In search of pasts?

History, women's movements and women's studies

Indian Association for Women's Studies

Cover Illustration by :Ratnabali Chatterjee

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Consolidated Report of the Seminars on Women and Regional Histories

Indian Association for Women's Studies
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Foreword

The importance of regional histories and comparative research can scarcely be understated. While there has been considerable work on social reform and feminist historiography in different locales in the subcontinent, a comprehensive understanding of 'regional histories' has not yet emerged in any significant way. Further while there is work on various trends within each region, there is a virtual absence of any systematic comparative research that looks at parallels, continuities and disjunctures between one region and another. In looking at Women and Regional Histories, we need to delineate specific thematic divisions and regional priorities, as well as work towards conceptual clarity on notions of citizenship and identity - especially the ways in which they intersect with gender and region.

Movements for social reform in the early part of this century provide an illustration. More recent movements that have signaled the rise of regional politics often in opposition to a homogenising national politics provide yet another illustration, the flip side being the assertion of regional identities within a region, for instance the Telangana movement. It would also be interesting to look for histories of women's work and issues of participation in organised and unorganised labour struggles.

A peculiarity of India is the wide variation in the work force participation rates of women in different regions. Yet another area of inquiry would be that of state and public policy in relation to regional histories with specific emphasis on law and legal changes. What are the directions that legal reform has taken in different regions? What are the issues that it has focussed on? Environmental histories and literary histories also have not been explored enough. Demographic trends are also region and culture specific.

Given the critical significance of the region in contemporary Indian History, the Executive Committee of the Indian Association for Women's Studies decided to organise workshops in five regions in collaboration with local groups/institutions.

Of these, four workshops have taken place, and we hope to about organise the fifth in the Northern region before June 2000.

The collaborating groups/institutions in the four regions were:

North East: All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples (AICFAIP)

Eastern Region: School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University

Western Region: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai

Southern Region: Department of History, Central University of Hyderabad

The workshops aimed at identifying work on political, social, demographic, legal, environmental, cultural and economic histories. The framework of the workshop in each region was determined by the specificity of that region and its priorities. Each workshop attempted a comprehensive review of existing work on region specific trends and identified gaps needed to be addressed.

This volume was made possible by the perseverance, commitment and enthusiasm of scholars in each of these regions. Each report speaks for itself. I must place on record our deep appreciation for the cooperation and solidarity of our collaborators: Aloka Parasher Sen and her colleagues in the Department of History, Central University of Hyderabad; Samita Sen and her team from the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, and Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University, Calcutta; Veena Poonacha and her team from the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai and Chanmayo Jajo, Anjali Daimari and their team from Guwahati and the All India Coordinating Forum of Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples. The workshops were possible only because of them. We are particularly happy that we were able to co-organise the North Eastern workshop, and do hope that this marks the beginning of a long collaboration with different groups in the North Eastern region.

Needless to say, my sisters in Asmita sustain me, my work and the work of the IAWS. V. Padmini's secretarial skills make my job of coordinating several events at the same time seem almost effortless. The willingness of Rajmohan Tella and his team to shoulder the entire responsibility of producing our publications and their competence in the field has been vital. Financial support from HIVOS for the workshops and the publication of the report made this effort possible.

We take this opportunity to thank each one of you for your diligence and support.

Kalpana Kannabiran
General Secretary, IAWS
January, 2000

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Transcribed proceedings of the
Workshop on
Regional Histories of Women :
The Eastern Region
25 and 26 February, 1999
Calcutta

Organised by:
Indian Association for Women's Studies
School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University
Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University

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Preface

This volume has been put together from the recorded proceedings of a workshop on women's history held in Calcutta in February 1999. The original proposal for a series of workshops on women's history in different regions of the country came from the Indian Association of Women's Studies. The idea was picked up by the two women's studies centres in Calcutta (Women's Studies Research Centre of Calcutta University and School of Women's Studies of Jadavpur University). The workshop was organised jointly by all three institutions. IAWS was generous with funds, WSRC provided the co-ordination and the SWS the infrastructure and the venue.

The thinking behind the workshop was set out in a brief 'proposal' which has been included in the beginning of the volume. The rest of the volume adheres, quite faithfully, to the format of the workshop. The first section sets out the Inaugural Session, which had four speakers. This is followed by the three business sessions, which had each four speakers. The discussions are appended to each session in the order they were conducted. In the first two sessions, the discussion came at the end, after the four speakers had presented their papers. In the third session, there were two rounds of discussions, one each after sets of two speakers. The fourth session was a panel discussion, and once again, the discussions were split into a first round after two speakers and a second round after three other speakers. The volume follows this format.

We have followed a simple procedure in producing this volume. We had recorded, on audio cassettes, the entire proceedings of the two days. These were transcribed, edited and where possible paper-givers and panelists were consulted to ensure accuracy. We have avoided leaving out material as far as possible. We have undertaken, however, quite extensive editing and pruning of the discussion sessions. Kavita Panjabi's presentation on the Tebhaga Movement has been replaced with an abstract, on her request. The volume reflects, nevertheless, the expansive mood of a workshop environment. The process of transcription and editing has produced errors, inaccuracies and omissions that have not been possible to correct in some cases and some of which must have escaped our eye. This is especially true of the discussion sessions, where we failed to identify some speakers who did not introduce themselves when making their interventions. We apologise, most humbly, to anyone who have been attributed words or sentiments they had not or had not meant to express.

As the person who assumed responsibility for organising the workshop and then producing this volume, I take this occasion to thank all those who have given unstintingly of their time and cooperation to actualise the project. I thank Kalpana Kannabiran, the Secretary of IAWS, for her prompt responses to our appeals and the staff at Asmita for their

cooperation. I thank Nirmala Banerjee for her inspiration and encouragement with first the workshop and then the volume. The Directors of WSRC and SWS are of course part of the team of organisers, but as historians themselves, Anuradha Chanda and Ratnabali Chatterjee, have taken very special interest in this project. Their staff, especially Maksuda Khatun, Sarbani Goswami, Shivani Banerjee Chakravorty, Abhijit Sen and Karuna Chakraborty have worked hard and long to make the workshop a success and this volume possible. Sarbani and Abhijit, particularly, stayed with the project and helped with not only editing, proof reading and financial management but also with the many tedious details involved in production. The transcribers, Manjira Chakrabarty and Arka Dasgupta, did a splendid job with the chaotic recordings. Joyanti Sen and Rita Bose of Sachetana Information Centre undertook the laborious process of word processing the transcriptions. My thanks to all of them.

Samita Sen
Department of HistoryCalcutta University

The Proposal

A Note

A workshop is proposed to bring together some of the ongoing historical research on gender in the Eastern Region. In the last decade or so a corpus of women's history has grown in India, more especially so in (or on) Bengal. Scholars from other disciplines (notably Economics, Sociology and Literature) have found it useful to start with historical explorations and many it has provided an important conduit for undertaking research on gender. They have concentrated on issues of Social reform, education, work, political participation, the gendered discourses of colonialism and nationalism. Most of this scholarship remains widely dispersed – both in terms of the themes addressed and approached adopted. Moreover, little attempt has been made yet to link, connect and thread the diverse insights of historians. It is important to understand, evaluate and even inventorise what we have in order to identify the existing lacunae and plan ahead. The workshop is intended, partly, to be a stocktaking exercise, to bring together the variety of research currently available. This will enable us to formulate an agenda for future research.

The aim of the workshop is two-fold: first, to provoke discussion on the need for a historical understanding of women's current situations; and, second, to examine how 'history' is itself a political resource (or have been used as such) to define (or assert or change) women's identity.

There can be no doubt about the critical value of a regular and sustained interchange among practitioners of women's history, those engaged in 'women's studies' and activists concerned with current issues about women. Yet, such interchange has been relatively spasmodic. As a result, the field of women's history and women's studies are insufficiently informed about or sensitised to each other's concerns. The historian tends to remain locked in paradigms set by current preoccupations of the discipline, which may or may not always reflect contemporary concerns on the ground. We have few comprehensive accounts of long-term social movements affecting women: we do not know much about marriage patterns, family and household constitution, the value and use of women's labour, patterns of migration, institutions of socialisation and skill dissemination, even in the nineteenth century. And, of course, an understanding of long term trends in such social forces is critical to many questions about women today, including poverty, employment and health.

Equally, however, much of historical research does have contemporary relevance were we to look for it and were we to pay attention to explicitly drawing it out. Witness the concern with problems of women's participation (or the lack of it) in nationalist and allied movements. Conversely, women's studies scholars often pay little attention to the implicit lessons springing from historical research. There are, at the moment, many debates among

the former about Liberalisation and Globalisation. Neither of these are short-term phenomenon. Liberalisation is a phase in the history of capitalism which did not arrive from nowhere in India in 1992. Globalisation, an ongoing movement is at least three hundred years in the making and is implicit in the history of capital and as such has been explored by historians. The workshop is intended as a small beginning in the direction of recognising the strengths and possible contributions of history to the larger field of women's studies – as part, we hope, of a longer term and fruitful exchange.

History is now in the foreground of Indian politics. It is a resource being used, primarily by Hindu fundamentalists, to rewrite the past of the nation as a means of reconstructing the nation itself. But this specific use of history is not an invention of the Hindu right. The efficacy of such a strategy follows from the inception of nationalism, which used this device to construct the nation in the first place. Historians believe that gender was a key in that emergent nationalist discourse. And such it still is. In so far as the main strands of political ideologies in India have drawn on nationalism and are structured by and limited within the nation-state, they continue to turn round issues of gender. The content of envisaged gender roles have changed, but the role of gender relations as definitive of national cultural identity remains.

The Indian women's movement, in so far, especially, as they lay claim to unique 'Indianness' also draws on these historical and cultural symbols. 'History' used in this way is: an important political resource; a way of articulating women's aspirations; a key to political and cultural identity; and a crucial springboard from which claims on the state are mounted. Moreover, there has been significant feminist endeavour to reclaim women's pasts – histories of both oppression and struggles – as a means of rearticulating feminine identity. History is a field in which new meanings are being constantly produced both for and by women.

It has been insufficient, demonstrably, for historians to assert 'objective' historical 'facts' in response to these political efforts. Where history is itself the terrain of political contestation, the historians' role is doubly difficult and it is perhaps fair to say that we are inadequately equipped – methodologically and empirically – to respond to these challenges. The workshop will aim to highlight some of these questions.

Anuradha Chanda

The question of women's history arose with the rise of feminism. As the famous saying goes: it was feminism that brought women to history and history to women. Today there is a reasonably well-theorized feminist historiography which has developed with the declared agenda of making women not only visible in history but also recording women's contribution to social and historical processes. The purpose is to integrate women's experiences into the dialectics of history. This trend began in the 1960s in the west along with the rise of 'second feminism'. The titles of some of the major books of that period show that a great emphasis had been given to the visibility element. Titles like 'becoming visible' and 'hidden from history' reveal this preoccupation.

By recovering stories of women's activism, feminists provided not just new information about women's behaviour but new knowledge, another way of understanding and seeing women, and another way of seeing and understanding what really counts as history. New missions of history depend on the perspectives and quests of the historian. Making women visible was not simply a matter of unearthing new facts. It was also a matter of advancing new interpretation, which not only offered a new reading of politics, but of the changing significance of families and sexuality. Women's perspectives thus brought in women as a category of historical investigation, but it also introduced new areas of investigation. As the historian stepped into the private domain, history, which had hitherto been engaged with the public arena, now found itself involved in a critical and necessary methodological shift.

Women's history, thus conceived, is bound to provide a more holistic picture and a more complete understanding of society. This forces the historian to step out of the conventional framework of the discipline. This has drawn researchers to 'Women's Studies'. The idea is not only to make women visible, not only to provide a numerical count of women but to develop a more holistic approach towards knowledge. This latter requires us to abandon the notion of a singular vision of 'women's experience' and to incorporate into our ambit the multiple dimensions of the lived experience of women.

In India, the women's studies movement started in the 1970s as, says Vina Mazumdar, an 'intellectual arm of the women's movement'. 'Women's history' is, by and large, part of the same process. It is since the 1970s that an interest in women's history has become discernible and much historical research has been undertaken in the past three decades, especially on colonial India, from women's perspectives. Michelle Perot, one of the editors of History of Women: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to the World War, said, in an explanatory note on rewriting the history of women, that they wanted to understand the place of women, the condition of women, women's roles and powers and how women acted. The need is to examine both their words and their silences. The historian has to examine the many images of women as Goddesses or as the Madonna. It is important to bear in mind that a history of women must be, fundamentally, 'relational'. The historian has to look at the society as a whole. The history of women is just as much a history of men. And 'mainstream' Indian historiography too needs to incorporate this perspective.

The history of 'women' is not an exclusionist history but a relational history. Women's history must, necessarily, incorporate relationships – of women with men and with other women. It is only thus that a more holistic picture of the past will emerge.

Ratnabali Chatterjee

Women's history has been generally posited as a project for retrieving lost voices. In this workshop we hope to add to this by situating gender at the core of an examination of how historical categories are constructed. For instance, both ancient and medieval periods as historical categories, especially in India, are associated with certain iconic images of

women. The period prior to 1200 A.D. is associated with women like Gargi and Maitrayee who are projected as *brahmavadinis*. Their erudition is supposed to have gained them the power to be free. This supposition is in stark contrast to the general picture of subjugation and domestication of women unearthed by contemporary research. Sukumari Bhattarcharya pointed out that in this period, prior to 1200 A.D., 'women' were equated with the sudras. Uma Chakrabarti, in her article entitled 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?' has shown how, in the nineteenth century, a deliberate misconstruction of Brahminical norms of womanhood was set in train. This was in line with the attempt to set up the Vedic Age as the Golden Age of the past. The erudition and freedom of a few upper caste women served as the main prop of this tale of past glory. By contrast, the medieval period, constructed as the Dark Ages by nineteenth-century historians (both indigenous and European Orientalists), became associated with the image of the woman bound down by religious restrictions and the feudal social structure. Among the different feminine icons of medieval India, Padmini and Meerabai represent two extremes. In their studies on Meerabai, both Kumkum Sangari and Parita Mukta had to negotiate historical categories like 'the Medieval' or 'the feudal' in order to historicise Meera's identity. It would be interesting to explore the histories of Medieval Bengali women on a similar vein, e.g., that of Chandrabati, the first women poet who became a legend in her own lifetime. Our readings would involve questioning the accounts of Chandrabati's contemporaries as well as nineteenth-century chronicles, which helped to deify her as a *saddhi*.

Historian have been generally accused of remaining locked in paradigms set by the current preoccupations of the discipline and, as pointed out in our general proposal, there are large gaps in our studies regarding the lives of women, in their situations and in relation to community and class. At the same time we must remember the way the discipline has evolved for us. What have been the 'exclusions' and the 'inclusions' in our general study of the ancient and the medieval? There never is anything more difficult than questioning the present. The more fragile the moments of reasons and unreason through which we pass, the more we turn to the past hoping for a ready-made answer. May I remember, at this moment, both to remind you and myself, that as students of history, our first lesson was to ask the right questions. That is what we hope to do.

