

**arena bulletin**

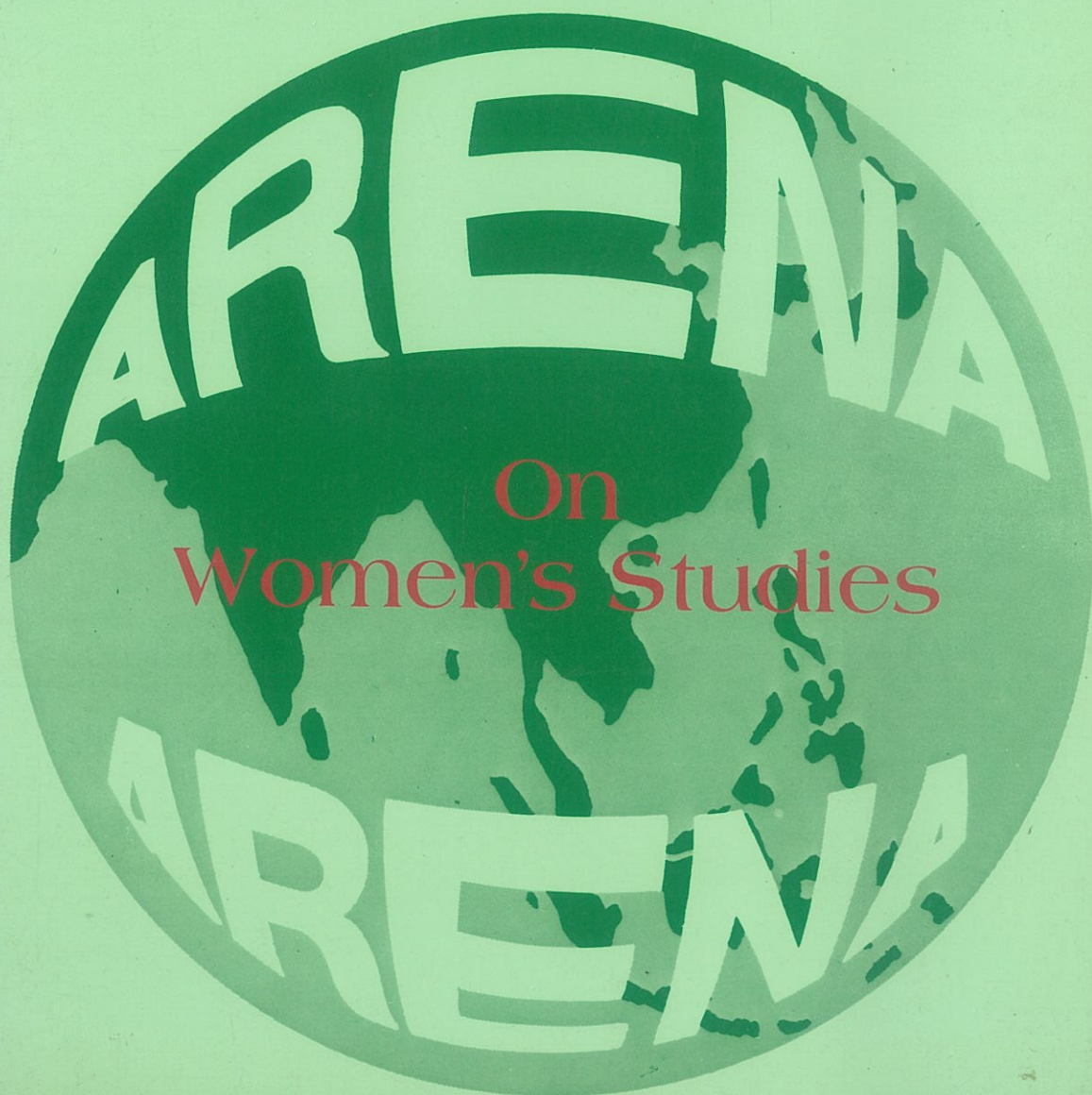
ISSN 0256-7520

---

# ASIAN EXCHANGE

---

QUARTERLY  
BULLETIN  
OF THE  
ASIAN  
REGIONAL  
EXCHANGE  
FOR NEW  
ALTERNATIVES



# CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Women's Studies in Developing Countries</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Gender Concerns in Development Debate – Emerging Perspectives</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4. Industrialization and Sexual Equality – The Case of Hong Kong</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>5. Women in Malaysia : Priority Research Issues</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>6. On Introducing Women's Studies in Thailand – Discussion Notes</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>7. Perspectives – The Women's Question</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>8. Documents</b> – a) End of the Women's Decade Conference b) Secular India introduces Islamic legislation	<b>106</b>

## A Remembrance

### In Place of An Introduction

As part of the overall perspective of ARENA, this focus of **ASIAN EXCHANGE** on 'Women's Studies' is, to present scholarship/theorisation/studies that arise in the service of people, social movements and communities in Asia. In introducing this issue of **ASIAN EXCHANGE**, we have chosen to depart from the standard practice of situating the articles and giving emphasis to the ideas in them, in a way the articles speak for themselves. We choose instead to place on record the memory of a little girl who lost her life, sacrificed to one of the greatest hazards of modern life - the motor car, her life being lost on the altar of the symbol of modernism-the highway.

Our readers may wonder why, the personal grief of one family is being placed on public record in a publication such as **ASIAN EXCHANGE**. The intense social engagement of the parents, their work in an organization which is part of the family of voluntary organizations that work in Hong Kong and of which ARENA is a part of, and our sense of mutual support and solidarity with them, are enough reasons to write this remembrance. However, we see more reasons to do it, particularly in an issue that celebrates an important facet and contribution of the women's movement, i.e. women's studies.

The parents, Jun and Cynthia work at the Mission to Filipino Migrant Workers (MFMW) in Hong Kong. There are over 30,000 Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong, most of them employed as domestics. More than 90 % are single women. The MFMW performs a very important service to these migrant Filipinos, who have come to earn a living in a distant place. The staff of MFMW, a very dedicated group of people, have to put in long hours of work to meet the needs and solve the problems of the migrants, which range from the personal to the institutional. Prior to moving to Hong Kong to work with the MFMW, Jun and Cynthia like so many other Filipinos were also among those who struggled against the dictatorship of Marcos and suffered for it.

In remembering their daughter Beth, we not only remember at the level of the personal grief of the two parents but also of those who work with them, to seek to console them by also remembering and placing on record their unflinching social commitment. Lives that produce the new men and women we envision,

peopling a more humane, non-destructive and just society, in contrast to the one we live in. We remember Beth for her brother Joseph, who is such a sensitive young man like other 'similar children, fortunate to grow under a different pattern of parenting, socialisation and responsibility roles, all made possible by parents with a strong social sensibility. For all these reasons we thought it was fit and proper that we remember Beth, not in a sense of mourning but as an affirmation of the humanity that is constantly striven for, both at the personal level and at the level of collectivities. Therefore, in a profoundly symbolic sense also, we remember Beth in an issue devoted to Women's Studies and contributed by women who are part of the women's movement in Asia.

Who is Beth? At her commemoration service, Rev. Eric Chung who also works closely with MFMW, had this to say,

"She was the daughter who resolved last Christmas, never to ask her 'ta-tai' and 'na-nai' to buy her expensive presents again after learning from her brother, that it would mean depriving less privileged children of food and clothing.

"She was also the daughter who was willing to give up her holidays with her mother and brother in Manila which she had been looking forward to, for a better part of a year, in order to be with her father who will be left behind in Hong Kong because of the heavy work-load at the Mission to Filipino Migrant Workers. In the end she went only after her 'ta-tai' and 'na-nai' had assured her that he will not be lonely as he will be busy, and that he will only be able to work with his full dedication knowing that she is happy in Manila with her 'lo-lo'.

"The magnanimity and compassion that is embodied in this little girl could only be understood in the circumstances of her birth. For Bethune was conceived and born at the height of Jun's and Cynthia's struggle to bring human dignity and some semblance of pride to the ordinary labourer. She was conceived at the point when they were sorely tested and suffered for what they believed in, that every man and woman has as much right to live and be fed as any other, regardless of class or creed. And the birth of this child is the mark of their triumph over evil that corrupts and eats away the moral fibre of Filipino society.

"Bethune when she first meets you is a very, very shy little girl, she may seem reserved and rather distant, yet after overcoming the initial uncertainty reveals for all a quiet gentleness and strength of character, an unprejudiced love and overflowing joy.

\* father

\*\* mother

\*\*\* grandfather

"She is never known to complain about her parents' frequent long hours at the Migrants' Mission office. Yet like most little girls her age she is capable of what most little girls could: like twisting both Jun and Cynthia around her little finger. With her big black eyes I have seen Cynthia relenting after 3 hours of Bethune's patient pleading to have dinner at her favorite restaurant, the MacDonalds. When either Jun or Cynthia is angry with her, she had a way at looking into their eyes with her's and melting that anger into sheer ecstasy of love saying:

'You promised not to be angry'.

"In essence, Bethune is the sum total of the very souls of the ones who gave her life, Jun and Cynthia Tellez in all their dedication as parents, and compassion as servants to their less fortunate fellow Filipinos".

Bethune, the full name of Beth, was named by her thoughtful parents, after Dr. Norman Bethune, the Canadian thoracic surgeon who in the 30s had fought against fascism in Spain and later fought and died in China in the war against the Japanese imperialist army. Dr. Bethune died fighting as a surgeon alongside the Chinese, treating the Chinese wounded with new techniques of blood transfusion that he had developed, so that the wounded could be treated on the battlefield itself. Dr. Norman Bethune was not only a prominent Canadian thoracic surgeon, he was also in varying degrees, a painter, poet, soldier, critic, teacher, lecturer, medical writer and theorist. A man who fought for socialized medicine in Canada, a man who said that "medical ethics had to be redefined not as a code of professional etiquette between doctors, but as a code of fundamental morality and justice between medicine and the people". A man who as a doctor kept insisting that, "our most important problems are economic and social and not merely technical and scientific in the narrow sense that we employ the words". A man who lived and died upholding these ideals, whose life was a unity of the personal and political, whose mediation with work had none of the simplistic, even fashionable dichotomies of present day social involvement that dichotomises between theory and action. It was perhaps not accidental that Jun and Cynthia named their daughter after Norman Bethune, who died only to live an immortalised hero among a billion people in China. In the Epilogue, to a wonderful, inspiring and moving book about Norman Bethune called, 'The Scalpel, The Sword', published by Monthly Review Press in 1952 and now translated into several languages, the authors write, "the visitors to Bethune's grave include peasants and men of renown, famous names and anonymous workers. They stand with equal reverence before it, and they leave it feeling an equal gratitude. For in the memory of

Bethune's life, the great are reminded of the people from whom they draw their strength, and the people are reminded of the road that everyone can travel to greatness". In remembering, little Beth, as a gesture of support to her family and close ones, we leave these thoughts.

To Jun and Cynthia and their co-workers at the Mission to Filipino Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, that they can continue to dream dreams, inspite of life's adversities and to have hope in their continuing struggles we offer this Chinese Poetry.

**DLS**

## *A Gift*

*by Shu Ting\**

*My dream is to be water in a pond,  
Not existing as a mere reflection of the sky,  
But letting the weeping willows and the milk vetches  
Drain me.  
From their roots I'll enter the leaf veins.  
Sadness will not come to me,  
For I have expressed myself,  
And gained life.*

*My joy, as brief as sunlight,  
Leaves behind immortal creations,  
Bringing golden sparks,  
To babies' eyes,  
Singing verdant songs,  
Through the seedlings slender shoots.  
Simple and rich,  
Yet I'm profound.*



Bethune A. Tellez

*I grieve like a migrating bird,  
Only Spring understands my fervent love.  
I'll endure all hardships and failures,  
To fly forever to the future, warm and bright.  
Ah, with my bleeding wings  
I'll write a powerful line  
To penetrate all hearts,  
All times.  
All my emotions,  
Are a gift of the earth.*

\* Shu Ting is a 33 year old factory worker in Xiamen, Fujian province, People's Republic of China. The poem is taken from the Feb 1981 issue of 'Chinese Literature'.

# Women's Studies In Developing Countries

Sukanya Hantrakul

## Introduction:

It is clear that 'women's studies' means 'feminist studies', says M.J. Boxer. She suggests that the general acceptance of the name 'women's studies' rather than 'feminist studies' probably represents an implicit recognition that expediency favours maintenance of a token of traditional academic "objectivity".<sup>1</sup> If we are to define what feminism is, a whole range of definitions can be found. One given by L. Gordon, a historian, on feminism "is an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly women have been studied in various ways and in a variety of contexts for many years. Women's Studies as a field of study, as a field in academic disciplines in a whole variety of educational institutions, however, is more recent. Its beginning lies in the distinctive practice of the Women's Liberation Movement which arose in the second half of the sixties, and has gone through a rapid growth in the West since its conception as an academic discipline in mid 1970s. The subject of women is becoming an increasingly respectable area for academic research, and so has generated a lot of theoretical studies.

In educational institutions in developing countries where almost all academic disciplines which are found in the West could be found, 'Women's Studies' as it is meant in the West is nearly non-existent. Yet it is an error to conclude that there are no women's struggles in the developing world. It goes without saying, political and socio-economic conditions different from that of the West give rise to different of struggle for women in developing countries from those of women in the West. With the exceptions of women in Northern Ireland, few Western feminists know what it is like to be directly involved in armed struggle, which is the context in which women's struggles of many developing countries are situated. In India, for example, drought is an issue of women's struggle. To talk about women's studies in developing countries, is we believe, to place the study in the economic and political context. Education will have some meaning only when it is relevant to one's environment. Thus, while the body of knowledge that has emerged in the West is undoubtedly valuable in throwing light on several aspects relating to women's subordinate position, which would be common cross-culturally, there is a need to evolve culturally and socially relevant concepts and theories, taking into account the specificity of certain social structures (for instance, the issue of caste in India) in the context of the historical and current experiences of their countries.

In 1977, the prestigious Ewha Women's University in Seoul announced the first, and probably still the only, Women's Studies Program in Asia. It is a three credit, general studies, undergraduate course.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, the term "Women's Studies" will be used interchangeably in two meanings: one refers to a field of study as a course, a program of study from a feminist point of view available in education institutions such as universities, and the other to a more general conceptual framework in which studies on women are conducted and which are not necessarily feminist.

The purpose of the paper is to draw a general picture of historical developments of women's studies in developing countries. After a brief geographical and economic contextualization of the areas we are looking at, historical developments of women's studies in developing countries - with special reference to India and Thailand - will be examined. Finally and more briefly, the future of women's studies, its difficulties and challenges in establishing itself as an academic discipline in the education system will be discussed.



## **Some geographical and economic features of women in developing countries:**

To discuss 'developing countries' is generally to envision the geographical areas in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean. The area we are looking at - the developing world - is of course a very large area and a diverse one. Even within the main geographic regions or sub-regions such as South Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, socio-economic differences are apparent. Yet if we were to exclude for the moment the highly exclusive specifications of certain social structures (such as the issue of caste in India, that of apartheid in South Africa) some common economic features do emerge; for instances the population is primarily rural-based, with agriculture as its principle source of livelihood, although all of them are in one way or another experiencing a rapid process of industrial modernisation. The pattern holds all the more true for the female labour force. In India for example nearly 90 per cent of working women are in agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Thailand's agricultural sector depends on the unpaid labour of 7 million women, counting for 77 per cent of the female workforce.<sup>5</sup> Women are also responsible for 60-80 per cent of the agricultural labour supply in Africa.<sup>6</sup> However, despite their great economic contributions, rural women in developing countries constitute the group at the bottom of the ladder in many respects - health, employment, education included. Nearly two out of every three illiterate people in the world are women and most if not all of them are in the developing world.

Research on women is not new. Only that the studies offer a variety of concern with shifting emphasis and perspectives, depending on one's theoretical orientation, ideological alignment, changes in the contemporary situation and in priorities for social and national development. Social historians, anthropologists and sociologists for example have done early research on women. Thus, where there are no women's studies courses, studies on women can still be found. In Thailand, for example, studies on women are scattered in diverse places and books, articles, dissertations, research papers, and government publications which touch on the subject, sometimes having no deliberate intention to look at women separately, as for example in population programs for instance.

It is quite astonishing at how similar the general historical developments of women's studies are in India and Thailand, with the exception of some few minor factors due to India's colonial past under the British.

In both India and Thailand, early research on women were primarily done by social historians, indologists, anthropologists

and sociologists. They investigated the position of women, mainly of the high caste in India, and high class in Thailand, and elite section of society. They shared the concerns and the basic ideology of the social reform movement which sought to cleanse the societies of institutional practices, which were believed to be deterrents to national resurgence and progress which gave the countries a bad name in the eyes of the Western World. Even today, this concern is still very predominant. The joint efforts between the Thai government and several women's organisations to tackle the problem of prostitution for example have largely stemmed from the concern to "protect its own image" in foreign countries.

Latent within the Reform Movement's humanitarian approach was a perception that traditional cultures and values must be strengthened to resist the inroads of westernisation. As custodians of traditional values and cultures women of the two countries were and still are viewed as potential allies in this struggle, provided their weakening influence within families could be strengthened by education and improved legal status. In fact the Iranian women's experience in supporting Khomeini to oust the Shah in 1979 is very interesting. Attracted by Khomeini's ideas based on Islamic virtues and spiritual values, many educated Iranian women went back to Iran from America and Europe to aid the clergy with the same message, and became the Government's spokeswomen.<sup>8</sup> It was after the establishment of the Khomeini regime that women began to realize that this regime was doing everything in its power to attack their rights.

While in India, political movement for independence resulted in a marked shift in the perspective on women's issues, democratic ideology and the recognition of the need to obtain women's support for the national struggle resulted in the principle of equality of rights, status and opportunities for participation in the process of national development. This is already around the early decades of the 20th century. The signal of the call for a fundamental redefinition of sex roles was given in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi. In Thailand, however the acceptance of the same principle of equality of rights and status at the state level was gained through the new constitution in 1932, the year which also marked the end of absolute monarchy.

Despite acceptance of the principle of equality by the national leadership and constitution in both countries, it had a marginal impact on the work of social scientists as far as the studies on women are concerned.

A trend survey of research on women indicates that in the period up to 1950s in India, the focus of research was primarily on general survey of women's roles and status within the narrow

perspective of the family, kinship and the community, with education occupying the second position. Later during the fifties there was some increase in studies on laws, legal and economic status of women. The legal studies, however, even today predominantly focussed on scriptural and statutory laws, which affected mainly the upper strata of society - mainly the urban educated class. Lives of the majority of women in rural areas continued to be ignored, governed by customs and laws and non-existent in the body of knowledge.

Then came the demographers' interests in women resulting in an enormous volume of research on population problems and politics and among them on women with a view to reducing population growth. As Cass points out, "it is in the context of population politics, in the context of establishment of national demographic objectives, that direct expression is given to some of the basic assumptions of proto-family policies"<sup>9</sup> and women who have a centrally important role within the family are inevitably focussed on. In India, a by-product of research on family planning was a renewed emphasis on women's education which was expected to influence both their access to family planning services and their general status. Our survey and a compilation of literature on Thai women also revealed a similar trend<sup>10</sup> of research on women educated during the sixties and seventies. It is worth noting that in India, as well as in Thailand almost all programmes for women were confined to education, health and welfare.

In the mid seventies onward, demands for the "integration of women into development" became more urgent, as has generally been the case since International Women's Year in 1975. Many developing countries and international development agencies have set up special offices to take care of women's concerns in line with such agreements as those put forward in a resolution of the International Conferences in 1964, which requested all member states to consider establishing a central unit for co-ordinating activities for women workers. Since then, many countries have set up women's bureaux, on women's development within Ministries of Labour, Social and Welfare or Social Security.<sup>11</sup>

In India, a Committee on the Status of Women was set up in 1971, and in Thailand in 1975. The emergency of this kind of committee was a major revival of attempts to review and evaluate data on various aspects of women's status and the directions of changes in women's roles, rights and opportunities due to planned development. In both countries the reports submitted by the Committees have contributed to new perceptions which have influenced the studies sponsored by several advanced education and research institutions. In India, women's studies programme is sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR).

In Thailand the Institute of Social Science Research has included "Women's Studies" as one of its new academic areas.

It should be mentioned that the overriding concern for improving the quality of intervention in favour of some target groups - rural women in particular - has resulted in a concentration of research interests in the sphere of economic participation with special interest in low-income group. While such research has certainly helped the search for new policy instruments, there was equally a neglect of vital areas of theoretical concern for understanding women. Historical aspects of the women's movement, for example, seems to be a less important research area. Though recognised as a priority area in the ICSSR programme, women's studies has not made much progress so far<sup>12</sup>. The program could not attract social scientists. In Thailand, the women's studies program at the Institute of Social Sciences Research has not made its presence much felt in the academic elite circles either.

An interesting question is in relation to what is the impact of this growing contribution from women's research on the educational system.<sup>13</sup> In India it did not make any impact on the education system.<sup>13</sup> Attempts to introduce changes in school textbooks have not made such headway in influencing the school system or teacher's education. At the higher level very few institutions have assumed any responsibility to develop women's studies, as a serious and long-term academic concern within research or teaching. The situation is more or less similar to the case of Thailand.

In 1981, a National Conference on Women's Studies was held in Bombay. Attended by 380 delegates who broke into 19 working groups and produced 80 papers, the Conference aimed at initiating "the long overdue process of incorporating women's roles and experience in academic studies".<sup>14</sup> The largest number of recommendations were directed at the university system to incorporate into its teaching and research program the theoretical debate on concepts, approaches and models of development and its inter-relationship with women's roles. It also recommended that there should be more studies in tribal communities as a pluralism of women's experiences was not adequately understood or known. Economic issues of course dominated discussion in all the working groups. The common theme was the impossibility of isolating women's issues from the general issues of social inequality and stratification.

Whether women's studies should be a separate course or not the recommendation for curriculum revision focussed on the need to incorporate questions regarding the continuation of women's inequality within the existing major courses in the social

sciences, literature etc., rather than relegating them to the status of a optional separate course. The latter alternative, however, it was felt could be tried at an advanced level but the former promised much greater long-term impact on the minds of students.

The Conference participants were determined that the momentum of women's studies generated should be continued and resolved to form an Indian Association for Women's Studies, with state-level branches with journals in all regional languages "to provide a forum for interaction amongst individuals, institutions and organisations engaged in teaching, research or action for women's development."

Such a conference of the same scale in the number of delegates and areas of concerns has not been organised in Thailand. Indeed to our knowledge, the Korean and Indian women's experiences in the realm of establishing women's studies within the education system are important landmarks in the history of women's studies in Asia in particular and in developing countries in general.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion it is possible to state that there is some grounds for optimism in relation to the future of Women's Studies in developing countries. In general there is some enthusiasm and a felt need for women's studies, within the educational system, governments, international agencies and mass media, although much is still left to be done. Western feminists, at the other end, have shown considerable curiosity and concern about how women live in other parts of the world. Western feminist scholars have undertaken countless research projects of women's roles and rights in foreign cultures. Relatively speaking, feminism has displayed an 'international spirit' - which is quite unusual in the history of social movements in the West, for instance, when compared with the labour movement that has become less and less international particularly during periods of economic recession in the West. Probably the only risk of having Western scholars researching women in developing countries is that this might give a sense of false universalism in feminist theories and which has been a subject of serious criticism in recent times. (see. H.Eisenstein, Contemporary Feminist Thought,) More involvement in such work from women in developing countries is very necessary and should be encouraged.

Another question remains to be answered is the role of women's studies as an academic discipline, or the role of education in general, in promoting social equality. Apart from the fact that the pattern of education expansion is linear, it's

impact is always felt more at the higher level than at the elementary level. Needless to reiterate is ofcourse the fact that, education in developing countries is only within the reach of a tiny minority. Besides, the language and the medium of instruction and the transmission of knowledge is generally exclusive. It would be an utopian hope that knowledge will "trickle down" to women at the bottom of the ladder. What is probably equally important in the developing world as far as women's studies is concerned, is how to bring the existing data and information on women to a larger circle than that of the academia. As custodians of culture, the position which has been more and more emphasized is to fight against Western modernisation in many developing countries, thus **women are faced with a double obstacle in establishing women's studies as a field of study.** As it was reported in Korea at the opening of Women's Studies Program in 1977, "Few academic programs in the Republic of Korea have ever received such public attention in the newspapers and on the radio, which publicized the debates between women activists and confucian conservatives. Critics dismissed the WSP as a betrayal of national identity, an imitation of Western ideas, and a distraction from the real tasks of unification and economic development."

Those who are interested in promoting women's studies in developing countries will certainly have a double task in many respects. On the one hand, they must familiarize themselves with women's studies in the industrialized world. On the other hand, as activists part of the women's movements in their societies they will have to start anew in the developing world - not much has been encoded in the body of knowledge and if ever at all circulates in small circles. This 'double burden' is the lot of the feminist in developing countries in general and in Asia in particular. Unlike Feminist scholars in the West, Feminists in Asia given their existential situation do not have the luxury of clearcut choices.

### **Bibliography:**

Davies, M., (ed.) Third World - Second Sex. London, 1983.

Mazumdar, V., "Women's Studies:Challenge to Educational system", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XVI, No.20, May 16, 1981, pp.890-2.

Mazumdar, V., and Sharma, K., "Women's Studies: New perceptions and the Challenge", Economic & Political Weekly, Vol.XIV, No.3, January 20, 1979, pp.113-120.

Rogers, B., "The Domestication of Women:Discrimination in Developing Societies, London: Tavistock, 1980.

Singh, G., "Trying to throw off the shackles of the past", Far Eastern Economic Review, January 5, 1984, pp.27-8.

Visaria, P., and Leela., "Indian Population Scene after 1981 Census: A Perspective", Economic & Political Weekly: Special Issue Vol.XVI, Nos.44, 45 & 46, 1981.

Yoon, S.Y., "Women's Studies in Korea", Sign, vol.4, No.4, 1979.

Women's Studies and Research in Asia and the Pacific: Emerging Trade, Gaps and Research Priorities. Prepared by the Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for Expert Group meeting on Forward-looking strategies for the Advancement of Women, Bangkok, 28 November - 2 December, 1983.

#### Footnotes:

1.M.J.Boxer, "For and About Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies in the United States, Sign, Spring 1982, p.664.

2.H.Eisenstein, Contemporary Feminist Thought, Unwin Paperbacks, 1984, p.xii.

3.S.Y.Yoon, "Women's Studies in Korea", Sign, Vol.4, 4., 1979 p.751.

4.G.Singh, "Trying to throw off the shackles of the past", Far Eastern Economic Review, January 5, 1984, p.30.

5.S.Hantrakul, "Dutiful daughters on society's lower rungs" Far Eastern Economic Review, January 5, 1984, p.39.

6-7.Women of the World: The facts, issued by Australian Development Assistance Bureau.

8.London Iranian Women's Liberation Group, "Iranian Women: The Struggle Since the Revolution", M.Davies,(ed) Third World:Second Sex, London, 1983, p.154.

9.B.Cass, "Population Policies and Family Policies: State construction of domestic life: in C.Baldock and B.Cass(eds) Women, Social Welfare and The State, 1983, p.165.

10.The survey was conducted in 1983, funded by UNICEF, under ASEAN Women's Programme, Committee on Social Development, ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

11.B.Rogers, The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies, 1980, p.79.

12.V.Mazumdar and K.Sharma, "Women's Studies: New Perceptions and The Challenges", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XIV, 3, Jan. 20, 1979, p.119.

13.V.Mazumdar, "Women's Studies: Challenge to Educational System", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XVI, 20, May 16, 1981, p.890.

15.Ibid.,

# Gender Concerns In Development Debate: Emerging Perspectives

Kumud Sharma

## **WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT : THE EVOLVING JOURNEY**

During the last decade the 'women and development' debate has incontestably, advanced the frontiers of our knowledge, accumulating evidence that no matter what the growth models, development increases differentiations by class and gender. In the mid-eighties the 'word' has acquired a familiarity, a visibility and a legitimacy among researchers and development specialists. The 'global consensus' in the mid-seventies that women have a vital role to play in the promotion of Equity, Development and Peace, gave a new direction and dimension to reframing gender issues vis-a-vis the process of development and change. At the beginning of the Decade the notion of women's integration in the process of development, however limited in its conception, became instrumental for policy debates, research initiatives and organisational efforts by decoding development messages (policy, technical and ideological aspects) from women's perspective. The global debate on Women's Equality, Development and Peace has introduced a totally new dimension giving the



debate political, international and developmental character in place of earlier approaches which viewed issues of women's status as essentially a social and cultural phenomenon.

The 'women in development' debate has been enormously enriched by the fresh intellectual and ideological offensive taken by women in developing countries, revaluating and reinterpreting their own experiences. The new information base highlighting the complexity of women's question has established linkages between the marginalisation and subordination of women to structures-social, political, economic and ideological; it is gearing itself to face the new challenges emerging from conservative forces that are joining hands with revivalist tendencies and authoritarian structures within the country as also new forms of exploitation emanating from the world economic system. This has provided the most compulsive logic for the reassessment of development theories, concepts and approaches. While recognising the fact that it is difficult to arrive at a common set of priority issues for the whole region, due to diversity of points of departure and historical context of development of the countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, 'women and development' studies which began exploring the realities of women's lives through hosts of micro-studies, has found many areas of common concern.

The growth of indigenous scholarship during the Decade, has slowly been built on primary data based micro-studies which are both problem-policy oriented and analytical. This has not only provided gender based analysis of employment, education, demographic and health aspects of women's status, but has also provided material for challenging the macro-perspectives based on aggregative data sets which hide more than what they reveal. The cumulative evidence of what may be broadly termed as 'impact-studies, has revealed the negative effects on women of the process of agricultural modernisation and rural development, industrialisation and other sectoral policies. This was seen as a manifestation of a process of development which was inimical to the poor and the marginalised groups of which women formed a substantial part. A significant number of these studies focussing on 'less visible women' (both statistically and within established scholarships) concluded that prevailing models of development have been detrimental to women in poorer households, not only denying them recognition as 'producers' but also contributing to their marginalisation due to their unequal access to employment, credit, technology, education and training.

