



# Women's Perspectives on Public Policy

An incomplete or lost agenda?

— Maithreyi Krishna Raj

## Theme Paper

IXth National Conference on  
Women's Studies

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NISIET, Hyderabad.

**WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC POLICY  
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The theme of the paper is public policy. It is difficult to talk about policy without bringing in some kind of evaluation of programmes that emanate from it. Women's perspectives would encompass what they contributed, what they opposed, what they ratified, what they found insufficient in terms of direction and content. I cannot deal with all of it and hope only to touch upon these aspects when the context arises. There really has been no 'women's policy' but a series of accommodation to various demands. We do not have for instance an Emancipation Council as in some European countries that has to be consulted in a mandatory way on all **policy** before it becomes law or executive practice. We have some thing on education, something on employment, something on economic matters, some on what are called 'social' issues like prostitution, destitution etc.

Fifty two years is not a small period for initiating progress. The promises enshrined in the Constitution and the vision of women's full emancipation will not be realised unless once again we gear ourselves to intervene more forcefully in the polity and public policy. By public policy we do not mean only policy documents actually released from time to time by the government in power but by actions by public agencies in all sectors of life to promote gender equality and gender justice. The woman's movement in the country has been instrumental in bringing about improvements in the rights of women, in enforcing rights already granted to them, in calling attention to the serious lacuna in many legal provisions and in legal procedures, in monitoring the actual status of women in several sectors through research and data, in mobilising women's groups in campaigns, in protests, in organising supports and help for many sections of women for employment, income, health, education, legal help etc, in generating a resurgence of women's creative activity and in forming alternative organisational innovations....the list is endless. Yet at the end of it all, the record of progress is patchy at best and dismal at worst going by the human development report on gender indices for India. In the ruling powers' hurry now to join the roll call of 'powerful' nations, social ideals that informed the early decades are in danger of being jettisoned and with it women's agenda. The signs are ominous. The main stream media that espoused women's cause in the seventies and eighties is now busy chasing profits to the detriment of its true role as the Fourth Estate. The mounting violence against women is another alarming signal that the elimination of the subordinate status of women is not as easily overcome as we thought and we underestimated the strength of patriarchy and caste politics. Public policy and its implementation had made many efforts in many directions but this thrust is today weakening visibly. The Committee on the Status of Women made a clarion call to equality; that call is lost in the new slogan of 'empowerment' a vaguer concept, hard to measure. Under it, any kind of action for women becomes empowerment. In the name of participation, many responsibilities are added without any reduction in the basic set of deprivations or work burdens; employment or education become tools for family welfare than woman's source of freedom; birth control is manipulation for population control rather than true release from reproductive burdens. More than that, the rhetoric of empowerment can evade the contingent clause that the oppressors when clearly identified (apart from systemic oppression) should be brought to book. Our judges and lawyers, the police and the entire criminal justice system in the majority of cases fail to give justice to women victims and the offenders get acquitted most of the time.

In a presentation here today it is not possible to cover all of policy or all of women's perspectives. I therefore confine myself to discussing the broader issue of 'development' and look briefly at three areas: education, population and environment. The sub themes would be discussing these and other issues in greater depth. Some critics of the woman's movement's strategy have held it guilty of relying too much on legal remedies and of putting so much faith on the state whose credentials to fight patriarchy is suspect and only co-opts women's organisations to neutralise dissent. This may be partly true but not all of intervention was so

negative in outcome. The sheer growth of women's organisations, the recognition of plural interests contains any excessive zeal there might be in this direction.

The question of law and the history of legal changes and their implementation, the concerted actions by women that brought them about would require detailed treatment. I only wish to offer an explanation here as to why the women's movement chose to focus on law. Rights granted by law give an avenue, a legitimate one, to the citizen to claim them and seek redressal through established rule of law, *presumably* because a rule based process is not subjective and biased by individual or sectarian prejudices and cannot be reversed easily by change of government. The constitution uses the word justice in a number of provisions. Though it is not defined, it is articulated through the Directive Principles of State policy and the guarantee of fundamental rights. The Constitution is a social document containing clear specification of the goals of social transformation which are intended to be achieved. It enjoins the State to take steps to bring about an economic order in which material resources of the community shall be so distributed as best to subserve the common good and that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. As for gender justice, neither the constitution makers nor subsequent amendments were informed on the real meaning and implications of gender justice. As Dr. Sathe points out ( Sathe 1993) in the total of 325 articles and 10 schedules the number devoted to women are very few and mostly enshrined in the Directive Principles which are not enforceable in a court of law. Barring the 42nd amendment which has a chapter on Fundamental Duties, no other amendment deals with women. Article 51A under the amendment has a clause which states: *It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to women.*<sup>1</sup> Apart from this there is only the provision on equality before law and prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex. The constitution also enjoins on the state to undertake affirmative action on behalf of women. Given this promise of a state that will act on behalf of women, in the first few decades, women spent a lot of energy in reforming the existing laws or creating new laws. There followed in quick succession the following: The Maternity benefit Act (1961); the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act ( 1971); The Dowry prohibition Act( 1961); The Equal Remuneration Act (1976)The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act ( 1986); The Commission of Sati Prevention Act (1987). These are some of the protective legislation we have gained. Of these, except for the last they were not initiated by women though they had drawn attention to these problems, particularly, dowry deaths, rising prostitution and resurgence of sati. The act prohibiting conducting of amniocentesis for determining the sex of the fetus was the direct result of public initiative. Amendment to rape law, bringing domestic violence under the purview of law, improving property rights within marriage were all the direct efforts of women's groups and supportive men. Public interest litigation was an important device used effectively, in a great many cases in quest of gender justice. The goal of a Common Civil Code was shelved when it got embroiled with minority religious rights. There have been many attempts to tame the legal procedures to make them more woman friendly. The CSWI had recommended the setting up of Family Courts. The creation of women's monitoring cells in police stations, increase in women police officers were some responses to improving the treatment of women in the courts and police stations. Sadly, the record of law's failure in so many instances and the way many judgements ran counter to the spirit of the law, disheartens one. On the other hand the possibility of going to court did open up for many women an outside support and authority to challenge the oppression at home or denial of justice in other places (Gangoli 1997)) ' By empowerment we mean creating and strengthening through various inputs the capacity of a person to impose duties and liabilities on **other** persons towards the person to be empowered.' (Sathe 1993). [emphasis mine]. For this, three strategies are followed - direct conferment of rights; creating the institutional support for the enforcement of rights and finally changing the attitudes, values and practices prevalent in society that uphold inequality and subordination.. The women's movement has attempted all three and it is not true that it has relied only on law. The last has been intractable and has nullified the attempts of the other two. The reading that there was total reliance on law perhaps arises because this attracted more media attention than

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<sup>1</sup> Ironic that soon after this, the opening of TV to satellite television and foreign channels is adding to our own commercial cinema this derogatory portrayal. The exploitation of sex and violence has reached its limits.

say, the silent constructive work of innumerable voluntary groups. An important legal infrastructure set up by the government is the establishment of the National Commission of Women (NCW) in 1990, followed by State commissions in some states. The Commission has three types of functions- to make recommendations about effective implementation of laws, to review laws and to make periodic reports on any matter pertaining to women. It has executive cum judicial functions pertaining to violations of rights; it has some powers of a civil court to summon witnesses, enforce attendance, request documents, receive affidavits. The achievements of the Commission is yet to be evaluated. Much depends on the choice of members. The Maharashtra State Women's Commission played an important role in the institution of inquiry and in the trial of the accused in the Jalegaon sex scandal case. The reconstitution of the membership of the NCW has not been given publicity. The work of the Commission is also not widely reported. We have increasingly come to realise that the pre conditions for gender justice is the creation of a democratic, liberal, secular culture. What ever the travails of our fumbling democracy, the imperatives imposed by democracy has stood us well-note the fact that all parties to day swear by women's rights. The stormy reactions to the women's bill has more to do with caste politics. Their interpretation might be different or it may be lip service. The tangible outcome of the half century is that the hitherto silent screams of women can now reach out side the walls even if they are not fully heard or answered. The other is the rising consciousness among women in general and the progress made by middle class women towards greater 'empowerment' if not equality. Of course, middle class women face many new problems and the rising rate of divorce is evidence of independent, professional women's quest for autonomy being thwarted by conventional expectations within marriage. (Bharucha 1999)

***To take up economic policy first:***

It is generally held that the 'women and development' discourse began only with Esther Boserup's Book and the inclusion of the theme in the UN. by the amendment brought out by Senator Percy. (Tinker- 1990). Not many are aware that long before its advent in the international fora, women in India had deliberated on the 'Role of Women in a Planned Economy'. Many of its observations are far sighted and display a remarkable understanding of the basic issues and their remedies. A National Planning Committee had been constituted by the Congress party in 1939-40. As part of this a sub committee was set up to advise on women. Chaired by Laxmibai Rajwade and Mridula Sarabai as member secretary, the committee submitted a broad ranging report. The importance to women of independent economic means was clearly emphasized. Its major recommendations included among others the following critical ones: that the woman worker should have full control over her earnings; imposing a ban on night work would only exclude women from employment and instead conditions of work in the so called hazardous occupations should be made less hazardous; the family should not be seen as the economic unit as this automatically leads to consigning women to the role of a secondary earner and male wage earners do not support the employment of married women who contribute to their families. A most radical and innovative suggestion of the committee was: that economic value of house work should be recognised and in lieu of payment all facilities and rights as workers should be extended to women for domestic work; they should have absolute control over a portion of their husband's income and lastly that men should be trained in domestic skills. So, we have here all that we are talking about: sexual division of labour; unpaid work; control over earnings; employment; treatment of woman as an individual and not as merged with the family. In fact the note of dissent by Kapila Kandwalla went further and was dissatisfied that the document was not strong enough in demanding that 'in the future planned society, what would count and count alone will be the individual personality of each woman ... and no relationship that she may have to bear with her fellows'.