Nirmala Banerjee

The IAWS launched this project on regional histories of women in order to emphasise the importance of the long-term perspective. There has been a lot of work on women's history in this country in recent years. Many of us have read such work with great pleasure and learned a great deal. What the IAWS wants to do and what I am very interested in is to introduce non-historians to a historical perspective. It is important to realise that women's issues do not just happen in the here and now. Women's problems viewed from the discipline of economics or psychology or any other, have always a long history. Unless we understand the history of these things, we do not understand the 'process'.

The IAWS launched this project after the new executive committee came into office in June. In the last two years we had two contradictory experiences. First, we started a series of regional workshops like this one - on the theme of survival and sovereignty - and in the end we had the national conference on the same theme in June 1998. What we found was that while there was a lot of talk about the present situation, the causes and trends and regional variations, there was very little understanding or discussion about the roots of the issues. In the case of problems regarding liberalisation, for instance, do we treat liberalisation itself as a sudden and recent phenomenon? Was there nothing before that? In fact, of course, there is a whole history behind the liberalisation policies. It is of crucial significance to note how that history contributed to the situation of women within the liberalisation process. The lack of such a perspective was very clearly brought out in the national conference. Second, in August 1997, to celebrate the fifty years of India's independence, we had organised a seminar on the first 25 years of India's independence. Since the 'new' women's movement took off in 1970s, we have been concentrating on the

post-1970 period. We are less clear about the first 25 years after independence. What happened? Women were in the nationalist struggle; there were prominent women leaders in the First Congress Working Committee; and yet, the promises and the benefits we got after independence turned out to be hollow. How did this come about? Why was it that whatever we did get, whatever we did claim for ourselves turned out to be so inadequate. Why were the substance and the content of our gains so diluted? The seminar in Baroda, where we discussed the first 25 years of independence, was very revealing. We realised that unless the women's movement as well as women's studies keep their eyes on this past and the process by which it transformed into the present, we are going to miss the tricks. If we disregard the lessons of past experiences, we lose a lot of the gains that are already made.

These were the two experiences which prompted the IAWS to decide that in this period of two years, we are going to spend much more of our attention on building up a regional history movement. We have to work within our limitations -- IAWS does not have the money to sponsor new research. So, we decided to focus on work that is already going on. It is important to take stock of existing work and ensure its dissemination. But the Association is also interested in giving a focus to historical scholarship. Thus, our major concern is to bring historians together. But we wish also to draw scholars from other disciplines to discuss their historical problems, that is to say, discuss their problems in a historical context. We hope, thereby, to build on the existing corpus of women's history, not just by bits and pieces in several areas but with linkages that explain processes as a whole.

Samita Sen

This is part of a paper written for a volume on Bengal's historiography being edited by Sekhar Bandopadhyay. It is not yet out. I call the paper 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation'.

In the last few decades a corpus of research on women and gender issues has grown in India, more especially in, and more so on, Bengal. Women's history now forms a distinct field within Bengal's historiography. Much of this literature has concentrated on the immediate past of the colonial experience and I think this is a very significant trend in the way women's history has developed.

The colonial period had been seen as a watershed in gender relations. In this period, processes of modernity were set in motion, both through colonial and indigenous initiative. Modernity came hand in hand with capitalism, which under the aegis of the colonial state transformed the agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing sectors of the economy. On the one hand, the use and organisation of land and labour came under new market compulsion, on the other, new sites of production, factories, mines and plantations, came into being. Moreover, the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism and in the early twentieth century, the contours of the nation state evolved. These were two significant political legacies on which the independent Indian State was founded. Together, these social, economic and political trends were to define and structure gender relations in contemporary India. The importance of understanding how Indian women's' situations is embedded in the context of the immediate past came with the new self-consciously feminist women's' movement in the1970s and 1980s. In common with other parts of the world, this phase of Indian's feminist movement witnessed an invasion of academia. First, with lively and innovative research from within mainstream disciplines, but also with a gender input into university curricula at the postgraduate level. The institution of several women's' studies centres across the country has provided greater impetus for both teaching and research. It is only very recently, though, that we have seen full-length monographs and now we see even textbooks.

Needless to say, the relation between the women's movement and growing scholarship in women's history is not always direct. Because of the women's movement, scholars have, with more urgency, sought to trace the origins of the women's oppression, explain their present situation and contextualise their current dilemmas. While historians

charted their own new courses in writing about women's pasts, and historicising gender relations, for the women's movement history itself became a prime resource. In both cases the recovery of the past became a crucial part of the current struggle. In common with feminists elsewhere, Indian feminists, and some of them were scholars placed in academic institutions, were faced with a past that spoke copiously of public institutions, political activity, social and economic structures. But the stories were entirely of women and by women. Worse, these stories subsumed all other stories; those of women's separate concerns, distinct interests and dissonant voices. The writing of 'her story' was thus a crucial agenda for the movement.

Many feminist scholars and many of them are not professionally historians, found it necessary and useful to address women's issues in historical contexts. In history, as in myth and tradition, there are empowering images of women, and mainstream history, especially nationalist history writing, has not been entirely silent about women's contribution and their sacrifices to the freedom struggle which are incorporated in any standard school textbook. Bina Das, Pritilata Waddedar, Matangini Hazra, Basanti Devi are names we are familiar with from our very earliest training in history. In the nationalist telling, the struggle for freedom from colonial rule was a common struggle of all people. The emphasis on the participation of different groups- peasants, workers and women - served to highlight the breadth and comprehension of the movement. Equally, freedom, it was argued, brought forth rewards for all these groups in the shape, mainly, of universal suffrage. For instance, the alliance between the women's movement and the nationalists, many argued, had been of mutual benefit. The moral framework of the nationalist movement allowed women to break through patriarchal barriers into the public world of political activity and on to the streets, the floors of Assemblies and Councils. The nationalist movement gained strength from women's participation and in the end the women won the vote and the guarantee of equal right in the new republic's constitution.

Marxist scholars first challenged the notion of a harmonious alliance against colonial power. They analysed the class composition of the nationalist movement to argue that within the umbrella of anti –colonial struggle, nationalist, primarily Congress, leadership had laid the basis of a bourgeoisie state in the yet-to-be independent India. To that end peasants and workers' struggles were misdirected, contained, restricted in order that dominant relations of property remain. Without disregarding the importance of nationalism in the overarching framework of anti- imperial struggle, Marxists began to examine class tensions within the movement. A similar critique became the starting point for feminist historians. Mainstream historiography offered these scholars three entry-points. First, the Bengal Renaissance and the social reform movement in the nineteenth century were represented as the beginning of modern India. In this period, Bengalis were influenced by ideas of European enlightenment. The period was also marked by the emergence of new women who were significant beneficiaries of cqlonial modernity and the benevolence of elite Indian male reformers. Feminist historians quite understandably questioned the view that women were passive objects of male reformism. There is now a considerable body of writing, which examines the patriarchy that was formulated in this period through an alliance of the colonial state and elite Indian men, both reformers and their opponents. The liberal rhetoric adopted in this period also, however, conferred unintended benefits to women and many of these can only be understood by exploring women's own agency. This liberal ideology was abandoned with emergence of nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Many scholars have seen this nationalist turn as socially conservative and detrimental to women's progress.

Partha Chatterjee's influential thesis of the nationalist resolution of the women's question challenges such a view. He analyses the construction of colonial and nationalist discourses, which set up binaries, overlapping the distinctions of the private and the public. But Chatterjee's judgement about the binary, that nationalism radicalises them by locating the nation in the inner domain of the sprit symbolised by women is not quite so accepted. These questions of nationalism and the issue of women's participation in the movement provide a second major entry–point for women's history. Like Marxist scholars, women's

historians are tracing a history of betrayal. With the waning of the euphoria of freedom, the vote and constitutional rights, Feminists are beginning to question nationalist leadership's attitude. It has been on the questions of institutions and the quotidian mechanisms of patriarchal dominance that mainstream historiography has been most silent about women. While volumes have been written about the detrimental effects of colonial intervention in the economy, the legal judicial system, and local governance, all these were assumed to be gender neutral. A great deal of attention was given to new social stratification, which transformed Bengal's and indeed Indian's society as a result of colonial policies. No attention was paid to the possible impact these policies may have had on patriarchal arrangements especially on the composition of the family household system and on gender relations within and outside the family household. These issues provide a third major entry–point for feminist scholarship. At present, very preliminary work has been undertaken in this field. It is, however, of growing concern to scholars and activists, specially since current debates on economic development demand a more long–term understanding of women's relationship to economic and social resources — to land, labour and capital.

In these various trends within women's history that I have outlined, there have been, I think, three major shifts in the last two decades. First, there has been a much more concentrated focus on women's own specific situations, experiences, and voices. Second, the attention paid to gender as a constitutive element of the most significant political processes of our time like, say nationalism, or communalism, has been focussed on. Third, the problematisation of the household, which had been assumed as a single economic unit, is an important development. By acknowledging that social and political processes affect women and men differently and that very often women more adversely affected than men are, the field of women's history has raised many new and important questions in history-writing of the colonial period. It needs to be said, however, that women's history has so far concentrated very heavily on the colonial period. The assumption is that the colonial period set many of the conditions that explain our current situation. The other assumption is that the colonial period initiated a significant and major break from its immediate past. The nature and dimension of this break, how ever, cannot be established without an understanding of the pre-colonial situation. The encounter of patriarchy with capitalism or with modernity can only be fully appreciated in the context of some under standing of patriarchy's own history. We must know more about women prior to nineteenth century. The longer term continuities and discontinuities in the constitution of patriarchy and its interaction with other social forces is a field that is yet to be explored as much as it should be.

Mukul Mukherjee.

Women's Work: Perspectives from Past and Present

What I shall present before you is a paper in the making. I apologise for the rather unstructured format of this presentation. I will focus on women's work but not quite on aspects that are usually central in discussions or studies of women's work. We now have an extensive literature on women's work, over time and space and occupational categories. Many of the characteristics of women's work are now well documented and in the Indian context we have become familiar with patterns of inferior technology and low productivity and low reward in activities performed by women, as also the burdens imposed by their multiple roles as producers and reproducers. We also know that the standard sources of information about women's activities provide only a fractured image of all the work that women actually do. Data systems are particularly weak on women's work. In 1881, the Bengal Census authorities were warned by the Government: "Women are not to be entered as employed unless they are engaged in special work of a distinctly definite character." It is not difficult to imagine the extent of underreporting that is peculiar to women's economic activity when it is filtered through definitions that emphasise exclusion. A century later and after much advocacy for reform in the counting of women's work, the scenario is not very different. We still have the classic case of the lace-workers of Narsipur in Andhra Pradesh who account for 95 per cent of the foreign exchange earned from export of Andhra handicrafts but are not found anywhere in the world of official statistics. This invisibility seems to be a constant in women's lives. In a very rudimentary manner I would like to present certain facets of women's work experience, which, to my mind needs attention and elaboration so that women's engagements can be seen in a more holistic perspective.

I begin with women's work vis a vis the industrial milieu in Bengal. Historiography of industrial labour in Bengal usually carries two basic premises. The explicit premise is the fluid and dual character of the labour force with attachment to both the urban work place and the rural hinterland. The not so explicit is the marginality and even exclusion of the experience of women who were either part of the workforce or tied to it in different ways. The rural connection of industrial labour features prominently in debates over consolidation of class and community among factory workers. What continues to elude us, however, is the nature of the arrangement that was key to this rural connection. Samita Sen's recent work points out that the responsibility of sustaining the rural links of urban labour was primarily borne by the women members of the mill hands' family. It is their continued presence in the rural homestead that served to protect whatever frail rights and status he had in the village and it is the continued supply of female family labour that ensured unbroken agricultural cycles. In effect, therefore, the male workforce could retain its urban profile largely because women held the rural buffer in place. Now women's work emerges as a customarily invisible yet an important element in the sustenance of industrial labour.

I would go even a step further and suggest that it also mediated in a major way the process of identity formation of the working class. Let us consider workers -- women workers — who themselves are part of the industrial workforce. Various accounts of jute millwork show, first, that a substantial proportion of women workers were widows, and, in effect, functioned as heads of households. Second, since the introduction of the shift system in the factories in the 1890's, women workers had a particularly arduous life. The superintendent of the Kakinada Jute Mills, witness before the Indian Factory Labour Commission of 1908, wrote, "It is one thing to work ten hours during an ordinary day but quite another and altogether different thing for a man and specially for a women to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning and trample a considerable distance to the mill, or when it is the last

shift, only reach their homes at 10 p.m. after which the preparation of the evening meal has to begin." Women have traditionally been a negligible presence in labour unions in terms of membership, leadership positions and issues chosen for struggle. Faced with many constraints and few options they seldom reach a bargaining position that advances their own interests. How have women responded to domination and oppression in the workplace? What have been their forms of protest and resistance? Are they different from strategies adopted by men? Some answers in the more modern context are beginning to emerge from recent research on trade union history for example, in the work of Sujata Gothoskar and Leela Fernandes, which mainly deal with 1950s and 60s and later years. Since we have not inherited first-hand accounts of how women workers coped with factory life, or indeed, their work experience in general in the early days of factory industry, we have only sundry clues to fall back upon. These are scant and scattered, but I think they still provide rather unexpected glimpses of how seemingly powerless women chose to deal with a hostile environment in the workplace. Let me recall two instances to show that sometimes even in those early days women were capable of devising their own distinct modes of resistance or protest in the course of day to day work. There is evidence in the literature that in the first decades of factory work in Bengal, cheap and submissive female labour was welcome. Encumbrances to the use of such labour were actually frowned upon. The report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission wrote, "Bengal mill managers did all they could to prevent women from bringing children into the mills as they generally take up the mother's attention and thus interfere with her work." Yet there are also references to continuing presence of non-working children inside the mills in the departments where women worked which shows that despite pressures women carried on with one of their preferred modes of behaviour that is, child care through physical proximity. The second example refers to a big cotton mill in Bombay in the 1930s where women went on strike on an unconventional issue. They stopped work saying that the European manager has touched the food basket of one of the women workers and thus made it ritually impure. For these women, accusing the manager of ritual pollution was one way of rebuffing the alien power structure. It is as if they succeeded in reversing race and gender as tools of aggression in the workplace.