Some of the key issues in this debate have been beautifully summed up by a feminist scholar who feels, that women are increasingly getting involved with the 'the politics of knowledge' by using innovative techniques of data collection,

research and project development, extracting and sharing authentic human experiences. "Women in the citadels of academia are daily assaulting the sacred cows of learning. They are questioning the historians who have reconstructed a past devoid of women or the economist with their myopic view of labour and whose theory of growth proclaiming the magic of the market place has so disastrously deluded so much of the Third World".<sup>2</sup>

One feels diffident in summarising research trends and issues for the region as a whole as the diversity and, the volume of literature available on women has grown considerably during the last decade. Some attempts have already been undertaken at the regional and national level to compile and synthesise the research information, although the growth of research activity<sup>3</sup> in the Asian and Pacific region has been uneven and scattered. A bulk of research on women in project-specific and micro-level analysis, is mostly available in mimeograph form. A significant deficiency of most of the research is its inadequate conceptualisation and contextualisation. To understand the present day realities of women's lives better, one has to look back into history (pre-colonial, and post independence phase) and analyse the forces/structures that have drawn women out or pushed them back.

A review of the 'state of the art' in Asian regions suggests, that "studies on women in Asia, signify an old concern with a new focus moving away from historical, prescriptive and ideal-typical accounts based on scriptural analysis, to more problem-specific and action/policy relevant research". As part of the indigenisation process, questions are being raised as regards the basic assumptions, borrowed concepts and methodological framework governing research and the need is felt for critical examination of existing theories and techniques.

A group of researchers from the Asian region reviewing the initiatives taken in their countries in promoting research and teaching on women, suggest ways for utilising research for 'policy and for faculty development' in order to develop social science research in a way which could promote greater regional cooperation and understanding of inter-cultural issues on women and to examine the conceptual framework and evolve relevant research methodologies. A country report further stated that "women's studies do not mean merely focussing on women's experiences, problems, needs etc. but has to be viewed as a critical instrument to improve our knowledge about society which at present remains partial and biased, projecting views of social reality derived from a male perspective".<sup>4</sup>

Another regional level conference with scholars drawn from fifteen countries, reviewed research on women's issues in this

region and drew up an agenda on research priorities for the next decade. Despite variations in national situations, a number of areas of common concern emerged from this exercise i.e. women and poverty, impact of technological change on women's work and income, effects of migration both national and international (latter may be more relevant to some countries) on women, female headed households, women in the informal sector, impact of industrialisation strategies (particularly export-oriented) on women, women in the family, women's struggles and organisations, the effect of state planning and policies on women, impact of changes in the world economic system on women's employment, income and well being and theoretical studies on the women's question.

The group also identified problems faced in the utilisation and generation of research, problem of dissemination, absence of and need for cross-cultural research and collaborative networking arrangements and need for training the younger researchers on women's issues.

The Asian Regional seminar in Delhi identified the following problem areas regarding growth of women's studies in the region:

1. the research process has yet to take the shape of an intellectual movement incorporating historical and structural perspectives. Greater efforts need to be put into developing theoretical and methodological perspective for research on women.
2. lack of appreciation for applied and problem oriented research.
3. lack of recognition and positive support from the academia and the government.
4. lack of effective network of women researchers to exchange experience and expertise and to expand resources.

Despite these obstacles and gaps in data and quality of research during the last decade, some trends in research on women are visible:

**1. Creation of infrastructure** needed to promote women's studies, independent women's studies centres/institutions, (e.g. Republic of Korea, India, Bangladesh), special cells or units within universities and research centres (Korea, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka) units within the government or separate ministries to handle women's affairs (in most of the countries) and National Commissions (Philippines). These regional and national forums have provided an opportunity to researchers to review the research trends and identify priorities.

**2. Attempts to organise professional associations and networks at National and regional level (PAWF, AWRAN, IAWS in India and Women and Development Network of Australia).**

**3. Attempts to prepare status papers and compile bibliographies of research on women** and exchange information, however, the gap between research output and its publication remains wide thus limiting its use by scholars within the region.

**4. Indigenisation of research on women.** "Although, it is difficult to make a correct assessment of the volume of such research as very little effort has been made to consolidate and systematise this research".

**5. Feminist studies which provide a cross-cultural comparative perspective** underlying structural changes in sex-roles and social organization of households in response to economic and political changes.

A UNESCO report while questioning the tendency of universalising women's issues and problems, emphasises that "with sound cross-cultural evidence including in-depth studies that have not so far received scientific attention, the validity of many of these generalisations may be disproved.... Studies on women and action programmes aimed at elevating women's status have been handicapped by a general lack of understanding of a cross-cultural and intra-cultural variations in the organising principles of societies and in the life contexts of women."<sup>6</sup>

With these review exercise already undertaken at the national and regional level, it is possible to identify some broad contours of research on women and where the major focus has been. The social science literature on 'women and development' issues, has been sector-specific (women and agricultural development, modernization, industrialisation, technology, educational development, law, demographic trends, etc.) area-specific, group-specific or issue specific (women and migration, female headed households, violence against women, sex tourism, kinship and family patterns, women in export oriented industries, women in home-based production).

Although the term 'development' has defied all attempts for an acceptable definition, as a process it encompasses social, economic, political, legal and even ideological spheres. Its contextual nature necessitates an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach to issues and problems and that these should be related to a wider developmental context.

Since '75 such reviews of development concepts, approaches, policies and programmes have formed the basis for drawing

research agenda, action plans and priorities. A few major arguments which have developed from the research are summed up. They are not exhaustive but illustrative.

National development policies and plans have by and large neglected gender dimension in development theory and practice, in policy planning and resource allocation and there is a need for increasing women's participation in the development process by improving their access to resources, developmental inputs and services and integrating their needs in the national development efforts. Some scholars concerned with issues relating to 'women and poverty', unemployment, underemployment and skewed distribution of productive assets, income resources and power between men and women, have tried to seek explanations to these issues within the national developmental context.

Women's economic roles have remained the most critical area for research, analysis and data collection. Most scholars have argued that the statistical undervaluation and ideological devaluation (women as supplementary/secondary workers) of women's work roles by and large, has been responsible for under conceptualisation and non-articulation of women's concern in development thinking, policies and programmes. Research has destroyed many myths by focussing on the content and quantum of women's work in the non-monetised sectors and women's critical role in survival strategies of poorer households. Estimates suggest that of all the hours worked throughout the world, women contribute about two-thirds, that rural women grow at least 50% of world's food, produce most of the food for domestic consumption and process, prepare and serve to families. In addition, in some developing regions a quarter of half of rural households are permanently or defacto headed by women. Inadequate recognition by and 'invisibility' of women's labour to the data system is reflected in neglect of women's claim to policy and resource support. The causes of this mystification and the methods of imputing value to women's unpaid but productive labour, has been an important area of debate. Time-use studies of rural households have attempted alternative ways of conceptualising and collecting data on women's work.

This submerged economy (hidden from view) of 'invisible rural women', is now threatened by policies of agrarian reforms and rural development, transfer of technology, commercialisation of agriculture and privatisation of land, eroding women's customary right to land. Such processes have taken the form of a gender differentiation in which men dominate in the management and decision-making of commercial and large scale agriculture, while women continue to be in the subsistence production with low technology and low returns. With more and more area being converted into cash crops for export and domestic consumption and

decline in the areas under food crop, women's productivity in agriculture has declined, reducing their access to food and affecting the nutritional level of the household. Food technologies, (in agriculture, dairy development, fisheries, food processing etc.) the major areas absorbing women's labour, have increasingly marginalised their roles.

Forest development policies often mean protecting the commercial interests of industries at the expense of pressing basic needs of poorer households and particularly women who rely on forests for fuel, fodder and food. Women's experience in industries is not too happy. Most subsistence crafts involving women are loosing ground with the fast deterioration of the environment and growing scarcity of local material like wood, cane, grass or reeds hastening the death knell of local crafts. In other cases traditional skills have been increasingly absorbed into the commercial economy and changes in organisation or production and marketing has left women helpless and ignorant.<sup>8</sup>

In the modern industrial sector, expansion of export-oriented foot-loose industries although have provided increasing employment to women, but the nature of such industries with uncertain markets, stiff competition in the world market, makes it less likely for them to have any long-term commitment. Such industries are forced to rely on cheap labour. Women work with inadequate protection of labour laws and trade unions. The newer industries (electronics, garment, food processing etc.) linked to the world system of production have created new forms of women's exploitation. Studies on Export Processing Zones and Free Trade Zones in various countries of South East and South Asia, have explored the relationship between the international system of production, social-political structures and the household politics. Studies have found that in the Free Trade Zones working hours are longer and labour laws are restrictive in order to curb the possibility of collective bargaining. Any attempt at unionising are severely dealt with, sometimes even manipulating the traditional authority of the family or of local bodies.

Another significant feature of women's employment is that they are predominantly in the informal sector economy, trying to meet the challenges of poverty and survival. Growing number of these women who are engaged in home-based production, under a puttingout system are not even aware that they are integral to national and international manufacturing industries and which do not take any responsibility for their health, working conditions and minimum wages. Even where they are part of the factory production, they are concentrated in few industries and in typically women jobs, which makes them more vulnerable to onslaughts<sup>9</sup> of vagaries of markets and technological obsolescence.

The question arises why these sovereign nations permit these runaway shops and other commercial interests to move in the country without adequate controls and protection to workers? Is it not that vested interests always find allies within dominant groups and power elites? The implications of these growth models for the female labour force, need a more rigorous analysis and an inter-country comparison.

Women who rejected growth strategies and compartmentalisation of their development needs to few sectors (soft), soon realised the international linkages to patterns of growth and development in Third World countries. During the Second Development Decade, the growth strategies were already under attack and the need to reorder the inequitous international economic system was on the agenda. The hope lingered in the minds of developing countries, unlike the mood in the eighties, that solution to some of the problems of dependent development, can be found through fresh international negotiations and initiatives. The current stalemate in this process belies the hope generated in the seventies.

**The view that has now crystallised is that the very nature of the development process and its philosophy needs to be seriously questioned (the alternative development debate) if it is not to marginalise women.** Scholars concerned with distributive aspects of development in a class and gender matrix, have found increasing evidence of the worsening situation of women.

Trade, technology and finance which have enhanced the domination of developed countries over developing countries, markets, labour and technology have accentuated gender differentiations and class contradictions within the society. The development crisis in the Third World due to the disastrous impact of global recession, mounting debt burden and growing trade deficits, increasing bilateralism and cut backs in developmental aid, is forcing developing countries to rely more on internal resources mobilisation and export-oriented strategies. Escalation in arms race, growing ethnic, class, caste tensions, and mounting defence expenditures are threatening the very basis of human development.

The important issue is to what use this knowledge has been put to by women? What are women doing to mobilise themselves around some of these issues? An interesting literature has developed evaluating women's organisational efforts and an attempt to understand the socio-cultural and political context of these movements.

On the action front 'women and development' projects have in

the last decade proliferated, with donor agencies and national agencies offering ideas for programming and action. Such women-specific projects have generated their own ethos, though they have sensitised the policy planner and women's groups of the advantages and limitations of such development projects in a given context. Their influence on policies and budgetary decisions in most cases has been nominal. An Afro-Asian workshop raising the issue of long-term continuity of such projects and its multiplier effects particularly in cases started by outside intervention, pointed out that the problems inherent in the project approach are evident in the dependency syndrome it creates. It suggested that women's projects or special structures should not substitute the comprehensive development approach, which could be incorporated through the national policy.<sup>10</sup>

ILO's documentation of some successful initiatives for improving the employment conditions of rural women shows both success as well as failure of these grass roots initiatives. These case studies also show, within the general processes of change, some constructive elements, signs of encouragement, on which one can build. Some general lessons also emerge; inspite of the overall context of constrained national economies, inequalities in societies and deep-seated barriers to greater power, the influence women have in terms of access to credit, assets (particularly land) and markets is important to improving the status of women. But an organisational base is at the heart of success and sustainability and is most effective when of their own choosing people decide, to pursue goals they set for themselves. Supportive structures<sup>11</sup> (government and academia) are also important.

The corporate body of knowledge termed as women's studies, to me seems to provide a balance between the norms of scholarly research and women's consciousness about their oppression, inequities and injustices. The combination of the two may offer the best alternative to initiate a change, through analysis, action and reinterpretation of specific experiences of women.

A complex set of issues surround the debate on 'women and development' although 'women, work and development' remains the single largest area of research. The bulk of research remains descriptive, which provides empirical evidence of changing situation of women in the contemporary context but they have however failed to also develop by and large a coherent theoretical framework. A significant lacunae in many of these micro-studies is that they are not linked to the macro context. There is also a dearth of cross-cultural comparative studies on certain important issues, which can provide theoretical insights as well. Finally for a better understanding of the dialectic of



sex, the nature and causes of women's subordination and its various forms and manifestations, it will be important to place the whole issue in a historical context.

Apart from the gaps in the systems which do not provide systematic gender-specific data on all aspects of women's development, there are several major issues that have emerged as a result of research done in this region, which need more rigorous analysis. The research priorities may vary from one country to another in the region, however a number of areas and topics seem to be important.

**(1) ISSUES OF STATE, PUBLIC POLICY AND WOMEN:** In multiple ways the state is extending its areas of influence and it is necessary to access the implications of state policy for women:

a. Growth models/strategies (export-oriented, industrialisation) its implications for female labour force;

b. population policies-new thrusts in population policies (selective strategies);

c. legal system-with special reference to personal law in property laws, erosion of customary rights of women;

d. state, media education and culture including development communication its media manipulation;

e. technology choices and transfer of technology-why it has a differential impact on women;

f. migration and state policies affect on rural/urban family.

**(2) NEED FOR MORE RIGOROUS ANALYSIS AND INTER-COUNTRY COMPARISON OF THE ISSUE OF:**

(a) Women's home-based production and its increasing integration into modern commercial interests both domestic and export sector,

(b) What are the policy options for their protection,

(c) What is the nature of interaction between gender, productive forces and division of labour by sex. What is the relationship between the power structure within the family and market factors in pushing women into the low-paid sector of the economy.

**(3) WOMEN, FAMILY, KINSHIP PATTERNS AND PRODUCTION SYSTEM:** as family provides the immediate context.

(a) Survival strategies of poorer households, women poverty and female headed households,

(b) Changes in family and kinship systems and traditional support system.

**(4) WOMEN IN STRUGGLES NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS, PEASANT AND WORKERS MOVEMENTS, CULTURAL MOVEMENTS AGAINST:** hierarchical and authoritarian structures, movements for women's rights-with specific emphasis on ideology, organisational structure, strategies of mobilisation, leadership, issues taken up and response/reaction from power structures, at different levels. Who were the women who participated and resisted?

#### **References:**

1. Draft Final Report of the Ministerial Conference of Non-aligned and other Developing Countries on the 'Role of Women in Development', Delhi, April 1985.

2. Lucille M. Mair International Women's Decade: A Balance Sheet: Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi - 1985.

3a. Leela Dube - Status Report on the Studies of Women in South East Asia (5 countries of the ASEAN Region).

b. Women's Studies and Social Sciences in Asia - Regional Meeting of Experts - UNESCO, Bangkok - 1983 (Participating countries - India, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea and Thailand).

c. Bina Agarwal - Women's Studies in Asia and the Pacific - APDC, Kuala Lumpur, 1983.

d. The Identification of Priority Research Issues on Women in Asia and the Pacific - A Report, APDC/SAREC, Kuala Lumpur 1984. (16 countries participated).

e. Status papers prepared by different countries for these Conferences.

4. Women's Studies and Social Sciences in Asia - op. cit.

5. APDC/SAREC Conference op. cit.

6. Leela Dube - op. cit.


7. Sarthy Acharya - Women and Rural Development in the Third World - Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, 1984.

8.Nirmala Banerjee - Women and Industrialisation in Developing Countries (Mimeo), Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1984.

9.Nirmala Banerjee - In the electronic industry women suffer from eye complaints, burns, suspected cancer risks from the chemical solvent used. Multinationals companies have already used up and discarded as many as 6 million women in developing countries who are too ill, too old (at 30) and too exhausted to be of any use to anybody - quoted in Nirmala Banerjee.

10.Report of an Afro-Asian Inter-regional workshop on "Strategies for Improving Employment Conditions of Rural Women", Arusha, Tanzania, 1984.

11.Arusha Report - Ibid.



**INSIDE ASIA**  
*the new magazine on Asian affairs*

**Among our major concerns:** human rights, environmental crises, militarization in Asia and nuclear proliferation.

**Issue 7 out soon, includes:**  
Aidan Foster-Carter on the dimensions of Korean nationalism; articles on Pakistan and the bomb; environmental activism in India; New Zealand's campaign for a nuclear-free Pacific; Laos—an assessment of the last ten years; the Philippines' long road to socialism; the slum dwellers in Bombay; Nepal's labour movement.

**Previous issues have included:**  
Praful Bidwai on Bhopal; Walden Bello on the economic disaster of the Philippines; Noam Chomsky and Ben Kiernan on Kampuchea; John Gittings on China's bomb; **articles on**—Japanese trade unions; the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka; the women's movement in Pakistan; Thailand's military politics; China's new economic policies; FRETILIN's struggle in East Timor; nuclear dumping in Malaysia; repression in Taiwan; the Morong nuclear reactor in the Philippines; and Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia.

**Plus Asian literature and Asian short stories, and a comprehensive reviews section.**

**Subscribe now!**  
**Free sample issue on request.**

Inside Asia, 242-244 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UP, U.K.

# Industrialization and Sexual Equality — The Case of Hong Kong

Chan Po King

## Honour or Shame? - The Case of 'Working' Wives

Though women have rarely been treated as an independent subject in sociological research in Hong Kong, one of the major themes in family sociology has been the changing social position of women. It is held that industrialization and urbanization have resulted in the trend towards free marriage, the growth of the conjugal family and the increase in female enrollment in wage labour. These factors are said to have given rise to women's equality in marriage and the family (Mitchell 1969, 1971, 1972; Podmore & Chaney 1974; Wong 1972, 1975, 1979, 1981). While these studies act to promote, either intentionally or unintentionally the idea that women are no longer subordinated to their husbands as before, others express the anxiety about the disintegration of the 'functions' of the 'traditional' family as a result of women's participation in wage labour (Ng 1975; HKCSS 1978; WGJC 1981). As a response to the growing incidence of juvenile delinquency and divorce, 'social problems' for which women are generally held responsible, efforts have been made to safeguard their 'traditional' role in the family. For instance, a number of voluntary agencies in Hong Kong have engaged in a social service named 'Family Life Education' which has been strongly supported by the Government since the late seventies. One of its

objectives is:

"To improve the quality of family life among individuals by enhancing the understanding of self, of human relationships within the family and of the role each family member plays." (HKCSS 1978, my emphasis)

The following quotations, extracted from two different news reports, aptly illustrate some stereotyping notions about the rights and duties of women in contemporary Hong Kong.

"The advice offered by three successful career women to any woman in Hong Kong who cares to make a success of her career is 'work hard and be prepared to make sacrifices'. 'But she should never forget that she is a woman although she might be doing a 'man's job.'" (Hong Kong Standard 9.3.1977)

"The number of divorces in Hong Kong could reach a record high of about 3000 this year - and working wives may be partly to blame, according to the Social Welfare Department.....For after a hard day's work, working wives are less inclined to devote as much attention and energy to their children and house-work as full-time housewives." (South China Morning Post 25.08.1982)

However, by stressing that women have acquired equality in marriage or by urging women to resolve their conflicting roles does not serve the needs and interests of women in the long run. These assertions have not only failed to challenge the persistent asymmetric gender division in Hong Kong society they reinforce sex-stereotyping and act to the detriment of women. For example, the problem of role conflict of working mothers in Hong Kong is often reduced to a technical or a subjective level, i.e. it is assumed that whether the conflict will be solved largely depends on an individual's ability to cope with the situation.

On the contrary, I will argue that we should refuse to accept the sexual division of labour in the household as something inherently natural and should examine how and why women in Hong Kong remain primarily and exclusively the reproducers of society and the implications of such arrangement upon their lives. By analysing women's role in reproduction, it will be shown that conjugalism and complementarity do not necessarily imply equality. Also, we should reconsider why it is only women who are asked to 'make sacrifices' and to compromise their dual roles. For the purpose of this paper, the term 'reproduction, is used to refer to both biological reproduction and reproduction of labour power. As Mackintosh (1981:9) suggested, reproduction did

not merely include the bearing of children, but also their care and socialization, and the maintenance of adult individuals through their lives, processes which created individuals to fit more or less into the social structure of society and so ensure the continuation of the next generation.

### **The Continuing Subordination of Women in Reproduction**

For certain I do not dismiss that women's position in Hong Kong has seen great improvement over the last two decades. The raising of education standard for women; the increasing rate of female employment; the trend towards free and later marriage; the practice of neolocal residence; the formation of the nuclear family and the availability of fertility control practices, all of which acclaimed as effects of the industrialization process in many sociological and demographic studies of Hong Kong (Chan 1977; Choi 1975; Choi & Chan 1973; Kwan 1979; Mitchell 1969, 1971, 1972; Mok 1980; Ng 1978; Podmore & Chaney 1974; Wong 1972, 1975, 1979, 1981), have helped to advance women's status and position in society and to widen their scope of development. However, industrialization itself is never a uniform process without contradictions, it has not always worked in the one and same direction. It is my view that a number of variables, also characteristic of the industrialization process in Hong Kong, are operating against the direction of freeing women from their subordination as reproducers. The separation of labour in the household from labour in the workplace, the maximization of demands of the market through the mechanism of consumerism and additionally, the absence of a comprehensive social insurance system, have worked to perpetuate and transform women's role in reproduction. It is my opinion that we should differentiate the various social forces in the specific historical context of Hong Kong and avoid to generalize and coalesce them under the terms 'industrialization' and 'urbanization'.

At the same time, the emphasis on the emergence of conjugal familial form tends to conflate the meaning of 'conjugal family' with that of 'equalitarianism' in marriage. Implicit in the works of Podmore & Chaney (1974) and Wong Fai-ming (1972, 1975, 1979, 1982) is a tendency to equate 'conjugalism' with 'a greater share of power between spouses' without regard to whether there are concurrent changes in the sexual division of labour in the household. This concept fails to challenge the continuing role segregation along sex lines which is still entertained as a natural expression of the social division of labour. I think that it is necessary to pay attention to the internal attributes of a familial group, such as the sex and age of its members, and grant them independent theoretical significance. To do this we need to give up treating the family as a holistic, pre-given unit separate from the public world. Rather, we should examine its

significance in mediating the social status and gender role of an individual. A number of Western feminists have proposed that the concepts of sexual division of labour and of reproduction are crucial to the understanding of women's subordinate position inside and outside the family (Beneria 1979; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981, 1983; Mackintosh 1981; Mies 1981; Riley 1981). This applies both to societies situated at the 'centre' or on the 'periphery' of the international capitalist system. To me, this offers a more relevant and fruitful approach to the Woman Question in Hong Kong than the functionalist perspective which dominates the family sociology in contemporary Hong Kong.

A third area of confusion concerns the notion that the rapid growth of women's employment in Hong Kong since the mid sixties has helped them to acquire equality and autonomy in marriage. Though based on a causal relationship between employment and the family, this argument continues to separate the political and economic relations between the so-called public and the private spheres, usually described as 'productive work' and 'family life' respectively. The weakness of this argument lies in its failure to acknowledge the organization of labour in the household and the social and productive nature of this labour. To analyse the relation between women's subordination in an highly industrialized society like Hong Kong, the concept of non-wage labour relation and its relation to the process of capital accumulation should be considered seriously. Also, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is women, especially married women, who perform the majority of domestic labour. Nor are women subordinated in reproduction only because of the non-valorization or the under-valorization of their work. The fact that they are situated in a subsidiary position in the labour market cannot be understood and treated separately from the context of their continuing responsibility as the breeder-feeders of society.

But why has sex become the organizing element in the social division of labour and that women, because of their sexual identity, have to perform the tasks of caring and nurturing children and the adult members of the house-hold? Moreover, the sexual division of labour predates the arrival of industrialization and capitalism. As Bennholdt-Thomsen (1983), Mies (1981) and Sayers (1982) argued, the sexual division of labour in society had its roots in human biology. The capacity of women to bear children was seized upon to determine their abilities and tasks in rearing children, feeding and caring for adults, and even nursing the aged and the sick.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to set the issue of women's position in the context of reproduction, and to show that as long as married women in Hong Kong are relegated as the

primary nurturers in society, it cannot be said that they have achieved equality with men by forming the conjugal family or by working as wage labourers. To do this, it is necessary to provide a descriptive panorama of the existing division of labour with respect to reproduction and to lay bare the kind of forces which have decomposed, perpetuated or transformed the forms of women's subordination as reproducers in the context of industrialization in Hong Kong.

### **Fit Work for women?**

### **Mutual Collaboration? No, Thanks!**

Housewives never appear in official annual yearbooks, economics textbooks, political debates at the Legislative Council, or any historical account of Hong Kong... But they cook, feed and wash in the home, bargain in the market, go to 'work', send their kids to schools, day by day... and people claim that industrialization has arrived in Hong Kong because of low tariff rate, the laissez-faire policy of the Government and a hard working labour force.

The question of the invisible housewife in the studies of development process or in history as a whole has generated an on-going debate on the non-wage labour of women and its relation to their subordination among feminists and marxists in the West (see, for example, Benston 1969; Coulson et al. 1975; Delphy 1976; Gardiner 1975; Hobson 1978; Mies 1981; Molyneux 1979, 1981; Oakley 1974, 1976a). Although there is considerable disagreement in what functions domestic labour performs in the process of capital accumulation and the perpetuation of male domination, it is generally agreed that domestic labour is socially necessary labour and has been under-represented.

Again in Hong Kong, housewives remain behind the scene. the anthropological model of 'Man the Hunter, woman the Gatherer' is constantly revived in the sociological literature on family structure and conjugal relation. The unequal sexual division of labour inside the household and its naturalization have never been problematized. The works of Wong Fai-ming (1972, 1975) have so far demonstrated the most blatant form of functional approach to the study of the modern family system in Hong Kong. His discussions are mainly concerned with expanding the functional relationship between the conjugal family and the development process in Hong Kong. He concluded from his survey on 637 families carried out in the years 1971-1972 that working mothers generally participated less in the performance of overall household tasks, and more in instrumental than in expressive roles, when compared with full-time housewives (my emphasis). He



stated that in families where the wives were also wage earners, the conjugal relationship had shifted from one of individual dominance to that of mutual collaboration (Wong 1981:230).

What is meant by 'mutual collaboration' here must be treated with care. The following quotation highlights that this term is one which only refers to the functional operation of the family unit rested on an asymmetrical division of labour:

"With respect to their participation in household tasks, they begin to practise a collaborative pattern. While they usually shared with each other in the undertaking of family affairs, the husband was mainly concerned with economic and social tasks of the family, where as the wife was predominately engaged in household duties, child care and control, and social activities (c.f.Wong 1972:17-18). On the basis of this finding it can be said that the husband-wife relationship is moving toward a companionship pattern (Burgess et al. 1963:3-5)." (wong 1979:108)

The functional approach of the argument assumes sex roles as given and does not examine whether role segregation is equally justified and beneficial to both parties. Its basic theoretical framework rests on the functional model of family roles proposed by Parsons & Bales (1956). When speaking of the nuclear family of the United States in the fifties; Parsons & Bales asserted that it had become a more specialized agency rather than going through a process disintegration. They held that the nuclear family was in particular capable of satisfying the needs of and therefore was functional to the industrial society. According to them, the most essential structure of the nuclear family consists of role-types differentiated from each other by the criteria of generation and sex. The husband plays an instrumental role while the wife plays an expressive role. The former refers to the leadership in achieving the goal for which the group has been set up while the latter refers to the creation and maintenance of the conditions of group solidarity. In contrast to Wong, Parsons & Bales (1956:23) did not take sex roles as pre-given. Instead, they addressed themselves to the question why men take up an instrumental role while women perform expressive tasks. They explained this phenomenon in terms of a strong presumptive primacy of the relation of mother to the small child. Nevertheless, there are still problems with their approach. By labelling women's work at home as being only 'expressive', it fails to acknowledge the economic dimension to childcare and housework. Second, by stressing the function of the dichotomization of sex roles, it serves to foster and legitimize the established pattern of sexual division of labour as if it were a separate but equal arrangement.

On the other hand, the increase in female participation of wage labour in Hong Kong since the sixties has begun to worry social scientists and policy makers. It is believed that with a rearrangement in women's role, the family as a 'basic social unit' is no longer able to perform its functions and provide adequate service to its members. Underlying this fear is an assumption of the incompatibility of housework and wage work. As Mitchell (1969:37) commented on the working mothers of the late sixties.

"Let us look closer at the working mother. Her work presumably is a potential source of many social needs and problems. For example, if her children are young, then day nurseries and schools may be required to care for them; if she is unable to supervise her older children, they may become behavioral problems/ and if she works outside the home, then labour laws may be needed to provide her with special protection. And, of course, the very fact of her working may reflect the need for anti-poverty programmes that remove the pressures that force women into leaving their homes and children in order to supplement their low family incomes."

Despite the fact that women's financial contribution has always been an important source of family income, it cannot be assumed that they join the labour market only because they are very much under economic pressure. Unlike men, women are not free labourers who can sell their labour power in the market. Awaiting them at home are dishes to be washed, children to be nursed. As long as women are available, why bother to build nurseries and youth centres?

It is against such background that I will try to address the problems women have encountered as mothers and housewives. Unlike the approaches mentioned above, I think it is of crucial importance to problematize women's role in reproducing labour power in the light of the persisting sexual division of labour. Again, the experiences of married women in Hong Kong in the years 1971 - 1980 will be used to illustrate the case in point. Based on the findings of several studies on this subject, a brief description of the pattern of division of labour in the household will be provided. Attention will also be given to the factors which have given rise to certain modifications in the pattern of division. I will then proceed to discuss the ways in which married women in that period were subordinated as reproducers. Lastly, the then existing social policy will be analysed so as to assess the role of the Government in perpetuating this subordination.

## The Persistence of Role Segregation

That married women in Hong Kong remained the chief caretaker of children and household tasks in the last decade is beyond doubt. Almost all the research studies done in the sixties and the seventies will demonstrate that role segregation in the household was quite persistent throughout these years. As early as 1967, married women were reported as chiefly responsible for the performance of household chores like cooking, washing dishes and washing clothes (Mitchell 1969). Mitchell also remarked that the husbands in his sample were more likely to respond positively to their marriage if their wives took good care of the house. A survey on the Chinese family in Hong Kong conducted in 1968 suggests similar evidence. It also shows that the mothers of the low-income group had a greater workload than those women from higher-income families. The most important factor contributing to this pattern is probably the availability of servants, usually Chinese amahs, in that period. The data also suggest that there was a high degree of conjugal role-segregation in the household. For example, 69% of the sample families assigned the task of making repairs at home to the father or to the son. In contrast, only 16% assigned this task to the mother, and 4% to the daughter. Tasks like cleaning the house, preparing meals, and buying groceries were almost exclusively done by the mother (Hong 1973:6).

