

T H E  
VII  
NATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

REMAKING SOCIETY  
FOR WOMEN:

VISIONS —  
PAST  
AND  
PRESENT

Background Volume  
for the Conference

251-

REMAKING SOCIETY  
FOR WOMEN  

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VISIONS – PAST AND PRESENT

**Background Volume for the Conference**

*Compiled and introduced by*  
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Indian Association of Women's Studies

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December, 1995

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## Preface

NEERA DESAI

The Indian Association of Women's Studies at its Executive Committee meeting in December 1994, decided to bring out an anthology — a sort of background volume to capture the varied dimensions of the major theme.

During the decade and half of its existence, IAWS at its various conferences has been concentrating on critiquing the various disciplines of study, examining the influence of larger forces on women's movement and women's lives. It has been deliberating on the challenges coming from conflicting identities, the onslaught of fundamental forces and the impact of the New Economic Policy on women. Now is the time, we felt, with the Beijing conference over, to look for alternate paradigms and practices which constitute the invaluable stock of experience for the movement. We hoped to find some articulation of visions of future society based on principles of justice and fairness, worth living for human kind.

The editor of the volume, Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj mentions with despair the limited articulation of such visions in contemporary society. This is a matter of serious concern. Why is this so? Has the movement been so exhausted in the process of confronting the formidable forces that it has neither the energy nor hope to dream about the future or to build up visions for a better society?

Looking back at the Nineteenth century social reformers who critiqued the extant society from a Liberal Victorian perspective, we notice that they not merely exposed the prevailing unjust social customs impinging upon women's position but they also conceived a future society where women will be better educated, will marry when mature, where widows will have the option to remarry and wives will be able to share the zeal for social

transformation along with their 'liberated' husbands. Veteran social reformer, Ranade, after scathingly criticizing the Revivalists, said, "If revival is impossible reformation is the only alternative" (Ranade).

The Nationalist phase and the early post-independence period inculcated a hope that with the termination of foreign rule we will put an end to gender injustice. The enshrining of equality for women in the Constitution and the enthusiasm to build a democratic socialist society on the basis of a planned economy, made all of us legitimately dream of a better future.

Today's scenario is completely different. Why have we stopped thinking about the future? Why have we lost faith in the declarations of State policies? The answer partly seems to lie in the bleak and grim present. Rampant poverty, deprivation, the forging of conflicting identities, and a complete absence of ethical values in human relationships and behaviour seem not to generate any hope or faith in the future. Most people are living their lives on a day-to-day basis. However, there is another reality too which we should not overlook. Groups of people are engaged in struggles for survival rights; they are challenging the oppressive patriarchal class society; they fight against communal and fundamental forces. They have been battling against the State for enforcing human rights. These are the evidences of resilience and attempts at building a better society. The demand for social commitment from the State as well as from social action groups, the clamour for the public trial of infringers of laws or norms of society, indicate the new assertion of vigilance to ensure that the promises made have to be kept. The visions are in the local level experiments trying to build up relationships and organisations on non-hierarchical principles cutting across caste, class and gender.

The IAWS is very grateful to Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj for not only accepting this challenging task but for producing a commendable work which, I am sure, will not only be a valuable treasure to remind us of our forward looking past but will recharge with hope and determination all who are involved in building a better future. I express my heartfelt appreciation towards Kamla Bhasin for her readiness to undertake the responsibility of bringing out the volume in spite of her pressing tasks as General Secretary.

*December 1995*

NEERA DESAI

## Acknowledgements

When at the EC meeting of IAWS in December 1994 it was decided to bring out a backgrounder to the Conference to be held in December 1995, I thought it was a wonderful idea. Then when I was asked to take the responsibility I was excited to do something on alternative visions. What would go into it took gradual shape after many false starts. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to IAWS and Kamla Bhasin in particular for not only giving me this opportunity but trusting me with the task, giving me a long rope. I do hope I have not betrayed that trust. This collection, as always, in most enterprises of this sort, is the result of help from many friends. Dr. Neera Desai was ever available for consultation and gave much reassurance and brought to my notice documents; she also made some of them available to me. Dr. Veena Poonacha of the Research Centre for Women Studies, S.N.D.T. deserves special mention for her readiness to help in getting material, and Usha Rao for parting with valuable books from the library with complete faith in my honesty. She saved me a lot of effort which I would otherwise have had to put in. The translators and contributors – Dr. Sharayu Anantram and Dr. Vidyut Bhagwat – had to spend many hours, travelling to many libraries, hunting for original manuscripts. Unfortunately, I could not use the piece by Iravati Karve sent by Vidyut as it dealt with mainly statistics on women. C. S. Lakshmi is someone I can always count upon. I am grateful for her contribution on Periyar. There were many others who helped with suggestions, like Dr. Vina Mazumdar. I could not in all cases include the suggestions but I thank them for their help. I also thank friends

in the *Economic and Political Weekly* for their help in getting the manuscript ready for publication. I do not regard this as 'my book'; rather, it is my participation in a very small way in something much bigger than me or anyone else. I am fortunate to be living in these turbulent times when things are not easy but are certainly challenging; challenging because each one of us is responsible for the future.

— Maithreyi Krishnaraj

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## Introduction

Maithreyi Krishnaraj

### I

The theme of the Seventh National Conference on Women Studies is: Looking Forwards, Looking Backwards, Alternatives in Paradigms, Theory and Practice. We are meeting almost half a century after India became independent. What happened to that 'tryst with destiny' made in 1947 and earlier? We have still miles to go before we reach even part of the way. The vision that in free India, women will come into their own is fading in the face of immense challenges within and without. Yet this is also the time of hope. Popular upsurges are arising on a scale never before witnessed since the struggle for national movement against imperialism. The resurgence of the women's movement since the seventies has pushed the women's agenda forward forcefully enough for governments and political parties to not ignore them if not take them seriously. But as Mazumdar and Agnihotri (1995) point out, this resurgence has to be read in the light of five major phases: i) the crisis of the state and government in the seventies when the 'emergency' was imposed and the institutional edifices of democracy stood threatened; ii) the post-emergency upsurge in civil rights movements; iii) the mushrooming of women's organisations countrywide in the early eighties when women's issues arrived on the national agenda; iv) the rallying of fundamentalist forces, both Hindu and Muslim, from mid-Eighties; v) the deepening crisis of the nation state against global economic and political pressures in the nineties.

The women's movement has grown in magnitude, scope and outreach. What is noticeable is its widening at the grassroots base. Peasant women, tribal women and dalit women are finding their independent voices. They have forced attention on major development issues, issues that affect the survival of the majority of women. They are also articulating gender issues differently from the urban middle class movement. (Guru, 1995; Roy, 1995). This is an ongoing struggle to redefine the perspective of the women's movement especially now in the light of the New Economic Policy that makes such a radical departure from our stated national goals.

Let us look back at those days when we committed ourselves to building a secular, free, democratic society with equality and justice for all. On the eve of national independence, the then national government unequivocally committed itself to the eradication of mass poverty as its fundamental priority.

"A quick and progressive rise in the standard of living of the people should be the primary consideration governing all economic activities and relevant administrative measures of the central and provincial governments. The achievement of a national minimum standard in respect of all the essentials of physical and social well-being within a reasonable period must be pursued as the practical goal of all schemes for economic development"<sup>1</sup>.

Our polity has changed beyond recognition with politicians replacing statesmen. We were to rid ourselves of the incubus of caste but caste has entered politics in ways that have strengthened divisive forces. We envisaged a moral order, Ram Rajya in Gandhi's words, but the very term has been perverted to create a fundamentalist nightmare.

This collection is not about the women's movement as such. It is not about recovering women's history, or celebratory writing on their contributions or their resistances. All these have found a place in other volumes brought out by competent feminists. This book is about alternative visions. Despite its growing

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<sup>1</sup> All India Congress Committee, 1948:3 as quoted in V. S. Vyas and Pradeep Bhargava, "Public Intervention for Poverty Alleviation. An Overview." Economic and Political Weekly, Oct. 14-21, 1995.

strength, the women's movement today appears less effective, more vulnerable to manipulation. For example, consultations are held with women's groups to project an appearance of consensus but their dissenting voices are silenced in the documents, the most recent case being that of the hurriedly prepared draft national policy for women with an eye on elections. Our laws remain on paper, many of which were in fact enacted in response to concerted action by women's groups. At this moment, the conference hopes to rebuild our perspective, redesign our strategies, recoup and consolidate our strengths. Many are worried about fragmentation and the assertion of plurality as voiced in the Bombay conference of 1994.<sup>2</sup> There is the danger that the emphasis on difference may lead one into a negativist cultural relativism that ends up defending the status quo. The exclusive attention to women's agency and free choice could result in a failure to take account of the social reality and material conditions. "By individuating women's experiences into isolated boxes constructed by the situation, we tend to undermine commonality." The same conference stated:

"Specificities of women's experiences may vary; the meaning they impute to that experience may vary across groups and communities. The choices women make, given limited alternatives, may differ but as long as these choices remain foreclosed by their socio cultural situation and enmeshed within the given environment, there arise within that context, certain common positions based on shared or similar positions. It is from that shared experience that pro women political positions are born"<sup>3</sup>

Post Beijing, we have more reason for faith in solidarity. (Agarwal, 1995).

We are reproducing different voices, different visions in this collection but there is a running thread – the concern for rebuilding a more civilised society.

<sup>2</sup> "Confronting Myriad Oppressions". The Western Regional Experience, Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1995

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

Any anthology is necessarily selective and the selection arbitrary. There is, however, a method in our madness. At the EC meeting in December 1994, the IAWS decided some background volume on alternatives would be useful. Subsequent discussions led to a feeling we have plenty of examples of alternative practice especially at micro level but not much on visions. The visions had to be Indian. Hence, keeping to the theme of learning from the past and looking to the future, the book spans three phases. The first recaptures the voices of our forerunners in late nineteenth and early twentieth century who thought deeply on women's position in family and society. What they had to say remains relevant even today. Relevant because the questions are the same though the context is different. Some of their visions are partial. They were bound by the times in which they wrote. With the exception of Mahatma Gandhi who tried to spell out an alternative to the economic model of development available then, all the others were either concentrating on gender roles or specific measures for women's improvement, such as the need for economic independence for women, but left open the question of in what kind of economy. Gandhi wrote extensively on women; there are many well written analyses on Gandhi's contribution to feminism (Patel, Kishwar, Karlekar). We have not, therefore, included him here mainly because so much of what he said is so well known. Yet omitting Gandhi's vision would make this anthology a travesty. His earliest piece 'Hind Swaraj' says a lot more about the Congress and the British. There was just a short page on the evil effects of modern technology. Hence a later piece that develops his idea of swaraj has been included as a sample of his holistic vision that connects women's liberation, national liberation and poverty eradication within one ethical framework. Surprisingly all the reformers we have included had this preoccupation, of linking women's emancipation with that of society. Perhaps this is what is unique about the theoretical approach of women's liberation in India. We do not hear any murmurs of separatism. All of them were deeply convinced that women's liberation was essential for a healthy society. It was not the concern of women alone. Isn't that what we are saying today

too? Thus the discourse, however varied or partial (partial because some did not raise questions of class, caste divisions), continually harped on this link between the social order and women's position. In recent years women studies have developed more sophisticated analysis of social institutions like the family, education system, organs of government, religion, culture and ideology to show how women's oppression is orchestrated within these. We have also included some of the less well known (outside their regions) thinkers for the radicalism of their views.

Agarkar made a fervent plea for co-education and common curriculum at a time when such ideas were revolutionary. He questioned the rigid sexual division of labour and argued how it was inimical to a healthy development of both men and women. R.D. Karve put his finger on the control of female sexuality as the pre-eminent site of oppression. He, in contrast to Gandhi, who saw celibacy for both sexes as an essential path for spiritual development, advocated sexual freedom for both sexes in as well as outside marriage. He understood such freedom is possible for women only when they can control their fertility and receive proper information and facility for practising birth control and for preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Marriage existed only for the bringing up of children. In today's world where we are fighting against coercive fertility control by State agencies in the name of population control, the issue of reproductive rights for women takes on a different significance altogether. The same problem, the same answers but the context lends them a different meaning. AIDS has brought to the fore the question of responsible sexual behaviour.

Pandita Ramabai is a household name and her work is well known. Yet we included her as against many other feminist writings for a very important reason, namely, that she was one of the few who made this connection between social health and women's emancipation. Female education was ardently fought for in those days and great store was set on the emancipatory role of education. Ironically, at the fag end of this century, large sections of women in India do not have even bare literacy. Reports from the national literacy mission show how women are the most eager students as well as volunteers in several regions and the liberatory potential of knowledge (if given in the right

way). Ramabai, as Meera Kosambi says, was a first in many other ways too. She saw the importance of women's organisations and built a wide network of her Arya Mahila Sabha all over Maharashtra. She used innovative techniques such as using traditional religious gatherings to spread her message; she strove to get women in politics. (Kosambi, 1986).

While most reformers were silent on caste and class, confining their attention to the travails of upper caste women, two men spoke out fearlessly on behalf of the lower castes and against Brahminical hegemony – Jyotiba Phule and Periyar (E.V. Ramaswamy). Phule's work for the emancipation of dalits and dalit women is noteworthy. Phule's deposition before the Hunter Commission is a landmark. Periyar was an iconoclast who demolished religious orthodoxy, and the patriarchal family and marriage as Brahminical inventions and irrational. He, like Gandhi, asserted that national leaders asking women to wait for national liberation was a deceptive ploy. Women's liberation can come not from men but by their own struggles. He declared that the very notion of manhood stood in opposition to womanhood and exists only where women receive no respect. In the light of rising male violence against women we see only too clearly how right he was; men have to assert their manhood by subjugating women by violent means if they cannot do so any more by the sanction of custom.

## III

At the end of the colonial era, the first wave women's movement had consolidated itself. On that fresh dawn, at the birth of free India there was an air of optimism all around. Women had been so much part of the freedom struggle. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's confidence was expressed in her words, "The past is dead, the present is a chain but in the future lies hope". She lived at a time when so many of us shared the socialist vision. From hindsight, the translation of that vision into reality seemed unproblematic. We have since witnessed the collapse of the centrally planned economies of U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe and there is a lot of heart searching as to what went wrong. Hobsbawm (1994) in the last chapters of his monumental history of this century concludes that the reason the socialist experiment failed was, among other things, that the vision of a truly communist society was never really shared by the whole society. People took communism in an instrumental way, not as a value in itself. A vanguard cannot bring real, sustained transformation. Feminists have repeatedly drawn attention to gender as a distinct axis that cannot be wished away. Kamaladevi gives us the standard prescriptions — public services like community kitchens, child care, economic independence for women, etc. The model available then was the progress made by U.S.S.R. on welfare provisions for women and children and drawing women into all lines of production. She believed that a peoples' state would work for the welfare of people. She pleads for economic growth with science and technology but with an egalitarian ethic. She constantly berated the urban middle class feminists as 'bourgeois' and emphasized how liberation of women has to go hand in hand with the liberation of masses. We know of the tremendous contribution made by Kamaladevi to Indian society and to Indian women. She had often taken issue with Gandhi and Nehru when they did not include women in their decisions. Had she lived today she would see a different picture of the Indian women's movement, its greater maturity and its complexity. She would understand how, for economic and social restructuring, we need fresh paradigms that would not neglect democratic values in the race for prosperity and that environment



has posed serious limits for science and technology. The Soviet model replaced private ownership of means of production but many other issues like what to produce, how to produce, and how people can participate in that process remained ill-defined. The way gender issues and environment are coming together now teaches us many lessons on this score.

The AIWC's charter of rights and duties reiterates demands that women's organisations have always made. The point to note is how much we are still where we were. Compare it with our 1995 charter of demands; one does not see much difference in the basics. We persist in our assumption that we have a welfare state that is the guardian of women's rights. We get rebuffed ever so often, but where else can one take one's appeal? In an elected government we can act as conscientious citizens and if we have managed to limit transgressions of rights up to a point, it is precisely because we have exercised the power of citizens. AIWC in its charter mentions one of the duties of women as educating themselves for citizenship. In the wake of the new opportunities opened by representation for women in local bodies, women's groups are busy trying to help rural women to learn their duties as voters as well as contestants or holders of power. We include in the last section a sample of a manifesto. Kamaladevi had hoped before independence that laws would not remain on paper but become living practices.

The National Planning Committee set up by the Congress in 1938 began its work in 1939. The subcommittee on women's role in planned economy was constituted with 14 members. Chaired by Lakshmibai Rajwade, the committee included the following members: Sarojini Naidu, Begum S. Hamid Ali, Amrit Kaur, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Radha Subbharayan, Vidyagouri Nilakant, Sushma P. K. Sen, Perin Captain, Lilavati Roy, Zarina Currimbhoy, Begum Shanavaz, and Sarala Devi. Mridula Sarabhai was the secretary. Later, some 17 more members were co-opted who included Rameshwari Nehru, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Kapila Kandwalla and Godavari Gokhale. Amrit Kaur and Sushma Sen resigned. We have taken the summary conclusions and Kandwalla's note of dissent. The document based on collection of data from all over the country is a comprehensive analysis of the position of women. The themes — education,

health, women workers, political participation, etc – read so much like our reports since 1974 after the Committee on the Status of Women. We sense the note of optimism pervading the document. Some important recommendations were a law like the ‘Caste Tyranny Removal Act’ in Baroda State enacted in 1933. They spoke of unionising domestic workers, of guaranteeing to them housing, minimum wage, social insurance and recreation facilities. They spoke of civic rights of women to public places. Child care was to be treated as social insurance for all mothers irrespective of whether they were employed or not. They did not approve of differential education for boys and girls and advocated that boys must learn home science. They wrote on rape and prostitution and observed that as long as woman is considered a property to be safeguarded in the interests of the family, the idea of bringing shame to the family will persist. “The only way to solve this problem is to change the position of women in society and make her equally responsible for the well-being of the social order.” Elsewhere in the document, the committee says “We would like to displace the picture so deeply ingrained upon the racial imagination of men striding forward to conquer new worlds, woman following wearily behind with a baby in her arms. The picture which we now envisage is that of a man and woman comrades of the road, going forward together, the child joyously shared by both. Such a reality we feel cannot but raise the manhood and womanhood of every nation.” The conquest of new worlds, we would like to add, cannot be imperial conquests but worlds of social imagination. Their views on abortion were more conservative. As we saw earlier, this committee too made demands on what women wanted but it did not ask questions of what model of economy is needed to fulfil them.

## IV

There is not much to say on contemporary times. We have selected some critical national documents. There are many different voices but it is not possible to reflect on all of them. The overriding consideration today is macro policy and the defeat of true national interests in the name of globalisation. We hope the various sub-themes and panels will provide much food for thought on issues of how to bring about a national resurgence. The DAWN document produced for Beijing talks of transforming the State to make it more accountable, more transparent, strengthening civil society, building alliances and building model programmes of education, literacy, child care, social security and change in life-styles. International relations are going to play a key role. We have to contend too with the power of the media.

Dr. Vina Mazumdar's piece on Women Studies and the Women's Movement brings out clearly the link between action and research/theory as it exists today. At the very end is a poem by Suniti Namjoshi whose feminist fables many of you might have enjoyed; it is thrown in here to allow us some time to laugh at ourselves.

Transformation is a long painful process. It cannot be achieved without sustained struggle. Each struggle only calls forth new ones. Women are striving to have their interests included, to have their concerns taken seriously and above all to have a major voice in the social, economic, political processes taking place. The maturity of the women's movement in India lies in its recognition that women's interests are not homogeneous but are determined by socio-historical contexts. Transformation can never be an automatic process; it is a continuous process of confrontation, negotiation, alliances with men, society, state and each other. The recognition of plurality need not be the exclusionary each for oneself or her group but a realisation that women are found in different locations according to class, race, ethnicity, age, etc. As such they are trapped within the ideological discourses of their time. Gender interests lie at the intersection of so many axes.

Institutions and State structures are elements located within specific constellations of power. Individuals are caught in this web as actors or subjects of other people's power. When we locate

the individual within these webs of power relations we should be aware that we too are situated in specific socio-cultural positions and take the political consequences of this positioning.

There are three dimensions of power – those processes where power is manifest in open confrontations, like state repression, caste violence and sexual violence. There are also other processes where one group manages to suppress conflicts to prevent them surfacing for discussion or even appearing on the agenda. A great deal of today's politics falls into this variety. For over a century now women have been clamouring that child care is a social issue but to this day it remains an individual mother's problem. Thirdly, there are many latent conflicts. North-South interests are of this category as well as many issues within the country between the privileged and the underprivileged.

The women's movement has sought autonomy as well as solidarity. From reports available, this was evident at the NGO Forum at Beijing. Unless we can show that the barriers separating women can be eliminated we cannot hope to transform society as a whole. The women's movement in India is often accused of not taking into account the conflicts of interests between lower castes and upper castes. This is not always true. Some metropolitan groups may be giving emphasis to life-style and personal relations but as this volume shows this is not the whole picture. There is a ground swell from the grass roots. So, have we arrived at alternatives? Yes and No. Not so much in terms of ready-made theory or visions but working towards it continually. We have learnt over the years that it is not enough to do politics differently; not enough to have autonomous spaces; not enough to do politics as it is. We have to occupy all spaces – autonomous as well as the formal ones. We fight for enfranchisement at the same time as demand entitlements.

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...represented in 1911... members of...  
...in... and the surrounding villages. About 25...  
...school for... established at the time...  
...about the year 1851... establish such...  
...of the family... I also...

# **FORERUNNERS**

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# Jyotirao Govindrao Phule

1827-1890

## MEMORIAL ADDRESSED TO THE EDUCATION COMMISSION

A Statement for the  
Information of the Education Commission

My experience in educational matters is principally confined to Poona and the surrounding villages. About 25 years ago, the missionaries had established a female school at Poona but no indigenous school for girls existed at the time. I, therefore, was induced, about the year 1851 to establish such a school, and in which I and my wife worked together for many years. After some time I placed this school under the management of a committee of educated natives. Under their auspices two more schools were opened in different parts of the town. A year after the institution of the female schools, I also established an indigenous mixed school for the lower classes, especially the Mahars and Mangs. Two more schools for these classes were subsequently added. Sir Erskine Perry, the president of the late Educational Board, and Mr. Lumsdain, the then Secretary to Government, visited the female schools and were much pleased with the movement set on foot, and presented me with a pair of shawls. I continued to work in them for nearly 9 to 10 years, but, owing to circumstances, which it is needless here to detail, I seceded from the work. These female schools still exist, having been made over by the committee to the Educational Department under the management of Mrs. Mitchell. A school for the lower classes, Mahars and Mangs, also exists at the present day, but not in a satisfactory condition. I have also been a teacher for some years in a mission female boarding school. My principal experience was gained in connection with these schools. I devoted some attention also to the primary education available in this Presidency and have had some opportunities of forming

an opinion as to the system and personnel employed in the lower schools of the Educational Department. I wrote some years ago a Marathi pamphlet exposing the religious practices of the Brahmins, and, incidentally among other matters, adverted therein to the present system of education, which, by providing ampler funds for higher education, tended to educate Brahmins and the higher classes only, and to leave the masses wallowing in ignorance and poverty. I summarised the views expressed in the book in an English preface attached thereto, portions of which I reproduce here so far as they relate to the present enquiry:-

“Perhaps a part of the blame in bringing matters to this crisis may be justly laid to the credit of the Govt. Whatever may have been their motives in providing ampler funds and greater facilities for higher education, and neglecting that of the masses, it will be acknowledged by all that in justice to the latter, this is not as it should be. It is an admitted fact that the greater portion of the revenues of the Indian Empire are derived from the ryot’s labour—from the sweat of his brow. The higher and richer classes contribute little or nothing to the state exchequer. A well-informed English writer states that our income is derived, not from surplus profits, but from capital; not from luxuries, but from the poorest necessities. It is the product of sin and tears.

“That Government should expend profusely a large portion of revenue thus raised on the education of the higher classes, for it is these only who take advantage of it, is anything but just or equitable. Their object in patronising this virtual high class education appears to be to prepare scholars who, it is thought, would in time vend learning without money and without price. If we can inspire, say they, the love of knowledge in the minds of the superior classes, the result will be a higher standard, of morals in the cases of the individuals, a large amount of affection for the British Government, and unconquerable desire to spread among their own countrymen the intellectual blessings which they have received.

“Regarding these objects of Government the writer above alluded to, states that we have never heard of philosophy more benevolent and more utopian. It is proposed by men who witness the wondrous changes brought about in Western world, purely



by the agency of popular knowledge, to redress the defects of the two hundred millions of India, by giving superior education to the superior classes and to them only... We ask the friends of Indian Universities to favour us with a single example of the truth of their theory from the instances which have already fallen within the scope of their experience. They have educated many children of wealthy men and have been the means of advancing very materially the worldly prospects of some of their pupils. But what contribution have these made to great work of regenerating their fellowmen? How have they begun to act upon the masses? Have any of them formed classes at their own homes or elsewhere, for the instruction of their less fortunate or less wise countrymen? Or have they kept their knowledge to themselves, as a personal gift, not to be soiled by contact with the ignorant vulgar? Have they in any way shown themselves anxious to advance the general interests and repay the philanthropy with patriotism? Upon what grounds is it asserted that the best way to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the people is to raise the standard of instruction among the higher classes? A glorious argument this for aristocracy, were it only tenable. To show the growth of the national happiness, it would only be necessary to refer to the number of pupils at the colleges and the lists of academic degrees. Each Wrangler would be accounted a national benefactor; and the existence of Deans and Proctors would be associated, like the game laws and the ten-pound franchise, with the best interests of the constitution.

“One of the most glaring tendencies of Government system of high class education has been the virtual monopoly of all the higher offices under them by Brahmins. If the welfare of the Ryot is at heart, if it is the duty of Government to check a host of abuses, it behoves them to narrow this monopoly day by day so as to allow a sprinkling of the other castes to get into the public services. Perhaps some might be inclined to say that it is not feasible in the present state of education. Our only reply is that if Government look a little less after higher education which is able to take care of itself and more towards the education of the masses there would be no difficulty in training up a body of men every way qualified and perhaps far better in morals and manners.

“My object in writing the present volume is not only to tell my Shudra brethren how they have been duped by the Brahmins, but also to open the eyes of Government to that pernicious system of high class education, which has hitherto been so persistently followed, and which statesmen like Sir George Campbell, the present Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, with broad universal sympathies, are finding to be highly mischievous and pernicious to the interests of Government. I sincerely hope that Government will ere long see the error of their ways, trust less to writers or men who look through high class spectacles, and take the glory into their own hands of emancipating my Shudra brethren from the trammels of bondage which the Brahmins have woven around them like the coils of a serpent. It is no less the duty of each of my Shudra brethren as have received any education, to place before Government the true state of their fellowmen and endeavour to the best of their power to emancipate themselves from Brahmin thralldom. Let there be schools for the Shudras in every village; but away with all Brahmin school-masters! The Shudras are the life and sinews of the country, and it is to them alone, and not to the Brahmins, that Government must ever look to tide over their difficulties, financial as well as political. If the hearts and minds of the Shudras are made happy and contented, the British Government need have no fear for their loyalty in the future.”

— *Joteerao Phooley*

### **Primary Education**

There is little doubt that primary education among the masses in this Presidency has been very much neglected. Although the number of primary schools now in existence is greater than those existing a few years ago, yet they are not commensurate to the requirements of the community. Government collect a special cess for educational purposes, and it is to be regretted that this fund is not spent for the purposes for which it is collected. Nearly nine-tenths of the villages in this Presidency, or nearly 10 lakhs of children, it is said, are without any provision, whatever, for primary instruction. A good deal of their poverty, their want of self-reliance, their entire dependence upon the learned and

intelligent classes, is attributable to this deplorable state of education among the peasantry.

Even in towns the Brahmins, the Purbhoos, the hereditary classes, who generally live by the occupation of pen, and the trading classes seek primary instruction. The cultivating and the other classes, as a rule, do not generally avail themselves of the same. A few of the latter class are found in primary and secondary schools, but owing to their poverty and other causes they do not continue long at school. As there are no special inducements for these to continue at school, they naturally leave off as soon as they find any menial or other occupation. In villages also most of the cultivating classes hold aloof, owing to extreme poverty, and also because they require their children to tend cattle and look after their fields. Besides an increase in the number of schools, special inducements in the shape of scholarships and half-yearly or annual prizes, to encourage them to send their children to school and thus create in them a taste for learning, is most essential. I think primary education of the masses should be made compulsory up to a certain age, say at least 12 years. Muhammadans also hold aloof from these schools, as they somehow evince no liking for Marathi or English. There are a few Muhammadan primary schools where their own language is taught. The Mahars, Mangs, and other lower classes are practically excluded from all schools owing to caste prejudices, as they are not allowed to sit by the children of higher castes. Consequently special schools for these have been opened by Government. But these exist only in large towns. In the whole of Poona and for a population exceeding over 5,000 people, there is only one school, and in which the attendance is under 30 boys. This state of matters is not at all creditable to the educational authorities. Under the promise of the Queen's Proclamation I beg to urge that Mahars, Mangs, and other lower classes, where their number is large enough, should have separate schools for them, as they are not allowed to attend the other schools owing to caste prejudices.

