In all definitions of politics several key words appear: power, control, regulations, and rules. While politics in the sense of art of governance has traditionally involved hierarchical relations -- rulers and ruled -- and use of force, deceit, manipu-

lation, corruption, a la Machiavelli or Kautileya, for centuries Philosophers and social reformers have also envisioned other types of politics --a transformed politics and polity -- which are more egalitarian and participatory. From the ancient Chinese, Indian and Greek political philosophers down to the modern ones, the well known proponents of both traditional and transformative politics have all been men. The visions of both traditional and transformation upto now have been provided by men. Women's vision of politics or the roles women might have played in the creation of these primarily male articulated visions is not yet known.

In different periods of history socialism as an ideology as well as a practice has been a consistent feature of the vision political transformation. From Plato to Marx, political philosophers envisioned socialist utopias. And though socialist communities in the earlier centuries were short lived, the twentieth century saw large scale experimentation with socialism in various states from the social democratic states of Europe to the communist states in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Socialism as an ideology as well as socialist states also took some deliberate positions on the role of women in society and politics. I am singling out 'socialism' as an example of transformative politics because other ideologies that transformed politics over the centuries e.g. nationalism and liberal democracy were generally silent on the role of women. Socialist ideology in contrast put out a more egalitarian vision of public life and called for women's emancipation as a distinct strategy of social transformation.

In theory, socialism stood for equality between men and women. Socialist movements and socialist states demand greater public role for women. Socialist states created greater opportunities for women in education and employment and expanded women's roles in public spheres. But while socialist states greatly expanded women's economic roles, they (with the exception of democratic socialist states of Nordic countries) did not emphasize the transformation of gender relations. When the socialist states collapsed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe it was relatively early to push back women from representative public life such as from parliament. The artificial gains women made in representative institutions due to women's quota evaporated when the quota system was withdrawn. Indeed, worldwide there was an approximately twenty-five percent decline in the number of women parliamentarians due largely to the demise of the socialist system in the Eastern bloc countries!

The records of the two other great ideologies of political transformation e.g. nationalism and democracy are even more dismal. In the nationalist struggle against colonialism, women were recruited to join as foot soldiers. Many women played key roles, particularly in countries which underwent armed struggles. But after the independence was won and colonial power was thrown out, women were often asked to get back to their "female" roles. The recognition and reward given to Jamilia, the world renowned Algerian revolutionary leader, by the Algerian state e.g. awarding her the sole contract for a cosmetic company is a case in point.

In many countries of Asia which saw prolonged nationalist movements to overthrow colonial masters, women were drawn in massive numbers both in peaceful resistance movements and armed struggles. Yet after independence was won, the post colonial states did very little to push for gender equality in public life. What is worse, the nationalist ideology in many states in recent years (especially India and Iran) have turned more extremist and reactionary defining women's place in society in a more restrictive way. Thus, while nationalist movements created a space for women in public life, when the movements achieved their goals women's space was again restricted.

The practice of liberal democracy for a long time completely ignored women's role. For centuries, liberal democracies of Europe did not recognize women as citizens and denied them the right to vote. Women gained equal voting rights only in the early part of this century as a result of their own suffrage movements. But even after half a century of gaining voting rights and being more than half of the electorate, women's representation in parliament in liberal democracies (with the exception of Nordic countries) remains at less than ten percent. In recent years in the democracy movements of many Asian countries, e.g. The Philippines, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, Women's organizations played a very important role. But after the overthrow of the military rulers, when democracy was institutionalized, women gained very little voice in representative institutions. Interestingly enough in all three countries, democracy movements were led by women - Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wazed in Bangladesh - but they were all catapulted to leadership positions by their dynastic connection with a slain male leader. The fact that these women led the democracy movements did not make much of an impact on the general state of women's participation

in decision making positions in these countries; nor were these women able to transform political processes, values and institutions. They succeeded in politics by playing with the traditional rules of the game.

The disillusionment of the women's movement with three great ideologies of our times - nationalism, democracy and socialism - explains why the movement felt so strongly that it needed to articulate its vision of political transformation. In the initial years women's movements and organisations emphasized elaboration of the vision because it was felt that the movement needed to first shape the vision; strategies and practice would follow once the vision is clarified and catches the imagination of the women. One of the early articulations of women's vision of political transformation can be found in the 1985 pre-Nairobi writings of a Southern Women's Network.

We want a world where inequality based on class, gender, and race is absent from every country, and from the relationships among countries. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships. In such a world women's reproductive role will be redefined: child care will be shared by men, women and society as a whole. We want a world where the massive resources now used in the production of the means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home... We want a world where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and decisions... Only by sharpening the links between equality, development and peace, can we show that the 'basic rights' of the poor and the transformation of the institutions that subordinate women are inextricably linked. They can be achieved together through the self-empowerment of women. (Sen and Grown, 1987: 80,82)²

A more recent articulation of women's vision of political transformation can be found in CAPWIP's vision statement:

"The Asia-Pacific women's new Paradigm for change in the 21st century...

Politics that is both TRANSFORMED and TRANSFORMATIONAL

TRANSFORMED because...

It uses power to create change, to develop people, and to build communities;

It is non-hierarchical and participatory in its structures and processes; and

It accords priority to the disadvantaged sectors, such as the poor grassroots women in rural and urban areas and indigenous women;

TRANSFORMATIONAL because...

It is development-oriented, issue based and gender responsive;

It seeks economic, social and political equity between sexes and among sectors; and

It builds a society that is just and humane, and a way of life that is sustainable.

The women of Asia-Pacific region will create a system of politics that is holistic, integrated, and life enhancing in its perspective."

2. Transformative Politics: A Gendered Perspective

The feminist vision of transformative politics highlights gender equality as well as transformation of existing values, process and institutions (See Box 1). In this feminist vision there are some distinct North/South differences in perspective and priorities dictated by the differences in their political contexts.

Box 1

The Feminist Vision of Transformative Politics

1. Equality

- a. gender parity
- b. gender balance
- c. shared power and responsibility

2. Transformed values

- a. equality and equity
- b. peace
- c. sustainability
- d. service
- e. sharing
- f. caring

3. Transformed processes

- a. participatory
- b. empowering
- c. transparent
- d. non-corrupt

4. Transformed Institutions

- a. egalitarian
- b. responsive
- c. accountable

Women from the Northern countries, which already have functioning democracies, focus on gender equality and transformation of gender relations. They prioritize an equality dimension—equality between men and women in rights and opportunities and in power and responsibilities. Their vision of transformation highlights changing male roles and eliminating

gender specific violence. On the other hand, women from the Southern countries, which have only recently taken faltering steps at democratization, highlight a broader vision of transformation. Their concept of equality include not only gender relations but also North-South and class and race relations. They articulate the vision of not simply eliminating gender specific violence, but also other forms of violence: war, exploitation and so on. They argue that as women gain power they need to use it "not as an instrument of dominance and exclusion as it has been used so far, but as an instrument of liberation and equality."³

The equality dimension is articulated in different ways. Some emphasize gender parity-50-50 representation of men and women in decision making. Others, including the Beijing Platform for Action, refer to "gender balance" without specifying a numerical target. Still others propose the Nordic formula of no more than 40 percent of either sex as an example of gender balance.