It is not the case that husbands have never participated actively in childrearing. What should not escape our notice is the type of help they usually give. From the findings of a research study on the patterns of childrearing in 1978 which included a sample 100 'working' mothers and 100 'non-working' mothers (1), M.C.Lam (1982:45) reported that the husbands' contribution mainly was in the area of playing with children at home or bringing them out to restaurants, playgrounds, shopping etc, perhaps with the exception of those living in nuclear families with wives going out to work. This latter group was more active in helping with the children's daily routine. Similarly, data from the Report on Working Mothers in Family Functioning (2) (HKYWCA & HYSYC 1982) show that the husbands in that sample were much more likely to help in tasks like bringing children to restaurants, parks and beaches or playing with them than in cooking, ironing and cleaning. On the whole, its data confirm that the distribution of childcare and household tasks between spouses was very much lopsided - with the wives taking many more responsibilities than the husbands.

Hence, it is quite clear that a high degree of role segregation persisted among spouses in the last decade. In general, married women continued to be the chief caretaker of

children and the house regardless of their increasing employment outside home. But this is not to assume that women were subjected to an unchanging pattern of division of labour. Quite on the contrary, the differences in economic resources, household structures and access to childcare facilities, and the changes in consumption patterns, have each in their own way shaped the experiences of different groups of married women. In the section that follows I will deal with these factors in detail.

## **Intervening Variables**

### **(1) The Availability of Domestic Servants**

Economic factor certainly plays a part in relieving or perpetuating women's role in childcare and housework. As Hong (1973:5) mentioned before, domestic servants shared many of the tasks of women coming from higher-income families in the sixties. The post-war decade witnessed a great supply of domestic servants (mainly female) in Hong Kong. They were mainly young immigrants who came from the rural villages of China and had probably found it hard to obtain a job other than working as domestic servants in well-off families. By the late sixties, the demand for baby amahs and domestic servants far exceeded the supply. This was probably due to the rise in women's education standard and the widening of employment opportunities especially in the manufacturing sector at that time. Under such conditions, only those wealthy families could afford to employ domestic servant's to take care of their house and children. It was also in the seventies when some married women began to work as part-time cleaners, baby-sitters, normally in their neighbourhood. By the late seventies, however, a new source of labour supply began to find its presence in Hong Kong. Many Filipino migrant workers were arranged to come in Hong Kong and were employed full-time at a very low rate. To some extent, the 'role conflict' of married women from the higher middle-class could be resolved at the expense of low-paid migrant labour. While it was not uncommon among higher middle class families to hire servants to take care of their children, those could not afford had to tap other resources, some even sent their children to their relatives in Mainland China.

### **(2) Household Structure and Kin Solidarity**

The structure of household and the solidarity among kin members may also influence the pattern of division of labour. Though it is generally believed that the absence of elder kins living under the same roof tends to strengthen the autonomy of women as 'the housewife' in the house, this practice may also work negatively for women. In contrast, in those families where grandparents are present, aged people may be a valuable source of

help in sharing housework or children. This is also true of the case in Hong Kong in the seventies. Married women living in extended families enlisted more help from parents than women in nuclear families, in particular paternal and maternal grandmothers. It is also worth mentioning that a considerable number of 'working' mothers depended on the grandparents as the major caretakers of their children even though they did not live in the same house (HKYWCA & HKSYP 1982:28; Lam 1982:15). Thus it can be seen that the formation of the nuclear family may not necessarily guarantee the interests of the wife as long as the internal division of labour between spouses remain unchanged. Also, even though the nuclear family was the predominant family pattern in the last decade, the importance of kin as a source of support system should not be undermined.

### **(3) Childcare Facilities**

Childcare institutions like nurseries had been a valuable source of help for mothers who were employed outside home and who did not or could not enlist help from their relatives. Statistics show that this group of women relied greatly on childcare institutions towards the end of seventies (Lam 1982:24). Together with the increasing enrollment of children in kindergartens, nursery provision helped to lessen the time children need to spend at home. But care should be taken to note the differences over the last ten years and the whole decade should not be treated as a static period. For example, in 1971, approximately 56% of children aged 4-5 were attending kindergarten and only 14% of children aged 3. By September 1979, the percentage of 3 year-old children attending kindergartens was 55.5% of 4 year-olds was 84.3% and of 5 year-olds was 87.7% (HKG 1980:16). Generally speaking, the standard and quality of services had not been satisfactory over the last ten years. A well-defined government policy on pre-school day-care was unknown until the publication of White Paper on Primary Education and Pre-primary Services in 1981. Before that, children from two to six years of age were either sent to day nurseries, kindergartens or they stayed at home. But the Child Care Centres Ordinance and Regulations only governed all the nurseries and creches under supervision of the Social Welfare Department and did not apply to kindergartens. At the same time, the Education Department had no policy at all on pre-school education, kindergartens were not under supervision of any official body, resulting in a great confusion in standard, staff qualification, physical facilities and curriculum (HKCSS 1978:6). A considerable proportion of women respondents in the two surveys mentioned earlier expressed their distrust in the quality of nursery service (HKYWCA & HKSYP 1982: 30; Lam 1982:24-25).

Meanwhile, the number of places provided in government

subvented and non-profit making nurseries and creches were far from being adequate. As late as 1978, the total number of places were only in the region of 10,000 to 11,000 with the number of children in this age bracket of the population amounting to 400,000 (HKCSS 1978:5).

Only in 1981 the Government began to intervene in childcare service in a more active manner. Since then, pre-primary services have been divided at the age corresponding to two years before entry to primary school: with children below that age attending childcare centres registered under the Childcare Centres Ordinance and children above that age attending kindergartens registered under an amended Education Ordinance. A scheme of assistance was introduced whereby children from low-income families would have a proportion of the fees for a childcare centre or kindergarten place paid by the Government.

In sum, in the years 1971-1981, the gradual expansion of nursery facilities by voluntary organization and profit-making bodies had facilitated the employment of married women who might have otherwise been forced to stay at home. As regards the role of the Government, it had been very slow to respond to the growing needs of childcare service and kindergarten education in Hong Kong.

#### **(4) Technologisation of Housework**

As a final point of this section, I like to suggest that it is important to consider the changes induced by technology in the form and content of housework, so as to specify the form of women's subordination as housewives in contemporary Hong Kong. This includes the rise in the technological level of society and the mass production of home technologies. According to Hartmann (1974), there are at least three kinds of household technologies: utilities which form the infra-structure; appliances, the actual machines used in doing housework; and commodities which are consumed inside or outside the home (quoted in Bose 1982:227).

Attention should be paid to the emergence of 'new home economics' and of consumerism in a highly industrial city like Hong Kong. It is often held that the introduction of household technologies has greatly reduced the burden of a housewife. But technology does not necessarily result in efficiency and still less, equality at work. Whether it can raise efficiency or facilitate a more equal relation among potential users largely depends upon the manner it is designed and marketed. As Bose (1982:230) showed, despite the introduction of labour-saving devices, the amount of time which American women spent on housework had either remained constant or actually increased the last fifty years. She noted that there was a tendency to use the

time provided by labour-saving machinery for more goods and services, resulting in rising standards and task-extension, e.g. new small appliances would likely involve more elaborate cleaning, more storage problems and increased need for maintenance. Nor did the technologization of housework bring about a more equal sharing of the burden. Task-specific technologies were utilized in such a way that women could take over the former tasks of other family members rather than vice versa.

It is my observation that the popularization of technologies in Hong Kong since the mid-sixties has been accompanied by and embodied in a number of mechanisms including people to consume so as to maximize the internal market. Technology has tended to privatize housework, increase the workload of an individual housewife and make possible the division between male and female tasks. Generally speaking, the market economy has produced and imported more goods for use in the home rather than develop services to take these functions outside it. Previous research on the performance of housework in Hong Kong has remarked on its rising standard (see, for example, Johnson 1975:220) but no thorough investigation has yet been made regarding this subject. To further our understanding of Hong Kong women's role in reproduction of labour power and household consumption with respect to the popularization of technologies, we need to elicit more information and develop a systematic analysis of it.

### **The 'Housewife Syndrome'**

But how is the sexual division of labour in childcare and housework linked to gender subordination? In what ways can we maintain that married women in Hong Kong, given such pattern of arrangement, remained in a subordinate position to men in the family and in society?

Again, I think it will be helpful to differentiate the ideological level from the economic level of subordination in the course of analysis. In reality, however, these two levels are intricately linked together and are complimentary to each other, and their separation here should only be viewed as a heuristic exercise.

It is my observation that housewives in Hong Kong in the seventies were ideologically subordinated in at least two ways. On the one hand, they were led to identify childcare and housework as essentially feminine tasks. On the other hand, their labour was denied its economic value and rendered socially invisible.

The social division of labour in reproduction was made

gender ascriptive. Women in Hong Kong remained subjected to the notion that childbearing and housekeeping were an inherent ability of a woman and the natural responsibility of a wife. The growing dichotomization between the public and the private spheres in the process of industrialization perpetuated the feminization of household tasks. As suggested by the findings of previous research, husbands did help with sharing household tasks; they tended to choose those which were more closely linked to masculinity, such as household repairs. Women continued to shoulder the majority of the caring and nurturing tasks, such as cooking, washing and feeding. The rigid role segregation is strongly related to the polarization between masculinity and femininity as defined in our dominant culture. In reality, the contradictions experienced by women in their dual roles were often resolved by their rationalization of the situation. For example, previous data reveal that women tended to justify their husbands' low involvement in childrearing and housework by explaining that 'they have no time at home', 'husbands have to work', 'husbands come home late' or 'children prefer mothers more than fathers' (HKYWCA & HKSYC 1982:4). Women's defence for their husbands suggests that they themselves had internalized the role of the mother and the housewife.

For those women who managed to go out to work, they could hardly escape from psychological pressure of having to fulfill two roles at one time. As long as women were still regarded as mainly responsible for the functioning of the family, they would be held responsible for any crisis in marriage and family life. Women's participation in paid work was seen to be potentially dangerous to the existing social relations of reproduction and to the constitution of gender identities. As Bland et al. (1978:68) put it precisely,

"When they enter wage labour force, there is immediately a contradiction between their positions as mothers and wage workers (as well as a contradiction in relation to men) while men are affirmed as men in their double relation as fathers and wage labourers through their role as 'bread-winner' - which is why masculinity as a construct can so often be overlooked - femininity is cast in doubt by such a relation."

On the other hand, the labour contributed by women in raising children and fulfilling the physical needs of adult members remained under-valorized. In the official census reports of Hong Kong, housewives existed in the name of 'homemaker' which was defined as part of the 'economically inactive' population. In 1971, there were 579,963 homemakers out of a total population of 3,936,630, i.e. about 15% of the population. Out of this 15%, 98% were women (HKCSD 1972). In 1981, there were altogether



645,647 homemakers out of a total population of 4,986,560, i.e. 13% of the population (HKCSD 1982). By excluding them as 'economically inactive', the economic value in reproducing labour power was totally dismissed. Neither had their labour input been calculated in GNP figures. Meanwhile we should not forget that a considerable proportion of those women classified as 'economically active' were simultaneously contributing to the reproductive activities at home. The activity status of a housewife was very low because housework was not considered as 'productive' - housework was not 'work'.

### **Subsidiary Position in the Labour Market**

Let us now look into the economic consequence upon women's lives. It is my view that, as agents of production, women in Hong Kong over the last ten years were conditioned by their role in reproduction. Though 'the family' and 'work' had never been inherently opposed to each other, society operated in such a way as if they were mutually exclusive to each other in women's lives. This is particularly true for those women who had young children at home and who could not have access to adequate resources and support. For them, in many cases, staying at home was but the only choice.

If we take a look at the age-specific labour force participation rates in the past years (see Table 1), we will find that female participation rate began to drop substantially after women entered the age bracket 25-34. At the same time, when we take into account women's mean age of marriage which was 23.6 in 1971 and 24.4 in 1981 (HKCSD 1982:19), we have strong reason to believe that women were more likely to retreat from the labour market after they got married or started to have their first child. A comparison between male and female rates further suggests that the freedom of men to work outside the household was based upon the non-freedom of their wives.

Table 1: Age-sex-specific labour force participation rates; 1971 and 1981

Age Group	Male		Female	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
	%	%	%	%
15-19	50.4	45.2	56.4	42.6
20-24	90.2	90.9	69.5	79.7
25-34	98.4	98.3	39.6	56.8
35-44	98.6	98.6	38.7	53.4
45-54	96.6	96.0	38.9	46.7
55 and over	70.1	60.3	24.1	24.9

This assertion is supported by the findings of Choi & Chan's survey. Among their respondents, 45.1% of all wives who did not work after marriage felt that their work in the home kept them fully occupied. At the time of interview, many of these wives had children and 35.4% of all those who did not work felt that they had to take care of their children and could not work. Even if help was available, 67% of them felt that it was not economical to employ a help so that they themselves could go out to work (Choi & Chan 1973:86).

One of the ways for women to reconcile their dual roles was to work as an outworker. The 1976 By-Census records a total of 67,400 outworkers, 75% of which were women. In 1981 this figure amounted to 55,686, with women making up 80% (HKCSD 1977, 1982). It is noteworthy that the majority of women outworkers were coming from the age bracket 25-49. The Report on Working Mothers in Family Functioning suggests similar evidence. A considerable number of respondents were found to be engaged in 'bring-home-crafts' distributed by factories so that they could undertake wage labour, childcare and household chores simultaneously. Alternatively, a considerable proportion of married women joined the labour force as part-time workers. It is a known fact that outworkers and part-time workers are the most vulnerable groups in the labour market since they are not entitled to the rights and protection provided by the Employment Ordinance.

The subsidiary position of Hong Kong women in the labour market cannot be explained without regard to their role as the chief caretaker of children and the family, their participation in wage labour is seen to be a supplementary activity. In reality, due to a cyclic workload in childcare and household chores, women suffered from practical constraints and could not operate as 'free' agents of waged production as men did.

The situation of married women in employment in the seventies is a case in point. Though it has always been mentioned that since the mid-sixties in Hong Kong women have enjoyed wider opportunities in employment, this assertion needs further qualification. The increase in job opportunities was largely a result of the expansion of the manufacturing industries which only required women with minimal education to act as semi-or unskilled workers. In 1978, the number of women workers in factories amounted to 51.4% of the total. Equal pay for both sexes were not fully institutionalized until 1975. Not until 1969 did the Government begin to introduce equal pay for both sexes. From this year onwards until 1975, by seven stages of adjustment, equal pay was enforced. But equal pay for equal job did not guarantee sex equality at work since there was a high degree of segregation in the labour market. They were segregated

into semi-skilled or unskilled, low paid and low status jobs.

To illustrate this point in detail, I will make use of the employment figures in two major manufacturing industries of the seventies, the electronics industry and the plastics industry, in both of which women workers had a high participation rate. By 1980, the electronics industry maintained its position as the second largest export-earner among Hong Kong's manufacturing industries. Domestic exports of electronic products in 1980 were valued at HK\$8,306 millions. It comprised 1197 factories employing 88,883 workers. The industry produces a wide range of products including radios, computer memory systems, calculators, transistors, integrated circuits, semi-conductors, pre-packaged electronic modules etc. (Hong Kong 1981:19). It is classified as a semi-skilled industry and about 70% to 80% of the total employees work at the operative level which is predominantly female. The electronics industry in Hong Kong can be described as a 'feminized' industry. Just as many of their sisters in South-East Asia are famous for their 'nimble fingers' and docility, Hong Kong women have entered the industry because it is rationalized as 'women's work'. However, if we examine the rate of employment at various levels of skill, we will find that men have more or less monopolized the jobs at the technologist level and have dominated at the technician and craftsman levels.

Let us now look at Tables 2.1 - 2.5 which show the distribution of male and female employees at all levels of skill in the electronics industry in Hong Kong in 1974, 1976 and 1980.

Table 2.1 - 2.5: The Distribution of Male and Female Employees at All Levels of Skill in the Electronics Industry in Hong Kong; 1974, 1976, 1980.

Table 2.1: Technologist Level

	1974	1976	1980
No. of male employees	755	1043	2216
No. of female employees	2	14	61
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	377.5	74.5	36.3
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	757	1057	2277
% of total labour force	1.5	1.8	2.4

(1) this ratio illustrates the number of male employees per female employee in this industry.

Table 2.2: Technician Level

	1974	1976	1980
No. of male employees	2656	2926	9121
No. of female employees	410	324	817
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	6.5	9.0	11.2
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	3066	3250	9838
% of total labour force	6.3	5.5	10.7

Table 2.3: Craftsman Level

	1974	1976	1980
No. of male employees	4420	3977	6319
No. of female employees	1344	1716	3002
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	3.3	2.3	2.1
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	5764	5693	9321
% of total labour force	11.8	9.7	10.0

Table 2.4: Operative Level

	1974	1976	1980
No. of male employees	3818	7122	12057
No. of female employees	34530	40737	57809
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	0.11	0.17	0.21
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	38348	47859	69866
% of total labour force	78.3	81.3	75.2

Table 2.5: Unskilled Level

	1974	1976	1980
No. of male employees	608	536	788
No. of female employees	417	459	778
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	1.46	1.17	1.01
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	1025	995	1566
% of total labour force	2.1	1.7	1.7

(Compiled from the Hong Kong Training Council, the Electronics Industry Training Board, Report on the Manpower Survey of the Electronics Industry: 1974, 1976 and 1980)

At the technician level, in 1974, for every female employee there were 6.5 male employees. The figures in 1976 and 1980 were 9.0 and 11.2 respectively.

In contrast, at the operative level, for every female employee, there was only 0.11 male employee. The corresponding figures in 1976 and 1980 were 0.17 and 0.21 respectively.

Thus it can be demonstrated that even in a 'feminized' industry like electronics, women were segregated at the bottom level of the occupational hierarchy.

In 1980, Hong Kong continued to be the world's largest supplier of toys, a major output of local plastics industry. In the same year, the industry had 4,816 factories and employed 86,314 workers. Domestic exports during the year were valued at HK\$5,397 millions (Hong Kong 1981:19). About 60% of the jobs in the industry are classified as unskilled jobs and women are again segregated at this level. Tables 3.1-3.5 below show the distribution of male and female employees at all levels of skill in the plastic industry in Hong Kong in 1975, 1977 and 1981.

Table 3.1 - 3.5

The Distribution of Male and Female Employees at All levels of Skill in the Plastics Industry in Hong Kong; 1975, 1977, 1981.

Table 3.1: Technologist Level

	1975	1977	1981
No. of male employees	116	203	296
No. of female employees	0	1	9
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	**	203	32.9
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	116	204	305
% of total labour force	2.0	3.1	3.6

Table 3.2: Technician Level

	1975	1977	1981
No. of male employees	2880	4133	3996
No. of female employees	453	568	1101
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	6.4	7.3	3.6
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	3333	4701	5097
% of total labour force	5.7	7.1	6.0

Table 3.3: Craftsman Level

	1975	1977	1981
No. of male employees	3063	2698	3364
No. of female employees	103	253	60
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	29.7	10.7	56.1
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	3166	2951	3424
% of total labour force	5.4	4.4	4.1

Table 3.4: Operative Level

	1975	1977	1981
No. of male employees	12859	15557	19693
No. of female employees	4447	4272	3536
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	2.9	3.6	5.6
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	17306	19829	23229
% of total labour force	29.5	29.8	27.5

Table 3.5: Unskilled Level

	1975	1977	1981
No. of male employees	5638	7790	14469
No. of female employees	29066	31103	37993
No. of male employees (1) (Ratio)	0.19	0.25	0.38
No. of female employees			
Total no. of employees	34704	38893	52462
% of total labour force	59.2	58.4	62.1

(Compiled from the Hong Kong Training Council, the Plastic Industry, Training Board, Report on the Manpower Survey of the Plastic Industry; 1975, 1977, 1981.)

At the technologist level, in 1975, not even one female employee was employed. For every one female employee, there were 203 employees in 1977 and 32.9 male employees in 1981.

At the craftsman level, in 1975, for every female employee there were 20.7 male counterparts. The corresponding figures in 1977 and 1981 were 10.7 and 56.1 respectively.

Only at the unskilled level can we find women's overwhelming

presence. In 1975, for every female worker, there was 0.19 male workers. The corresponding figures were 0.25 and 0.38 in 1977 and 1981 respectively.

It goes without saying that women in Hong Kong over the last ten years had not acquired equality at work despite the efforts of equalizing pay for equal job. Their lower wages were attributed to their secondary status in the labour market which was seen as a natural consequence of their capacity to bear and raise children, and to take care of the physical and psychological needs of their family members.

### **The Role of Social Welfare Policy**

"Hong Kong is not, in the full sense, a welfare state. People are expected to stand on their own feet, a principle which accords with their proud and independent spirit" (Hong Kong Yearbook 1975)

In this section, I would like to discuss the role of social policy in mediating married women's experience in reproduction between the years 1971 and 1981. Earlier in this paper I have already discussed the development of childcare facilities during this period. Here I will focus upon the development of other family welfare services and social security system which have significant implications upon the pattern of division of labour in reproduction.

Hong Kong has never been a welfare state. Before the early sixties, most of the welfare services in Hong Kong were organized by voluntary organizations. The Government then, apart from providing material relief in kind did not have any active participation. The 1966 and 1967 riots in Hong Kong had urged the Government to reconsider its social welfare policy and to adopt a preventive rather than curative approach. Towards the end of the sixties, the Government began to increase its subvention to voluntary social service bodies. Throughout the years 1971 to 1981, the following services were introduced and developed: counselling and referral services; family life education; home help; statutory and non-statutory protective care; residential and non-institutional care; subvented daycare centres, adoption services and child health services. Unlike the voluntary sector which was very active in pioneering new programmes and doing preventive and educational work, the Government was only active in fulfilling statutory functions under a number of ordinances related to the family. In services like home help and childcare centres, the voluntary sector was the sole agent in providing the service when the Government was involved solely in giving financial support (Lau 1980:92).

Though a variety of services were introduced, they existed on a very limited scale and were far from being adequate in meeting the needs. For example, as late as March 1981, there was only 30 full-time home helpers serving the whole community. Thus it can be seen that the Government had not actively shared the functions of the individual family, particularly when solidarity among kins and neighbours were undermined by the industrial organization of work and the physical planning of housing and environment. Neither were women identified as a distinct target group for service in social policy.

Further, the absence of a social insurance system and the meagre provision of facilities for caring for the aged and the disabled have each in their own way acted to retain women's role in reproduction. Behind this was the Government's conservative social welfare philosophy. The White Paper entitled Aims and Policy for Social Welfare in Hong Kong published in 1965 can shed some light on this point. In discussing the direction in which social security should be developed in Hong Kong the White Paper warned against organizing social welfare services "in such a way as to make it easier for socially disruptive influences to gain a hold over the community, or to accelerate the breakdown of the natural or traditional sense of responsibility". It believed that Chinese social traditions were still maintaining a stronghold and that poverty, delinquency, infirmity and natural disaster were regarded as personal matters rightfully dealt with by the family (Chow 1980:82).

The responsibility of the Government was therefore seen to consist of mainly public assistance for those 'demonstrably unable to support themselves'. In 1971, a cash public assistance scheme was introduced to prevent families from falling below a certain subsistence level set by the Government. Two years later, a non-means tested and non-contributory allowance scheme was introduced, providing allowances for the elderly infirm and the severely disabled.

In short, the development of social policy and welfare services in the period 1971-1981 was based on the assumption that the individual family was the basic unit responsible for satisfying the needs of its members in all stages of life. By disclaiming Government's chief responsibility for the social cost of reproduction and childcare, the social policy in this period did not act in the direction of relieving women's role in reproduction.



## **Reproduction as a Non-Wage Labour Relation**

### **Reproduction Re-represented**

In trying to re-present women's labour in history and economics, and to uncover the material basis of women's subordination, many feminists have begun to confront and problematize reproduction as a crucial, if not central, site of women's subordination (Beneria 1979; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981, 1983; Bland et al. 1978; Fireston 1979; Mies 1980). Due to the wide range of denotations embodied in the term 'reproduction' and the confusion it has caused, attempts have been made to discern the various meanings of 'reproduction' so that their implications upon women can be specified (Edholm et al. 1977; Mackintosh 1981; Mies 1980).

Edholm et al. first clarified the concept of reproduction by isolating three different levels; social reproduction, reproduction of labour force and human/biological reproduction. By social reproduction, it refers to the reproduction of conditions of social production in their totality. To locate the relation between female subordination and social reproduction is to decide to what extent women's position and male-female relations are crucial to the reproduction of social totality. Reproduction of labour force is seen to consist of two meanings: the maintenance of labour force and the allocation of agents to positions within the labour process. To conceptualize women in the reproduction of labour force, we need to determine the extent to which women are involved in this process which is in fact a productive process. We also need to assess whether their involvement varies from one production regime to another. The relevance of biological reproduction to the Woman Question lies in whether and how women's reproductive capacities are controlled and in what way this control determines the position they occupy.

In undoing different layers of social relations in the sphere of reproduction, the schema suggested by Edholm et al. has proved to be very useful. What is most significant is their attempt to differentiate the reproduction of labour force from human/biological reproduction and in such way, they have established the importance of analysing women's role as producers.

At the same time, Mies (1980) contributed to the debate by analysing the close relation of reproduction to capitalist development. To stress the economic significance of such reproductive activities, she defined them as 'subsistence reproduction' and 'subsistence work'.

"In so far as the production of human life and of

living-working capacity is the necessary precondition of all modes and forms of production, we shall call this the subsistence production and reproduction. In the sphere of use value production the distinction between subsistence production and reproduction has little analytic value as both processes are hardly separated from each other. Therefore, in the following I use the term re-production to denote the continuum between the two processes. Subsistence production thus defined involves a variety of human activities ranging from pregnancy, the birth of children, to production, processing and preparation of food, clothing, making of a home, cleaning as well as satisfactions of emotional and sexual needs. In all this activity human energy is spent to transform 'nature' into human life. Therefore, I shall call this activity subsistence work." (Mies 1980:2)

By distinguishing its different levels of operation and establishing its economic significance in continuing the social organization, 'reproduction' is rediscovered as a historical and materialist category of labour rather than an inherently natural activity. The reconceptualization of reproduction enriches our understanding of the persisting sexual division of labour. It is in the light of his approach that I have begun this study on women's reproductivities in Hong Kong.

In the earlier part of this paper, using the experiences of married women in Hong Kong as an illustration, I have attempted to provide a concrete analysis of the given division of labour with respect to biological reproduction and reproduction of labour power. In examining their persisting role in reproduction, I have tried to show that they remain subordinated to men in the family and in society, despite the various changes in education, employment opportunities, fertility patterns and household nature etc. Here I would like to extend the discussion to a more conceptual level and develop some theoretical implications from the previous analysis. My argument will be oriented to explore the following questions: What do the experiences of Hong Kong women tell us about reproduction as a site of female subordination? What is the exploitative nature of such division of labour in a capitalist society like Hong Kong? How does the analysis of women's reproductive role further our understanding of the political and the economic relations which are yet socially invisible? Though the issues concerned will be dealt with at a general level, it should be noted that the analytic framework is basically oriented towards a society in a capitalist urban setting.

## Naturalization of Gender Roles

"Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion."

Barthes 1973:129

As a site of women's subordination, reproduction operates at multiple levels. Gender ideology plays a significant part in guarding against any proposal of changes in the sexual division of labour in reproduction. The role of women in childbearing and housekeeping is basically a coercive gender role in which women are forced to conform on the basis of their sex. Sex has become the organizing element in the social division of labour particularly in the sphere of reproduction. This sexual division of labour is held as a natural pre-given because both female biology and reproduction are defined as derivations of nature itself. The myth that women must bear children and should exclusively take care of them through their childhood is built upon the fact that women can bear children. The abilities and tasks of women are seen to be the irresistible result of female biology. Women's household and childcare work are seen as an extension of their physiology, of the fact that they give birth to children, of the fact that nature has provided them with a uterus (Mies 1981:3). Once born in this world, women are destined to perform these activities as the necessary condition of the fulfillment of womanhood. Bennholdt-Thomsen (1983) aptly compared gender ascription to caste situation and serfdom.

"The present social position of women has a caste-like character, that of a low caste. The occupations they have to fulfil is predetermined by birth and as with outcastes or untouchables, the tasks performed by women become low merely because of being done by them." (1983:4)

"The mechanism of this ascription can be compared to the feudal attachment of the bonded labourer to the soil, since women are similarly attached to their ability to give birth; i.e. to their interns, and bonded by means of this." (1983:22)

The essential function of the myth is articulated through the naturalization of the concept (Barthes 1973:129). The myth of women's role in reproductions set upon the naturalization of concepts like 'female biology', 'childbirth' and even the concept of 'nature' itself. Mies (1983:3) pointed out that women's conscious interaction with nature was alienated as an act of nature and hence defined as beyond women's control,

"All the labour that goes into the production of life, including the labour of giving birth to a child, is not seen as the conscious interaction of a human being with nature, i.e. a truly human activity, but rather as an activity of nature, which produces plants and animals unconsciously and has no control over this process."

This is why gender-typing is found to be most rigid in relations of biological reproduction and reproduction of labour force (Mackintosh 1981:9). The high degree of women's conformity to their role of reproduction serves as an illustration. Though women may not enjoy or may dislike doing housework, it is not uncommon that they have a high or medium identification with the role of mother and housewife (Oaklev 1974:188).

The institutionalization of women's role in reproduction as something feminine, exclusive and eternal has helped to rigidify the sexual division of labour in society. It does not only oblige a woman to fulfil specified qualities and standards once she chooses to cohabit with a man, it also operates ideologically against other women by setting limits to what is called womanhood. Failure to realize this role implies failure in femininity and poses a threat to the self image of a woman.

But imagine: if childbearing and childrearing at home were wage labour, if housewives were paid a monthly salary and fringe benefits, what would people think of reproduction as a kind of human activity?