I would like now like to go on to three aspects of women's work in Bengal. The first is resource generation by women's independent effort, which is quite distinct from, paid work or work in subsistence agriculture and has to be recognised as a crucial contribution towards food security of the household. It is now established that manual husking of paddy has been a very important economic activity for Bengali women right up to the early decades of the twentieth century. This work was open to women of all castes and communities and required little by way of capital and working space and more importantly, it was traditionally renumerated in terms of clean grain. Rice obtained through women's husking labour appears to have been a significant item in the family budgets of rural households as reported in a large number of village surveys. We now have a rough idea of the average amount of rice collected by women huskers at different points of time during the first half of the nineteenth century. It varied from about 9 maunds of rice per year in 1807 that is during the Buchanan-Hamilton surveys, to 1 maund in the 1930s. Thus, the level of resource generation declined over time but the amounts were still substantial for protecting food security, directly by adding to the family food stock and indirectly, by reducing the need for consumption loads. In contemporary West Bengal, where manual husking has all but disappeared, many areas are found to have two lean seasons during the year, which may be described as the hunger periods. One is the months of Chaitra, Baisakh, Jaistha, that is, mid-March to mid-June and the other is the month of Aswin, mid-September to mid-October. At this time the consumption and the availability of rice and potatos tend to fall rapidly and there is also shortage of employment leading to entitlement failures in most poor households. During such critical periods, women's foraging from forest and common property resources is often the only means of coping with food deficits. This is amply borne out by the annual food calendars that have been constructed for West Bengal districts. Resource generation by women and family food security continues to be inter-linked in a major way not only in West Bengal but also throughout rural India. This is reflected in the

substantial proportions of women recorded under NSS code under which non-working women are reported to be engaged in collection of food, fuel and fodder.

The second aspect can be brought out best in the context of traditional industries of Bengal. Both cotton and silk products of Bengal handlooms enjoyed a buoyant export market at different periods of time. They also retained a special segment in the domestic markets even when confronted with modern methods of production. Cotton textile weaving, as we all know, actually starts with certain essential preparatory processes: sizing, winding and warping. In traditional cotton handloom industry all the three processes require time, energy and a degree of skill and are generally performed by women of weaver families as unpaid family labour. The time taken for setting up a full length warp is often three days and a Bengal government report of the 1930s calculates that a women warper has to walk more than six miles in a day in the process of warping. The same report investigated more than three thousand weaving families and pointed out that in the cotton handloom industry each year's work put in by a male weaver required six months work performed by women and children. The low cost of production in the handloom industries, that is, their main competitive strength, therefore, has largely been a function of women's labour, though it still remains to be properly evaluated.

More or less the same situation prevailed in the household silk industry where female labour has traditionally been an integral input in sericulture and the spinning of silk yarn. Profitability of sericulture depends largely on a meticulous feeding schedule of silkworms, which has to be constantly adjusted to their metamorphosis. The expertise in rearing the widely used 'nistar' insects lies in stopping and re-starting feeding at the right time. In traditional sericulture the treatment of worms would be typically supervised by experienced women, as also the treatment of cocoons prior to spinning. Expert women would know the precise time when the silkworm should be killed and the cocoon ready for silk extraction.

Jute is almost synonymous with commercial agriculture in Bengal, but women are hardly even mentioned in the context of the production of raw jute fibre. This includes the important processes of retting and stripping of harvested jute stock. At least in the 1920s much of the raw jute extraction took place at the home of the cultivator and this work was largely the responsibility of the women of the family. If at all they did this work commercially, they could earn a daily wage of six annas in the 1920s, enough to buy 2 seers of common rice. Authorities noted in many places that the price of raw jute was largely influenced by the care and expertise with which retting and stripping was done and that raw jute processed by women was invariably regarded as a more tangle-free fibre.

What appears as a striking phenomenon in the history of cotton and silk handlooms and also in raw jute production is the subsidising role played by women's labour. This labour was characterised by activity-specific skills and was pivotal in preserving vitality in all the three sectors.

A third aspect that deserves attention is a gradual and subtle change over time in societal perceptions of women's work with regard to its productivity and skill status. One would like to imagine that at least at the household level there was some recognition that success in cotton handloom weaving or sericulture silk spinning or raw jute extraction was inescapably dependent on women's labour and the traditional skill that went with it. With the rise of mills and mechanised production came a different perception and we find that women's jobs were being described differently. In the jute mills, jobs were easily gendered and some marked wholesale as *maagi* (a Bengali slang for not very respectable women) jobs. Spinning and weaving, more highly regarded and rewarded, remained the monopoly of men. De Haan has brought to our notice the glaring gap in the status accorded to millwork done by men and women. Whereas the spinners and weavers were seen to require a year's apprenticeship and experience, women's work was said to take only a week's learning. The same arbitrary gradation of women's work prevails to this day. To take a contemporary instance, the Indian Farm Management Studies and the Cost of Cultivation Studies contain a wide range of agricultural data, but farmwomen's work feature only peripherally. The experts classify women's labour only in terms of family and wage labour. Female labour is

only mentioned as the derivative of male labour, for example, Madras Farm Management Studies equates one women day to 0.54 man-days, and treats one woman earner as half a unit of a man. In U.P. women fare slightly better. A woman day is said to be equal to 0.66 man-days. It is seldom realized that the wide spread practice of arbitrarily defining women's work has very serious consequences. On the one hand it systematically under-states women's contribution in productive activity and on the other it indirectly justifies the gender-based wage differentials even where women and men are engaged in the same kind of work.

Let me sum up the main points. I have tried to open a few windows into the complex domain of women's work. Its income—earning and capability—building aspects are important in their own right and duly discussed in the literature. But no less important are certain other dimensions of women's labour that have profound implications for society and economy though they continue to be undermined by cultural conditions and a male-centric mind set. These include subsidising and vitalising roles in the context of household industry and family food security and its distinct contribution to the identity formation of the working class. Also to be marked is women's latent capability of devising their own modes of resistance in the course of their day-to-day work, though their abiding image is one of silence and submission. I would like to end with the hope that these issues and concerns will be increasingly reflected in new research and open new doors into the world of working women.

Nirmala Banerjee

Continuing Gender Patterns: The Case of Sericulture

I am here with great trepidation, because I am neither a historian nor an economist with work on economic history like Professor Amiya Bagchi. What I propose to do is to re-look at some old data that I had collected and which I have not really used properly because I did not know how to. I would like to do further work on it with your help. In a way Mukul Mukherjee has opened up the issues that I wanted to talk about - gender relations as we observe them and the need to go back in time to see how far they were already there and how far they can explain what happened in the past. It is a kind of an experiment in trying to understand the past of a particular industry in terms of the gender relations that existed in it then and what we see of those gender relations at present in the 1990s.

I have taken the industry of sericulture for two reasons. First, in the 1990s, the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences was working on a project through which we had a chance to look at the working of the industry. I was part of that team and so I had an opportunity to understand something what the gender relations in sericulture producing households at present. Second, sericulture is one industry of West Bengal that has a record going back to at least, three hundred years. In these three hundred years of an industry continuing in one region, there has been surprisingly little technological change. It is the one industry in which technology was actually brought into Bengal by the East India Company and this was the first factory industry (in 1773) in the region. The Ganotia silk factory in Birbhum in 1870 is supposed to have employed as many as 4,000 workers. So, as a factory industry, there was also paid labour. But the bulk of the industry remained household-based. To understand what happened to the industry, how the industry survived and coped with a host of changes in the last two hundred years or so, we have to look at gender relations in the household that underpinned the industry.

The sericulture industry consists of two or three stages. There is the first stage of rearing cocoons, the second stage of drawing, reeling and winding the yarn and the third of weaving. The first two stages are household-based.

1. For rearing and reeling, women's labour is crucial. In fact, a house-hold decides on how much land they will put under mulberry depending on how much adult women labor they have in the family that is available for that work.

2. This labor is totally unpaid – it is a part of family labor.
3. In the seasons, these tasks involve seven to eight hours extra work for women but it does not give them either a command over any kind of decision-making regarding the sericulture industry itself, nor does it give them particular consideration, any help in the household or healthcare or education. In recent years, women working in household-based sericulture are being married with dowry despite their skills.

The industry is an important one and women are very crucial workers in it. The West Bengal Government keeps saying that sericulture is the most profitable agricultural occupation in West Bengal. Actually, if you attribute any imputed cost to the labor of the women, it often has negative net returns. The industry is profitable only because women's labour remains unpaid.

Let me go back to the history of sericulture in this region. If you go to the records before the time of the East India Company, you find silk exports from Bengal (at a level of about 25 to 33 per cent of cotton exports). Alongside, there has always been a huge domestic market from Gujerat, Benaras to Punjab for Bengal's silk. Bengal's silk was never a quality product – not like Bengal's cotton yarn or cotton weaving. Country-wound silk, as it was called, was always criticised for its bad quality. Nevertheless, Bengal had the natural advantage of growing mulberry and producing silk from that.

In 1769 the company wanted to expand its silk exports, and therefore it brought new technology into Bengal. So the situation was quite different from that in cotton textiles where new technology had destroyed the local industry. Italian experts brought the filature technology to local sericulture workers. The workers learned the new technique of filature winding which made the silk even and stronger. Earlier, it was only used in mixed fabrics, with jute or something else to make it stronger.

With filature exports growing, the prosperity of the industry continued into the early nineteenth century and not only the East India Company, but also private traders (Europeans and Indians) had set up factories. In addition, a hybrid technology was also being evolved; it was half–way between the new filature and the older crude system. In the older system, the cocoons were reared by the *chasha* (peasant) family; then the women used to wind off the silk by a *takli* or by pulling out the thread rolling it on their thighs rolling it on the *latai*. The filature put the thread through a different process by passing it through a croissure to give it a twist, which made it smooth. In the latter system, it was possible to estimate the exact number of cocoons required for a length. In the older system, this estimation was not possible.

The new (mid-way) system was called *katghai*. The cottage industry was able to adapt some of the advantages of the filature. For filature the cocoons were heated separately, then put in hot water to draw out the thread. In the *katghai* system, they put the cocoons in hot water, kept it simmering and then drew the thread. This was a slight improvement but the colours were not as good as in the filature system since they used the same water for heating the cocoons and drawing the thread. The two systems, *katghai* and filature, remained side by side till about 1825 when the filature system began to gain ascendancy. The exports were mainly of filature silk and filature experts became the concern of the East India Company. The Company tried to prevent the continuation of cottage, i.e., *katghai*, silk industry arguing that these workers should not weave silk at all. The entire cocoon produce should be, they believed, brought under the filature system for export. But this did not happen — at least half of the silk production continued in the cottage sector, which retained its viability and vitality. At the same time, all through the nineteenth century, filature silk exports were expanding. From about 1838 to about 1860-61, the filature silk exports were about £15,00,000 whereas at that time the country-wound silk exports varied sharply from about less than £50,000 to about £700,000. The period between 1871 and 1875 was very good for the Indian filature system because a disease attacked silk worms in Europe and the European silk industry was in crisis. At that time the Indian silk did really very well and in that period the exports went up to about £17,00,000 but at the same time the country export were about £7,00,00. After 1875 when the European system revived, filature exports declined very sharply, to about half the quantity they were the year before and then they

declined continuously, whereas the country- wound silk exports wavered around the same amount of about £ 7,00,000, till the late 1890s to early 1900s, when British traders started bringing Japanese silk to India. Indian silk lost out in this competition with Japanese silk, which was finer,whiter and more evenly wound. By 1931, the filatures closed down and even the katghai system was in trouble. The women workers returned to winding silk as they used to do. The 1931 Census gives very elaborate pictures of how women wound the silk with bamboo sticks and mud-balls. This reversal has meant that the whole range of experiments of the nineteenth century went unrecorded.

In 1951, the Khadi Commission revived the silk industry with the *katghai* system. Though the Government of West Bengal did start some filature factories, they never worked as well because the cocoons, they said, were in inadequate or uncertain supply.

All the records blame the Indian cultivator, the cocoon-rearer, for being lazy, selfish, interested in immediate profits rather than in the long run ones. But if you look at the trade figures, it comes out very clearly that the British never gave any protection to the Indian silk industry either in India or in the British market, though the French already gave that to their own silk industry. Secondly, Indian silk, which was competing all the time with the European, Chinese and Persian silk, was usually a price taker. The markets depended on the supply situation of the other producers. If the latter's production fell, as it did in 1871-75, there was good demand for Indian silk both in the export and in the domestic markets. In the years when export demand for Bengal silk was good, the domestic silk demand was also good. If, in the next year the export demand fell, Indian silk producers could not sell their silk in the domestic market either. If foreign silk was cheap, then silk weavers used imported silk. As indicated in the figures I gave for the 1870s, there were very wide fluctuations in the supply situations, in the export and domestic markets, requiring rapid adjustment in production. There was never any stability given to the entire market. Secondly, the foreign silk price that the Europeans wanted to keep competitive in the world market was kept at a level where the cost of filature could not be covered at all. The cost of filature was much higher than the country- wound silk, precisely because the country-wound silk used unpaid family labour, whereas the filature system used wage labour. Harbans Mukhia has shown in a paper, that if the relation between prices of the country-wound silk and the filature silk was 1 to 1.3, the cost was much higher in the filature system, which paid wages. In the latter case, the entire burden of keeping the price down was pushed off to the cocoon grower who between the *paikar*, the European trader and the filature owner, got a very poor price. So there was no incentive for the cocoon-grower to improve the cocoon quality or to give it to the *paikar* who was going to cheat him out of the price he had promised him in any case. The system was not profitable enough for the cocoon-grower to either produce the better cocoons that the filature system required or to give those to the *paikar* for selling to the factories. On the other hand, till 1900, at a lower price, there was always a market for country-wound silk here or abroad, because even the Company's servants were carrying on private trade in exports in country-wound silk. It could always be used in mixed fabrics.

After 1890 or 1900, when Japanese silk took over the Indian market completely, the industry did not die out. It stayed. The tradition of producing the cocoons and winding some silk and selling it locally continued throughout the twentieth century. In the late 1970s and 80s the government decided to promote this labour-intensive rural industry. But till then (and, of course, in South India this industry was being promoted by the State Government of Mysore) this industry survived two hundred years despite several crises and formidable challenges.

My hypothesis is that this survival was possible because of women's unpaid labour, because the household was able to utilise women's unpaid labour whenever required. They could always keep the sericulture industry going for whatever supplementary income the household could earn. When the filature factories were working, the same women who knew how to draw the thread from the cocoons could go to work as factory labour, and earn good income from the produce. When the filature factory closed, they returned to household-based production. In the *katghai* they were responsible for rearing the cocoons

and also for some country winding. The same pattern holds even now. So that what you have in the silk industry is a pattern of gender relations, which is very much more steady than any of the various developments in the economy we have considered. This consistent pattern of gender relations consists of the household using women's labour as a resource to tap and deploy, as they want, but the women did not have a voice in production decision. In our 1990s study, we found women wanting to move to the better cocoons which produce the better silks precisely because much fewer cocoons are required to produce the same kind of value. This would reduce their work. But the shift also requires the family to invest in building some 'machighar' and in some other developments. Moreover, these cocoons are not as hardy as the 'nistari' cocoon that has been traditionally used here. It needs a lot of isolation, fomenting, cleaning and the household has to maintain a time gap. But the families are not willing either to make the investments or to take the risks: the idea of a free family resource that they can tap whenever they want precludes investment in women's work.