In the present state of education, payment by results is not at all suitable for the promotion of education amongst a poor and ignorant people, as no taste has yet been created among them for education. I do not think any teacher would undertake to open

schools on his own account among these people, as he would not be able to make a living by it. Government schools and special inducements, as noted above, are essential until such a taste is created among them.

With regard to the few Government primary schools that exist in the Presidency, I beg to observe that the primary education imparted in them is not at all placed on a satisfactory or sound basis. The system is imperfect insofar as it does not prove practical and useful in the future career of the pupils. The system is capable of being developed up to the requirement of the community, if improvements that will result in its future usefulness be effected in it. Both the teaching machinery employed and the course of instruction now followed, require a thorough remodelling.

(a) The teachers now employed in the primary schools are almost all Brahmins; a few of them are from the normal training college, the rest being all untrained men. Their salaries are very low, seldom exceeding Rs. 10, and their attainments also very meagre. But as a rule they are all unpractical men, and the boys who learn under them generally imbibe inactive habits and try to obtain service, to the avoidance of their hereditary or other hardy or independent professions. I think teachers for primary schools should be trained, as far as possible, out of the cultivating classes, who will be able to mix freely with them and understand their wants and wishes much better than a Brahmin teacher, who generally holds himself aloof under religious prejudices. These would, moreover, exercise a more beneficial influence over the masses than teachers of other classes, and who will not feel ashamed to hold the handle of a plough or the carpenter's adze when required, and who will be able to mix themselves readily with the lower orders of society. The course of training for them ought to include, besides the ordinary subjects, an elementary knowledge of agriculture and sanitation. The untrained teachers should, except when thoroughly efficient, be replaced by efficient trained teachers. To secure a better class of teachers and to improve their position, better salaries should be given. Their salaries should not be less than Rs. 12 and in larger villages should be at least Rs. 15 or 20. Associating them in the village polity as auditors of village accounts or registrars of deeds, or village

postmasters or stamp vendors, would improve their status, and thus exert a beneficial influence over the people among whom they live. The schoolmasters of village schools who pass a large number of boys should also get some special allowance other than their pay, as an encouragement to them.

(b) The course of instruction should consist of reading, writing Modi, and Balbodh and accounts, and a rudimentary knowledge of general history, general geography, and grammar, also an elementary knowledge of agriculture and a few lessons on moral duties and sanitation. The studies in the village schools might be fewer than those in larger villages and towns, but not the less practical. In connection with lessons in agriculture, a small model farm, where practical instruction to the pupils can be given, would be a decided advantage and, if really efficiently managed, would be productive of the greatest good to the country. The text-books in use, both in the primary and Anglo-vernacular schools, require revision and recasting, inasmuch as they are not practical or progressive in their scope. Lessons on technical education and morality, sanitation and agriculture, and some useful arts, should be interspersed among them in progressive series. The fees in the primary schools should be as 1 to 2 from the children of cess-payers and non-cess-payers.

(c) The supervising agency over these primary schools is also very defective and insufficient. The Deputy Inspector's visit once a year can hardly be of any appreciable benefit. All these schools ought at least to be inspected quarterly if not oftener. I would also suggest the advisability of visiting these schools at other times and without any intimation being given. No reliance can be placed on the district or village officers owing to the multifarious duties devolving on them, as they seldom find time to visit them, and when they do, their examination is necessarily very superficial and imperfect. European Inspector's supervision is also occasionally very desirable, as it will tend to exercise a very efficient control over the teachers generally.

(d) The number of primary schools should be increased —

- (1) By utilising such of the indigenous schools as shall be or are conducted by trained and certificated teachers, by giving them liberal grants-in-aid.

- (2) By making over one half of the local cess fund for primary education alone.
- (3) By compelling, under a statutory enactment, municipalities to maintain all the primary schools within their respective limits.
- (4) By an adequate grant from the provincial or imperial funds.

Prizes and scholarships to pupils, and capitation or other allowance to the teachers, as an encouragement, will tend to render these schools more efficient.

The municipalities in large towns should be asked to contribute whole share of the expenses incurred on primary schools within the municipal areas. But in no case ought the management of the same to be entirely made over to them. They should be under the supervision of the Educational Department.

The municipalities should also give grants-in-aid to such secondary and private English schools as shall be conducted according to the rules of the Educational Department, where their funds permit, such grants-in-aid being regulated by the number of boys passed every year. These contributions from municipal funds may be made compulsory by statutory enactment.

The administration of the funds for primary education should ordinarily be in the hands of the Director of Public Instruction.

But if educated and intelligent men are appointed on the local or district committees, these funds may be safely entrusted to them, under the guidance of the Collector, or the Director of Public Instruction. At present, the local boards consist of ignorant and uneducated men, such as patels, inamdars, surdars, &c., who would not be capable of exercising any intelligent control over the funds.

### **Indigenous Schools**

Indigenous schools exist a good deal in cities, towns, and some large villages, especially where there is a Brahmin population. From the latest reports of Public Instruction in this Presidency, it is found that there are 1,049 indigenous schools with about 27,694 pupils in them. They are conducted on the old village system. The boys are generally taught the multiplication table by heart, a little Modi writing and reading, and to recite a few

religious pieces. The teachers, as a rule, are not capable of effecting any improvements, as they are not initiated in the art of teaching. The fees charged in these schools range from 2 to 8 annas. The teachers generally come from the dregs of Brahminical society. Their qualifications hardly go beyond reading and writing Marathi very indifferently, and casting accounts up to the rule of three or so. They set up as teachers as the last resource of getting a livelihood. Their failure or unfitness in other callings of life obliges them to open schools. No arrangements exist in the country to train up teachers for indigenous schools. The indigenous schools could not be turned to any good account, unless the present teachers are replaced by men from the training colleges and by those who pass the 6th standard in the vernaculars. The present teachers will willingly accept State aid, but money thus spent will be thrown away. I do not know any instance in which a grant-in-aid is paid to such a school. If it is being paid anywhere, it must be in very rare cases. In my opinion no grants-in-aid should be paid to such schools unless the master is a certificated one. But if certificated or competent teachers be found, grants-in-aid should be given and will be productive of great good.

### **Higher Education**

The cry over the whole country has been for some time past that Government have amply provided for higher education, whereas that of the masses has been neglected. To some extent this cry is justified, although the classes directly benefited by the higher education may not readily admit it. But for all this no well-wisher of his country would desire that Government should, at the present time, withdraw its aid from higher education. All that they would wish is, that as one class of the body politic has been neglected, its advancement should form as anxious a concern as that of the other. Education in India is still in its infancy. Any withdrawal of State aid from higher education cannot but be injurious to the spread of education generally.

A taste for education among the higher and wealthy classes, such as the Brahmins and Purbhoos, especially those classes who live by the pen, has been created, and a gradual withdrawal of

State aid may be possible so far as these classes are concerned; but in the middle and lower classes, among whom higher education has made no perceptible progress, such a withdrawal would be a great hardship. In the event of such withdrawal, boys will be obliged to have recourse to inefficient and sectarian schools, much against their wish, and the cause of education cannot but suffer. Nor could any part of such education be entrusted to private agency. For a long time to come the entire educational machinery, both ministerial and executive, must be in the hands of Government. Both the higher and primary education require all the fostering care and attention which Government can bestow on it.

The withdrawal of Government from schools or colleges would not only tend to check the spread of education, but would seriously endanger that spirit of neutrality which has all along been the aim of Government to foster, owing to the different nationalities and religious creeds prevalent in India. This withdrawal may, to a certain extent, create a spirit of self-reliance for local purposes in the higher and wealthy classes, but the cause of education would be so far injured that the spirit of self-reliance would take years to remedy that evil. Educated men of ability, who do not succeed in getting into public service, may be induced to open schools for higher education on being assured of liberal grants-in-aid. But no one would be ready to do so on his own account as a means of gaining a livelihood, and it is doubtful whether such private efforts could be permanent or stable, nor would they succeed half so well in their results. Private schools, such as those of Mr. Vishnu Shastree Chiploonkar and Mr. Bhavey, exist in Poona, and with adequate grants-in-aid may be rendered very efficient, but they can never supersede the necessity of the high school.

The missionary schools, although some of them are very efficiently conducted, do not succeed half so well in their results, nor do they attract half the number of students which the high schools attract. The superiority of Government schools is mainly owing to the richly paid staff of teachers and professors which it is not possible for a private school to maintain.

The character of instruction given in the Government higher schools, is not at all practical, or such as is required for the



necessities of ordinary life. It is only good to turn out so many clerks and schoolmasters. The Matriculation examination unduly engrosses the attention of the teachers and pupils, and the course of studies prescribed has no practical element in it, so as to fit the pupil for his future career in independent life. Although the number of students presenting for the Entrance examination is not at all large when the diffusion of knowledge in the country is taken into consideration, it looks large when the requirements of Government service are concerned. Were the education universal and within easy reach of all, the number would have been larger still, and it should be so, and I hope it will be so hereafter. The higher education should be so arranged as to be within easy reach of all, and the books on the subjects for the Matriculation examination should be published in the Government Gazette, as is done in Madras and Bengal. Such a course will encourage private studies and secure larger diffusion of knowledge in the country. It is a boon to the people that the Bombay University recognises private studies in the case of those presenting for the Entrance examination. I hope, the University authorities will be pleased to extend the same boon to higher examinations. If private studies were recognised by the University in granting the degrees of B.A., M.A. &c., many young men will devote their time to private studies. Their doing so will still further tend to the diffusion of knowledge. It is found in many instances quite impossible to prosecute studies at the colleges for various reasons. If private studies be recognised by the University, much good will be effected to the country at large, and a good deal of the drain on the public purse on account of higher education will be lessened.

The system of Government scholarships, at present followed in the Government schools, is also defective inasmuch as it gives undue encouragement to those classes only, who have already acquired a taste for education to the detriment of the other classes. The system might be so arranged that some of these scholarships should be awarded to such classes amongst whom education has made no progress.

The system of awarding them by competition, although abstractedly equitable, does not tend to the spread of education among other classes.

With regard to the question as to educated natives finding remunerative employments, it will be remembered that the educated natives who mostly belong to the Brahminical and other higher classes are mostly fond of service. But as the public service can afford no field for all the educated natives who come out from schools and colleges, and moreover the course of training they receive being not of a technical or practical nature, they find great difficulty in betaking themselves to other manual or remunerative employments. Hence the cry that the market is overstocked with educated natives who do not find any remunerative employment. It may, to a certain extent, be true that some of the professions are overstocked, but this does not show that there is no other remunerative employment to which they can betake themselves. The present number of educated men is very small in relation to the country at large, and we trust that the day may not be far distant when we shall have the present number multiplied a hundred-fold, and all be taking themselves to useful and remunerative occupations and not be looking after service.

In conclusion, I beg to request the Education Commission to be kind enough to sanction measures for the spread of female primary education on a more liberal scale.

Poona

19th October 1882

JOTEERAO GOVINDRAO POOLEY,  
Merchant and Cultivator and Municipal Commissioner

PETH JOONA GUNJA

[*Education Commission, Bombay, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1884*  
pp. 140-145].

[Contributed by Sharayu Anantram].

# Gopal Ganesh Agarkar

1856-1895

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## COMMON CURRICULUM FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

The title of today's essay is bound to disturb many minds. It cannot however be helped. We ought to write what we deem fit. It is feared that if co-education became a reality then many men might have to do domestic chores like minding the babies, washing clothes, cleaning utensils, cooking, grinding grain, etc. So, what? Women are not predestined to do such chores. Again no one can prove that the nurture of children is exclusively a woman's job simply because she gives birth to them. It is generally noticed that rich women do not have to strain themselves for the nurturance of their children regardless of the number of children. It is a well known fact that the elites engage wet nurses for their children. Thus there is no inevitable link between bearing children and undertaking the burden of domestic chores. Any way, why should women have to bear ten or twelve children? We feel strongly that they do not do this out of their own volition. We are convinced that men force women into repeated pregnancies. Had men themselves experienced even a small bit of the pangs of child birth, they would have controlled their sexual predispositions. Their behaviour is based on the notion that they need not worry about other peoples' agony. If they had at some point in their life experienced disgust with child birth, then both men and women would have acted with restraint, which in turn would have eased the population pressure. However, it appears that the current exploitation of women cannot continue for long. As men receive more education women would also get opportunities for gaining knowledge. This would enable women to understand where their true interests lay

and how best to realise them. Men would then be forced to give up their habit of loading their wives with repeated pregnancies and child births. It is important to note that the conjugal relationship requires the consent of both partners in all matters. Only a relationship on such a basis can emancipate women. All this can be achieved only when women have full access to education and of the same type of education as men.

In every country, ever since it was deemed right to open educational opportunities to women, the question of what kind of education it should be is hotly debated. There is common consensus on this – that like boys, girls should learn the three R's ie. writing, reading and simple arithmetic. Beyond this consensus gives way to difference of opinion, being most pronounced at the stage of higher education. Many feel that after primary education girls should be withdrawn from school and be trained at home in household management. If some girls do want to continue in school then they should be taught tailoring, music, culinary art, home management, knitting, weaving, basket making, child care, disease management, women's ailments and so on. They should not (so the argument goes) be taught subjects like geography, history, mathematics, physics and astronomy that would tax their brains. In imparting education one has to bear in mind the physical and mental capacity of the recipient as well as the kind of life that person is going to lead. Women's reasoning power is naturally weaker than that of men. They are endowed by nature with the responsibility of bearing and rearing children. Hence they should be given an education that is commensurate with their weak intellect and which would equip them to carry out their assigned roles without competing with men. There is no injustice involved in making people do those things they are capable of. On the contrary, this would best serve their interests. It would be ruinous to both men and women if women started taking education and working outside while men remained uneducated and managed the household or the domestic front. Men with their robust health should face the pressures of work outside the home, the ravages of seasons. In short it is only proper that they should exert themselves physically and mentally and earn for themselves and their family. It is equally proper that women should with their delicate physique

enjoy the safety of the home and manage their husbands' earnings. They should attend on their husbands when they return home tired after a day's work. They should toil for the upbringing of the children and bear for their husbands ten to twelve children. Women's true interests and happiness lie in this pattern of life.

In other words, this opinion held by many favours the existing pattern and regards that as the best; they do not entertain any change therein. This notion is backed by doctors and has acquired a kind of finality.

But what good can come out of an insistence on retaining such a pattern of life? Do we have a consensus on desirable education for men? Even if there was, was it achieved without any struggle?

Can we forget the struggle before primary education for girls became acceptable? The fact of the matter is that those who acquire power are ever reluctant to relinquish it. For a variety of reasons, men have established their hegemony over women and having tasted power, do not want to have it slip away from them. Using the patrician-plebian analogy, men and women can be said to belong to these two categories. Just as the master-servant relationship among the ancient Romans got extinguished in course of time, so also the men-women relationship of hegemony and subordination is going to wither away with the passage of time. The tasks performed by men today were performed by Roman patricians or elites of society and those performed by women today were done by the plebians or slaves. As the Romans progressed to a more advanced stage, the master-slave relation weakened and those who proved themselves meritorious by dint of their intellect, experience and accomplishment acquired positions of authority within the State. Subsequently, the patrician-plebian distinction disappeared. Likewise men and women would gradually acquire power according to their merit. Assuming that men have heavier brains and granting that the sexual division of labour should relate to this, even the most power crazy man cannot contend that all men have heavier brains than all women. Hence to hold up a division of labour solely on this score is cruel and unjust. Each person should have the freedom to pursue tasks in accordance with one's capacity. This will benefit both males and females and the world at large. At present the intellectual capacity of many women is thwarted. Often men are required to

carry out tasks for which they are intellectually ill-equipped and yet capable women do not get a chance to perform them. The end result is that the tasks are performed poorly and the entire mankind is put to a great loss. There ought to be competition between men and women in every field of science or art. If women are incompetent in science or art they should be declared so only after their abilities are actually, empirically tested.

### **On co-education**

The social structure and social practices in Europe are very different from that in our country. .... We in the orient have stuck to the extraordinary view, for thousands of years that women must not concern themselves with affairs outside the home. On account of this as well as other reasons, we disapprove of free mixing of the sexes. We are firmly convinced that such free mixing is an open invitation to disaster. Although it is obvious that such disasters do not take place in Europe, we still look upon such eventuality with terror. This reflects the level of rationality in our thinking. It is interesting though to note that in Europe where no major social function can be celebrated without the presence of women, there is a difference of opinion regarding co-education.

If women did not attend events like horse racing, cricket, prize distributions, foundation laying of buildings, weddings, funerals, exhibitions, dance and music parties, men would lose interest in such events. The exuberance which is characteristic of European societies is to a large extent due to the free mixing of the sexes. It is often argued that free mixing would lead to loosening of the moral fibre of society. But this is what people who have never been exposed to such societies think. This is similar to the argument that there cannot be any morality for women unless they don the veil. We agree that society at large stands to gain if men and women do not go astray. But we do not agree that to attain this end, women must be kept in seclusion or that morality is secure only if women are so confined. It is human nature to seek a thing beyond one's reach. If it is available easily one would not even think about it. If an individual has not visited a place for years and is forbidden to visit it for a month, he is likely to experience a serious loss of freedom. Viewed objectively, it could be argued that there will be less of morality among those

who confine their women to harems or put them under veils. Free mixing can prevent to a large extent seeing one another as objects of sex. In our country even socially respectable men ogle at women when they come out for social ceremonies, or go on journeys and at girls going to school because men and women rarely meet each other. If they met more often, then the indecent behaviour on the part of men would stop and more decency would creep into their speech and behaviour. Barring a few exceptions, the majority of men use indecent language in their every day conversation.... The state of affairs of any society is like the state of the human body. As long as the body grows, it is easier to subject it to many new experiences, but with when growth stops, stiffness sets in which does not accept new experiences. Society more or less follows the same principle.

Like Muslims, many Hindus are afraid to let their women come face to face with men lest it leads to dire consequences. The Europeans are not convinced yet that co-education can have always pleasant consequences. This attitude is disappearing in the West. The opposition to co-education revolves round three points:

First, men and women are made different by nature, which necessitates a different type of education for each; co-education precludes this possibility. Secondly, boys are boisterous and this is likely to affect the sensibilities of girls. On the other hand, the modesty of girls in no way affects boys. Thirdly, coming together of boys and girls from a young age arouses their sexuality prematurely leading to unpleasant consequences.

This may not be true always. If proper supervision is done such consequences will occur only rarely. Proponents of co-education argue that it will help discipline boys and make them mellow down. When they have to be taught together, it becomes essential to draw up a curriculum that could be comprehended by both. This in turn brings to light the monotony and insipidity of the prevalent curriculum. The coming together of young boys and girls instead of arousing sexuality makes them take a more serious view of it because gradually they learn to base their friendship on test of inner qualities of one another.

[Contributed by Sharayu Anantram]

# Raghunath Dhondo Karve

1882 - 1953

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Translated from Marathi.)

## SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SEXOLOGY

The issue of sexuality up till now has been considered from the point of view of individuals. The focus was on sexual characteristics of men and women and the best ways of achieving gratification. But Man being a social animal it is necessary to put aside this purely individualistic view and see instead how this gratification can be achieved without harming other peoples' interest. In other words we must discuss the morals involved while discussing sexuality. Besides, this thinking must be done in a dispassionate, detached and unbiased manner.

The question of morals arises when two or more people interact with each other. The natural way to seek sexual gratification is the union of male and female. Looked at from this limited perspective it could be argued there should not be any objection to cohabitation between man and woman provided they do so out of their free will and do not even unknowingly communicate any disease to one another. It is observed that often people indulge in sex even after knowing full well the possibility of their contracting a disease. Here, the individuals contracting the disease have themselves to blame, they do not have the right to blame the other partner of unethical conduct. The consequences of such conduct is that not only do they harm themselves but they harm others. Therefore any sexual intercourse is highly immoral if it carries with it the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Also, any intercourse that results in progeny and adds to society's woes should also be regarded as immoral. More importantly, this applies not only to husband and wife but to unmarried or unattached couples.



The common people are however unfamiliar with this notion of morality. Men and women who do not conform to this social morality are likely to suffer. Society has strong mores about sexual conduct and enforces them ruthlessly. Men and women often do indulge in extra marital sex despite these injunctions but they do so clandestinely. A married woman can get away with such a relationship because in the event of conception, paternity can be attributed to the husband. But spinsters, widows and wives whose husbands are away for a while are likely to be trapped. Men who cohabit with such women lack in morals; these women are duped and are likely to lose whatever source of livelihood they have. It is true that men are not to blame in all cases and there may be instances of women enticing men. Most of the time, however, it is due to lack of discretion on the part of women and they are made to suffer the consequences of their indiscretion. Ultimately as men do not suffer from their acts but inflict pain on their partners, it is they who must take the blame of lacking in morality; women can be exonerated from this charge. It is our view men can act with greater discretion if taught to do so. In contemporary times, both sexually transmitted diseases and conception/pregnancy can be controlled. Therefore the immorality surrounding extra marital relations do not any longer hold. Those who indulge in such relationships must have adequate information. Women must not depend on others to seek and use such information regarding the best available contraceptives. Both men and women can learn to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases by taking adequate precautions. The immorality attached to sexual relations outside marriage disappears in this context. There is no longer the need to take permission from a priest or law to enter into a sexual relationship. At present married women are forced into sex by the husbands because of laws that confer conjugal rights on the man. As a matter of fact a married woman does not have freedom of her own sexuality - not even as much as a prostitute. From a purely sexological point of view no man or woman can derive pleasure from forced sex. Whether a married woman derives any pleasure at all is debatable when she is forced into it. Even if she does not derive any pleasure from it she is unlikely to complain about it because for most women marriage is their source of livelihood, lacking as they are in

education and independent economic means. There are some women who do not seek self reliance and are happy in marriage but they are a tiny minority. Women in general accept the domination of their husbands, fathers or brothers though unwillingly. I will cite an example of a widow who went to live with a woman friend. This friend and her husband under the pretext of guarding her chastity literally ruled over her life. The woman had independent economic means and could have acted freely on her own. She had internalised the slavish mentality to such an extent she allowed her friend and her husband to take charge of her life. The moral of the story is that unless and until the notion of freedom and independence is imbibed deeply by women their position cannot improve.

It is natural for men and women to desire sexual relationships with more than one partner. Provided they take precautions such relationships are harmless and certainly not immoral. The prevailing norm that permits a man to have two wives but not an extra marital partner is ridiculous. Marriage is important only for nurturing progeny. As a matter of fact it is more immoral to have two wives and children by both when it is difficult enough to nurture a child properly. Just as an extra marital relation does not harm any one provided due care is taken not to harm any one, a woman too can have an extra marital relation so long as she takes due care of her children. It is in no way immoral. We also do not see trading of sex by sex workers as immoral. What is important is that sex workers should have freedom to apply their trade and not be coerced into it; they should have protection against diseases. It is not proper for men to seek sex from sex workers in the absence of their wives or lacking access to women. For men not needing this outlet, our society has to undergo a major transformation in sexual morality. Some men do not have the courage to develop attachments with the opposite sex; some do not have the time; some men are ugly and cannot attract women. Any sexual relationship that is not based on some degree of attachment however tenuous is certainly inferior – like seeking sex workers – but for some men this inferior relationship alone is possible.

Many regard clandestine relationships as a fraud on society and such persons are challenged to have open relations. It is

ridiculous to brand clandestine relations as immoral. We regard sexual relationship as a private matter between two consenting individuals and no one should be forced to reveal this to the outside world. If some one gets unduly curious he or she can be snubbed or dismissed with a lie. As a matter of fact, the couple owe it to each other not to disclose the relationship and injure the other person. Many modern-day reformers feel that husband and wife should have full sexual freedom but as such practices are rare married couples act under the belief that each has an exclusive sexual rights over the other. They keep watch over one another. Under these circumstances, the best interest of their marriage is not served. Some argue that this is tantamount to a breach of loyalty made at the time of marriage. Men have broken such promise often enough and society has looked the other way.

Society must change its norms, confer equal sexual rights to both as well as stricter norms for both. It is futile to bind people to promises when a relationship outside marriage can be harmless.

The institution of marriage is connected closely with the bringing up of children. If extra marital relations can take care to prevent progeny arising out of it, it is in no sense immoral. Jealousy is not a natural phenomenon as it is made out to be. It is the feeling of holding some one as property that is painful. Jealousy becomes a normal reaction when one's love is not reciprocated. When it is reciprocated by the partner who yet feels attracted to another, jealousy ceases to be natural. We know under polygamy co-wives do live in harmony as they do not suffer economic deprivation.

The general norms of morality which emphasize others' rights along with one's own and which also emphasize non-infliction of pain or injury to others ought to be extended to the man-woman sexual relationship. This also can become the true test of morality, if we learn to look at it in a detached manner.

Cleanliness should be a part and parcel of sexual morality. People feel secretive and embarrassed about their genitals and afraid of public reaction. Hence they are indifferent to the cleanliness and hygiene relating to these parts of the body. A survey conducted among Bombay university students revealed that 80% were unclean and unhygienic. People should bathe

naked. One's own body has to be clean but the question of morality arises here in connection with sexual intercourse. Lack of hygiene on the part of a partner can affect the other. Vaginal discharge among women is often due to men's lack of penis-hygiene as well as women's vaginal hygiene. Even educated women do not observe these. Oral hygiene is equally important. Husband and wife or a man and woman seeking sexual pleasure must behave as friends and discuss issues with frankness. The problem can be solved if men and women go for a medical check up before marriage. Such practices can go a long way in eliminating unpleasant experiences. Sex workers too should be spared of such unpleasant experiences.

[Contributed by Sharayu Anantram].

## Pandita Ramabai

1858-1922

(From "The High Caste Hindu Woman",  
Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture,  
Bombay, 1981)

### HOW THE CONDITION OF WOMEN TELLS UPON SOCIETY

Those who have done their best to keep women in a state of complete dependence and ignorance, vehemently deny that this has anything to do with the present degradation of the Hindu nation. I pass over the hundreds of nonsenses which are brought forward as the strongest reasons for keeping women in ignorance and dependence. They have already been forced out into the broad daylight of a generous civilization, and have been put to the fiery proof of science and found wanting. Above all, the noble example of thousands of women in many countries have burned the so-called reasons to ashes. But their ghosts are still hovering over the land of the Hindus and are frightening the timid and the ignorant to death. Let us hope that in God's good time, all these devils shall be forever cast out of India's body; meanwhile it is our duty to take the matter into serious consideration, and to put forth our best endeavours to hasten the glad day for India's daughters, aye, and for her sons also; because in spite of the proud assertions of our brethren that they have not suffered from the degradation of women, their own condition betrays but too plainly the contrary.

Since men and women are indissolubly united by Providence as members of the same body of human society, each must suffer when their fellow-members suffer, whether they will confess it or not. In the animal as well as in the vegetable kingdom, nature demands that all living beings shall freely comply with its conditions of growth or they cannot become that which they were originally designed to be. Why should any exception to this law be made for the purdah women? Closely confined to the four

walls of their house, deprived throughout their lives of the opportunity to breathe healthy fresh air, or to drink in the wholesome sunshine, they become weaker and weaker from generation to generation, their physical statures dwarfed, their spirits crushed under the weight of social prejudices and superstitions, and their minds starved from absolute lack of literary food and of opportunity to observe the world. Thus fettered, in ninety cases out of a hundred, at the least calculation, they grow to be selfish slaves to their petty individual interests, indifferent to the welfare of their own immediate neighbours, much more to their nation's well-being. How could these imprisoned mothers be expected to bring forth children better than themselves, for as the tree and soil are, so shall the fruit be. Consequently we see all around us in India a generation of men least deserving that exalted appellation.

The doctrine of "pre-natal influence" can nowhere be more satisfactorily proved than in India. The mother's spirits being depressed, and mind as well as body weakened by the monotony and inactivity of her life, the unborn child cannot escape the evil consequences. The men of Hindustan do not when babes, suck from the mother's breast, true patriotism, and in their boyhood, the mother, poor woman, is unable to develop that divine faculty in them owing to her utter ignorance of the past and present condition of her native land. Fault-finding with neighbours, bitter feelings towards tyrant relatives expressed in words and actions, selfish interest in personal and family affairs, these are the chief lessons that children learn at the mother's knee, from babyhood up to the seventh or eighth year of age.