When reproduction is seen as the natural phenomenon of evolution and a function of female biology, it is simultaneously driven out of the boundary of economics. The non-valorization of reproductive labour in capitalist society is possible because it is dealt with as a natural resource (Bennholdt-Thomson 1983:22) and defined as non-reproductive. When women perform this labour, they are typically called housewives, i.e. non-workers. In a capitalist society where production and reproduction are separated as autonomous and mutually exclusive spheres, the relation of reproduction is made socially invisible. In capitalist economics, the concepts of 'labour' and 'productive work' are reserved for work which is sold in return for a wage. The negation of the economic value of reproduction is a consequence of its non-commoditization. Again, Mies (1981:4) took issue with the concept of 'labour' under capitalist societies and pointed out its implicit ideological biases,

"The instruments of this labour, or the bodily means of production implicitly referred to in this concept, are the hands and the head, but never the womb or the breasts of a woman. Thus, not only are men and women

differently defined in their interactions with nature but the human body itself is divided into truly 'human' parts (head and hand) and 'natural' or purely 'animal' parts (genitalia, womb, etc.)"

To redefine reproduction as subsistence production therefore has the merit of recovering its productive nature. Capitalism gives the impression that production can be independent from its basic purpose, namely the reproduction of life and in such way, results in the subordination of subsistence production to commodity production (Bennholdt-Thomson 1983:17). In fact, women create the only commodity that can create value. The re-evaluation of reproduction lies in the breakdown of such dichotomies as the family against the workplace, the public against the private and finally, production against reproduction.

### **The Dispensable Workforce**

As stated earlier, reproduction is never an autonomous sphere from production outside home. Women's reproductive role is used to militate against their full integration of women in the labour market. The demands made on women to undertake reproduction as their primary role have produced both ideological and practical constraints upon their behaviour in the workplace. Only men are seen as the indispensable 'workforce'. The special characteristics of female employment in many societies: segregation, low pay, part-time work, outwork and discontinuity, etc. cannot be understood without analysing women's primary responsibilities in the household.

### **Reproduction Relation**

To refuse the prevailing concept of the sexual division of labour which seems to suggest that men and women simply divide different tasks among themselves, it is necessary to make known the exploitative nature of the relation through which women perform reproductive labour. What does reproduction relation tell us about gender relation? In what way does reproduction relation increase our knowledge of the articulation between capitalism and the sexual division of labour?

While the existing sexual division of labour is not a consequence of a universal sexism of men, men do have vested interests in it. Through the institutions of marriage and the family, men are in a position to command the reproductive labour of their wives in terms of childbearing, childrearing and housekeeping. While the material significance of lineage organization has been considerably eroded as a result of the industrial organization of work, its ideological framework is still in force especially in a society whose majority population

is Chinese. The appropriation of women's labour in biological reproduction by men is demonstrated by this practice: women bear children who are only named after men. As Rich (1981:92) wrote,

"Institutionalized motherhood demands of women material 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self. Motherhood is 'sacred' so long as its offspring are 'legitimate' that is, as long as the child bears the name of a father who legally controls the mother."

Women's procreative capacity is often accentuated and even exaggerated; but at the same time women are made 'impotent', in other words, their ability to succeed human society is denied.

It has been suggested earlier that women are deprived of their freedom to sell their labour as a result of their primary role in childcare and housework. It is also notable that the non-freedom of women precisely constitutes the basis of men's freedom to commoditise their labour power. In many societies, this relation is manifested in the higher mobility of men as a workforce. In Hong Kong, it can be best illustrated by women's relatively unstable behaviour in the labour market after their marriage and especially after their first child is born.

There are others who claim that domestic labour is a 'labour of love', and motherhood is self-effacing and self-sacrificing. It is not my intention to deny the emotional involvement an individual has when she/he performs a task for somebody she/he loves. A housewife performs housework not only because she feels it to be her duty, but also because she is motivated by her emotional feelings toward her husband and children. When we assert that a woman's domestic labour is essential to the reproduction of labour power, we should take into account her emotional energy and supportive behaviour in the household. However, what is oppressive to a woman is when such love relationships between sexes and generations become institutionalized, and when such expression of feelings is enforced as an instinctive female quality. For there is no reason to assume that it is only through bearing a child and taking care of a house that a woman can realize her affection for her partner. Once the relationship of affection and its consequence become established as both natural and necessary, a woman loses her freedom and authenticity. The analysis of de Beauvoir (1972:491) highlights the tragedy of enforced human relations.

"A human relation has value only in so far as it is

directly experienced the relation to parents, for example, take on value only when they are consciously realized, it is not to be wondered at that conjugal relations tend to relapse from conditions of directly experienced emotions, and that the husband and wife lose their liberty of feeling in the process."

In addition, there is a latent effect of lumping tasks with feeling together because this can easily reinforce the invisibility of physical burden. In stressing that reproductive tasks are but the manifestation of love, that they are spontaneous and spiritual, we may lose sight of its material aspects and of the benefits of men in this situation. It is exactly through the ideological notions of 'conjugal love' and 'mother love' that the material benefits of men are obscured.

To understand the exploitative nature of women's reproductive activities, it is also necessary to define its relation to the accumulation process of capitalism. Redclift (1982) distinguished three recent discussions of women's economic role in the development of capitalism. Firstly, there has been considerable exploration of the significance of women's domestic labour and its relation to capitalism, or whether housework contributes to the use value or surplus value (for example, see Benston 1969; Coulson et al. 1975), whether it is productive or non-productive in Marx's specific sense (see Bland et al) or whether domestic labour constitutes an autonomous mode of production from which all men can be said to benefit (Delphy 1976). A separate discussion is concerned with the special characteristics of women as wage labourers and the role of gender in the development of specific aspects of the labour process in the context of advanced industrial societies (Beechey 1978; Bruegel 1979; West 1982). At the same time, the changing nature of women's economic roles in developing and non-Western societies; the consequences of capitalist penetration for their productive activities; and the differential impact of 'development' on women and men, have given rise to a third debate on women's work and the development of capitalism (Deere 1976; Mies 1980, 1982; Loutfi 1980; Palmer 1977).

These discussions have each in their own direction highlighted the different aspects of women's contribution to the accumulation process. However, the framework which some debates have set up for themselves have placed considerable constraint upon their further development. The domestic labour debate has served to challenge the apparently opposed spheres of the 'economic' and the 'non-economic' and in such way recovered the economic significance of unpaid labour in the household. Yet, by only struggling with the orthodox form of Marx's value theory, many discussions cannot arrive at an analysis which distinguishes

the differential relations of women and men have to capitalism. The basic constraint among these discussions is to take up solely the categories developed by Marx in his analysis of commodity production and wage labour relation. A more central question should be, I think, whether the wage-labour relation is the only significant relation in capitalism.

Various attempts have also been made to explain women's subsidiary position in the labour market with regard to their central role in reproduction in the family. Beechey (1978) is notable for her analysis of women's position under capitalism in the context of an illusory separation of reproduction from production in the course of capitalist accumulation. However, her assertion that women have been paid below the value of labour power seems to have based upon the assumption that women in reality are economically dependent on men. It has not only obscured the fact that in many cases, men are not the main bread winners of the family, it has failed to explain why certain categories of workers should be more exploitable than others at particular moments in history, or why certain combinations of domestic factory production should be developing especially in the periphery of capitalism (Redclift 1982:11).

While it is important to maintain a continuum between women's experience in the household and their behaviour in the labour market, it cannot be assumed that the 'needs' of capitalism have been served by cheap female labour whose reproduction costs have been shouldered by a family wage. Rather, we should look into the process of proletarianization which takes different forms for women and men with reference to the present phase of capitalist accumulation. It is at this point where I find the debate on women's economic role in developing countries particularly illuminating. By conceptualizing women's reproductive activities in peripheral capitalism in terms of subsistence production, it reveals the dilemma of any argument which tries to conceive wage-labour relation as the only essential production relation in capitalism. To suggest that women's reproductive labour is appropriated in the process of capitalist accumulation, it proves the inadequacy of the argument that cheap female labour is functional to the continuance of capitalism.

The mechanisms of capitalist accumulation especially in the centre of capitalism have not always worked in the same direction in the appropriation of women's labour. The mass production of commodities and the expansion of the world market have created the need to incorporate women's labour in factory production. Indeed, women have been invited to sell their labour power as men do. Yet, in reality they are faced with a lot of constraints because simultaneously, their labour is 'preserved' in the



non-capitalist sector of the economy, i.e. the reproduction of human beings and the maintenance of labour power. The persisting inequality and polarization between the sexes in the process of capitalist penetration is not the result of any sexist biases of the accumulation mechanisms. Rather, the organization of capitalist production has rested upon and continued to reinforce the sexual division of labour which predates capitalism.

Capitalism penetration should not be seen as a process of 'universal proletarianization' of the 'non-capitalist' spheres or modes of production. Rather, two tendencies which have differential impact on women and men can be identified. One tendency is to enroll a part of the labour power (both male and female) in the labour market; the other is to preserve the other part of the labour power (mainly female) in the 'non-capitalist' sector which, by virtue of its unpaid nature, shares the costs of reproduction with the capitalist sector.

Mies (1980) has been concerned to refute the classical argument that the capitalist mode of production will ultimately 'free' all non-capitalist spheres and modes from their structural isolation and integrate them into the world system ruled by the laws of capital accumulation. She made use of Rosa Luxemburg's (1913) discussions on the non-capitalist strata like peasants and colonies and suggested that accumulation was an ongoing process by which non-capitalist and structurally heterogeneous spheres were being tapped for the extraction of surplus labour and surplus product. According to Mies, Werlhof (1978) extended Luxemburg's analysis to the area of female labour both in the capitalist centres (housework) and in the capitalist periphery. Werlhof argued that the dominant production relation of capitalism was not simply the relation between wage labour and capital, but also the non-wage labour relation of subsistence reproducer, particularly of women.

The fact that women's labour has been both pushed inside and outside the capitalist sector illustrates the contradictory aspect of the capitalist organization of production at the present stage. In the process of maximizing its profits and incorporating the prevailing forms of sexual division of labour, capitalist development has created some conflicting forces within itself. Women, whose labour is appropriated by the waged and the non-waged sectors, bear the brunt of this contradiction. As regards reproductive labour, it can be best conceived in terms of the non-proletarianization of certain forms of work and of its role in sharing the reproduction costs of the capitalists.

Further, I think that the conceptualization of the double-edged relation between women and the development of capitalism will remove some of the obstacles encountered in the

previous attempts to analyse the class position of women in orthodox marxist terms. The benefit which the non-proletarianization of women has contributed to the capitalist accumulation has revealed that the production relation under present capitalism is not complete without the reproduction relation, and that women's sexuality and fertility should also be taken into account when we discuss the control of means of production. The redefinition of reproduction highlights the necessity to extend the original scope of discussion or to develop new categories which can accomodate for the once hidden relations and processes.

Last, but not least, the reconsideration of women's role in reproduction would serve to explain why participation in social production outside the household has not produced a liberating effect on women either in capitalist or socialist societies. The idea that economic participation has set forth to liberate women from patriarchal control is equally resonant in a capitalist society like Hong Kong and in a socialist society like china. In view of the strong influence socialist China has on the immediate future of Hong Kong, an evaluation of women's role in reproduction in both kinds of societies seems all the more necessary and urgent.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have set out to examine the various forces which have relieved, fostered or given rise to the subordination of women in reproduction in contemporary Hong Kong and to refute the argument that women have acquired sexual equality in marriage as a result of the formation of the nuclear family and of 'increased' participation in employment. My arguments are summarized as follows.

The process of industrialization in Hong Kong has not worked in a unidirectional way in either eradicating or reinforcing women's role in biological reproduction and reproduction of labour force. In fact, it has launched its impact on women in both directions. The erosion of the material basis of patricarchal lineages; the greater autonomy a woman can enjoy in marriages and the popularization of birth control practices have basically freed women from the norm of high-fertility. On the other hand, women are still subjected ideologically as essential childbearers and are deprived of the right to succeed the ancestral line.

An examination of the existing pattern of the division of labour in the household has suggested that an overwhelming majority of married women are primarily responsible for reproductive tasks such as childcare and household chores.

Despite the development of nursery provision and pre-school education which has shared the burden of women, the formation of the nuclear family and the physical setting of housing and environment have on the other hand rendered it more difficult to socialize childcare among neighbours and kin. The organization of mass production outside the house hold in the process of industrialization and the apparent opposition between the family and the workplace in capitalist economy have masked the economic value of reproductive labour. The fact that women have to fulfill their primary duties at home has produced both ideological and practical constraints upon their behaviour in the labour market.

The experience of Hong Kong women suggests that reproduction is an important site of women's subordination at least in societies which share structural similarities with Hong Kong. It operates as a coercive gender role and alienates women's reproductive capacities from their own control. The non-valorization of reproductive labour and the myths of motherhood and of conjugal love tend to obscure the exploitative nature of the reproduction relation. It is argued that the prevailing reproduction relation is both an unequal gender relation and an exploitative production relation in present capitalism.

Meanwhile, as the case of Hong Kong has shown, it is important to take into account the role of the state in mediating women's role in reproduction and the existing sexual division of labour. By disclaiming responsibility in the social costs of reproduction or by relegating reproductive tasks into the sphere of the family, state policy may have acted to the detriment of women.

Needless to say, being the first attempt to analyse the reproductive role of Hong Kong women, this study is exploratory rather than definitive in nature. However, it is my view that the area of reproduction deserves more attention in both academic research and in concrete feminist struggle. It is also my observation that at the present moment, it is strategically important to investigate and emphasize the common basis of women's subordination as reproducers in view of building a feminist movement in Hong Kong. Yet, it does not imply that we should dismiss the social and economic differences among Hong Kong women which should always have an important bearing on feminist analysis and feminist struggles.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to draw the necessary strategic conclusions from the above analysis. Yet a few hints can be given for the development of a strategy aimed at the elimination of women's essential role in reproduction.

Considering the dominant ideological biases implicit in the notion of sexual division of labour and their reactionary effects on any proposal for change, it is necessary and urgent to launch a feminist attack on these biases. A feminist analysis can start from the premise that the prevailing sexual division of labour is not natural, that it does not imply complementary roles for men and women. Also, it can be suggested that the institutionalization of sex roles has differential impact upon women and men. One way to demystify the notion of sexual division of labour is to demonstrate its historical origins and variations over time. To start with, this may only be an ideological struggle to pave way for the necessary conditions for more practical proposals in the future.

Secondly, it is equally important to fight against biological determinism which has pervaded our sexual practices and sexual relations. While we should on the one hand acknowledge the biological roots of women's role in reproduction (i.e. their capacity in childbearing), we should on the other hand recognise its social and historical determinants. As Mackintosh (1981:3) once put it in a straight forward yet humorous way,

"For nothing in the fact that women bear children implies that they exclusively should care for them through their childhood; still less does it imply that women should feed and care for adults, nurse the sick, undertake certain agricultural tasks or work in electronic factories."

We should also seek to break down the moral constructs which have adhered to biological essentialism and to deny the moral duty of both women and men to conform to the supposedly biologically given ideas of masculinity and femininity.

Meanwhile, it is necessary for us to struggle with the state and with capital to ensure that they will undertake the social costs of reproduction which are now largely shouldered by the family or to be exact, by women in the family. Many voluntary organizations like the Hong Kong Council of Social Services and the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee have urged the Government to introduce a social insurance scheme in Hong Kong. It is only recently that the HKCIC has again proposed for a social insurance scheme which will be contributed by the Government, the employer and the employee. I think this is a right direction. Apart from a social insurance scheme which should include paid sick leave, paid maternity leave and old age pensions etc, we should also aim at fighting for the improvement of both quantity and quality of a number of supportive services in Hong Kong which would not only facilitate the employment of

women outside the household, but would also promote a more socialized and communalized way of living.

Indeed, behind the facades of 'industrialization' and 'urbanization', and in view of the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong in 1997, much is left to be said and to be done.

#### References:

1. Mitchell, R.E., i) Family Life in Urban H.K., 1969. ii) Chinese Fertility Rates, Population Studies, 1971. iii) Husband-wife Relations & Family Practices in Urban H.K., Journal of Marriage & the Family, 1972.

2. Podomore, D. & Chaney, D. Family Norms in a Rapidly Industrialising Society, Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1974.

3. Wong, F.M., i) Modern Ideology, Industrialisation and Conjugalism, International Journal of Sociology of the Family, 1972. ii) Industrialisation and Family Structure in H.K., 1975. iii) Family Structure and Processes, 1979. iv) Effects of the Employment of Mothers on Marital Role & Power Differentiation in H.K., 1981.

4. Ng. A., Social Causes of Violent Crimes Among Young Offenders in H.K., Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of H.K., 1975.

5-6. Hong Kong Council of Social Services, (HKCSS), Family as a Unit of Welfare Planning in H.K., 1978.

7. Mackintosh, M., Gender and Economics, in Young, K et al. (eds) 1981.

8. Chan, K.C., Carter, M.J. & Colbourne, M.J., Family Planning Provisions and Attitudes, The Family Planning Association of H.K., 1977.

9. Choi, C.Y., The Impact of Industrialisation on Fertility in H.K., Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of H.K., 1975.

10. Choi, C.Y. & Chan, K.C., The Impact of Industrialisation on Fertility in H.K., The Chinese University of H.K. & The Family Planning Association of H.K., 1973.

11. Kwan, Y.K., Fertility Decline in H.K., 1940-76, University of London, 1979.

- 12.Ng P.T., Family Planning, Fertility Decline, and Family Size Preference, Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of H.K., 1978.
- 13.Beneria, L., Reproduction, Production and the Sexual Division of Labor, Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1979.
- 14.Bennholdt - Thomsen, V., Subsistence Production and Extended Reproduction, in Young,K. et al.(eds), 1981.
- 15.see (7).
- 16.Mies, M., Consequence of Capitalist Penetration for Women's Subsistence Production in Rural China, Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 1980.
- 17.Riley, A. If Women Born, Motherhood as Experience and Institution, 1981.
- 18.Sayers, J., Biological Politics, Tavistock; 1982.
- 19.Benston, M., The Political Economy of Women's Liberation in Malos, E.(ed.), 1980.
- 20.Coulson, M., Magas, B. & Wainwright, H., The Housewife and her Labor, in Malos, E.(ed.), 1975.
- 21.Delphy, C., The Main Enemy: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression, 1976.
- 22.Hobson, D., House Wives: Isolation as Oppression, in Women's Studies Group, CCCS(ed.), 1978.
- 23.Mies, M., The Search for Origins within a Feminist Perspective, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1981.
- 24.Molyneux, M., Beyond the Domestic Labor Debate, New Left Review, 1979.
- 25.Oakley, A., i)The Sociology of Housework, 1974. ii)Wisewoman and Medicine Man: Changes in the Management of Childbirth, in Mitchell, J. & Oakley, A.(eds); 1976a.
- 26.Lam, M.C., Changing Pattern of Child Rearing, The Social Work Dept. of Chinese University & UNICEF, 1982.
- 27.Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association & Hong Kong Shue Yan College, Report on Working Mothers in Family Functioning, 1982.

28. Hong, L., A Profile analysis of the Chinese Family in an Urban Industrialised Setting, *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 1973.
29. Hong Kong Government, Primary Education and Pre-primary Services: Green Paper, 1980.
30. Johnson, E., Women and Childbearing in Kwan Mun Hau Village, in Wolf, M. & Witke R.(eds.), 1975.
31. Bland, L. et al., Women 'Inside & Outside' the Relations of Production, CCCS(ed.), 1978.
32. Hong Kong Council of Social Services, Family as a Unit of Welfare Planning in H.K., 1978.
33. Hong Kong Census & Statistics Dept., Hong Kong By-Census, 1976. Basic Tables, 1977 & H.K. 1981 Census, 1982.
34. Lau, S., Family Welfare Services, in Chow, N. et al., 1980.
35. Chow, N., Social Security, 1980.
36. Firestone, S., The Dialectic of Sex, 1979.
37. Edholm, F., Harris, P. & Young, K., Conceptualising Women, Critique of Anthropology, 1977.
38. Barthes, R., Mythologies, 1973.
39. Redclift, N., Relations of Gender in the International Division of Labor, 1982.
40. Benston, M., The Political Economy of Women's Liberation, in Malos, E.(ed.), 1969.
41. Beechey, V., Women and Production: A Critical Analysis of Some Sociological Theories of Women's Work in Kuhn, A. & Wolpe,, A.(eds.), 1978.
42. Bruegel, I., Women as a Reserve Army of Labor: A Note on Recent British Experiences, *Feminist Review*, 1979.
43. West J.(ed.), Work, Women and the Labor Market, 1982.
44. Deere, C.P., Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 1976.
45. Loutfi, M., Rural Women: Unequal Partners in Development, 1980.
46. Palmer, I., Rural Women and the Basic Needs Approach to Development, *Labour Review*, 1977.

# Women In Malaysia:

## Priority Research Issues

Jamilah Ariffin

This paper attempts to provide an exploratory analysis on women's issues in Malaysia and consequently suggests major priority areas for research. It is divided into two sections; Section One analyses the forces influencing the issues for women in Malaysia. Reference is also made to selected academic theses and research publications on some issues. The aim here is to highlight the gaps in knowledge on many issues which are important but have not been studied.<sup>1</sup> Section Two discusses the basic considerations and criteria utilised by the writer in identifying the priority research areas and subsequently provides a listing of the related issues.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION:**

'Women in Development' has suddenly become an important topic for discussion and research in Malaysia since the mid-1970's Seminars and workshops on women's issues sponsored by the government, political bodies and private organisations (both local and international) are held almost every year. A good deal of publicity is accorded by the mass media to these women's forums. Research on women has also grown significantly in this



decade; before 1970 there was a paucity of research and writing on Malaysian women but since then, a greater interest on the subject has been generated.<sup>2</sup>

The encouraging climate for women's issues as described above is conditioned by a combination of three major forces. They are firstly, the International Women's Decade and Feminism, secondly, the Malaysian government's support for women's participation in national development and thirdly the development trends affecting women in Malaysia. Let us now view each of these forces, the issues generated by them and the related research.

### **The International Women's Decade and Feminism in Malaysia**

As elsewhere in the world, the recent upsurge of interest on women's issues in Malaysia can be credited to the Women's Liberation Movement and the International Women's Decade launched in 1975 by the United Nations. Ideas on Women's Liberation have permeated popular and ephemeral writings in Malaysia particularly those published in newspapers and women's magazines. Theoretical ideas and issues on women's subordination, exploitation and discrimination were contained in a few research and seminar papers.<sup>3</sup>

In support of the International Women's Year and International Women's Decade, women's organisations in Malaysia have organised seminars and raised several issues on women.<sup>4</sup> These included the changing status and position of women, women in rural and urban areas, problems of working mothers, and women's conflicting roles and values. Research activities have not been able to keep pace with the issues raised.

Mention must also be made of the encouragement given by various organisations like the Trade Union Congress, the Selangor Graduates' Association and the institutions of Higher Learning in stimulating discussion on women's issues through seminars and forums. These deliberations on women have focussed on issues like women's participation in trade union activities; women in rural-urban migration, women in employment, women and exploitation, women and public life, women in the industrial factories.<sup>5</sup>

The Malaysian government in agreement with the United Nation's resolution of integrating women in the development process has also shown considerable support on women's issues by forming a women's bureau, the National Advisory Council on the Integrations of Women and Development, its acronym NACIWID. This committee functions as the advisory consultative, and co-ordinating body for the government on women-related matters in

development planning and implementation. NACIWID has organised seminars and studies on women and drawn out a comprehensive national plan of action.<sup>6</sup> A recent involvement of NACIWID in research on women is the KANITA project.<sup>7</sup> To date, even though NACIWID has discussed some priority issues on women, it has not yet issued a comprehensive listing.<sup>8</sup>

### **Malaysian Government's Support for Women's Participation in Development**

Women's issues and studies have been accorded legitimacy in view of the government's acknowledgement of women's contribution to national development. This recognition is expressed explicitly in the Third Malaysia Development Plan (covering the period 1975-1980) and implicitly in the Treasury's Economic Reports relating to women's participation in the economy.<sup>9</sup>

In perceiving women's primary roles in development as housewives, mothers and supplement income-earners, the government allocates funds for Family Planning and Home Economics programmes through the National Family Planning Board (NFPB) and KEMAS (the Community Development Division of the Ministry of National and Rural Development.<sup>10</sup>) The National Family Planning Board deserves to be appreciated for organising several seminars on women in relation to demography and labour force participation. This has provided an opportunity for researchers on women to discuss their findings and gain further insights into women's issues.<sup>11</sup>

The Malaysian government's recognition of woman's issues and needs is also expressed in the form of the Ministry of Social Welfare's projects for poor women. These include the income-generating project for poor rural woman and the guidance and counselling service for migrant factory women. In these projects, the Ministry has accepted the research findings of some local researchers.<sup>12</sup> Recently, a training course for domestic servants was conducted by the Ministry with the aim of providing employment for poor women and indirectly helping working mothers who can employ them. In this aspect the government recognises the needs of the emerging middle-class and its women. Undoubtedly, the ascendance of women into high status jobs previously dominated by men has been aided by the government. Since the late 1960's, university-educated women have taken position in the bureaucracy, the judiciary and in government. The entry of these women into the 'corridors of power' has raised new issues for women. Women in the professions is a popular area for research, as shown by the academic dissertations of Leslie O'Brien, Fatimah Abdullah and others.<sup>13</sup>

The research and literature on women in education is however very sparse. As noted by Fan (1981) one major reasons for this

lack of interest on this subject is that Malaysia, unlike other Asian or developing countries, equal opportunity prevails in present times for women to pursue their studies up to university level. Problems in education for women do not therefore relate to access to education but to the choice of studies as it affects career development of women. The few postgraduate studies are by Siraj(1975) Goon(1975) and Gerhold(1971).<sup>14</sup>

In support of women's organisations clamour for equal pay, the government has also implemented equality in payment for men and women workers in the public sector. With the establishment of a law school at the University of Malaya, several research work on women and the law are generated mainly through honours year dissertations. The main focus of these legal studies has been on Muslim women following the scholarly example set by Professor Ahmad Ibrahim. Customary marriage and family laws form another popular topic while recent issues like women's rights and laws governing female employment are beginning to attract the attention of researchers.<sup>15</sup> The recent seminar on Women and the Law in 1981 brought forth other issues affecting women. Among the issues are those relating to the lack of protection for women from sexual discrimination, unequal rights to inheritance and also guardianship of children.

### **Development Trends Affecting Women**

Malaysia is experiencing rapid development and change. It is therefore inevitable for its women to be affected by these changes. In this section, we are concerned with outlining only those development trends affecting women's issues significantly. Some of these trends are as follows:

Firstly, the Malaysian economy is changing from a position based primarily on agricultural production to a more diversified and industrial-oriented status. After the Second World War, Malaysian women ventured steadily into new forms of paid employment outside the home. Women's labour force participation increased significantly in the service sector in the 1960's and in the industrial sector in the 1970's. There has undeniably been a shift of women's labour from the traditional agricultural sector to the modern non-agricultural sector. The demographic and statistical aspects of these changing trends in women's labour force participation have been studied in some detail but the broad sociological and cultural implications have not been investigated in depth.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly the shift in the government's industrial policy from one of import-substitution to that of export-oriented industrialization in 1970 has tremendous impact and implications for women. Export-led industrialization dependent mainly on

multinationals investment has created vast employment opportunities for unskilled women. (In the case of the electronics industry, the majority of workers required are young, single women). Concurrently, the government's New Economic Policy of restructuring society was taking effect particularly in terms of the migration of Malays to the cities and into new forms of economic activities. These rapid changes have affected women, particularly Malay women, and raised several new issues. Among others those related to female rural-urban migration to the export-oriented factories, the exposure of women workers to culture multinationals of and their low moral status, new occupational and health hazards, the exploitation of women, problems of retrenchment of women workers by multinational companies and its consequences, can be noted. These issues have been investigated quite substantially by researchers.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, with increasing rates of urbanization and women's employment outside the home, new forms of services and equipment are required in the society such as institutionalised child-care centres, commercialised food-catering services and labour-saving domestic household equipment. Women's earning capacity and new consumer habits have also raised new issues. Among others those relating to the manipulation of women consumers by commercial advertisements and by the mass media can be singled out. In the same vein, the newly-found economic independence by working women also has several implications in terms of their role and status in the family and kinship group. Although these issues are discussed widely yet they have seldom been investigated in depth.

Fourth, while new development programmes and projects are being implemented in pursuit of economic progress, modern technology is also introduced in various sectors of the economy. The issues and implications for women in relation to the adoption of new technology are wide and varied. Among others those related to the displacement of female labour, the improvement or conversely the deterioration of women's status and the cultural changes generated by this trend can be noted. To date, few studies have been conducted on these issues.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, as the Malaysian economy prospers, new technological products are brought into the society and this creates issues relating to technological change. As argued in one of my recent papers, technological change<sup>19</sup> in the industrial sector has tremendous effects for women. This can also apply equally well to technological change in the service sector, the domestic household sector and the agricultural sector. As Malaysia is planning to enter into the phase of higher-technology industrialization, the change in technological base will cause the phasing out of labour-intensive 'female-dominated' industries. This changing trend in development raises issues relating to the employment and retraining opportunities for women

and the possibility of retrenchment for women workers. To date, there is no detailed study on these issues.

Fifthly, the continuing development trend of unbalanced growth and economic dualism between the urban and rural sector creates serious employment problems for rural women. As recent studies have predicted for the coming decade, about half of the unemployed people in Malaysia will be women, the majority of whom will comprise the relatively educated, young, rural women.<sup>20</sup> With limited employment opportunities in the rural sector, these women will be prone to migrate to the urban centres. However, with the possibility of reduced employment opportunities for women in the industrial sector due to the shift towards higher-technology industrialization, these women will find difficulties in getting jobs unless opportunities are expanded in the other sectors. These prospects raise several queries and issues for women; for example should rural women's migration to the urban areas be suppressed and more employment opportunities be created in the rural areas? These are issues requiring a detailed study.

#### **CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY RESEARCH ISSUES**

In taking stock of the several and diverse issues affecting women in Malaysia, it is now timely to identify the priority issues. Admittedly, there are several criteria for selecting these issues depending on our aims and objectives. In my opinion, the selection should be guided by three interrelated considerations and four major criteria. These considerations are the importance, relevance and urgency of these issues for women in Malaysia. As correctly pointed out by Papanek, the issues which are important and relevant for women in the developed countries are different from those in the developing countries because of the different social and cultural contexts and level of economic development. Similarly, priority in research should also be related to issues which reflect the urgent problems of a nation and its women. It must however be emphasised that not all research should only be problem-solving but should also contribute to theoretical knowledge which can generate further insights into women's situation.