Sadly this entire history was forgotten after 1951-52 and this valuable document was buried when the country launched its plans. So much so, few remembered its existence. What has puzzled many is what exactly happened that these women who were so forthright then, did not intervene later. The perspective on women that got actually incorporated after independence was that of 'keeper of the family' and their role in household and community. (Banerjee 1998) .Many explanations are given- that an elected government and constitutional guarantees

assured women that their interests would be kept in mind. Or because the women in leadership position in post independent India belonged to the educated, urban sections, the shift did not seem inappropriate to them. We do not know the real answer. This deserves some research. The planned economy had a definite thrust towards building a strong nation and matters of distributive justice did not command priority. For this neglect, in the coming decades we paid a heavy price. Until the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in the mid seventies, this neglect was invisible to policy makers as well as scholars. The plans despite their rhetoric were preoccupied with economic growth; in building a strong industrial and technological base and the allocations and priorities are evident if one looks carefully at where funds were allocated, where women figured, where allocations were utilised. The first plan was concerned with reconstruction after the war and partition. Women came under welfare and the governments role was that of extending help to voluntary agencies. In the Second Plan, women did not figure at all. They were the responsibility **only** of the Central Social Welfare Board. Some attention was given under health plans particularly for family planning. This trend continued when some expansion of nurses and ANMs etc took place under the Third Plan. The Fourth Plan expressed some concern about girls' education but the dominant emphasis on women as social sector beneficiaries continued. And the only active department was the Central Social welfare Board which made allocations for rehabilitation of destitute women and women were part of weaker sections. Even when the problems of women workers were taken up it was for 'welfare'. No where was there any recognition that the majority of women in this country are workers and not just home makers; they needed remunerative employment; they needed measures to improve their productivity; they had to have productive assets. Home Science Colleges in their extension work taught middle class domestic skills to rural women who were involved in agriculture.

This welfare approach did not look at women's problems and conditions in order to investigate why these conditions persisted. The planners and policy makers were reluctant to question not only male domination but political economic structures that generated inequality. Even as welfare recipients, women got subsumed under 'community'. For 10 gram sevaks for community development there were only 2 women for women's programmes. Women's programmes were not under different sectoral allocations but were confined to Mahila Mandals. (Buch 1998). Came the CSWI, the pressure from the women's movement, the continual badgering by women studies scholars of the economic role of women and their exposure of: distortion in data systems, the marginalisation of the masses of women, their displacement from traditional occupations, their loss of jobs in the organised sector, the growth of informal employment, migration and its travails, the struggles by the poor for basic needs; and on the other hand the growing middle class, their entry into higher education and employment, the growth of public sector providing avenues for both the middle class and lower rungs of it to lower sections of society. The latter development hid the former. It was when dowry raised its ugly head that the middle class women also began to suffer acutely from gender injustice and inequality. In the early years new laws were passed such as equal pay for equal work; some modifications in right to property. It was in the Sixth Plan that women found themselves in a separate chapter thanks to the continuous efforts of the women's movement to highlight women's concerns and the international pressure and visibility brought about by the International Women's Decade. A National Plan of Action had been prepared in 1976-77; a Working group on Employment of Women for the Planning Commission made several recommendations to improve the productivity of women's traditional occupations, to improve their access to training and skills and to open up opportunities in non traditional occupations. Women participated in the working group on development of village level organisations for rural women and exposed the useless programmes of the officially sponsored Mahila Mandals. There were similar working groups on adult education for women and on self employment. The Ministry of Agriculture constituted a National Level Committee on the role and participation of women in agriculture. If nothing else, data and research poured in to highlight the multiple contribution of women to society and the neglect and discrimination they suffered in every walk of life. Statistical profiles of women in India began to be regularly published. By the mid seventies and mid eighties the women's movement had accelerated; this was the hey day also of 'income generation' projects for women. Despite all this tremendous activity, considerable media publicity and general visibility, the response of policy makers continued to be to create special women's departments, women's projects,

special components. An enormous number of NGOs sprang up to do these 'women's projects' both through national funds as well as international donor funding. Increasingly attention became focused on poor women, on female headed households. There were reservations for women in anti poverty programs. Through out the eighties, women's groups kept addressing the state as there was a sincere belief that only through public policy can the status of women be improved. Changing the status of women within the family and community through directly addressing gender disparity and power imbalance was not easy; the threat to established structures would provoke too prompt a back lash. Through public policy, they hoped, the weight of authority the government has, can be invoked in women's favour and by building supports through better programmes addressed to women, they can be strengthened to fight against discrimination at home. Perhaps this was an over optimistic view; perhaps it was subject to the vicissitudes of changes in government as later events showed. Nevertheless, these interventions did have some impact. The class position of the leaders of the women's movement made access to government officials easier. If today there are a large number of grass roots women leaders, and grass roots women's movements, despite dwindling initiatives by major parties on women's concerns, the credit must indeed go to the pressure exerted on public policy as well as the gathering strength of the women's movement. In several ways the utilisation of what little was offered through public programmes were sourced by women's collectives, assisted and supported by women NGOs thereby giving a voice to grassroots women. That the gap between acceptance of women's needs and recommendations and actual policy and programmes remained unbridgeable is not solely the fault of wrong strategy by the women's movement. No political party really pushed women's issues. The political milieu was strengthening the hands of those who were pushing for nation building and fundamentalism was rearing its head. In this scenario women's attempts to shift the direction of policy remained ineffective notwithstanding sops that were offered. The various programmes remained disconnected from each other so there was no overall coherence. Women's programmes were the responsibility of 'Women and Child Development' and not of the entire administrative set up. The nineties were to bring total reversals that would complicate further avenues for struggle. As we enter the new millennium, the spectre of nuclearisation is rearing its head with disastrous shrinkage of public expenditure on more important needs. On the positive side, 'gender' as an important concern penetrated mainstream scholarship to a much greater extent. To go back to our history of women's intervention in economic policy.

In September 1980, a symposium was organised at the initiative of CWDS at New Delhi to which Dr. M. S. Swaminathan who was then a member of Planning Commission was invited to give the key note address and Prof. Asok Mitra, the then Professor of Population Studies at JNU was in the Chair. A large number of women's groups, representatives from international agencies participated. Swaminathan declared that 'promoting adequate development efforts for women at different levels and creating channels for women to participate effectively in decisions that affect their lives require organised efforts by women's groups and institutions'. Discussions were held in several rounds to enable wide participation and the final report was signed by Sarojini Varadappa (President AIWC), Vimla Farooqui (Secretary NIFW), Ivy Khan (general secretary YWCA) Zarina Bhatti (Delhi chapter YWCA) Bina Roy (President, Indian Federation of University Women's Associations) Ashoklata Jain (representative of Janavadi Mahila Samiti), Rangana Nirula (representative of All India Coordination Committee of Working Women) and Vina Mazumdar, member secretary CWDS). Women belonging to different political parties shared a common position. To recall very briefly, their major recommendations:

- i. replace the family-household approach with explicit mention of women as target group as women and girls constituted the largest pool of unpaid family labour, low paid and casual workers
- ii. special component approach with ear marked resources in all sectoral plans and programmes at the Centre and States in view of the fact that households that were solely supported by females formed 35%
- iii. provision of a net work of child care centres
- iv. expansion of training opportunities for women in agriculture, agro-based industries, in non traditional skilled industrial occupations
- v. greater earmarked resources for MCH to reduce infant mortality

- vi. physical and time targets to reduce male female gap in literacy and elementary education
- vii. promoting values of sex equality within and through the educational process
- viii. developing field cadres within the government to assist in the formulation, implementing, monitoring special component programmes
- ix. improving enforcement of existing laws, protection to women and women workers, increased access to legal remedies

In sum the thrust of the document was non controversial- it merely wanted more resources to be given to women within the existing plan framework and was happy with the special component approach.