Again, how does it come to pass that each succeeding generation grows weaker than the one preceding it, if not because the progenitors of each generation lack the mental and physical strength which children are destined to inherit? The father may have been free and healthy in mind, as well as in body, but the mother was not; she undoubtedly has bequeathed the fatal legacy of weakness and dullness to her children. The complete submission of women under the Hindu law has in the lapse of millenniums of years converted them into slavery-loving creatures. They are glad to lean upon any one and be altogether dependent, and thus it has come to pass that their sons as a race,

desire to depend upon some other nation, and not upon themselves. The seclusion, complete dependence and the absolute ignorance forced upon the mothers of our nation have been gradually and fatally telling upon the mental and physical health of the men, and in these last times they have borne the poisonous fruit that will compel the Hindu nation to die a miserable and prolonged death if a timely remedy is not taken to them.

Moreover the Hindu woman's ignorance prevents liberal-minded and progressive men from making necessary and important changes in the manners and habits of the household: bigoted women also prevent their husbands and sons from such important enterprises as crossing the ocean in the pursuit of useful knowledge, or for purposes of trade.

To add to all the disabilities of the Hindu mother in the discharge of her sacred maternal duties, she is as a rule, wholly ignorant of the commonest hygienic laws. It must be remembered that she is herself a girl scarcely out of her babyhood, when she becomes a mother. At about fourteen, fifteen or sixteen years of age she cannot be expected to know all that is necessary in order to take good care of her child. The first and second of the children of this young mother usually die, and if they survive, they are apt to grow up to be weak and unhealthy adults. Until they are seven or eight years of age, the children of the household are left to themselves without any one to take care of them, and no influence is exerted to mould their character at this most interesting and important period of life. Who but an intelligent and loving mother can do this all-important work for her children at that age?

Having thus far endeavoured to bring to the notice of Western women the condition of a class of their oriental sisters, I now desire to direct their attention definitely to our chief needs. After many years of careful observation and thought, I have come to the conclusion that the chief needs of high-caste Hindu women are: 1st, Self-Reliance; 2nd, Education; 3rd, Native Women Teachers.

**I. Self-Reliance** — The state of complete dependence in which men are required by the law-giver to keep women from birth to

the end of their lives makes it impossible for them to have self-reliance, without which a human being becomes a pitiful parasite. Women of the working classes are better off than their sisters of high castes in India, for in many cases they are obliged to depend upon themselves, and an opportunity for cultivating self-reliance is thus afforded them by which they largely profit. But high-caste women, unless their families are actually destitute of means to keep them, are shut up within the four walls of their house. In after-time, if they are left without a protector, i.e. a male relative to support and care for them, they literally do not know what to do with themselves. They have been so cruelly cropped in their early days that self-reliance and energy are dead within them; helpless victims of indolence and false timidity they are easily frightened out of their wits and have little or no strength to withstand the trials and difficulties which must be encountered by a person on her way toward progress. But it is idle to hope that the condition of my country-women will ever improve without individual self-reliance; therefore, is it not the duty of our Western sisters to teach them how they may become self-reliant?

**II. Education** — The lack of education among the women of India can be fairly realized by scanning the report of the Educational Commission for 1883, and the census returns of 1880-81. Of the ninety-nine million seven hundred thousand women and girls directly under British rule, ninety-nine and one-half millions are returned as unable to read and write; the remaining two hundred thousand who are able either to read or write, cannot all be reckoned as educated, for the school-going period of a girl is generally between seven and nine years of age; within that short time she acquires little more than ability to read the second or the third vernacular reading-book, and a little knowledge of arithmetic which usually comprehends no more than the four simple rules. It should be remembered that the two hundred thousand women able to read or write are the "*alumnae*" of the government schools, mission schools, private schools conducted by the inhabitants of India independently, private societies and Zenana mission agencies all reckoned together. It is surprising how even this small number of women can have acquired the limited knowledge indicated, when we consider the



powers and principalities that are incessantly fighting against female education in India. Girls of nine and ten when recently out of school and given in marriage are wholly cut off from reading or writing, because it is a shame for a young woman or girl to hold a paper or book in her hand, or to read in the presence of others in her husband's house. It is a popular belief among high-caste women that their husbands will die if they should read or should hold a pen in their fingers. The fear of becoming a widow overcomes their hunger and thirst for knowledge. Moreover the little wives can get but scanty time to devote to self-culture; any one fortunate enough to possess the desire and able to command the time is in constant fear of being seen by her husband's relatives. Her employment cannot long be kept secret where every one is on the lookout, and when discovered she is ridiculed, laughed at and even commanded by the elders to leave off this nonsense. Her literary pursuits are now at an end unless the proceedings of the elders be interfered with by her progressive husband; but alas, such husbands are extremely rare. Our schools, too, are not very attractive to children; the teachers of primary schools, (and it is to these schools that girls are usually sent), are but nominally educated, and do not know how to make the lessons interesting for children. Consequently a great many of the girls who have been educated up to the second or third standard (grade) in these primary schools make it their business quickly to forget their lessons as soon as they find an opportunity. Shut in from the world and destitute of the ability to engage in newspaper and useful book-reading, they have little or no knowledge of common things around them, and of the most important events that are daily occurring in their own or foreign lands. Ignorant, unpatriotic, selfish and uncultivated, they drag the men down with them into the dark abyss where they dwell together without hope, without ambition to be something or to do something in the world.

**III. Native Women Teachers** — American and English women as Zenana missionaries are doing all they can to elevate and enlighten India's daughters. These good people deserve respect and praise from all, and the heartfelt thanks of those for whose elevation they toil, but the disabilities of an unfriendly

climate, and of an unknown tongue make it exceedingly difficult for them to enter upon their work for some time after reaching India; and then, "what are these among so many?" They are literally lost among the nearly one hundred millions of women under British rule to whom must be added several millions more under Hindu and Mahommedan rule. In America and in England we hear encouraging reports from mission fields, which state that a few thousand Hindu and Mahommedan women and girls are being instructed in schools or in their own homes, but these seem as nothing, compared to the vast multitude of the female population of Hindustan. In a country where castes and the seclusion of women are regarded as essential tenets of the national creed, we can scarcely hope for a general spread of useful knowledge among women; through either men of their own race or through foreign women. All experience in the past history of mankind has shown that efforts for the elevation of a nation must come from within and work outward to be effectual.

*The one thing needful, therefore, for the general diffusion of education among women in India is a body of persons from among themselves who shall make it their life-work to teach by precept and example their fellow-countrywomen.*

## E V Ramaswamy

1879-1973

### WHY WAS WOMAN ENSLAVED?

(Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Publication, 1952,  
14th edition).

A collection of articles written over a period of 50 years  
by Thandai Periyar (E. V. Ramasamy).

(Introduction by K. Veeramani,  
the current head of the Dravida Kazhagam,  
who says that this collection contains the ideas of  
Bertrand Russell and how this reveals that great thinkers  
think alike).

The book is made up of ten chapters entitled Chastity, Valluvar and Chastity, Love, Divorce, Remarriage Is Not Wrong, Prostitution, Condition of Widows, Right to Property, Birth-Control, For Women's Liberation 'Manhood' Must Be Destroyed. Following are excerpts from some of the chapters.)

#### **Chastity**

... There is nothing that proves that chastity concerns only women. The word actually means something that cannot be destroyed; something that is strong. ... Chastity in English actually refers to virginity. Seen that way, this would apply not to men or women but to the entire human society and it refers to a purity that has nothing to do with the sexual union of the male and the female.... But the Aryan language renders the word chastity to mean pativrata. In my opinion, it is here that the meaning slave is inserted for the word chastity. In other words, the meaning that emerges is of one who considers her husband a god and who has taken the penance to be his slave. Moreover the word pati is meant as the superior, the master and the leader and these terms strengthen the condition of slavery. ... The Dharma Shastras that refer to women and other texts on women, had they been written by women, or if women had to define the term

chastity, would they have defined it to mean the quality of a pativrata, is a matter to be considered.

Since chastity was supposed to mean the pativrata quality and since men have been made in a way to have better wealth, income and physical strength, the enslavement of women has been made possible and it has also turned men into imbeciles who think that chastity is not for them. Moreover, male-domination is the reason why words in our language which denote the chastity of men, have been kept hidden. In this matter, apart from Russia, no other country, religion or society has behaved in an honest manner....

One cannot say that laws and religion alone have been responsible for this condition. It must be said that women have accepted and added the perpetuation of this condition. Just as the backward castes, due to practices of many years obey, get controlled and turn untouchables on their own, so also women consider themselves the property of men, bound to men and not wanting to annoy men are not perturbed about their own freedom. If women have to be truly liberated, the system of having chastity forced on just one set of people must be eradicated. Both parties must have a system of chastity that is of their own choice. Forced marriages that make unwanted relationships happen making chastity a reason, must go. Oppressive religion and laws that demand that for the sake of chastity, a woman must put up with the husband's animal behaviour, must be totally removed.

### **Divorce**

In no other country is the husband-wife relationship as much of a torture as it is in ours. Our entire concept of marriage is, in short, nothing but the enslavement of women by men. In order to dupe women we create rituals that hide the aspect of slavery and call it divine marriage and cheat women. ...

If these oppressions continue this way, within a short time, within a matter of half a century, marriage rituals and marital relationship may almost disappear. Knowing this, scholars abroad are loosening the hold of this oppression. Only our country is holding on to it tight like a monkey's grip. So, a revolution from below by women is most needed in our country.

In the Self-Respect meeting at Chenglepet, when we passed a resolution supporting divorce and later in Madras, in the Women's Meet, when it was resolved that there should be laws for marriage, even those who called themselves reformers screamed as if it was the end of the world.... If women have to progress, if they have to have humaneness, human rights and self-respect, if men want satisfaction, happiness, true love and character, divorce must be allowed. Until then, true happiness and independent lives will not be possible for men and women....

### **Prostitution**

The term prostitution is used to denote male-female sexual relationship.... It is a term that is used to confer guilt and blame (on women).... Such accusations, abuse and insults don't apply to women. No man is called a prostitute and abused. Even if called so no man would be annoyed. So, experientially speaking, the term prostitution is an indicative term for women's slavery because, the guilt of prostitution and character-loss that follows prostitution, is normally only for women. It is not at all so for men.

We can state an example for this. In our country so far, we have only blamed women for prostitution by excommunicating them from their castes, throwing them out of homes, torturing them by battering them and even murdering them in some instances. We haven't seen or heard any instance of men being subjected to this. At times, prostitution has boosted a man's ego and has added to his prestige. We hear some men even boasting about it. Even people get angry only when called son of a prostitute. No one objects to being the son of a prostitute-father. Men get angry only when their wives are called mistresses or prostitutes. They get upset that their honour is at stake.... Looking at these experiences and the way men treat women in sexual relationships, it is clear that what lies behind the term prostitution is a philosophy that considers women the slaves of men and as objects that can be rented out or sold. ...

We don't totally deny that there must be some restrictions and discipline for people in general. But they cannot be general rules like rules that apply to other types of relationships like the ruler-ruled, master-servant, employer-employee. Rules that apply to

public life must not affect the individual liberty of anyone in the general public or differentiate or create hierarchical differences. More than anything else, they should not go against natural functioning. All this must also not harm in any way, the justifiable rights and freedom of others. When we say justifiable we need not go and look into the Dharma Shastras for what is justifiable. What is justifiable must be decided by whether a person can grant someone else the same thing that he claims as justifiable for himself. In other words, it must be the same for two persons and it must go along with knowledge, possibility and experience and also be necessary.... Hence, what is called prostitution now and the philosophy behind it, as we have elaborated above, has enslaved women and is built on the notion that women are slaves and since it does not include men in any way, it is not acceptable. If work connected with women's freedom and women's liberation has to face the hurdle of (being linked with) 'prostitution', the duty of the true worker is to throw the hurdle away boldly and walk on.

### **Property Rights**

There are many oppressions in India which are not found generally in any other part of the world which go against humanity, justice and rationality. But two things need immediate solution in order to prove that Indians are not barbarians, that they have human qualities and are a civilized society so that they can be respected by the world and so that they can call themselves capable of defending and ruling their country like many others who do so without the help of outsiders. The first one is the practice of turning communities with a population of several crores into untouchables and to treat them even worse than irrational animals and insects and worms without feelings. The second one is to hold the entire women-community, in general, as being by their very birth, undeserving of freedom and maintain the notion that "god" has created them to be slaves of men and to treat them like walking corpses. These two matters, whatever the reason for their existence, must be eradicated and not allowed to remain in India even for half a second. ...

Our politicians called nationalists, do not pay any attention to such matters and when we do propoganda regarding any such

matter they say it is against nationalism and that laws can be made once swarajya is achieved. When anyone else brings such bills in the legislative assembly, they say that reforms cannot be brought about by laws; that only propagation of ideas can bring them about. They have been managing by tricking and cheating people.

Under such conditions, our first duty is to do away with the right that only men can take up such efforts. Women must enter into these activities with all determination. Women's first struggle must be to have the same property rights as men. If women have property rights all their difficulties will go. If we see how mere (deva)dasis are free in their own families and community because they have property rights, we can understand how much better the lives of family women would be if they had property rights. Moreover, no one has stated so far the reason why women have not been given property rights. If parents give their daughters education and profession, women will have the capability to acquire property. Then they can choose their own husbands or acquire the quality to live a liberated life with even those husbands chosen by their parents.

The most important reason among several for women's slavery, in our opinion, is not having property rights. It is very important and urgent that women must freely and boldly come forward and struggle for property rights.

### **Birth-Control**

There is a fundamental difference between our reasons and the reasons of others for the need for birth-control. We say that there should be birth-control to liberate women and for women to gain freedom. Others advocate it for the health of women, for the health of the children, for the economy of the country and for not creating more shares thereby lessening and spoiling the family property. Many abroad also support it. But our concept does not give importance to these reasons. As said above, since generally pregnancy comes in the way of women's liberation and freedom, women's reproduction must be totally stopped. Not only that, by begetting many children, even men cannot be free, courageous or liberated. The truth of this can be found out when a man or a woman start talking whenever their freedom is affected. ...

When people in the world are in that position where they have to suffer physically and mentally for their livelihood and give up their freedom and self-respect and be slaves to earn a living, if they are burdened with the necessity to take care of children, how can they be free? Therefore, in today's world, for the freedom of both men and women, pregnancy and begetting children, is a hurdle. Specially for women's freedom, pregnancy is a terrible opposition. Since they don't have property, or earnings or a profession women are forced to depend on others to bring up their children. That is why we say firmly that women must stop begetting children. Moreover, pregnancy is the main reason for women falling ill, getting old at an early age, for reducing their life-expectancy and for their untimely deaths. Besides, while among men there are bachelors, sanyasis, Shankaracharyas and saints, what prevents bachelors and Shankaracharyas being created among women, prevents them from living freely or to be millionaires or to hold positions and be admired and respected by men and women, is pregnancy. Given this situation, we say that women must stop getting children so that they can be free, liberated and can progress. ...

### **For Women's Liberation 'Manhood' Must be Destroyed**

Everyone is aware that in the name of women's liberation there are many associations and efforts that are growing in many places all over the world. Even men pretend to be concerned about these efforts. No liberation movement that is based on male efforts, will, in any way, grant women true liberation. At present, in our opinion, even movements spearheaded by women for women's liberation will not only reap no results but on the other hand, will create more and more restrictions that will enslave women further. Just as the consequence of brahmins and foreigners who think that brahmins represent this country, beginning to work for the liberation of the Dravidians has led to more Dravidian enslavement creating everyday strong restrictions that will deny liberation forever, similarly when brahmins and Aryan myth-makers who have pretensions about social reforms and equality enter into reform activities, social oppressions and inequalities get strengthened through religion and laws.



Moreover, men working for women's liberation enslaves women further and restrictions to deny liberation forever get more and more strengthened. Saying that they are working hard for women's liberation and giving respect to women is nothing but a trickery of men. Can rats be ever liberated by cats? Can lambs and chicken be ever liberated by foxes? Can Indians become wealthy by the efforts of Britishers? Can non-brahmins ever gain equality by the efforts of brahmins? If one considers all this one will understand the truth of what was stated. It can be strongly stated that even if the above things are possible sometime, women will never get their liberation through men. This is so because women must not forget that the term 'manhood' itself is in usage in the world to denigrate women. Women must remember that so long as that "manhood" exists in the world there is no respect for womanhood. So long as "manhood" holds, women's slavery will increase. Unless women destroy the philosophy of "manhood" there is surely no liberation for women. It is "manhood" that has enslaved women. Qualities like freedom and courage have been attributed to "manhood" in the world. Men have decided that only men have these qualities. Moreover, women must fully realise that Hindu religion grants them no liberation or freedom in any aspect.

Regarding women the Hindu religion states that god has created woman as prostitute by birth and that she cannot be free at any time and that she should be controlled by the father as a child and by her sons in her old age. Hindu Shastras and Puranas say that Draupadi and Arundati are divine proofs of the statement they made that women can be pativratas only if there are no men and no secluded places around...

For inequality among people to be destroyed, it is necessary to destroy the notion that god has created people unequal by birth. Similarly, for women to be truly liberated, the notion of godliness that god is supposed to have created "manhood" and "womanhood" must be destroyed. ...

[Contributed by C. S. Lakshmi].

## M K Gandhi

(From Gandhi on Women, Pushpa Joshi,  
Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, and  
Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.)

### SPEECH AT WOMEN'S MEETING, DAKOR

October 27, 1920

*Sisters,*

**A**ll of you should listen to me in silence. I will finish what I have to say in a few words. While some of you belong to Dakor, others must be visitors to this place of pilgrimage. I am sure there is hardly any among you in this large gathering who is fully aware of the present plight of India. What is our duty, our dharma, in the condition in which India is placed today? You have all come to this place of pilgrimage with feelings of devotion. You probably believe that you will be rid of your sins through the darshan of the Dakor shrine, that you will have your heart's desire granted if you take a dip in the Gomati. Some of you may be thinking that by having darshan of a mahatma like this Gandhi, they will be sanctified. This is far from the truth. In fact, you pollute the Gomati if you merely bathe in it without purifying your hearts. It will avail you little if, going for the darshan of Dakorji, you leave behind there only the dirt on your feet. The darshan can bear fruit only if we purify our hearts, fill them with good thoughts and attain self-knowledge. You yourselves will ask what good such darshan can do to a sceptic like myself or to a Christian. I wish to make it clear to you that so long as the heart is not purified and the mind not cleansed, darshan of Ranchhodraji or bathing in the Gomati can bear no fruit.

First of all, I request you, my sisters, to understand the true meaning of religion. So long as you do not do this, you will not

realize what the present condition of India is. While you look upon the present Government as your parents and believe that you live in peace under it, you will not be able to free yourselves from slavery. I believe that the Government has enslaved us. For thirty years, I thought that we were happy under the protection of the British Government, but now I am convinced that, instead of being sheltered by the Government, we burn in its scorching heat. We are about to lose all sense of dharma. On my way, I saw a signboard which said that we lose caste by eating in hotels. This is true enough, but it is not the whole truth. When were these hotels introduced? It was under the present Government. Why were they introduced? Because the present Government taught us to lead a life of ease and luxury. We now prefer bazar-made preparations to what is cooked at home and violate the strict restrictions of the Vaishnava way. This is a Government which collects hundreds of thousands of rupees by trafficking in liquor and opium. It is said in the Shastras that a king who carries on trade is of the middle order, one who raises money from his subjects just enough to help him protect them is of the highest order, but one who collects revenue by making addicts and drunkards of his subjects is of the lowest order. I have come here to make you, my sisters, realize that our present Government is of this last order.

We have been taught in the Bhagavad Gita to treat all men as equals. The Hindus and Muslims are like the two eyes of the country. There should be no enmity between them. But we look with contempt upon them, do not associate ourselves with them, and treat them as our enemies. Today this Government is bent upon destroying the religion of the Muslims. If it can destroy their religion today, it can destroy ours tomorrow.

And now about the Punjab. Perhaps you have not even heard of the Punjab. But it is through the Punjab that our rishis entered India. The Punjab is the land in which the rishis wrote the Shastras. It is in this same Punjab that the Government humiliated our men and women, whipped the children, and forced the people to crawl on their stomachs like serpents. It is against dharma to accept the authority of such a Government. That is why I tell you that we should overthrow this Ravanarajya and establish Ramarajya in its place.

My second request to you is that you should adopt swadeshi. This Government has taught us false ways. We have come to believe that foreign cloth adds to one's beauty. Even the clothes worn by you, in this gathering, have the odour of foreign cloth. Even mill cloth is not swadeshi. The cloth produced by the mills is not sufficient to meet the needs of the country. You are not quite so poor. I have seen people who are poorer than you. I have seen men who have only a loin-cloth with which to clothe themselves and women who have no more than a torn skirt. We can set ourselves free this very day if India adopts swadeshi, if all women take to the good old spinning-wheel and if they put on clothes made only with yarn spun by themselves. To the women of the past, virtue was beauty. Wearing of foreign cloth makes a woman ugly. There is a touch of the harlot in a woman seeking loveliness by fine dressing. What is our image of Sita and Damayanti, whom we adore? Is it that of women clad in finery? We revere Damayanti who wandered in the forest, half-clad, and Sita who suffered vanavasa for fourteen years. Was Harishchandra's queen, who served as a maid, dressed in fine clothes? In those days, people covered themselves with nothing more than leaves. To seek beauty by adorning oneself is to imitate the harlot. If you want to follow your dharma, you must first understand the swadeshi dharma. It consists in using cloth made with yarn spun by yourselves and woven by your menfolk, singing as they work. I am truly handsome, since the clothes I am wearing are made with yarn spun by women and lovingly woven by men. If you wish to deliver yourselves from Ravanarajya and establish Ramarajya, you must adopt swadeshi and introduce the spinning-wheel in your homes. There are many women now who will be able to teach you how to work it. Each one of you should spin for at least an hour daily, singing devotional songs the while. Get the yarn, afterwards woven into cloth.

You will no doubt find it difficult at first to use hand-spun cloth in place of foreign muslin. Some women in Bombay complained to me that their saris, which previously weighed less than forty tolas now exceeded seventy tolas in weight. I replied to them in figurative language, saying that, they had till now lowered their own weight by reducing the weight of their clothes. During pregnancy, women cheerfully carry their load for nine months

and suffer the severe pains of child-birth with joy. This is the time for the birth of new India. Will you not be ready at least to carry the weight of heavy clothes at this hour? You can make India free only if you bear this burden. If you wish to give birth to a new India, every woman must bear this burden not merely for nine months but for nine years.

Secondly, do you know to what kind of schools you send your children? You send them to the schools of Ravanarajya. Would a devout Vaishnava ever send his or her children to the schools of an irreligious Government? Would I ever go to the wicked to learn the Gita or the Bhagavat from them? Our present schools are run by a wicked Government. So long as these schools are not run by us, do not send your children to them. Teach them Ramaraksha, teach them devotional songs, or go to the wise men of your town and request them to educate your children. But do not, under any circumstances, send them to the present schools.

A sister came and left Rs 5 for me. Till today, I have accepted nothing in this way. What I need, I obtain from friends. But now I want swaraj to be established and to run many schools; I cannot do all this by raising money from friends. If you want Ramarajya, you must work to that end. Contribute whatever you wish to. I shall use the amount for the cause of swadeshi and for running schools for your children. At present, some wicked men among us have made the shrine of Dakor a subject of litigation. Should we take disputes concerning our shrines to courts of law? This is wickedness. We must compensate lawyers for giving up their practice. If the arguments put forward by my colleagues and myself hold good, every pice you contribute will bring you two in return. With this money, your own law-courts will be run and the swadeshi movement will be carried on. The money that we contribute to these sacred places is being squandered by the wicked.

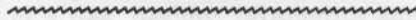
If you wish to be pure like Sita, if you would give up the many forms of subtle mental degradation of the kind I have described and make others give them up, if you wish to understand your true dharma rather than wickedness, then you must wholeheartedly join in the movement for swaraj. Each one of us must be able to distinguish between true dharma and wickedness. Many fraudulent men will also come to you for contributions.

I would ask you not to contribute to any of them. I hold out my hand to you only because I feel certain that you have trust in me. I shudder to introduce the corrupting influence of money in my work. Had I the strength and the tapascharya to be able to carry on my work without money, I would most certainly not ask for it. But I do not have such tapascharya and such strength. I also am a man of Kaliyuga and am full of failings, but I know that I am constantly striving to overcome these failings. So, if you trust me, contribute anything you wish to, from a pice onwards. The funds will be handled by the Swarajya Sabha.

Finally, I request you to see that these few things I have placed before you do not go in at one ear and come out at the other. By adopting swadeshi, you will be able to save some money on clothes. You will be able to give your children milk and ghee out of this. At present, you spend on your comforts and luxuries the money which could buy milk and ghee for your children. I, too, want a small share from the amount you will save. But contribute only you wish to. Even if you do not give money, you should at any rate follow the dharma of spinning which I have explained to you. We have today to wash off the pollution caused by the eclipse. The right way of doing so is to purify our hearts. If all of you take the name of Rama in good faith and pray for Ramarajya in place of Ravanarajya, I can assure you that you will find that Rama is the strength of the weak. May your hearts be ruled by God and may He set you free from all other forms of enslavement.

[*Navajivan*, 3-11-1920, *CWMG*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 391-95, translated from Gujarati.]

**VISIONS FOR  
A  
NEW NATION**



# Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties

(As Ratified by the Standing Committee of the  
All-India Women's Conference at its Meeting in Calcutta  
in July 1946)

## Preamble

Whereas we believe that freedom and equality are essential to human development and whereas woman is as much a human being as man and, therefore, entitled to share them with him;

Whereas we believe that the well-being and progress of society depend on the extent to which both men and women are able to develop their full personality and are cognisant of their responsibilities to themselves and to each other;

Whereas we believe that woman has thus a definite role to play in the building of a free, healthy, prosperous and moral society and that she can fulfil this obligation only as a free and responsible member;

Whereas we believe that the position of woman in India is far from satisfactory and is in large measure responsible for the backwardness of the country;

We deem it essential that the status of the Indian woman be improved and brought on a par with that of man so that she may contribute her legitimate share to the general reconstruction of the life of this country and of a wider world. It is with this object in view that these demands are framed with regard to the rights of the Indian woman whether as an individual or as a member of society as a basis for future legislation.

## Fundamental Rights

Whereas in a democratic society, no citizen can be denied the fundamental rights based on the principle of human equality and



whereas women in this country are denied some of these rights, the All-India Women's Conference affirm that:-

- (a) all citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of caste, creed or sex; and
- (b) no disability attaches to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

### **I. Civic Rights**

Whereas we cannot accept the present basis of franchise, which restricts the number of enfranchised men and women specially the number of women — to a small percentage of the total population; and whereas we cannot accept the special qualification for women which requires them to be the wives of voters enfranchised on a property qualification, the All-India Women's Conference affirm that:-

- (a) Every man and woman of twenty-one and above, unless otherwise disqualified, shall have a right to vote in elections to the Legislatures, Central or Provincial, to Municipalities and Local Bodies; and
- (b) that woman shall have a right to be represented on Legislatures, Municipalities, Local Bodies and all Committees, Conferences, Commissions or Delegations that Government may appoint or call whether for service at home or abroad.