Taking all these considerations in mind, we now discuss the four major criteria for identifying the priority research issues. The issues identified should reflect the following criteria utilised in their selection:

Firstly, these issues can generate research which will provide a more meaningful participation of women in the development process. This is imperative so as to ensure that women will reap maximum benefits from their contribution to development.

Secondly, the issues can generate research which will fill the gaps in knowledge about women in Malaysia.

Thirdly, the issues are relevant and related to the wider national development issues and problems especially those affecting women in Malaysia. Some of the major Development issues of importance to Malaysia at the present time are the restructuring of society, poverty and employment creation, industrialization, revitalization of the rural agricultural sector and National unity. Major problems related to these development issues are rural and urban poverty, unemployment and underemployment, migration and accommodation, dependent development, inter-ethnic and inter-racial unity, drug addiction and trafficking.

Fourthly, the issues selected can be conceptualised theoretically so as to generate theoretical insights and theoretical understanding on women. This in turn will nourish further research which will provide an accumulation of knowledge on women in particular and mankind in general.

#### **MAJOR PRIORITY RESEARCH AREAS AND ISSUES**

On the basis of the considerations and selection-criteria as outlined above, five major priority areas and related issues are listed below:

##### **(a) Women, Development and Change**

As discussed earlier on, Malaysia is experiencing rapid socio-cultural, economic and ideological changes and these are affecting Malaysian women in significant ways. Some of these effects require women to reorientate their values, attitudes and behaviour-patterns.

The integration of women in national development requires considerable adaptation and adjustment by Malaysian women. As in other traditional societies, Malaysian women have always been confined to the domestic domain and to their primary roles as daughters, wives and mothers. Traditionally, the linkage of women with an integration into the community and wider society has always been through their membership in the primary groups consisting of the family, kinship and women's voluntary associations. The sudden changes brought about by women's autonomous integration into the development process through their own individual abilities and attainment (for example education and skills) have significant implications for women's position and status in these primary groups. How do women cope with these changes and what are the consequences? These are important

issues for research. To date, wider-ranging studies and comparative research on these issues are lacking. The priority research issues related are as follows:

(i)How changes in the position of women in Malaysia are related to the changes in the religious, ideological, cultural and social systems.

(ii)How women cope with changes in their social, economic environment (this can also be related to issues on the effects of development projects on women).

(iii)Women's position in primary groups and how women's participation in paid employment outside the home affects their position in these primary groups.

(v)Women and demographic change: Problems and Needs of Women in a rapidly developing society. (This can be related to the problems of working women coping with multiple and conflicting roles, the problems and needs of aging and retired women, the problems of rural women in heavy outmigration areas, and the like).

(vi)The role of primary groups and women's voluntary associations in integrating women into development.

(vii)Women at the top of the occupational scale: a sociological analysis of the background factors determining their ascendancy and implications for women in development (other than the usual emphasis on class and educational correlates, the influence of early socialization patterns should be investigated in depth).

(viii)The culture of poverty in the Malaysian context as it relates to women.

#### **(b)Women And Technology:**

As discussed earlier on, this is an important topic which has been neglected in women studies in Malaysia. The relevant issues are as follows:

(i)The impact of the Green Revolution for women in the rural agricultural sector.

(ii)The impact of modern technology in the industrial sector for women workers and the implications of technological change for women (in this aspect, the implications of the shift in the industrial policy towards higher-technology industrialization can be studied).

(iii)The impact of the adoption of modern technology in the

service sector for women. (In this area, the implications of modern technology like automatic cash-registers, word processors and computerised equipment for women's labour force participation can be analysed).

(iv) The impact and implications of the introduction of modern household gadgets for women's roles and position in the home and in society.

(v) Women's role in determining suitable and appropriate technology for Malaysia.

#### **(c) Women and Work:**

Women's work has now been acknowledged as an important contributor to national development. However, unpaid household work by women is still unrecorded and not given its full appreciation in Malaysia. To gain higher status and socio-economic recognition, women have to venture into the public domain and secure high paying and administrative positions. Women's labour force entry into these jobs, previously dominated by men, are often viewed with envy and hostility by men and women alike. There still exist sexist bias in appointing qualified women to positions of managerial and supervisory status especially in the private sector. Even though women have entered into paid employment for some time now, attitudes and practices pertaining to the 'domestic division of labour' persist even among educated working women. This practice creates difficulties for women to fulfil their multiple roles.

Although issues relating to exploitation of women workers (including sexual discrimination and sexual harassment) have received a good response in the popular and ephemeral writings, a well researched and wide-ranging study has never been conducted for women in all sectors. As stated earlier, the working conditions of women workers in the industrial sector (especially in the electronics industries) have been studied, this is not the case for women in the other sectors like the rural peasant sector, the service sector, and the primary commodities sector (for example the tin-mining sector).

The gender subordination of women workers and sexual division of labour are issues worthy of detailed research. Besides the usual reference to women as a 'reserve army of labour', the more serious aspects relating to 'unequal exchange' and 'unequal relations of production' of women's labour force participation deserves to be studied in the Malaysian context. This applies to women in all sectors and occupations.

The contribution and role of women in the informal sector



are also issues neglected in current research.

The priority research issues on 'Women and Work' are as follows:

- (i) The value of unpaid female domestic work to the economy.
- (ii) Sexist bias in the employment and promotion of qualified women in the private and public sector.
- (iii) Women's gender subordination and its implications for women's integration in national development (related theoretical issues include women's conformity to the 'domestic division of labour' and 'sexual division of labour').
- (iv) Women in the labour market: the position of women workers in an inferior situation of 'unequal exchange' and inferior status in the 'relations of production'.
- (v) Health and occupational hazards faced by women workers in the agricultural, service and the industrial sector.
- (vi) Women and employment-generating activities (related issues are the prospects of unemployment for several educated, rural women and the need to foster not only supplement-income generating activities in the rural sector but employment-creation activities).<sup>21</sup>
- (vii) Women and informal sector economic activities. Women's labour force participation in the informal sector and the contribution of these activities to development. (In this aspect, related issues are the role of informal sector activity for women's economic and financial position and contribution to the household economy). Empirical studies of this nature are urgently needed in the Malaysian context.

**(d) Women, The Media and Culture:**

In attempting to fulfil their roles as good wives and mothers, women are susceptible to be manipulated by commercial advertisements on baby foods, modern medicine, modern household gadgets and beauty products. In attempting to achieve the cultural ideals of femininity or to secure high ratings in the marriage market, women consumers are prone to be manipulated by sales; gimmick. As receivers of mass-media communication, women are exposed to media manipulation.

Women have also been socialised to believe in depending on men (hence the 'cinderella complex' affecting women). In traditional homes, where 'women's place is in the kitchen', girls

are socialised to be subservient to men and perceive their vocation in life primarily as housewives and mothers. The gender dependency ideology is also mediated through popular literature (such as in fairy tales, story books, novels etc.)

Despite the cultural ideals of happy marriages and shared parenthood, there are increasing rates of the postponement of marriage, divorce and desertion in Malaysia. Given the present situation of rapid urbanization and geographical mobility, and the disintegration of the extended family system, female single parents (including widows, deserted wives and divorcees) are facing problems of child-rearing. The children of female single parents may also experience adaptation difficulties in the absence of stable surrogate fathers (in the traditional extended family system, these are the uncles and grand fathers) or role-models.

Although prostitution does not seem to be a major social issue at the moment (as in the case of some other Asian neighbours) reported rape cases seem to be on the increase and so is drug addiction among women. In a cultural context where such women (raped women, illegitimate daughters, drug addicts, prostitutes and others) are severely stigmatised, it is essential to do a wide-ranging study on these social outcasts so to understand the background factors for their unenviable position and social status, and to rehabilitate them.<sup>22</sup>

The relevant issues on 'Women, the Media And Culture' are as follows:

(i) Women And Consumerism. How women's consumer needs are conditioned by culture. The role of women in consumer education.

(ii) Women And Media Manipulation: impact and implications of modern mass media manipulation for women's progress and development. Popular writings and effects on women's world view, dependency on men and women's role in society and development.

(iii) Gender subordination and continuing dependency of women, ignorance of women on their rights, (social, legal, economic etc.) problems of single women (divorcees, widows spinsters). A social history of the vicious circle of gender subordination.

(iv) Society's cultural perception about women and their role in society (such as society's attitudes towards spinsters, divorcees and unmarried mothers, illegitimate daughters) in a situation of rapid change and diverse cultural influences. For example in the case of the Malay society, these diverse influences include westernization, Malay culture and Islamic values.

### (e) Women, Politics And Nation-Building

It is generally recognised that women can exert significant political leverage. In Malaysia, the role of the Kaum Ibu (the women's wing of UMNO) in rallying political support has been acknowledged.<sup>23</sup> The participation of women in certain industries professions and services has risen dramatically recently. What are the experiences of these women and are their roles incompatible with the traditional and religious concept of women as the "weaker sex"? More importantly are these women confined to tasks which are determined by gender-specific considerations? To date, no study on these issues has been done.

In the sphere of nation-building women in their common roles as mothers, share the same experiences due to biological, cultural and social factors. These shared experiences and attitudes can make them vital contributors to inter-racial and inter-ethnic harmony and unity, factors so essential to nation-building.

A very important political development in Malaysia is the Islamic religious movement (the Dakwah movement). This has a significant impact on Muslim women's attitudes and behaviour. Although a study is being conducted on this movement in the universities a wide ranging study on women in Malaysia in general is needed.

The priority research issues related to Women, Politics and Nation-Building are as follows:

(i) Women leaders as effective decision makers for the progress of Women in Development or mere token representatives.

(ii) Politicization of women's issues and mobilization of women's power: women in political parties.

(iii) Women and the labour movement; women's power in the organised labour sector (in the trade union movement) and the unorganised, non-unionised sector.

(iv) Women and the law: formulation, implementation and execution of the law. This relates to women magistrates, lawyers, judges and women in the police, navy, army and security service.

(v) Women and their role in National Unity.

**References:** I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Rohana Ariffin, Associate Professors Dr. Khadijah Muhammad and Dr. Nik Safiah Karim, and Professor Kamal Salih, respectively for our stimulating discussion on this matter and lending me the relevant

reading material.

1.It must be emphasised that the references given are not exhaustive of all research on women since the aim in this case is not to do a literature review. On this aspect, readers are advised to resort to the bibliographies on women in Malaysia. My apologies are offered to researchers whose publications are not cited in this paper.

2.According to the comprehensive bibliography on women by Fan (1981) it was estimated that before 1970 slightly over 100 were counted. Between 1970 and 1980, this figure doubled to approximately 300 entries. See Fan, K.S., (1981) "Women in Malaysia: a Bibliography" (Forthcoming).

3.For some examples of this limited collection, see: (i)Rohana Ariffin, "Exploitation of Women" in Proceedings of the seminar on Women in Contemporary Malaysia, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1979. (ii)Gong C.K., "Women's Rights and Equality Provision of Article 8 of the Constitution", paper presented at the Fifth Malaysian Law Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 1979. (iii)Sivaretnam, J.P., "Women's Rights and the Law: A Comparative Study on Sex Discrimination", L.L.B. academic exercise, University of Malaya, 1977.

4.See for example, The Third Convention of Malaysian Women's Organisations Seminar, Kuala Lumpur, 1981.

5.For some examples, see: (i)I.L.O. Regional Seminar on Women's Participation in Trade Union Activities, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, sponsored by the International Labour Organisation and Malaysian Trade Union Congress. (ii)'Women in Contemporary Malaysia' Organised by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1979. Some of the research papers discussed and published as the proceedings of seminar are as follows: (a)Manderson, L., "Women in Public Life: Theoretical and Critical Implications". (b)Nik Zainab Haji Abdul Karim, "The Contribution of Malay Women from Kelantan in the fields of Education, Economics and Politics to National Development"

6.Some examples are the Asean seminar titled "Women and Employment" and the study on "Income Generating Skills for Women in Malaysia". Another study currently underway is "Women's Needs and Aspirations in Society and Their Priorities in Career Development".

7.This project was initially funded by UNICEF and presently financed by the Federal Government. The main thrust of this project is to identify and work out the problems and needs of women, children and youth in Malaysia.

8. Personal communication from Associate Professor Dr. Nik Safiah Karim.

9. See Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, p.105. And Economic Reports (1975/76, 1982/83). One interesting point to consider is that it took the government nearly 20 years after Independence in 1957 to realise the contribution of women to Development. It needed the impetus set by the International Women's Decade to foster this acknowledgement. Despite the recognition of women's work there are still no policies addressed specifically to women; women's role in Development is regarded only as a complementary and contributory entity.

10. KEMAS is responsible for carrying out Family Development programmes which mainly concentrate on women. Activities organised by KEMAS in the rural areas are pre-school activities and home economics education. In this connection, see Purvis, B.M., "Development of Extension Programmes for Rural Women", Master's Thesis, University of Malaya, 1974.

11. One example of such a seminar is "Women Economic Activities" organised by NFPB in 1983 which discussed the data on women obtained from the 1980 Population Census and Labour Force Survey. Some of the issues raised are cited in sub-section 1.4.

12. Jamilah Ariffin, "The Migration of Malaya Village Women to the manufacturing sector: a 'Bumiputra' economic problem?" Ministry of Social Welfare Bulletin, 1979.

13. (i) O'Brien L.N., "Class, Sex, and Ethnic Stratification in West Malaysia with Particular Reference to Women in the Professions", Ph.D. Dissertation, Monash University, 1979. (ii) Fatimah Abdullah, "Wanita dan Pekerjaan", Master of Arts thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan, 1982/83. (iii) Khadijah Muhammad's research on Malay women employed outside the home is one of the pioneering pieces of work pertaining to this area. See Khadijah Muhammad, "Wanita Melayu dan Pekerjaan". Master's thesis, University of Malaya, 1969.

14. Siraj, A.N., "Women and Adult Education", Master's Thesis University of Malaya, 1975. Goon, C.A.I., "A Study of the Pattern of Vocational Preference", Master's Thesis, University of Malaya, 1975. Gerhold, C.R., "Factors Relating to Educational Opportunity for Women", Ph.D., Cornell University 1977.

15. For an exhaustive list on these aspects, see Fan, K.S. (1981) Bibliography on Women in Malaysia, pp.23-32.

16. Some examples of demographic studies on women in the labour force are as follows: (i) Jones, G.W., "Female Participation in the Labour Force in a Plural Economy: The Malayan Example", *Malayan Economic Review*, 10:2 (1965) 61-81. (ii) Fong, M.S. "Social and Economic Correlates of Female Labour Force Participation in West Malaysia", Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1974.

17. Some examples of the research conducted on related issues are as follows: (i) Working and living conditions of factory women in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were investigated by Fatimah Daud, Rajmah Samad and Zuhairah Ali for their postgraduate dissertations. (ii) The impact of multinational factories and culture on women workers were studied by Linda Lim Ai-Hwa, Grossman, and Wendy Smith respectively. (iii) Policy-oriented research are being conducted by the HAWA project of the University of Malaya and the Young Workers Project in Penang, Malaysia. (iv) Rural-urban migration of Malay women workers to the industrial factories has been the focus of a study by the writer.

18. One of the rare studies on this topic is by De Koninck R., *Rice Men, Women, and Machines*, *Jurnal Ekonomi Malaysia*, 1982.

19. See Jamilah Ariffin, "The Impact of Modern Electronics Technology on Women Workers in Malaysia", paper presented at the International Symposium on technology, Culture and Development, Kuala Lumpur, 1983.

20. See papers and resolutions of the seminar, "Women in Economic Activities in Malaysia", organised by NFPB, September 1983.

21. This relates to the discussion given earlier on development trends pertaining to women's unemployment prospects.

22. Prostitution has been the major focus of studies on women relating to Crime and Delinquency. See for example Ahmad Hadi, Z. (1975) "Some Patterns in High-Class Prostitution in Kuala Lumpur And Petaling Jaya" M.A. thesis, University of Malaya.

23. The role of the Kaum Ibu has been studied by Manderson (1980) see Manderson, L. *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO Malaysia 1945-1972*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1980.

## Discussion Notes On

### Introducing Women's Studies Perspectives in Basic Courses in Social and Human Sciences in Higher Education: Reconstructing Knowledge

Sucheela Tanchainan (Thailand)

#### Introduction:

Women's studies in most countries emerged from the women's movement. In their struggle for equality, women discovered that the oppression which permeates their lives has deeper roots than what can be observed. Starting with consciousness raising groups in which they analysed their own situation, women began to recognise the similarities of their experience and to identify the mechanisms which keep them in a subordinate position. From there, women decided to act upon their own lives, to transform them and change the mechanisms which maintain their subordination and oppression. The course of their action was (and still is) confronted by a structure of knowledge (religious and 'scientific') which either conceals the oppressive reality under which women live or misinterprets it. This structure of knowledge also fosters unequal and hierarchical conditions between the sexes. Thus, women began to recognise that their struggle for change in society must encompass not only the transformation of the male-female relationship but also the existing structure of knowledge itself which contributes to female oppression. Women's studies were developed to correct the male-biases and assumptions found in dominant social theories and to produce new theoretical knowledge which can explain more adequately the asymmetrical relation between the sexes. These developments in the academic world have followed various strategies and most are contributing to the social movement from which women's studies emerged, namely the feminist movement. However, most of these attempts have been in the European continent and in the United States. Some attempts have already begun in some third world countries and in this sense, we feel that women's studies programme need to be developed in our own countries keeping in mind the specificities of Asia, particularly developing Asia.

A fundamental aspect of women's studies which we are interested in reproducing is its methodology which consists of a careful attention to women's everyday life. It makes a special effort to observe the elements that support hierarchical

male-female relations. In doing this, it reviews the different ways in which knowledge is produced and reality interpreted. A critical analysis of the transmission of knowledge, ranging from popular saying and songs to different scientific production, needs to be done in our own countries. In this way, women are directly involved in the process of reconstruction of knowledge and in the identification and transformation of the different oppressive realities.

In this paper, the women's studies programme in Thailand will be discussed and some feasible approaches for the development of women's studies at the higher education level pointed out.

### **Background:**

Women's studies in Thailand is a topic of concern today both at the university level and at the level of women's organisations. Though it has not yet been included as a subject in university syllabi, there are Women's studies centres at two universities. One is affiliated to the Social Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, the other will be established at Payap University in Chiangmai province. There is also the course on Sociology of Women offered at the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology at Thammasat University in Bangkok. Apart from these programmes there are short training programmes jointly organised by women's organisations and the women's studies programme of Chulalongkorn University.

The women's studies programme at Chulalongkorn University aims within an academic setting to look at women's issues with an attempt to highlight or help solve certain specific issues(1), as well as to initiate and support the research projects on women. In addition the programme has worked out some short training programmes for non-governmental organisations in the areas of concern such as women and development. A seminar on "Legal measures on prostitution" was jointly organised by this programme and the Friends of Women Group. The programme at Payap university is still in the embryonic stage, there is not yet much information about its activities. In regard to the course on Sociology of Women which is offered at Thammasat University, the instructor of the course attempts a survey of literature in women's studies as well as concentrating on the concepts of sex roles and sex differences in our societies. The course is an elective course which is not yet popular and needs to be improved by way of availability of literature and personnel development. In other faculties and universities, no women's courses are offered mainly due to the fact that none of the instructors feel qualified to take handle such a course. A team teaching course has been recommended but not yet implemented because members of



the teaching team belong to different universities and also a good coordinator is required to make a team teaching course a success.

Women's studies programme in terms of support for curriculum development, is not that easily attainable. Most of the present day academicians are not equipped and do not feel qualified to teach courses on women's studies or to develop a programme curriculum on women's studies. Refresher courses or short training programmes may have to be initiated to help train present instructors with women's studies material. Personnel development is indeed what is needed if efforts in the development of women's studies courses are to be strengthened(2).

### **Women's studies in Thailand and links with the women's movement**

In spite of the fact that Thai women have always faced many problems in socio-economic and political terms there has not been much literature and study on the issues, either in the higher education institutions or by most of the government departments. The problems of Thai women were pointed out in the Socio-Economic Plan for Women both short-term (1982-1986) and long-term (1982-2001) by the National Economic and Social Development Board. As Narong Nitayaphorn mentions:

"...The findings showed basic problems which urgently need to be solved. Thus, the formulation of the Plan for the Development of Women during the next phase (Fifth Plan) includes certain economic problems as well as the problems of female labour, education, public health, women's rights and political status..."(3)

The government has only now become concerned about women's issues, after the proclamation of International Women's Year in 1975 though women's groups and organizations have existed since many years ago as for example, the National Women's Council of Thailand. In terms of women's studies, women's groups within different universities have organized their own study groups on various women's issues from 1972 onwards. And the two women's Studies Centres, one at the Social Research Institute Chulalongkorn University and the potential one at Payap University have been initiated by members of the Friends of Women Group, realizing that there is a need to create an atmosphere within an academic setting in which issues on women can be discussed and debated in an attempt to help solve certain specific short term and long term issues, to initiate and support the research project and to promote further study in this area. There are clear links between the women's movement and the emergence of women's studies and though both programme courses on Women's Studies are yet to begin, much ground work necessary to

initiate such courses has been done (see appendix).

It is clear that women's studies is needed because of the fact that Thai women need analytical tools to analyse and understand their own situation and to be able to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of the root causes, forms and dimensions of their subordination and exploitation. This also raises the need for a source of data and documents relating to women as well as a source for support and promotion of research.

### **Why a multidisciplinary women's studies programme in Thailand**

There are present arguments for and against the multidisciplinary and the interdisciplinary approaches to women's studies programme. The strong argument for interdisciplinary women's studies programme is that an autonomous unit, provides room for women's studies equal to other disciplines to develop. Such a women's studies project has the possibility to define and chart its own scope and knowledge base that can benefit women as a whole and without a male-biased orientation. This approach is needed to gain access to other groups of people and existing disciplines. The argument for the multidisciplinary approach is based on the fact that it can provide for women as a subject in different existing disciplines within the universities. Furthermore, it can challenge the male-bias prevalent in the academic atmosphere. As Eloise C.Snyder points out:

"It was found that academic literature tells us very little about women and that, more important, much of what it does tell us is erroneous or, at very least, questionable. Discovery of the paucity of knowledge about women, on the one hand, and the question of its validity, on the other, led immediately to the third and very positive phase of Women's Studies development, feminist scholarship"(4).

As far as the situation of women's studies in Thailand is concerned, the possibility of setting up an autonomous women's studies programme within the university level is still a debatable question. It is not only the problems of budgetting and personnel problem but also the question of its popularity among students. For example the course on Sociology of Women offered at Thammasat University is found to be attractive only to activists from student groups and who are not a majority. The possibility at the moment is to introduce the course within the existing disciplines in various faculties, for example a course on Women and Law in the Faculty of Law, a course on Women and Work in the Faculty of Economics, a course on Women and Politics in the Faculty of Political Science, Women and Education, Women and Religions, Women and History at the Faculty of Art etc.

Besides the integration of women's studies courses within the existing disciplines, the two Women's Studies Centres should function to provide documents, materials and short-course training programmes for those who are interested in the issue as well as to support the teaching materials for the courses mentioned. Once the women's studies has developed and gained popular support from the students and the administrators of the universities the need to establish an autonomous programme becomes more feasible at this stage.

### **Conclusion:**

Women's Studies in Thailand has primarily emerged from the women's movement which recognized that women are oppressed and suppressed by the existing male-dominant society. Women feel the need to develop their own theory and critical analytical tools to analyse and understand their own situation and to be able to develop a theoretical framework for analysis of the root causes, forms and dimensions of their subordination and exploitation. In the present circumstance it is possible to introduce women's studies courses within the existing disciplines rather than having an autonomous programmes. Since it is not only a question of the paucity of instructors and financial support from the university but also the problem of its popularity among the students. The cooperation of the two existing Women's Studies Centres, and Women's Movement, will help develop a strong base for an autonomous Women's Studies Programme in the future.

### **Appendix:**

#### **Women's Studies Programme**

#### **Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute**

##### **1.Objectives:**

- 1.1 To be a source for data and documents relating to women.
- 1.2 To be a source for academic services for those interested.
- 1.3 To be a source for support and promotion of research, teaching and activities relating to women's problems and women studies.
- 1.4 To be a source for circulating data for the general public to understand and to have more interest in women problems and studies.
- 1.5 To be a source for coordination between organizations with similar interests.

**2.Directives for Implementation:** The above objectives can be realized through:

## 2.1 Teaching, more specifically:

2.2.1 Including Women Studies as a subject in the syllabus of the University.

2.2.2 Arranging special lectures.

Such teaching and training will combine different academic disciplines, and will also involve teaching teams arranged between universities. At the moment several faculties have already ongoing instruction in relevant subjects. The lecturers concerned have agreed to cooperate in setting up teaching teams at both the inter-faculty and inter-university level.

2.2. Research work: There is a strong need for an increase in research relating to women. Such research can be conducted both at undergraduate and graduate levels and in collaboration with the research work of individual lecturers and research project. In addition to this, subsidiary research work and projects should be encouraged.

2.3. Collecting and distributing data, to provide a reliable data base for the benefit of the academic community and general public, the Women's Studies Programme should work in close collaboration with related activity groups. Apart from this, the programme should support or join in with other activities in order to obtain and distribute data (both for the general public and special interest groups) as necessary or appropriate.

2.4. Publication, the programme will produce various types of publications related to women issues, including a newsletter research reports, material to support teaching activities, and other publications aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of women issues.

## References:

1. Amara Pongsapich, Status of Women's Studies in Thailand, paper presented to the meeting of experts on "Women's Studies and Social Sciences", New Delhi, Oct 4, 1982, p.6.

2. Ibid, P.9.

3. Narong Nitayaphorn, "Guidelines for the Development of Women in the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan of Thailand (1982-1986)", Aspects of Thai Women Today, document presented to UN Decade for Women, Copenhagen, 14-30 July, 1980.

4. Eloise C. Synder, "That half of 'Mankind' Called Women: Introduction to Women's Studies:", The Study of Women: Enlarging Perspectives of Social Reality, e.d., Eloise C. Synder; (Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), p.5.

## Perspectives

This paper was first published in the 'Asian Exchange' issue of March 1983, and elicited a great amount of response and feedback. For reasons of space, we have not been able to publish the response. We are reprinting the article in the Perspectives section of this issue dealing with 'Women's Studies', because of many early requests we have had for reprinting the article and it's relevance to the focus of this issue of Asian Exchange. In the introduction to the paper published in our March 1983 issue, we had written:

"The paper was written as a contribution to the discussions on 'The Women's Question' in Sri Lanka. The paper questions some of the orthodox left and Marxist formulations on 'The Women's Question', as well as the way in which it is posed from a pure and simple feminist point of view. This the authors have done to set out, as they state, "some of the basic issues regarding the formulation of a correct and scientific theoretical framework for understanding the role and position of women in society today".

"The actual existential reality of a developing society such as Sri Lanka, within which the paper is written, backed by theoretical rigour and sound historical perspective, makes it possible for the authors to arrive at theoretical formulations that closely approximate actual, historical developments.

"The paper....., also forcefully demonstrates, one central fact, i.e., that changes in the status of women has not come by 'the simple fact of economic and or technological progress'. Matter of fact, such progress has only tended under the conditions of the existing social organization and technological growth, to further erode the position of women as a marginalised group in society. It is the continuous struggle of women against their marginalisation, and to assert and protect their rights, that has historically led to changes in their status and brought them greater equality with men. This is of very great significance and has several important implications for all peoples of developing societies".

The authors say that their, "paper was not aimed at deriving any final conclusions as such, but rather at posing some fundamental questions and initiating a discussion". They have done this very well and deserve close and careful reading. This paper we hope, in the wider context of Asian societies, will contribute to the ongoing discussions and programs on the women's question" (Asian Exchange, March 1983). We are sure three years later that both old and new readers of Asian Exchange, will still find the paper refreshing and of interest.

- June 1986.

# The Women's Question

Sunila Abeyesekera, Sunil Bastian  
and Reggie Siriwardena

It is almost a hundred years since Friedrich Engels wrote his classic work *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE* (1884). It is significant that Engels should have devoted attention to the question of the family and the position of Women, since in his own life he defied bourgeois morality, living with a working-class girl to whom he was not legally married.

Drawing mainly on the researches of the American anthropologist, L.H.Morgan, Engels traced the history of the family, showing that the modern monogamous family was only one of several different forms of that institution that had existed in human history. The rise of the monogamous family, with its domination by husband and father, he related to the emergence of private property. The function of the monogamous family, with its strict emphasis on the fidelity of the wife, was to guarantee the paternity of the children and thus to safeguard the inheritance of property.

Engels argued that in bourgeois society, marriage for the bourgeoisie was marriage of convenience, determined by property

considerations, but that among the proletariat which did not own property, there was no 'stimulus whatever to assert male domination'. Moreover he argued:

'..since large-scale industry has transferred the woman from the house to the labour market and the factory, and makes her, often enough, the bread-winner of the family, the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation except, perhaps, for some of that brutality towards women which became firmly rooted with the establishment of monogamy'.

Engels therefore looked to the introduction of the entire female sex into public industry as the 'first premise for the emancipation of women'. The participation of women in the social processes of production would become general under socialism while housework would become collectivised. This would ensure the total emancipation of women. With these developments, too, men and women would be able to order their sexual relations on a basis of freedom and equality. Engels looked forward to a new generation under socialism:

'A generation of men who never in all their lives have had occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of any consideration other than that of real love, or to refrain from giving themselves to their beloved for fear of the economic consequences. Once such people appear, they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do. They will establish their own practice and their own public opinion, conformable there with, on the practice of each individual - and that's the end of it'.

Engels' analysis has been the foundation for the position that most organised Marxist movements from his time have taken on the women's question. Since the emancipation of women was regarded as dependent on the overthrow of capitalism, Marxist movements have drawn the conclusion that what women had to do in order to end their oppression was to enter the labour force and ally themselves with the proletariat in their struggle for socialism. In other words, the liberation of women was seen as subordinate to the class struggle: the way to emancipate women was to further the class struggle.