The transformation dimension is also conceptualized in multi-dimensional ways. It is argued that the dominant political values, processes, and institutions need to be changed. For example, transformation of values would mean a shift from power as domination to power as liberation; from war and conflict to peace; from efficiency considerations to equality and equity; from growth to sustainability; and from "winner take it all" norms to sharing and caring. Transforming processes of governance implies for example, changing them from being hierarchical to participatory; from corrupt to clean; from secretive to transparent; and from burdensome to being empowering. Similarly transformation of institutions is visualized from being top down and bureaucratic to becoming egalitarian, responsive and accountable.

The following two statements from two leading women activists of the North and South describe the key elements of the Northern and Southern vision of transformative politics. (Box 2).

Box 2: Different Visions of Equality and Transformation

"Equal opportunities in Sweden means:

1. An equal distribution of power and influence between women and men.
2. The same possibility for women and men to achieve economic independence.

3. Care for children and home.
4. Equal access for girls and boys, women and men, to education, including the same opportunities to develop personal ambitions, interest and talents."

(Anita Amlen, Head of NGO office, Sweden, Plenary on Governance Citizenship, and Political Participation, NGO Forum, Huairou, China, September 3, 1997).

"We want to use power to transform in the sense that certain issues and values, such as education, peace, social justice, equality, health, became dominant topics of the political agenda-we are... (achieving) power not only by supporting women to take leadership in the existing power instruments, but also, and mainly, trying to transform them. Yes, we want to break the ghetto and bring the gender perspective issues to all voices."

(Jacqueline Pitanguay, Plenary Session on Governance, Citizenship and Political Participation, NGO Forum, Huairou, China, September 3, 1995).

3. Practice of Transformative Politics

Over the years women have identified numerous strategies for initiating political transformation. The strategies for gaining equality particularly closing the gender gap in numbers are much more well defined. Some of these strategies have already been put into practice and demonstrated results. Other strategies for transformation particularly changing values, processes and institution are less clear and their practices are much less frequent. In this section I shall attempt to give a few examples of practice of transformative politics ranging from changing numbers to more qualitative aspects of transformation such as transforming political agenda and changing power relations at the household level.

3.1 Transforming Representative Institutions : Increasing Women's Numbers

In the last twenty years a series of strategies had been devised and

put into practice to close the gender gap in numbers in representative institutions and other decision making bodies. (Box 3).

**STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING GENDER GAP IN
REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS**

- a. Mandate and affirmative actions
- b. Constitutional and legal reforms
- c. Electoral reforms
- d. Increasing pool of women candidates
- e. Support for women seeking political office
- f. funds for women
- g. Constituency building
- h. Policy reforms
- i. Regular monitoring of progress through presentation of gender desegregated statistics
- j. Gender sensitization and awareness raising
- k. role model and visibility at all levels
- l. Training
- m. Positive portrayal of women
- n. Challenging gender segregation

Mandates and affirmative action such as quotas, targets and time table were used in the Nordic countries to increase women's representation in political and administrative decision making bodies. Political parties and trade unions followed a gender-balanced approach in nominating candidates for elective offices. In national parliament and cabinets, women's representation is now over 30 percent in the Nordic countries.

In North America, too, affirmative action was used effectively to increase women's share of administrative and managerial positions (approximately 40%) though it was less successful in increasing women's share of elected political offices (less than 20 percent). In some of the Asian, African and Latin American countries, women's quota was used to ensure at least a minimum level of women's numbers in representative and decision making bodies. Quota was used as an upward ceiling and not as a

moving target using a time bound framework as was done in the Nordic countries.

Electoral reforms, particularly introduction of proportional representation, which generally favour greater representation of women has been an effective strategy, particularly in the Nordic countries.

A series of other strategies have been used to increase the number of women in elective bodies e.g., increasing and expanding rosters of women candidates interested in running for offices; establishing campaign, funds for women candidates; organizational support in campaign, support for building agenda, media contact, and projection; leadership training, and so on. Nordic countries also used gender desegregated statistics to push for steady progress for women. Gender desegregated statistics on decision making bodies at all levels is presented annually too national parliaments for public scrutiny and debate.

3.2 Transforming Agenda

In the last twenty years, women's movements in most countries have achieved some degree of success in promoting their agenda and changing the mainstream mindset and priorities. The most effective strategy was sustained advocacy of women's concerns and feminist visions at all levels and with all institutions, public as well as private. In many countries, women's organisations adopted advocacy work as the primary tool to influence and change the mainstream agenda. Advocacy was done through a variety of means: research, publication, gender desegregated data and statistics, experimental projects, media, training, lobbying and so on.

Networking and alliance building within and outside the government was another effective strategy for influencing and changing agenda. Women's groups not only networked among themselves locally, nationally and internationally; they also networked with other civic political organisations e.g., political parties, trade unions, professional organisations, advocacy groups and so on to get support for women's agenda. Feminists working outside government bureaucracies networked and built alliances with feminists working inside to build common cause coalitions around issues and worked in a mutually supportive way. Networking and alliance building had a tremendous multiplier effect on the promotion of women's agenda. By networking with other civic organisations e.g., human rights, environment, peace, indigenous people and so on, women's organisations were successful in building their concerns into other organisations' agenda.

Lobbying was another effective strategy. Women's organisations learnt to use critical periods to lobby different organisations. For example, during election year e.g., Sweden and during democratization or national liberation movement e.g., Brazil and South Africa, political parties were lobbied to include women's concerns in party platforms. Similarly, during the formulation of national five years plans e.g., the Philippines, or preparations of national reports on UN conferences, governments were lobbied to include women's concerns into their plans and documents. Women also started using national, regional and international conferences to advocate their concerns and influence the conference agenda. Women's organisations and networks were particularly effective in the 1990s in lobbying the international conference starting from the Environment Conference in 1992, followed by the Human Rights Conference in 1993, Population Conference in 1994, and the Social Summit in 1995.

Brazil is often cited by the feminists as a good example where women through their participation in the democracy movements in the 1970s and 1980s were able to transform the political agenda of the resistance against dictatorship. To quote one of the leaders of the women's movement in Brazil:

Besides direct access to institutional power, one of the most powerful strategies used by women to influence the political sphere has been and still is by changing the political agenda... in Brazil from the 70s till the 80's that was the main strategy of the women's movement... give visibility to issues that had been considered non-existent, unimportant or even ridiculous by the establishment and forcing (them) into political platforms and executive organs... in the 80's we have gone through a time of forging public policies.⁴

In the 1970s and 1980s through their participation in the democracy movement, Brazilian women were able to transform the political agenda of the resistance against dictatorship. As part of the larger democracy movement against dictatorship women denounced state violence but also brought domestic violence to the political agenda enlarging the concept of peace. Women protested against social inequalities and the injustice of the social class structure but at the same time they voiced their stand against other inequalities resulting from gender, race and sexual orientation. They enlarged the concept of rights placing social rights in the centre and also bringing up health, reproductive and sexual rights as key elements of women's rights.