In January 1987, a National Commission for Self Employed Women and the Informal Sector was constituted by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of Ela Bhat to make a comprehensive study of the working and living conditions of poor women in poverty. The Commission covered women doing manual work in agriculture and allied occupations, home based workers including artisans and piece rate workers, women in processing in traditional and non traditional areas, services like washerwomen, scavengers, domestic help, petty vendors, hawkers and all others not covered above. It made exhaustive inquiries and made wide ranging recommendations emphasising four dimensions: measures to improve productivity, measures that would give women control and ownership of productive assets not only in government distributed land but in all kinds of assets, protective legislation and enforcement of existing laws and above all support services like day care for children and health and education inputs. It pointed out that the approach of the government to women is one of ad hocism. The limited achievements under anti poverty programmes were more than offset by land alienation and environmental degradation, increasing polarisation between rural and urban sectors and between the poor and the rich. It asked for more allocations for all the above four aims and suggested mahila mandals as the agencies for implementation and participation in local level planning. Its approach was cautious with regard to the household - it blamed past policies for the household approach but at the same time recommended a balance between individual as the target of policy and household as a target. How this would work was not clear. To this day, there has been no report from the government on what was done on these recommendations.

Women's collectives as the answer to local level mobilisation by women's groups has worked well as a strategy of increasing the autonomy of rural and poor urban women in the unorganised sector and their control over their earnings and assets. It has had many fallouts like developing leadership, increased role in community decision making and more say at household level. Reports arrive of various success stories- the Pudukottai experiment of women getting their own lease to quarries, of a village in Bihar where women's collective has completely taken over community assets and employ men, of efforts at rooting out alcoholism, of water management schemes which has promoted women's participation in decision making in Gujarat (Ahmed 1999) are examples. The list would be quite a few pages. Like wise the major initiative such as SEWA, Working Women's Forum and Annapurna which have grown into federations have attracted world wide attention as models. However in all these, the availability of foreign funds, the role of charismatic leaders were important factors. On the flip side, they could not reverse policy directions that continually widened the parallelism in the economy- the organised and unorganised. It would be too harsh to call these initiatives relief operations - they were more than that- they were mobilisational achievements and helped to bring the middle class closer to the grassroots but it would be true to say they did not promote upward social or economic mobility for the majority but prevented further downward mobility. It was a finger in the dyke. The government's assistance was minimal despite many sensitive and committed women in the bureaucracy, who when they pushed more aggressively women's concerns were quickly transferred. Women's representation in the Panchayati raj holds out great hope but realistically their capacity to undertake local development will depend on availability of funds and neutralising local power structures.

1991 ushered in the era of economic reforms which drastically changed many of the parameters. The reforms involved liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. While many agree that the Nehruvian development plans put a major emphasis on the government as the



change agent and importance to public sector, it also bred the 'license-permit raj' and misjudged the capacity of the state to be pro poor and neutral. In other words, the state itself is an institution (and not outside all institutions) with its class alignments and the growth model tilted the outcomes in favour of the 'possessed' and not the dispossessed. Besides the accent on capital goods and big industry led to a relative neglect of wage goods. The small and tiny industrial sectors were covered by 'reservation' policy rather than making them more competitive. Unlike China which redistributed land, undertook massive land improvement schemes through deploying rural labour, promoted rural agro industries, achieved near total literacy - all of which helped to increase rural incomes, the policy here resulted in uneven agricultural growth, concentrated only in some pockets. Though we definitely made notable advances in terms of a strong industrial base and educated manpower, the basic problem of poverty eradication and employment generation was not a strategy built into the Plans but were to be tackled by 'anti-poverty programmes' many of which suffered from not only massive leakages but failed to enhance productivity in rest of the economy outside the high growth areas. Import substitution strategy had also run its course with mounting external debt and a protected industrial sector grew flabby, inefficient, did not invest in R&D. The rate of return to investment in public enterprises was 3% compared to 17% in private enterprise but it absorbed more than 50% of total investment. Lacking autonomy and facing political interference, the public sector became inefficient and overstaffed. Reforms were definitely called for to improve the performance of the economy but under the Structural Adjustment programme instituted by the World Bank and IMF the unevenness of development accentuated under a suddenly unleashed market economy. Given the vulnerability of the poorer sections and women their situation worsened. There was faster economic growth but it has not led to more employment and some recent studies show that growth has not resulted in any further reduction of poverty either. Much has been written about the adverse gender impact of these policies. Poverty has multiple and complex causes and the expectation that economic growth will increase income and employment may not be fulfilled for it would depend on whether the new developments promote labour intensive technologies or capital intensive technologies. In the large industries, capital intensive production is opted for to become 'competitive' with products from outside. The assumption that all that is necessary is only investment in human capital - education and health is also not valid. Poverty is primarily lack of productive assets and unless physical capital and productive assets is generated by appropriate policies, and unless there is redistribution, the well being of the majority is unlikely to be taken care of. (Ward 1999). For example land redistribution will serve several goals - data suggest that small landholdings have higher income per hectare and have an incentive to reduce birth rates. (Shariff 1999, Desai 1998). In this context public expenditure for infrastructure development becomes critical. Given the withdrawal in this area, given the gender skewness, 'women's development' will take a back seat. On the other hand, there is the belief that the rich must be paid more and they must not be taxed to induce them to work while the workers can be retrenched under the 'leaner, meaner' goal. That cheap labour alone is what will give us competitiveness goes against even what the original father of liberalism, Adam Smith subscribed to. He advocated high wages as important for worker effectiveness. What is happening now is a severe distortion in relative wage structures with islands of phenomenally high wages and the rest experiencing a fall in real wages. As Ward says, historically it was the political reform of 1848 in England which devoted much resources to improving public health and the substantial expansion of municipal services in the latter half of the nineteenth century which provided for the first time proper water, waste disposal sanitation, sewerage housing which raised the living standards of the people. (Ward 1999)

S.P.Gupta in a paper titled "Trickle down theory revisited-the role of employment and poverty" (1999) comparing the results of NSS 38<sup>th</sup> round with NSS 59<sup>th</sup> round demonstrates that while in urban areas the proportion of people below the poverty line has declined to some extent (from 40.78% to 34.58%) rural poverty has declined only marginally (from 45.65% to 45.25%). What is alarming is the increase in absolute numbers- from 32.8 crores in 1983 to 40.63 crores today. If one looks at employment, the gains in organised sector employment has been small. 'Which ever definition of poverty or employment one adopts no macro policy based on market led growth will be successful in dealing with either poverty or employment. The market benefits those qualified and socially well placed. All sections of society should be able to get opportunities to enter the mainstream job market'. Rural households around the

poverty line are primarily engaged in occupations which since the initiation of the reforms have not experienced any increase in productivity.

Year	Changes in poverty ratio	Changes in employment	growth rate
1983-90/91	-3.1	1.6	5.6
1990-1998	+2.7	1.1	5.7

[ Gupta 1999]

Prof. S. R. Hashim, member of the Planning Commission also comments that despite poverty alleviation programmes these created no more than 3 to 4 million jobs and the same level is maintained without any improvement. Offering figures he shows that employment elasticity has in fact fallen. (Hashim 1999). There has been a drastic reduction in self employment and in regular jobs and growth in casual, temporary jobs leading to further expansion of informal sector. This development has noted by many. Traditionally informal sector is viewed with reference to the firm (registered or unregistered) but actually should be seen from the point of conditions of employment for the worker regardless of where he/she is (Unni 1999) Seen this way, many workers in so called organised sector have the status of casual, temporary, put out categories. The pace of economic and technological change is set by large firms and the public sector. Most new employment will have to be in the small/medium enterprises and much greater attention would have to be paid to enhance their productivity. The short term gain of cheap labour is the 'low road' and efficiency enhancing methods is the 'high' road and over the long run only the latter will help us be truly competitive in the world market. (Holmstorm 1999). There have been a spate of studies on these trends (Krishna Kumar 1997; Krishnamurthy 1996; Surya narayana 1996) which reiterate these conclusions. There have been other criticisms: that India is relying more on foreign direct investment by relaxing many controls on them rather than really building export capability. The entry of foreign investment has been in areas where we already have profitable markets so that it is more to gain shares in the Indian market than build new capabilities in areas where we need them most.