In the last decade, however, the inadequacies of such an analysis have been clearly proved and certain Marxists have made attempts to fill out some of these inadequacies of the traditional Marxist position on women by developing a political economy of housework. Thus, Eli Zaretsky recognises that

capitalism has not incorporated women into the labour force on equal terms with men; instead, it has created a separation between the home and family on the one hand and the workplace on the other. While men are oppressed by having to work for wages, women are oppressed by being largely excluded from wage work. Zaretsky's explanation for this is that capitalism requires women to work in the home in order to reproduce and nurture wage workers for the capitalist system. Mariarosa de la Costa argues that housework performs an essential economic function for capitalism, creating surplus value through that work, since women's work in the home is not paid for by wages. She asks women to organise themselves to demand wages for housework, a demand that has been taken up by some women's groups, especially in the U.S. The common feature in this wide spectrum of arguments is that if one is to approach an analysis of the 'women's question' in present day capitalist society in the scientific and correct manner, it is essential to reach a correct understanding about domestic labour, the work that women perform in their homes, and the relationship it bears to the general capitalist mode of production.

The rise of militant women's movements in the West in the last decade has been accompanied by the development of new schools of thinking regarding the oppression of women - the radical feminists, who have rejected the traditional Marxist analysis that the oppression of women is rooted very firmly in class society, - and instead view the problem from the perspective of a male-female contradiction. They see the motive force of history to be the striving of men for power and domination over women and they use the term Patriarchy to denote this institution a alised oppression of women. Some radical feminists have sought to bridge Marxism and feminism by claiming that two forms of oppression have existed in the course of history and survive at the present time - a class oppression of exploited classes by the ruling class, as analysed by Marxism, and a sexist oppression of women by men. It would follow from their position that while women ally themselves with the proleteriat in the struggle against capitalism, they would need to wage an independent and separate struggle against partiarchal oppression for their own liberation.

The value of the radical feminists is that they have recognised the specific character of women's oppression which had been ignored or given little importance by traditional Marxist thinkers. But the radical Feminists err in seeing patriarchy as an a historical phenomenon - a constant factor underlying all other processes of social change. History shows that the character and intensity of women's oppression has varied greatly from one society to another, and that in fact in certain societies there has been no institutionalised oppression of women



at all. Patriarchy, while a real phenomenon must therefore be recognised as one which has a determinable historical origin and social roots.

In his work, Engels provided a basis for explaining the origins of female subjugation through tracing certain developments in the growth of the family as an institution and then relating these developments to changes in the mode of production. Dividing the progress of society basically into three stages-savagery, barbarism and civilization - he tried to show how the role that women play in society has passed through a series of changes, in keeping with other social and economic changes, in order to become what it is today.

In talking about the age of 'savagery', the period in which the appropriation of natural products, ready for use, predominated, Engels showed that the processes of 'hunting and gathering', respectively assigned to the male and female members of the savage tribe, were 'social tasks' that were of equal importance and value to that society. He said, 'The division of labour between the two sexes is determined by causes entirely different from those that determine that status of women in society'. It seems that one of Primitive society's first important cultural 'adjustments' was that of assigning to the woman tasks that were more compatible with her biological functions of child-bearing and rearing. However, since this was an era of a 'communistic' family and a group marriage system, the fact of physically bringing forth a child was not inextricably tied to the fact of tending for them. Thus, while many women bore children, one or two looked after them; child-care was the joint responsibility of the entire community, since children were a common productive resource, and biological motherhood carried very little special social status for the individual women, other than the respect accorded to all women as the persons solely responsible for the propagation of the species. Women occupied a relatively free and highly respected position in the tribe, and participated in tribal decision - making at the highest level. Since under the group marriage system only the mothers of children could be identified, descent and genealogy were also traced matrilineally and this too was a factor that enhanced the status of women in tribal societies.

History shows that the character and intensity of women's oppression has varied greatly from one society to another, and that in fact in certain societies there has been no institutionalised oppression of women at all. Patriarchy, while a real phenomenon must therefore be recognized as one which has a determinable historical origin and social roots.

With the transition to Barbarism, which Engels takes to be the period in which knowledge of cattle-breeding and land cultivation was acquired, the position of women seems to have undergone some change in the early agrarian societies, the role of women retained its social value. Rituals linking up woman's fertility with good harvest, the worship of the Mother Goodess, all point to the important role assigned to women in these societies. Upto this point in the history of human development it is possible to trace many social organisations which were matriarchal, or dominated by women. Evidence of tribes headed by women. 'Queen Mothers', in which women went to war, sat in Council and held the reins of power within their community, are to be found in most of the ancient agricultural societies. In parts of Africa, the South pacific and Asia some tribes are known to have retained their matriarchal characteristics until very recent times.

'The overthrow of the mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house; the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust and a mere instrument for breeding children'.

In Sri Lanka, where agriculture came to dominate the economic sphere very early in history, a number of rituals and beliefs point to the fact that there were some matriarchal features in our ancient society. For example, the ceremonies that accompany a girl's 'coming of age' or reaching puberty are very similar to those discovered in matriarchal societies elsewhere. In the same way, the tradition of two forms of marriage-deega (in which a woman was taken to the man's house) and binna (in which the man came to reside in the woman's house) existing side by side with equal legitimacy and social acceptance, the custom of polyandry or of a woman having more than one husband, the practice of a woman retaining her own name after marriage, of owning, inheriting and disposing of property in her own name all these hint at a social formation within which women had a larger degree of independence than in other contemporary western societies, and certainly enjoyed a more privileged status than that which is theirs today.

The transition of property from being communally owned to becoming the property of individuals is seen as the juncture at which the social status of woman also receded in to a secondary and inferior position. During the period of 'savagery', as described above, the processes of production (of material needs) and reproduction (of human beings) were both equally important for the preservation of the tribe: therefore, the social value of the labour expended by members of the savage tribe on production and reproduction were equal and women were of the same status and

importance as men. However, the change from hunting to agriculture also signalled a change in the way of life; tribes that had hitherto wandered freely, following the herds of animals they hunted, now became sedentary; the restrictions on movement imposed by the process of child-bearing saw the women of the tribe now being confined at least for a certain length of time, to a specific area close to the tribal dwelling area; thus, women were definitely and firmly excluded from certain aspects of tribal life: hunting, and, together with it, exploring areas far beyond the settlement. Sedentary life led to a feeling of 'belonging' to one particular geographical location; the urge to protect this area from encroachment by other tribes led to the first inter-tribal conflicts; later on, the pressures of a population that outgrew the capacity of the available land to support it, led to further inter-tribal rivalry and tension. Since it was the men who ventured beyond the immediate confines of the settlement, they naturally became those who involved themselves in conflicts - 'the warriors' - and also those who acquired property-land and slaves - as a result. At the same time, sedentary agriculture and the availability of added labour power (slaves) for the first time meant the production of a surplus. Whereas, before whatever had been produced by any member of the tribe was consumed by the tribe, now a certain proportion of what was produced was set aside - for the payment of war 'booties' and for use as seed. The problem of who would control this surplus naturally arose. And since, by this time, men were in a position to lay claim to the property of the tribe-slaves, land and livestock - because they fought to win and defend it - men also found themselves in a position where they could become the controllers of the surplus and, through this, achieve a superior position in the social structure. Thus, the persons who came to own the means of production and control the surplus - men - also came to dominate society, which was by now evolving into a more organised system; the tribal state was in its embryonic form, and the family was by now evolving into a 'pairing marriage' system in which a couple, man and woman, formed a definite social unit, even though the bond between them was temporary and could be dissolved with ease.

Thus, in the latter stages of 'barbarism', we find that men have established economic and social dominance over women, already beginning the process of marginalization of women's role in society which, as we shall see, reaches its culmination in the era of 'civilisation'. As men became the acknowledged 'masters' of property and produce, they also established the 'male' right to inherit property which was bolstered by the ability of men to defend this property in a more aggressive and successful manner than women (which ability, ofcourse, was acquired through centuries of warring while women, who stayed at home, became socialised to a passive and sedentary role). Male supremacy was

thus nurtured into a social 'norm'.

With the increased acquisition of property and the need to establish a man's right to give and inherit property as an individual, we enter the era of class society, of civilization, patriarchy and monogamous marriage. Engels says, 'The overthrow of the mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house; the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust and a mere instrument for breeding children'. And the development of feudalism and capitalism, which slowly but surely followed, the evolution of the city state to the nation state, strengthened the patriarchal family system and ensured male supremacy in a society governed by a mode of production based on the private ownership of the means of production.

The woman's role within the home, which in earlier phases of history had given her a dominant role in society, now condemned her to a secondary social status. The development of capitalism took out of the woman's hands most of the productive tasks that she had fulfilled - the preservation of food, the preparation of clothing and all other household needs. In an era when the household was the basic unit of production, as well as the centre of all educational, health and religious activities, women played a key role in the overall social structure. As society developed and many areas of production passed out of the home into society itself, women, still secluded in their homes, still burdened by the task of child-bearing and -rearing, which had also by then ceased to be a 'collective responsibility', were very easily marginalised and pushed in to a subordinate position.

As production for exchange eclipsed production for use, it changed the nature of the household, the significance of women's work within it, and, consequently, women's position in society.

The above outline, however sketchy, will show that in the early stages of society, productive resources were owned communally by the tribe or clan. Production was for use (subsistence) alone; there was no surplus produced for exchange. The household, which was the basic social and economic unit, held all foodstuffs in common, and all work too was done for the household, and not for individuals. As Engels said, 'In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the administration of the household, entrusted to the women, was just as much a public, a socially necessary act as the providing of food by the men'. Since all work was for social use, and all adults were social producers, all adults were equal members of the group.

The material base for women's transformation from an 'equal

partner' to a 'subordinate wife' lay in the development of productive resources into private property. In the earliest history, this would have meant domesticated animals and cultivated land, and since by then herding and farming had evolved into being men's work, the property too became the men's. With the eroding of collective ownership, the communal economy of the family was shattered. The family grew in importance and women's subordination became more marked.

Private property transformed the relations between men and women within the household only because it radically changed the political and economic relations in the larger society. As production for exchange eclipsed production for use, it changed the nature of the household, the significance of women's work within it, and, consequently, women's position in society. Class society tended to socialise the work of men and domesticate that of women, to its own ends.

Thus, it will be seen that patriarchy, or male domination in society, has not always existed, that in the primitive human societies, both male and female members of society played equally important roles and that of devaluation of women's work is a result of the development of society towards a system based on the acquisition of property (the means of production and surplus production).

In examining the development of the patriarchal family system, it will be seen that the nuclear family, as it exists today in capitalist society, has become a principal instrument of oppression as far as women are concerned. In the days of 'Communal' property ownership, the home was the basic unit of production; as such, women played a key role in social production and her role in the family was one which earned her respect and honour as well as decision-making powers in that society. As domestic labour became 'privatised', as woman was relegated to being a 'personal servant' rather than a social producer her social status, undertandably, declined.

Monetisation, which accompanied the rapid growth of capitalism also meant devaluation of women's labour, since household tasks performed by women remained outside the sphere of wage-work work that was paid for with cash.

Now, it was the very institution of the family that confined her and oppressed her. Housework became a drudgery that she performed in isolation from other human beings; her alienation from society, from other human contact, made her 'apolitical'; being a 'good mother' and an 'exemplary housewife' became her only goals. It was only through her husband's eyes, and later on through those of her children, that she saw the world outside.

Bourgeois society, dominated by the capitalist mode of production and reproduction, saw to it that the perception of woman as a domesticated, docile creature, emotional, passive, irrational, childlike, seeking total satisfaction in motherhood and housewifery was reinforced and perpetuated by its super-structure-mainly the mass media, the religion. Bourgeois morality saw its ultimate culmination in the institution of monogamous marriage, the idealising of the 'life-long one-man one-woman' relationship, the romanticising of 'love' and the nuclear family of mother, father and children, the introduction of dual moral standards for men and women which severely chastised a woman for straying off the beaten track while openly and smilingly condoning the same behaviour in men. Marriage became a bond that was specifically every woman's most-sought - a fter goal; a bond that nobody could 'rend asunder' no matter how wearisome it had grown to be. A woman's ability to negate her personality, sacrifice her pleasure, for the sake of a husband and children became a virtue to be extolled, and her unhappiness within an unsatisfying marriage was to be borne, with patience, as this was what society expected of her, and what she had been brought up to do. Small wonder the number of harrassed housewives and mothers who seek refuge in tranquilizers and neurosis!

Naturally, adultery and prostitution, both largely the hunting grounds of the male of the species, flourished in this type of society, side by side with the moralising bourgeois ideologues. Women, as portrayed most luridly in pornographic literature and commercial advertising, more subtly in the greater part of the bourgeois mass media, became sex objects, conjured up to satiate men's desires. However, woman was not supposed to have any such desires herself, and the woman who dared to seek sexual gratification was soon 'cast out' of society. The repression of female sexuality, and the dominance of men was reinforced by confining women very strictly behind the walls of bourgeois morality.

What we must understand in terms of our earlier analysis, is that the capitalist mode of production all along controls and represses the sexual needs and desires of the working class for its own ends; and women, as the instruments of propagation, are particularly repressed in this situation. Right through history, from the very birth of class society we can see how the ruling groups or classes have tried to control and dominate the sexuality of those they ruled, in order to meet the needs of the dominant mode of production of that time. In recent times we can observe the fluctuating attitudes of the capitalist world towards women and reproduction by the changes in emphasis on family size. In the early industrial era, when everyman, woman and child could

perform a task in the mines and mills of Western Europe, large families were the 'norm'; those who dared speak of population control or family planning were ostracised and penalised, because the capitalist of that era needed more workers in order to swell his coffers. As capitalist production methods grew more sophisticated, and women and children became marginal figures in the economy, the taboos on birth control were gradually lifted. During the wars and in the periods immediately following, we see once again an emphasis on large families - to restore the declimated labour force to its original size; and now, once again, when capitalism is in the grip of severe economic crisis a period of emphasis on small families is with us again.

While woman was, in this way, excluded from the processes of social production and at the same time excluded from active participation in other social life by the taboos of bourgeois morality, this led to the final and total devaluation of her role and status in modern capitalist society. By assuring workers of a 'harmonious; family unit within which all their needs are supplied (embroidered with the trimmings of love and familial affection) capitalism did away with the need to provide for these services to be rendered to workers, by outside elements, which would of course be far more expensive. This is the basic economic principle behind the so-called 'family wage' which in real terms means that all members of a worker's family are exploited by the capitalist system even though only the male enters into a direct wage-labour-capital relationship. By convincing women of their inferiority and passivity, capitalism assures itself that women do not become active, a threat to the labour market or to the system in general. By glorifying 'motherhood' and 'Good House-keeping', capitalism gives women a sound backing for staying at home and furnished the system with yet another generation of doclie labourers.

This historical survey of human societies shows us very clearly that human beings have organised themselves into units in different ways to carry out the basic functions of production and reproduction. As shown by Engels the emergence of private property resulted in valuing these basic functions differently and in the resulting division of labour based on sex, women were relegated to a subordinate position.

The traditional Marxist analysis expected capitalism, in the course of its development, to change this situation in the following manner.

a)by drawing out more and more women into the labour market, as would be demanded by the growth of productive forces of capitalism, the sexual division of labour was expected to change radically, making women wage labourers who were equal partners in

their work with men. It was expected that capitalism would abolish the difference between male and female workers, and treat all equally. The principal contradiction in society would become that of capitalist and proletariat and the position of women in society as a whole would change accordingly.

b) the participation of women in the labour force on an equal footing with men was expected to have a profound influence on the position of women within the family. Engels thought that an undermining of the patriarchal family system would take place especially among the proletariat, since both men and women would be equal partners in their work places.

The political implications of this 'traditional' Marxist approach are clear. Marxist women's liberation requires first, that women become wage workers like men and second, that they join with men in the revolutionary class struggle against capitalism. Capital and private property are seen as the causes of women's oppression; therefore, there cannot be any women's struggle other than the class struggle.

Our experiences of developed capitalism and the effect that the development of capitalism has had on the position of women in capitalist society has led us to question the validity of this approach, on several counts.

A study of capitalism today shows that it has not incorporated women into the labour force to the same degree as men. Developed capitalism still seems to confine a large proportion of women to domesticity, and it is obvious that the less developed the form of capitalism in a society, the greater will be the proportion of women involved in the home. Thus, capitalism maintains the separation between wage work and house work which became wide-spread in human society for the first time due to the emergence of capitalism. According to Zaretsky, whose work we briefly mentioned earlier and who studied developed capitalism a century after Engels, the resulting dichotomy between home/family and personal life on the one hand and the work place and public life on the other is the crux of the problem of women's liberation.

Even when capitalism has drawn some part of the female population into the work force, it has done it in such a way as to recreate a sex-based division of labour within the labour market itself. Thus, we have certain types of jobs—for example, typing, public relations, serving, nursing—in the service sector which are primarily occupied by women who continue to play their traditional roles in this type of employment by being 'pleasing' and of 'service to others'. This phenomenon is to be seen even in fields of employment requiring some professional training.



For example many professions concerned with the welfare of children—for example, teaching, child psychology, probation and social welfare work - are largely serviced by women. In developed capitalism, the expansion of the service sector and the high degree of atomisation of the processes of labour (for instance, by use of the conveyor belt) has increased the employment of women in certain spheres. However this cannot be considered to be merely a case of women expanding their range of employment, because once a large proportion of women occupy certain areas of work, it is to be clearly seen that these jobs sooner or later become specifically 'women's jobs'. If it was a genuine case of women expanding their areas of employment we must see all spheres of activity occupied by both men and women to the same degree. And we very well know that this is not so.

In the same way, the impact of the development of capitalism on the relations between men and women within the family is not what was expected in the traditional Marxist analysis. Engels' view that capitalism, by drawing women into the labour market, would undermine the foundations of the patriarchal family, is not borne out by the experience of a whole century of capitalist development. In spite of the increasing involvement of women in work outside the home, the male dominated family is still as strong as ever, and it would appear that capitalism, far from undermining patriarchy, has preserved and adapted it to its own needs.

At the same time, Engels, contention that in the proletarian family there is no basis for male domination since the proletariat is propertyless, idealises the proletarian family in a way that can be seen to be unreal. He does, ofcourse, makes some reference to the survival of some 'brutality towards women' but seems to think of it as simply an ideological and cultural remnant; according to him, the material basis for the oppression of women has disappeared in the proletarian family under capitalism. But this is to ignore the very real and continuing material basis for such oppression - the division of labour between the sexes and the performance of housework by women (including women workers who do a day's work outside the home) from which the men (including proletarian men) benefit.

A woman who works under capitalism can be economically independent; yet, within the family, she is just an additional income-earner, expected to serve the men in the family with traditional subservience in spite of her economic stature. Her position in relation to male members of the family has not changed in any significant way, and since the prevailing tendency of society in general is to define women in terms of their roles as wives and mothers rather than as workers, most working women also see their domestic status as the one which gives them a

social identity. Thus, the glorification of motherhood and housewifery at the cost of all other aspects of the female character, leaving most working women with a dual burden of work, both outside the home and within it - the notorious Double Day.

In a situation of underdeveloped capitalism like in Sri Lanka these contradictions of capitalism are felt even a greater degree. Women have been drawn to the organised sector to an extent less than in the advanced capitalist countries, the division of labour within the labour market is more significant and the impact of the fact that women had started to work has affected their position in the family negligibly.

Recent Marxist analyses of the family and housework have resulted only in clarifying how the family is linked to the capitalist mode of production and what role it plays in making the whole system work. Dalla Costa argues that what is socially important is the fact that housework is necessary to capital; Zaretsky expresses the same idea, saying that while the superficial impression of capitalist society is that of women serving man, the reality of the situation is that these women are serving capital.

The work of Dalla Costa and Zaretsky is valuable in that it recognises the social importance of the labour performed by women in the home. Yet it suffers from the same limitations that have characterised traditional Marxist approaches to the women's question. It reduces women's oppression to exploitation by capitalism, since in their analysis, housework is a service performed by women for the maintenance of the capitalist system. It ignores the fact that men, as husbands, fathers and brothers, also benefit from this sexual division of labour and therefore obscures the sexist nature of this oppression. And, as other classical Marxist analyses do, it sees the women's struggle as purely a struggle against capitalism.

This is why it becomes necessary to approach the women's question in terms of certain fundamental concepts of historical materialism.

In order to exist, any society, whatever its level of development, has to possess the means of satisfying certain fundamental needs. These needs are the production of food and of other material essentials of existence as well as the reproduction of its members, without either of which the society would die out. For our present purpose, two points need to be made in clarification of these two fundamental needs:

1. Production of food and other essentials includes not only production for exchange in field or factory but also production

for consumption within the family through household work - e.g. cooking, making of clothes, etc. In pre-capitalist societies, the family was in fact the fundamental unit of production, both for exchange and for domestic consumption. In capitalist societies, production of exchange commodities is generally carried out in capitalist production enterprises, while the production of use values takes place within the family.

2.The reproduction of human beings includes not only sexual propagation but also the care of infants and young children, since it is one of the distinguishing features of the human species that the newborn come into the world more helpless than the young of animals. This fact makes possible the plasticity of human nature and its freedom from rigid subordination to inherited instincts, thus enabling human social and cultural evolution.

A materialist philosophy of history should, therefore, take as its starting point the changes that have taken place in the course of human history in the ways in which human beings have satisfied these fundamental needs - the production of material things and of people - and the relations into which they have entered for this purpose. This was realised long edition of the origin of The Family Private Property and State:

'According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular epoch live is determined by both kinds of production; by the state of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other'.

In spite of this statement in what has universally been recognised as the first classic Marxist work on the family and sexual relations, most writers in the Marxist tradition have, in their analysis of society taken as their basis 'the mode of production' conceived in narrow economic terms - i.e. the mode of production of things and relegated the relations between the sexes to the superstructure.

In a recent publication (Capitalist Patriarchy and a Case for Socialist Feminism-ed. Zillah R.Einstein-MR Press 1979) Zillah R.Einstein draws our attention to the shortcomings of this view and the manner in which the family came to be viewed in the traditional Marxist analysis. According to her, "family comes to

be viewed as just another part of the superstructure, totally reflective of class society, and relations of reproduction become subsumed under the relations of production. The point is not that the family does not reflect the society but that through both its patriarchal structure and patriarchal ideology the family and the need for reproduction also structure society".

Taking into account these views we feel that the relations between sexes, and the institutions of reproduction have to be viewed in a different manner because:

1.The relations between the sexes in the reproductive process and care of children are not just a matter of ideology; they are as material as the relations of economic production, and must therefore be regarded as part of the material base. On this base is reared, ofcourse, an institutional and ideological superstructure which helps to sustain the base - e.g. marriage laws, beliefs regarding the superiority and inferiority of the sexes etc.

2.The division of labour between the sexes - i.e. the relegation of women to looking after children, house-work etc. Of their admission only to inferior levels of economic production outside the home - represents an important aspect of production relations which cannot be ignored in any analysis of the mode of production.

It will be noticed in the quotation from Engels that he speaks of the modes of 'production and reproduction of immediate life' as constituting the material base of a society, and says that both the modes of production determine its social organisation. It is suggested that the best formulation would be to use the term 'mode of production' to cover the production both of things and of human beings, since, as has been pointed out, these two sets of relations interpenetrate each other.

In applying this definition to, the capitalist mode of production, we can see that the production of the material necessities of life gives rise to exploitative relations between capital and labour, while the reproduction of the labour force is characterised by patriarchal relations between men and women. These two units of the capitalist mode of production are, ofcourse, not independent of each other. On the contrary, they supplement each other; in capitalist society, a strong partnership exists between patriarchy and capital which can be illustrated by a number of phenomena that we observe in the course of the development of capitalism.

## CAPITALISM AND PATRIARCHY

Elements of patriarchy can be seen in all human societies which are based on class divisions and it has been proved that patriarchal society based on male supremacy came in to existence long before capitalism emerged as the dominant mode of production. Capitalism was expected to change existing social relations by drawing women into the labour force and thereby creating a society of capitalists and proletariat or a society whose main contradiction will be that between capital and labour. In such a society both men and women will be treated as members of one class - the proletariat. But let us see what really happened.

With the emergence of capitalist commodity production, and wage labour, the division of labour that had already existed in society underwent a qualitative change. Capitalism makes the concept of paying for labour with cash the norm in society. Therefore, the labour that is paid for in 'cash' terms becomes the more important and more valued labour in society. From this results the immediate devaluation of, and discrimination against women's work with the home, which now had passed out of the realm of wage work.

The other significant development with capitalism is the concentration of production outside the home. In feudal society and even at the stage of petty commodity production the household unit still played a significant role as a centre of production and women were involved in this process as full partners. But with the emergence of capitalism the production process moves out of the home in to the factory. Man's work thus moved out of the home and was carried out for wages while women concentrated on the reproduction process at home which was not paid and for therefore became devalued.

While these aspects of capitalism resulted in the increased marginalisation of women, the manner in which capitalism drew women into the labour market did not lead to any significant improvement of their position. As we mentioned earlier capitalism only recreated the sexual division of labour within the labour market and its indirect impact on the situation of the women in the family was negligible. This was all the more true in countries with an underdeveloped capitalism like Sri Lanka.

The fundamental reason for the inability of capitalism to draw women into the labour force in the expected manner would be sought in the primary contradiction of capitalism itself - i.e. the contradiction between the growth of the production forces within the limitations laid down by its own production relations; the driving force of capitalism is the profit motive; this

particular structure of capitalism puts a limit to the growth of productive forces within capitalism and it draws out women into the labour force, only to the extent to which it requires them, which fact is ultimately determined by the level of the productive forces. Thus, the dynamics of capitalism operate within a structure which limits the growth of its productive forces; it therefore cannot be strong enough to break down the sex-based division of labour and offer full employment to all members of capitalist society.

If this was the only reason for the position of women within capitalism it is simply a case of an incomplete process. This implies that capitalism will complete the task of women's liberation or will lay the foundations for it in the course of its development. The often stated view that women's liberation is a part of the bourgeois democratic revolution accepts this argument unquestionably.

Although it is true that the inherent limitations arising out of the primary contradictions of capitalism play a role in limiting the extent to which women are drawn into the labour force this alone cannot adequately explain all aspects of oppression of women that are found within capitalism. It is here that we have to understand the manner in which capitalism and patriarchy supplement each other. Capitalism and Patriarchy are neither autonomous systems, nor identical; they are in their present form mutually dependent. In capitalist societies a healthy and strong partnership exists between patriarchy and capital and their objectives mutually supplement each other. This can be illustrated too in the spheres of capitalist economy and capitalist ideology.

## **CAPITALIST ECONOMY AND PATRIARCHY**

Capitalist economy is driven by its drive for profit maximisation. Therefore if the confinement of women to household work and sexual divisions within the labour force helps in profit maximisation, capitalism will not find any structural contradictions with patriarchy. On the contrary the existence of patriarchy helps capitalism to maintain these oppressive elements with relation to women.

One of the earliest developments of capitalism was the family wage system. Capitalists, it is often argued, recognised that in the extreme conditions which prevailed in early nineteenth century industrialisation, working class families could not adequately and satisfactorily reproduce themselves, if the larger number of family members (men, women and children) were engaged in wage work. They realised that housewives produced and maintained better workers than wage-working wives

and that educated children became better workers than uneducated ones. The bargain thus struck, paying family wages to the men and keeping the women in their homes, suited the capitalists of the time, as well as the male workers.

This male-female division of labour benefits the capitalist by ensuring him of a supply of labour that could be further exploited, and benefits the male workers by maintaining them in their comfortable and dominating positions at home.

The family wage, for most adult men, also implied their acceptance of and collaboration in maintaining wage levels low for other groups, especially women and young people. The obvious benefits of this arrangement for the generation of profit for capitalists is very clear.

Capitalism has taken out of the home those aspects of the reproduction of labour that can be carried out more efficiently, and cheaply, outside the home. It does not require much investigation to prove that such adjustments are based purely on self-interest and that the profit-making motivation of capitalism plays a key role in influencing such decisions. Therefore, the imparting of knowledge and skills to workers is by now carried out almost completely outside the home. So are certain aspects of health-care. But all other functions are carried out in the home and capitalist production has utilised advances in technology to manufacture various 'gadgets' which convey an impression of mechanization and modernization within the home, while in actual fact condemning the housewife to further isolation, alienation and drudgery. The myth of the modern housewife, going about her daily chores at the press of a button, while on the one hand creates business and profits for some industries, on the other, perpetuates patriarchal relations in society by confining women to the home, operating under the disguise of making women's work in the home easier and more efficient.

It is customary to think that the limited socialisation of house work depends entirely on the development of certain services and technology which will ultimately take the domestic chores out of the house. But in recent times many have pointed out the objective economic necessity of capitalism to keep these activities at home. Thus Jean Gardiner in one of her articles titled 'Women's Domestic Labour' argues that "domestic labor does not create value on the definition of value which Marx adopted, but does nonetheless contribute to surplus value by keeping down necessary labor, or the value of labor power to a level that is lower than the actual subsistence level of the working class". "For example it could be argued that it is cheaper for a capitalist to pay a male worker a wage sufficient to maintain a

wife who prepares meals for him than to pay him a wage on which he could afford to eat regularly and seperately at the restaurants".

The prevalence of sex divisions in the labour market is directly beneficial to capitalist profit maximisation. Making use of the prevailing ideology to stress the 'unimportant' nature of women's work and the idea that a woman's wage is supplementary to a man's and not an essential part of the family economy, capitalism artificially imposes a lower monetary and social value on the types of work that are relegated to woman alone.

## **CAPITALIST IDEOLOGY AND PATRIARCHY**

It is possible to distinguish two important forms of propagation of ideology in the capitalist society. One is the more easily identifiable form of making use of the communication systems and the media, and the other is the more subtle form of propagation through various means of socialisation. The patriarchal family is a most important agency of socialisation in capitalist society, the education system being an other.

Family plays a key role in inculcating such values like competitiveness and individualism which are very important for the functioning of capitalist society. It is in the family that children are taught discipline, concern with money and various other elements of capitalist work ethics. 'To get on in the world', to strive for individual success becomes the ultimate aim in the life of a person. Within the family one also learns to obey authority, which is an all important characteristic of capitalism. In the patriarchal male dominated family the authority is represented by the father. In capitalist societies the values that are dominant are those usually identified with men and therefore this figure of authority. These include competitiveness, rationalisation and dominance, while the women are supposed to be irrational, weak and emotional. During the process of socialisation within the male dominated bourgeois family unit, these different characteristics are inculcated into children, thus producing a male population that will try to dominate within the society and a female population that is passive and ready to be confined to the home.