3.3 Transforming Institutions

Sharing power and responsibilities at the household level including domestic work has long been regarded as a significant step towards social and political transformation. In the last two decades gender relations have changed in some countries more than in others. In the Nordic countries, for example, public policy interventions such as flexitime for work for both men and women, paternity leave for men to rear children, leave for husbands to join wives employed abroad etc. have helped in greater sharing of power and responsibilities within the household. This greater sharing of power within the household in turn has contributed to greater sharing of power and responsibilities in the public domain. Nordic countries constitute the only region where in the last two decades a steady progress has been made in women's political participation measured by their share of seats in national parliaments (nearly 35 percent) and national cabinets (over 30 percent). In other regions of the world, public policy intervention in support of increasing male role in domestic work has been lacking. In the last two decades in most countries women's roles and responsibilities outside the domestic sphere has increased tremendously without corresponding increase in male responsibilities in domestic work. This has led to unequal burden sharing. Lack of time has often been cited by women as a major obstacle to participation. However, even in countries where gender relations have not on the whole undergone significant changes, there are examples of micro level initiatives where there are greater sharing of power and responsibilities within the household. For example in Bangladesh where generally men do not share in domestic work *Banchte Shekha* a non government organisation succeeded in changing the patterns of traditional division of gender roles and relations among its members. In many of the villages where *Bachte Shekha* is active, when women are engaged in income earning activities men participate in domestic work such as cooking, child rearing etc.

The last decades have also seen transformation of civil society organisations in many countries, particularly those where representative civilian governments have only recently assumed power e.g. Brazil, Uganda, Cambodia and South Africa. Many of these countries are still marked by deep social inequality based on race, class and gender. There are examples of trade unions and grass roots NGO in these countries which have worked successfully to address the root causes of inequality and inequity. The tools

used to empower the marginalized groups include awareness raising, social cohesion through mobilization and finally social action.

3.4 Transforming Processes

Women have identified a series of strategies to transform processes of governance. Open forums are found to be effective in creating a transparent and participatory process. Inclusiveness and diversity are other effective steps in democratizing processes. Discrimination is difficult when governance processes are open, inclusive and participatory. Linking the micro with the macro, the grassroots and the national levels is another effective strategy for changing the governance process. The prevailing top down, hierarchical, political administrative decision making process is viewed as contrary to institutional processes by making them inclusive and participatory and appointing grassroots women to top levels of decision making. The statements of two feminists from the North and South at the NGO Forum (Box 4) provide excellent examples of how processes can be transformed.

Box 4: Strategies for Changing Processes

What we have learnt is that the electoral lists that are shown to the voters there are more women on these lists, (those) that are not shown to the public there are a big difference in women's representations".

(Anita Amlen, NGO Network, Sweden, Plenary on Governance, Citizenship and Political Participation, Huairou, China, September 3 1995)

In all our consultations and training programs we explicitly required of ourselves to listen.. to foster the spirit of openness that breeds respect and friendship among the participants; and an attitude of faithfulness to the participatory process that made all our encounters both consultative, inclusive, educational and in spite of the dissonance, created fun. Result: people love to come to our exchange and training programs and they become allies in what we would like to see happen in their agencies".

(Remedis Iqnacio-Rikken, former head, national machinery, Philippines, Plenary on Institutional and Financial Arrangements, Huairou, China, September 3, 1995)

4. THE BEIJING 1995 PROCESS, MARKER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

The preparatory processes leading to the fourth World conference on women which is also known as "The Beijing Process" inspired women's visions of democratic participation and demonstrated how global civil society could create global democratic governance. What are the major characteristics of the "Beijing Process"? The Beijing Process was deliberately conceptualized to link the grassroots voices with the national and international agenda. Careful considerations were given to establish consultative mechanisms from the grassroots to the international levels for both the government and non-government sectors. The government and non-government processes and outputs were conceived as interactive, which facilitated cross-fertilization of grassroots, national, regional and international perspectives. At each stage of the FWCW preparations, emphasis was placed on participatory planning consultation, open process, and consensus building. More than any other previous world conference, FWCW preparations were used to create an inclusive global network. Diversity was clearly recognised as a strength and not a weakness of the movement. Diversity of voices were deliberately sought to enrich the visions of the Platform for Action.

In 1990, the UN General Assembly called for the holding of the FWCW in 1995, and requested the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to start the preparatory activities. This set off, world over in communities, countries and regions intense activities, most of it voluntary, designed to bring women's, particularly grassroots women's perspective into the international development agenda and also to bring the international agenda closer to the grassroots women. The motto adopted by the NGO Forum of FWCW '95 was "look at the world through women's eyes", and indeed through the preparatory processes women were able to turn the FWCW from a world women's conference to a women's conference on the world.

The women's movement in different countries were determined to use the preparations for FWCW to achieve two broad objectives: widen and strengthen their political constituencies through mobilization of networks at all levels; and consolidate the gains women have made in the last twenty years, particularly in the last several international conferences - Environment '92, Human Rights '93, Population '94 and Social Summit '95. The slogan of the women's movements was to link the grassroots to na-

tional, and international levels and to link the agenda of all previous conferences. To achieve the first objective, women's movements started forming Beijing preparatory committees at all levels grassroots, national, regional and international. These committees tried to pull together diverse women's groups under a broad inclusive umbrella. Numerous workshops and conferences were organised at the grassroots, national, subregional, regional and international levels to assess progress, identify obstacles, and highlight future priorities. The preparatory processes were decentralized - each level was encouraged to draw their own action plans depending on their own contexts; but at the same time attempt was made to build common ground around key issues and bring the voices of grassroots women to the other levels and vice versa. For the first time, NGOs organized parallel conferences and action plans at all levels - grassroots, national, regional and international.

The official preparatory process started later than the NGO preparations. But the official level preparatory activities were also marked by unprecedented openness to the NGOs. Official national preparatory committees and national delegations to the conferences generally included NGO members. For the first time, in all five regions of the world, NGO conferences were organised before the official meetings of the regional commissions. A record number of new NGOs were given accreditation to the official conference. These new NGOs and networks, established in the post-Nairobi decade, built pressure on the established NGOs as well as the UN system to democratize the preparatory process. As a result, a whole group of new actors were able to get entry into the lobbying processes over the official plan documents in the national, regional and international levels.

To achieve the second objective of consolidating women's gains in the previous world conferences, issues based networks e.g., population and reproductive health, human rights, environment, peace, economic justice and so on, started alliance building across networks. They also started to lobby the preparatory processes of the official conferences e.g., regional ministerial and preparatory committee (Prepcom) meetings. Many women's group and networks were given training in lobby strategies and tactics. As a result, the language of official documents, negotiations over languages, and the processes and procedures of official conferences were demystified.