In Maldah, Murshidabad and parts of Birbhum, where fuel has got very scarce, the women collect sticks of jute (patkathi), make a mixture of mud and some coal dust and put this on the sticks. And these sticks are then dried and used as fuel. They burn very quickly, so the women have to sit next to the stove and feed the fuel sticks one by one. Even cooking rice takes a whole hour of sitting next to the stove. But none of the families were talking about adopting any other kind of cooking or any other kind fuel, though in the season women work six seven hours feeding the worms and picking up the cocoons. The only benefit women seem to have derived from the recent prosperity in the industry is the opportunity to go to the hospital for child deliveries and that too only at times when delivery at home would pollute the crop. In Shaktipur, which has a district hospital, the same was the case. So, women's health and women's concerns were in no way reflected in family decisions.

The use of family labour has helped this industry to survive such a long period and through many vicissitudes. Perhaps because of this, silk-growing households are extremely conservative. They have a major interest in maintaining unequal gender relations which ensures family survival. This conservatism is reflected in their responses to technology and to other changes which in turn determines the fate of the industry. The possibilities of developments which will enable the industry to find alternative means of survival are remote.

Nupur Dasgupta

Women and Work: Appraisal of Early Indian Sources

I am speaking as on outsider in this particular session since my talk will not actually focus on economy. This is a paper on the condition of women in the early Indian society. There is the need to clarify what the 'early Indian' social theoreticians considered to be an acceptable social framework before I can address issues of women and their work or the definition of work in early Indian society. It is very important to understand how early Indian society identified women and aspects of work. My paper is divided into two sections. In the first half I will discuss the existing literature on the subject and the general issues involved in the study of women in early Indian society and in the second half I will describe and analyse particular textual references to illustrate the arguments presented in the first half.

The on-going research in India on women's history sets a refreshing trend of discussions at both popular and academic levels. Most of these researches tend to trace back to the early social conditions and this is done very rightly, I feel. However, there is a hesitation among researchers about the efficient handing of historical sources. This is unnecessary because, to raise our voice on major social issues like gender polarity or injustice, we require a certain approach, which mitigates the necessity of being pedantic. What is the use of being pedantic when the issues are very much at the levels of feeling and a deep concern for current conditions in society? To be pedantic about details of references

in texts will not serve any purpose. What is necessary is to bridge the gap between theories and historical facts, and a real concern for the present social dilemma in which men and women find themselves. The present paper aims to focus on certain attitudes and perspectives.

I will be starting with a discussion of several researches that have at least touched on the conditions of women in early Indian society, and in these researches there is often a hiatus between theory, actual references to historical facts and concern for the issues. There are those who are theoretically inclined and write on modern Indian society. They generally lack the expertise to deal with the kind of detailed examination of records required for the study of early Indian conditions. This is evident in the books by Prabhati Mukherjee and Brinda Nabar. The authors themselves feel that they are not really equipped to detail early Indian social conditions, but they find it extremely relevant to touch upon these issues, because early Indian society constructed certain themes, ideals, images to which women still respond. Nirmala Banerjee's description of the sericulture industry emphasised a household arrangement in which women are bound to do certain things for which they are unpaid – not only unpaid materially but also unrecognised because their labour is devalued by association with (or inclusion in) 'housework'. Such a setup was formulated in early Indian society.

There is a body of writing which really deal with modern Indian conditions but they relate back to the early Indian conditions, and there is another set of writers who are steeped in the knowledge of early Indian social conditions, but have a generic overview on gender issues. The ideal would be a conjunction of three characteristics: a) a proper theoretical basis; b) a sound knowledge of early Indian society; and most importantly, c) the ability to go beyond theory to practical conditions to bring out the issues for the lay person to understand. On the whole I think that the second group who deal with the actual conditions of life are better equipped to deal with women's issues from a political perspective. They are better able to bridge the gap between knowledge and feeling and this is what is most important. I hope my paper illuminates the conditions in early Indian society with clarity so that a positive reaction is evoked amongst the people assembled here at least. At the end of my paper, I will present before you two radically different statements, one from *Therigatha* (in which an oppressed woman speaks for herself) and the other from 'Vak' (the daughter of Rishi Ambhrin speaks of her superiority). These are the two dimensions of Indian womanhood, at two different poles, hard to reconcile.

Brinda Nabar's "Caste as Women" has no pretension of being an erudite exposition of women's condition in early Indian society. She attempts to relate personal experiences with historical sources, makes general comments and draws overviews on feminist issues. Her definition of feminism is of course practical rather than theoretical. She makes a most interesting observation about generations creating their own definitions of womanhood and that most Indian women are taught by other women that they have no choices and that these oppressive conditions incorporate both 'stri-jati' and 'stri-dharma'. In talking about 'stri-jati' we refer to a fifth caste, the woman caste and 'stri-dharma' appertains to stri-jati. This formulation goes back to early Indian society and this why it is most relevant to begin with early Indian social conditions in dealing with gender issues.

A volume edited by Julia Lesley contains a few articles which approaches issues in early Indian society from a sociological perspective. But most of these articles are pedantic, aspire to an unbiased treatment of sources, and somehow fail to formulate an opinion. But one article by Frederick M. Smith, presents early textual evidence to show how, in the Vedic tradition, the role of the women was categorised as one which was negative to the performance of auspicious rituals. In a society where social existence was bound up within rituals, and the definitions of rituals, customs and their interpretations, this definition of women as negative to ritual performance really forms the crux of the issue. This could well be called the beginnings of a social framework in which women were viewed as negative. Smith ends by pointing out that the Vedic rituals visualised the celestial and terrestrial worlds in a constant state of turmoil. They attempted to create a status quo in that particular cyclical order and that is the reason why they constantly reverted to sacrifices, to keep things in balance. Part of the problem of turmoil was to do with women, and the solution

also lay in women, because the women were the procreators. So the problem was to do with feminine energy, and this is the very psychology which guided, later on, the promulgation of both Buddhism and Jainism, which have a similar attitude towards feminine force. So the early Indian religious systems, both Vedic Brahmanaism and Buddhism as well as Jainism, were centrally concerned with the feminine force: they had to control and regulate feminine power in order that status quo be maintained.

For example, take the question of celibacy, which lay at the centre of all early Indian religions and demanded a marginalisation of the feminine. The sexuality of the female had to be marginalised, but that sexuality was also necessary for the procreation of offsprings, and the birth of a son was of utmost importance in a property-oriented society. There was a duality in the role of women. On the one hand, her very sexuality was to be curbed; and on the other, that very sexuality would provide offsprings and ensure continuity. In a society where social psychology was largely shaped by religious beliefs and customs, this attitude played an important role in identifying relative social status of men and women.

The collection of articles in Julia Lesley's volumes could have been more analytical. By comparison, the references made to gender issues in early Indian context by Prabhati Mukherjee or Brinda Nabar, are less erudite but more touching, reaching the heart of some of these problems. One very pertinent point raised by Mukherjee is that one cannot answer the women's question by referring to women only. This is relevant for early Indian society, too. R.S. Sharma's work on the sudras and women in early India, as well as Uma Chakravarty's on servile labour in the same context, are good examples of how the question of social disparity touched the lower classes and women together.

If one examines original texts, for example the Kautilyan Arthashastra, it becomes clear that even among the equations between dasas and dasis, there was a greater degree of pressure on 'the dasi', by definition a free good to be used for sexual gratification by her master. So women of any category or class were, on psychological grounds, objects of sexual desire in a patriarchal society. That is the reason why women's issues have to be treated separately from the general issue of servility.

The theoreticians of early Indian society constructed two images of women: a) the temptress or evil incarnate, as in 'nari naraker dvar' and b) the servile and the domesticated. The very essence of the early theoretician's problem in a patriarchal society was to domesticate and discipline feminine force. And the disciplined woman represents the only positive image of women.

There was an agreement among the historians of earlier generations like E.W. Hopkins, or A.S. Altekar, who have written on the position of women in ancient India, that the Vedic society did not abuse women. The Vedic society was their ideal and they talk about the Brahmacharins, the Bramhabadinis, the Acharyas and the position of the wife, which was auspicious. But these do not represent the general picture. The research conducted by Sukumari Bhattacharya and Sukla Das show that the Vedic society was steeped in negative attitudes towards women. The social construct sought to create a water tight system where all individuals were categorized into groups and these groups were organised into a hierarchical pattern. The castes were, in fact, an expression of class-consciousness. The Brahmanas, who were intellectuals, were, by virtue of their managerial capacity, sought by rulers for advice and support. The Kshatriyas, by virtue of their might and power, controlled the material resources and the producers of commodity. The Vaishyas were the better-off producers who hobnobbed with Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas and by virtue of their wealth they achieved a certain status. None of these castes were monolithic, of course. But the vaisya were the least so. In fact, there was a clear division between the wealthy vaisyas or the merchant classes and the less wealthy ones, who were peasants. And finally, the sudras, the actual producers of wealth who, however, were controlled and manipulated by the upper two castes.

The women, in this fabric of society, were a problem to be solved. They formed a workforce within the domestic purview and were, most important of all, procreators of heirs. So, their moral and social lives had necessarily to be controlled. In this society manual labour was looked down upon as 'hina'. In Buddhist sources we find a description 'hina

shilpas' (or hina shippas) and the list contains all kinds of handicrafts as well as cultivation. The total workforce consisting of both women and men were predictably placed at the bottom rung, out of which there was no way of escape. But even in their servile equality with the 'dasa'. The 'dasi' suffered more as an object of sexual gratification. When it came to women as procreators of offsprings, the male's choice in the matter had to be asserted, and, of course, the male issue was the more welcome, and there were cases (from indirect evidence) of female infanticide in the later Vedic literature.

An offshoot of this attitude was the development of legally sanctioned prostitution in early Indian society. We have descriptions of *ganikalaya* (brothels) and there is specific mention of a 'ganikadhyaksha' in Arthashastra. Clearly, the Arthashastra recognised the existence of legally sanctioned houses of prostitution and the state employed officials (ganikadhyakshas) to control them and to extort revenue from them. Ironically, there was even a certain glorification of the highly rated ganikas in some less dogmatic early Indian sources (all composed by men). There was a clear element of a dual attitude towards women and their sexuality. There was this covetous admiration for resplendent public women. Contrarily, or probably inversely logical, was the patrician suppression of the household women from a sense of male insecurity in all the structures of Manusmriti and like-minded theoreticians.

What about the definition of work? As I have already mentioned, the list of 'hina shilpas' is extremely illustrative of the attitude towards manual work that existed in early Indian society. All respect went to the Brahmanas, the intellectuals. By contrast, manual labour was never given high status. There is enough evidence to show that the women were engaged in industry, especially the textile industry. Kautilya's Arthashastra recommends women workers for recruitment in the state-run workshops. He mentions widows, unmarried spinsters and orphaned girl-children as workers in the state regulated textile sector. Textile was one of the largest handicraft sectors in early Indian society and in this sector the majority of the workforce consisted of women. Another sphere of work was, of course, domestic, in which we find dasis husking rice, pounding rice, bringing water, and doing the general house–hold jobs as well as the 'grihakartri', the lady of the house, also undertaking some domestic chores. Women worked in cultivation also, if not in the actual ploughing but in sowing and harvesting. Such women tended to be part of the common servile classes who were never to be given any status in society. The third sphere of work was procreation of progenies.

Notably, the household women, even of the Brahmanas, 'patnis' (wives) of Brahmanas, were secondary. They were always daughters or wives or mothers of men. I am going to give you certain examples from literary sources. For example, we have a categorisation of wives in Buddhist sources. In the Vinaya, one of the earliest Buddhist texts, ten kinds of wives were postulated:

A Bharyya, one who has to be supported;
One who was bought with money;
One who was living together with a man voluntarily;
Wives who are to be enjoyed or made use of occasionally;
Wives who are given cloth ;
Wives who were to provide the house with a bowl of water;
Wives who put a head cushion on their heads to carry a vessel;
Slaves who are also wives;
Artisans who are also wives; and
Flag-bearers or prisoners of war later turned into 'upapatnis'.

The list is indicative of women's status. They are bought, or given cloth and in return they serve the household, or they are slaves, or artisans, or the bearers of water to the household.

Another description is of a very docile wife, to whom the master himself, that is the Buddha, taught a lesson: 'bare-headed and meanly clad, my Queen, once thou did feel no shame to fill thy lap with jujube fruit and now dost ask its name? Thou art eaten up with pride, my Queen. Thou find no pleasure in life—begone, and gather thy jujubes again. Thou shall no longer be my wife.' She was a seller of jujube fruit. The king had fallen in love

with her and married her, but afterwards, when the woman began to enjoy her position the above stricture came from the husband, who tried to remind her of the position she was in before she was married to him. Buddha comes to solve the problem and he reconciles the pair:' These are the sins of a women. Forgive her, and cease from thy anger, O King, for it was you who made her great.'

Another interesting list of wives is offered in an early Buddhist text, which suggests a sequence of ascending worth of wives from the husband's point of view. The criterion being the class of a person a wife may resemble. She may resemble a murderer, or a thief, or a mother, or a sister, a friend, or a slave. The highest category of wife is the one who resembles a slave and she is good and will attain bliss. There is also another description in the Jataka stories. The best wife is a slave wife: 'calm when abused, afraid of violence, no passion, full of dogged patience, true hearted, bending to her husband's will. Slave is the title given to her state.'

In total contradiction to the above picture of womanhood stands the Vak Sukta in Rg Veda (X Mandala, 125), a glorious self-declaration of female power. It is difficult to locate its exact status in a historical evaluation of the gender question in early India. There were clear instances of female worship in pre-historic and proto-historic phases of Indian history. There are clear indications of the continuity of the trends in later societies, among the tribals. But these instances were peripheral to the early Sanskrit society that constructed the idioms of social fabric. The Vak Sukta appearing in the Rg Veda stands in glorious isolation. It may be an exception to the rule, but it is both very tempting as well as a persistent beacon to the historian of early India, to unravel its mystery. Temporally much earlier than the other sources mentioned above, the Sukta may actually refer back to an earlier social delineation. Let me dwell briefly on what 'Vak' says in the Rig Veda. She is the Speech personified and described as the daughter of Rishi Ambhrin.