Field studies like the one done by Astha (1998) show fall in consumption among the poorer households in Rajasthan with the slowing down of the Public Distribution System. Even in the best of times no more than 50% rural households benefited. Prices of grain in the ration shops is near the open market prices so the question arises as to whether the procurement policy and PDS serves the poor or acts as support prices for the better off farmers. Food security is a critical concern and many scholars have pointed to PDS as important in softening the blow of new reforms. ( Mahendra Dev 1996; Parikh and others). Dev indicates how in put subsidies for agriculture as a ratio of public investment from 1980-81 to 1992-93 went up from 87% to 337% and richer states with irrigated areas captured a disproportionate share of it. 'In the Indian context social security for the Indian workers must be understood to include both promotional measures aimed at raising and improving the standard of living of workers and protective measures to preventing a decline in standards' ( Dev 1996). Given the widening gap in access to social security both as between classes and gender this is of particular importance, but the policy under the reforms is to reduce subsidies and government expenditure regardless of whom it affects most. But for low yield, low infrastructure investment in agriculture outside the well endowed sectors, bad storage etc, India has the biggest potential to become the world's food basket. (TOI 1999) because we have a greater proportion of our land mass as arable land and more sun shine than any advanced countries. A short sighted export policy of food grains may not help us achieve this status. Food security is of prime concern to women in poorer households; so is employment.

To turn to gender specific impact of the reforms. A very recent study ( Arora 1999) looks at the gender specific impact in terms of four major processes:

- changes in production structures and processes and consequent labour market reorganisation
- state withdrawal and pattern of social sector allocation
- policy changes with respect to management of natural resources
- expansion of consumerism

She identifies seven changes in production structures:

- i. increasing reliance in existing units on modern technology that is not necessarily associated with improvement in quality but changing tastes ( e.g. food processing; clothing; )
- ii. units unable to modernise turn sick
- iii. fewer jobs in new industries
- iv. reorganisation across space and time to disperse and disconnect production processes( high tech in some section; labour intensive in home production)
- v. displacement of existing crafts due to raw material shortage, big industry priorities
- vi. expansion of traditional industries to meet global market demands without modernisation or mechanisation
- vii. greater linkages between industry, agriculture, forestry and markets such that growth or displacement in one sector is reflected in others

There has been no feminisation of labour as argued by some eg, Deshpandes. Out of 19 industries studied by them, in 10 female labour remained stagnant, in 2 it decreased and only in 7 it increased. The increase in absolute numbers relative to male labour was small. Hindustan Lever decentralised so that from 600 women it once employed it now had only 3. Much of the female labour has entered in traditional female occupations. Most significantly female labour has become increasingly casual/temporary/insecure with poor rewards.

Commercialisation of agriculture which began earlier has proceeded apace leading to changes in land use away from food crops to cash crops and in some cases leading to loss of fertility as in aquaculture. Foreign investment in food processing is around Rs. 9000 crores displacing one of the ubiquitous female enterprises. In Kerala screw pine mat weaving has declined due to loss of raw material. Such examples can be multiplied. Labour intensive export industries are 'labour unfriendly' and though they provide income and opportunities otherwise unavailable to women workers, they account for only a small proportion of total female labour. State support for agro processing for industrial uses and changes in land ownership has reduced the supply of agricultural goods to the poor. Data is coming in on increased school drop out especially of girls who are needed for economic support to the families either by working them selves or to take care of domestic responsibilities while the mother works . Though cuts in social sector has since been restored to previous level within the sector allocations are discouraging- education has gone up from 0.5% of plan outlay to 0.6% (much of it for increases in salaries) health budget is hardly 0.55% and housing is 0.2%. As for availability of drinking water, sanitation, roads etc in rural areas there has been no investment. Consumerism has promoted role models and beauty myths to promote cosmetics and products. The record in environmental deterioration has not been comforting.

This brings me to the point that while there have been many initiatives in the nineties and many micro successes events have overtaken women. There have been schemes for aiding women entrepreneurs (small scale) but these are ad hoc programmes. Some women narrate their harrowing story of how from pillar to post they have to run. (Bharadwaj 1990). Micro credit has been hailed as a great achievement. No doubt they represent women's thrift potential and self help groups do assist poor women (Bhat ,1999 ) but if we see the record of the nationalised and schedule banks credit given to households and individuals they have diminished in importance over successive years (from a total number of accounts of 5370,76,658 to 533,93,124 (EPW Research Foundation Figures) so that rural India and the poor every where even today rely heavily on non bank credit like money lenders with high rates of interest. The earlier priority lending and differential rate of interest have been abandoned in the quest by banks to make profits. Government sponsored development programme like the women's development project in Rajasthan ran into trouble when women became really assertive. The formation of the National Alliance of Women's Organisations is a step forward. It has now undertaken the monitoring role of the U. N. Convention on Abolition of all Kinds of Discrimination Against Women. The establishment of the Women's Commissions at National and State level are laudable but we need a proper evaluation of their contribution. The National Commission has played an important role in identifying , investigating crimes against women and is expected to review laws. The statement of the National Alliance of Women's Organisations makes it clear that women are aware of what they are up against:

*'The development policies and programmes initiated by the government for women have been of two kinds: firstly, programmes to integrate women into development and secondly special development programmes for women. In our analysis we question the development model itself which has been manipulated by the dominant class/caste group and has led to the increasing impoverishment of large sections of working people as well as severe ecological crisis'* and adds *'... the State is not a monolithic entity and has to be approached as well as confronted in the context of each issue and programme'*. Perhaps that is the trouble? Issue based confrontation? In the absence of significant representation of women in the high level policy making bodies, we end up with fire fighting operations.

In 1996 the Department of Women and Child came out with a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. It is a misnomer to call it a 'policy' The document is disappointing in that it betrays no knowledge of all that has happened on the women's front in the aftermath of the new reforms and is a series of ad hoc suggestions made many times before; it suffers from an ideological vacuum and an overload of laudable 'intentions' but lacks any kind of vision. The onus is put on women to empower themselves and there is very little by way of policy goals or implementing strategies that **will create conditions for gender equality**. It has nothing to say on the ILO convention on home workers not being ratified by India.

All in all 'women are expected to participate in decision making while the issues on which they would like to decide move outside the jurisdiction of these decision making bodies themselves not only theoretically but in effect because there are wider processes in the economy and the market' (Arora 1999). Not merely that- the present right wing politics has made it that much harder to act on a united front by women.

A brief note as to why it is that economic policies bypass women. It has much to do with economics as a discipline. The National Policy grandly states that it will be concerned with the effect of macro policies on women's status. How?

There are links between theory, policy and practice. 'Policies are based on beliefs about what the market does or does not do, what the prices stand for, what the national income statistics reflect, what unemployment data reveal etc and these in turn depend implicitly on an enormous body of economic theory' (Sen 1983). Today neoclassical economics has become dominant in economic policy formulation; they set the macro criteria for development agenda. Macro economics talks in aggregate terms and is blind to the differential impact of policies on individuals and groups. Although macro and micro are supposedly independent bodies of thought, most macro policies work indirectly by influencing micro level production through incentives. Economics deals with allocation of resources among competing ends and in theory the basic economic problem includes all resources- domestic and market but in practice economic theory restricts itself to only monetised activities. Corner has explained the problem very succinctly in terms of 5 blinkers that micro economics has. (Corner, 1993). Micro economics deals with the production and consumption of individual economic units; men's and women's activities tend to be operationally different: men work predominantly outside, women predominantly inside and more on non monetised activities. As only monetised activities are covered, there is partial coverage leading to wrong interpretations. For example movement from the non monetised to monetised sector appears as increased production because the basis for comparison is only one part. By ignoring the non monetised activities within the household and the transfers over time between the household and market economics we get an incomplete picture of the impact of policy at micro level. Boundary blinkers is seen clearly in two areas: in National Accounts as non monetised activities of the household is ignored it exaggerates growth and fails to analyse structural change. For example - increased women's labour market participation is leading to school drop outs. Secondly substitution of household goods for market production is regarded as efficient because it releases resources from public expenditure but in effect is dis-investment in human resources because of the extra demand on women's energy and time. Dwindling environmental resources put heavier burdens on women which is not costed. The second blinker is measurement of contribution to production. The persistent under enumeration is not just a matter of bias in perception but a fundamental problem because of the nature of

women's work. They are primarily responsible for biological and social reproduction. These imply multiple roles for women; their activities tend to be simultaneous; they are non discretionary in that they cannot be postponed. Meals have to be prepared, children fed, clothes washed etc. every day regardless of what else is done. All these activities are time and labour intensive but are difficult to measure. The third blinker is specification. The opportunity costs of an individual's time devoted to paid work is the amount of socially or economically productive work foregone. Withdrawal of women's work from non monetised services at home generate significant opportunity costs which are not taken into account in policy formulation. Women's paid work is not a choice between leisure and work but family well being services and paid work. As an example: in the propagation of breast feeding as cheaper than manufactured baby food, the cost in terms of time and energy of mothers in breast feeding is ignored.

*'On the one hand, it is not denied that the sustenance, survival and reproduction of workers is obviously essential for workers being available for outside work. On the other hand, the activities that support that sustenance and survival are typically regarded as not contributing to output and are often classified as unproductive'* (Seen 1990). I would say not often but invariably!