The inclusive, participatory, democratic preparatory process, in the end, helped to save the day for the FWCW. In the last six months before the FWCW '95, when the official conference as well as parallel NGO Forum suddenly started to face serious challenges e.g., bracketing of nearly half of

the Platform document in the last preparatory committee meeting in March '95, the shifting of the NGO Forum site from Beijing to Huairou in April, the uncertainties about visa and hotel facilities for all the 40,000 registered NGOs, and so on, women's groups and networks from around the world were able to quickly mobilize protests and actions to counter the attempts to divert the momentum of the conference. Such rapid response was possible only because the "Beijing Process" had by 1995 succeeded in building a strong constituency in each country behind the conference. After nearly two years of mobilization, consultation, and lobbying, women all over the world were committed to have a successful conference. Any attempt to roll back was not going to be tolerated by them.

The success of the FWCW '95 and the NGO Forum, in the face of tremendous obstacles, thus, has to be explained by the democratic principles and practices of the Beijing process. For example, by making participation open and not depending on invitation - anybody could register by paying \$50 upto April '95 - the NGO Forum was able to attract the largest gathering of women. Forty thousand women registered and little over 30,000 participated. NGO Forum also emphasized representation of diversity - ethnic minorities, peasants, indigenous women, disabled, elderly, youth and so on. The numbers and the diversity, especially the presence of youth, demonstrated the strength and the vitality of the women's movement. Similarly, the official conference, by opening up the NGO accreditation process from the traditional CONGO members to the non-CONGO, enabled hundreds of new networks, based in the countries and regions, to participate and lobby the conference. The successful negotiations over the contested issues and language of the conference document within the relatively short period of ten days of the conference was made possible by the presence of the NGOs in the country delegations as well as the lobbying of the NGOs presence at the FWCW. During the conference nearly one hundred different issue based and regional caucuses met every day to strategise and lobby and they all grouped together under one umbrella - Equipo - to consolidate their efforts. Most of the brackets were lifted from the Platform document as a result of NGO pressure. The participatory preparatory process finally bore fruit.

4.2 Contestation, Negotiation, Compromise

The FWCW '95 was, in many ways, a primer for the women's movement about global democratic governance. Prior to the conference, women's

groups and networks successfully built pressure on the governments and international organisations to open the preparatory processes for NGO participation. Once given the opportunity, the NGOs utilized their participation effectively to influence the official agenda. The NGO community also democratized themselves. The new NGOs and Southern based NGOs and networks successfully pressurized established Northern based NGOs to open the doors of the so-called international networks, which were controlled by the latter. This push for democratization and wider participation involved intense contestation amongst women's groups and networks. There were ideological differences and differences in perspectives and priorities. In many cases, it was a struggle over power and control.

The process of contestation also involved intense negotiations over differences to find common ground and identify the non-negotiable issues. There were negotiations amongst women's groups to build common cause coalitions. There were also negotiations between the women's networks on the one hand and the governments and the international agencies on the other. The negotiations often resulted in compromises and mutual give and take. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which was adopted by consensus, was in the final analysis a result of contestation, negotiation and compromise. Unlike many other UN conference documents, which are generally prepared by a few UN officials and consultants, the Platform for Action was formulated through a wide ranging participatory process. It was the outcome of innumerable local level grassroots workshops, national seminars, sub-regional forums, five ministerial level regional group meetings and various informal consultations. The consultative processes were time consuming and often generated conflicts. But through contestation and negotiations the women's movements succeeded in exerting ownership over the Platform document.

5. Conclusion

A number of issues emerge from the above analysis that need further debate and discussion.

A. How useful are binary categories in the real world?

Binary categories such as "transactional/transformational" politics is a good analytical tool for clarifying concepts. But in the real world often it is difficult to find pure ideal types of transactional or transformational politics. Transactional politics may have elements of transformational and vice versa. For example, a political movement may start as transformational i.e. the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, but later when the movement achieves state power it turns transactional.

B. Will Increase in Women's numbers in decision making help transformation?

Whether a quantitative increase in women's numbers would help transformation has always been a debated issue. Some have argued that a greater increase in numbers would not contribute to transformation-others have argued that unless women are present at a critical mass level i.e. 30 percent or more, it would be difficult to push women's agenda. Numbers are important but what needs to happen is simultaneous strengthening of women's constituency and agenda. Without the latter a greater increase in numbers would create a situation like Bangladesh where for 25 years a reserved quota ensured women's presence in parliament but they never took any autonomous proactive stance on behalf of women.

C. Women as leaders of democracy movements

As noted earlier many of the women leaders of Asia e.g. Mrs. Aquino in the Philippines, Mrs. Bhutto in Pakistan came to power at the behest of democracy movements and though they practised "transactional politics" at least they remained loyal to maintaining democratic forms of government. Many of these leaders e.g. Benazir Bhutto and Khaleda Zia demonstrated a personal trait of autocratic behaviour but they submitted themselves to democratic means of change of governments e.g. elections. The commitment of women political leaders to democracy even when they are involved in transactional politics needs to be further discussed.

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1. look at page 1.
2. Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crisis and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*, New York 1987, pp.80-82
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4. Ibid.

Annie Besant's many lives

Kumari Jayawardena

South Asian countries have displayed a remarkable ability to attract Western women who became renowned for their work in local political, social, cultural and religious movements, and as partners of local male political leaders and religious *gurus*. One thinks today of the extraordinary phenomenon of Sonia Gandhi, treated as a possible saviour of the Congress party; of Mother Theresa who, despite her conservative views on many social and political issues, was given a state funeral; of the influence of Mira Alfassa, the Jewish Mother of Pondicherry, and her partner, Aurobindo; of the English Admiral's daughter Mira Behn (Madeleine Slade), devotee of Gnadhi; of Sister Nivedita (Margaret Nobel), the Irish radical and disciple of Swami Vivekananda; of two Americans, Agnes Smedley and Evelyn (Trent) Roy and their influence on Virendranath Chattopadyaya and M.N. Roy, members of the Indian Communist movement in its early years; of England-born Doreen (Young) Wickremasinghe, who entered the Sri Lanka Parliament as a Communist MP; and of Alys (George) Faiz of London, widow of the poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and her work in Pakistan's progressive movement.

But perhaps most of all we remember the charismatic Annie Besant (1847-1993), who, as her biographers have noted, led many lives. Up to the age of 44, she was in turn a clergyman's wife, atheist campaigner, socialist propagandist, trade union agitator, birth control promoter, critic of capitalism and colonialism and a fighter of women's rights. To socialists and feminists she had two lives: the years up to 1891, which they consider

** In view of the 150th birth anniversary of Annie Besant which fell on first of October*

the more important, and her "Indian phase" from 1893 to her death in 1993, which was more problematic. The British Fabian socialist, Sidney Webb, called Annie Besant "one of the 19th century's most remarkable women": to Bernard Shaw she was "the greatest woman public speaker"; and the Indian political activist Kamladvi Chattopadhyar referred to her as "one of the most outstanding world figures of her time."

In 1890 Besant became absorbed with Theosophy and succeeded Helena Blavatsky as the leader of the Theosophists. It was one of the strangest about-turns in modern history. The secretary of the Fabian Society was appalled; he cut out her name from the list of members with the comment "Gone to Theosophy".