### **II. Education**

Whereas freedom from ignorance is one of the essential freedoms without which neither an individual nor a nation can hope to go forward; and whereas this fundamental right has not been vouchsafed to millions of men and women in this country as can be seen from the total percentage of literacy which comes to about thirteen for whole country and about two for women; and whereas the little education that is given is most defective in that it has not advanced the cultural, intellectual, physical or spiritual growth of the people, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:-

- (a) The present system of education be overhauled and a system more suited to the needs and requirements of the country be adopted;
- (b) No basic difference be made between the education of man and woman as their duties as citizens are the same;
- (c) The (1) Pre-basic, (2) Basic, (3) Secondary, (4) Vocational, (5) University and (6) Adult education form an integral part of the system of education; and the medium of instruction throughout be the recognised language of the Province;
- (d) Basic education be a seven years' course and be made free and compulsory for every boy and girl from the age of seven to the age of fourteen;
- (e) In view in particular of the lack of teachers, equipment and buildings, co-education be adopted in all stages, with a possible exception in the secondary stage until prejudice against it has been overcome;
- (f) Government shall through legislation, if necessary, make immediate efforts to eradicate the evils of child marriage, child labour, purdah and untouchability which come in the way of education specially of girls' education;
- (g) Government shall give aid to such poor parents as are reluctant to send their girls to school for economic reasons by awarding scholarships to the girls, providing books and materials free, and by such other means;
- (h) Government shall help the brighter and more intelligent girls who should continue their studies even after the compulsory period is over and who are unable to do so for financial reasons by providing scholarships, freships, books, and by such other means;
- (i) Physical education through exercises and games and education for health shall form part of the school curricula;
- (j) Secondary education shall be as varied as circumstances permit and shall not be unduly restricted by the requirements of universities or examining bodies;
- (k) A large number of Secondary Schools shall be provided so that such education may be within the reach of everyone who needs it;

- (l) In order to facilitate vocational training among women, there shall be provision for Polytechnics on an extensive scale;
- (m) Regional Universities shall be established so that more men and women can take advantage of higher education;
- (n) Education in Art, Music and Home Science shall form part of the University curricula;
- (o) Hostels shall be provided to facilitate women joining the various educational institutions either as students or teachers;
- (p) There shall be a large number of Institutions for training of women teachers to meet the growing need; and scholarship and freeship be provided to induce more women to take the training; and that refresher courses for teachers be provided at regular intervals;
- (q) The status of teachers shall be raised in order to attract the better educated women by improving the conditions of their service, providing, *inter alia*, for better pay, free housing, and a social insurance scheme which would include maternity benefit;
- (r) Primary schools, Secondary schools and other Educational Institutions shall be housed in their own buildings;
- (s) Special facilities for the education of adult women in rural areas shall be provided by Government such as residential schools for adults on the lines of the Folk Schools in Denmark;
- (t) Health education including nutrition and citizenship shall form part of the curricula of adult education; and mobile exhibitions with competent lecturers who would demonstrate on all matters pertaining to village life including model homes, hygiene, 'sanitation' care of children, kitchens, gardens, etc., etc., be organised;
- (u) Every village with a school shall have a library and a reading room; and
- (v) Governments and Municipalities shall actively help in the cultural education of the people by establishing Central Libraries, Art Galleries, Museums and National Theatres in order to enable them to make wise use of their leisure.

### III Health

Whereas the health of every man, woman and child is the nation's greatest asset and whereas conditions in this country are such that they have undermined the health of the people as can be seen from the appalling death rate and the figures for maternal and infant mortality, and whereas these conditions must be improved, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:-

- (a) A nation-wide plan of free health services, including medical, dental and hospital treatment and provision for free medical examination be adopted;
- (b) A nation-wide plan of free pre-natal and infant welfare clinics, maternity hospitals and nursing services be adopted;
- (c) All preventive measures such as medical inspection of school children, child welfare centres, sanitation, general hygiene, industrial hygiene, and immunisation services be taken;
- (d) More facilities for the training of men and women doctors as well as health visitors be provided;
- (e) Steps be taken to popularise the profession of nursing in order to induce more women to join it and the conditions of service of the nurses and the probationers who are under training be improved by way of adequate housing, pay and allowances, regulating hours of work, facilities for recreation, holidays with pay and social insurance;
- (f) The training in nursing be given through the medium of recognised provincial language;
- (g) The public be educated to recognise the early signs of disease such as tuberculosis, cancer, leprosy and venereal disease;
- (h) Adequate facilities be provided for the segregation and free treatment of infectious diseases including leprosy and venereal disease;
- (i) Government or local bodies concerned shall take steps for the provision of a clean water supply and drainage system as well as for the proper disposal of refuse in rural and urban areas;
- (j) Overcrowding in houses be stopped by law;

- (k) Government shall take steps to improve the bad housing in urban as well as rural areas, such as:
- (1) abolition of one-room tenements;
  - (2) fixing of a minimum standard for homes in towns or villages with regard to size, area and equipment and not permitting any building below this standard;
  - (3) including a separate kitchen, separate bathroom and a separate lavatory among the minimum requirements of the home;
  - (4) building homes with low rentals by Government or Municipalities for persons with low income;
  - (5) including a small garden for each cottage and a playground for children for a group of cottages; and
  - (6) Organising by Government or Municipalities of exhibitions, demonstrations and Cinema shows to educate the people, in particular women, to keep their homes and surroundings clean; and to beautify their homes and make them comfortable.

#### **IV. Moral Standards**

Social conditions and the chronic economic distress in this country have raised an ugly problem, viz, the traffic in women and children. Advantage is taken of the helplessness of women destitutes to entice them for immoral purposes. The All-India Women's Conference, therefore, demand that:-

- (a) there shall be an equal moral standard for men and women;
- (b) rescue homes on scientific lines be established to rehabilitate women who have been victims of the evil;
- (c) Rules and Regulations be framed for the conduct of Homes and Hostels meant for women so that no nefarious practice may be carried on under the guise of running such Homes; and
- (d) steps be taken to improve the social and economic condition of the people in order to minimise and eventually eradicate the evil.

## V. Work

Whereas in a democratic State the right to work is a fundamental right of every individual whether man or woman; and whereas no disability should attach to woman on the ground of her sex in regard to public employment, office of power or in the exercise of any trade or calling; and whereas woman must receive the same payment as man for the same amount of work she does, the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) there shall be no bar to the employment of married or unmarried women provided they are prepared to abide by the conditions of service;
- (b) no woman shall be debarred owing to sex from the enjoyment of full equality regarding social and labour rights and duties, but both men and women shall equally receive special consideration on grounds of health and in the case of women on grounds of motherhood.
- (c) while women workers shall have the same facilities as men workers with regard to pay which should be a living wage, leave, hours of work, sickness allowance, holidays with pay and free medical treatment; and shall have the same amenities with regard to bathrooms, lavatories, canteens serving hot meals, etc, they shall be allowed special facilities by way of:
  - (1) creches for their babies and nursery schools;
  - (2) rest rooms for expectant and nursing mothers;
  - (3) milk canteens for the children, nursing and expectant mothers;
  - (4) a break during work for expectant and nursing mothers; and
  - (5) maternity benefits which shall form part of a comprehensive scheme of social insurance.

## VI. Home Making

Whereas the work of the housewife has so far received no recognition in the sense that no steps have been taken or contemplated for the protection of one who works from morning

till night without rest or holiday; and whereas we believe the work of a housewife to be as important as any other, we deem it essential, in the interest of these women who are the home-makers and the mothers of the race, that steps be taken for the raising of their status, for the protection of their health and for providing leisure in order to enable them to improve their mind, and the All-India Women's Conference, therefore, demand that:

- (a) the husband shall have no right to dispose of his entire property without the consent of his wife;
- (b) the woman who works in the home shall have a right to a part of her husband's income to be used by her as she likes;
- (c) in any scheme of social insurance that Government may introduce for the benefit of the workers who work outside home such as workers in fields or factories, teachers or nurses, the home-maker shall be included for purposes of benefit; and any contribution to be made to the fund shall be deducted from the husband's income if the wife has no separate income of her own;
- (d) creches, infant classes, and pre-basic schools shall be provided by the Government or Municipalities; and
- (e) facilities shall be provided for the woman to learn how to run her home in a systematic and scientific way.

## **VII. Property Rights**

Whereas we believe that woman should have the same rights as man to hold, acquire, inherit and dispose of property; and whereas some of those rights are denied to women or if given are given on an unequal basis; the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) the sex disqualification by which women have hitherto been precluded from inheriting in various parts of India be removed;
- (b) woman shall inherit in her absolute right; and
- (c) there shall be no discrimination between sons and daughters, i. e., both shall have equal shares in the property of their father or mother.

### **VIII. Marriage**

Whereas we believed that the marriage laws in this country are one-sided and have made the lives of many women unbearable; the All-India Women's Conference demand that the laws be improved and changed to suit modern conditions of life by providing that:

- (a) No marriage shall take place if either the girl is below the age of 16 or the boy is below the age of 21.
- (b) Neither party shall have a husband or a wife living at the time of marriage.
- (c) The consent of both the parties concerned shall be necessary before their marriage.
- (d) There shall be no restriction to marriage on the grounds of caste or community; and no declaration shall be necessary to renounce their religion before two persons can marry.
- (e) Either party shall have the right to dissolve the marriage under certain conditions including cruelty, desertion for three years, suffering from incurable disease and impotency.
- (f) Such cases for divorce shall be conducted *in camera* before a special matrimonial court.
- (g) A wife who has obtained a divorce from her husband shall be entitled to claim alimony from him until such time as she marries again.
- (h) The dowry system be abolished by law.

### **IX. Woman's Place in the Family**

Whereas we believe that the still prevalent conception of the family as an institution with man as the head who looks upon his wife and children as his property is wrong; and whereas we believe that laws affected by such a conception must be changed and the family be regarded as a co-operative concern where every member has an equal place: the All-India Women's Conference demand that:

- (a) woman shall be considered as much a guardian of the children as man is;
- (b) man shall have no right to deprive her of this right;



- (c) in case of dispute as to the guardianship of the minor children, the Court shall decide the issue taking into consideration the age and the sex of the child or children, and the fitness or otherwise of the parent concerned;
- (d) neither husband nor wife shall have the right to adopt a child without the consent of the other if he or she is alive, and that child can be of either sex;
- (e) such adoption will have to be made with the sanction of a Court of Law;
- (f) The wife shall have a right to limit her family. It shall be the duty of the state to provide facilities for acquiring the necessary knowledge by married women who desire to have it for health and economic reasons only through recognised hospitals or maternity homes.

#### **X. Duties of Woman**

Whereas we believe that while woman has the same rights as man, she also has the same obligations towards the society of which she is a member; that whereas it is the duty of man and woman to be prepared to serve the nation when called upon to do so during a national crisis or calamity or in times of national need; and whereas national services in this country such as teaching, nursing, etc., suffer through lack of women personnel the All-India Women's Conference call upon women in this country:

- (1) to come forward in large numbers to take to these essential services;
- (2) to come forward for work in time of national need;
- (3) to educate themselves for good citizenship.
- (4) to organise themselves to fight against the social evils which retard the progress of this country such as child marriage; purda, polygamy, caste, communalism, untouchability, etc.;
- (5) to educate and bring up children if any to become good citizens;
- (6) to set and maintain a high standard of morality in all spheres of life; and
- (7) to strive to the utmost for world peace.

[Hansa Mehta, *Indian Woman*, Butalia and Co., Delhi, 1981].

# Woman's Role in Planned Economy

(Report of the Sub-Committee of National Planning  
Committee set up in 1938. Report Published in 1948)

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Chapter I — Civic Rights

1. We fully endorse the declaration of the Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India made by the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress in 1931 which lays down that:

- (a) "All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.
- (b) "No disability attaches to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed, or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.
- (c) "The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage."

2. Woman shall have the right to vote, to represent and the right to hold public offices.

3. An identical moral standard of morality shall be insisted on for both man and woman—one that harmonises social welfare with individual freedom.

4. The State shall ensure the health of the race by:

- (a) the granting of medical certificates before marriage to both parties;
- (b) the sterilisation of the unfit under strictest medical advice and care, in circumstances to be laid down by the State; and
- (c) the disposal of the embryo strictly for reasons of the mother's health, or where the pregnancy is the result of rape, assault, etc.

5. The establishment of a nationalised health service which will work through a series of health stations with a network of dispensaries, maternity homes and hospitals all over the country. Provision should be made for specialised care of all diseases in hospitals and for after-care which should be given free service in these homes at the time of childbirth.

6. Maternity homes shall be established in rural as well as in urban areas. There should be at least one maternity bed established for every thousand of the population. Every woman should be entitled to free service in these homes at the time of childbirth.

7. The health programme should include the establishment of a chain of maternal welfare centres which will give all the necessary information to women and include pre-natal and post-natal clinics. These will be in charge of women doctors with special knowledge of maternity and child-welfare.

8. The gradual replacement of the indigenous Dai by fully qualified midwives within the next ten or fifteen years.

9. The health programme should include the establishment by the State of research centres where food values can be worked out so that it may be possible to introduce correctly balanced diets in every home.

10. The establishment of a national service of housing which will ensure to every citizen a house to live in with a minimum cubic space, light, air and sanitation. But while the private ownership of housing exists, the State should lay down the minimum requirements and fix the rent of houses in both rural and urban areas.

11. A scheme of social insurance, contributed to by the State and the individual. This should include benefits in case of temporary disability, sickness, accident, pregnancy and child-birth, assistance for the care and nursing of the new-born, child sickness benefits and old-age pensions.

12. Every human being is entitled to a certain amount of leisure for self-development by:

- (a) cessation of all work during the day at a fixed hour so that the midday meal can be conveniently taken and the housewife released from the duties of the kitchen;

- (b) the establishment of well-organised co-operative services such as restaurants, laundries, etc., under the management of local bodies;
- (c) provision of whole-time creches and nurseries; and
- (d) the State providing suitable parks and open spaces in the city where people can spend their leisure and preserve the health necessary for carrying on their work efficiently.

13. Every person born in India, whether in the provinces or Indian States, should be regarded as an Indian citizen. Women should have the right to choose their own nationality in the event of their marrying a non-national. Persons born of alien parents in India, should have the right on reaching majority to choose their nationality.

14. Every child, whether born in wedlock or out of wedlock, is born with certain rights. He shall have a right to education, to health, to protection from abuse, neglect, economic exploitation and moral hazard.

15. A Children's Charter of Rights shall be drawn up on the basis of the U.S.A. Children's Charter and shall include:

- (a) Orphans generally and more specially girls who are liable to exploitation. They require special protection from the State during the period of transition. We recommend that all orphans should be registered and that both in urban and rural areas they should be under the protection of an officer or "guardian" who will see that no exploitation takes place.
- (b) Children are frequently bound down by parents and guardians to life-long commitments before they have attained the age of majority and the very nature of the commitments is not understood by them. Child marriage, dedication to temples, etc., are instances in point. We recommend legislation to be passed whereby every child who is shouldered with such a burden should, on reaching the age of majority, be given a choice whether he wishes to abide by the commitment or to end it.

## Chapter II — Economic Rights

### **Economic Activities**

16. No impediments should be placed in the way of women holding public office or employment which might in effect prevent women from taking their full and equal share in civic duties and obligations. They should, however, be eligible in the same way as men, and on the same conditions for all grades and branches of public service, employment, and in the pursuit of trades and professions.

17. No further attempts should be made to stop married women workers from earning an independent wage and an investigation should be carried on to collect information regarding her difficulties.

18. Whatever policy the N.P.C. adopts in respect of rationalisation, they should safeguard the interests of women and see that rationalisation is not effected on grounds of sex; and that any provisions made for allaying the unemployment resulting from such rationalisation shall be for all wage earners irrespective of sex.

19. Any steps taken to protect the health of the women workers should not be considered as for their exclusive benefit only, but as taken in the interests of the whole nation. Hence due provision should be made to see that women workers are not victimized or that their position does not deteriorate further by reason of the measures taken for their protection.

20. Sickness insurance of industrial labourers should include benefits in cash in case of maternity as well as child sickness. Due provision should be made in the leave rules of a woman worker to get leave on the ground of the sickness of her child. It should also be provided for in the rules that the above provision is not made a ground for dismissal.

21. No occupation should be prohibited to women unless an alternative scheme of employment is provided by law for those thrown out of work as a result of such prohibition.

22. The jobber system should go and educated women supervisors should be employed to look after the welfare of the women workers.

23. Night shifts shall be so arranged as to enable the employment of women in such shifts.

24. The Labour Sub-Committee should devote special attention to the problem of equal wage for equal work and recommend ways and means of bringing this theory into practical effect, without creating unemployment or barring employments to women. As we have already mentioned in 'Work on the Land' we do not wish that separate wages be given to the women workers of a family, but recommend that they should be made co-sharers in the collective income of the family.

The wage fixing machinery suggested by the Labour Sub-Committee should be authorised to investigate into the question of equal wages and to suggest ways and means of putting this principle into practical effect without creating unemployment or barring employment to women. When the Planning Authority decides to fix a minimum or living wage, consideration must be paid only to the principle that for equal work, equal wages shall be paid, both to men and women workers, irrespective of sex. No consideration should be paid to the status of the worker, whether married or single, whether he or she has to support a family or not. The wage fixing authority must only take into account the actual work turned out and pay wages as determined in that behalf for that work and reckon it with consideration for children.

25. All payments should be made in cash and no part of the wages should be paid in kind; and that instead of truck shops, co-operative stores may be introduced for the convenience of the workers.

26. A Payment of Wages Act shall be enacted by all provincial governments whereby wages shall be paid direct to the worker.

27. Suitable measures shall be enacted obliging employers to make payments punctually.

28. The State shall ensure, all women wage-earners absolute control over their own earnings.

### **Facilities to the Wage Earner**

29. We endorse the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Labour that "in the event of any different scheme of social

insurance being adopted, maternity benefits should be incorporated and the cost shared by the State, the employer, and the worker.”

30. The present tendency of not employing women workers should be checked by effective means after further investigation.

31. Maternity benefits which will be paid to women must be of two types:

- (i) Cash. Determination of the exact amount of cash benefits should be left to a competent State authority. But it should be sufficient for the formation and healthy maintenance of the mother and the child.
- (ii) Kind. Should consist of free medical attention by a doctor or certified midwife, and health visitors before and after confinement.

32. All local bodies such as local boards, municipalities, gram panchayats, etc., should immediately start granting maternity benefits to their employees.

33. The creche and nursing centres scheme should come into effect on the lines suggested in recommendation 12. But during the transition period we recommend:

- (a) The financial burden of establishing creches and nursery centres shall be borne by the employers. The N.P.C. shall investigate the best method of effecting this proposal so that women workers are not victimised.
- (b) Local bodies should immediately establish creches, nursery centres and nursery schools for the children of their women employees.
- (c) Provinces and States which have no such acts as the Maternity Benefit Acts should not adopt such schemes, but should take up a scheme of social insurance on the lines suggested by the Planning Committee.

34. The State should lay down rules permitting new industries to be started in rural and urban areas only when provision has been made for the suitable accommodation of workers and their families. We realise that this would mean extra financial strain on the industry and to meet this we recommend that the State and the employer should co-operate to meet the cost.

35. A 48-hour week for both men and women which would leave time for leisure and recuperation.

36. Nursing women working in factories, mines and plantations should be provided with rest intervals in between the working hours to visit and nurse their babies in creches, etc.

37. Night work should only be prohibited to pregnant women and nursing mothers and for every person below the age of 18.

38. The provincial governments should enforce the provisions of the Indian Factories Act regarding installation of protective machinery and controlling of dust and other impurities in the air in the factories.

39. A system of health certificates should be established showing that the certified person's health permits him or her to be employed in certain unhealthy industries.

40. Long hours of standing in an unhealthy atmosphere has been one of the causes which has affected the health of the wage earner, and more especially of women. Seats should be provided for all workers. Regulations should be made to this effect.

41. Schemes of rationalisation or of prohibition of work to any group of workers should be so planned in future that those workers thrown out of employment would be absorbed in other work. What is meant to safeguard the wage earner should not act to her detriment.

### **Child Labour**

42. Child labour and the employment of children for wages under the age of 15 should be prohibited. During the transition stage, before compulsory education comes into force the raising of the age to 15 should be gradual so that it does not result in unemployment amongst those children already working. We are also of the opinion that whole-time work, between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. should be prohibited to boys and girls under 18.

### **Work in Organised Industries**

43. The planning authorities should consider the establishment of a Central Labour Exchange with a network of recruiting centres spread over all densely populated rural areas considered suitable for recruitment. The local gram panchayats or rural officers should be asked to co-operate in the task of recruitment.



The Labour Exchange should have on its board both men and women members and also representatives from trade unions and employers' associations. Its task should be to control and organise the immigration of labour and co-ordinate it in such a manner with the demand of various industrial centres that useless overcrowding and unemployment is avoided as far as possible. The exchange of labour in industries should also be encouraged.

The villager should be encouraged to bring the family with him and efforts should be directed to finding work for the members of his family in the same locality if not in the same industry in which he is working.

44. We endorse and urge the immediate adoption of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour: "That where women are engaged in substantial numbers, there should invariably be employed at least one educated woman in charge of their welfare and supervision throughout the factory. She should be responsible to the labour officer, where there is one, and to the manager where there is not, for the management and dismissal of all the female staff, whether permanent or temporary. If Naikins are employed they should be under her immediate control. It is important that she should be remunerated on a salary and not on a commission basis, and on a scale likely to attract the right type of woman for work of such responsibility."

"The successful inauguration, as well as the adequate enforcement of laws and welfare orders specially bearing upon the welfare of women and children such as those relating to maternity benefits, creches; etc., call for the services of trained women inspectors and we are confident that in India as in Great Britain their appointment has only to be made to prove its justification."

"We recommend that such women should be of Indian domicile and not younger than 25 years of age, and their remuneration should be on a scale calculated to attract and to hold the type of women required for work which will necessitate initiative, resource and self-reliance, and in the first decade at least, no small measure of pioneering enterprise."

"The appointment of one such woman in every province is desirable; but if this be not practicable, we recommend the appointment of part-time women officials in those provinces

where the number of women and children employed in regulated industries is smaller.”

45. All women, except pregnant women and nursing mothers, should be permitted to work in all forms of organised and heavy industries.

### **Work in Cottage Industries**

46. In industrial areas an effort should be made by the planning authorities to co-ordinate the main industry with the cottage industry in such a way that extra population which settles down with the worker in that area also gets employment.

### **Work on the Land**

47. The economic value of woman's work on land must be recognised and in lieu of cash payments, she should have the right to claim all facilities given by the State to other workers, viz., (a) medical help; (b) creches; (c) better conditions of work in the home as well as on the field; and (d) training for the work she is required to do.

### **Work in Home**

48. Women should have an absolute control over some part of the family income.

49. Women should have a share in the husband's property which he cannot will away.

50. The husband should give his wife's shares of the contribution to any social insurance scheme that may be introduced by the State.

51. Labour saving devices shall be introduced in the home which will relieve woman of the drudgery of her work.

52. Creches should be established by the State where she can leave her child or children whenever she wishes to be free.

### **Domestic Service**

53. Some regulations for domestic workers concerning hours of work, holidays, wages, health, etc., are very necessary. We recommend that the following suggestions be adopted:

- (a) Compulsory registration of all domestic workers.
- (b) Establishment of training centres.

- (c) Formation of domestic workers' union, registered and recognised by the State.
- (d) Half day holiday in every week and 15 days annual holiday with pay.
- (e) Provision for adequate housing facilities.
- (f) Fixing of minimum monthly wage.
- (g) A scheme of social insurance should be introduced.
- (h) Establishment of recreation and education clubs.
- (i) No girl under 15 should be employed as a worker.
- (j) Girls and boys under 18 should not be given full-time work.
- (k) Fifteen days' notice on either side before terminating service should be made compulsory.
- (l) Employment bureaux should be opened in every town.

### **Serfdom**

54. Vigorous propaganda and educational activities should be carried on amongst the serfs and a consciousness of their civic rights and of their self-respect should be created.

55. All loans of more than a prescribed amount or period should be wiped out and facilities to provide credit through banks should be made available.

56. A scheme should be provided to safeguard the interests of the aboriginal tribes to carry on educational activities amongst them.

### **Trade Unions**

57. Trade unionism amongst women of all categories must be encouraged. By facilitating collective bargaining, it will give them strength and help to protect their civic and economic rights. Trade unions should consist of both men and women workers and the rights of women should be safeguarded equally with those of men. We are entirely opposed to separate trade unions for women.

58. Trade unions should accept the principle of equality between man and woman and recognise the individual as a unit. They should realise that even though the number of women workers in their unions may be comparatively small, or they may not have been successful in enrolling any woman member at all,

yet they represent the interest of workers irrespective of sex. The Trade unions exist to safeguard the rights of these workers. It is up to them to see that their attitude does not by doing justice to one group create new problems amongst the less organised group of workers, i.e., the women.

59. Special propaganda must be carried on and training facilities should be given to women who wish to take up the career of organisers in trade unions.

60. Trade unions must be democratic in organisation to be welcome to all workers. Every individual member of the union should have an equal chance to rise to a position of control and authority.

61. An increasing effort shall be made to see that the governance of these unions become more and more the charge of the workers themselves.

62. All trade unions and employers shall keep a separate record of all women and children members. This will not only serve as a valuable information as far as the number of existing membership is concerned but will also be useful to register the progress in membership.

### **Insurance**

63. As worker in any recognised walk of life, the Planned Society shall see that all the contingencies of working life to which a woman is exposed in the course of her work be provided against by some form of contributory insurance.

## **Chapter III — Property Rights**

64. A common civil code shall be evolved in India, just as we have a common criminal code. This new code will have three branches at least, viz. (i) Inheritance and Succession law on the basis of the Indian Succession Act; (ii) Divorce law; and (iii) Marriage law.

65. The N.P.C. should appoint a Committee of experts, both men and women to work out the details of the new code which should be enacted on an optional basis, to begin with but should be made universally applicable within a reasonable period of its passing into Act.

66. Every Hindu, man or woman, will be deemed to be absolute owner of his or her property, whatever be the nature thereof, including any property he or she may inherit or any property that may devolve upon him or her by, i.e., being a member of a joint family or by survivorship and he or she will be entitled to dispose of the same by will.

In the event of his or her dying intestate, his or her heirs will be:

- (i) Wife or husband as the case may be;
- (ii) Sons and daughters and their children, the children of a predeceased son or daughter taking the share of such predeceased son or daughter. The share of the wife or husband will be one-third and the remaining two-thirds shall be divided equally among the children.

67. Daughter will be entitled to the same rights of maintenance, education, marriage, succession or inheritance and acquiring property as if she is a son.

68. All properties belonging to husband and wife respectively at the date of the marriage shall thereafter remain their separate property.

69. The income or acquisition from any sources whatever made or acquired during coverture will be owned by the husband and wife jointly.

70. On the death of either husband or wife, his or her separate property and half of the property jointly acquired with the help of the income during coverture should devolve on the surviving husband or wife and their children:

- (i) the surviving wife or husband shall take one-third of such property;
- (ii) the remaining two-thirds shall be divided among her or his children in equal shares; the children of a predeceased son or daughter receiving the share of a predeceased son or daughter.

71. On the marriage tie being severed by divorce the separate property of both the husband and the wife will remain their own.

72. No husband or wife shall have the power to demise or bequeath more than a stated proportion of his or her property;

the remaining property must go to his or her heirs as provided by the laws of intestacy.

73. Husband and wife shall be at liberty to will away the rest of their respective properties and half of the property jointly acquired.

74. Any property owned by a woman, whatever be the nature thereof, will be considered her absolute property.

75. Vigorous propaganda should be carried on to educate the Muslim women about their rights to which they are entitled under the existing law.

76. One glaring defect in the Parsi Law of Intestate Succession is that a daughter inherits half of what the son gets. This should be remedied.

#### Chapter IV — Education

77. It is necessary that the child should have healthy knowledge of sex but before any policy in this respect is adopted, investigation into the proper method of approach and teaching the subject is necessary.

78. The State should make it obligatory on local bodies to provide milk or any nutritive substitute for all children in primary schools.

79. We feel that more training facilities are necessary to train a large number of women teachers every year so that it will be possible to have all the lower standards of primary schools under women teachers.

80. The State shall adopt a well-defined educational policy which, while co-ordinating the various stages of education provides a certain measure of education and training to every individual born in the country.

81. There shall be no discrimination based on sex in the educational curriculum, but special training for particular occupations and needs and special aptitudes of individuals shall be provided for. All restrictions which prove a handicap to the free and full development of woman's personality shall be abolished.

82. Primary education shall be compulsory for all boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 14 and will emphasize education

through a creative, productive activity. In selecting the activity the State shall take into account the local needs and the environments of the child.

83. There shall be a pre-basic stage of education recognised by the State. Creches and nursery schools shall form a part of this stage. Pre-basic education shall be optional during the transition period.

84. Continuation classes shall be provided on a part-time compulsion basis for all boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 18. These classes shall be linked up with the scheme of apprenticeship adopted by the Education Sub-Committee.

85. Secondary education shall not be merely of the academic type but shall provide vocational training for various needs.

86. University education shall be more comprehensive and more purposeful in the sense that it shall make available activities for training in a variety of subjects.

87. The medium of instruction shall be the language of the province. In no case shall the medium of instruction be a foreign language.

88. In the interests of social equality, mutual understanding and better co-operation between the sexes, we recommend that the ideal of the system of co-education in all stages must be kept in view. A national system of education should be based on common institutions and a common course of study for boys and girls. During the transition period, for the adolescent stage, common high schools for both sexes should be encouraged, but provision should also be made for separate high schools for girls where such are required and there is a sufficient demand for them.

89. Wherever public opinion is felt to be in favour of co-education all educational institutions financed by the State and local bodies shall be non-communal and co-educational in organisation.

90. The staff in all co-educational institutions shall be mixed and in other institutions mixed staff should be encouraged.