I travel with the Rudras and Vasus, with the Adityas, and all Gods. I wander, I hold aloft both Varuna and Mitra, Indra and Agni and the pair of Aswinis.... Pushan and Bhaga I laud with zelous sacrifices, who pours the juice and offers his oblation to me. I am the Queen, the gatherer up of treasurers, most thoughtful. First of those who merit worship. Thus Gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and abide in. Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them. Each man who sees, breathes, hears the word spoken. They know it not but yet they dwell beside me. Hear and one and all, the truth as I declare it. I verily myself now utter the word that Gods and men alike shall welcome. I make the man I love exceedingly mighty, make him a sage, a rishi and a Brahmana. I bend the bow for Rudra, that his arrows may strike and slay the hater of devotion. I rouse and order battle for the people and I have penetrated earth and heaven. On the world's summit, I bring forth the father. My home is in the waters and the ocean....

[Varuna was the emblem of justice, Mitra of sunlight, Indra of warriorhood, and the Aswinis of medical science. Pushan and Bhaga are both sun deities.]

Vak is thus the first of those who merit worship, one of the earliest feminine energies described in the Rig Veda, which is followed by the concept of Saraswati. Saraswati is a concept of a free spirit, of fertility, of giver of life, and the feminine force. It is river Saraswati which is identified as feminine energy. It is difficult to reconcile this declaration of super female power in the Rg Veda with the protestations against misery expressed by co-wives and widows in the same text. Neither does the Vak Sukta fit into the general pattern reflected in the later Vedic texts which are full of instances of increasing polygamy, structures of controlling wives with the rod, clear preference for male issue and even female infanticide.

The Terigatha verses, however, are compatible with the general framework, but surprising in coming from suffering women themselves, thus bringing in the 'have-not's' end of the picture. Kisha Gautami's verse expresses sentiments exactly opposed to that found in the Vak Sukta.

Woeful is the woman's lot; hath he declared charioteer of men, to be tamed; woeful when sharing home with hostile wives, woeful when giving birth in bitter pain, some seeking death or ere they suffer twice. Piercing the throat, the delicate poison take

Mutta's verse in Therighata is pronounced after she becomes a bhikshuni and becomes free of all domestic chores.

O free indeed, O gloriously free am I freedom from three crooked things, from querns, from motor and from my crooked lord, free am I from birth and dying....

I have digressed to the general conditions of women in early Indian society because I believe that such a context is necessary to appreciate the specific issues of women and work.

Amiya Bagchi

It is important to bear in mind that at present there is a very deliberate attempt being made by so-called academics to obliterate history. They are cooking up history. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, the Bhartya Janata party and their academic associates are comlicit in this. And this has affected, or rather infected, so-called academics in Economics. I will give you a very specific example. Ramesh Diwan is an economist who teaches somewhere in the United States. He had an article a few days back in The Statesman, saying that, in India, poverty increased under the Muslim rule. We have no evidence whatsoever, that before the coming of Muslim rule, ordinary Indians were leading golden lives – either women or men. Such publications find place in the respected media in this country. All the big newspapers are polluting the atmosphere of knowledge. It is very important to recall and I shall go on record again to say that History is deliberately being obscured by a very large section of the upper middle classes and they are not just confined to Delhi. They are also to be found in Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai and everywhere.

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

Gendered Exclusion: Women in the Raniganj Collieries

We geographers talk about place and uniqueness of places through the subjective knowledge process. When it comes to gender issues, we look at women in an inter-disciplinary light, putting the subjects in their contexts at different geographical scales and focus on the differences. Geographers have been ruled by space for a long time. It is only during the last two decades or so that we have begun to re-assert the importance of time in shaping space. Feminist studies have contributed much in bringing the two together – time and space – different domains, at one time viewed to be the domains of historians and of geographers, through especially women's subjective knowledge process. That historians are holding a workshop on 'regional' histories of women is proof enough that this is happening even in Calcutta.

Women have been described as 'Utopia' – I will start with a spatial term - too fluid for topologic and abstract concept, with no fixed identity and as a fiction, an imaginary woman, whose fragments can only be seen, at certain points of time. They do not constitute an automatic, unitary group. We accept it that they are numerous identities in the broad group 'women' and will try to see, in this paper, how certain changes in the mode of production, and consequent environmental changes can have different meanings for each of the sub-group of women.

In spite of being aware of the extreme subjective position that women are an imaginary category, women's presence in fields of work other than life-nurture poses important challenges. In this paper, I will talk of women in their day-to-day world in a

specific regional context in a historically specific way. Feminist experts have studied changing modes of production from feudal to capitalist. They tend to consider women powerless. In this analysis also, we shall adopt the feminist methodology of conscious partiality and we will point out that when men are tool-makers, they control women's labour. Thus gender assumes different meanings with respect to social construction of technology – who makes, what, how and who controls these? In other words, we will see how a job becomes gendered in the first place.

Now – why have I taken up mining? Mining is no less unique by itself; tools are an integral part of the production process and much of the productivity as well as the downstream impacts in mining depend on the level of technology used in the production process. Mining is an area where women, at one time, interfaced with men – with overlapping spheres of men and women – it is a sector with geographical ramifications from the local economy and socio-cultural levels of the state and national as well as international levels. To make these connections conceptually and visibly, is a crucial task in feminist geography. Moreover, mining is now mostly perceived as a uniquely male world where the separation of men's and women's lives is virtually total. Mining is usually perceived as a dangerous, dirty and hazardous job, very risky – where men go down the mines everyday risking their lives, sharing risks that contribute to a particular form of male solidarity, and endow the manual labour with attributes of masculinity. The unequal economic and social relationships between men and women imposed by the social organisation of mining increase the subordinate position of women in a mining region both directly and indirectly.

Mining employs only 1 per cent of the global workforce. Of that, coal mining employs only 5 per cent women, of which a tiny 1 per cent is employed in production. So, clearly, we are talking of an exceedingly small community. But I intend to show how the external relations of coal mining industry reveal intricate complexities in creating both commonalities and differences in experiences of women.

The question that arises is whether there is an 'average' woman in mining. We take it that there is not a representative 'mining woman'. That is women's experiences as mediated by class, are difficult to identify since the official figures of numbers of women miners include white collar jobs in various offices of the coal industry. What is more, in its various reports, the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation of the Government of India does not even differentiate women miners from men. Thus words like 'manpower', 'manning the mine', assume much significance in mining parlance. Women are largely invisible in the huge literature that exists in mining. I have been to two major international mining conferences -- one on mining and environment and the second on mining and safety. At one point of time I began to realise that there are three basic groups that control the entire activity of mining. There are politicians, bureaucrats, engineers and geo-scientists – nearly all male groups -- who discuss matters among themselves. Women's issues are subsumed. Even the trade unions -- at least five of them operate in the Raniganj area -- also tend to co-opt women's issues as part of class issues.

Why exclusion? Work is a salient feature of women's lives affecting and being affected by other sectors. It is agreed that modernisation and technology have in many cases displaced women workers bringing a decline in their livelihood. Technology opens up very limited options in front of women. You may be familiar with the stereotypical cartoons of a woman standing in front of a car in the middle of the road because she does not know how to do basic repair work. In mining, technological changes have favoured men. In the mining region, especially the decay of environmental resources and decline in agriculture has resulted in the loss of alternative employment opportunities for rural women. Thus in a mining region we are not only talking of the women who cut the coal, who are paid wages by the mining company. There also are women whose lives may not be directly linked with mining, but indirectly influenced by mining activities. Mining is an environmentally unsustainable activity. A mining company starts with the premise that it is not going to last for a long time. The resources are going to be exhausted and in a matter of time, the company would have to go away. Mining disrupts the environment in several ways and this disruption of the natural processes and environmental resources deprive women of common

property resources. These have a tremendous effect on the lives of women. Each technological change within the industry has excluded and marginalised women. The extent of exclusion depends on how men's interest, needs and hopes are disproportionately represented. Therefore, the impact of technological changes was experienced differently by women and men. Technological changes and advancements are still popularly regarded as progressive, positive and inevitable. I will quote the famous words of Langdon Winner – 'Technology progresses under its own inertia. It has the character of a self-propelling, self-sustaining, ineluctable flow.' Because of this perceived inevitability, we tend to reduce human outcomes to a homogeneity in which men and women are merely human actors who are affected as an undifferentiated mass rather than differentiated elements within the category of labour force. There is a hierarchy inherent in technology, making the experience of particular segments of the female workforce separate from others. However, micro-inequalities which perpetuate exclusionary behaviour can be identified in the process of changing modes of production, process of descaling, loss of worker control and technological unemployment. A lot of research has been done on mining and women in other countries. For example, McDowell and Massey have worked on colliery settlements of Durham, England. They have shown that gender segregation in the coal mining industry have led men to view themselves as the industrial proletariat, but enjoying the ownership of home. At home they were the rulers. The question is to what extent is the experience of workers, particularly women workers in advanced countries, of relevance when considering gender impact of technology adaptation in less developed countries. In the same way that the earlier assumptions about the general effect of technological innovations upon workers overlooked the differential impact upon men and women in advanced countries, we must be aware that the effect on women workers is not globally consistent. It has been shown that first generation female workers in India actually gained skill in several cases during reformulation of the economy, and they were empowered and found new opportunities in the initial stage. In the fishing industry just the opposite happened. Gulati has shown how the mechanisation of fishing and fish preservation impacted negatively on women of fishing households. The case of coal mining industry, too, shows, how changes in the technology and economic organisation of pre-independent India and post-nationalisation times have interacted to produce a rigidly hierarchical patriarchal society in the region vis-a-vis women's place.

Women workers have become increasingly vulnerable to job loss in the event of increased mechanisation and technical innovation. They are more readily disposed off than their male co-workers. Therefore, in case of automation women workers are first to be affected and last to gain from any extension of skills. Exclusion thus has a gender dimension in case of mining in the Raniganj region. In Raniganj women's banishment from the male world of work have in several ways excluded them from the power to determine their own lives. In mining it has been recognised by the ILO that the level of technology used is the most significant determinant of labour requirement and skill needs in mining.

The Raniganj region is standing at a crossroad with regard to technology use and role of women in mining at this moment. You must have heard recently that the ECL is going to dissolve itself, close down 65 of its unprofitable mines, lay off 72,000 workers. This is not a matter of joke as it has only 1,20,000 or so workers. The dissolution of ECL will make way for private contractors. And those mines, which they will retain, will be highly mechanised and mainly open-cast. To consider women in mining, is important because we are standing at a very critical juncture in the history of coal mining, which is trying to make a transition from labour intensive to capital-intensive processes. At present, manpower requirements are high, while the range and complexity of skills are modest. However, capital intensive open cast mining would soon change skill requirements leading to further displacement of women miners. Even in underground mining, the trend is now to close down the unmechanised less productive mines and to introduce 'long-wall' technology instead of traditional board and pillar type of colliery which you see in the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum of Calcutta. In the latter, boards support the roof and as mining progresses, the gallery also progresses underground. This is the standard technology used in

most Indian underground mines. In this operation, a lot of coal has to be left on the roofs and walls as well as in the pillars. Longwall technology is the state-of-the-art technology and right now no further development in this technology is expected. It uses computers, which control the entire mining operation from above. Under the ground, there are seven or eight steel pillars depending upon the geological conditions of the area. These pillars move forward and backward and there are huge razor like steel blades which literally raze out the coal. As a result, the surface ground subsides. The subsidence of the land is an integral part of the 'Longwall' technology. Now, one should consider two factors while selecting this technique. First, the roof has to be supported and it cannot be very thick. So you cannot go very deep underground and use Longwall technology. The coal seam has to be close to the surface. Second, mining has to take place in a comparatively uninhabited region. In the case of Raniganj, only the tribal villages are being targeted for longwall technology.

A rich source of historical data is available on coal mining and women in the Raniganj region -- colonial reports, gazetteers as well as post-independence records and studies besides the census material. Raniganj region underwent a process of transformation when coal was discovered and began to be mined. The physical and social isolation of the tribals was begun in the region. But over the years of intensive mining, first it has driven the tribal and then women away and established itself as a predominantly Hindu upper caste male industry. The history of coal mining in the Raniganj region, particularly in the early days of the industry is synonymous with the history coal mining in India. Raniganj along with the Jharia region was the largest suppliers of coal for about 100 years since coal was first struck by Mr. Suetonius Grant Heatly and John Summer, two employees of the East India Company.

Some of our archeological surveys show evidences of use of coal since ancient times. However, during the British Raj, coal mining in the modern sense of the term began in right earnest. Inspite of indigenous enthusiasm, the East India Company showed little interest in developing coal resources in India. Several reasons were floated: Raniganj coal was inferior to the British counterpart, it was unfit for ordinance works, and working with it involved heavy transport costs. So much was the apathy of the British that Heatley, the person who discovered coal in Raniganj, was transferred to a remote district to discourage his intentions. Coal mining in Raniganj continued to be sporadic in nature until it was discovered that instead of transporting British coal to India by steamships, it was economical to extract this resource in India itself. This served two purposes: capital could be invested in this highly profitable venture and at the same time, the limited British reserve could be conserved. Three factors were responsible for providing stimuli for growth of coal mining industry. The abolition of East India Company's trading monopoly in India in 1813, opening of the Raniganj mine under the European supervision, and introduction of Railways to facilitate the transport of coal to the market of Calcutta. A German scholar Rothermund and Indian scholar Wadhwa have done extensive research on coal mining and land-holding, the operation of mining economy in Zamindari areas and the opening of the mines. Rothermund and Wadhwa have described the coal mining industry in Raniganj region as a 'secondary enclave', since it served the needs of the primary enclave – metropolitan Calcutta. By the time of Hunter's famous visit to the region, mining had made the region was 'practically treeless' and changes in the region's social fabric had become palpable.

Indigenous entrepreneurs, however, came to dominate coal production; as many as 13 of the 17 companies were owned by Indian operators. The low levels of technology and capital investment allowed Indian landowners an easy entry into the industry. In the initial phase of mining development in the Raniganj coal belt, local people along with their families were employed in large numbers. Paterson (1910) reported that two thirds of the total workforce in the mining industry was locally born. The *bauris* were the first to bring their women into the coal industry. They are a semi-tribal group lying somewhere in the middle of the tribe-caste continuum. Their contribution to the coal industry was quite significant. The Santhals, Kols, Koras and Bhuinyas also joined the mining workforce along with their women. Naturally mining evoked little response from upper caste women. Women in collieries were initially employed as 'gin-girls', derived from the term 'engine'.