Some leaders - whether in politics, trade unionism or other movements - are best known and remembered for their achievements in the latter part of their lives. Others are honoured for their early idealistic, courageous years before "betrayal", "compromise", "sellout" or radical change of belief. For socialists and feminists, Annie Besant's early life was memorable, but her later years as a Theosophist were an aberration, if not an embarrassment. Their regret that Annie Besant did not stay on in Britain, lead the Labour Party, fight for democratic rights at home and in the colonies and blaze the trail for women's liberation around the world. Instead, she got caught up in Blavatsky and Theosophy, in romanticising and celebrating Vedic "Aryan" India, in decoding "messages" from the Tibetan Master Koot Hoomi, and grooming a young boy from Andhra to be the World Leader and head of the Order of the Star of the East. Her "great betrayal", however, was of socialism and feminism, movements to which she had contributed enormously and unforgettably in her early years.

The Militant Years : Scandal Upon Scandal

Annie Besant, nee Wood, was born in England in 1847 to an upper middle class family. Her mother was Irish and her father half-Irish. His death meant that the family was without an income, and family savings were spent on the son's education at school and university. This was Annie's first taste of British patriarchy, where sons got priority, and the impoverished daughters had few choices except marriage. Aged 21, Annie married an Anglican priest, Frank Besant, and had a son and a daughter. She soon developed doubts about both Christianity and bourgeois marriage and left for London with her daughter in 1873 to lead the life of an independent woman, moving around among dissidents, progressive and free thinkers.

This was the beginning of the many scandals she caused in Victorian Britain. It was an era of challenges to traditional beliefs, including Christianity, and the increasing popularity of Darwin's theories. Annie Besant created a stir by publicly proclaiming herself an atheist and joining the National Secular Society. Along with Britain's foremost atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, she travelled around the country preaching atheism and free thought; they jointly wrote a *Freethinker's Text Book*, which denounced Christianity for "having set itself against all popular advancement, all civil and social progress, all improvement in the condition of the masses." In 1876 Besant also wrote the *Gospel of Atheism*, in which she said, "An Atheist is one of the grandest titles... it is the Order of Merit of the World's heroes... Copernicus, Spinoza, Voltaire, Paine, Priestly." Both this book and the *Freethinker's Text Book* were popular among the intelligentsia in India and Sri Lanka. The "scandal" surrounding Besant and Bradlaugh grew, when in 1877, they republished a pamphlet on birth control that had earlier been declared obscene. They were prosecuted but won the case, making birth control a topic of popular debate. Besant also wrote her own pamphlet on the subject *Law of Population*, citing India as an example of overpopulation.

In 19th century Britain, a woman had few rights in marriage and was legally a chattel of her husband. The child custody case Besant fought with her husband led her to campaign against archaic marriage and custody laws. In the course of the case the judge objected to Besant defending herself, and as her biographer Arthur Nethercot writes, was "perturbed that a woman was thus exposing herself before lawyers, journalists, spectators and the nation." In 1879, Besant wrote a pamphlet *Marriage as it was, as it is and as it should be*, denouncing all the unequal laws governing British women. She lost child custody on grounds of her atheism, but her trial created much debate in the liberal circles, eventually leading to changes in the repressive laws.

One of the feminist-inspired movements all round the globe in the 19th century was that of the movement for female education and access for women to male-dominated universities. By the 1870s, London university admitted women and Annie Besant attempted to study for a Science degree. But in spite of her successes at the first examinations, she faced much petty harassment at the final examination, being told by one examiner that he would not pass her because of her atheism and immoral political activities.

By the 1880s, Annie Besant was a notorious figure in Britain. Along

with Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb and other in the Fabian Society, she lectured on the need for socialism, trade unionism and Home Rule for Ireland. She wrote popular political pamphlets, an influential one being *Why I am a Socialist*. Besant was also outspoken against war, capital punishment and flogging, she criticised the House of Lords and the royalty. And as she wrote of herself in 1883:

I was... a passionate oponent of all injustice to nations weaker than ourselves, so that I found myself always in opposition to the Government of the day, against our aggressive and oppressive policy in Ireland, in the Transvaal, in India, in Afghanistan, in Burma, in Egypt. I lifted up my voice in all our great towns, trying to touch the conscience of the people, and to make them feel the immorality of a land-stealing, piratical policy... no wonder I was denounced as an agitator, a firebrand, and orthodox society turned up at me its most respectable nose.

The Match Workers' Strike

Besant's sympathies for exploited workers, and especially women workers, were an important features of her politics. She wrote on "White Slavery in London" in 1888, describing the appalling conditions of women match workers of the Bryant and May factories. She distributed this article, along with roses, to the women, subsequently led them out on strike and formed the Match Workers' Union. This got instant support from radicals as well as great publicity in the press, and the struggle ended in concessions from the employers. She was also active in the wave of industrial strife and the new unionism of the period. Besant was one of the organisers of the famous Bloody Sunday mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1888, when numerous working class and socialist groups defied the closing of the Square to popular protest meetings. Bernard Shaw referred to Besant as the "heroine of Trafalgar Square" for her courage in defiance of assaults and shooting by the police.

Thus by 1890, Annie Besant had become Britain's most famous woman orator and agitator and a great inspiration to socialists, trade unionists and intellectuals in the colonies, and to feminists of the incipient movement for female franchise. At the height of her fame as a radical, and after many years of battles on a wide range of issues challenging the establishment - the Church, the state and employers - as well as her defiance of various patriarchal institutions and male-dominated practices, she made a sharp and drastic change in her life. She joined Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophists

and very rapidly, by 1891, became the President of the Theosophical Society. As her old friend G.W. Foote, editor of the *Freethinker*, wrote in disbelief: "At one leap she left atheism and materialism and plunged into the depths of the wildest pantheism and spiritualism."

For forty years from 1893, Annie Besant was absorbed in the Theosophical Society in Madras. the past was erased; she withdrew her pamphlet on birth control (on grounds that the practice was incompatible with reincarnation), ceased to be involved in the socialist and trade union movements and found it inappropriate to speak up loudly on women's rights in India.

"Gone to Theosophy"

The occult, spiritualist and theosophical movements of the late 19th century attracted many women, including outstanding women leaders, especially Blavatsky and Besant. Alex Owen, writing on spiritualism, has said that "the discourse of spirit has long been a means of articulating subversive ideas," nothing that although not all feminists of the 19th century were spiritualists, most spiritualist movements advocated women's rights. Theosophy was attractive for its radical thrust against the Church and state, challenging not only the claims for universalism and superiority made for Christianity and Western civilisation, but also speaking out on the brotherhood of man, opposing colonialism, accepting "difference" in culture and religion and advancing the idea of perfect equality for women and men.

This was the radical aspect of Theosophy that appealed to South Asian nationalists, including Gandhi, Nehru and Krishna Menon. But the Theosophists also had another, spiritual, agenda. Some communicated with the "Masters" in Tibet for guidance, others like Blavatsky mesmerised people with "occult phenomena" (table raps, tinkling bells and the materialisation of objects), while they all uncritically romanticised and idealised Hindu and Buddhist practices and cultures, including the caste system.