91. Physical training shall be made compulsory in all schools. Exercises and games shall be arranged to suit the physical condition of girls and to create in them a spirit of self-reliance. Folk dancing and indigenous games shall be encour-

aged. Facilities shall be given to every child to learn swimming.

92. Military training for self-defence shall be made compulsory for both girls and boys and in all schools and colleges.

93. Adult education shall form a part of the national system of education. The State shall provide training centres for women social workers who, due to economic circumstances and lack of higher academic education, cannot avail themselves of the existing facilities.

94. A State Publication Bureau shall be established to provide the necessary literature for adult education, State propaganda, etc.

## Chapter V — Marriage & Its Problems

95. Under the Civil Code marriage shall be a monogamous contract freely entered into by the parties concerned and shall be dissoluble, subject to certain conditions as provided by the laws of the State.

96. If a Muslim woman wishes to forego her Meher she should make a declaration to that effect before a Magistrate or such declaration should be registered.

97. Marriage shall be a monogamous contract freely entered into by the parties concerned which shall be dissoluble, subject to certain conditions as provided by the laws of the State

98. The marriage age shall be progressively raised to the age of majority, i.e., 18.

99. The Child Marriage Restraint Act shall be made more effective by making marriages in which either party is of less than twelve years of age, null and void, and by making marriage in contravention of the Act a cognisable offence.

100. All marriages shall be notified and registered. The Registrar before notifying has got to satisfy himself on the following:

- (a) Consent of both parties.
- (b) Whether it is in contravention of the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

101. The provisions of the Special Marriage Act of 1923 shall be extended to other communities besides the Hindu, Buddhist,



Jain and Sikh, so that persons belonging to these communities can also inter-marry without renouncing their religion.

### **Divorce**

102. The Hindu marriage should be dissoluble under certain conditions laid down by the laws of the State. Such dissolution must be obtained by either party to the marriage and must be certified by a public authority.

103. Whether divorce be granted on the express desire of either party or on certain specific conditions, it must provide for the economic needs of the woman and safeguard the interests of the children if any. This provision must be made by law.

104. Unless good reasons to the contrary are shown the mother should have the control of the child.

105. Arbitrary exercise of a Muslim husband's discretion to divorce should be abolished.

106. The provision of Restitution of Conjugal Rights in Hindu and Muslim Laws should be abolished.

## **Chapter VI — Family Life**

107. Individual families will and should continue, but so far as the State is concerned, the individual must be the basic unit to which consideration should be specially given.

108. Both the parents should be the joint guardians of their children. If the marriage tie is broken by death of either party, the surviving partner should necessarily be the guardian of the children and it should not be in the power of either party to deprive the surviving party of this right, as is possible under Muslim and Hindu laws, except for reasons of unfitness which must be decided by the Court. If the tie of marriage is severed by divorce the custody of the children should essentially be given to the mother, except when the mother is of an undesirable character and unfit, therefore, for the custody of the child. If the child is capable of expressing a preference his wishes should be consulted for the maintenance of the child.

109. The father must, till full and equal property rights are afforded to the woman, be responsible for the maintenance of the child.

110. The right to adopt a child is an individual right and cannot be interfered with but we are of the opinion that adoption of a son for purposes of inheritance is undesirable.

111. Birth control clinics controlled by the State and staffed with medical men and women should be established where instruction should be imparted to those persons who wish for it.

## Chapter VII — Miscellaneous

112. Insofar as the caste system tends to retain inequality or to obstruct woman's advance, it must be progressively put an end to.

113. We are strongly opposed to widowhood being considered as the perpetual condition and every effort should be made by education, social reform and even legal reform, to put an end to the evils that result from such condition. We desire that the widow, instead of being the nation's liability be turned into a useful member of society and that every opportunity should be given to direct her intellect, energy and devotion into creative channels. Widows should have the same social and economic rights as any other citizen and no social or legal disabilities should attach to them. The Committee is of opinion that widows should be entitled to remarry and we have already suggested the means of popularising the idea. However, we would like to make it clear that widows' problem cannot be solved by remarriage only. Training for economic independence and self-reliance are essential for the re-establishment of her position as an individual in Society. Another way of doing this is to accept the principle that marriage shall not be a condition precedent to full and equal civic status. Social rights and economic privileges on these lines will really remove all obstacles. We visualize a state where there will be no special problem of widows.

114. As a preliminary step for the application of all remedial measures we think that the compulsory registration of all widows should be necessary.

115. An officer should be appointed for every 50,000 of the population who will act as a consultant on women's rights and difficulties, help in matters of social legislation, help the Court of wards to look after the estates of minor or illiterate widows, act as supervisor of women's institutions, correlate training and

opportunities for employment of the widow, assess the needs of the widow and the degree to which the State should be called upon to render financial aid.

116. The officer recommended by us must of necessity be a woman but if no competent woman is available in a particular district, a start may be made with a suitable man.

117. Widows' homes should not be marriage bureaux in disguise, but should be centres for training for some occupation so that it might eventually lead to the economic independence of the widow.

118. Society has no right to ostracize the unmarried mother alone and allow the man to escape since both man and woman are responsible for the child.

119. The responsibility of bringing up the child and maintaining it should devolve upon both. In case however, where man is not married, but marriage between the two is not possible because either party refuses to marry, or either party is not fit to be married, Court should hold both or either party responsible for the maintenance of the child.

120. Man should be liable to punishment as much as the girl if he refuses to recognise their child or to maintain it and as a result the girl deserts it or resorts to infanticide.

121. An innocent child should not be made to suffer whatever its origin may be. It should receive all protection at the hands of the State. Even if the child is born out of wedlock the mother should be entitled to all medical help at the time of child birth from the State as any other woman. The child should be allowed to use its father's name and should be entitled to a share in the father's property. The State in short should make no distinction between a child born in wedlock or a child born out of it, and the child should be entitled to all the rights and privileges of a citizen.

122. The only way to solve the problem of prostitution is to change the position of woman in society and make her equally responsible for the well-being of the social order.

123. Legal steps should be taken prohibiting and punishing any person who drives a woman member or minor child from the house without making any previous provision for her maintenance and shelter.

124. All rescue institutions should be supervised by a woman welfare officer and all social workers should be registered.

125. Supervision and control of urban and rural boarding houses, dharmashalas, etc., should be undertaken and separate residential arrangements should be made in dharmasahas for women travellers. At the places of pilgrimage a network of women social workers should be organised.

126. Railway stations often become recruiting grounds for prostitutes. Procurers are on the lookout for ignorant, stray women passengers who are misled. At all railway stations and centres of transport, trained women guides should be provided to help women passengers.

127. Prophylacteria centres should be organised where these women may resort to for treatment. The centres may also give training in some occupation to such women who would like to give up prostitution and earn an honest living. Efforts should also be directed to provide alternative employment to women in the special recruitment areas.

128. Legalised abortion should only be permitted on two grounds:

- (a) when pregnancy is medically considered to be dangerous to the health of the mother;
- (b) when the pregnancy is the result of rape.

129. The N.P.C. in making its provisions for administrative machinery should include a ministry of social affairs to co-ordinate and investigate into all problems connected with social welfare.

130. The N.P.C. should carry on the necessary propaganda directly or through the existing women's organisations to educate the public and specially women, to the aims and objects underlying the plan in order to prepare them for the new order.

## Chapter X —

### Resolutions of the National Planning Committee on the Report of the Sub-Committee on Woman's Role in a Planned Economy

The Final Report of the Sub-Committee on Woman's Role in Planned Economy was presented on the 31st August by Srimati Mridula Sarabhai, Secretary of the Sub-Committee, in the unavoidable absence of the Chairwoman, Rani Lakshmi Bai Rajwade. Several members of the Sub-Committee were present during the discussion, which continued on the 1st, 2nd and 4th September.

The following resolutions were adopted:

1. On the basis of the Karachi Congress, 1931, declaration of Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India, it is resolved:-

- (a) In a planned society, woman's place shall be equal to that of man. Equal status, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities shall be the guiding principles to regulate the status of woman whatever the basis of society in the Plan;
- (b) Woman shall not be excluded from any sphere of work merely on the ground of her sex;
- (c) Marriage shall not be a condition precedent to the enjoyment of full and equal civic status and social and economic rights by woman;
- (d) The State shall consider the individual as the basic social unit and plan accordingly.

2. Woman shall have the right to vote, to represent, and to hold public office, on the same terms as man. There shall be joint electorates, based on adult franchise, for both men and women, for election to political bodies, including self-governing institutions.

3. An organised health service, with special maternity arrangement for women, shall form an integral part of planned economy. Indigenous Dais shall be gradually replaced by trained midwives as soon as possible.

4. The health programme of the State shall aim at the eradication of serious diseases, more especially such as the

communicable or transmissible by marriage. The state should follow a eugenic programme to make the race physically and mentally healthy. This would discourage marriages of unfit persons, and provide for the sterilization of persons suffering from transmissible diseases of a serious nature, such as insanity or epilepsy.

5. A planned scheme of national economy should provide for a scheme of social insurance, made available in cash and kind, for all citizens. This should include benefits in the case of disability, sickness, accident, pregnancy and childbirth in the case of women, and assistance for the care and nursing of the newborn child. This scheme should be given effect to progressively.

6. During the transition period due provision should be made in the leave rules applying to women workers to get leave on the ground of the sickness of the child. The burden of this may be borne by the community.

7. Creches and nursery centres should be provided for as laid down in resolutions 12 and 14 passed on the Labour Sub-Committee's Report. Meanwhile the present system of requiring the employer to provide for maternity benefits and creches should be continued and extended to include plantations and mines. In view of the fact that this provision had led to the exclusion of women workers from such employment, the cost should in future be assessed on the total number of employees, irrespective of sex. All benefits shall be disbursed by the State or local authorities.

This rule should also apply to local self-governing institutions as well as other large employers.

8. Those Provinces and States which have no Maternity Benefit Acts should adopt a scheme of social insurance in preference to a Maternity Benefit Act. In the event of a Maternity Benefit Act being introduced, this should be on the lines indicated in resolution 7 above.

9. All women should be assured adequate leisure, irrespective of work in or outside the home. This leisure will follow from:

- (a) The organisation of Pre-Basic education institutions, such as nursery schools, kindergarten centres as well as creches, and
- (b) The improvement of social amenities and co-operative and community undertakings.

It is also necessary that there should be some kind of regularity in home life. There should be a cessation of all work during the day at a fixed hour, so that the midday meal can be conveniently taken and the housewife released from the duties of the kitchen.

10 An identical standard of morality, which harmonises social welfare with individual freedom, should be accepted for both man and woman, and should guide legislation and social convention.

11. Persons born in any part of India of parents who are Indian Nationals shall, in regard to nationality, be considered Indian citizens. Persons born of alien parent or alien parents shall have the right to choose their nationality within six months of their reaching the age of majority. Married women shall have the same right in the event of their marrying non-nationals of India.

12. Every child born in the community has a claim on it in regard to education, occupation, earning and property, as well as civic and social rights. There should be no restrictions made either by law or custom between children born in or out of wedlock. Children of alien parents shall also be entitled to education, health and freedom from abuse.

(**Note**—Mr. A.D. Shroff does not agree that there should be no difference made either by law or custom between children born in or out of wedlock.

Mr. Shuaib Qureshi desired to record his dissent as follows: "Such claim should be confined to:

- (i) the parents of the child;
- (ii) in case of a child born out of lawful wedlock, to maintenance, parental care, and education, but would not affect the law of inheritance.")

13. A Charter of Children's Rights shall be framed on the lines of the U.S.A. (legislation) and its provisions shall include:

- (a) Reservations against any commitments made by guardian or parent on behalf of a minor child in respect of marriage, dedication to religion, slavery or beggary. These commitments shall be deemed to be voidable in law at the option of the individual concerned on, reaching the age of majority. In the event of any such commitment being given effect to, the special officer appointed for this purpose should be

entitled and empowered to act on behalf of the child to avoid the commitment.

- (b) The employment of children for wages under the age of 15 should be prohibited. During the transitional period, the minimum age for such employment should be progressively raised to 15, particularly in industries and in occupations where hours and conditions of work are harmful to the children. Exceptions may be made for agricultural work. Night work between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. shall be prohibited to boys and girls under 18.

When the national system of education, including Basic Education compulsorily up to 14, comes fully into operation, the minimum age for such employment will be automatically raised; and correlation shall be provided between work and training, even after the age of 14.

A special organisation should be established to look after and protect the rights of children, particularly orphan children.

14. The principle of equal wage for equal work shall be granted practical recognition in such a manner that it does not create unemployment or bar employment to women.

15. Women shall not, as a matter of policy, be excluded from any industry or occupation. In the event of any legislation or development causing the exclusion of women from any occupation, and thus leading to their unemployment, steps should be taken by the State to provide for their being absorbed in other occupations.

16. For purposes of recruitment and co-ordination of labour supply in different occupations, a system of labour exchanges should be established.

17. Trade Unions should consist of both men and women workers. There should be no separate trade union for women. Statistics of trade union membership should include information about women and young persons on their registers.

18. Woman's work in the home, as well as her work on the family land, though not easy to recognise in terms of money value, is an essential contribution to the social wealth of the State (community); and shall be fully recognised as such. The aggregate of social wealth under Planned Economy will include all kinds of work, whether recognised in money value or not.



19. A uniform Civil Code shall be enacted applicable to all citizens of India. This should be based on the fundamental principle of equality as between man and man and man and woman. During the transition period, it should apply to those who choose to accept it. Those who are unable to subscribe to this Code, may continue to be governed by their personal law. Where, however, anything in this personal law affects the woman's position adversely, immediate attempts should be made to remedy this.

(Note—Considerable discussion took place on this resolution. Mr. Shuaib Qureshi expressed his disagreement with it. Mr. G.M. Sayed was of the opinion that the Civil Code should be made compulsorily applicable to all, and that there should be no option about it. Some other members were in sympathy with this view, but they felt that, under the existing circumstances, it was preferable to make the application of the Code optional. The representatives of the Sub-Committee stated that their members, including Begum Hamid Ali and Begum Shah Nawaz, were in favour of an optional Civil Code. Mrs. Zarina Currimbhoy and Mrs. Ismail also expressed their agreement with this view.)

20. Reformers in many communities have brought about changes in the Personal Law from within these communities. These efforts are to be welcomed, and wherever they are in line with the general policy of the State, they should be encouraged by the State.

21. An All-India Civil Marriage Act shall be enacted enabling any two persons above the age of majority, to whatever religion they may belong, to be married without any declaration in regard to religion.

22. Pending the completion of the Plan, it is clear that the existing law will continue to function in regard to marriage, side by side with the civil marriage provided for above. Immediate steps must, however, be taken for the following purposes:

- (i) In regard to the age of marriage, the legal limits should be progressively raised to the Age of Majority.
- (ii) Consent of the marrying parties shall be made essential.
- (iii) Marriage shall be made monogamous, and the right to divorce introduced.

(iv) All intended marriages shall be notified, and marriages shall be recorded by a public authority. The State should afford facilities for this, so that this intimation and record may be made easily through the village panchayat or other self-governing body.

**(Note—**There was considerable discussion on clause (iii) above relating to monogamy. Mr. Shuaib Qureshi was in favour of encouraging monogamy in every way and of the State discouraging polygamy, but he was opposed to a legal bar against polygamy. He agreed that on a second marriage by the husband, the first wife should have a right of divorce.

Mr. G. M. Syed was in favour of immediate and compulsory monogamy.

Mr. Joshi was of opinion that if the age limit of marriage was raised to majority, and divorce was made easy and at the will of either party, this provision about monogamy was not necessary. Dr. Dubey and Mr. Shroff agreed with Mr. Joshi. The clause was, however, approved by the majority of the members.)

23. Divorce shall be available at the option of either party, subject to such conditions as may be laid down by the law in that behalf. These conditions may relate to sufficient notice, period for the divorce to be effective, and maintenance and custody of children. These conditions should be equal as between man and woman.

**(Note—**In this connection the question of mehr in Muslim Law must be considered, without prejudice to the principle laid down above.)

**(Note—**Messrs. Shuaib Qureshi, Syed Mahmud and Nazir Ahmad add the following note to this resolution on divorce: This shall not affect the Muslim personal law, according to which the two parties to a marriage contract could, as the law stands even now, have, as part of the contract, equal right of divorce. As to the right of maintenance of children, that too is fully safeguarded under the Islamic Law.)

24. Divorce when effective shall be evidenced by an appropriate certificate from some public authority.

25. Disabilities attached to the condition of widowhood should be ended.

26. The State should follow a policy to assure to women the same rights as man to hold, acquire, inherit, and dispose of property of all kinds, and to shoulder corresponding obligations, without any differentiation at any stage or in any manner on grounds of sex alone, and changes in the existing laws, when necessary, should be progressively made. This is especially necessary in regard to the Hindu Law.

(Note—Messrs. Shuaib Qureshi, Syed Mahmud, Nazir Ahmad and G. M. Sayed wish to add that this should be without prejudice to Muslim personal law.)

27. The right to insist upon restitution of conjugal rights in Hindu and Muslim law should be abolished.

28. Co-education shall be the basis or ideal of the national system of education, which should be founded on common courses of study for boys and girls. During the transitional period, common high schools for the adolescent should be encouraged for both sexes. Provision may, however, be made for separate high schools for girls, where local sentiment demands them, and this is considered feasible.

The staff in all co-educational institutions should be mixed, and in other institutions such mixed staff should be encouraged.

(Note—Prof. M. N. Saha and Mr. Shuaib Qureshi were against co-education between the ages of 12 and 18.)

29. The State shall provide training centres for women social workers who, due to economic circumstances and lack of high academic education, cannot avail themselves of the existing facilities.

30. Legalised abortion should be permitted only in recognised institutions under properly qualified persons:

- (a) when pregnancy is a result of rape;
- (b) when pregnancy is considered dangerous to the health of the mother.

31. The administrative machinery of the State shall include a Ministry of Social Affairs to co-ordinate all problems connected with social welfare, and to arrange for investigation and research into problems of this nature.

## Appendix

### NOTE OF DISSENT BY MISS K. KHANDWALLA

1. I am writing this note because I find that the approach of the Authors of the Report to the main problem entrusted to the Sub-Committee is fundamentally different from my approach to the same problem. I conceive the problem as referred by the Planning Committee to this body to consist mainly in envisaging the part woman should be enabled to play in the planned society of the future. In planning the entire life of the community, the Planning Authority would have to correlate and mutually harmonise the claims of social organisation and collective action with the demands of personal liberty and right to self-expression of individuals. This is the crux of the problem which affects woman more, thanks to the accumulated weight and past tradition and convention under which we have been living, than man. In this note, therefore, I am addressing myself to consider the various social institutions and incidents in woman's life, so as to bring about this co-ordination, and thereby enable woman to play her most effective role in the planned society of the future.

2. I would not have troubled to write this note, even on the ground mentioned above, had it not been for my conviction, after having carefully gone through the report, that the Sub-Committee, the Authors of the Report, have departed materially from the general basis agreed upon in the Sub-Committee meetings when that body decided the fundamental issues or principles which were to guide us in preparing our Report. The points mentioned below are specific illustrations of the manner in which such departure has occurred. In general I may add that the Report offends, perhaps, not so much in the actual substance,

as in presenting that substance in a round-about manner which is, I fear, liable to serious misconstruction. I can appreciate the desire to adopt a conciliatory attitude and compromising tone in all cases where effect has to be given to proposals or ideals as applied to large masses in democratic communities, where, however, unpalatable the fact may be, the majority will have to decide; and the majority is seldom enlightened enough to appreciate against the force of prejudices and conventions in which such majority has been brought up, the value of the ideals placed before them. A body, however, like our Sub-Committee should, I hold, not permit itself to be influenced by considerations of this kind so far as almost to abandon the ideals originally accepted. And that is why I am writing this note to clarify certain issues and over what I conceive to be the correct attitude for the woman of the future in planned society.

3. It must be evident from this that my approach is radically different from that apparently accepted by the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee accepts that woman's position must essentially be on a footing of absolute equality with that of man, in all questions of civic rights, social obligations and economic possibilities. But the object of this equality is, as I conceive it, to assure the fullest possible scope to woman for self-expression, for the development of her personality as an individual, and for the largest possible measure of contribution from her to social progress. For such a purpose the mere postulation of political or civic and economic equality would not suffice. In planned society such equality will have to be made real and substantial. That is to say, the social mechanism, institutions and regulations must all be so devised as to make this equality a real, living force in actual life, and not merely a copy book maxim, more honoured in breach than in observance.

4. I emphasize this difference of mine from the standpoint of the Sub-Committee all the more, because not only do I expect that woman in planned society will have a very substantial contribution to make which she cannot make while the present shackles confine and restrict her, but also because I believe that the real impediments to the Indian people's progress on freely civilized and social lines will only be achieved when that part of the society, which has suffered for ages from conventional

restrictions, becomes alive to the injurious effects of such restrictions, and helps to co-operate in their removal not only so far as she herself may be considered, but also as regards the rest of the organised society.

5. I will now take the specific incidents and institutions which, while treated of in the Report, do not, in my opinion, express correctly the view of educated and progressive Indian womanhood as regards the role of woman in planned society. Taking first the woman's position as an individual, the Report has, as already remarked postulated equality as between man and woman. This equality effects and will condition social status, economic obligations and civic privileges. At the present time all the privileges, obligations or restrictions woman has to suffer from are in virtue of her relationship, and not because in recognition of her individuality as such. She may have a place in society as wife or daughter or mother, but not as an individual by herself only. This has been conceded in the Report, but its obvious corollary is not so clearly brought out, namely that in planned society woman's individuality must be recognised as such without reference to the relationship she may have contracted of her own will, or which may be forced upon her for any reason. Reading through the Sub-Committee's Report on all points in which woman has to have contacts with society, or to incur any responsibilities *vis-a-vis* society, I feel that the Sub-Committee has not made it clear that in the future planned society what would count, and count alone, will be the individual personality of each woman or of each man as such, and no relationship that she or he may have to bear with their fellows.

6. Emphasizing as I do the necessity in planned society for the fullest possible recognition of woman's individuality as such, I would like that all the various rights the Sub-Committee has laid down in the list of fundamental rights of citizenship as affecting woman shall be completely divorced from any taint of relationship of any kind. For example take the right to work. Planned society will have to guarantee the right to work to able-bodied adult citizen, irrespective of sex, creed, or birth. The work, however, may be in any capacity which is suitable to different person's training and inclination. Given the very large population for which the planning authority for a country like India will have

to deal, it is not at all unlikely that this requirement of apportioning work according to training and inclination of each individual would be amply fulfilled. It may also be that in the dispensation that results hereafter under planning at least in the first few years, the bulk of woman's work may be within the precincts of the traditional home, and be concerned with the care of the family. As will appear below, I consider the institution of family and particularly the joint, undivided Hindu family to be the most difficult impediment in the way of woman's emancipation; and, therefore, I would emphasize with the utmost earnestness I can that the first task of the Planning Authority will be to undermine the system of family and all that it stands for, in the shape of exploitation of woman or children. Holding this view, I consider that the recommendation of woman's work in the home, even if woman in planned society elects to do so, will have to be far more specific than the words of the Sub-Committee in that regard suggests. Whether money economy is destroyed and some other calculus substituted in its place, I think it of the utmost importance that the work be recognised as work, no matter where and how it is done, and not merely in respect of the environment or relationship under which it is done.

7. Lest I may be misunderstood in this connection, I would add that by family I mean that institution which has been developed and which functions today as an association bound together by ties of blood over which the individual concerned has no control. Family in the sense of a voluntary association of two or more adult individuals who live together for any purpose they choose will be a matter of the mutual consent of competent individuals joining together for specific objects with which the social concern will only be that such association fits in with the basic system of the planned society. No such association can either override, or, what is worse, even by implication, seek to frustrate the very basis of planned society, which, in the family as it is organised and functions today, we have every reason to fear may happen.

8. The right to work must be amply cleared for woman and made real. The Planning Authority will, therefore, have to consider the aggregate amount of work to be done for the community collectively; and the manner in which and the kind

of personnel amongst which it will have to be distributed. What will be counted, therefore, would not be men or women, but only individuals, their training, and aptitudes, which will also be scientifically determined and certified. Work will, therefore, be apportioned according to training and abilities, certified for the purpose and not merely because of any relationship that is due to an "Act of God", and not to any personal consent of the party affected.

9. Along with the right to work I postulate all the incidents and privileges associated with such work. That is to say the National Code of Labour will have to apply in an equal measure to man as well as woman, and all the safeguards, protection, and regulations which are devised to promote the efficiency and maintain the health and safety of workers will be applied equally to woman as well as to man. This would include the right to a full measure of social insurance, of sickness, maternity, accident and invalidity, old age or other permanent disability. It would include a certain proportion of the right to leisure, meaning thereby periodically holidays, or vacations, amusement and recreation, which must all be integral parts of planned economy, and must be provided as indispensable for the continued efficiency of workers in planned society. Needless to add, it will also include in an equal measure the right to cultural facilities and advantages that planned society provides, whether in the form of the usual continuation classes, or any other mode that the appropriate body under the Planning Authority may devise for the purpose. It is unnecessary to mention that we are culturally very backward at the present moment. Even in the very limited scope of education or mere literacy now-a-days prevailing in this country, whereas there may be one such literate man out of every five, there is only one literate woman out of 50. This in itself is sufficient to indicate the very poor level of cultural awakening amongst women; and the heavy leeway that will have to be made up to increase that awakening. As, however, the system of work and remuneration for each, including all the incidents, privileges or obligations connected with work under the Plan, will be one of the prime functions of the Planning Authority, I would not dwell at greater length on this aspect of the problem before us.



10. I would, however, refer more particularly to one aspect of the problem which relates to the organisation of women workers in trade unions or other organisations particularly concerned with women. The trade union, as it functions in class society, is a machinery for strengthening workers in their class struggle and emphasizing their consciousness as a class apart. This, I trust, will not necessarily be so in planned society where by the mere fact of planning, the division into divergent classes will be dispensed with. But even so, trade unionism as a machinery for administering the Labour Code may become indispensable; and accordingly it would be of the utmost necessity to require that no one, woman included, would be allowed to work unless he or she is a member of a trade union. Membership, in other words, of trade unions must be made compulsory under the Labour Code, not only to reinforce its consciousness of obligations in planned society, but also because as a mere administrative machinery such organisation is indispensable. The Sub-Committee have contented themselves only by noticing the fact that women workers at the present time are not readily amenable to unionisation, and they would be satisfied if efforts are made to encourage the spread of unionisation amongst workers. My point is fundamentally different in that I insist upon unionisation becoming compulsory and, therefore, universal; in the present society because it is necessary as a weapon for strengthening the working class; and in planned society as a machinery for administration.

11. If the right to work is guaranteed in the manner mentioned above, the disabilities now resting upon woman in her civic or social position would be comparatively negligible. The civic equality has been mentioned by the Sub-Committee, but I am afraid the Sub-Committee have not realised fully the implications of their own statement. The right to vote, for example, is based upon adult franchise. This is quite good as far as it goes. But I would like to point out that in the institutions and organisations which the planned society would have to provide for, such as the trade union councils, the works councils, etc.— the present day conception of democratic governments, implying a civic right to vote for political bodies like the legislature or local self-governing institutions will have to be viewed in a totally different

light. The right, privilege, or obligation would, in these cases, be conditioned not merely by the accident of age, but rather by the function one discharges. I consider it more than likely that in the planned society functional representation may be much more common and acceptable than the irrational, geographical right to vote as laid down in the Sub-Committee's Report. The difference here, again, is a difference rather of the ultimate vision and the ultimate society as it would result after planning than of the detail of adult or manhood, or any other condition of property and other qualifications. The principle would quite suffice if it was laid down that the right to vote must be on an equal footing as between man and woman, no matter what that footing is, and how it is conditioned.

12. From this it would also follow that the right to represent and the right to hold any public or private office, post or employment would be a mere corollary of what has been stated above. The Sub-Committee have mentioned this too, but their remarks seem to suggest that they confine themselves only to the public or political aspect of this privilege, and not make it co-extensive with the whole social organisation as I conceive the planned society of the future. I don't think that there would be any distinction between public employment and private employment of the type implied in the Sub-Committee's remarks. All social work will be public. Every social post, employment or duty will be as much a public responsibility as a nominal public office today. In that vision, therefore, I cannot but emphasize that woman should have the same equal right of representing and holding any post, office or employment irrespective of any distinctions as between public or private institutions that man has.

13. It may be mentioned in this connection that what we nowadays regard as civic rights will, for the Planning Authority, be a matter more for treating them as civic opportunities, and making those real, than merely enunciating the propositions of the type generally found in political constitutions and called the fundamental rights of citizenship.