The fourth problem is the perception of what is efficiency. There are short term and long term efficiency of allocations. Efficiency is defined as a situation which cannot be changed without making someone worse off. Not only are short term and long term quite often in conflict but the basic condition for achieving this efficiency is perfect competition; in the real world there are innumerable imperfections; stickiness of factors. Monopoly, monopsony, taxes, subsidies and so on. In addition there is gender based imperfections- women's non monetised work is not substitutable easily for men will not do it, society will not take it up. Secondly, products and services produced within the household are sold in the market at less than true opportunity costs. At the macro level, thus, gender differentials in human capital endowments create critical inefficiencies. (Yet there is so much indifference to improving the productivity and reducing drudgery of women's work) Finally there is a contextual blinker because conventional economics ignores institutions which govern behaviour and treats them as outside. These social institutional mandates are particularly relevant for women. If policies ignore their operation they are ineffective. Provision of schools do not help in getting girls to school. Much more is needed to change the existing bias in favour of boys. Women's struggle for equality therefore always seems as some thing 'extra' the state and society have to do, as a noble gesture. It is not admitted that the basis of policy making is faulty at the core for at a fundamental level the conception of the 'economy' is partial and biased.

Another short coming apart from these blinkers is that in efforts to highlight developmental outcomes in terms of human development and as a further improvement, gender development index there is further selectivity in what goes into the content of the index. Feminist scholars have suggested genuine indicators of progress such as quality of community life and decision making, consumption of resources within the family, dignity and personal security. (Hirway et al 1996). The human development indices should add the value of activities that promote human progress and subtract activities that take away from progress. Then military adventures will not boost national income. The existing human development indices are a great improvement over the sole reliance on GNP but it still suffers from an ideological bias-it over emphasises income as a measure of welfare and underplays structural inequalities that sustain both poverty and patriarchy.

### ***Environment:***

Environment became an important rallying point between environmentalists, rural development NGOs, women activists and women researchers in a big way. The Chipko movement first dramatised the problem. The fundamental cause of poverty in India arises out of scarcity of biomass to meet basic needs for food, fuel, fodder, manure, and building materials. (Agarwal and Narain 1985, 1989). A recent study in Bangladesh (Khan 1999) shows that even under conservative assumption of modest environmental damage and the distribution of damages equally among the population, it worsens both poverty and inequality

and enhancement of poverty alleviation effects of growth can only come from improving environmental quality. The most effective critique of the direction of development and its unequal costs and benefits to different sections has come from the environmental lobbies, here and in the west. In the traditional division of labour between men and women in a traditional subsistence economy, women's work of collecting fuel wood, fetching water, fodder and other produce binds them more closely to natural resources and hence their degradation directly affects them. Thanks to the enormous research by women researchers as well as environmentalists, that emerged in this area, a lot of data became available on the kind of work rural women performed and the criticality of natural resources and free, common property resources for the very survival and livelihood of millions of rural poor and women among them. This was the best example of advocacy research that influenced policy. Today even though all their efforts have not borne fruit, the problem is at least acknowledged as some thing that cannot be wished away. Grass roots women's organisations supported by educated feminist groups have been in the fore front of the pressure to make governments take note of the impact of past development and planned development on the poorer sections. The dam agitation is part of this general protest.

Land resources in the country are under constant pressure with a growing population. About 35 to 50 % of land area is waste land. Forests have declined alarmingly from 53% at the turn of the century to around 23% at independence to a bare 10 to 12 % today with proper tree cover. Biodiversity of 17,270 plant species the country boasted has come down to 1469 only and 50,000 varieties of rice which we grew now number only 50. Traditional irrigation methods like tanks and surface wells have dwindled with large dams displacing them and community arrangements for water preservation withering away. Only 10% of rain water is made use of. Grazing lands have shrunk beyond redemption. (Vyas and Reddy 1998)

The crisis of fuel and fodder is acute. (Agarwal 1986). Fuel wood accounts for 80% of energy produced and 96% of it is produced by women in households. Of the total fuel wood energy, 13% is purchased, 23% is home grown and 65% is collected. It has been demonstrated that the destruction of forests for commercial purposes and big industry has meant increased work burdens for women having to work longer hours and walk longer distances. There are matters of energy supply for cooking, of income from sale of fire wood and other non timber produce, of wage work of women in forest lands, of grazing lands for cattle whose care is primarily the responsibility of women. Livestock is mainly fed on crop wastes and there are no fodder crops as such. Natural resources are a matter of survival and sustenance of livelihoods for many especially tribals.

Policy initiatives urged on the government have been a) waste land development b) protection of existing forests c) rights to people for these natural resources d) involvement of women in all these activities of managing, planning ( like selecting the right species) and reaping benefits in all these. Women's groups and NGOs have assiduously tried to promote these goals, have monitored the implementation of projects and schemes. An extensive literature is now available on this area.

The sequence of policy initiatives was the following:

1973 Social Forestry was introduced. These were supposed to be schemes to promote fuel, fodder and small timber. However the focus was on individual households and mostly benefited large land holders. Some nursery development was undertaken. The tree crop chosen in many places was the eucalyptus, which turned out to be unfriendly to soil conservation. In 1980 was launched waste land development where for the first time, due to persistent efforts of women's groups and other NGOs, local community involvement was attempted and regeneration of commons was on the agenda. In 1985 Wasteland Development Board was constituted through which group management and women's cooperatives were successfully incorporated. Bankura and SEWA experiments were shining examples of mobilisation of poor women and winning of their collective rights to land and its produce and saving them from disruptive seasonal migration. From wasteland development for planting trees, gradually the objectives widened to include addition to biomass, meeting energy requirements and creating income possibilities. There were three kinds of ownership of waste land - panchayats, forest/revenue department, and private land. However barring isolated

experiments by women's groups with international support, government policy in general lacked a clear perspective. The national energy policy did not take into account the household gender dynamics, displayed a technical determinism, inflexible, fragmented and bureaucratic top down methods despite lip service to people's participation. Women researchers pointed out the need for translating specific solutions into broader national policies. The NGOs focus on individual locations was not enough. ILO had stated: National energy planning should follow a certain procedure. First there should be basic data gathering on energy needs and resources, followed by proper evaluation of household need at national and community level and identifying the basic needs of women and integrating them with energy resource availability and lastly exploring fuel substitution possibilities and instituting appropriate levels of technology for the same (ILO 1985, 1986). Rules and regulations for registering cooperatives, inaccurate land ownership records create many conflicts. Women cannot register coops till land is allotted and land cannot be allotted till women form coops. (Singh & Burra ed. 1993).

Taking the case of forest management, some efforts have borne fruit in joint forest management, in granting of tree pattas to tree growers cooperatives. By 1989 there were a few hundred joint forest management committees. The results are mixed. Van Panchayats were constituted in 1993 in Uttarkhand where Van Niyamavali stipulated 20% membership of villagers and 50% of the net income was to be devoted to the betterment of the forest. Rural women in Uttarkhand are responsible for collection of fuel wood and knew more about wood species than men. Yet their participation was not encouraged. Not all have really involved women or ensured full participation of the community. In the Bharaki-Urgam van panchayat all the members were men and the unscrupulous sarpanch was in league with timber smugglers and charcoal bhatti owners. One charismatic woman leader of a Mahila Mangal Dal stopped them and now 13 members of the van panchayat are women. The woman leader Bauna Devi heads the management committee. She holds meetings regularly and the panchayat carries out afforestation, nursery protection etc. Here is active, transparent and responsible governance. (Agarwal 1999). There are many such inspiring examples. One of the unfortunate fall outs from the emphasis on women's role in collecting fuel, fodder etc is the obscuring of their market participation as wage labour and as sellers of non timber forest produce. As for the second, as their sale is nationalised, women sellers have to deal with two powers - the agents and contractors as well as government officials. Royalty to government takes away 57%, agents and contractors get 36% and tribals get barely 19 % (Venkateswaran 1995). As wage employees women contribute 300 million woman days in forest lands. Yet they have no safety standards, no training, no productivity linked bonus. Not much attention has been given to growing raw material for traditional crafts like rope making, basket weaving etc.

As for rights to land and natural resources (Rao and Rurep ed. 1997), along with the process of alienation of resources from local communities, there is also an emergence of new kinds of land resources from wasteland development, tree crops, watershed programmes etc. These rights are communal and except in some special cases like pani panchayats in Maharashtra, women do not receive a share. Tata Energy Research Institute (1990, 1993) gives examples of joint forest management in Haryana where 25,000 people are involved in protecting 15,000 ha. Rajasthan has several women's protection committees but these are still exceptions. Effective implementation machinery is lacking so that timber mafia and commercial lobbies can defeat many well planned schemes. Even in the Left front ruled West Bengal, land redistribution did not envisage women as recipients of rights which made the peasant women ask, "what about us, do we not need any security?"