Critics of Theosophy abounded, especially among those whom Annie Besant had left being in London. The *National Reformer* said that Theosophists were "very good, very respectable and very mad"; Richard Hodgson called Blavatsky "one of the most accomplished.... and interesting imposters in history"; and T.W.Rhys Davids, the Pali scholar, claimed that Theosophists "based their ideas on the medieval alchemists, which they mix up with a little misunderstood Indian thought." And the American critic H.L. Mencken specu-

lated on the appeal of Theosophy and "Hoovey from the Orient" to intelligent Western women. But not all intellectual women were interested in Theosophy; Beatrice Web, for example, called it "a wonderful fairy tale".

Besant's Passage to India

In 1893 Annie Besant visited India and Sri Lanka with a view to promoting Theosophy and starting schools for girls. But she soon succumbed to the warning given by "thoughtful Indians" that female education was suspect because Pandita Ramabai, a convert to Christianity, had used the education of child widows for purposes of conversion. "The unhappy perversion of an Indian lady," said Annie Besant, "had shaken the confidence of the Hindu public with respect to girls' education, and they feared Christian proselytising under the grab of interest in education." Instead she concentrated on boys' education and started a modern school for Hindu boys in 1898, the Central Hindu College in Benares. By 1904, Besant turned to female education and wrote on the topic of "The Education of Indian Girls". But her views were traditional; she spoke quoting from the laws of Manu, and discouraged modern education for Indian girls. She wrote:

That is not the kind of education you need. It would not build up women of the ancient Aryan type... I presume that no Hindus... desire to educate their daughters, and then send them out into the world to struggle with men for gaining a livelihood.

Annie Besant became widely known and respected in India for her championing of the Home Rule movement, even before Gandhi and Nehru had entered politics. Along with some Indians, she was part of a deputation to Britain in 1914 to present the case for political reform. On her return, she launched a Home Rule League in 1915, linking it to the India National Congress. She acquired the *Madras Standard* and turned it into the *New India*, to campaign for self-government. The government arrested and detained her for three months, causing a furor in India and abroad, thereby making her a national hero. By 1917 she was elected President of the Indian National Congress - an extraordinary achievement for a woman and a foreigner. But she had political differences with Indian nationalists like Gandhi and only gave qualified support to civil disobedience. The militant nationalist Tilak, criticising Theosophy and Besant's dependence on the Masters (mahatmas), wrote: "Congress recognises no Mahatmas to

rule over it except the Mahatma of the majority." By the 1920s, Besant became disillusioned with Congress politics and directed her energies to Theosophy and Jiddu Krishnamurti.

The New Messiah

Born in 1896, Krishnamurti had been befriended at Adyar by Besant and another Theosophist C.W. Leadbeater, who had been on the lookout for the coming World Teacher. In 1910, aged 14, the boy Messiah, it said, wrote *At the Feet of the Master*, inspired by the "Master". Criticism in the press was inevitable. Dr. Nanjunda Rao said it was "very silly... to deify an English woman, be she ever so clever... when she offers as an object of worship the little Hindu boy." The columns of *The Hindu* were filled with such protests. On comment was that "only fools or madmen could believe in this 20th century that the boy Krishnamurti is an incarnation of the divinity."

In spirit of criticism, Krishnamurti and the "Order of the Star of the East" gained some support in India, Europe and the States, claiming 12,000 members in 1913. But the World Teacher changed his mind and in 1929 disbanded the Order and renounced any claim to be a Messiah. Besant was demoralised by the debacle; her health declined and she died, aged 86, in 1933. It was a sad end to an eventful life.

Befitting the life of a great personality like Annie Besant, there have been many differing opinions on her life and work. To Christians and missionaries she was the she-devil incarnate, espousing atheism in her youth and praising Hinduism in her later life. Pandita Ramabai wrote in 1904: "Sometimes it looks as if the world is going backwards, when one hears an English woman like Mrs. Besant declaring that Hindu widows should never marry again." Liberals-reformist Indians were also critical. The editor of *The Hindu*, Subramania Aiyar, wrote in 1893, on Besant's arrival in India:

We must decline to concur in Mrs. Besant's wholesale condemnation of Western civilisation...if nothing else, it is superior to that of the East in being able to produce women of the courage of conviction which have made Mrs. Besant and many others of her sex a power for good ... Hindu civilisation is yet to produce a woman of the stamp of the talented lady...and until it does...we cannot appropriate for Hinduism the praises which Mrs. Besant so generously lavished on our ancestors.

But to socialists and feminists Besant remains an important figure for her pioneer contributions to their cause. What is interesting to note about

her is that, as Nethercot wrote, she knew "how to wear sandals in India and shoes in the rest of the world". In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist ideologue Anagarika Dharmapala also noticed this difference and said that while Besant was preaching "gentleness and obedience" to Indians, she supported the militant suffragettes in England.

Besant moved cautiously on feminist issues in India - calling for female education, an end to seclusion and supporting female franchise - but she refused to include women's suffrage in the platform of the Home Rule League. This was Annie Besant in India. But Besant on a visit to London wrote that "the only live movement in the world today is the Women's Movement" and in a lecture in London on "Women and Politics" in 1914, she recalled her earlier commitment on women's suffrage and said: "for forty years and more women have been claiming justice; for forty years and more, justice has been denied".

From the point of view of Theosophists, of course, there was no inconsistency, for each country is said to work out its own destiny and develop its own religious culture. This could be a daring view in a period of colonialism - that Europe had no civilising mission to impose on others. But for women, such views could legitimise existing oppression and glorify those structures that feminists and reformers were trying to change. As I have written elsewhere,

From the local women's point of view, the foreign women's idealisation of Indian patriarchy was harmful, while to traditional Hindu males, it was a godsend. No wonder, therefore, that the white goddess found her place in Indian society and that a suburb of Madras is named Besant Nagar.

Global March Against Child Labour: A Process of Empowering the Girl Child - A Write Up

The widespread exploitation of the girl child for their labour is one of the gravest injustices facing the world today. Around the world, especially in Third World countries, we find young girls who are forced to work from dawn to dusk, deprived of enjoying even their basic human rights. Though most of the hazards faced by boy child labourers are faced by girls too, yet, girls have extra problems of their own: from sexual exploitation at work to exclusion from education. In virtually every area of life and in almost every country, girls and women routinely bear burdens and endure treatment that reflect their unequal status. The same is the case with child labour. Working girls are often "invisible", hidden behind traditions and closed doors, with very little being done to stop this exploitation.

In fact, if we were able to measure the number of girls doing unregistered work as domestic help, or working at home to allow other members of the family to take up paid employment, the figures would show more female child labourers than male. On an average, girls work longer hours than boys, carrying a double workload --- a job outside their home as domestic servants, in factories, workshops and tea estates and doing domestic duties on their return.