But they switched to various kind of surface and underground work when the mechanical system of lifting coal from shallow shafts was phased out. The main job of women from the early decades of the present century was that of a loader of coal cut by their male partners – father, brother or husband. This family labour system was suitable in view of the primitive labour technique used in the open cast mines, locally called *pukuria-khads*. The system operated well for several social reasons too – the tribal sentiment of family attachment, and the unwillingness of women to carry coal for men of other castes. Above all, the dominant economic reason was that it provided uninterrupted work schedules and cheap labour. Flourishing mining activity also initiated a stream of migration and the region's social fabric began to adopt a cosmopolitan colour. The Coal-fields' Recruiting Organisation (CRO) was introduced to maintain, often forcibly, the supply of labour to the mines. Intra-state migration was initially comparatively smaller in volume possibly due to the ravages left by frequent *bargi* attacks from the western states of India. The local tribal and semi-tribal labourers often used to leave the collieries during the cropping season to work in agriculture and this interfered with maintaining mining operations. As result, collieries began to employ 'up-country labour' to create their own captive workforce. Contractor and *thikadars* brought hardworking, able-bodied men from eastern U.P., Bihar and M.P. The santhals and bauris responded to these immigrations of male workers by withdrawing in favour of tea plantations in North Bengal and Assam and gradually large sections of the workers in the collieries became typically immigrant and male. This is how the tribals first left the coalmines.

Changes in the technology of coal production in India in the inter-war period led to a transition from the open-caste mines to deep shafts, which were considered unsuitable for women. The technological shift was aided by several ILO measures. The 1919 Convention prohibited women's work at night. There was another convention on underground work of women in 1935, which restricted women's work to the surface. The Indian Mines Act, 1952, restricted employment of women to surface work during the day only.

Till the end of the First World War, the Indian coal mining industry had remained extensive in nature, technology did not undergo any decisive change, the units of production did not grow in size and mines of similar size were added to each other. We also see that, till this time, women workers were treated as equals in the production process. During this early phase, lack of a free market forced the coal industry to grow up as a secondary enclave. During this time, decline of agriculture a little bit of a different type took place in this region. Landlords were squandering money, intermediaries and moneylenders benefited from the wealth derived from agriculture and peasants remained at a subsistence level unable to produce enough food for transactions. In the post-Nationalisation period, in the last three decades, during the rapid expansion of mining, decay of agriculture of a different sort has been taking place. The current processes are more related to environmental change due to widespread mining and inadequate policing by the State in enforcing good enviornmental practices. We really do not even have a set of best practices as yet to act as guidelines for the mining company. So what has happened can be described as the privatisation of the commons. When a mining company goes to a region and identifies coal underneath, the land is taken on lease. If there are trees on that land, they are first cut for money, the person who is selling or leasing the land gets a job in addition to the price of the land – for every six bighas of land, one job is given by the company. The people, who used to depend on the *bagans*, tiny patches of land, and tiny local ponds suffer as a result. The water table goes down due to mining activity, because the subsurface strata are disturbed. In this way, environmental changes are related to the current decline in agriculture of the region. Why I am mentioning all these changes, because even if women were excluded from mining industry, they could have found alternative employment, traditional type of employment in agriculture. But, the formal mining sector is marginalising women, possibilities of alternative employment are also narrowing due to environmental degradation.

Women's role in mining industry declined gradually over the years, but during the last two and a half decades under state ownership, it has decreased at an alarming rate. With

such development of shaft-sinking and longwall technology, other heavy capital underground equipment, and the introduction of dragline-based open cast mining, women have been assigned unskilled tasks. There has been no attempt to impart training and skills for them to adjust to the reorganisation of work. Women now occupy a marginal position in the coal industry because they were made redundant in the labour process.

The Eastern Coalfield Limited (E.C.L.), the public sector subsidiary of Coal India Ltd. now actively discourages women in collieries without opening alternative opportunities for them. In a personal correspondence, the Technical Director of ECL pointed out the reasons for such negative perceptions. First, the restrictions in working hours. But this is not valid, because in any case the mining workers in India work in only the day shifts. Second, the issue of surplus manpower, ECL absorbs labour at the lowest level – illiterate and unskilled. Labour and environmental conditions of working in the mines are so poor and the health of workers deteriorate so rapidly that in 10 or 12 years they become unfit for any kind of productive work. That is one reason for ECL having surplus manpower. The ECL does not have a HRD department. 'Mining is different from office or factory work' – this is the general attitude. There is a very negative perception of mining. The official stance on women's employment is also negative and one can only apprehend what the recent thrust of mechanisation in coal mines has in store for women workers.

The history of coal mining industry in Raniganj is closely related to changes in social and gender composition of the region. The other driving force behind this transformation was the change in natural environment. In the first wave, the forests rapidly gave away to settled agriculture and large patches of barren and derelict land began to appear. In the second wave, a rapid rate of ecological destruction is taking place and modern capital intensive technology is aiding this process. As a result, the subsistence bases of disadvantaged communities are being undermined and rural women are the ones to suffer the most. Exclusion of women from the productive processes and environmental degradation is now threatening the survival of rural women in the Raniganj region. The modern urban sector has absorbed women at the lowest strata of society as manual labourers, construction workers, in various small factories, brick-kilns, stone crushing units, as rag pickers, as domestic help, as sex workers catering to the truck drivers, and as participants in the flourishing unauthorised coal-mining business. This activity is locally called illegal mining. In the area there are tiny, informal rat hole mines. Once I remember, we were standing in the middle of a ground and noticed the presence of a hole there. After half an hour or so we found small children and women were coming out of the hole. Women form an important segment of the labourforce in these illegal mines. It is in response to the privatisation of the commons that such activities have developed. As women were marginalised, the family no longer remained a valid unit of mining production. The family and the factory are of no consequence to each other, and may even have contradictory interests. The result is a lowered and powerless status of women who continue to get drawn to the urban and industrial sector, joining the work of mining at the lowest level as unskilled, low paid, high-risk illegal workers while taking the full brunt of environmental degradation.

What role has been played by the trade unions? The trade unions have refused to accept that women can and should receive equal opportunities with male miners. Even the active participation of women in leading or key roles in trade unions has not always been welcomed by male trade unionists. The prevailing view is that women belong in the home and only working for the butter – not the bread. Unions often grudge that women claim equal wages while their frail bodies cannot put in the kind of hard work that men undertake in a colliery job.

Discussion

Arati Ganguly

This is with reference to Kuntal's paper. I can tell you something about the cotton textile factory: we have made a study of four cotton textile factories around Calcutta. After

1961, the enactment of equal wage for equal work had a negative impact on women's factory work. The number of women workers is declining and the few employed are waiting for their retirement. According to the Factories Act, there are maternity and other benefits, which are rarely enjoyed because most of the women are well past their youth. Their daughters did not go into factory work. The women themselves are welcoming this, because the daughters were married out of their family. Besides, there are reservations about women working for eight long hours. We found in Keshoram, Kankinara, Srirampore and Kalyani factories, women worked from 6 am to 10 am and then again from 2 pm to 6 pm. In the four hours' interval, they had enough time to go to the nearby coolie lines to take care of their family and cook.

We are interested in the condition of women workers in small mines and the teagardens.

Unidentified Partcipant:

I wonder about the definition of work we historians of women have continued to work with. I grant that we are uncomfortable with our biological capacities, but why is reproductive work not work? Why is it not fundamentally a part of the double shift? In all historical time, whether 17th or 20th century, this has been the case.

The second question is specifically to Nirmala. Your work reminded me of the debate on deindustrialisation. You work is suggests that underlying de-industrialisation, there has been a shift within the household. Would you like to explore that a little bit further for late 18th and early to mid-19th century?

Amiya Bagchi

May I say something about some of the ways in which we are bound to address these questions. I am not talking about students of women's work or women's history. There is an implicit functionalism in many of the ways in which words are used. Samita for instance said, 'encounter of capitalism with patriarchy'. When did capitalism encounter patriarchy? Capitalism has been complicit with patriarchy and on that I will give you historical details from wherever you want. The complicity did not end in this century even in the Western countries. If you have contrary evidence, I would like to see that. Second point is, sometimes it is said that women's work has been functional in some ways in keeping the family economy. Is it that? Or is it that a particular way of structuring the family has gone on to structure the women's work. Which is prior – is it the structuring of the family which is prior or is it the preservation of the family? Third question, (the role of an economist comes in here) bondage is, very often, the result of capitalism itself. The system of social reproduction has been one of the most under-theorized in any theory including the Marxist one, which has been the most radical one of the mainstream theories. The point is that nether men nor women had any escape from the mining areas from working, because their lands had been taken away, their forest had been taken away. They were made to work under semi-servile conditions. Then the ways in which families were structured earlier on now got mixed and families were being restructured under capitalism. Given the structure of the colonial economy, the men did not have the alternative of giving women the freedom. They were both starving. Look at the rates of reproduction and growth in the tribal areas in the late 19th century, in most of the cases it was negative. This was the last brief effort to save them. We have to integrate all these issues.

Arati Ganguly

I refer to Mukuldi's paper. I have the same experience with the Soorma Valley documents. They show that in the tea plantations, women plucked the leaves much better than men and therefore men could not be employed there. Yet for ages they have been less paid. The question is – what prevents the women from organising themselves? Again, from experience of trade unions, I can give evidence from the Soorma Valley that women's problems where

tackled much better before labour was unionised. The moment labour got unionised, women's issues became less noticeable, these were not taken up as general issues. Even the individual men workers, whose wives were working with them, did not take up women's issues.

The next goes to Nupur, about the ganikalaya, about which I want to know a little more. From what I know (very little) the status of the ganikas were much higher that now. Though in Kautilaya's Arthasastra it is said that Ganikalayas should be in one part of the city, the fact remains that they enjoyed some kind of independence. Is that because of a different kind of social set up? And, finally, to what Amiyada said about capitalism – clearly, from Nupur's paper we see that much before capitalism, the status of women was subordinate. Patriarchy was already in action.

I have one thing to ask Nirmala. In one of the villages where sericulture is now being introduced in a big way and women are being trained, I found another kind of problem cropping up. This was an experience of a scheduled tribe village where sericulture training has been given very successfully, where women are earning a lot. They could buy up a pond for Rs. 20,000 through their earnings from sericulture. They have now gone in for pisciculture. They are negotiating to buy another pond for Rs. 70,000. The immediate question that came to my mind was the social impact. It came out from discussions that dowry had gone up to Rs. 10,000 from Rs. 2,000. The leader of that group immediately said that my father never gave any dowry for my wedding.

I found it very interesting when talking about the textile industry, Kautilya said that women were to be the major part of the labour force. Later, women were not allowed to touch the loom. I would like to know about this transition. There must have been a point at which this becomes a moral check.

Samita Sen

A response to Amiya Bagchi's comment –yes, capitalism is complicit with patriarchy but not always and not in one day. Capitalism comes as a process and need not be complicit with patriarchy from the beginning and in all respects. If the fundamental thing about capitalism is to individuate labour then there has to be a contest between capitalist desire to control labour and the family's prior claim over women's labour. Family authority, presumably, will resist individualisation of labour because the domestic system as a production unit is based on not having individuated workers. In the long term there is an accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism but there are processes of contestation and negotiations through which the accommodation is worked out. And I think that the Indian case is particularly illustrative of situations where Capitalist employers and the family heads competed for control over women's labour. The plantation migration is a very good example, where actually the state had to intervene and legislate to protect family authority vis-à-vis plantation employers. You could say that the small man won, but it was the man who won. There are processes through which capitalism develops and unless we understand the details of these processes, the fundamental or ultimate conclusion might be flawed.

The comment I would like to make was to Nupur's paper, keeping in mind one of the major agenda of this workshop. I think the comments she made went well with the intervention Prof. Amiya Bagchi first made when talking about History writing and the way in which History is being used by different groups of people, especially the right wing fundamentalists. When I was reading my paper at the inaugural session, I was talking about how academic women's history has concentrated so closely on the colonial period whereas the use of history politically has tended to focus on more remote history. In fact, what you say about pedanticism needs to be put against questions of disciplinary rigour. Is it the lack of access to, and understanding of the rigour of ancient and medieval history that actually makes it so vulnerable to all kinds of political usages? I do not think it is enough to say that our political agenda is more important than the ancient historians' pendanticism. We need to temper that by saying historical rigour is important to all of us.

Amiya Bagchi

May I take one minute. There is patriarchy and patriarchy. Paul Lovejoy has a book called Transformations since Slavery. There is transformation in patriarchy; there are different kinds of patriarchy. We tend to demonise capitalism and idealise it. One of the most successful capitalist systems of the world, the Japanese Capitalist system has not individuated labour. Even today Japanese women's wages are 60 per cent of men's wages. The difference at the highest levels of education of men and women is greater than at the lower levels. The Japanese women are better-educated then Indian women on an average but the difference in the salary structure is much greater in Japan. So to equate individuation with capitalism is to get one kind of Capitalism with individuation. I do not think this is true of the capitalism experienced by the major part of the world. I have used your article on the three-way confrontation between family, planters and the Government. It is very good; we need to understand the contradictions. But we also need to de-idealise the concept of individuation with capitalism. They are coming into conflict with one another. Look at the slave trade. It went on down to 1807, in Jamaica and it was not ever legally abolished in India. It was only de-recognised. I think we need to deconstruct our notions about what capitalism is like. I think Marx tended to idealise it and so do the modern admirers of post structuralism and so on who think India is very unique in not having wonderful concepts of individualism which capitalist of West evolved. I do not think this is true.

Ratnabali Chatterjee

Actually my comment is to Nupur and I am taking off from what Samita has partly said. At the inauguration, we were trying to explore the ways in which history has been read and we are trying to negotiate such readings at the present moment. This is fractured because our entire empirical knowledge that we have evolved and accepted has become the basis from which we are trying to challenge fundamentalism. For example, all the text books to date have stated that the Muslims were invaders and looters. They have always said that there has been an indigenous tradition dating from the Vedas and an extraneous tradition which has come from the Muslims. When we are being apologetic for Medieval India, we are harping on all the good things that have been brought from Central Asia by the Muslim rulers for us. The construction of us and them, who we are, what is our and what is their tradition have been imbibed. There is also the question of syncretic tradition, which has created certain pitfalls for us. We have to constantly negotiate in our work with the terminology itself, how have the ancient and the medieval been constructed. We are having a parallel conference in archeology where most of the archeologist will be fighting over Aryan culture. The other problem we face, which Amiyada has put very well, is that the fundamentalists are not only writing in academic journals, they are writing in newspapers. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid there was actually a contestation over what is our tradition and how has the tradition been invaded. What Sadhvi Ritambara had said was an internalisation of B.B. Lal's theories, now gone into the popular common sense and we are really standing by helpless watching all our tools being totally demolished. So history is no longer just something that we can discuss and then forget. And contestation is not just between patriarchy and the different modes of production. We have not only to situate ourselves in history but we have to situate ourselves in our present fractured moment.

Unidentified participant:

I would like to highlight the role of trade unions and marginalisation of women's issues. Today the context has been changed and with labour commissions and so on, a consensus has been attempted that if you can silence the workers, you can push in any kind of measures. Yesterday the Economic Survey has come out, and it has openly declared that lay offs will be there and from our mining presentation we all know that lay off is gendered. Mining has been historically linked with displacement of labour. Wherever there has been a

question of displacement or question of rescheduling labour it has had a gendered dimension.