There have been a plethora of schemes for rural employment. The Jawahar Yojana was supposed to help the poor but by planting trees on agricultural land female labour got displaced. Women as producers in farm forestry are not represented in forest personnel- there are only 9 women extension assistants and 49 women workers out of a total of 882 employees. Women also do not get sufficient information on what they can collect and get hauled up by forest officials. (Saxena 1997). Fuel substitutes like gobar gas or solar cookers have not become real alternatives because of their high cost and poor maintenance. Efficient fuel use through smokeless chulhas has run into rough weather because of bad planning and poor

design inappropriate to women's cooking practices. The high health cost to women of wood smoke continues. TERI rightly argues that pollution control is not to be measured by ambient air quality but its impact on health of people.(1997)

It is not possible to cover all aspects of environment and women but from the foregoing one can conclude that the aggressive thrust by the grassroots women's movement supported by urban educated women activists, was largely responsible for whatever has been achieved. It is important to mount a monitoring mechanism so as not to allow bureaucratic lethargy to set in. The magnitude of the problem is daunting and solutions have not been fully protective of women's rights except in pockets. It is time our national accounts reflected the national cost of environmental degradation.

#### ***Population policy:***

Right from the mid seventies the women's movement has mounted a stringent critique of the state's population policy. The main highlights of this critique were the following:

a) its obsession with population numbers and therefore its control b) policies of near coercion through the practice of targets c) its focus on women and inordinate use of terminal methods as opposed to reversible methods d) its promotion of inadequately tested drugs and methods injurious to women's health e) spread of techniques of sex selection against which there were few safeguards f) medical termination of pregnancy legalised but facilities in hospitals were insufficient leading to a large number of illegal abortions g) insufficient attention to health risks to women in general of many methods i) lack of understanding that women are not the decision makers regarding fertility in a patriarchal culture and the pervasive son preference leads to distortions of family planning and creating a gross imbalance of women in the population and most importantly the total neglect of women's rights in reproduction. Repeatedly the attention of the public and the administration had been drawn to the alarming masculinisation of the population. A joint statement was issued by seven national women's organisations soon after the 1991 census results became available. Agitations at state and national level was responded to by legislation to curb the practices of amniocentesis tests to determine the sex of the fetus and abort it if it was female. Unfortunately the law has not been very effective.

Once again with a lack of transparency a new bill is sought to be introduced in the present parliament, which repeats the same old cussedness and insensitivity to peoples' opinion as earlier. In this context, the CWDS has brought out an excellent and timely compendium entitled, 'National Population Policy. Perspectives from the Women's Movement' which document the efforts made to intervene in the policy making process. To recount briefly the history of the gains and losses from the CWDS report: In 1993, in preparation for the Cairo Conference, the GOI had appointed an expert group under Dr. Swaminathan to draft a national policy. Women's organisations had already submitted several memoranda to the Minister of Health and Family Planning opposing the use of hazardous contraceptives in government family planning drives, and against coercive measures direct and indirect being practiced. Women's organisations had a discussion with the expert group and the Chairman requested that women's organisations should offer their positive suggestions. CWDS organised a public debate in New Delhi on the issue after which a memorandum was submitted to the Expert Group. The Gerontological Centre in Trivandrum argued for a comprehensive social approach emphasizing women's empowerment through education and economic advancement in lieu of a fertility oriented policy. Unbelievably, the Expert Group applauded in its implementation strategies the new laws enacted in Haryana and Rajasthan disqualifying persons who do not accept two child norm from offices of the panchayat! Women's organisations lodged strong protests and Devaki Jain who was a member of the expert group resigned in protest against this betrayal of members' suggestions and violation of women's democratic rights.[A similar bill for disqualifying persons to parliament, legislative assemblies and panchayati raj is once again being pushed]. Even the Chairman publicly expressed his disapproval. The Swaminathan Committee's recommendation was tabled before the parliament in June 1994. The Ministry of labour tried to introduce amendments in the Maternity Benefit Act to restrict the benefits only to two children. This was withdrawn after fierce protests from women. Nothing further happened in 1995 and 1996. In 1997 the National Commission on Women has



issued a draft statement on national policy and constituted an expert group to examine this document to make it more gender sensitive and gender equitable. The present form of the policy draft suppresses all the positive recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee. This ceaseless battle to change the rigid mindset of the governments in power continued and continues.

As there is a sub theme on health I will not devote much attention to health policy. Suffice it to say the same battle has been going on to gear health care system to promoting women's well being and not be obsessed solely with their 'mother' role. If this interest in the mother really received adequate attention, we would not have one of the highest figure of maternal mortality. The paucity of resources at PHC level, the poor staffing, inadequate referral services, the poor nutritional intake of girls and women, irrational drug policies, the insensitivity of health personnel to women's ailments and distress- these and many more maladies that afflict our health care system have been high lighted by men and women studies researchers. Among NGOs the greatest number are working in rural and urban areas to promote preventive community health and to bring about greater health awareness among women. This is indeed a good sign. It has snags however in that what the government should be doing is now taken over by NGOs. As it is, privatisation has diminished what little by way of public health care we had. Even poor households in India spend a disproportionate share of their income on health costs. Public expenditure on health is a meagre 2.5% of GDP. If one sees this against the 18% subsidies given to the well to do industrialists and agriculturists we can conclude where priorities lie. Occupational health hazards is an area that has merited very little attention in policy or practice. It is not the size of our population that should worry us so much but its poor quality that should really engage us. If proof was needed there is plenty available historically and in contemporary empirical data that voluntary restriction of family size comes with social development.

I am not also touching on political participation and representation as there are other plenaries but here too we have to go a long way. The Panchayati raj has been a harbinger of progress not withstanding voices that debunk it as 'reform from above' for proxy women. True the record is a mixed one but there are many good stories and women's organisations have launched training of women for panchayat.

#### ***Education:***

All shades of opinion, right from the nineteenth century, be they conservatist, radical or revivalist, have shared an abiding faith in the transformative power of education and of women's education as a key to bringing about a desired kind of society. To the conservatists, the right kind of education for women would help in holding the family together, to the revivalists, as upholders of tradition women would be equipped to do their job better. The radicals pinned their hopes on women's education for restructuring Indian society towards a modern, forward looking, egalitarian society. (Mazumdar, nd.). One has only to recall the innumerable commissions and committees on education that dot the pages of our history to realise how important this concern for education was. What happened in reality is another story. Part of the story is that despite protestations of an egalitarian goal that would address women and other depressed classes, there was always the undercurrent of a profound ambivalence regarding the goals which translated into the same ambiguity in concrete realisation. This ambiguity had a line of continuity right from the nationalist movement. Given that the nationalist movement was not an organised cadre based one but had within it a variety of ideological positions, there was no coherent, well articulated strategies for education. The strong pull of those factions who above all wanted a strong nation, equipped for industrialisation and entry into a technological society in post independent India, resulted in an emphasis on higher education and science and technology that served to create a large pool of trained manpower. Our achievements in higher education surpassed that of many other developing countries and some developed countries as well as, for example Japan. To day, there is talk of India becoming a knowledge super power. Contrary wise, to this day primary education after half a century does not reach all our children, eradication of illiteracy is still a distant dream and our record here is way behind almost all other countries.(UNDP 1998). It is not as if there were no other voices. Gandhi's idea of basic education, and a work centred

schooling that would partly defray costs was soon given short shrift. Repeated pleas for compulsory primary education till age 14, attempts to dislodge the pre-eminence of the English language which created a distance between the intelligentsia and others were all drowned in the elite pressures to mould the education system in their own interests. Nationalist thought did not visualise that mass education would impose costs in the context of general poverty which required substantial palliative measures other than just provision of schools. Mass education was not ignored completely but it lacked the total commitment to it as a democratic right of people. At no time did movements of peasants and workers make any serious contribution or intervention in education unlike in China or East Asia with the result that the built-in inertia of ideological conservatism and patriarchal family patterns held firm. To this I would add the teachers' unions have not also looked beyond their pecuniary interests to resist the wastage that the system promotes. Besides, an open door policy of admitting private schools created the cleavage between schools for the well-to-do and poorly endowed public schools for the rest of the population. Now under the new reforms more among the poor are turning to private schools leaving municipal schools empty and requisitioned to NGOs. The latest is a move to privatise India's premier institutions, the IITs.