Gender bias is not simply a question of attitudes --- it is enshrined in almost all the main institutions of society. Hence, statistics are alarming. In Guatemala, for instance, working girls spend an average of 21 hours a week on household duties on top of a 40-hour working week outside. In most

countries in the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and especially South Asia, the gender gap is enormous and ample evidence of this can be found in the denial of girls' fundamental right to even primary schooling. Thus, in the South Asian country of Nepal, the female literacy rate is an appalling 11 percent. The overwhelming majority of girls either have never gone to school or have dropped out of work. Discrimination soon becomes exploitation. Lack of education, early arranged marriages, stark poverty and lack of power/empowerment makes girls enormously vulnerable.

The gender gap thus becomes a vicious circle for girls. Unable to attend school because of their low social status or their domestic responsibilities, they are denied the extra power and wider horizons that education would bring. If they seek power outside the home, their opportunities are limited to the most menial tasks. Their low status is reinforced and passed on from generation to generation. Thus, they grow up to be adults vulnerable in almost all spheres of life ---- uneducated, unhealthy, unempowered and victims of violence.

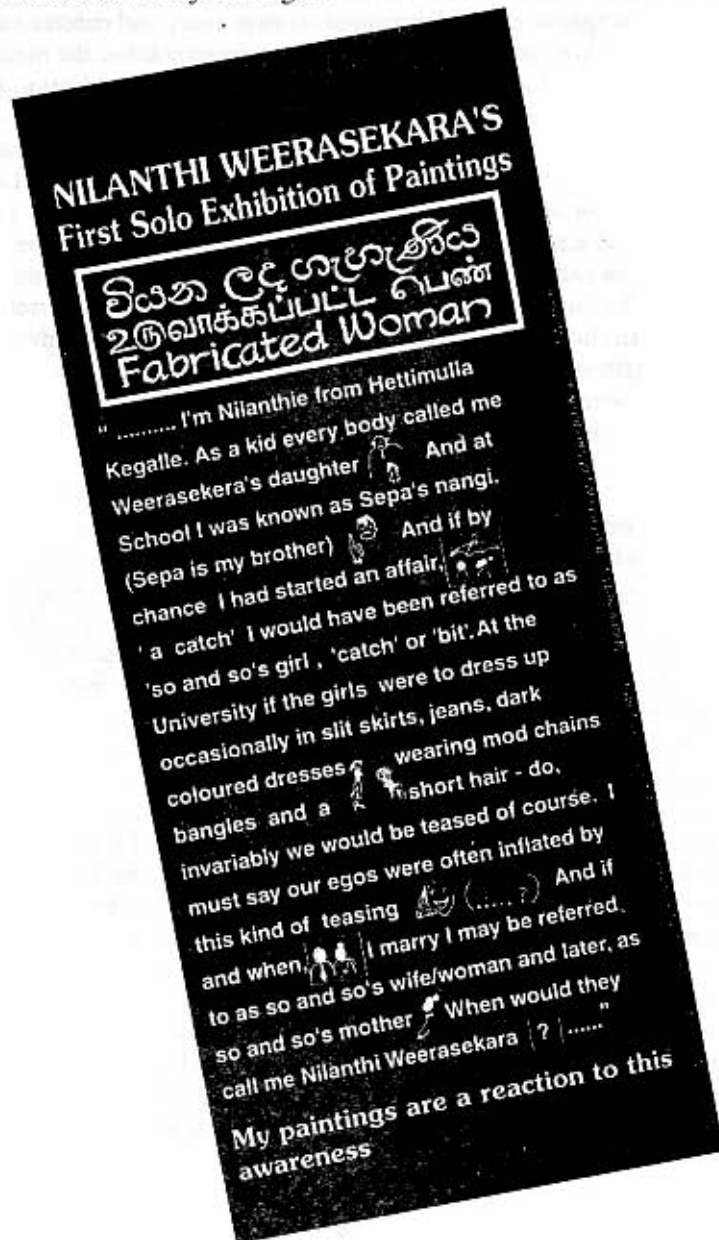
We believe that the girl child is entitled to enjoy her rights. These rights stem from her status as a dependent young individual who requires love, care and protection, education and guidance. Therefore, as conscientious citizens, it is our duty to help her rights and give her hope for the future. After all, the girls of today are going to be the women of tomorrow. To achieve this aim and to focus world attention of the said plight of child labourers, an international group of leading child rights and human rights activists and practitioners met in The Hague, Netherlands on 22-23 February 1997. They discussed some concrete action to be taken on the problem of child labour, with particular emphasis on the girl child. The consensus which emerged was to cooperate together in a Global March to generate massive public, employers and governmental awareness on the issue. The mandate of the March will be "To mobilise world-wide efforts to protect and promote the rights of all children, especially the right to receive a free, meaningful education and to be free from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be demaging to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development".

Begining in January 1998 and ending in June of the same year in Geneva, marchers will stream in from Asia, Africa, Austria, Europe and the Americas. With the International Secretariat based at the South Asia Coalition for Child Servitude (SAACS) headquarters in New Delhi, India, the March itself will be a combination of international foot marches and bus

caravans, linked extensively with a program of local and national-level demonstrations, events and advocacy marches. The goals of the March are to raise awareness against child labour; urge states to ratify and enforce existing conventions and laws on child labour and education; mobilise the maximum possible national and international resources to support education for all children; demand the immediate elimination of the most exploitative forms of child labour; urge states to ratify and enforce existing conventions and laws on child labour and education; mobilise public opinion and action against social, cultural and economic factors contributing to child labour; promote positive actions by employers and consumers; and ensure the proper rehabilitation of child labourers. We feel that the March, the first of its kind in the world for this cause, will provide a foundation on which better societies -- free from child exploitation and labour -- can be built. Though the road ahead is fraught with risks and struggles. We sincerely hope we can come together in proving that such an event can be a body of experience in breaking the cycle of child labour and make the world a better place for children to live in.

Upala Devi Benerjee
Global March for Child Labour

Nilanthi Weerasekera, a Sri Lankan artist has this to say on the brochure introducing her first Solo exhibition of Paintings:



A look at Post Modernist terminology.... A GLOSSARY*

agent or agency - someone assumed to have authority and power, causal force

author - person who writes or creates a text, or one who is responsible for an outcome.

celebrate - approval of something, applaud a point of view.

chronophonism - the modern assumption that time is chronological or linear. Post-modernists are opposed to chronophonism (Derrida 1981).

countermemorializing analysis - an analysis that denies a referent reality, rejects foundations, and ignores origins (Ashley and Walker 1990b: 400).

de-centering - absence of anything at the center or any overriding truth. This means concentrating attention on the margins.

deconstruction - a post-modern method of analysis. Its goal is to undo all constructions. Deconstruction tears a text apart, reveals its contradictions and assumptions; its intent, however, is not to improve, revise, or offer a better version of the text.

differend - difference in the sense of dispute, conflict, or disagreement about the meaning of language (Lyotard 1988b: 193-94).