14. As I have emphasized, the individual is to be the only basic unit of society irrespective of any association or 'family' ties, the question of the social status of woman does not present a serious problem to me. The only social status to be recognised in planned

society will be that of the individual worker, or of the child who has to be the citizen and worker of tomorrow, or of the aged, disabled, defective person, who will have to be dealt with separately. The social status, therefore, which today presents the most serious question of social reform, will not, I take it, matter at all in planned society. Neither motherhood, nor wifehood, nor, *a fortiori*, widowhood, matter at all. Every requirement of all these and similar positions will be provided for in consideration or in virtue of the individual concerned being a citizen and a worker, and on no other ground. The emphasis, therefore, for example, laid in the Sub-Committee's Report upon the position of the widow seems to me to be out of place. Much more important is it to add that the sections of the Report devoted to the rights relating to property appear to me also to be relatively out of place, at least in the planned society as I envisage it.

15. I realise, of course, the present hard facts in which the entire social system is founded upon the rights of property and motivated by the desire for personal profit. In Planned Society, however, I do not think it would be possible to maintain private property and personal initiative or personal profit in anything like the degree in which it is maintained under the individualist society of today. Planning, if it is to be at all real and effective, must mean co-ordination of all effort to a given end, directed from a common centre; and therefore, inevitably involving what is called regimentation of the citizens and of their belongings. In any such objective I believe the presence of private property and the right to personal initiative can only be a hindrance.

16. The transition from the present to the planned society, particularly in regard to property rights will, no doubt, be difficult, especially if, as assumed, the changeover is to be effected, not by a violent revolution, but by peaceful evolution. In the transition period, therefore, I accept the recommendations of the Sub-Committee for assuring the fullest scope to woman with man in regard to the right to acquire, inherit, hold and dispose of property; carry on any business and receive any fees, wages or profits for the same. The minute particulars, therefore, that the Sub-Committee have given as regards the right to inherit, bequeath and to acquire jointly with the husband any property from separate earnings or joint earnings, etc., seem to me to be

somewhat irrelevant to the ultimate aim, however necessary they may be during the period of transition. I would only sound one note of warning: that we must not take any steps during the transition period on the excuse of effecting the transition as peacefully as possible, which would create enough obstacles in our way for achieving the goal of planned society hereafter. Woman holds today no property in her own right, generally speaking. If now, on the ground of passing easily over the transition period, property rights are to be given to woman, and a property consciousness is created in woman, it may become an obstacle for achieving the Plan, as other countries have found the disinherited being given property rights becoming an obstacle in the way of socialisation of forms of natural wealth subsequently.

17. This does not mean, of course, I may add, at the risk of repetition, that while the institution of private property continues I would object to woman getting her equal share. I am only guarding against a possible impediment being needlessly created in the way of achieving the planned objective in the future. But even while property rights continue, I would suggest that its perpetuation should be undermined with a view to its ultimate elimination as early as possible. I would begin by abolishing the right of inheritance, both for man and woman, and would emphasize the need for taxation of excessive possessions or earnings progressively, so as to dispense with as much of the excessive possessions and earnings as possible within a reasonable time. After all, for carrying out many of the needs of the plan, very much larger funds than available today would have to be obtained, and even if the State does not assign to itself the full profits or surplus value from all the present sources of natural wealth, the State must, nevertheless, take steps from now onwards so that undue accumulations of property and means of purchase, which are also means of exploitation of those who do not possess such property, be progressively eliminated.

18. One of the main grounds for the maintenance of the twin institution of family and property, both closely related to one another, is, of course, the obligation to provide for the children and also for the aged. I consider, however, that both these are obligations of the community collectively which have rested upon individuals only because of the maintenance of individual

property rights. But in their observance individuals have not been conscientious or altruistic, in the care of children as well as the aged quite apart from their competence or qualifications to do so. Not every woman is fit to be a mother, to be entrusted with the care of the children any more than every man is fit to be a father in that sense; still less is it true for every grown up adult to be a good nurse or guardian of the aged and the infirm. These must be treated by planned society, either as sources of new wealth for the future "child" or as means of the continuing our programme and progress. And as regards the aged and the infirm, those have already made their contribution to the sum total of the social wealth, and, therefore, entitled, while they live, to a share sufficient for their maintenance in such condition as their age or infirmity may require.

19. Once these two responsibilities are taken over frankly by the State as a collective concern and not an individual liability, the foundation stone of the twin institutions of family and property will have been removed, and the institutions rendered as unnecessary as they are objectionable today.

20. There are two or three other social institutions which affect woman as woman materially today; and which will continue to affect woman as woman even in planned society if due care is not taken to guard against them. I refer in the first place to the institution of marriage and all it implies. The Sub-Committee have laid down that marriage must be a contract which must be evidenced by registration for the purpose of secular obligations arising from it; and which must be monogamous while it lasts, and which must be incurred by the free consent of equal parties willing to live in such close association with each other. The observations of the Sub-Committee, however, in that section, might lead one to feel that the Sub-Committee have not completely dispossessed themselves of the traditional and conventional forms of this ancient institution as a sacrament and as a foundation for the family ties and relationships. I look upon marriage as an association of equal individuals binding only so long as the desire to remain associated holds. The bond must be possible to be severed the moment the desire ceases. I would, therefore, require that in the planned society the fullest freedom should be available for either of the parties to dissolve the

marriage tie once the desire to remain associated in this bond disappears on either side. I do not think it is the concern of the community or its organised representative, the government, to insist upon learning the reasons why the parties have ceased to like each other sufficiently to continue to live together. Divorce must, therefore, be permissible at the request of either party without any investigation into the reasons why the party seeks divorce. Any responsibility arising from the association, while it lasted must, of course, be allocated to either party in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Code governing marriage; and the State should devise the machinery to see that this responsibility allocated to either party or any party is adequately and regularly discharged.

21. In view of what has been stated above in regard to the care of children and the aged, I do not think it necessary to add any more as regards the liabilities of marriage on that account, though I would like to guard myself against the possible misunderstanding that I do not appreciate the psychological value of family affection in the upbringing of children. While any marriage lasts as a happy union, I do not see any reason why the children should be taken away from the care of their parents unless either party is disqualified for the purpose. But I would provide a safety valve lest the unavoidable maintenance of children may become a drag upon the individuals concerned, and affect their powers of contributing to common welfare by the temperamental stress and strain which such disagreeable necessities forced upon people involved.

22. A consequence of the institution of marriage, which is seldom fully appreciated in its principal light, is prostitution. I consider that phenomenon to be solely the result of economic factors, which, I trust, in planned society will be progressively eliminated. By prostitution I mean the necessity which drives women to sell themselves for money to obtain a living. If work and, therefore, living are provided to every citizen trained and competent for it by the society collectively, I do not think there would be any necessity for any woman to drive herself to that occupation. Irregularities in the gratification of the sex instinct may remain; but that is not prostitution in the aspect in which I am concerned with it in this note. While this institution lasts,

I think the prostitute ought to be assured in the fullest possible measure the civic and human rights which are today denied to her. The observation of the Sub-Committee in regard to the provision of clinics and prophylacteria do not seem to me to be sufficient for the purpose. I would insist that public clinics must be maintained freely accessible to all, where every possible safeguard, protection, or prophylactic may be freely available; so that any undesirable consequence to the health of the individual concerned may be avoided. It would be the duty of the public health insurance system under the Planning Authority to provide the hospitals and sanatoria for people suffering from any disease, whether connected with prostitution or not. The prostitute is the creation of the social system now obtaining. She is a curse, a menace, and reproach to what are known as the respectable institutions of family and marriage. I want not only to transform those institutions themselves, as indicated above, I want to dispense with any possible consequence of the type embodied in prostitution. Hence my desire to see that the causes which brought about prostitution originally are eliminated; and that while the system is in a state of transition every possible source of danger and disgrace or disability to the prostitute is guarded against.

23. Another similar incident of the institution of marriage to which the Sub-Committee have drawn attention, is the cause of the unmarried mother. Postulating as they have done equality as between man and woman, I do not see any reason why we should not emphasise that the mere fact of a child being born out of wedlock should be in the least measure a handicap upon the woman bearing such a child. The Sub-Committee have recognised the injustice of penalising the "illegitimate" child. I would not only dispense with all laws and regulations regarding legitimacy, but I would insist that the fullest possible help be assured to all children of such peoples, whether they are linked together by marriage tie or not. The parental responsibility should in no way be reduced because of the presence of the marriage certificate or not. Nor should the liability of the State in respect of the maintenance of the children be affected in any such way. While, therefore, the institution of property, for example,

continues, I would insist that the child of any individual citizen, married or not to another, must be treated as equally entitled to a share in that individual's property, earnings and other advantages. Similarly the mother also, whether she was linked by marriage or not, must be treated as having, or continuing to have the same social, economic and civic rights as before, irrespective of the fact whether she is an unmarried mother or not. I may conclude this part by adding that our conception of social morality are rapidly changing, and will have to change still more, if the ideal of planning, apparently accepted by the Sub-Committee themselves, is to be achieved. Morality would have to be on a basis of equality and not regulated in accordance with any pre-conceived notions of the place of man or of woman in society.

24. A third incident of marriage may also be noted upon in this connection. I refer to the facility for abortion of an unwanted child. The Sub-Committee have recognised the need for abortion in the case where the health of the mother requires it. I see no reason why abortion should not be permitted in public institutions properly staffed with qualified doctors and nurses for any reason that the individual concerned finds necessary for this purpose. I would particularly insist that abortion may be permitted in such public institutions. The Sub-Committee's observation with regard to the need to procure certificates of health before a valid marriage contract can be made, I entirely endorse, as also their observation with regard to the compulsory sterilisation of the individual. I also endorse their remarks about the provision of birth control clinics, though I do not think that their observations in regard to the exercise of self control are quite relevant or in accordance with the ways of the world in which we live. As, however, my main purpose is served in these regards I do not think it necessary to add any further observations.

— *Kapila Khandwala*



## Future of Indian Women's Movement

(From *Our Cause* ed Shyamkumari Nehru, Allahabad Law Journal Press, Allahabad. Undated — eve of Independence)

BY KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA

The future is a nebulous thing full of possibilities and coloured by romance. We hold it in the palms of our hands, we press it to our hearts with secret wonder and joy for it is our very own, a creation of our dreams, a realisation of our hopes, a fulfilment of our age-long aspirations. It is a reality and yet an unreality. It is bound by the past as the tree is by the earth. It can only burgeon into blossom and fruit. It is held a prisoner in the coils of the present as a child in the womb of the mother, who, with the fire of her mother hunger, shapes it that she may live her treasured hopes through it. Man is what he is because he has created a future. Even as nature has carved out the seasons to drink fuller at the fountains of life and seek perpetuation, man has carved out a past, present and future out of a chaotic nothingness. The future is his strength in failure, his beacon light in the darkest gloom. Without a future life would cease to have a meaning. The past is a dead thing; the present a chain that seeks to bind us; but the future — it is the free untrammelled wonder — life where sorrows and cares cease and man becomes a lovelier and nobler thing. Religions have created other worlds of beauty beyond the pale shadow of the earth to colour many visions with the lure of life to come. Seers have painted Utopias with man and life transformed to fill man's mind with courageous hope and romantic solace. To write of the future is an exciting task. The very boldness has unique exuberance which like the magician's wand changes the dull dross of bitter yesterdays and the sorrowful todays to the quivering opalescent hues of tomorrow.

As the future is but a part of the past we need to trace the historical background before we take a leap into the future. But before we proceed to paint the role woman has played or will play, we must first of all disabuse our minds of that ridiculous myth of a "female," biologically and physiologically weak and inferior and consigned her to oblivion. To deal rationally with the Women's question one needs not only a chronological historical knowledge but biological facts as well. Sex existed even before man was and life can continue to exist without sex in the simple unicellular creatures. Why then did sex happen? Because "it seems a rule of living matter that it cannot go on for ever growing and splitting up without becoming vitally exhausted and this exhaustion is counteracted by the physical mingling of two individuals." Sex is not merely for reproduction, but also for an "increased ability for variation whereby the offspring has a greater reservoir of characteristics upon which to draw and in consequence an exalted chance of success in the struggle for existence." The division of the biological function and an attempt to enrich it led to the formation of the sex — male and female, the two aspects of one life force. But man in his ignorance built up crooked, unhygienic superstition and dark irrational theories which are now being fast battered down by scientific facts.

The history of woman is not always a well ordered process following our traditional conception of evolution from the dark winter of primitivism to the exuberant spring time of Americanism. It is rather like the moods of nature from gentle dawn to burning moon and pastel tinted twilight, and then out of the travail of a star-spangled night a golden morn. Though we may take it that the more cultured a society, the more natural the position of woman, we cannot take the word 'culture' to mean modernism or material advancement. We are often deluded into thinking that women in primitive and tribal society are degraded and their lot harder. On the contrary very often their position is more advantageous than that of women in so-called civilised society, though the standards may vary. Savages rarely verge so much on the brink of starvation as we do. Even today women in Polynesia or Madagascar or other similar tribal tracts enjoy more equality with men and wield more influence in their society than women in most countries. The economic structure of

primitive society is simple. Men and women shared their labours and gains. It is the rise and accumulation of private property and the incidental complications that come in its wake that changed the position of women.

The history of India must be viewed against the huge shadows of a lost eastern world of Egypt, Babylon and Asia Minor. The history of their women is the same as ours. On the threshold of human history stand kingdoms based on agriculture, each of them developing a religion where feminine power as the supreme goddess of fertility is worshipped. In India the incarnation of power and strength is "Shakti", the giver and preserver of life. Women enjoy equal status with men. We have the rise of matriarchy in some parts where woman becomes not only the head of the family but the owner of real property and only through her is inheritance transmitted. But these simple natural states are changed and modified under the rising pressure of new complicated economic forms and the growing cultures conditioned by these reactions. Then arise vast empires out of the lust of man for military glory, thirst for adventure, desire for conquests and in any society where warfare is regarded as the highest form, of male activity woman gets degraded, for the degradation of woman is but the enslavement of the forces of life by the forces of death.

### **Our Cause**

The division between the classes sharpen, vast masses of humanity are oppressed and exploited by the few rich. Manual labour becomes the hallmark of degradation and the lot of the majority, on whose sweated labour the minority who develop a parasitical existence begin to live and thrive. Idleness clasps its manacles tight on the hands of the women of this upper leisure class and they become its saddest victims. They are deprived henceforth of their legitimate practical sphere of activities and while the millions of toiling women are being sealed up in darkness and hunger, the rich are being sealed up in luxurious prisons of marble and precious stone equally doomed only to pompous idleness. Over-work and under-work henceforth go hand-in-hand in the process of degrading women and shaping their history. Sex is no more so binding as class.

In the meanwhile men seek new pastures to fill their idle lives but deny entrance to the women folk. Thus while man's sphere expands, in direct proportion to it the woman's contracts. In the lustrous empires of Greece and Rome men regaled themselves in intellectual pursuits, isolating the women for reproductive purposes, to produce soldiers for imperial conquests and statesmen to shine as rulers, little dreaming that within this vicious system are hidden the seeds of decay and destruction. New social codes and epics are now made, new customs and usages, fortifications behind which men entrench themselves to safeguard their undue privileges. Thus arises the double standard of morality, a high severe code for the woman who is to be henceforth the preserver of the home, of society's morals, while man in his romantic garb of fickleness and vagaries goes gallivanting about. Religions gradually fall into line with this framework. Shastraic injunctions, Biblical epistles and Quaranic sayings are all interpreted to serve one purpose—fasten the door of seclusion more firmly on women. The history of man is rewritten to initiate it with his fall by a woman in the garden of Eden and woman forever branded as a temptress and sex an unclean thing. Faithfulness to husband becomes the supreme virtue when all else can be forgiven. The greater the submission to man and his tyranny, the surer the road to heaven. Woman is of the man, but man is not of the woman. The taboos appear making of sex an ugly dark blotch on the fair face of man. Woman ceases to be an individual. She is the mysterious "female" veiled and desired, an object of sensuality, a weak helpless piece of human flesh denied a soul. The richer and necessarily "respectable" the class the sterner the code, the greater the seclusion for women, the more helpless and pitiable their condition.

The more complex the civilization and sharper the division of classes, the greater the economic and social struggle and the greater the trade in women. The need of exploitation bear many evil fruits but few so vicious as prostitution. In primitive society the good of one woman was the good of all, the good of all the good of one. But in civilized society the growth of individualism and the assuming of personality tends to emphasise individual needs and desires as apart from common group life. But these

new desires and rights man jealously regards as his own preserve and in order to avoid conflict and ultimately surrender and compromise with woman, denies her the right to self-expression and individual development. He is content to keep his wife a "Domestic Matron" which signifies not so much capacity to run a home successfully as being devoid of intellectual alertness, wider interests and of all those qualities which make for a pronounced character. Women who develop these characteristics become "shady" and "doubtful" characters to whom the respectable doors are shut. A class of women is henceforth created to satisfy man's need for vivacious and intelligent companions. This usage of some women selling themselves that others may remain dull sheep and virtuous becomes a recognised and regulated feature of social life in every civilized country, a thing unknown in the primitive world. While the upper few were building up high philosophies and abstruse religions, the toilers below were little tarnished by their ethics and codes, though at times they did attempt to borrow bourgeois' morals. But before their grim struggle for bread all else pales into insignificance. They are bound not so much by the pale shadows of the past as the stern realities of today. India is still in the grip of a decaying semi-feudalistic order. Industrialisation which made such severe onslaughts on it in the countries of the West, hammering in a new social order and new changes for women has barely scratched the surface of Indian life. Our society has lost its ancient contours. It is today a jangled mass of heterogeneous elements with a medley of reactions which are gradually becoming perceptible as a conflict between the old dominating forces of reaction and exploitation and the new scientific and rational urge towards emancipation from all forms of slavery.

The feminist movement in the accepted sense is a symptom of Capitalist society and has no place or reality in a mass class struggle such as one visualises India to be heading for. And that is why it has never assumed the significance it did in the countries of Europe. Social customs and the position of women are conditioned not merely by the prevailing economic history of the race. This then give us the key-note to the future of the Women's movement in India.

Before we proceed let us first glance cursorily at the demands the feminist movement in India puts forward and see how far it touches the deeper problem and what relation it has to reality. Equal citizenship rights is already a recognised principle. Next come economic independence for women and property rights. Let us examine these. The right to work is essential to human happiness, but the need of the mass of Indian women today is not the "right to work" but the "right to the legitimate fruit of their labour." To the millions today, economic independence only means the right to slave and starve, while their uncared for, underfed children drag through an existence which is nothing short of a living death. Thus those who clamour for the right to work think only in terms of the few who are bound by the chain of idle respectability. As for property rights, India is essentially an agricultural country and 75% of her population is engaged in rural occupation. Over 53% of these are landless labourers and are unaffected by the property rights. Of the total cultivable land, nearly 1/3 is under semi-feudalistic condition, being under Maharajas and Zamindars, a confirmed parasitical class under whose regime the cultivators fare little better than slaves. Then for those who own land—their plight is no better. The average holding per family is 2 to 4 acres, which makes it more of a burden under the prevailing burden of high taxation. The lot of the women in industries is no better.

Therefore, to demand property rights and economic freedom by the few bourgeois women within the present economic frame work is not only misleading, but distinctly dangerous for it means trying to secure privileges to one class at the expense of another and condemning the latter to perpetual exploitation. Economic freedom in its truest sense can become a reality only when there is a more scientific and rational system of production and distribution and the forces of economic progress which they set into motion are consciously guided.

On the social side the demand is for more rational and equitable laws relating to social relationship such as marriage, custody of children, etc. Now history proves that in a society where woman is an economic factor and she produces wealth side-by-side with man, she enjoys fuller freedom and suffers far less from restraints and taboos. Social disabilities are more a

feature of bourgeois society than the working class who even today give more rights to the women such as divorce. Hence any advantageous economic adjustment for women is bound to secure for them social freedom as well, just as loss of economic freedom necessarily means the loss of social rights as well. The condition of women in Russia and the contrasting conditions in Germany and Italy proved this as an unchallenged fact.

Now we come to the question of general culture, physical well-being and social purity – education, health and social morals, – they are inextricably bound up. Education and health are just as much governed by economic factors. Making Education compulsory or promulgating Sanitary codes cannot touch even the fringe of this immense problem. It is nothing short of cruelty to compel starving and half-fed children to study; nor can poverty make for cleanliness much less to fit women up to become mothers. “The fact that a woman has no work and no one to care for her is the fundamental social cause of prostitution,” declared Ssyemashka, people’s Commissary for public health in Russia. The cause and spread of prostitution has already been explained. The feminist movement tends to deal with it more from the ethical point of view and is more ready to offer merciless police vigilance and a cold religion than food to those hungry mouths. None of the half-measures tried in Capitalist countries will ever succeed for they do not reach the heart of the problem which is primarily rooted in economic necessity. Statistics prove that 90% of the prostitutes seek that profession from economic pressure and 4/5 are drawn from classes in extreme poverty. The only country which has so far successfully tackled this problem is Russia for there alone the very root of this evil is sought to be eradicated not only through legislation, but by providing work, homes and more human conditions for these sad victims. When economic wants and the social degradation which goes hand-in-hand with it is removed and woman along with man becomes a conscious living factor, she will resist against her being made to serve merely man’s physical and social unit, equal wages for equal work being recognised and she will discard her position of inferiority. In such a society child-marriage and *purdah* have no place, for these vicious customs only prevail where women need protection and exist only as appendages to man, with no

individual life of their own. Human life is one indivisible unit. No one aspect of it can be separated from another, the solution of one has a vital bearing on the solution of the others.

Then we finally come to their political demands. They ask for adult franchise and equal rights with men to enter legislatures, to share the right to legislate. In a country where the majority is denied franchise, the vote has a glamour beyond its rightful proportion. So long as a government is run within a capitalist framework as in India — that is, finance, big business and private property control the administration — the vote counts for little. The sad plight of millions of peasants and workers in all capitalist countries where adult franchise has been in vogue for years, proves its impotency. The right to exercise vote or enter legislatures counts for little so long as power is entrenched safely in the hands of vested interest which draws its wealth out of the sweated labour of the masses. Even the few concessions the manual workers had been able to win through years of struggle count for little today in a world lost in catastrophic economic chaos. The sad disillusioned workers today look with hope not to adult franchise, but direct action for their salvation.

Women easily show fervour for the political cause once the message is carried to them. In the political struggle of every country women have played a noble part. "It is impossible to win the masses for politics unless we include the women," said a great revolutionary. But the politics of the future are not the bourgeois politics of the past, where women along with men are exploited and used to win the cause of the bourgeoisie and tighten stronger the coils of oppression round them. Revolution after revolution has come in every country, millions have heroically shed their blood in the proud hope of inheriting a freer world and a brighter life, but have emerged out of the columns of smoke and risen from the rivers of blood to sink yet lower. It is only in the new State built on the solid foundation of mass will and mass power that politics in terms of the larger human life will have any meaning. In the old Capitalist countries women's share in politics has been very negligible even in the most advanced areas, for politics has never had the same reality for her as her home, and social drudgery has denied the full opportunity to those who did feel the call. Political rights even when won have remained an



impotent and dead factor. In England where the feminists fought and won a bitter battle for political rights, the lot of the poor, the working class women and their millions of children, is in no way better than the lot of their poor sisters and their children in France where women enjoy no political rights. Hence we aim at a State in which the hand of woman is felt, where her influence makes for beauty and sunshine in life. That is only possible when power is wrested from the hands of vested interests and passes into the hands of the creators of wealth. As Lenin says: "It is our task to make politics accessible to every working woman... from the moment private property and private ownership of land and factories is abolished and the power of the landowners and capitalists broken, political duties will become perfectly simple to the working masses and within the reach of all." They will cease to be a hobby of the leisured few as now and become a dynamic weapon for the good of all.

The fundamental problem which faces India today is the human problem — the problem of creating a free, healthy, clean race. It is not this or that aspect of it which is at stake but the national life as a whole. The solution lies in radically reconstructing society, bringing about a fundamental change in its economic basis and its social character. Then alone can women hope to gain the freedom they thirst for and hand it on as a proud legacy to their progeny. To illustrate the truth of this let us take Russia where the future of the womanhood the world over is so vividly foreshadowed.

"Every cook must learn to rule the State," said Lenin and his country is endeavouring to realise it. "Once the Russian woman was roused to defend downtrodden rights, she surpassed the men in energy," writes Amfiteatrov, one of the authorities on Russian women. "Proletarian women have stood the test magnificently in the revolution. Without them we should not have won," said Lenin. Today they are reaping the fruits of their revolutionary fervour and their sacrifices in the cause of the exploited and the oppressed. They enjoy not the economic freedom of the bourgeois State, but economic security which is the right of every citizen — not merely the right to work, but the right to their legitimate earnings. They enjoy real political power, for the Soviet is based on the foundation of mass will and mass power. The

number of women working in the various Soviet Departments is over 500,000 and 89 in the Central Executive of the U.S.S.R. Their power is felt in the Judiciary and the Executive throughout the U.S.S.R. They figure no whit less in the cultural renaissance as is evident from the rising women writers who make their mark and the increasing number of women's journals and their growing percentage in the scientific and technical fields. Their economic and social freedom necessarily reflects itself in their national laws. The new form of marriage is rational and humane, based upon the equal rights of the sexes which are made practicable in every detail and may be roughly defined as legal marriage with legalised birth-control, right to divorce by mutual consent, protection and security for children. The stigma on the unmarried mother is removed and the obnoxious term "illegitimate child" wiped out for the "factual" non-registered marriage "is put on an equal footing with a registered marriage.

Assuredly laws are not everything. Yet in the legislative field everything possible that is required to make women's position equal to men's has to be done. All relations between the sexes are a private concern, but provisions are necessary to safeguard the offsprings of their union and to guard against sexual crimes which involve a menace to society. Feeble-minded mentally unsound or diseased persons should be prevented from breeding – hence the need for medical examination and health certificates and easy access to knowledge of birth control.

Divorce has to be as simple and as private a concern of the parties concerned as marriage, no principle of guilt being involved, a factor so obnoxious in most countries today. In a State which recognises and shoulders its responsibility towards the children, this becomes a much simpler affair. Children will no more be used by husbands as a means of enslaving and keeping under subjection their wives as is so often the case now. A forced marital relationship is more degrading and harmful to children than guardianship of a single parent, however imperfect that may be. The economic independence of women will considerably simplify the problem of children, though law must recognise and insist on the fundamental principle that man is under obligation to provide for all his offsprings, whether born within wedlock or not. Custody of children, where no private agreement is achieved,

should be decided by the court solely in the interest of the children and not on the old worn out theory of patriarchal rights, a relic of the old feudalistic days which sought to protect the possessing class. For this, motherhood has to be recognised as a social function, honoured, tended and loved, and children as potential seeds of future achievements and greatness.

One visualises the future social relationships not as laws existing on paper, but rather as living forms, crystallising anew, breaking through dead old rigid frameworks, — forms which outlive their living meaning. But real comradeship of the sort which the Russian woman is in a position to enjoy is possible only where the wife is able not merely to maintain herself without the help of man but is able to secure liberation through scientific means from the grinding cares and deadening drudgery of house-keeping as it prevails today in our country and also better facilities for the care of children through State and public institutions. If equal opportunities for work and intellectual pursuits are to be provided with any measure of success, then more socialistic economic forms are needed in the way of public institutions taking over so much of the dull routine work that burdens our women so needlessly today.

To enable emotional growth and free and satisfactory play to emotional life, sufficient leisure and freedom from petty cares is absolutely essential. "Women's domestic life is a daily sacrifice amidst a thousand insignificant trifles" said Lenin on one occasion. A housewife's working day is at least 5 hours longer than that of any working woman engaged in labour outside. Mechanisation and socialisation of much of the work alone will give her time and energy for more fruitful pursuits. Public kitchens, canteens, communes have to be set up and easily made available for those who would take advantage of them and gradually learn of their advantages. A sufficiently long period of freedom from work at maternity is indispensable together with homes for mothers and children, infants' nurseries, children's creches not only in industrial but rural areas as well, nursery and kindergarten schools, holiday homes and advisory centres which would give hygiene and medical information, but also advice on social and judicial laws and rights governing women; all these are necessary items in a society which wishes women to live a

larger and a fuller life. Freed from outside compulsion the bond between man and woman gets an untrammelled chance to express its harmonious relationship and create real sex equality when woman shall cease to be either a drudge or an ornament and marriage will become a technique of living, not a means of livelihood.