*'Few ex-colonial countries can claim such a strong, continuous strain of higher learning; fewer still had as much stratification. Nor could any one else claim the dubious benefit of an intelligentsia nurtured in the language and culture of the ruling power. The subjective and objective possibilities of an elitist, strong national development have merged with class interests of the empowered, who in the peculiar language of the ballot box democracy were compelled to take the direction that was taken.'* ( Shukla 1997 )

One has to understand the problems of women's education within this social context. As part of the middle classes, women made rapid progress in higher education but have problems of resolving tensions between traditional roles and the demands of an enlightened mind. With respect to the demands made on behalf of women, one notices a dividing line between the leadership of men and of women. In their articulation of goals of women's education there is both continuity and change. Till the arrival of the mid-seventies, women leaders wanted education to equip women for a broader role than that of wives and mothers but the likelihood of tensions between conservative family formations and the liberating potential of education did not surface earlier. Nevertheless, women consistently opposed separate curricula and kept emphasizing the need for a broader role for women outside the home. An insistent plea throughout was the need for special measures and a recognition that the family and the cultural milieu posed stupendous barriers. From early twentieth-century women leaders' interventions were notable. They not only participated in many committees but also formulated policy, programme options in their own deliberations. In 1925 the National Council of Women was established. AIWC founded the Lady Irwin College at Delhi as an institution to be managed and staffed exclusively by women with special curricula. Yet, in 1928, AIWC strongly opposed separate curricula for women in colleges of general education. Thus women's own perspective kept changing over time. Despite this the Kher Committee advocated home science, needle work, home craft, first aid for girls at high school level. The battle to get women's education on the national agenda continued but there were many failures. The 1944 development report was dismissive of women's education stating that women's education was no longer a problem requiring special measures! Among the major commissions that made recommendations on women's education (and accepted by the parliament with some minor modifications) were some of the following:

1948-49: The University Education Commission recommended that for girls in coed. colleges amenities should be made available to girls.

1952-53: Secondary education commissions once again reiterated that girls' education should be on the same footing as that of boys.

1958-59: National Committee on Women's Education where many women educationists were represented, was alarmed at the persistent gap between girls and boys. They wanted State Councils for women and girls' education to be established who would prepare comprehensive plans to promote girls' and women's education. Most importantly, they asked for concessions and incentives to families. An

innovative suggestion was that a prize be instituted for the village with the best record on girls' education. However none of these were implemented, nor was any special budgetary provision made.

1964 : Committee urged the training of more women teachers and dissuaded primary schools from any separate curriculum for girls. An important suggestion was that as in rural areas many girls do not enter middle school, even those girls who did not complete primary schools should be allowed to join middle level.

1966: Education Commission looked at all levels of education. The Commission's vision is worth quoting: 'In the modern world, the role of a woman goes beyond the home and the bringing up of children; she is now adopting a career of her own and sharing equally with man the responsibility for the development of society in all its respects'. The Commission set precise targets for closing the gap between girls and boys and top priority to primary education, greater vocationalisation, introduction of work experience. A radical departure was the suggestion to create neighbourhood schools to which children from all strata would go. Obviously this never saw the light of day.

Thus all along while girls' and women's education was accepted as important, there were recommendations related to training of more women teachers, curriculum etc but there was no appreciation of the fact that supply of schools and teachers was not enough to induce parents to send girl children to school and retain them there. Time and time again, factors have been identified which militate against parental desire for girls education especially in rural areas, - girls are needed for assisting the family in their occupation as well as for help with house work and child care; they go away after marriage and the returns to education would be reaped by some one else; sons were important and received priority in terms of family investment. Loads of research, have vindicated these as unsullied truths.

It was in the seventies that women's demand for education became more focussed on the equality issue. The erstwhile notion of schooling for 'good wives and mothers' took a back seat and issues of gender inequality were clearly, openly stressed. Observing that the education system has failed to meet either the aspirations of the people or the need of the society to modernise itself in the direction of democracy, secularism and socialism, the National Committee on Women's Education, 1970 made a fervent plea that education of women should form a major programme of the government for some years to come and a bold and determined effort to bridge the gap between men and women should be made. For this special machinery, special schemes were necessary. If we analyse the different plans we see none of this happening with no adequate budgetary support. Illiteracy among women was concentrated in the traditional low status occupations such that their movement out of the poverty trap was out of the question. The National Plan of Action for Women's Status, once again the initiative of women, stressed unequivocally that the general goals of education cannot be different for men and women but given the special obstacles women faced, special allocations for women were necessary to bring them into full social participation, help them break out of legal social barriers that constrained them so that they can receive full scope for the development of their talents and potential. This requires that national child care is woven into schemes for education of girls so that younger sibling care which keeps girls out of school can be tackled while simultaneously making it possible to attend to the health and pre school programmes for pre school children. These can be integrated with ICDS programmes with no difficulty. For this suggestion, the response of the ministry of education was that child care is not 'their' business. Such a fragmented view of what education was all about prevented a most critical input from emerging. Had this recommendation been implemented, we would have come a long way in girls' education as well as in ensuring the well being of small children. Provision of public child care not only releases girls' time but gives the opportunity for working mothers in the country side and urban poor areas, the opportunity to earn better and have their children benefit from good health and educational facilities. Anganwadis and Balwadis have been universally welcomed by rural women. Notwithstanding the leakages ICDS suffers from, it remains a very good universal programme of child development in rural India. ICDS has resisted the idea of integrating balwadis with its programme so that it is confined to being a nutrition cum immunisation programme only. Many studies have pointed out that supplementary programmes like midday meals have a positive impact on schooling.

Then arrives the New Education Policy (1986) in the drafting of which many influential women leaders had a hand. This has been revised in 1992. Its most important clause is the accent on 'education for equality' and the need to tackle many attitudes that block women's progress- stereotypes regarding

jobs, the rigidity of roles that heap responsibilities on women in the family; their subordination of their interests to so called 'family well being'. We have indeed come a long way- from asking for more schools, asking for equal opportunities to finally asking for relaxing the rigidities that mere provision of schools or teachers will not melt. Removing gender bias in the entire social structure through exposure to women's studies, it is hoped can bring some change. In the words of the Report:

*"Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well conceived edge in favour of women. Women's Studies will be promoted as part of various courses and educational institutions encouraged to take up active programmes for to further women's development. Major emphasis will be on women's participation in vocational, technical, professional education at various levels. A policy of non discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate the sex stereotypes in vocational and professional courses to promote women's participation in non traditional occupations as well as emerged technologies."*

Pronouncements to the contrary, in the implementation of these lofty ideals, there are many missing steps such that realisation of these ideas is far from being achieved even modestly. (Indiresan 1995 ).The missing steps are: inadequate hostels for girls and even those that exist are of a poor standard; very little is done to gear the positive interventionist role of education so that educational curriculum is even today dominated by academic thrusts and market led courses; women's studies centres and cells may be doing good work. They lack proper leadership, inadequate staff training. Poor infrastructure and insufficient resources have made their tasks difficult and ineffective. State governments are loth to provide support once the UGC grants run out. In general there is a lack of broader perspective and imagination, insufficient autonomy and stranglehold of university bureaucracy, tardy and erratic release of funds by UGC and to cap it all a low undefined status within academia. Unless the policies accepted are pushed with some commitment to the goals they are expected to subservise, we will continue to be repeating the same sad story of neglect. On the positive side, there has been a tremendous expansion in alternate channels other than formal ones - correspondence courses, open university, non formal education etc. Dr. Madhuri Shah for instance introduced a waiver for eligible age limit for women teachers' application for fellowships to do their Ph.D. Women heading educational institutions played a significant role in decision making at official level and kept alive the agenda of women's education. In the Mahila Samakhya programme women volunteers and workers have given excellent service but the danger is that instead of these channels being supplementary they may become substitutes for reforming the formal system. Non formal education cannot be the answer to getting every girl into school. District Primary Education Programme funded by the World Bank, covering the whole country in selected districts seeks to improve the quality of education at primary level by building in more infrastructure, better training of teachers and involving teachers in preparing teaching material, gender sensitising of officials and staff. (DPEP 1997)The Mahila Samakhya is funded by the Netherlands and is operative in five states. Both these being externally funded, donor demands for accountability has ensured a degree of seriousness in implementing these programmes. Nonetheless, their link with the mainstream is tenuous and the strategies and methods adopted for improving quality is not likely to be widely adopted so they remain islands of excellence. (Ramachandran 1999). The importance which women's groups attached to child care as an adjunct to schools, the provision of various incentives, facilities to lessen the burden on families, the prize for achievement to villages that procure maximum enrolment of girls and retain them there - these have well nigh been forgotten. In the recent reports on the state of primary education, a large unmet demand is visible. If all the children of age 6-11 are not in schools, why are they not there? Many studies have tried to look into what makes parents want to send girls to school. (Unni 1998; Sengupta 1999). Among various factors like caste, land, or occupation the most salient fact is that educated mothers encourage girls schooling while educated fathers do not. With Amartya Sen and others harping on social development and the links between women's education and fertility

reduction and enhanced child health there is now an instrumental value attached to women's education. (Dreze et al 1996). Sen himself moved away from his earlier construction of women's agency to reduce fertility, to promoting women's role as agents of change as a good in itself (Sen, 1995). However in the competition for resources, one sees no great urgency to enhance 'social development'. We have the illusion that primary education is 'free'. Though ninety percent of schools fall into the public sector, the cost of education to the poor is disproportionately high, not only in terms of child labor lost but in terms of direct costs of schooling. In a study by J. B. Tilak (1996) the following facts emerge. NSSO (1993-94) figures for household expenditure reveal that households spend large sums on primary education in government schools. They pay fees, examination fees, and various other payments. 3.9% at lower primary and more than 18% at upper primary paid fees. Even the Planning Commission's study in 1990 on private expenditure on public education found the same. Recent NSSO's data show 15% of students in rural areas and 50% in urban areas pay fees plus incur many other expenditures. Hardly 15% are covered by free text books and only 10% by mid day meals at all India level as compared to 80% coverage on noon meals in Tamil Nadu. The annual expenditure by households is Rs 290 in Bihar and Rs. 773 in Kerala. The expenditure on girls' education is far below these figures - a gap of 180 to more than 220 rupees in some states. In Gujarat and Maharashtra girls get free education but this has not achieved the desired results. Yet given that economic factors play a role among low income families, in explaining enrolment and retention, primary education should be totally free argues Tilak- which would include provision of text books, uniforms and other school materials. The NCAER study (1999) of human development in rural India comes to similar conclusions. There are wide variations between states but at the national level, rural households spend more than 5% of their total income on primary education.