Within trade unions, there is both a political silencing and a tendency to co-opt women's issues into overall class issues of the workers. This I think reflects general social conditions. And what prevents the women from unionising and presenting their case? There is an example – in Australian coalmines. Women did unionise. There was a landmark judgement given, which fixed the wage for women at 54 per cent of the basic male wage. The basis of this was family wage as in Raniganj. The notion was that men had to support wives and children whereas women had only themselves to support. This established women as a form of cheap labour but at the same time gave them an unfair advantage. As female labour was cheaper, employees responded by trying to define more and more work as women's work. Male trade unions again responded by defending their work conditions, trying to have women expelled from most areas of employment. In Britain, many of the old colliery areas have closed down the mines and the economy has been re-organised and new employment opportunities have surfaced, for example, garment making and the hosiery industry. In the small-scale mines, the miners who had worked in the formal mining economy find it very derogatory to down below and work in those condition.

Jayoti Gupta

I have one question and one clarification to ask of Nirmala Banerjee. She ended by arguing that the household-based system in sericulture was hampering the introduction and development of new technology. What I wanted to know was about the relationship between the household, the labour process and technology. Is the household being conservative? Can this conservatism be seen separately from the requirements of the entire economic process, which actually allows the persistence of the household system as you have explained?

Kuntala, I found your point regarding the ILO convention very interesting. And the fact that an ILO convention as way back as 1919 laid certain regulations as a result of which women labour could not be at par with male labour. My impression is that ILO protects labour, from Kuntala's paper it appears that ILO also played a role in restricting women's labour. How can we link these issues with the recent ILO report of 1998? This recent report seems very difficult to obtain. I have been trying to get a copy, without success. Kuntala has already pointed out the decline of the female labour force in this sector and the consequent illegal workings. And, I believe that the ILO now is not talking about legitimisation of prostitution or sex trade. ILO has come up with a long paper on regulating the sex industry in South-eastern Asia. This is perhaps because they have realised that women's labour in the sex industry is a potential source of revenue and the tax network can be expanded in that direction. So we are going to get another dimension to women's labour under ILO guideline. How are we going to now conceptualise women's labour? I really feel at this point of time that the structural adjustment programmes put into place in affluent countries is going to give sex trade the status of an industry. We already see in West Bengal several programmes in that direction. One of the things we have to watch out for is the heavy promotion of tourism. And tourism industry is one of the main sources of revenue in South East Asia, now being further promoted in India and South Asian countries. Sex trade is inter-linked with these developments.

Kuntala Lahiri Dutt

A question was raised about the cotton textile industry. I have, of course, referred very peripherally to modern industry, specifically cotton textile industry. But I think we all know about the dilemma that protective legislation poses for women. On the one hand it is supposed to bring benefits to women by giving them compensation or paid leave or child care, and on the other hand it discourages entrepreneurs from engaging women. That is one of the reasons why there is a decline in factory employment through out the early 20th Century, particularly it is very stark in case of the coal mining industry. And one of the

ways in which female labour was excluded from coal mining work was the legislation (1929) preventing women from underground work. There is an article by Simmons which brings about how this Act decimated women's employment in the coal mines and how that affected the family income and standard of living of coal miners. The early form of coal mining labourers, when it was mainly tribal labour, used to live in families. During the early 20th century we find a lot of agitation, discontent and demonstrations in case of cotton textiles and jute mills. But in comparison coal mining labour was quieter. Perhaps the tradition of a harmonious family life, particularly in the context of tribal culture, promoted a kind of stability. This was quite different from the atmosphere you found in coolie lines of cotton textile or jute mills where there was no family life and the entire atmosphere was one of tension and disharmony.

Amiya Bagchi:

The coal mines were located in Zamindari areas. Bengal Coal Company ran its own police force. We do not know if families were murdered completely by this force. One does not have to attribute any kind of family harmony or things like that. Cotton mills and jute mills were unfortunately located in urban areas. Where 'outside agitators', as the British always called them, would take up their cause. And also the workers were rebellious about defending their rights.

Nirmala Banerjee

We have heard a lot about the status of wives. Do we perceive any transition when women become mothers? Is the transition from wifehood to motherhood attended by improvement in status and gain of some autonomy? In common usage we have the *Upanayan* ceremony in which the boy who receives the *upanayan* first goes to the mother. Is this a carry-over from Vedic tradition? Secondly, was thereat all any area left for the expression of autonomy by women? Did she become a *'barbanita'* where she existed in her own right? Perhaps one other way was to become a *'bhikkhuni'* where you could leave your family responsibilities and lead a corporate life and perhaps attain some degree of autonomy or some freedom.

Nirmala Banerjee

The responsibility of reproductive work and double burden on women has been there for a long time. How much reproductive work ties women to the household, or reduces mobility, is a very culture specific thing. For example, you have the whole African agriculture where women tie their babies on their back and carry on their work. Whether reproduction and household duties tie you to the household is not a natural process, actually it is very culture specific phenomena.

I did do a paper where I compared the de-industrialisation process in the cotton textile and the silk industry and my argument was that in cotton textile, women lost their work completely after 1920-30 when the spinning part was completely eliminated by technology. Whereas in the silk industry, women never lost their work, in fact they were labourers as well. And throughout 19th century, women worked as factory labourers because they also had the skill of pulling the thread. And their families did not object to their going to work in the factory. Whereas a woman working at cotton textile factory saved 4 annas a month, in a silk factory she could earn Re.1 and 12 annas.

This brings me to the other point, which I wanted to take up – there is a very wrong representation of women in Indian culture that women are in the private sphere and the men are in the public sphere. Actually women always go out into the public sphere whenever the family wants them to go. So there is no such thing as women being confined to the private sphere. And therefore they went into the factory whenever there was a job available for them and the family adjusted to that. I have talked about this in many places that the private/public sphere does not really apply, what does really apply is that the family controls

what women should do. Coming to what Samita and Amiya were talking about. I find that patriarchy and capitalism do carry on a kind of interaction and dissidence and Samita's depiction of the 19th Century experience was very important because it a was time when labour was in shortage. If you are looking at how capitalism looks at women and how patriarchy does, I think one has to look at the total situation. How much demand is there for women's labour? Can they accommodate this? For example in Korea which has such a tight labour situation, skilled women have been used by capitalism by pushing them back into the household, by saying you do this work at home, we will pay you less for that. I do not think it is right to say that capitalism wants this and patriarchy wants that, they keep on negotiating with each other and they are the same people. They make up power groups at the level of the state as well so that they can change laws as well. The third point I wanted to talk about was one Amiya raised about how do we see family. And I think one of the interesting issues is how do we find the family. In a way Nupur was talking about this when she depicted the attitude the family has for women. Let us say that this is the continuing strain in the Indian culture where families see their women as inferior and controllable, their sexuality to be kept leashed. If we take that as a running trend, then in the family in a subsistence economy where everybody works, the man decides how the labour is to be deployed. Now suppose that expands and you have an export trade – the aspect of familial control does not change much nor does the fact that the men decide where labour is to be deployed. Power relations within the household are determined on the basis of familial relations whether you have an export industry or a modern industry. I think in all cases, the family decides how to use women's labour. In recent studies, it comes up again and again that family decides how to deploy women's labour rather than the other way round. Therefore, we have to see how much the family carries on this function and where and how this changes. The change might be just in form rather than in the content.

I have recently given a paper about technology and conservatism (referring to Jayoti's question). I think what I was saying does not come out very well in the case of sericulture as it does in the tradition of men doing the tailoring and women doing some other kind of work. In the early 1990s, when the garment industry of Matiabruz was booming, women were withdrawing from that labour while men worked in it. They even hired labour from Bangladesh. This was in 1992-93. Recently, a re-survey shows that because of free entry into the industry, small units are proliferating. The strategy now is to go back to using family labour. So women are back into production. This means that the industry remains at a very low level of development. This prevents any kind of technological change or shift into a different market.

Nupur Dasgupta

Did the *ganikas* have more independence in early Indian society? Those who specialise in early Indian history would know that whatever sources we have of early India are actually representational. They often distort actual facts. We get to know that the *ganikas* were well-educated and independent but finally they were under the thumbs of the patriarchs in the society. They did not choose their professions by themselves but the patriarchs of the republican states chose them, as in the case of Amrapali. They had to undergo a sexualisation of their role. They were not only sexual ambassadors. In the story of Shyama (made popular by Rabindranath but based on a Jataka story), she is a very well-known courtesan. She earned a lot of money. And that is one of the reasons why a lot of thieves would get into her home. Rabindranath has refined the story, but in the Jataka version, Bajrasen (was no name in the original story) was punished for killing a courtesan

Did women choose to be a *barbanita* or a *bhikkhuni* in order to express their autonomy? Far from it. The Dhammapada cult very succinctly directed that that *bhikkhuni* even of 100 years standing had to bow down to a *bhikkhu* of 25 years standing every day every morning. So a *bhikkhuni* of a Buddhist order had no glorious status. But of course their situation was better than their household situation sometimes. Now you can imagine for yourself what the household situation would be.

I would like to answer to Nirmaladi's question about transition – there is no transition. In the Rg Veda itself, there were confusing representations of women. On the one hand, we have women as '*brahmacharinis*', '*brahmabadinis*', very famous women; on the other hand many underwent so much rigour that they felt like committing suicide. There were instances of female infanticide. Actually what happened was that in the early stages, when consciousness of property and hereditary succession had not yet crystallized, the role of women in the family was perhaps more free. But as these things got crystallized women's roles were relegated to the periphery of the household more in her role as a mother. Only as the mother of sons did she have any independence. The best example we get is the history of the Satvahanas, a dynasty around the Vindhya region around 1 BC to 2 AD. All the kings are named after their mothers, so it was perhaps a matrilineal dynasty. Nevertheless, the importance of the women was as mothers. They enjoyed certain powers but there were also restrictions. Women were donated for religious purposes, No names are given for these women. They are represented as the wife of the village headman and so on. The identification is always with reference to the male members of the family.

When Samita asked me to read this paper in the seminar, I was not really very prepared. I agreed because I feel, earnestly, that if one has to do any work on any issue in social history, be it caste, women or marriage rights, one has to begin with early Indian society. It is a must and some work is now being done on those lines. And I believe that organisations such as these should continue to interpret such work.

Domestic work did not win women any recognition. It was her duty to control the household. I like to take reproduction as another sphere of work. In early Indian society, there was a division between spheres of work -- one was the procreator of progenies and the other the actual workers in fields and workshops.

About distortions of history, let us take the case of *Saraswati Vandana*. We all know what is going on. Just as Harappa is a part of our culture, the Vedas are a part and parcel of our culture, the Islamic culture is also a part and parcel of our culture. We all go to *eat Moghlai khana*, it is a part and parcel of Indian culture. Why do we try to distort these things, why do we try to negate one in order to assert another? I specialise in Archaeology, I find that archeologists and historians (as Ratnabalidi was saying) are polarising the Harappan and the Vedic. But in my view there were innumerable cultures which contributed to build these two big brothers. They could not exist without the help of the small brothers. Historians and Sociologists have to more rigorously analyse the nature of representation.

Amiya Bagchi

The name of the ILO cropped up more than once. The ILO has been just taken over by the theorists of the World Bank and IMF. In 1920, when they passed those conventions they had genuinely some pro-workers standards. The Americans boycotted the ILO for a very long time. And when they entered it, they did so on condition that ILO would now adopt their ideology. The trade unions of Europe have now adopted their stance of supporting their MNCs. They are going to introduce labour standards. Recognition of sex trade as an industry is partly to protect Europeans who might go to South East Asia to enjoy sex tourism. One has to regard these international organisations now simply as serving the multinationals of the G-7 countries including the ILO. There are some exceptions, but they are very much of an exception. I must also mention this that the working class all over the world is under attack and in the USA and Europe the lowest rung of workers has lost in terms of real wages during the last twenty years. Incomes have never been so unequal in the history of the North Atlantic than it is now and one has also to situate the possibilities of women's autonomy against that global situation.

Asha Hans

Tracing Female Genealogies: The Case of the Bhauma Karas of Orissa

Since I work in the sphere of International politics and refugee studies, this part of history was not my concern, except that I live in Orissa where this was one of the periods often highlighted. Taking a cue from that, my paper will trace female genealogies and take the Bhauma Karas of Orissa as a historical example. My knowledge of history is very limited, but as a political scientist, I explored this issue of a number of queens who reigned in Orissa as a link to the present reigns of a number of women in India. The Bhauma Kara reign began from about 740 AD, no one knows exactly when since there are discrepancies. What is important is that from 840 AD to 900 AD, there were six queens who reigned in Orissa.The significance of the period lies in the fact that contrary to the injunctions of the Smriti writers six queens who constituted a third of the total number of Bhauma who ascended the throne.

This had at least two important dimensions. I call it a female genealogy but it prevailed within a patriarchal and not a matrilineal system. It could thus be related to the modern system today. The second is to enquire into or rather define the system of documentation. For me it became more important as I went on reading. Where documentation or traces of this history are concerned there is a very little. This is confusing as they were not a small principality. It could be because they were unorthodox rulers and possibly of non-Aryan origin, and the orthodox Brahmins ignored them as they did not fit into the conservative traditional system. It could also be because in the Brahmin perception the female dynastic rule contravened the patriarchal system, which they promoted. There are bronze plates and copper plates, which are being found, which are available. I could see only one of them which belonged to the Hindol principality.

It was a very large kingdom. It stretched from Midnapore to Mahindragiri, down south of Orissa. So you can see that the whole of Orissa as we see today especially in the eastern sector, all of it was covered by the Bhauma Karas. All the kings took the name Kara but not the queens. For lack of documentation, one of the writers on Bhauma Kara reign (there have been three books written all during 1978-79) says that these kings were non-Aryans and therefore they were ignored by orthodox Brahmins. As a feminist writer I would like to see whether this was the only reason or not.

There were six female rulers belonging to the Bhaumakara dynasty. The first one was Tribhuvana Mahadevi who came in 846 AD. According to the bronze plate, it is said that she was brought to the throne by a number of her ministers and feudal lords. All of these queens were quite old when they occupied the thrones. Tribhuwana Mahadevi herself was a widow, she came to the throne because she did not have a son and she ruled till her grandson was old enough to take over the throne. She ruled as queen as a complete ruler. The grandson who took over was her daughter's son. She came at the end of the Buddhist reign. One of the quotations made in one of the bronze plate says that she was bereft of stars and was a female with a distressful heart. That was the beginning of her reign. And from that, they compare her with Shesnaga who bears the burden of the earth on its hood and was an ideal ruler who vanquished the people who tried to conquer it, maintained the glory of her family and established administration and social harmony. During her reign, these three things were very important, that she could establish a good administration, there was social harmony and aggression could be stopped.