* *Courtesy Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions by Pauline Marie Rosenau*

differance - a structuring principle that suggests definition rests not on the entity itself but in its positive and negative reference to other tests. Meaning changes over time, and ultimately the attribution of meaning is put off, postponed, deferred, forever (Derrida 1972; 1981: 39-40).

discourse - all that is written and spoken and all that invites dialogue or conversation. Discourse "even promotes its own reformulation" (Agger 1990:37).

evoking - acceptable post-modern alternative to re-presenting or representing. It is assumed to free one's analysis of objects, facts, descriptions, generalizations, experiments, and truth claims (Tyler 1986: 129-30).

foundationalism - an attempt to ground inquiry or thought on pre-given principles assumed true beyond "mere belief or unexamined practice" (Fish 1989: 342; Bernstein 1986: 8-12). Post-modernists are anti-foundational. They contend that "questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity can neither be posed nor answered" (Fish 1989: 344).

genealogy - history of the present that looks to the past for insight into today. It focuses on "local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges." Genealogy dismisses the possibility of any view of history as a "unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchies, and order ... in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (Foucault 1980:83).

heroic - modern social scientists sometimes focus on one event or person; and in so doing, post-modernists argue, they create heroes, attach excessive importance to the capacities of a single individual to effect change or influence specific, dramatic events. Post-modernists, rejecting this approach (heroic analysis), neither focus on individuals nor construct heroes. Many post-modernists call for the end of the subject, the death of the author.

hyper-reality - reality has collapsed, and today it is exclusively image, illusion, or simulation. The model is more real than the reality it supposedly represents. The hyper-real is "that which is already reproduced" (Baudrillard 1983c: 146). It is a model "of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1983c:2).

hyper-space - post-modern term referring to the fact that our modern concepts of space are meaningless. Space doesn't act according to modern assumptions. It has been annihilated, and spatial barriers have disappeared. Everything is in geographical flux, constantly and unpredictably shifting in space.

imploding, implosion - tendency for phenomena in a post-modern world to explode inwardly, thus destroying themselves and one's assumptions about them (Baudrillard 1983a). Meaning disappears altogether (Baudrillard 1983c:57).

intertextual - infinitely complex interwoven interrelationships, "an endless conversation between the texts with no prospect of ever arriving at or being halted at an agreed point" (Bauman 1990:427). Absolute intertextuality assumes that everything is related to everything else.

logocentric - an adjective used to describe systems of thought that claim legitimacy by reference to external, universally truthful propositions. Post-modernists are opposed to logocentric thought. They say such systems are really grounded in self-constituted logic. As post-modernists see it, no grounds exists for defensible external validation or substantiation (Derrida 1976: 49).

moment - indefinite point in time with undetermined duration or nonspecific geographical location or place. Post-modernists also use this term to refer to the stages or steps of social analysis.

move - as in chess, it is strategic. To "move" means to defend a position or take the discussion or analysis in a certain direction.

narrative - post-modern opinion of this concept varies, depending on the type of narrative under discussion. Post-modernists severely criticize meta-narratives, global worldviews, mastercodes. Meta-narratives are modern and assume the validity of their own truth claims, however, mini-narratives, local narratives, traditional narratives are just stories that make no truth claims and are therefore more acceptable to post-modernists.

paralogism, paralogical - refers to the unknown, what is admittedly false knowledge. But for post-modernists it can refer to those practices that "exploit the

destabilization of the language games of Truth" in order to point to how little we really know, how much what we do know is pure linguistic convention of an arbitrary character (Smith 1988:xxiii; Lyotard 1984:60).

pastiche - a free-floating, crazy-quilt, collage, hodgepodge patchwork of ideas or views. It includes elements of opposites such as old and new. It denies regularity, logic or symmetry; it glories in contradiction and confusion.

performativity - modern criteria by which judgement is made on the basis of pragmatic performance or outcome ("capacity, efficiency, control," according to Benhabib 1984: 105). It is not acceptable to most post-modernists (Lyotard 1984) who understand it as an extension of modern faith in reason. Post-modernists argue that performativity discourages diversity and autonomy, flexibility and openness.

phonocentric - Derrida, a post-modernist, argues that modern analysis focuses on speaking and the oral text. He criticizes this tendency to attribute special status to the spoken word and labels it phonocentric. Derrida contends that the written word is superior to the spoken (Derrida 1981: 24). Post-modernists are antiphonologocentrist (Berman 1990: 14).

privileged - to give special attention or attribute priority to an argument, a person, an event, or a text. Post-modernists oppose privileging any specific perspective.

project - organized, formal, modern ventures or activities. It implies having a strategy, a game plan, a design, a self-justifying, often hidden goal. Modern political parties, for example, have "projects". For post-modernists this is a term of criticism.

le quotidien - daily life analysis or everyday life focus. Post-modernists see it as a positive alternative to global theory.

reader - observer. Post-modernism is reader-oriented and gives readers the power of interpreting a text that, in modern terms, belonged to the author. Post-modern readers are dramatically empowered.

readerly text, "lisible" (French term) - a modern text that is written with the intention of communicating a specific, precise message. It assumes a passive reader that merely takes in the message (Barthes 1970; 1979: 77). The writer's role is one of representation, that is, representing reality. Compare "writerly text."

reading - understanding, interpretation. In post-modern terms one speaks of "my reading," "your reading," or "a reading," without reflecting on the adequacy, the validity of said reading.

re-present - the underlying assumption of modern representation that it is possible to present something over again, to replace one object (concept, person, place, or time) with another, without loss of content or violation of intention. The post-modernists say this is impossible.

rhetoric - in the modern sense denotes "artificial eloquence" as opposed to serious, rigorous, scientific discourse. But for post-modernists it is taken in its more classical definition to mean oratory, the artful presentation of ideas that play with symbols and the construction of meaning in an open text that play with symbols and the construction of meaning in an open text that has no design or intention of imposing a hegemonic view or of insisting on its own superiority.

simulacrum - a copy of a copy for which there is no original (Baudrillard 1983c; Elgin 1984: 877-79.) No distinction can remain between the real and the model.

site or space - not merely geographic location; places that cannot be definitely determined. It may also refer to opportunities. Sometimes it alludes to the topic or problem being studied.

story, stoytelling - see narrative; an explanation that makes no truth claims but admits to being the teller's point of view based only on his or her experience. Traditional, local narratives are stories.

subjectivity - post-modernists use this term to refer to an emphasis on the subject as a focus of social analysis. The post-modernists criticize subjectivity. Post-modernists do not employ this word in its modern sense of philosophical relativism or tentativeness or the opposite of objectivity.

text - all phenomenon, all events. Post-modernists consider everything a text.

totalizing - assumes a totality, a total view. By extension this rejects other perspectives. Post-modernists criticize totalizing theories.

voice - the modern conception of the author's perspective. Post-modernists question the attribution of privilege or special status to any voice, authors, or a specific person or perspectives. The "public" voice, however, is more acceptable to post-modernists because it democratizes rhetoric, makes discourse broadly understandable, and at the same time subverts "its own expert culture" (Agger 1990: 214).

writerly text, "*scriptible*" (French term) - a post-modern text that is written to be rewritten by the reader with every reading. This open text invites interpretation and re-interpretation (Barthes 1970; 1979: 77; Jefferson 1982: 100-101). The reader's role is that of production, construction. Compare "readerly text."

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