Other than being an instrument of socialisation capitalism now has more reason to maintain the family because the increasing competitiveness and alienation in capitalist society makes it important to have a 'haven' where there is not only an organic reproduction of labour but a process of psychological 'regeneration' taking place as well. For the man, who is pressured by bourgeois ideology into being 'a man', strong, active decisive, forceful etc. home is the one place where he



can, at least seemingly, achieve these 'manly' goals a place where he can seem to make decisions and see them put into action, the one place in the world where he can at least have the illusion of being 'the boss' even if only for an hour or two. And for the women, too, the home becomes the one place where she can seek total fulfillment of the aspirations that society attributes to her and that bourgeois ideology impresses upon her at every turn. The ideological apparatus of capitalist society emphasises the role of women as being within their homes, both indirectly and directly and we must realise that the confining of women to this role is indispensable to today's capitalism where the stresses and anxieties of capitalist development are felt most. This is how capitalism strengthens patriarchal relations within capitalist society and brings about a situation from which men benefit, as husbands, fathers, brothers.

The picture of a woman being 'delicate', 'soft' which is propagated by patriarchy is effectively used by capitalism to maintain sexual division of labour within the labour market. It propagates the 'suitability' of women for certain specific types of employment. For example, the use of large numbers of women in electronic assembly industries is attributed to the fact that women have 'deft' fingers and are 'by nature' better suited to this type of repetitive and delicate task. The portrayal of women as passive and submissive is also a necessary part of bourgeois ideology; it means that even though the demands of the productive forces of capitalism force more and more women into the labour force, her position as a worker is always a secondary one and she is less likely to become involved in any action against the injustices that are an inherent part of the capitalist system.

## **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The political implications of the traditional Marxist analysis on the women's issue meant that it submerged the women's struggle in the class struggle. This was somewhat deduced from the expectations of the traditional analysis which hoped that capitalism would undermine patriarchy. Later analyses, although they accepted that capitalism had not undermined patriarchal relations, did not derive any political implications from this but instead concentrated on the link between house work and capital; thus, their conclusions also emphasised the role of the class struggle in the liberation of women.

In our analysis of capitalism, in relation to the women's question. What we have tried to show is that while capital is not all-powerful, it is nevertheless tremendously flexible. Therefore, when the forces of capital accumulation encounter pre-existing social forms in its path towards capitalist

development, it sometimes destroys them to the extent that it is able to do so, and at other times adapts them to its own purposes, always being guided by the principle of what is of most advantage to its own ends. This is what we see in relation to patriarchal relations: On the one hand, capitalism brings about changes in it to the extent that it is able to and on the other hand adapts to it, and strengthens it to meet its own needs. Thus patriarchy becomes necessary for the propagation of capitalism itself.

The direct political implications of this type of an analysis is the need to treat both the class struggle and the struggle for women's liberation on equal terms considering them to be of equal importance in our search for a socialist social order. This means that the struggle has to be waged on two fronts, both in relation to the mode of material production as well as in relation to the mode of reproduction.

The male-female dichotomy which pervades working class political activity at present must be viewed in the light of the above analysis of capitalism. It will then be clear that capitalism uses patriarchal relations just as it does racism, in order to keep the working class divided against itself and without a clear and correct understanding of the issue in hand, thereby successfully defusing the class struggle.

The other implication that we would like to draw as a result of the above analysis is the inability to consider any society within which elements of patriarchy persist as being socialist.

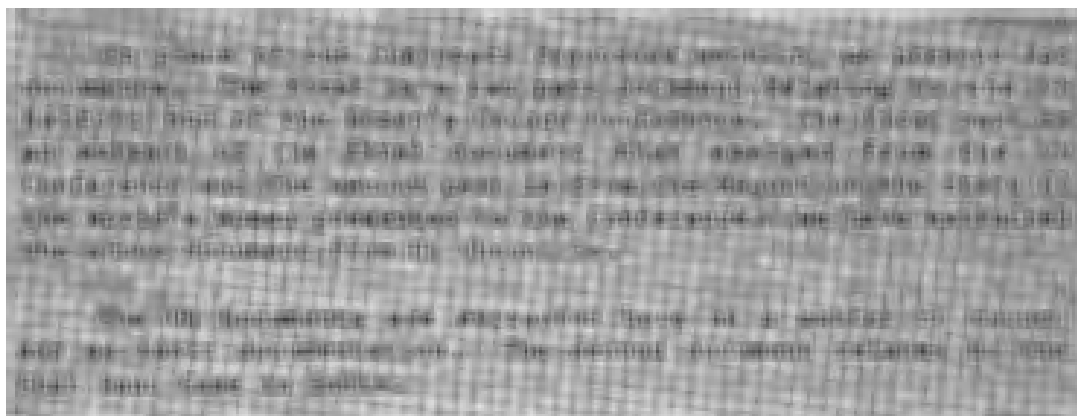
In human history, patriarchy emerged with the appearance of class society. Therefore, this oppressive element of human society should disappear with the establishment of a classless society.

## Subscribe to Asian Exchange

Annual subscription rates (four issues):

Japan, Australia and New Zealand	US\$ 30.00
Rest of Asia (Individual)	US\$ 10.00
(Institutions)	US\$ 20.00
USA and Europe	US\$ 50.00

# Two Documents



## Strategies for future action for women adopted at pre-dawn session in Nairobi

Just before dawn on 27 July 1985, after more than 12 hours of continuous debate, the conference marking the end of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) reached consensus in Nairobi on a final document.

The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women had begun its last meeting at 4 p.m. on 26 July with conflicts over such issues as zionism, apartheid and the new international economic order still unresolved. Finally, at 4:40 a.m. the next morning, it concluded with the adoption of a consensus text.

The final document, now known as the **"Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women"**, calls for redoubled efforts to enable women to wield more power and reap more benefits in and from society. Nations are urged to enforce laws already enacted to provide for the equality of women, and to make further efforts to enable women to take advantage of theoretically equal opportunities for education and training. Countries are called on to recognize that women and children tend to be the hardest hit by poverty, drought,

apartheid, armed conflict, family violence and the marginalization caused by refugee, migrant or ethnic minority status.

The Strategies reiterate concerns expressed throughout the Decade regarding the need to improve the status of women, integrate them into all aspects of development and support their participation in efforts to promote peace. But they also identify emerging areas of concern, such as the economic value of women's unpaid work; violence against women, including family violence; the usefulness of data banks on women and women's issues; and the need for women to take a greater part in decision-making at all levels of society.

The "Forward-Looking Strategies" are organized into five chapters. An introduction describes the historical background of the Conference and analyses economic, social and political factors and trends expected to have a bearing on the advancement of women over the next 15 years. It states that the Strategies are designed for immediate action, with monitoring and evaluation every five years, adding that each country will have the option to set its own priorities, based on its own development policies and resource capacities, and that the mode of implementation will vary according to each country's political process and administrative capabilities.

The headings of the first three chapters correspond to the themes of the Decade - Equality, Development and Peace. Each of those goals is approached in terms of obstacles encountered in efforts to reach it, strategies for overcoming those obstacles and steps to be taken at the national level to put the strategies into effect.

The fourth chapter, under the umbrella "Areas of special concern", addresses the situation of women who are experiencing, in addition to more common problems, specific problems due to socio-economic condition, age or minority status or difficult political conditions. The last chapter deals with international and regional cooperation to advance the status of women.

## **Equality**

While acknowledging the progress made in many countries in legislating equal rights for women, the "Equality" chapter of the Strategies points to de facto and indirect discrimination and a persistent, widespread belief that there is a physiological basis for regarding women as inferior, as obstacles to real equality between the sexes.

Underdevelopment and the existence of multiple, conflicting

legal systems within a given society are also cited in that regard. As an example, Mcleod T. Darpoh (Liberia) told the Conference that although her country's statutory system provided for married women to own property and inherit property from their husbands, "the customary legal system is based on polygamy, multiple inheritance and the extended family..." Under that system, the woman does not inherit upon the death of her husband, being herself part of her husband's estate. "This duality is one of the major obstacles experienced by our women", she said.

The Strategies state that discrimination promotes an "uneconomic use of women's talents" and wastes valuable human resources. "Society is the loser if talents of women are under-utilized", the text affirms.

In that area, the Conference proposed the creation of conditions to promote implementation of legal norms and public education to eliminate stereotypes. It urged the establishment of government machinery to monitor and improve the status of women, as well as a sharing of domestic responsibilities by all family members and "equal recognition of women's informal and invisible economic contributions".

Specifically, the Strategies recommend that Governments become parties to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. They are also called on to institute legal and agricultural reforms, and to ensure that employment legislation provides for equal treatment and benefits for women, not only in the conventional labour force but also in the service and informal sectors, in food production and in family enterprises.

Governments are asked to encourage the provision of equal pay for work of equal value, to prohibit discrimination on grounds of pregnancy or marital status and to facilitate the return to the labour market of women who have left for family reasons.

Marriage agreements are to be based on the equal participation and valuation of both partners, and are to provide for equal rights with regard to property ownership, divorce and child custody, according to the Strategies. In addition, "provisions should be made to eliminate discrimination against single mothers and their children", the text states, "without prejudice to the religious and cultural traditions of countries".

Governments, political parties and trade unions are asked to make efforts to increase the participation of women. In particular, government departments are advised to establish special offices, preferably headed by women, to monitor and

accelerate women's equitable representation.

## **Development**

The "Development" Strategies point to sex-stereotyping, the arms race, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, foreign occupation, the world economic situation and the exclusion of women from policy-making as obstacles to the achievement of the goals of the Decade. The lack of national mechanisms for the integration of women in development and the lack of resources, focus, responsibility or authority accorded to such mechanisms where they exist, are also cited.

Strategies for the improved integration of women in development include recognizing the need for women to have an equal share of power in guiding development efforts and enhancing women's autonomy, as well as eliminating gender biases in development programmes and reflecting on women's unremunerated economic statistics. Providing social infrastructures and promoting changes in attitude so that parental responsibilities can be shared by women, men and society are also emphasized.

The Strategies assert that "appropriate machinery with sufficient resources and authority should be established at the highest level of government" to ensure that all development policies and programmes include women, recognize their contribution to development and ensure them an equitable share of its benefits. Governments are encouraged to establish national and sectoral plans and specific targets for women in development, and to take specific steps so that women benefit equally from national policies adopted to create jobs.

Measures to be taken in the health sector include recognition of the vital role of women as health-care providers, both inside and outside the home, and integration of female traditional healers into national health planning. Increases in the number of women in high-level posts in health institutions are recommended, as well as re-orientation of health education to change discriminatory attitudes and values that are detrimental to women's health. Women's participation in water-supply and sanitation projects and immunization schemes is also stressed.

The Strategies urge Governments to strengthen women's participation in making education policy and to intensify efforts to reduce the high rate of illiteracy, school absences and dropping out among females. They are also asked to ensure that scholarships and school boarding facilities are equitably distributed between boys and girls.

Carlotta Bustelo (Spain) warned the Conference that

theoretical equality of educational opportunity between males and females was not enough. "Two out of every three illiterates in the world are women who cannot benefit from adult education, nor literacy campaigns, because the burden of their obligations does not allow them to attend educational courses", she said.

The Conference recommended that curricula and text books be reviewed and educational personnel retrained, to eliminate gender stereotypes, and that incentives and counselling be provided to encourage girls to study scientific, technical and managerial subjects. In addition, Governments were asked to introduce "educational programmes to enable men to assume as much responsibility as women in the upbringing of children and the maintenance of the household".

The role of women in food production is stressed in the Strategies, which urge the international community to increase financial assistance to enhance the role of African women as food producers, with an emphasis on providing women as food producers, with an emphasis on providing training in food technologies.

Rural women's access to land, capital, technology and other productive resources should be secured through land ownership and inheritance rights, according to the Strategies. In addition, their right to inherit livestock and other property should not be restricted, and restrictions on their access to credit should be removed. The Conference also urged Governments to involve women in the mobilization and distribution of food aid and in efforts to combat desertification.

Measures to increase women's participation in industry, in trade and in science and technology are also envisaged in the Strategies. In particular, Governments are called on to recognize the positive contribution of women traders and to take steps to support, protect and organize them, including adopting innovative mechanisms to provide them with access to credit.

The integration of women into housing, community development, transport, energy and environment activities was stressed by the Conference. It recommended, for example, that rural transportation planning in developing countries aim at reducing the heavy burden on women who carry agricultural produce, water and fuelwood as head-loads.

## **Peace**

The "Peace" chapter identifies the arms race, aggression, imperialism, apartheid, terrorism and sex discrimination as threats to peace and obstacles to the advancement of women. It says that women's participation in the struggle against such

obstacles has often gone unnoticed.

The Strategies call for women's equal participation in efforts to maintain peace and international co-operation and, in particular, for efforts to be intensified to overcome attitudinal barriers to their equal participation in international and diplomatic services.

Recommended measures to promote peace range from support for the Contadora Group's initiative in Central America to efforts to prevent and punish violence against women. The Strategies recommend that women be encouraged to promote education for peace, and that concrete action be taken to discourage providing children with games and publications that promote "war, aggression, cruelty, and excessive desire for power and other forms of violence".

### **Areas of special concern**

The fourth chapter of the Nairobi Strategies, "Areas of special concern", addresses problems specific to such women as those in areas affected by drought, urban poor women; elderly women; young women; abused women; women who are the sole support of families; disabled women; minority women; women who are victims of sex trafficking and involuntary prostitution; women in detention; and refugee women. In each case, Governments are urged to recognize the problems of such women and to provide them with specific assistance.

The section on victims of sex trafficking, for example, points to the victimization of refugees by procurers and characterizes sex tourism, forced prostitution and pornography as the reduction of women to "mere sex objects and marketable commodities". It calls for measures to create wider employment opportunities for women and for increased international police efforts to combat the exploitation and violence associated with prostitution.

The Conference stated that the problems of the special groups cited in the Strategies are diverse and vary tremendously from country to country. "The basic strategy must remain one of fundamentally changing the economic conditions that produce their deprivation and of upgrading women's low status in society, which accounts for their extreme vulnerability", the Conference affirmed.

### **Emerging Issues**

Although the goals and themes of the Decade provided the framework within which the Strategies were drafted, the text also



acknowledges the impact on women's situation of changing world political and economic conditions over the past 10 years. In addition, the effect of shifting trends in marriage and family life, and advances in information-gathering and other technologies are reflected in the Strategies. Following are some of the emerging issues identified in the text.

### **Women and power**

"The absence of women and women's perspectives (from decision-making) means that the democratization of human and international relations remains incomplete. As we, the women of this world, survey this deprivation and the devastation of our birth right, how can we fail to resolve to take initiatives at the international level to create a wholly different environment which properly reflects our finer instincts for justice, equity and peace?" - Fatima Issak Bihi (Somalia)

"Women wish to and must struggle for peace and against violence, of which they are the primary victims... but who decides between war and peace? Are we in the elected assemblies? the Governments? the seats of power ... where the major decisions are taken? No! The decisions that affect the balance of the world are taken in bodies from which women are largely absent." - Yvette Roudy, Minister of Women's Rights, France.

The idea that women's participation in high-level decision-making is essential not only to the advancement of their own status in society but also to the achievement of overall societal goals has gained momentum since the last global conference on women. The Strategies testify to this, calling on Governments to adopt legislative and administrative measures to effectively ensure women's participation in national, state and local decision-making processes.

Exclusion of women from development policy decisions is seen to have blocked the inclusion of women's interests in "the largely male-dominated choices of progress", according to the Strategies. The Conference proposed that Governments allocate resources to prepare women for increased participation in policy - and decision-making through training, vocational guidance and career counseling and "to integrate them by means of special measures at all levels".

The strategies state that "universal and durable peace cannot be attained without the full and equal participation of women in international relations, particularly in decision-making concerning peace". Also, in view of the critical role of the communications sector in eliminating stereotyped images of women and providing them with easier access to information, the

Strategies say that "the participation of women at all levels of communications policy and decision-making and in programme design, implementation and monitoring should be given high priority".

### **Women and technology**

The need for women to have access to new technologies, to reap their benefits, to be protected from their adverse effects and to have a say in their deployment, was another issue of emerging concern.

The Strategies call on Governments to involve women in the choice of research and development priorities and in the choice, acquisition, adaptation, innovation and application of science and technology for development. The need to expand women's participation in the peaceful applications of outer-space technology, especially with regard to water, health, energy, food production and nutrition, is also stressed.

The Strategies call for assessment of the impact of technology on women's integration into various sectors of the economy and for the integration of those findings into policy. Efforts to design and deliver appropriate technology for use by women are to be intensified, the Conference recommended, and the implications for women of advances in medical technology are to be carefully examined.

In addition, assessment of new energy sources, technologies and delivery systems "should specifically consider the reduction of the drudgery that constitutes a large part of the work of poor urban and rural women". The Strategies point, for example, to the need for improved stoves to reduce the drudgery of fuel collection.

### **Statistics on Women**

Throughout the Strategies, there is emphasis on the "invisible" and unremunerated contributions women make to national economies through domestic work, subsistence agriculture, family enterprises, self-employment and participation in informal sectors. The Conference suggested that in marriage, the value of housework should be considered equal to financial contributions. It recommended in particular that efforts be made to measure and reflect women's unremunerated contributions "in national accounts and economic statistics and in the GNP".

With the expansion of information technologies during the

Decade, another issue that has moved to the forefront is the need to break down national statistics by gender, develop data bases on women's issues to be used as a basis for policy formulation, and set up an international information network on women.

The Strategies call on Governments to take into account recent advances in the development of statistical concepts and methods for measuring inequality between women and men and to compile gender-specific data, as well as develop information systems to facilitate Government action to improve the status of women. The United Nations is called on to collect, analyse and utilize statistical data on women's questions.

### **Women without Men**

A new recognition of the needs of single women and of the increasing number of families supported by women is also reflected in the Strategies. "Legal provisions should be made to grant official status and recognition to de facto family structures that have not been accepted and to eliminate discrimination against single mothers and their children", the text states.

According to the Strategies, women who are the sole supporters of families are among the poorest people in urban informal labour markets and constitute large numbers of the marginally employed and rural unemployed. The assumption that households are headed by men hinders women's access to credit and other resources, the text states, urging Governments to eliminate such assumptions from their policies.

The Conference called for assistance to women heads of households in discharging their domestic responsibilities and in gaining access to education, training and employment. When children are born out of wedlock, "the putative father" should be made to assist in their maintenance and education, the Strategies affirm.

### **Violence against women and other abuses**

Recognition of the widespread incidence of violence against women, including family violence and other abuses, such as sexual harassment, has increased dramatically during the Decade. "Violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies", the Strategies state. "Women are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped."

The Strategies cite the elimination of domestic violence and violence against women as priority issues, along with the elimination of colonialism, racism, apartheid, aggression and

foreign occupation. Governments are urged to pass and enforce laws "to end the degradation of women through sex-related crimes", and to take measures "to prevent sexual harassment on the job or sexual exploitation in specific jobs, such as domestic service". They are also called on to provide for redress in cases of such harassment.

The Conference recommended that steps be taken to identify, prevent and eliminate all violence against women and children, including family violence, and that shelter and support be provided for victims of such violence. These measures should aim at making women conscious of their right and duty to fight maltreatment, whether they are victims or witnesses of it, the Strategies state.

Governments are called on in particular to "recognize that many young women are victims of incest and sexual abuse in the family", to assist the victims, and to prevent such abuse "by education, by improving the status of women and by appropriate action against offenders".

### **Family planning**

Women's right to control their fertility - a hotly debated issue at the beginning of the Decade has gained broader acceptance during the last 10 years, as affirmed in Mexico City by the 1984 International Conference on Population. the Population Conference called for strengthening the family-planning components of primary health care and for providing family-planning services and information.

The Nairobi Strategies use the language adopted by the Population Conference, calling urgently on Governments to make available "information, education and the means to assist women and men to make decisions about their desired number of children". They state further that programmes should be neither coercive nor discriminatory and should be consistent with internationally recognized human rights, as well as with changing individual and cultural values.

Citing the ability of women to control their own fertility as "an important basis for the enjoyment of other rights", the Conference recommended that access to family-planning services be encouraged by Governments, "irrespective of their population policies", and that women's organizations participate in providing such services.

Recognizing the dangers of adolescent pregnancy and its impact on all aspects of the lives of young girls, the Conference also urged Governments to encourage delay in commencement of

childbearing by raising the legal marriage age if it is low, and by ensuring that adolescent girls and boys receive adequate information and education.

### **What are 'women's issues'?**

#### **For women and men both: Bread and roses....Poetry and Power**

At the 1980 Copenhagen Women's Conference, following the adoption of the final document by a vote of 94 in favour to 4 against, with 22 abstentions, several speakers expressed the view that the Conference had been used as a forum for the introduction of controversial political issues only marginally relevant to the cause of women's rights. Explaining their failure to endorse the Programme as a whole, the dissenting countries (Australia, Canada, Israel and the United States), as well as many of those that had abstained, expressed regret at what they saw as the Conference's "politicization", pointing in particular to the Programme's reference to Zionism.

Other speakers, however, said it was impossible to deal with the problems of women in isolation from their political context, or without referring to the fundamental causes of oppression.

That divergence of views persisted through preparatory meetings for the Nairobi Conference, contributing to a stalemate in negotiations on the draft final document. But the Conference transcended those differences, reaching a consensus on its "Forward-Looking Strategies", and attaining more decisive results than predicted by some.

As for the questions: are all issues 'women's issues', or only some? What issues are of most concern to women today? Here are some views presented in the Nairobi Conference.

Leticia R.Shahani, Secretary-General of the Conference, said the conclave should challenge women "to go beyond mere protest and exhortation", and governments should "go beyond mere tokenism and complacency". The Conference should "mobilize action and release creativity to enable women to take their rightful place in society.

Margaret Papandreou (Greece) took the stand that "all issues at this Conference are political. To fight for equal pay for equal work, is that not political? To argue for the right of a woman to have control of her reproductive functions, is that not political? To push for the elimination of stereotypes about women in the mass media, is that not political? "The women's

movement was a political movement, a social revolution, addressing itself to all issues that affected the daily lives of women.

Gertrud Shope, of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC), said of women under apartheid, "There have been no achievements, no advances, but rather a deterioration in both the legal status and the living conditions of the majority of the women of South Africa.

"In what other country have the courts been faced with cases where a man is charged with 'harbouring' his wife? Where else have magistrates imposed sentences on women accused of bringing their suckling babies into towns with them?... Where else, but in the land of apartheid?"

Many speakers addressed the need for women's issues to be better integrated into policies and programmes at all levels of society. Janet Banana (Zimbabwe) said that in developing countries, the major reason women have been getting a raw deal has been the failure of central planning systems to integrate the role of women into the overall national plans. "The tendency has been to regard women's issues as sideline issues outside the macro-as sideline issues outside the macro-economic structures", she explained. "This has to be eradicated if we are to guarantee the total development of mankind, irrespective of sex. Indeed, the treatment of men and women in any given society should be the same whether in poverty or in riches."

Meanwhile, Dr. Halfdan Mahler, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said women need to be considered for their own worth, as equal members of society, rather than as mothers, potential mothers of carers. We know that girls get less food in some developing societies than boys do - so how can they grow properly? We know that girls receive no schooling - so how could they make their own living as women? We know that images created by men of women shape women's lives.

"Perhaps when you go back to your countries, you will pose the question: 'Who reproduces women?' It might lead you to think about ... a more caring society that gives, not only to men but also to women, both bread and roses, poetry and power."

## The State of the World's Women

"The scales of world equality are out of balance. The side marked 'woman' is weighed down with responsibility, while the side marked 'man' rides high with power. Advantage builds on advantage until today they are tilted so steeply that almost all of the world's wealth is on man's side, while most of the world's work is on woman's".

So concludes The State of the World's Women 1985, a publication based primarily on the findings of two major United Nations reports which served as a starting point for discussion at the Nairobi Women's Conference.

The reports - a review and assessment of progress achieved and obstacles encountered at the national level during the United Nations Decade for Women (A/CONF/116/5 and Addenda 1-14) and a world survey of the role of women in Development (A/CONF/116/4) - reflect research undertaken by individual countries and United Nations agencies. Over the United Nations agencies. Over the past year, the United Nations compiled the results of a questionnaire completed by 121 Member Governments assessing the position of women in their countries. At the same time, agencies pooled the results of their research on the participation of women in development.

The data stress the major underlying cause of women's inequality: a woman's domestic role as wife and mother - vital to the well-being of society and consuming about half of her time and energy - is unpaid and undervalued. Among other things, the findings reveal that:

Women do almost all the world's domestic work, which together with their additional work outside the home, means most women work a double day;

Women form a third of the world's official labour force, but are concentrated in the lowest-paid occupations and are more vulnerable to unemployment than men; women still earn less than three quarters of the wages of men doing similar work;

Women grow about half the world's food, but own hardly any land, find it difficult to obtain loans and are overlooked by agricultural advisors and projects;

Women provide more health care than all health services put together and have been major beneficiaries of a new global shift in priorities towards prevention of disease and promotion of good health;

Women continue to outnumber men among the world's illiterates by about three to two, but a school enrolment boom is closing the education gap between girls and boys;

Although 90 per cent of the world's countries have organizations promoting the advancement of women, because of poorer education, lack of confidence, and greater workload, women are still dramatically underrepresented in the decision-making bodies of their countries.

The report examines the roles women play in various spheres, including the family, agriculture, industrialization, health care, education and politics.

### **The family**

Unpaid domestic work is seen everywhere as women's work, women's responsibility, the report states. It is important, vital work, but it is invisible work. Those long hours go unrecognized, undervalued and unpaid. Yet their contribution to society is enormous.

Domestic work, however, is not the only work women do. There are relatively few women in the world who can claim to be "just a housewife". Women do not choose to take on extra work in addition to their domestic responsibilities: in most parts of the world, a woman's labour is vital to her family's survival.

The chief injustice, the report points out, lies less in the extra work women must do outside the home than in the assumption that it is their role - and their role alone - to do all the work inside it. It is unjust because it means that women around the world work twice as many hours as men. And it is unjust because domestic work is looked down on as not being "real" work because it is unpaid.

### **Agriculture**

Women have always known who weeds the sorghum, transplants the rice seedlings, picks the beans and tends the chickens. In fact, it has been estimated that women's labour produces almost half of the world's food. But it has taken a long time for the rest of the world to discover these facts, the report notes. In Africa, for example, three quarters of the agricultural work is done by women. In Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, women are half of the agricultural labour force.

As with domestic work, much of women's agricultural work tends to be overlooked because it is unpaid. In Mali and



Botswana, for example, more than 75 per cent of women work unpaid on the land. One study in Pakistan found that women's "invisible" agricultural activities - such as their vegetable garden by the house-took just as much time as the "visible" ones.

It is not only in the developing countries that women's farm work is underestimated. Surveys in Turkey and Spain found farmers' wives working up to 70 hours a week in the field.

## **Industrialization**

The number of countries which have equal pay legislation on their statute books, making it illegal to pay men and women different wages for the same work, has increased from 28 in 1978 to 90 in 1983. There are signs that the wages gap between men and women may be beginning to close, too. In 1975, a woman working in the manufacturing industry earned an average of only 70 cents for every dollar earned by a man doing similar work. In 1982, she earned 73 cents for every man's dollar.

A woman's domestic responsibility cuts into her ability - and inclination - to do shiftwork and overtime. It also means she is more likely to seek part-time work. Both factors result in a shorter paid working week than for men. Another factor that helps push women's wages below men's is the effect of time-based pay rises. Because women often interrupt their working lives to have children, they tend to lose out in pay rises and promotion, compared with men hired at the same time.

The most important reason women earn less than men is not because women work fewer hours and receive fewer benefits, but because women do different work than men. Thus, not only does the amount of housework women do restrict the quantity of paid work they can do, but also the nature of housework has come to define the nature of paid work they are offered. If "women's work" was as well-paid as "men's work", there would be less cause for concern, the report notes. However, the majority of occupations in which women predominate - cleaners, secretaries, waitresses, nurses, food and textile workers - are badly paid.

Because of poor diet, many of the world's women suffer from "nutritional anaemia". In India, though rich women eat about 2,500 calories a day and gain an average of 27.5 pounds during their pregnancies, poor women eat about 1,400 calories a day and gain only 3.3 pounds during that crucial nine months. Such women bear tiny, underweight babies. In fact, one sixth of all babies - 95 per cent of them in the developing world - weigh under 5.5 pounds when they are born.

Life expectancy varies from contry to country, but nearly

everywhere women live longer than men. However, in parts of Asia such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal - women's life expectancy is as low as or lower than men's.

The reason may be as simple as discrimination against girls, the report states. A Bangladesh survey found that more girls than boys under five years old were malnourished because they were allocated smaller portions of food, and that infant girls were 21 per cent more likely than boys to die in their first year of life. But Asia does not have a monopoly on discrimination. A survey in Botswana found girls more likely than boys to be malnourished, and in Turkey it is reported that rural men are given the lion's share of whatever food is available.

## **Health**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 200 million children under age five are malnourished and that 10 million of them are so severely thin that they risk death. Figures such as those demonstrate the potential of helping women feed their children better. Of the 50 countries that have now begun nutrition programmes, 25 have developed them especially for women.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that, excluding China, 25 per cent of people in cities and 71 per cent of those in the countryside of developing countries are without safe drinking water. The consequences are ill health and great hardship for distances to fetch water.

To keep a family of five in good health, a woman must make about 15 journeys a day to the water source. But many women live a long distance from safe drinking water and can only make one trip a day. In Burkina Faso, for example, some women leave at dusk to walk to the water hold, sleep there overnight and return at dawn. It is not surprising then that 8 million children die each year of diseases that might have been prevented by clean water from a nearby tap.

## **Education**

A girl has the disadvantage of being born into a world that "does not even expect her to succeed, a world that perhaps does not really want her to succeed, a world that has been systematically schooling her for failure", the report states. The message from teachers, school books, parents and the media is loud and clear; the domestic role is that most important role for girls. Research on the portrayal of women in the media, in almost every country, reveals a portrait of woman as housebound and decorative - "a sort of sexy washing machine".

As with all other spheres of society, the media is overwhelmingly controlled by men. In Italy, for instance, 53 of 100 male journalists recruited in 1967 had become chief editors by 1982. But not one of the 100 women journalists recruited at the same time had risen any farther than editor.