This no doubt will lead to the disintegration of the old patriarchal conception of family. That is inevitable in the face of the great changes, critical thought, startling scientific revelations, conscious study and revaluation of family relations and the forms of life. When economic institutions change emotional relationships change also. Matriarchy, polygamy, polyandry have existed and still exist. It is therefore idle to talk of social institutions and social laws in terms of ethics and standardised concepts of morality. The family or the social codes of today are not the same as of a century ago. No social institution is permanent. However much we may cling to our own snug little faiths and beliefs and pet desires, the future we know will respect them but little, for all human ideas are but passing phases in the ever changing kaleidoscope of human life and that the forms of emotional expression are conditioned by social necessity.

There is one other very vital factor that one sees revolutionising the position of the woman of tomorrow — the right to motherhood. Indivisibly linked up with her economic independence is her sexual independence. One without the other would be innocuous and it alone will make sex equality a true reality for her. Man's fight against woman's struggle to free herself from the penalty of undesired motherhood, is one of the bitterest wars waged by him, for he knows that her victory will deal a death blow to his vested interest and devastate forever that atrocious structure of a "female character." In savage life as well as in civilised, woman's irrepressible urge to freedom and desire for a larger life has ever led her to seek escape from the sentence nature decreed upon her, and man has ever sought by law, religious canons, public opinion and penalties to thwart her. The highest form of blessing bestowed on a married woman in India is that she may be blest with eight sons, a usage which no doubt has its origin in the old days of imperialistic ward, for the more the ambition for Imperial glory, the keener the encouragement

given to breeding and greater the consequent enslavement of women. No woman can call herself free who cannot own and control her body and who can be subdued and enslaved through that very quality of fertility which once raised her to the altar as a deity in the dawn of early civilization.

The first argument against birth control is that it will lead to abuse and immorality. But let us look at morality as it prevails today. "Woman is today condemned to a system under which the lawful rapes exceed the unlawful ones, a million to one," says Margaret Sanger. "Fear and shame have stood as grim guardians against the gate of knowledge and constructive idealism. The sex life of women has been clouded in darkness, restrictive, repressive and morbid. Women have not had the opportunity to know themselves or to give play to their inner natures, that they might create a morality, practical, idealistic and high for their own needs. ...She must not only know her own body, its care and needs but she must know the power of the sex force, its use, its abuse as well as how to direct it for the benefit of the race. Thus she can transmit to her children an equipment that will enable them to break the bonds that have held humanity enslaved for ages. ...Abused soil brings forth stunted growths. An abused motherhood has brought forth a low order of humanity." A free nation cannot be born out of slave mothers. Few have stressed the immorality of the "Property Rights" of man over the body of woman, though religious and social codes and legal laws have been loud over the preservation of the chastity and purity of the unmarried. The crusaders in the cause of freedom must destroy that dead hand of the past which seeks to reach out to the present in its attempt to extinguish the flame of new idealism and crush the fingers who would carve out the new woman, new society and a new world.

Motherhood is one of the most sacred and unique functions of womanhood and should not be left to the mercy of exigencies of accidental circumstances or allowed to be determined by ignorance. It must be a conscious task undertaken with joy and a full sense of its responsibilities, controlled and regulated according to the emotional urge and physical capacity of the woman. For this reason sound knowledge on sex, birth control and use of contraceptives will have to be made easily accessible

to every woman. From the point of national benefit birth control is necessary for reasons of health, eugenics, social and economic considerations. To put forth the plea that a useful and necessary weapon should not be brought into public use simply because it may be abused is utterly absurd and meaningless. One may as well advocate the stopping of manufacture of matches simply because we can set anything on fire with a match-stick.

The other argument against it is that it will lead to a drastic fall in population. This is a most misleading statement. Mere breeding adds neither to the quality nor the greatness of a nation, it merely lowers vitality, spreads diseases and brings unsound citizens into the world. Those who would have a healthy and clean nation must submit to scientific regulation and stop indiscriminate reproductions. The deadly scourge of venereal disease today is eating into the vitals of 47% of our people and if we would prevent its spreading, birth control is indispensable. That birth control does not necessarily cut down the population too drastically is proved by Russia, a country where birth control is legalised, but where the annual increase of population is something like 3 million. The future of women in India lies with those 90% who toil and labour in green fields and dark factories and the amount of consciousness that can be roused in them to the rights of their class for it is with them that the rights of their sex are bound up and the measure of the power and influence they wield will be determined by the strength of the class they belong to. They who would win freedom for women, vindicate their rights and give them perfect equality, must work for the larger freedom of the exploited and the oppressed and wipe out the society which keeps the few in luxury at the expense of the many. The women's problem is the human problem and not merely the sex problem. It is not literacy or franchise which will fundamentally change their position to their advantage and satisfaction but the root-basis and entire construction of society. We have the two striking examples of Russia on the one hand and Italy and Germany on the other. Whereas in the former the women are establishing complete equality in the physical, material and human relationship, in the latter they are fast losing even their hard-won concessions and rights, for while in Russia vested interest has been overthrown, in Germany and Italy it is making

its last desperate bid for an existence which is threatened. India must therefore look to a revolutionised future, when class shall have become a memory of the past, poverty shall have been wiped out and man and woman will have obtained not only their sex rights but their human rights as well and live as noble dignified human individuals and build the new race of equality.

*[Contributed by Neera Desai].*

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**SHATTERED HOPES  
- NEW BEGINNINGS**

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## Declaration of the National Convention of Women on Beijing

FEBRUARY 1995

**W**e as women, as workers, as cultivators, as producers, as consumers, as mothers, as citizens, as human beings:

*Question:* the very premise of global attempts of 'redress' women's inequality and bondage through the slogan of "integration of women in mainstream development". This path of development means development for some and underdevelopment for many, peace for some and violence for many. Just as women's interests are not being and cannot be served by such development, so also the women's movement cannot be co-opted into tacit acceptance of the dominant development model.

*Reject:* the theory that the market is the sole arbiter of human existence.

*Assert:* the rights of nations and people to choose their own path of development free from the pressures of imperialist dominated agencies and financial institutions, because it is only in the framework of national sovereignty and democracy that women can assert their right to be free.

*Demand:* not structural adjustment but structural transformation. The former leads to feminisation of poverty and redistribution of hunger between men and women. The latter is based on redistribution of wealth and property with equal rights for women and an end to patriarchal structures and values.

*Find:* that the documents being prepared for the Beijing conference by UN agencies are devoid of content since they do not identify the root causes for the deterioration in the status of women. They are, at best, only statements of good intention. They do not challenge existing global hierarchies. The draft country paper of the Government of India is also inadequate and

conceals the Government's own responsibility for the dismal condition of the mass of Indian women.

It is within this context that we make the following recommendations:

1. The UN should constitute a monitoring body with judicial powers to check the activities of multinational corporations in relation to the exploitation of labour and environment. The present subversion of the UN mandate by dominant powers, principally the US, has to be reversed as must its subordination to financial institutions like the WTO and funding agencies. The UN should support efforts of third world countries to renegotiate their membership of such institutions which are at present heavily weighted against their interests.

2. UN programmes suggested for raising the economic status of women should be based on land reforms and granting of land rights to women. It should draw up special international conventions to protect the rights of women agricultural workers and women in the unorganised sector, including homebased workers, to be implemented on a timebound basis. This would include legislation by member countries which would redefine women's work in agriculture to eliminate the notion of women's work being light work and guarantee equal minimum wages to women. It would also include the provision of creche facilities, maternity benefits and protection against sexual harassment at the workplace for all women workers.

3. Recognising that economic independence is a prerequisite for equality, member countries, including Government of India have to themselves end and also prevent the retrenchment and displacement of women workers due to modernisation and technological development without providing them alternative employment opportunities and upgradation of skills through training.

4. The UN should set up separate international agencies to prevent international trafficking in women and children. Special safeguards for immigrant women must be ensured.

5. A special convention for the protection of the girl child should be mandatory for all member States, and in particular press for an enabling environment for the abolition of child labour and the guarantee of free and compulsory education for all children in member countries.

*Other issues relevant for India and many third world countries which should be reflected in UN concerns are:*

6. Opposition to the cuts in food subsidies as Governments have responsibility of providing food security for their people. In order to ensure essential commodities at affordable prices to all consumers, the public distribution system should be strengthened, expanded and the anomalies in the present system should be removed. Land under cultivation should not be indiscriminately diverted for commercial or industrial use as a part of Government policy. Cash crops and food exports have to be subordinated to the food needs of the people.

7. Increasingly women, particularly tribal women, are being denied access to common property resources like forests and grazing lands under the pretext of environmental protection, even as these lands are leased out for commercial purposes. This policy has to be reversed and women should have access to common property resources which are an important source of livelihood.

8. The Government has to take the responsibility to provide basic needs such as potable water, sanitation facilities, housing, clothing, health and education to all. Privatisation in these spheres has to be strictly opposed.

9. Present population policies of the Government are anti-women and have to be reversed. UN agencies should ensure that aid to third world countries is not linked to population policies in third world countries. We demand an end to all programmes that promote the use of harmful invasive, hormonal contraceptives both in the family planning programme and in the Indian market as they deeply and adversely impact on women's health. Women's health should not be subordinated to population goals, nor restricted to reproductive matters. The Government must provide comprehensive and universal health care to all citizens and not leave them to the mercy of private practitioners and multinational pharmaceutical companies while at the same time Government should end gender bias in the provision of pharmaceutical services.

10. Fertility and the number of children should not be a criteria to decide the eligibility of a candidate to contest an election. Women's political participation needs to be encouraged by extending the present reservations in the panchayats to at least

33 per cent reservations in the State Assemblies and Parliament.

11. The Government should take steps to effectively delink religion from politics to prevent the misuse of religious sentiment for political gain. Communal propaganda should be made a ground for disqualification for contesting elections and holding electoral or public office. It should also be a disqualification for Government jobs.

12. A comprehensive law against sexual assault needs to be enacted which will particularly address itself to custodial rape as a political instrument, rape on the basis of economic power, child rape and abuse, and sexual assault at the work place. Specific provisions are necessary to protect dalit and tribal women from caste oppression and sexual assault. The Government should build transit and shelter homes for women who are victims of violence or are at risk.

13. Legislation to provide legal rights to women in the family such as joint matrimonial property, guardianship, adoption, inheritance and property rights is essential. Wife battering needs to be recognised as a crime, and a comprehensive legislation on domestic violence is necessary.

14. Women's education needs to be viewed as their right and not linked to other goals such as family planning, etc. Budgetary provisions for education along with incentives such as mid-day meal schemes, uniforms, free books to the poorer sections to prevent dropouts must form part of Government policy apart from free and compulsory education up to the secondary level. For this budgetary provisions have to be steeply raised. Higher education should not be curtailed and definitely not left to the profiteering of the private sector. At present there is a move to cut funds for Women's Studies. It must be strongly opposed since such centres that generate a new body of knowledge will become subordinated to private vested interests.

15. Support services such as creches, care of the old or chronically sick and for deserted women, particularly for female headed families must be widely available to enable women to participate in public life and in the political sphere, in the community and in productive labour.

*(Lokayan Bulletin, 12:1/2, 1995)*

## Sat Talai Declaration

### WE WOMEN OPPOSE DISPLACEMENT IN ONE VOICE

**W**e – Adivasi, Farmer, Labourer, Artisan, Slum Dweller women – have gathered at this village of Sat-talai on the banks of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh today this 27th day of March, 1995. In the last three days we shared our experiences and we felt that:

Across the country big dams, industries, mines, power plants, atomic power plants and such like so-called development projects are robbing us of our water, forests, land and other natural resources and are being used to hound us.

Our right to forest produce is getting eroded due to the forest policy, protected areas, national parks, etc. We are losing our rights over basic necessities such as fuel, water and fodder. We women bear the direct burden of this entire mode of inhuman development. On the one hand our traditional rights/knowledge and practices concerning fodder, leaves, forest produce, wood, medicines, seeds, plants and other basic resources – their use and preservation – are being deliberately destroyed. This increases our work load. On the other, our role and rights in the development of our families, society and nation are being eroded. In a patriarchal society, as it is we women have had secondary status. But now this so-called modern development and the new economic policy is putting even greater pressure on us.

Capital is getting centralised in the country. Development is taking place only of certain areas and of a certain class. The natural resources and the labour of the rest of the country are being used for this purpose. This centralisation is leading to regional imbalances. As a result regional and state identities are

under constant attack and are being distorted. This affects us women the most. Our decision making potential is shrinking and there is a check on our freedom.

This regionally unbalanced development is leading to migration. Women suffer the problems of migration as adivasis, dalits, labourers and farmers; in addition as women in a patriarchal society and its practices they also bear physical exploitation and get low wages. A feeling of insecurity is generated as a result of the disintegration of the village, community, home and family.

Women bear the first blows of the unemployment arising out of the large scale practice of capital intensive techniques in agriculture and craft. We are being displaced from employment along with being displaced from the village, land and home. We are being given such employment which is more time consuming, labour intensive, harder and which pays lower wages instead. Such jobs which are unorganised and therefore without regulation, which do not use skills and capacities and which offer no possibility of developing our personalities.

Women have been considered the preservers of natural resources and society but these rights are slipping out of our hands as a result of the development policies and migration. The entire society is faced with a real danger of steady destruction of natural resources on the one hand and social disintegration on the other. The use of such technology is also on the rise which destroys the land, fills the air with toxins, ruins our health, affects the foetus in the womb and handicaps human beings and animals physically and mentally.

The disintegration of the village, family and community is affecting regional diversities, traditional practices, lifestyles, beliefs and faith and an entire way of life. Being forced to move far from their natal homes, a disintegrating home and family is leading to distortions in the man-woman relationship, lessening of mutual trust and a shrinking of freedom for women. Anti-women practices such as witch-hunting are on the rise instead of getting reduced.

Chased away from the village, we come to the city. We make our shelters on the footpaths and in jhuggis. Even basic facilities for life such as a house, water, toilets and electricity are not

available to us. We are chased away again in the name of industrialisation and beautification of the city. Once we get displaced we find ourselves getting displaced again and again. The rest of our life is reduced to being fugitive. Criminals and the police trouble us. We are considered thieves and dacoits. Sometimes we are forced to sell our bodies, our self-respect and our morals for survival.

In the name of women's development, many government schemes are being formulated and government machinery and budgets are burgeoning. But on the other hand the status of women is falling steadily. In a statement before parliament, the minister for water resources has said that since independence two crore people have been displaced because of development projects. Of those only 50 lakh people have been compensated/rehabilitated. Nothing is known of the remaining one and a half crore, of which half are women. Eighty lakh women are missing and there is supposed to be women's development in the country.

We have not gathered here today only to count our sorrows caused by these anti-people and especially anti-women policies and talk of the effect of these development projects. Across the country, at hundreds of venues, women (and men) are unitedly opposing these destructive projects through struggle. They have won some victories also. Women are equal participants in struggles such as Baliapal, Netarhat, Narmada, Chattisgarh Mukti Mōrcha, Bisalpur. Bearing the load of housework, looking after the children and putting aside the fear of earning a bad name in society, women are taking part in the struggle.

We have felt that is not enough to take part and that we should also take the lead. We have to take big decisions in life and in the struggle. We have to lead the organised struggle and change the direction of development. For this we have to change unequal relationships inside the house, unequal distribution of labour and the usual social perspective with which women are viewed.

It is clear to us that the present form of development is anti-people and anti-women. It is for a few people only and we will fight against it together. We will also clearly oppose the international agencies (such as the World Bank and many foreign governments) which give aid to beautify cities and for building big dams and industries.

We are fighting for the right to our lives and for the lives of the coming generations. This is why we are prepared to fight this long, hard and challenging battle. And this is why we will win. We will create a society and a pattern of development based on equality and linked with nature. We will have our place in it.

*(Lokayan Bulletin, 12:1/2, 1995)*



## Recommendations on the Draft Platform of Action

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Coordination Unit —  
National NGO Lobby Team

The following are the preambles of the critiques prepared by Indian NGOs of the Draft Platform for Action which will be debated and adopted in Beijing by participating governments. We are reproducing them here since they provide an important insight into the inputs that women's organisations and activists want to make to the formal inter-governmental process.

### **Preamble to Economic Empowerment**

#### *Poverty*

We recognize the structural nature of poverty that affects women, economically and socially marginalised people, and indigenous communities. The gender subordinating structures that ensure women's persistent and growing poverty worldwide are exacerbated by current political, macro-economic policies, programmes and structures. To achieve both equality and equity between women and men and among all social groups of people, women must participate fully as decision-makers in the evaluation and redesign of all political, economic, social and ecological policies, programmes and structures.

#### *People Centred Sustainable Development*

Economic growth not directed toward social development on a sustainable ecological basis exacerbates both poverty and environmental degradation as the current and growing gap between the rich and the poor both within and among countries attests. The current model of development is detrimental for the majority of the people, and for the sustainability of the earth.

Nation-states must exercise the political and social will to implement commitments already made at conferences to develop a just and sustainable political, social and economic world.

#### *Macro-Economic Policies*

People-centred sustainable development is the foundation for the future. Without addressing both the growing poverty of people throughout the world, both in the South and in the North, as well as patterns of investment and overconsumption, particularly in the industrialised nations, there will be no sustainable future.

#### *Globalisation*

Women's poverty and marginalization results not only from structures of gender subordination but also from macro-economic structures which often depend on the subordination of women for their implementation. The quality of jobs available to them has consistently been characterized by low pay, low skills, lack of benefits and opportunities as well as the absence of labour rights and standards.

#### *Structural Adjustment*

Increasing evidence illustrates the failure of current structural adjustment programmes to eradicate poverty and create sustainable communities and societies. Women, in particular, carry the heaviest burdens of market failures. Structural adjustment needs to be redesigned and transformed to ensure appropriate growth within the context of sustainable ecological policies and directed at social development.

We call on all governments to acknowledge the negative impacts that structural adjustment policies (SAPs) have on women and urge all governments and international agencies to integrate women's concerns and perspectives into all economic restructuring programmes.

#### *Debt*

Debt is the underlying factor of the financial crisis of governments, "justifying" economic restructuring and adjustment policies. Existing patterns of financial transfers, prompted by commercial, bilateral and multilateral lending exacerbate the

debt crisis and hinder the efforts of governments to attain full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights of their people. All current agreements to alleviate and/or eliminate debt need to be implemented and expanded. New agreements to alleviate and/or eliminate multilateral debt need to be developed and implemented.

#### *International Financial Institutions*

The Bretton Woods institutions must be brought into greater accountability within the UN system. Their programmes of stabilization and structural adjustment must be characterised by transparency, accountability and participation by civil society. Nation-states should instruct their Executive Directors at the World Bank and IMF to ensure that all programmes are designed to enhance social development, gender and race equality and ecological sustainability.

#### *Transnational Corporations*

TNCs are the largest economic actors in the global economy and they are virtually unregulated. They are also major employers of women, worldwide. However, while the quantity of women's work has increased, the quality of jobs available to women remains low-skill, low-waged, and unprotected by labour laws. Women are conspicuously absent from managerial positions and governance of TNCs. Current trade agreements, such as NAFTA and the WTO do not include labour and environment laws to govern the TNCs. Individual governments have difficulty regulating TNCs because they are beyond the scope of any single government. The UN needs to update and conclude agreements on an International Code of Conduct for the TNCs.

#### *Women's Access to Economic Resources*

Despite a growing participation in the economies, women still suffer exclusion from economic resources due to structures of gender subordination. To address endemic poverty, women's and children's programmes and policies must ensure that women have equal access to resources. Women's economic rights must be the framework for developing all economic policies.

### *Unwaged Work*

Given the fact that women perform  $2/3$  of the world's work but earn only 5% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the assets, we support a call for valuing unwaged work and reflecting this reality in national accounting systems such as in satellite accounts of GNP.

### *Access to Employment*

New patterns of work are emerging as a result of economic restructuring. These include, for example, casual, short-term, flexible and sub-contracted work.

### *Labour Policy*

Women workers predominate in these jobs. Current labour laws do not address these new types of work situations. New labour legislations need to be developed which link benefits, social security and labour standards to the worker, not the job.

### *Food Security*

Given the fact that women produce much of the world's food and a sizable number of women are in the agricultural sector, but are increasingly getting marginalised with the current global emphasis on micro-enterprise, market driven production, and privatisation of common property resources, we urge for a call to recognize the critical role, needs and issues regarding women in agriculture.

International agencies and nation-states must increase investments in agriculture to ensure food security. Women in agriculture must have increased and equal access to resources that enhance their skills and ability for their sustainable development.

### *Displacement*

Development paradigms promoting large-scale projects (like dams, mines, tourism) have led to the displacement of communities especially indigenous peoples with far-reaching negative consequences on women's lives and on the environment. It has led to the loss of traditional livelihoods and support systems for women without adequate compensation. It has increased

inequalities between rich and poor and between men and women.

All development projects should be designed in partnership with women who are likely to be affected, taking into consideration social and environment costs.

#### *Crucial Areas of Concern*

- ◆ Food security of poor communities, especially women, is non-negotiable.
- ◆ TNCs must be made more transparent and accountable under an international/UN system.
- ◆ Countries should recognize market-failure and the negative impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes on poor communities especially on women. We demand structural transformations and not structural adjustment.
- ◆ Protect the agricultural sector where majority of women are employed.
- ◆ Women's greater access and control to land, water and common property resources should be ensured.
- ◆ We condemn debt conversion of all kinds and demand debt reduction and cancellation.
- ◆ A commitment from developed countries for 0.7% of GNP as development aid.

#### **Preamble on Human Rights**

We express our concern over the selective way in which human rights are enforced by the international community. Human rights which affect Northern interests become more important than the human rights of the poor, victims of racial discrimination or women.

It should be emphasised that women of colour and economically poor, politically powerless women have no remedy under international human rights law to enforce their human rights.

We demand an effective, non-selective enforcement of women's human rights by setting up special courts within the International Court of Justice or by vesting UNIFEM with judicial powers.

**Preamble on TNCs**

1. We express our deep concern over the recent reorganisation of the UN, including the abolishment of the UN Centre for Transnational Corporations which, among other things, assisted Third World states in drafting contracts with TNCs and was in the process of drafting a Code of Conduct.

2. TNC's operations affect women in many adverse ways, including: as victims of their anti-women labour policies; as victims of their market strategies, including offensive anti-women advertisement campaigns and as victims of corporate crime committed by TNCs, specially drug and food companies.

3. We demand that there should be an effective monitoring mechanism within the United Nations system on the effect of TNC operations globally. This can be done in the following possible ways:

- a. Reopen the Centre for TNCs with special emphasis on women.
- b. Establish a department for monitoring the impact of TNCs on women within UNIFEM.
- c. Establish a division within the Economic and Social Council to actively monitor and maintain a data base on the impact of TNCs in Third World countries.
- d. Appoint a Special UN Rapporteur to monitor the impact of TNCs on women.
- e. Establish a division within the WTO to monitor the impact of TNC operations on women.

**Preamble on Women and Political Decision-Making**

We recognise that women continue to be marginalised and remain outside political and social structures as well as decision-making processes. In the majority of our societies today, the most disadvantaged have the least access to political and social structures which, in turn, further accentuates their marginalisation.

Political participation should be redefined to include all processes that influence, decide and infringe upon policy evolution, implementation and decision-making.

Affirmative action by governments to create political space for women is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's political participation. This should be viewed in the context of growing global violence, criminalisation and fundamentalism.

Women have suffered the worst adverse effects of the global economic and structural adjustment policies. Empowering them politically is vital to their articulating their view about such policies and enabling them to be in better control of the situation. Peace is a prerequisite for women's participation in political processes and decision-making.

*We recommend:*

- ◆ Affirmative action and necessary support mechanisms to promote the participation of all women, including those from indigenous communities, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious minorities, at all levels of decision-making.
- ◆ Efforts to check the growing violence, fundamentalism and criminalisation of politics.
- ◆ Recognition that mass movements, people's struggles and other forms of political action other than electoral politics must be recognised as integral to women's political empowerment.
- ◆ The realisation of the targets set by the UN Economic and Social Council for 30 per cent women's representation by 1995 in Parliaments, Legislatures, Bureaucracy, Judiciary and other private and public bodies, including UN bodies.

### **Preamble to the Section on Girl Child**

This section has selectively drawn from earlier international agreements on rights of children which have not considered the special vulnerabilities of the girl child. Some crucial issues have been left unaddressed or very partially addressed. We demand the inclusion of the following issues more strongly:

1. Comprehensive primary health care made accessible and affordable without discrimination to girl children.
2. Adequate and appropriate nutrition from infancy to adolescence.

3. The special emotional and psychological requirements of growing girls.

4. Girls must have the opportunity to develop their full potential free from the burdens of work inside and outside the home.

5. The media has a formative influence on the girl child. Therefore various gender stereotypes in the media should be strictly avoided.

6. The increasing sexual abuse on the girl child including forced prostitution has acquired global proportions and needs concerted commitments for action.

*(Lokayan Bulletin, 12:1/2, 1995).*



## Human Development: An Alternative Paradigm?

(From *Markers on the Way:  
The DAWN Debates on Alternative Development, Beijing,  
September 1995*)

A second major issue that has been part of our discussion and reflection during the last five years is the idea of "human development". UNDP, through its Human Development Reports, has done the most to popularize the concept.<sup>1</sup> But even the World Bank now acknowledges that governments have a role to play in ensuring basic social infrastructure such as primary education and primary health. Can this idea, in the forms that it is now being espoused by various agencies, serve as an alternative to the dominant Bretton Woods paradigm of globalization?

An important issue here is the nature of a new consensus that is emerging about the relative roles of states, private producers, and civil society. The proponents of this consensus argue that economically productive activity is best left to private producers, while states should play an aggressive and active role in the social sectors, and poverty eradication. The argument is that, if economic growth picks up and employment grows, then growth will not only generate incomes for many, but will also generate

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<sup>1</sup> During the last five years UNDP has been producing a Human Development Report (HRD) each year. It comes out at roughly the same time each year as the World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) and focusses on many aspects of human development, providing extensive data that the WDR does not cover systematically. Its Human Development Index ranks countries by certain indicators of human development, and often provides a stark contrast to their ranking by GNP per capita. Increasingly its concepts have been refined and have become more gender-sensitive; the HDR provides a salutary though not adequate corrective to the concepts and approaches of the WDR.

resources (both public and private) for the social sectors, and poverty removal.

But the weaknesses of the new consensus are many:

a) growth may not pick up for many countries. This is especially true in the poorest countries where both the base of economically valuable skills and physical infrastructure are currently weakest. But it is also true of the recent experience of a number of Caribbean countries whose human development indices are quite high, but where growth is stagnant;

b) growth may occur but employment generation may be weak. This was the experience of a number of countries in both South and North during the 1980s when the rate of industrial growth was high, but job creation in the private organized sector was stagnant and even declining, leading to the phenomenon of jobless growth;

c) both growth and employment may rise, but the jobs created may provide neither economic security nor human dignity. Many examples of modern day export sweatshops exist to bear this out;

d) growth may occur at the expense of significant and irreversible environmental damage;

e) the processes of economic restructuring that are argued by the Bretton Woods institutions and others to be essential to generate faster growth have very high social and human costs, including greater insecurity of livelihoods for many, sharp increases in the work burdens of women, reduced access to services such as education and health, in part because of the decline in public service provision, and in part because of higher costs consequent on privatization and higher charges in the public sector.

Thus the deck will be stacked against governments willing and interested in doing something about human development even before they begin. The pent-up frustrations created by the poor employment prospects of young people, the worsening distribution of consumption and income, and the aspirations generated by an increasingly multinational media are vented through the rise of fundamentalism of various kinds, fascism, ethnic conflicts, and growing violence against women.

Because of its associations with the consensus outlined above, some have argued that we ought entirely to drop the concept of

human development. Alternatively, if the idea of human development is to transcend the problems inherent in the mainstream consensus, then it is necessary to i) engender the concept<sup>2</sup>; ii) spell out the principles on which it should be based; iii) re-define the concept itself; and iv) clarify the links that ought to exist between human development and economic growth.

#### *Engendering human development*

It is worth remembering that this is the second time in the development dialogue / debate of the last four and a half decades that people and their needs are coming nearer the center of policy discussion. The first time was in the 1970s when there was a consensus around the importance of focusing on people's basic needs, a consensus that emerged out of a belief in the inadequacy of trickle-down growth, and from the debates around dependency and the calls for a new international economic order.

The 1980s, as we know, saw a reversal of this consensus, with the primacy of economic growth becoming re-established as the dominant policy direction. In the 1990s, once again, discussions of human-centered development, human security, or sustainable human development are coming to the center of policy debate.

But there is a difference. In the 1970s there was no gender in the debates; perhaps understandably so since the field of "women in development" was minuscule, and the international women's movement was still a fledgling. This is not true in the 1990s. Discussions of human-centered development in the 1990s have no excuse to, and cannot afford to repeat the mistake of the 1970s. It will be too costly for women, and too costly for human development.