Similarly another study (Bhatty 1998) comes to the same conclusion that the usual explanation of child labour and inadequate motivation of parents as obstacles to universal primary education is not true. It is more the direct costs of schooling and poor quality of schools which are the culprits. Schooling alienates our youth and makes them unfit for either their traditional occupation or the new ones and ends up deskilling and expanding the numbers of unemployed and unemployables. The NSSO round of 1993-94, finds 36% of India's population to be under 15 of whom 66% are between the ages of 6-14. Yet only 50% of this age group actually attended school. Child labour accounts for 5%. Where are the rest? The PROBE report has similar things to say. (Probe, 1998).

Literacy campaigns have had mixed results (Sunderaraman 1996). It is known that women are the largest participants and why are there no real sustained efforts are made to meet this latent demand? Against this general scene one has to understand that girls' education is likely to suffer even more. While it is true there are gaps between boys and girls, it is also noticed that where general education has advanced women also do better. The importance of primary education particularly to developing countries in periods of change has been highlighted in research studies with comparative data (Asian Development Review 1990).

Access is one problem. For even those who do complete schooling, the system has done little to remove gender biases in text books, in curricular materials, in school practices, NCERT's efforts notwithstanding. Education even at higher levels continues to be problematic for women given a pervasive patrifocal family structure and ideology. It is not denied that there are huge cultural variations but as a 'heuristic device' as Mukhopadhyaya puts it, it helps to high light the structures that bind women. (Mukhopadhyaya and Seymour ed. 1994). These structures that construct the regime are:

- i) the family, sub caste and wider kinship are the most important reference point regardless of actual household composition to which the individual must subordinate his or her needs, desires
- ii) patrilocal residence and patrilocal descent that accord primacy to males
- iii) sharp and rigid gender defined roles and responsibilities that puts an onus on women to perform them
- iv) gender defined authority between males and females of the same generation
- v) family control over marriage, female sexuality and reproduction and
- vi) appropriate behaviour norms for women that enjoin submissive behaviour. Given these limiting conditions, decisions on education are not exercised by an individual woman or girl, by and large, but the family's. Career oriented women face severe problems and tensions caught in this milieu. It was hoped

that women's studies through sensitising generation of teachers, students, through sensitising officials would usher in change. We have to evolve more innovative changes that would legitimise women's aspirations through appropriate policy changes. One example is paternity leave for teachers. We may perhaps have to create a variety of living arrangements that would weaken the patriarchal hold and bring in changes that would make investment in girl's education worthwhile. By redefining development as expansion of social opportunity, women's education in particular is seen to yield rich dividends for society as a whole. (Dreze and Sen 1995). Women's groups are demanding education for women as a constitutional right, their right as a citizen of this country. It is primarily a matter of equality forget the so called empowerment that can often serve other agendas. Fighting for building a Ram temple can also be 'empowering'!

A major gap is still in the narrow discipline concentration among women in higher education. Concern has been expressed in many committees and by women's groups on the importance of increasing the presence of women in science and technology and in professional streams. The Report of the Working group on Personnel Policies for Bringing Greater involvement of Women in Science and Technology (1981) recommended more scholarships to women and inclusion of women scientists' contribution in text books. It also advocated more attention to technology for women to reduce their drudgery. A special allocation was made for these objectives. A dynamic woman administrator did promote many worthwhile projects like high school educated girl students setting up rural pathology labs; women learning to improve water storage and purification; learning latest technology to grow vegetables for the market in small plots; women becoming masons and forming a collective; learning to ride bicycles in villages. These definitely improve the image of women as capable of acquiring new skills and breaking some age old stereotypes. There was some sharp criticism from some feminists (Swaminathan 1991) of the S&T policy document. She took issue with the approach saying it perpetuated the division of labour. This is a perennial dilemma for us that in advocating the easing of present burdens (which will not go away so easily) one is also in some way, endorsing those burdens; however considering that the bulk of technological advances have never addressed women's work and the enormous drudgery it involves, is one wrong in asking that in the present some of it may be eased? Is it wrong to ask that the larger society share some of the work burden induced by sexual division of labour through provision of facilities that make parenting easier? Altering sexual division of labour at home is not easy as it has to take place in individual homes; public action is easier and can exert influence and be effective in creating space for women. True, it is not meet the ultimate feminist goal of changing gender relations but some steps can if pursued along with others may take us nearer that goal. We have always had this tension between asking for recognition of what women do and asking for it to be reduced or abandoned to make room for other self enhancing activities. Swaminathan objects to the tone of the document saying it reflects the marginalisation of women by designating issues as women's issues not peoples' issues. Perhaps, yes; but is it not also true that what affects women most need to be called attention to? Semantics apart, enrollment in technical professions of women has increased but the work place in scientific establishments discriminate in ways that produce unequal outcomes (Doraiswamy 1998). This is a result that may not be typical only of science.

We can briefly look at the progress in 50 years; we have come along way but there is still a long way to go!

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## A Few Selected Statistics

### 1. Expenditure on Education as % GDP

Year	Expenditure	
1990-91	4.34	
1991-92	4.10	
1992-93	4.13	State wise, Kerala spends 7% of its state GDP, while other states range between 2 to 3% of their state domestic product
1993-94	3.96	
1994-95	3.79	
1995-96	3.91	
1996-97	3.80	

(Source C.S.O. 1997)

### 2. Growth in Educational Institution

	Primary Schools	Upper Primary Schools	High/er Schools	College General	Prof Colleges	Universities
1950-51	2,09,671	13596	7416	370	208	27
1995-95	5,90,421	1,71,216	98,134	6569	1354	226
Rate of Growth	Nearly 2 Times	12 times	1 ½ times	15 times	6 ½ times	11 times

**Number of colleges exclusively for women increases from 647 in 1982-83 to 1991-92**

(C. S. O. 1997)

### 3. Literacy

Year	Persons		M	F
1991	Total	52.19	64.20	39.19
	Rural	44.54	57.84	30.35
	Urban	73.01	81.05	63.94

(Census)

### 4. Literacy Level of Females & Males by Age Groups

Age	1961		1991	
	F	M	F	M
5-9	14.44	25.0	51.0	62.6
10-14	28.4	54.4	59.7	77.7
15-19	23.8	52.0	54.9	75.3
20-24	18.2	49.8	43.8	71.6
25-34	13.9	42.5	36.6	64.7
35+	7.7	35.3	22.0	52.6
All Ages	13.0	34.5	39.3	64.1

(“Women’s in India “Statistical Profile, Dept. of Women & Child Development, GOI, 1997)

Comment: Gap between Females & Males continues Infact has widered if we see - ‘all ages’ it is less at younger age groups.

### 5. Gross Enrollment as % age group

Year	Age 6-10		Age 11-13	
	F	M	F	M
1950-51	24.8	60.6	4.6	20.6
1995-96	93.3	114.5	55.0	79.6

Comment: Improved at 6-10 age, but gap is wider at upper primary level [CSO, 1997]

### 6. Number of Girls per 100 Boys Enrolled

	Primary Class 1-V	Middle VI-VIII	Secondary IX-X	College/ University
1950-51	39	18	16	11
1995-96	76	64	57	50

### 7. Female Teachers per 100 Males

Year	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Education
1950-51	20	18	19	9
1995-96	46	54	52	30

### 8. Drop Outs (% Enrolled) (1994-1995)

	Boys	Girls
Primary	35.2	37.8
Middle	50.2	56.5
High Schools	67.2	73.8

### 9. Enrollment by Disciplines Girls per 100 Boys

Year	Arts	Science	Commerce	Engineering & Technology	Medicine
1950-51	54.4	NA	0.5	0.3	18.5
1995-96	71.8	54.9	41.6	16.6	52.7

*Comment: Steady Improvement in Science, Technology, Medicine but if you see girls as distributed over the various discipline, Arts dominate. (CSO, 1997)*