In most countries, there are many more illiterate women than men. This literacy gap is paralleled by an education gap at every level of the system. In 1985, there were seven girls for every eight boys in primary education; about five girls for every six boys in secondary school; and about four women for every five men at college or university. Yet the education gap is closing at last and although boys still outnumber girls at school, girls are edging forward slightly in the race towards literacy.

### **Politics**

At the end of the Decade for Women there were signs that Governments had begun to take seriously their debt to their nations' women. Ninety per cent of countries now have official government bodies dedicated to the advancement of women; fifty per cent of those bodies have been established since the beginning of the Decade. Sixty-six out of 92 countries surveyed by the Secretary-General have incorporated specific programmes for women in their National Development Plans. Most countries have instituted constitutional and legal equality between women and men, and 45 countries - 30 in the developing world - offer free legal advice to help women fight for those rights.

One of the major achievements of the Decade has been the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979, and since acceded to or ratified by more than 65 countries.

Inequalities remain, however, because new laws are implemented slowly, because they are often overridden by custom, and because old laws have yet to be repealed. There are, for example, 12 countries in which a woman must still seek her husband's approval if she wishes to take a job.

The report concludes that perhaps the most important factor impeding women's progress is their domestic role. If women have to do all the cooking and cleaning when they get home from work, they have much less time than men to take part in political activity. Governments may have identified the obstacle, but many seem reluctant to redress the disadvantaged situation and respond to women's natural function of childbearing by bringing about the sharing of social, economic and political responsibilities including family responsibilities.

# 'Secular' India Passes 'Islamic' Bill

## Muslim Women Pushed Towards the 'Dark' Ages

From **SUNANDA DATTA-**

**RAY in Calcutta.**

MORE than 100 protesting feminists chained themselves to the railings of India's circular parliament house in New Delhi all through the night earlier this month as Rajiv Gandhi's government rushed through a Bill to deprive divorced Muslim women of the right to maintenance from husbands.

"It is a lawless law," thundered a Marxist MP who is also a leading barrister.

From the ruling Congress Party, Arif Mohammed Khan, himself a Muslim, denounced the controversial legislation in more telling terms: "This takes the country back to the pre-Islamic era when women were considered animals and chattels."

Khan was a minister in Gandhi's government until recently when he quit in protest at a measure that is widely seen as dragging India back into the Dark Ages to placate fanatical Islamic fundamentalists who had opposed Gandhi's Congress Party.

In effect, the new law denies Muslim divorcees the redress provided to all other Indian women under the Criminal Procedure Code bequeathed by the subcontinent's former British rulers.

Deceptively titled the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, the measure is a masterpiece of political newspeak. It stipulates that a divorced Muslim woman must look for a livelihood to her father or brothers.

If they are unable or unwill-

ing to provide for her, she will have to appeal to charitable Islamic trusts.

Ashoke Sen, India's Law Minister and also an eminent barrister, indulged in even more reprehensible sophistry when piloting the Bill through Parliament. He described it as "a law ordained by God" aimed at "protecting the legitimate rights and interests" of Muslims.

As the acrimonious debate dragged on through the night — the vote was not taken until the small hours of Tuesday morning — Sen scaled even dizzier heights of doublespeak to claim that this act of discrimination was the first step towards drafting a common civil law applicable to all Indians irrespective of religion.

Others fear that it might be difficult now to resist demands to stone adulterers to death or chop off a thief's right hand, both being sanctioned in Muslim jurisprudence.

This furore, which has divided the country, was sparked off by a penniless illiterate 75-year-old Muslim woman, Shah Bano, whose husband threw her out of the house and divorced her after 40 years of marriage.

Shah Bano appealed to the courts and was granted alimony to the intense anger of orthodox Muslims who have always maintained that the law of the land does not apply to them in matters of marriage, divorce and property.

Under pressure from priests, Shah Bano withdrew her case, publicly confessed that she had sinned against the Koran, the holy book of the Muslims, and pleaded with the government to

ensure that no other Muslim woman could ever again approach the law courts on any personal matter.

Her dilemma, cruel as it was, would probably have left Gandhi unmoved had it not been for mounting evidence that India's 100 million Muslims, the Congress Party's traditional vote bank, were turning against him.

As the cry of "Islam in danger in Hindu India" went up, a Muslim-dominated alliance defeated the Congress in the Assam state elections.

Rajiv Gandhi then decided to surrender to Islam obscurantism rather than risk further erosion of his popularity.

To ensure his political survival the Prime Minister staked his prestige on a measure that will drive divorced Muslim women into destitution, which explains the comment in *The Statesman* newspaper that "his prestige would have commanded wider public respect if it had been staked on some less unworthy cause."

Apart from the injustice that it will directly result in, the Bill is expected to encourage similar demands by other minority communities such as Sikhs, Christians or *Pariahs*.

If every religious, linguistic or ethnic group in the country is to be governed by its own laws, the common definition of being an Indian may one day disappear.

With a Sikh rebellion already on his hands, and several Mongolian tribes in India's north-east battling for separate homelands, Rajiv Gandhi may find that he has paid too high a price to win Muslim votes and quell a party revolt.

Most of our readers would be aware of the Shah Bano Case, in India, which had become the centre of a major controversy. In a very retrograde and constitutionally questionable move, the Government decided to introduce a Parliamentary Bill to nullify the precedence created by the Supreme Court Judgement in the Shah Bano case. The passing of the bill itself caused quite a furore in parliament as can be seen from the above newsreport.

This bill has caused fresh controversy and country-wide protests particularly by women's organizations. Legal opinion as well as a significant section of Muslim public opinion is vehemently opposed to the bill. It is seen as not only being blatantly communal but causing further disabilities to muslim

women, a vast majority of whom already stand severely disadvantaged within the community.

The Bill has also brought increasing demands for an uniform civil code. This in turn has raised many fundamental questions with regard to the implications of such a code in a largely multi-religious and multi-ethnic society such as India. In the light of the controversy and the serious issues raised by the whole Shah Bano case and the Muslim Women's Bill, many social activists and intellectuals in India see the need for a renewed examination of secularism and secular principles in the context of essentially plural societies like India. These questions have direct relevance and validity for a number of other countries in developing Asia. Above all at the level of personal law it has raised some very sharp questions for the women's movement in India as also elsewhere in Asia. Many in the women's movement in India feel that issues raised by personal law are directly the concern of the women's movement.

In an issue dealing with 'Women's Studies' we felt it would be of value to provide some basic documentation relating to the Shah Bano case. This documentation deals with the situation prior to the passing of the Bill. We are grateful to the BUILD (Bombay Urban Industrial League for Development) Documentation Centre from whose bi-monthly newsletter 'News for Action', this documentation is reproduced. 'Asian Exchange' will and does plan to come back, not merely to the Shah Bano case and its implications/lessons for other Asian societies but more generally the more fundamental questions raised with regard to 'Women and Law in Asia'.

### **'The Bill is a Sin Against the Quran'**

(Reproduced below is an extract from the letter of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, former Supreme Court Judge of India, to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the Muslim Divorce Bill.)

February 28 1986.

Dear Shri Prime Minister,

I am reluctant to write this unpalatable letter to you, knowing that your mind is perhaps dead set on the 'amendatory' solution to the Shah Bano syndrome. But beholding vividly the macabre portents of the legislative Bill now being hurriedly piloted through Parliament, I cannot remain silent. You are our Prime Minister and it behoves me, as a citizen, to do my duty by my country and speak publicly when dangerous mistakes are unwittingly made by the highest political echelons. Criticism is a duty where public power goes awry. And men in authority have a

patient responsibility to keep themselves fully informed of other's viewpoints.

Section 125 CrPC is obviously a secular provision designed to salvage all divorced damsels in penurious distress, regardless of religion, from the throes of desperate destitution, which may drive them to prostitution and other survival alternatives. This provision is sustained by Article 15 of the Constitution and applies to all women equally. Any exclusion of one religious community is a plain violation of the fundamental right to equality. Illusory alternatives driving Muslim women to seek maintenance from their parents and from the Wakf Board (most of which have little in the kitty) are clearly and substantially discriminatory. You could as well put Hindu and Parsi and Christian women under the same handicap and drive them to their religious trusts. Why pick on Muslim women? They are the major victims, as statistics show from a study of applications for maintenance under Section 25 CrPC.

You will easily appreciate that this provision has no relation to liability to maintenance under the personal law. The jurisdiction is different, the jurisprudence is different, the measures and procedure are different. One is rooted in family law, the other is public order and social justice. To confuse between the two is to be guilty of judicial cataract.

Section 125 CrPC is of British vintage broadened by the benign Parliament. The twentyfirst century is a summons to move forward progressively, not to retreat regressively, frightened by sixth century primitivism. Section 125 rescues needy divorcees, rendered homeless, from moral danger resorting to means of livelihood contrary to peace, tranquility and social health. Such a provision is founded on the secular values of our Republic and is expressly contemplated in Article 25, which empowers the state to make provision necessitated by public order, morality and health. To contend that Section 125 is for or against any religion is a crass caricature of the scope and purpose of the law. To invoke 'religion in danger' to resist a provision based on the constitutional concern for public order, morality and health envisioned in Article 25 is to draw the red herring across the trail. Three decisions of the Supreme Court, which have consistently affirmed this approach, are enough authority to negative the fundamentalist distortion. Masculine obscurantism, Muslim or Hindu, should accept the law laid down by the highest Court explaining the *raison d'etre* of the measure.

True, some ayatollahs of India and their political mukhtars are making noises as is their wont, as if Islam would decline, if women in distress were kept contented! What a travesty of truth! Many hundreds of liberal Muslims and many organisations of Muslim

and other women have, to my personal knowledge, applauded the Shah Bano ruling and have been outraged by the reversal of the ruling through the legislative process.

It is a grievous error to exalt the strident few reactionaries and pachydermic communalists as the sole representatives of the masses of women. Women's status is at stake; kindly discover the truth before its too late. There is bitter disappointment among Muslims and total disenchantment among women consequent on the surrender of the Prime Minister to a handful of surrogates in Parliament whose 'sound and fury' scare him and make him deaf to the deeper feelings of the broader community.

What is more, there is terrible danger of Hindu communalism being whipped up on this score. The temperature is hotting up. Bigots on both sides are busy. I implore you not to let down our secular stability, the political motive being transparent. Nehru said at Calicut, as Prime Minister, the Muslim League is a dead horse. Should you, as Prime Minister, use it as your mentor? Cliques and claques may later betray.

I see ominous sign of passions rising and feel nervous about the backlash of communal conflicts and poll verdicts. After all, the Supreme Court has interpreted and there is no provocation for scuttling a salutary decision. Kindly note that in Kerala, as elsewhere, the Muslim intelligentsia and women have been awakened and large numbers of responsible people are denouncing the pseudo-Shariatariat. May I entreat you not to stand on prestige, which is a poor defence in crisis, but base yourself on human rights and social justice, so that principled politics may overpower communal politicking?

You rightly stress that communalism shall not be a political tool. But deeds and words must match. Whatever your assertions to the contrary, the present 'Muslim' Bill is blatantly communal. 'Et tu Brute!' may be history's comment. When the genetic code of this alleged Protection Bill and its communal DNA is to be decoded I have little doubt about the analyst's report. Already communal passions, on this Bill, are beginning to convulse. Why punish innocent Muslims and Hindus? You have shown dynamic departure from previous wrong policies and so may I humbly summon your statesmanship?

Let me tell you that the Bill is a sin against the Quran and the constitution of Wakfs. Many Islamic scholars hold that the Koranic command to husbands to pay upkeep expenses to divorcees beyond the period of iddat is clear. Again, Wakfs are religious and charitable trusts by pious Muslims to perform specified holy acts for their spiritual benefit. It will be sacrilege to divert

these funds for maintenance of other people's wives. Many Wakf boards are themselves poor and it is an illusion to make them caretakers of jilted and jettisoned wives. The whole project is a legislative tamasha. Please don't stultify our great Parliament. Already the Supreme Court judges have been insulted by Minister Ansari in Parliament. 'My object, in this long letter, is to persuade you that the Shah Bano nullification Bill is born in communalism and will perish in communalism but the processes are often perilous'

May I conclude with a prayer to you on behalf of Indian women, human rights defenders, secularist radicals and constitutional advocates?

The Bill to kill the Shah Bano decision of the Supreme Court is the unfortunate political product of a creative genius for multi-dimensional injustice. The Bill is an injustice to our Republic's secular principle; it is an injustice to women's basic and therefore, violative of human rights; it is an injustice to the egalitarian policy in our Constitution in Article 14 and 21 and 25; it is a vindictive injustice to Muslim women selling the soul of the state's humanism to obscurantist fundamentalists; it is an injustice to the Holy Quran which insists on payment of maintenance of divorced women in distress; it is an injustice to the twentyfirst century because it throws us back to the sixth century to buy Islamic votes through the noisy illusion of electoral support of fundamentalists whose hold on the liberal Muslim intelligentsia and the suffering masses of women is marginal; it is an ultra vires injustice to the law of Wakfs because Wakfs are not trusts to look after privatised wrongs inflicted by irresponsible talaqs; it is an injustice to family integrity because it is fraught with potential for litigation between close relatives. It is an injustice to pragmatic working of the law because, functionally speaking, the provisions lead the destitute to several cases in search of a pittance; it is an injustice to national stability, because the secular credibility of the government will be a casualty. The dictate of the social dialectics of India leaves no choice. But as Karl Menninger put it: **"The voice of the intelligence is soft and weak, said Freud. It is drowned out by the roar of fear. It is ignored by the voice of desire. It is contradicted by the voice of shame. It is hissed away by hate, and extinguished by anger. Most of all it is silenced by ignorance."**

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,  
Sd/-VR Krishna Iyer

Hon'ble Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India,  
New Delhi 110 001. (The Telegraph 4-3-86)



## **Muslim Women's Bill:**

### **The Government Position**

The Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, received the mandate of the party to go ahead with the Muslim women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, thus setting at rest the controversy that it had evoked in the party. Meanwhile, Mr. Gandhi reaffirmed the governments commitment to protect the legitimate interests of the minorities.

\* Mr. Gandhi said he would not rush the Muslim Women Bill through Parliament and that he would examine the objections made against it. He gave this assurance to a delegation of the Committee for the Protection of Rights on Muslim Women, who submitted a memorandum with 180 signatures, opposing the bill. (TOI 12-3-86)

\* The government does not propose to bring about changes in the personal law of a minority community unless the initiative for this purpose comes from the community itself and there is an ascertainable consensus for such a change. Minister of State for Law and Justice H.R. Bharadwaj told the Lok Sabha. He said a memorandum had been received by the government from the Joint Womens' Programme proposing revision of the Indian Christian Marriage Act 1972. The Government had not taken any decision on the proposals for amendment as they will have to be examined. (D 5-3-86)

\* In face of stiff opposition from within the party and outside, the government is understood to be seriously considering reference to the Bill to a joint select committee of Parliament. The controversy touched off by the resignation of the Minister of State for Energy, Mr. Arif Mohammed Khan, has acquired wider dimensions with prominent public personalities voicing their concern for what they see in the measure as encouragement being given to Muslim fundamentalist. (TOI 6-3-86)

\* The Union Energy Minister, Vasant Sathe said in New Delhi that the provisions of the proposed Bill should be applicable to all women in the country. He added that the entire Muslim Law, not only those relating to marriage, should be codified. (FPI 3-3-86)

\* The Muslim Women's Bill held centre-stage of the activities marking the International Women's Day. Mrs. Margaret Alva, Minister of State for Women's Welfare defended the Bill and Mrs. Pramilla Dandavate called for its withdrawal. Inaugurating a seminar on women and development in Delhi, Mrs. Alva said the government was committed to a uniform civil code and laws to end discrimination of any kind, particularly against women, the bill.

was aimed at safeguarding minority religious beliefs.

Mrs. Dandavate who was speaking at a meeting organised by the Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce Ladies Organisation in Delhi, observed that some two thirds of working women were in the unorganised sector where they had no benefits. Mrs. Dandavate lashed out at the Bill as being discriminatory towards Muslim women. The issue she said, should not be left to Muslim women alone. Women in general should demand withdrawal of the proposed Bill.

Several womens organisation took out processions in Madras.  
(TOI 9-3-86)

### **Ecchoes in W.B.Assembly**

The Muslim Women's Bill awaiting passage in Parliament and mentioned in the West Bengal Assembly led to a confrontation between the Left Front legislators and some of Congress (I) MLAs. During the mention hour, Ms. Aparajita Gorpi (FB) said that the Bill if passed, would be tantamount to putting women back to the medieval age. Mr. Jyoti Basu said that the Left Front also held the same view. (S 14-3-86)

### **For The Bill**

Mr. Khurshed Alam Khan the Union Minister of State for Textiles, and Mr. Z. R. Ansari minister of state for forests, congratulated and thanked the Prime Minister for introducing the Bill and urged him to pass it immediately without first expressing it to a select committee. (TOI 8-3-86)

\* Two Muslim organisation in Tamil Nadu have commended the Muslim women bill. The organisation of Muslim Educational Institutions and Associations of Tamil Nadu (OMEIAT) said in a resolution that the rights provided under the Bill were more beneficial for the Muslim women than the provisions of Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The resolution also expressed satisfaction over the provisions of the bill being in accordance with the principle of the Shariat.

The Tamil Nadu Muslim Graduates Association congratulated the Prime Minister and the Government on the "bold stand taken in introducing the bill, which would protect the interests of destitute, divorced Muslim women and it is also in accordance with the principles of Shariat". (H 12-3-86)

### **... and Against It**

In a telegram sent to the Supreme Court, the General

Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Mahila Federation, Ms.G Sarda Devi, has sought its intervention for the withdrawal of the Bill. The telegram said that the Bill was ultra vires of Article 14, 15 and 44 of the Constitution. (N 3-3-86)

\* In Maharashtra, the Kolhapur Bar Association held a morcha in the town to protest against the bill. The Association said that the Bill violates Article 44 of the Constitution. It also congratulated Mr.Arif Mohammad Khan. (LS 4-3-86)

\* Eminent jurists, including former Supreme Court judge VR Krishna Iyer declared they would challenge the validity of the Bill in the Supreme Court, if it was passed by Parliament. (TOI 5-3-86)

\* The Women Lawyers' Association, Madras, has requested the Prime Minister not to proceed with legislating the Bill, but withdraw it in the larger interests of women in general and Muslim women in particular. The Association said the attempt to tank Muslim women outside the scope of Sec 125 of the CrPC and also to get over the Supreme Court's judgement in the Shah Bano's case, was not only discriminatory but also a retrograde step. (H 5-3-86)

\* Mr. Baharul Islam, a former Supreme Court Judge and a Congress-I member of the Rajya Sabha in a note to the Prime Minister said that the Bill is liable to be struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional.

Mr. Islam, who delivered an important judgement in 1978, when he was a Judge of the Guwahati High Court on the issue of talaq under the Muslim Law, is of the firm view that no personal law concerning Muslims or for that matter other communities can be applicable on the criminal side. They are all governed by the same Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and other acts of legislature.

In his view, the Supreme Court derives its power under the provisions of the Constitution apart from other statutes. So far as the interpretation of the provisions of the Holy Quran relating to the payment of maintenance allowance to divorced Muslims is concerned the Supreme Court had committed no sacrilege by its judgement in the Shah Bano case. If a case between two Muslims involves the question of fundamental rights, the Supreme Court has the right to interpret the relevant provisions of the Quran if enforcement of the right demanded its interpretation.

According to Mr. Islam, the interpretation given in various high court ruling in the past and the text books on the Muslim Law that the payment of maintenance allowance to divorced muslim women is limited to the period of 'iddat' (three months) only is

not correct. Quoting relevant Quranic verse in sure 11, (at-Baqarah), verse 224 Mr. Islam says that the expression "during the period of 'Iddat'" is not part of the verse and has been interpolated later.

In his view, the bill, if enacted and challenged in the Supreme Court would be struck down for infringement of Article 14, 15 and 25 of the Constitution.

In another note submitted earlier to Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Islam pointed out that the limitation of two years for payment of compensation to children of a divorced Muslim women as provided in the Bill was too short and should be extended till they become majors. (N 6-3-86)

\* On March 6, hundreds of women marched through the streets of Delhi, this was the first procession to mark a series of such marches scheduled for the next two days, to observe the International Women's Day.

The procession was led by women clad in burqua, carrying posters and shouting slogans for the withdrawal of the Bill related to sec 125 of CrPC.

The rally was organised by the National Federation of Indian Women, AIDWA, Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Delhi Mahila Federation and Students Federation of India. (HT 7-3-86)

\* The Andhra Pradesh branch of the Indian Federation of Women Lawyers unanimously requested the central government not to pursue the Muslim Women (protection of rights on divorce) Bill.

\* A silent procession to protest against the Bill was organised by the women in Pune. The women gagged themselves to portray the status of women who are forcibly kept mum over their rights. (SV 8-3-86)

\* Dr. Manmtaz Chowdhury Secretary, Society for Protection of Muslim Women in Calcutta, has sent a telegram to Rajiv Gandhi, strongly opposing the new Bill. The society has started a signature campaign and plans to collect 10,000 signatures requesting that the Bill be dropped. (S 8-3-86)

\* The Indian Federation of Women Lawyers has passed a resolution stating that the Bill will undermine the secular nature of the republic adopted in the Preamble of the Constitution by the 42nd Amendment. It said the Bill was highly discriminatory. It also discriminated between Muslim divorced women of other communities. (TOI 9-3-86)

\* Forum Against Oppression of Women has condemned the Bill and described it as a 'retrograde' divisive step. In a resolution adopted in Bombay, the Forum said, the Bill's objective was to exclude Muslim Women from protection hitherto given to them. The Forum said every divorced woman has a right to maintenance irrespective of her religious background. It requested all women to assert this right . (TOI 10-3-86)

\* Widespread resentment has been reported in the Muslim - dominated areas of Lucknow, over the controversial bill. Many working Muslim women belonging to Aminabad, Nasirabad, Nakhsha Chowk, and Turiabad, who do not want to come out openly for fear of the Mullahs feel that this 'retrograde' bill will take Muslim women back to the 10th century. (H-10-3-86)

\* Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Manch observed Women's Day in Calcutta with a procession and street corner meetings. Two spokespersons of the Committee for the Protection of Rights of Muslim Women, Mumtaz Sanghamita and Sajeda Asar criticised the proposed Muslim women's bill as anti-quran and anti-Women.

\* The members of the Bombay Advocates' Association, have criticised the Centres' efforts to get the Bill passed. The members were of the opinion that this action was prompted by narrow considerations of the ruling party and is positively against the fundamental rights of Muslim women. (IE 14-3-86)

\* Ms.Kamila Tyabji said several evils such as bigamy were tolerated by Islam because of the oppression of centuries of male chauvinism. **"The present controversy had come as a big awakening for Muslim women,** who were forced to consider whether what was being shoved down our throats was really Islamic" she said. (TOI 14-3-86)

### **Shah Bano States**

Shah Bano, whose case in the Supreme Court sparked off a nation-wide controversy, has gone to court again claiming a meher of 3000 silver coins from her former husband. Her husband has deposited the amount of meher in currency notes but Shah Bano contends the meher according to their marriage contract was 3000 silver coins.

Asked if this will not create a fresh controversy, she said "my religious leaders forced me not to accept maintenance because according to them it is against the Shariat. But now I have decided I will not leave this matter just like that, I am determined to secure all those rights which have been provided in Shariat exclusively for women and meher is one of them" (TOI 10-3-86)

## About the Contributors

**Sukanya Hantrakul**, Phayao born is active within the Thai women's movement and writes often on Women's Issues.

**Kumud Sharma**, is Deputy Director of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, India. Her article was presented as a theme paper to the 6th. General Meeting of the Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific (ADIPA). We thank her for permission to include it in this issue of Asian Exchange.

**Chan Po King**, has specialised in Women's Studies and is an active member of the Association for the Advancement of Feminism in Hong Kong. In the April 1984 issue of Asian Exchange focussed on 'Development Indicators-A Critical Look', we had drawn on her thesis work, 'The Subordination of Women in Reproduction- The Case of Married Women of Childbearing Ages in Urban Hong Kong 1971-1981'. Her contribution to this issue is also based on her thesis work.

**Jamilah Ariffin**, is a lecturer in Rural Development at the University of Malaya. Her article originally appeared in the ILMU MASYARAKAT - A Publication of the Malaysian Social Science Association. We are thankful to the Editors for permission to include it in this collection on Women's Studies in Asian Exchange.

**Sucheela Tanchainan**, is a former Deputy General-Secretary of the Asian Students Association. She is also active with the Thai women's movement and is with the Women's Studies Programme of the Alternative Development Studies Group of the Chulalongkorn University Research Institute (CUSRI), Bangkok.

**Suneela Abeyasekera, Sunil Bastian and Reggie Siriwardena** are Sri Lankan scholars. Their article was first published in the Asian Exchange issue of March 1983.

As always the production of this issue was made possible with patient help of Beatrice Lee. Cheryl Isaacson and Maria Tsui helped in the final stages of this issue.

D.L.Surendra

# POWERFUL IMAGES

## A Women's Guide to Audiovisual Media

Groundbreaking guide to one of the most important international trends in the women's movement today. Includes articles on using videos, slideshows and other audiovisuals with women's groups • practical tips on equipment and production • illustrated accounts of the experiences of Third World women in making and using audiovisuals • an annotated catalog of more than 600 women's audiovisuals in all media • addresses of distributors, women's groups, and film/videomakers.

220 pages, 21 x 30 cm, in English. US\$12 individuals, US\$20 institutions. Bookstore discount available. Add US\$7 for airmail outside Europe.

**Isis International, Via Santa Maria dell'Anima 30,  
00186 Rome, Italy.**



GRAM : ICSORES  
PHONES : D : 385989  
R : 624165

भा सा वि अ प

ICSSR

सामाजिक विज्ञान प्रलेखन केन्द्र

SOCIAL SCIENCE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

INDIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

### SERVICES AVAILABLE

1. compilation of short/selected bibliographies tailored to the needs of the scholars,
2. facility to study on all days of the year except three holidays (i.e., 26 January, 15 August & 2nd October) in the premises of SSDC ; publications not available in the library are procured from other libraries on inter-library loan basis,
3. supply of photocopies of articles/documents of interest from out of a rich collection of back and current issues of journals/serials as well as unpublished theses and research reports, subject to the provision of the Copyright Act,
4. facility to get cyclostyling/rotating/electric scanning,
5. financial assistance under Study Grant scheme for visiting libraries for collection of material for research.

Kindly address all enquiries to:

The Director

SSDC-ICSSR.

35, Ferozeshah Road,

New Delhi-110 001, INDIA



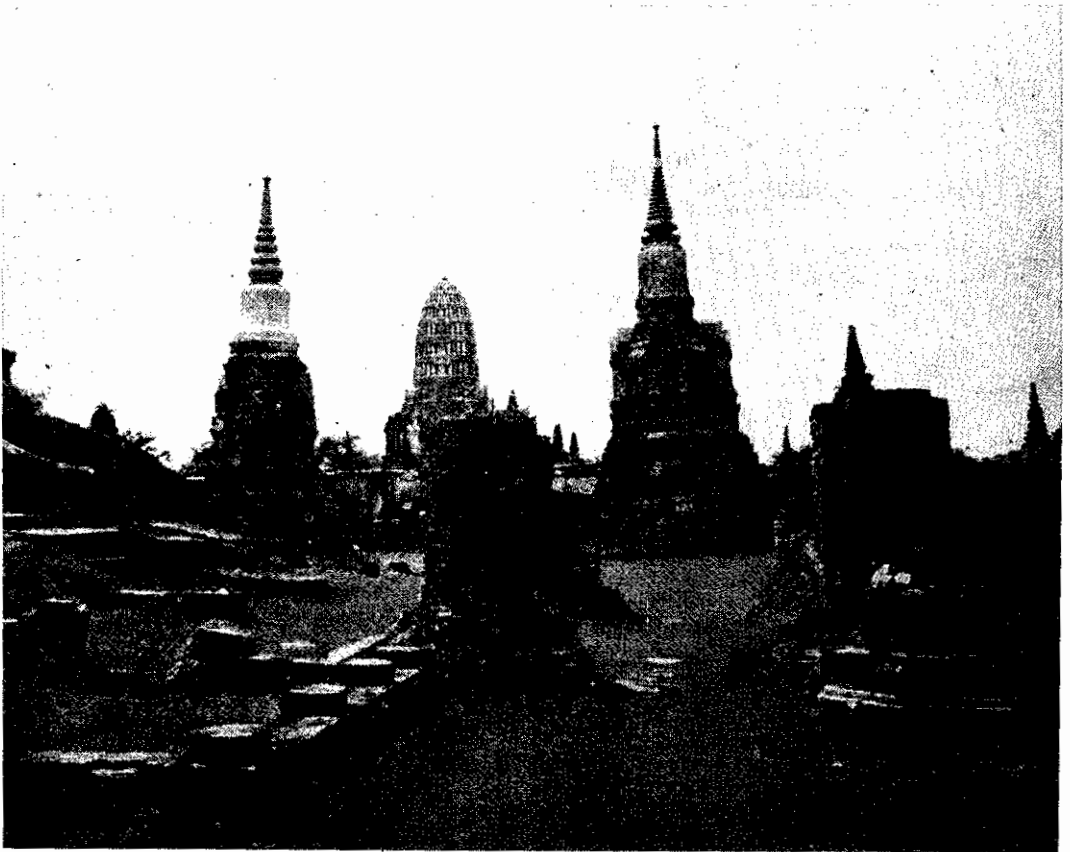
Advertisement

ALTERNATIVE TOURS (THAILAND)  
CULTURAL AND TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

We offer assistance in arranging:

- Bangkok and vicinity tours.
- Visits to rural areas or any part of the country.
- Visits to Hill Tribes.
- Participation in National and Local Festivities as well as religious and cultural ceremonies and events.
- Visits to development projects.
- Study tours on various topics.

If you wish to have simple accommodation at our Centre, may we offer you a bed in one of our rooms? We have double, triple bedrooms and two large ones for 4-8 persons, with or without air-conditioning, with or without private bathroom.



If you need any further information please write to:

ALTERNATIVE TOURS (THAILAND)  
14/1 Soi Rajatapan, Rajaprapop Rd., Bangkok 10400, THAILAND.  
Tel: 245-2963 Telex: 82164 B. V. T. TH ATT. ALTERNATIVE TOURS  
Cable: ALTERNATIVE TOURS