A gender perspective is crucial if the paradigm of human development is to break out of its current impasse. A gender perspective means not only recognizing, as many in policy circles are now willing to do, that women suffer the worst when human development is inadequate. A gender perspective means recognizing that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the

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<sup>2</sup> Some attempts in this direction have been made in the recently released Human Development Report 1995.

care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. They are the workers in both spheres – those most responsible, and therefore with most at stake, those who suffer the most when the two work at cross-purposes, and those most sensitive to the need for better integration between the two.

The implications of this understanding are:

a) the importance of recognizing women as the potential political actors with the strongest stake in human centered development; and the need to **engender human development** in a way that has not happened up to this point, by integrating a gender-perspective at the highest policy levels, and strengthening women so as to enable them to hold economic and political policies and systems accountable;

b) uncovering, researching, supporting, and strengthening the economic alternatives (policies, programs, models, experiences) that women have themselves been creating, as well as those others which link economic activity and human development in humane and fulfilling ways.

#### *Principles for human development*

In the DAWN discussions, five principles emerged as a critical core for a genuinely human-centered development:

- i) Human development means supporting the development of people's potential to lead creative, useful and fulfilling lives.
- ii) Human development for all is or should be the primary and direct goal of economic growth processes.
- iii) Transforming gender relations is central to the human development of both women and men.
- iv) Class, caste, race and other social relations of power are embedded in inequalities between and within nations, and interwoven with gender relations so as to pose major barriers; their transformation is key to human development.
- v) Human development must be environmentally sound and ensure secure and adequate livelihoods for poor people, especially women.

These principles raise a number of questions and issues that require clarification.

*Redefining the concept*

Fundamentally a focus on human development as the goal of economic and social processes should reaffirm the centrality of people realizing their potential to be creative, useful and fulfilled members of society; the acquisition of material wealth is a means to that end, not an end in itself. It stresses values of self-realization through creativity, through participation in community, through sharing and reciprocity, and through a rich ethical and spiritual life. A society that gives such values short shrift by raising material acquisition from the status of means to the position of a dominant end impoverishes itself in many ways, and lets loose forces of social pathologies are not so much results of extreme poverty (except insofar as poverty and marginalization go hand in hand with the breakup of communities and value systems) but of an obsessive, even frantic search for material acquisition as an end in itself bereft of human values.

There is a pressing need now for a clear rearticulation of values for at least two reasons: first, the environmental unsustainability of the materially acquisitive life-styles which are the support base of an acquisitive economic system; second, the human unsustainability of economic processes which value human beings if they are wealthy or failing that, if they are useful and difficult to replace in the process of wealth creation. All other people are marginalized or rendered subordinate. These two tensions are in some sense endemic to the dominant global economic system; but they have to become particularly acute over the last decade when ameliorative policies to sustain human beings have taken a back seat to the pressures of globalization.

*What is or should be the relationship between human development and economic growth?*

At present the problem is that the economic growth of countries has become once again an end in itself, and human development<sup>3</sup> is viewed as a means to that end. This needs to be reversed. This does not mean that economic growth is not important. It is important given the extreme material deprivation of large

<sup>3</sup> It is no accident that it is called "human resource development" in the dominant paradigm.

numbers of people in the world and particularly in the South. But growth needs to be managed and qualified so that it contributes to human development. One crucial aspect of the above is to guarantee a base of economic security for materially poor nations and people, through more equitable global economic and especially trade arrangements (e.g., an insurance fund for primary commodity producers) and systems that guarantee access to material resources by poor people. These systems should themselves be designed on human development principles and should be "debureaucratized" and participatory.

Besides better distribution of the fruits of growth, what kind of economic growth should be promoted is also important. Booming export earnings through despoliation of natural resources, or sex-tourism may lead to very high rates of economic growth for a time, but they run counter to environmental sustainability, and human values, especially gender equality. Both environmental controls and human controls are crucial. These are complex and difficult but essential. Regulating and controlling market forces, transforming states to be supportive of human development goals, and strengthening the institutions of civil society are crucial in this.

## Women's Studies and the Women's Movement in India

(From *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Feminist Press,  
Vol. XXII, 1993.)

VINA MAZUMDAR

Prior to the investigation of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, research focused on women's problems reflected motives very different from the research that has taken place after 1975. The objective of pre-Independence research was often to justify social reform or to provide a backbone for India's cultural pride, which had been battered by colonial rule and the onslaught of Western culture. The focus of such research, whether the period was ancient or modern India, was on the minority of women in the upper classes. For a variety of reasons such research declined after Independence.

The political context of post-1975 research was distinctly different. The need to justify the culture of the colonized in the face of colonial oppression was no longer present. The guarantee of women's equality in the Constitution (a feature unavailable to this day in the far older United States Constitution) provided a completely different set of standards to assess women's situation in all its aspects. The committee's report, *Towards Equality*,<sup>1</sup> presented a grim picture of social reality and trends of change that sharply contrasted with the goals of equality laid down by the Indian Constitution.

The guiding principles of the committee are significant; they could well be read as the manifesto of women's studies in India:

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1975. A summary of this report, *Status of Women in India*, was published by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1975.

1. Equality of women is necessary as a basic condition of social, economic and political development of the nation;

2. Improvement of employment opportunities and earning power should be given the highest priority in order to release women from their dependent and unequal status;

3. Society owes a special responsibility to women as mothers; safe bearing and rearing of children, therefore, is an obligation that must be shared by the mother, father, and society;

4. The contribution made by an active housewife to the management of a family should be accepted as economically and socially productive and as essential for national savings and developments;

5. Marriage and motherhood should not become disabilities, preventing women from fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of nation building, in which society, including women themselves, must accept their due responsibilities;

6. Disabilities and inequalities, of which women are victims, cannot be removed for women only: of all inequalities and oppressive social institutions;

7. Some special measures will be necessary to move in the direction of the goals set by the Constitution and to transform *de jure* equality into a *de facto* one.

The result of the report was to define a new agenda for women's studies in the country, an agenda that stressed the dynamism and pluralism of Indian society in contrast to the often monolithic discourse of the nationalist or the development schools. A new Program for Women's Studies, initiated by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, emerged after the report with three distinct objectives: (1) to indentify and work for needed policy changes; (2) to persuade the social science community to reexamine the methodology, concepts, theories, and analytical apparatus of social research, which had successfully excluded women's role, status, and situation from the entire arena of social investigations; and (3) to revive the social debate on the women's question, which had emerged as a major issue during the freedom struggle but had faded in the post-Independence period.

While there were other significant reasons for unrest among women of different classes, it is also clear that women's studies



contributed, among other factors, to the revival of the women's movement in this country in the post-1977 period. For the first time the movement was armed with a much larger body of information about women of the nonprivileged classes and was thus able to draw the concerns and priorities of the latter into the perspectives of the movement. The earlier women's movement was led by a very small number of educated women, who gathered and analyzed social data to influence its own leadership. This limitation confined the concerns of the earlier women's movement to a few social problems that affected women mainly in the urban middle class and, at a later date, in organized industry. The extension of the post-1975 research to peasant women and women in the informal sector generated new sources of information for the fast-growing women's movement.

### **The Issues**

The revival of the women's movement in the late 1970s brought new dynamism and directions to women's studies. Issues of violence — domestic and social, sexual exploitation in old and new forms, identification of complex structures of domination and their reassertion in new forms in the ideology of revivalist, fundamentalist communal and ethnic movements — are some of the most significant of these new dimensions that the movement has brought into women's studies. Similarly, investigations of peasant women in the rural economy and of their undiscovered history have prompted new questions and drawn women's studies closer to issues being raised also by ecological and environmental movements. Investigations into women's marginalization and exploitation in the economy, formal and informal, in the educational process, in communication and media and, also in the political process, have turned women's studies into one of the major crisis of the pattern of "development" and the choice of strategies.

By its very scope (as evidenced from the earlier catalogue of subjects) women's studies was part of a broader process of critical evaluation of the nature of social science, taking place on a world scale after 1968. The formalization of disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences — that is the division of social research into politics, economics, history, and sociology — had grown rapidly

in the twentieth century. The development of capitalism in Europe generated the need for specialized knowledge to run the social order. Thus, the expansion of education systems was accompanied by the growth of specialization within every branch of knowledge. The fragmentation of the social sciences within disciplinary boundaries was not without considerable problems. Each discipline soon developed in isolation from sister disciplines, generating its isolated theories, research, and analytical tools, complex jargon, and mystifications. Social science degenerated into an obsession with micro-level studies, with predesigned models of inquiry, rather than locating analysis in a broader social perspective.

By the late 1960s critical voices, muted earlier, began to become stronger within the various disciplines, calling for the development of a holistic perspective and the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries. In this struggle to restore social investigations to their original role, of examining the social process as a complex mosaic in which several processes are inextricably interconnected, women's studies was to play a major role. By its very nature women's studies could not be imprisoned within the formal boundaries of the established discipline. At any rate, the established disciplines had distinguished themselves by obliterating gender concerns from their research agenda. Women's studies solved the problem with a critique of the established disciplines which also called for a rich interdisciplinary perspective. It also questioned the dependence of most social scientists in India on theories and methods developed in the West, applying them blindly to the Indian context, despite the latter's marked difference from the West in political economy, history, and cultural plurality. Last, it challenged the Western concept of a value free social science, or the role of academic neutrality, transatlantic in origin, which had penetrated Indian academe with considerable success.

Soon after the First National Conference on Women's Studies in Bombay in 1981, a group of practitioners in India defined women's studies as the pursuit of a more comprehensive, critical and balanced understanding of social reality. Its essential components include (i) women's contribution to the social process; (ii) women's perception of their own lives; (iii) roots and

structures of inequality that lead to the marginalisation, invisibility and exclusion of women from the scope, approaches and conceptual frameworks of most intellectual enquiry and social action. Women's studies should, thus, not be narrowly defined as studies about women or information about women, but viewed as a critical instrument for social and academic development.<sup>2</sup>

Another area in which women's studies intervened was to contest the notion of development. Developmentalism was for many years the received orthodoxy not only in much social science but also among policy and planning circles. During the 1950s and 1960s United States social science put forth a "modernization" theory as the solution to the ills of the Third World. Here social analysis was premised on a simple dichotomy: between "traditional" and "nontraditional" societies. Traditional societies were rural, stratified, and "backward," while nontraditional societies were urban, dynamic, and progressive. There was a linear path from traditional to nontraditional societies, the catalyst being modernization. The modernizing agents were identified as an educated middle class and improved communication and methods of governance. The benefits of growth, it was claimed, would "filter" down to the poorer classes. This crude analysis, of course, reflected the goals of Western nations at the time of the cold war, in which modernization was seen as an antidote to social revolution.

Many Indian social scientists, especially historians whose anticolonial heritage had made them sensitive to the political underpinnings of colonial interpretations of Indian society, found little difference between this approach and those developed by the intellectual ideology promoted by the British raj since the nineteenth century. First, such an approach totally ignored, or deliberately avoided, the conflicts of interests latent within the

<sup>2</sup> The full report of the conference was published by SNTD (Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey) Women's University, Bombay. For a full description of the gradual evolution of the definition of women's studies and how it was incorporated into the National Policy on Education adopted by Indian Parliament in May 1986, see Vina Majumdar and Balaji Pandey, *National Specialised Agencies and Women's Development National Council for Educational Research and Training*, chapter 2 (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1989).

social system. Second, it altogether avoided the challenges to that system articulated not only during the freedom struggle against the raj but also through repeated assaults against the hardening hierarchical patriarchal values promoted by the system throughout India's history.

Unfortunately, developmentalism also increasingly infected the approach to and methods of planning in post-Independence India. It was assumed, rather naively, that development would resolve the contradictions of the Indian social order. Further, the simplistic binary oppositions with which modernization theory operated – for example, urban versus rural, progressive versus regressive – crept into the framework of Indian planning, offering glib but unrealistic models of growth which need not tamper with the unequal social structures; in which resources and power were unevenly distributed, between classes, castes, communities, and gender. The modernization theory only helped to strengthen the view of women's status as an issue of "social reform" equally pressing for all sections of society and thus enabled the Indian planners to ignore the class, caste, and gender dimension of economic, political, and infrastructural growth. It also allowed the ignoring of the negative consequences of such strategies, visible in simple demographic indicators such as the declining ratio of women to men in the population and the economy.

Against the rather simplistic analysis of the modernization theorists and the Indian planners, work within women's studies showed that development is not an innocent term but is, rather, value laden. Any analysis of development cannot be only quantitative, a question of more or less development. Development needed a qualitative analysis. Development does not affect people equally but differs across social classes, castes, and other groups. In the case of women; in particular, evidence showed that so-called development has in fact marginalized the vast majority of poor women, in rural and urban areas. The question, therefore, is not about development as such but, rather, what kind of development – one that only increases inequality and gender exploitation, for example, or development that is sensitive to egalitarian and gender concerns.

By its very nature women's studies is interdisciplinary. Apart from that, women's studies is also a critical discipline. It is critical

because it raises crucial questions about the way social theory has traditionally posed questions of analysis, and, by doing so, women's studies makes way for a broader and receptive social science, alive to the crucial questions of the day. Thus, the practitioners of women's studies ask; Why did women's historic roles in the discovery of agriculture, pottery, and textile production in India (and the world) remain hidden from the educated community for so long? Why has the massive infrastructure for agricultural research and development failed even to see women's contemporary roles and problems? Why has women's labour in the family remained outside the framework of any analysis of the production and reproduction of commodities and services and their valuation? And why have investigations into the caste-class community nexus failed to examine its connections with controls over women's labour freedom and behaviour?

Women's studies has been crucial in helping social science to broaden the notion of the "social," thus transcending the earlier narrow formulations. A crucial example in this respect is redefining old notions of "class." In the orthodox formulation "class" was often opposed to divisions of gender, caste, and ethnicity. In this reading class was seen as the central organizing principle of social analysis, in contrast to differences of gender, caste, and ethnicity, which were seen at best as transitory phenomena with the onset of modernization. As women's studies has shown, this analysis does considerable violence to the situation on the ground. Thus, class is not a "model" that can be "applied" to the real world; class is a real historical product. Women's studies practitioners argue that disposition of gender is crucial to an understanding of class differentiation. Historical, in opposition to formal, class analysis shows that class exists not in opposition to differences of gender, caste, and ethnicity but, rather, in and through them. The Indian theories of purity-pollution, or boundary maintenance between dominant and suppressed caste and tribal groups, also operate through greater controls on women. Such controls also prevent women and their children from acquiring any identity beyond the one of birth, defined by the family, caste/ethnicity, and class. In the final analysis women's studies has actually enriched our analysis of

these central organizing social principles of our time and society. M. N. Srinivas, doyen of Indian sociology, describes women's studies as the "only significant development in Indian social science in the last two decades — a thrust from below."<sup>3</sup>

From its embryonic origins in the mid-1970s, women's studies has now become a national movement. The First National Conference on Women's Studies was convened in Bombay in 1981, and the response was overwhelming; the mandate given by that conference led to the establishment of the Indian Association for Women's Studies in 1982. The association's membership now includes 18 universities, 10 colleges, and 15 research institutes as well as more than 650 individuals, many of whom are from the academic profession. Since the association came into existence the University Grants Commission has drawn the attention of the universities to promote an understanding of women's issue through the teaching research and extension activities of various disciplines and nearly forty universities have entered the field. The National Policy on Education (NPE), adopted by Parliament in 1986, for the first time prescribed a new "role" for the national educational system, of providing "education for women's equality," through the revision of curricula, the reorientation of teachers and planners, and direct involvement in women's empowerment.

It is important to remember that the National Policy on Education did not design women's studies but only accepted the demand of academic participants in the women's movement, voiced through a decade of struggle. The perspectives, ideology, and strategies adopted by the women's studies movement was thus not evolved by the government or the academic establishment but, rather, by the movement and its allies. The primary objectives of the movement have remained constant:

1. To change social perceptions, attitudes, values and structures that obstruct or deny gender equality as a value. Some of these are traditional and deep rooted in our past. But some are very new, ideas, institutions, and movements that manipulate old

<sup>3</sup> Inaugural address, International Congress of Sociology, New Delhi, August 1986. Published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 No. 4 (24 January 1987).

practices, norms, customs, and primordial loyalties of people to set the clock of social development back. Typical illustrations of such new wine in old bottles is the escalation of dowry and dowry-related violence, the spread of female infanticide and feticide, market propaganda that glamorizes women's role as primarily consumers, and communal and ethnic movements that project protection of cultural or religious rights of a group at the cost of gender equality and women's freedoms;

2. To promote, activate and support processes of reform of the education and communication systems, so that, instead of being a tool in the hands of reactionary movements, they play "an active interventionist role" against such attacks.

Women's studies, as viewed by the Indian women's movement, is meant to be a potent instrument, playing a deliberate and active role in the battle for people's minds and values now raging all over the world. A typical manifestation of this is a growing cynicism about education, and higher education in particular. The powers that be (the real manipulators are often hidden under the cover of international or national development strategies) would like to transform education from its original role as a value generating process to one for skill transfer only. They would like to discourage questioning and dissent and the academic freedom to reanalyze the past and the present from more humanist perspectives. The same forces, however, quite often compromise with and even encourage the use of false history and selective cultural symbols by revivalist, fundamentalist, and chauvinistic movements. A common element in all these movements around the world, and definitely in India, is opposition to gender equality. The time has come to question the rationale behind such opposition.

The issue appears to me to be primarily one of conflict between the political, cultural or, communal identity of group, on the one hand, and human rights, the future of civilization, and social transformation with a humane face, on the other. Gender equality, or elimination of women's subordination, by its very nature threatens all movements for the preservation of narrow group identities, which require control over women's minds and bodies. Women play a double role, of transmitting a sense of identity to future generations and of maintaining the cultural

practices and values that are tied up with that sense of a group identity.

Similarly, forces that require keeping the majority of people in subordination as a passive group to be exploited or manipulated also need to control women and, through them, the rest of society. Unfortunately, many scientists have become willing instruments of such manipulation. Experiments in genetic engineering, or reproductive technology, diverting major investments to research and development for destructive weapons, and encouraging environmental destruction or mismanagement of natural resources are typical examples of the prostitution of scientific knowledge to serve vested interests.

The Indian women's movement has laid a special responsibility on women's studies to combat and counter such forces. Acceptance of this fighting role and the higher social responsibility that it entails necessarily influences women's studies approach, methodology, organization, and operational perspectives. It is not possible for this struggle to be carried on by a small group. The objectives of women's studies cannot be achieved by a monopolistic attitude or by confining it to a discipline, a course, a program, or a degree. Still less can our objectives be realized by creating new institutions for this purpose.

There is a close parallel between women's studies and the women's movement as a whole: autonomy continues to be a battle cry of both. Yet a choice has to be made between seeking autonomy for autonomy's sake and taking on the far more difficult role of catalyst, to influence larger systems and movements. Autonomy, separation, can also lead to isolation, marginalization, and even alienation. Women's studies practitioners, when they confine their dialogue only to persons within the movement, do tend to develop jargons and terminologies of their own, which reduces their ability to communicate with others. Sometimes jargon also promotes a kind of hierarchy within the women's studies movement, between those who claim longer experience and greater theoretical rigor and new entrants who have the concern but not the experience. It has also been occasionally noticed that such pursuit of theoretical rigor within an autonomous framework encourages elitism and a drifting away from the burning concerns of the majority of women. If this trend



succeeds, it would defeat the basic objectives of women's studies as the academic arm of the women's movement.

This is not to underestimate the dangers of working within structures that have acquired increased rigidity over the last few decades or of being co-opted within the academic establishment and losing contact with the women's movement. It is refreshing to note, however, that, while many of the pioneers of women's studies in India expressed acute apprehensions of such "possible co-optation" when women's studies centers began to expand within the universities after the Education Policy of 1986, much of this apprehension disappeared in the face of the enthusiasm to innovate, experiment, and learn from one another, displayed by a large majority of coordinators of the university centers, when they gathered together for a review and planning workshop on women's studies at SNDT (Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey) University's Research Centre in October 1989.

One of the outcomes of this workshop is a massive project on the Girl Child and the Family, taken up jointly by twenty-four university centers with interdisciplinary teams. The objectives of this project are quite unique in the Indian context. The studies have been undertaken not to win academic laurels for the individual or the institutions but, instead, to identify areas for intervention by the universities, with all the human and infrastructural resources at their command. If the gamble succeeds, it will create a network of institutions directly involved in reducing, if not eliminating, discriminations and deprivations of female children on a sustained basis. Such a role cannot but influence the thinking and behaviour of teachers and students in these institutions in the long run. It may also create a network of bases from which to mount programs for girls' development which will not suffer from the usual problems associated with massive national programs or campaigns (e.g., family planning, child immunization, etc.).

#### *Sociopolitical Impact of Women's Studies and the Women's Movement*

Assessing the sociopolitical impact of the twin movements is not an easy proposition. Comparing today's situation with that of 1975, when the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was released, however, one can view the high points.

At that time there was no women's movement. Since the late 1970s the movement has been a growing social reality. Political parties, government agencies, the media, and academic establishments have been forced to accept its existence and the rationality of some of its demands, even if in a limited way. The level of information and awareness of some of the problems is far higher today than in 1975. Antiwomen measures cannot be enacted or introduced without inviting protests.

Maybe that is one of the reasons why some of these measures are introduced in a surreptitious manner by the government. It is regrettable that the Indian government's decision to curtail the right to maternity leave to two children only for its own employees was introduced without informing Parliament and without any process of consultation with the general public or women's organizations. The net result? Even female officers of the government remain unaware of this measure, four years after it was introduced. A few national women's organizations who learned about it recently have already lodged their protest and are waiting for the present interregnum to be over before demanding its withdrawal or challenging its legal validity.

On the other hand, the story of the enactment of the National Commission on Women Bill in 1989 may be taken as a demonstration of successful pressure by women's organizations, which had been demanding such a commission persistently since 1975. The demand was ignored with equal persistence by successive governments. When the bill was finally introduced into Parliament early in 1989, many advised that it should be passed without debate, "as something is better than nothing." Women's organizations, however, thought otherwise and demanded extensive consultation before enactment. Such consultations did take place, and the Act that was finally passed in August 1990 was very different in its structure and form than the original Bill.

Divisions within the women's movement, ideological and otherwise, and differences in its intensity and strength in different regions of the country have affected its sociopolitical impact. A second reason for this limited impact is the time that the movement has taken to clarify its own perspectives vis-a-vis the burning issues now stirring the country. A third reason that has contributed to this limited impact is the media's narrow

perception of the role of the women's movement. As long as the movement confines its protests and demands to women-specific issues, they are considered legitimate. When the movement gives expression to broader political views on issues such as communalism or the general political situation in the country, these are not taken with the same degree of seriousness or reported adequately. Such limited perceptions are also reflected within the movement.

As compared to this, issues relating to women and development, the feminization of poverty, and the need to organize women at the grass roots and expand their opportunities for participation in the broader decision-making process have found much wider acceptance. Similarly, the role of women's studies as an instrument to revitalize and reform the educational process appears to have found credibility in the Acharya Ramamurthy Committee appointed in 1989 with the objective of reviewing and eliminating some of the antidemocratic elements of the Education Policy of 1986.

One may also point to the sharper expressions of resistance to gender equality which are becoming increasingly frequent in some political movements and various types of establishments as a reaction to the women's movement. Within academic establishments such hostility goes hand in hand with increasing interest among students and a limited section of teachers.

The Program of Women's Studies of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) was initiated in 1975 with three specific objectives.

1. To undertake policy-oriented research with a view to bringing about changes in policies that had marginalised women;
2. To promote re-examination of social science theories and concepts that had made women's lives, roles, and contributions invisible in social analysis; and
3. To revive the social debate on the women's question which had erupted during the freedom struggle and then faded from the public arena.

A fourth objective, which was not recorded (for obvious reasons) was to create space and opportunities for people's democratic struggles for their rights, using research as an input. The program was planned within two weeks after the declaration

of national emergency in 1975. The decision to use women-focused research as a counter-instrument to the suspension of democracy was taken by the veteran freedom fighter who then headed the ICSSR, the late J.P. Naik.

When I look back over all that has happened since 1975, I am tempted to say that women's studies has tried to contribute to all the four objectives, though perhaps in differing degrees. The changes introduced in collecting information relating to women's work in the Census of 1991 is an acknowledgment of the sustained work done by women's studies practitioners during the last fifteen years. The current debate on the declining sex ratio, identified again by the 1991 census, however, ill informed, is a refreshing contrast to the utter indifference to this persistent trend in earlier decades. Similarly, the reference to women's issues in the manifestos of various political parties, however limited or rhetorical in substance, do find space in media analysis of these manifesto, again a refreshing contrast to earlier years.

The multiplications of women's organizations, the growing number of conferences, seminars, and workshops devoted to women's studies and the networks that have emerged over the last decade and a half may lack cohesion and clear-cut strategies, but they do display dynamism and an activist orientation. Whether they can sustain the strength of the movement and deepen its sociopolitical impact will depend to a great extent on their capacity to draw strength and sustenance from an expanding base of women at the grass roots.

The concept of empowerment of the most deprived groups of women to enable them to enjoy their constitutional rights has given way to the understanding that empowerment is mutual. Women at the grass roots, when they are organized, emanate a kind of energy and determination for change which galvanizes all those who work with them. Today's women's movement is no longer a movement from the top percolating downward. The question facing us today is whether all at the top can effectively participate in the aspirations and concerns of the majority.

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## Women Voters' Manifesto

- ◆ Adequate provision of water taps, toilets, electricity, drainage, asphalted roads and garbage bins be made in every locality
- ◆ Creches, balwadis and welfare centres be provided in every locality
- ◆ Centres providing information and assistance for employment be provided in every municipal ward
- ◆ Well-equipped shelter homes be set up for rehabilitation of the needy and wronged women
- ◆ Girls' education be accorded the necessary priority and assistance
- ◆ Reserved seats be provided for women in buses and other modes of public transport
- ◆ Well-equipped hospitals be established at appropriate places
- ◆ Vigilance Committees be set up to combat atrocities against women; medical aid be provided on priority to women victims of atrocities
- ◆ Equal opportunity of education be provided to male and female child labourers
- ◆ Enactment and enforcement of the law making it mandatory that all immovable property is registered in the joint names of the husband and the wife
- ◆ Hostel facilities be created for employed single women
- ◆ Facilities be created for free legal advice and rehabilitation on a priority basis

- ◆ Candidature be denied to those booked for acts of atrocities
- ◆ Adequate security be provided from anti-social elements
- ◆ Stringent actions be taken against illegal liquor and gambling joints in all localities.

Women voters belonging to whichever religion, caste and background – urban or rural, literate or illiterate, skilled or unskilled – must exercise their franchise in favour of a candidate who promises to fulfil these demands of theirs.

Campaign for Awareness of Voting

C/o Neelam Gorhe

President, Krantikari Mahila Sanghatana,

2, Chandrasheel Apartments, 1202/15 Ghole Road, Pune 4.

Tel 321017

*(Contributed by: Neelam Gorhe)*

## Ordinary Women

{From: *The Blue Donkey Fables*, Suniti Namjoshi,  
The Women's Press Ltd., London}.

I had got it all wrong-  
                                about who  
was supposed to rescue whom,  
                                who was to judge,  
who to watch, and which one of us  
                                was expected to set the world aright.  
'Puzzling,' I thought. I looked  
                                at the leaves, the trees.  
I imagined the creatures hidden  
                                in the leaves.  
I would rather be a plant.  
                                But those who were tall  
we turned into knights. Those who were womanly-  
                                that was obvious enough.  
And those who were kingly we made  
                                into kings; though the armour  
didn't fit, and some women said  
                                they didn't know what a lady was.  
'But that's okay,' everybody said.  
                                'We'll redesign, readjust.'  
I was a knight-  
                                I was courteous, I was tough, but not  
tall enough. I sat among the women  
                                and watched the knights.  
I lounged among the knights and watched  
                                the women. At last

somebody said, 'This really won't do'.  
So we all got up.  
We mixed and we mingled, we shared  
a common cause.  
Halfway through it all I fell in love.  
'There is no wooer and no one is wooed,'  
my lady informed me.  
'Fine,' I replied and looked expectant.  
'And you are not a knight.'  
'No,' I agreed. She nodded approval.  
'And what this means  
is that you and I are equals in love.'  
'Yes', I said smiling happily,  
'we love one another like two ordinary women.'  
But she quickly demurred,  
'I was always a lady-'  
And at last I understood.  
'Right,' I said. 'You are a lady, and I  
am a lesbian.'