She was the daughter of a Mysore king called Rajamalla. The writing on her, which is very androcentric in character, says that her reign was the dawn with hundreds of auspicious signs of the world. The way she was projected was very much male oriented in character. All the documents that are there, (one from Orissa and one from an Arab traveler

and from China) make it very clear that she was an extraordinarily good ruler. During her rule she imposed order. Though she was called Ranima (a patriarchal device) the political history entered into a glorious phase in the reign of the new queen. She was accepted as her person was 'adorned with hundreds of auspicious signs of a lord of the world'.

The second queen was Prithvi. She came to the throne by killing her brother-in-law with the help of her father. A major historian of this period, Das, argued that the reign gave new strength to the dynasty. So in the documentation's we have, on the one hand, some saying that the queens were there because of their fathers, on the other hand, there is the argument that the dynasty existed because of her.

The third ruler was Gauri Mahadevi who was supposed to have maintained law and order in the kingdom. And, according to one bronze plate, the entire population was prostrate at her lotus-like feet. The fourth was her daughter, Dhandi Mahadevi. She defeated her neighbours and had absolute authority over her subjects. The fifth was Vakula Mahadevi, her stepmother, who dethroned Dandhi Mahadevi. Sixth was Dharma Mahadevi. These were the six rulers who came.

Despite the law of primogeniture, these six queens ruled in Orissa over a period of nearly a hundred years. Some of them were widows, some were not, and all of them were old. But despite these laws, in the absence of male heirs (there was no custom of adoption during that period of history) women could succeed. At least where the second Mahadevi was concerned, it was obvious that she was not there because her ministers and people wanted her. She was powerful enough to get her brother-in-law killed and get the throne herself. Where the characterization of these rulers is concerned, they were supposed to be (at least in the case of the first Mahadevi) very benevolent. For example, she did not like oppressive taxes. These female leaders were trained in warfare. They set up the administration. Das argues that they had a stable state. The economy was quite vast with agriculture, industry and commerce. When Mahadevi the first came there was nothing in the treasury because most of the money was spent by earlier rulers on Buddhist Viharas. She built up the treasury. There was a change in religion also from Brahminism to Buddhism.

Though there is some documentation on the rulers, there is none on the general condition of the people at that time. What you can see from these records is that there were no women at all in the administrative structures. There was a queen at the top but at no other level. Polygamy existed. Vakula and Gauri were wives. Devdasi system also began at the end of Buddhist phase. The questions that arise are very obvious. Where the writings are concerned, the emphasis is on male values.

There are a number of questions, which have come to my mind. If you look at the dynasties then and now, I would not differentiate between Mrs. Indira Gandhi taking over, as a widow put there by her father and the minister, Sonia Gandhi is also a widow. Female genealogy if you take it as a historical concept, it has not changed. If we ask the question, are we advancing? It would also be significant to me as a political scientist to see that the nation was masculine in character and the language used by writers was androcentric. I remember Zillah Eisenstein's caution that political states have an interest in bodies because politics is derived from such interests (93, 171). In this context one must remember that the female body has been always an object of control in many countries. They can also emerge as keepers of national cultures and social honour. The role of ministers, fathers, military training, education is important as is the way in which these are exploited in relation to political power. I think we need to tell the story of women at different levels: historical, mythical and biographical. It is not an easy task since contemporary perceptions of gender roles and language intervenes. We have to recognise that the testimony of history is different in feature and women have usually found it difficult to articulate the transformations they have experienced. Any study would have to map out a more complete feature of these women's experiences. For me this is the beginning of research and personally I think a number of questions need to be answered and perhaps I will get some help today: what are these issues and questions which need to be looked into.

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Sources are from the copper/ bronze plates found for instance in Dhenkanal, Daspala, Hindol and Baud.

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Indrani Chatterjee

Not of woman bound but of bound women

I have to begin with a vote of thanks for the enormous goodwill and support members of my institute have felt emanating from women's studies, Jadavpur. I also need to say that my book was made possible by 15 years of women's movements and academic work that was coming from those movements. My political consciousness began with the Mathura rape case. Some of you might remember that big event in our legal, judicial and social world. To continue on that personal note, I am going to begin with a story from my childhood. I was taken to a crowded gathering where my father was addressing some elderly women as 'Ma'. I turned to him and asked, quite logically, why he had so many mothers and I had only one. Later I found out that apart from the very clear-cut families from which I and my friends from school came, I had also a large number of diverse levels of kin. People forgot to explain to me in what precise ways they were kin or not kin. For example there was one Pulinkaku, great favourite of all the children, who was always feeding us things and making us toy bangles. He was also a sovereign rule-giver over a newly wedded aunt and a trusted lieutenant of my grandmother. When I had grown old enough to take all this seriously I learnt the provenance of this Kaku. I suppose you all understand the word Kaku (uncle: father's younger brother). He had been brought into my grand father's house at the end of a famine when he was barely seven and since one of the uncles was having his Upanayan at that time, the boy was also given his sacred thread ceremony. Since then he had stayed in the household. My mother later told me of another such uncle, Damodar-da in her maternal house, who went with my grandmother to her marital household. My aunt-in-law talked subsequently at length of somebody called Sundari-da, a very handsome man, the mainstay of her paternal home. She heard him being mocked: 'O to bandi poot' [oh, he is the son of the maid/slave-girl]. In my youth there were very few cultural and social histories of these elaborately structured families.

Of course there are not much more now either because there is a dearth of material or because, as my friend and colleague, Sudeshna Banerjee, will argue after me, the ideas and definitions of family have changed drastically over time. Yet, this is an issue we need to engage with seriously as historians, not only in the specific context of regions in the subcontinent, but keeping in mind a global discourse on the family and the household. If we read the history of Bengal as the representative history of India (which I have problems with but which we continue to do) even within the sub-group of Bengal studies there are presumptions about the kind of family history we can write that are governed entirely by our political sympathies. An invisible prohibition lies across the studying of elite ideas, the constitutions and working out of such households or families. And the dearth of records prohibits the studying of the ideas and structures of the families of the poor. What we are left with, very often, are studies based not only on the presumptions of people like us, 'Hindu and Bhadra groups', but also studies which implicitly rely on the definitions of family in the present context. I have been struck by this again and again in the past few

years. Let us take the example of Tanika Sarkar's presentation at the Centre for Social Science Studies (January 1999). There was a great deal of disquiet among the audience. Tanika Sarkar's work is path breaking in many ways. As a teacher of mine I have always acknowledged her great influence on me and my work. Her papers on 'Phulmoni and the Age of Consent Controversy' have shown us the way to conceptualise the historicity of marital rape, the issues of legal personhood and women's roles vis a vis the Hindu community and the colonial state. She has explored the marking of the boundaries of women's individual rights in subject positions. Why is it that her work causes me such soul searching? Partly because that kind of work does not engage with the various different kinds of non-Hindu family also affected by the same modes of violence that Tanika is talking about. And this disquiet increases when I look at say a colonial record Tanika herself has looked at which was compiled in the 1860s and 70s. This is a series of statistics of wife-murders by men. Colonial officials have recorded two chief causes of such violence – "jealousy, because the women intrigues with some other man, and anger, because the women has done or omitted to do something connected with household management". A perfect representation, in colonial English officials' words, of the dual level economies within which young girls grew to adulthood. Our training as historians has taught us to believe that these legal records obliterate more than they tell. Did the state ask itself in these cases how such wives came to be wives, which kind of husbands were murdering? There is an entire historical development in law, in social history behind framing of diverse entities under a single uniform rubric of murder or violence. It is this desegregation, historians, especially of women's history, must take on now. And anything else I say after this is born out of that commitment to further women's history by complicating it.

For such exercises, to glance backward in time is, I think, essential. Routine classificatory categories -- marriage, family, child, girl, boy -- are not naturally occurring phenomena. Each term is, as I have already been taught, culturally specific and historically particular. Take the term 'child' which till early 1830s in Britain represented a labourer of a particular sort. Slaveholders in the plantations of the Atlantic economies regularly used terms like 'boy' and 'girl' to denote the owned male and female slaves. Many were in fact adult men and women. Therefore, the term 'child' did not necessarily imply a correspondence between sign and referent. In colonial and post-colonial conditions terms may have displaced referents. This linguistic strategy is only one amongst many used to infantilise groups of people. The difficulty lies in the Indian context of explaining the yoking of child to marriage in the 18th and 19th century (at least in my work). We have to problematise what counted as marriage in a particular society at one time, and also historicise the way in which marriage, alongside the other kinship terms, came to validate certain commercial transactions that East India Company first and then the parliament of Great Britain had no desire to abolish.

The term of kinship that I have looked at (and there are quite a few I am not going to read out in great detail), are all terms that can be read in double or triple ways depending upon the specific context. There is, for example, the 'palak beta', sons by nourishment, and the 'dhammapita' or the 'dhamma bap', father by the faith or in the faith. These kinds of terms are often used in dispute resolution and certainly crop up in judicial cases. Such terms implying fatherhood and son-ship which carry such clear connotations of authority and power were associated with punitive resolutions. And the equivalent terms for females implied daughterhood and wifehood. For example, in Assam you have the term 'beti' (daughter) being used for slave girls. In all the data I have seen of the 18th and 19th centuries, there are terms like 'chokra-chokri' and 'londa-londi' being used with double meanings. There is 'kannapatri' which comes from mid-century Coochbehar. These represent a whole range of kinship terms. They are not just descriptive terms, they also work hand in hand with terms of address. A mid-19th century Bengali author like Gurucharan Mahalanobish recount how a woman who had become a servant in the paternal grandfather's household after the cyclone of 1833 was addressed – 'we did not consider her as a slave, we considered her as an elder sister'. We have continued such habits and practices in the late 20th century. In another contemporary-looking family, the author

describes a slave (bought for a debt of Rs. 30. by his grandfather) being inherited by his father. He described the daughter of that slave family addressing the author's mother as 'pishima', father's sister. The author's own address term for the slave daughter was 'Khemi-bon' – sister Khemi. You also find such incidents in folk narratives and in different kinds of records. I am not going to elaborate on this. Much of the English reporting in the late 18th and 19th century was blind to the context specific nature of kinship term. Therefore, blind to the nuance within which the kinship terms circulated. I will give you an example. Beveridge, a very famous scholar and historian of the late 19th century who translated verses and Persian documents, differed with the court poet of Udaipur over the translation of a Persian phrase – 'Valida Sababikhesh'. Beverage said that it meant 'this is his own royal mother', discussing Jehangir's mother, and the court poet who knew better advised him not to take a kinship term literally. 'Valida Sababikhesh' means mother for some reason, reason for being Valida. Beveridge dismissed him and subsequently of course Shyamaldas lost his job in Udaipur. But it is Beveridge's translation that is current and has gone into the histories we write. No one has pointed out that Shyamaladas had actually given the right reading. So what we are looking at is actually language, how blind we are to the context specific nature of power in kinship. I will give you another quote, which I hope you will appreciate in the spirit that it is given. This comes from the Magistrate of Tirhut, 1868, describing the great market in children who are changing hands in the entire eastern belt right from the end of the 18th century to the 19th century. The official writes that "after purchase, the condition of these children was far better than what it was before and though they were considered the property of their master, they were not looked upon as slaves. They often acquired property and in some cases attained opulence. To call the one custom or the other slavery will be giving a very wrong impression." Historians do want to know what is going on in the structures and processes of the society at that time. And it is this fact alone which gives me the strength to talk about such matters here today because this is fundamentally a part of how men lead 'families' and households being constructed in the late 18th and 19th centuries. So when we are talking about sons, wives, daughters, I beg you to keep this parallel economy in mind. This is necessary also because the nature of the records show me that the largest majority of the children and adults who were sold were female. So we are taking issue here with all those who have theorised about the slave mode of production presuming the slave is male and adult. Indian evidence both for the 18th and 19th century is that the slave is female and under 12. Does this information do something for our history? I suggest that it does. For example, look closely at biographies you will find – there is the institution of the 'Bharar-Meye' which many Bengali contemporaries talked about. Bharar meye is a term used for boatload of girls brought from different regions to a central point from where they were sold by dalals. And in the late 18th century, a boatload of so-called Bangsaj girls may not have been Brahmins at all, though they were passed off as such to Bangsaj bridegrooms who bought these girls. Instances are known when Muslim girls sold off the boat were passed off as Bangsaj Brahmins. One such girl after marriage was discovered to be a Muslim when she used the word 'chirag' instead of 'bati' or 'diya'. But she remained in the family; she was not driven away by her husband since such a procedure would have resulted in loss of caste. The matter was hushed up. Autobiographical accounts from Sylhet and Barishal allude to the widespread nature of the Bharar Meye institution. It is unlikely that such a system evolved in the late 19th century, it must have existed, by inference, in the late 18th century.

For our purpose today, this evidence means that when we are confronted with tables of wife-murders, we are possibly looking at various different kinds of wives within the ambit of law, and equally, at different kinds of husbands. Given that Bengal Presidency had a Muslim-majority population in the 19th century, I accuse myself and many other historians of Bengal who have distorted the very terms upon which the past, especially the social and cultural past of this region, needs to be studied. I am not suggesting an additive framework of 'add Muslim and stir', but when records of wife-murder carries alongside comments of officials that Muslim and Hindu households are equally afflicted by these murders, what are we to make of the legislation that is then passed on the basis of such

homogenisation? The problem has already been raised by scholars talking about gender justice and the uniform civil code. I am proposing some humility and some imagination in our historical research. Let us not presume that the 'Nikah' of 1850s is the 'Nikah' of today. Or that all cohabitation strategies in 18th and 19th century involved free men and women alone.

I am going to read out from a book in Urdu written by the brother of Abdul latif, Abdul Gaffar Nassakh who served as a civil servant in the colonial bureaucracy between1860s and 1890s. His autobiography describes cases of slave women running away and/or being done to death between pages 151 and 154. And this is something we as historians of Bengal have not reflected on. What does this mean when we are talking about gender relations? We mean, quite bluntly, that gender is an extremely stratified system. We are not just talking about 'free' women here or women who are not slave, but women who are both slave and non-slave in the construction of gender. We are talking about eunuchs who are slaves, born hermaphrodites who are not slaves and free boys and men in historical time. We are talking about the relationships these diverse groups have with each other in the construction of a gender-specific history.

Samita (Sen) had asked me whether I would be willing to take on the role of the devil's advocate in this workshop. I do so very happily. I will do a kind of quick projection of what would happen to the history of Bengal if anyone over here took my challenge, added a stratified notion of gender to the study of women's history. I have chosen three accounts to demonstrate my point. I will do a quick 'what-if' history for these three. I know it is imaginative and even perhaps imaginary history. But they may well be less 'imagined' than our habit and training prompts us to think. There is, in fact, enormous evidence for the scenarios I project. I would welcome it if people from here take up the challenge and stay with me.

Imaginary history, Thesis One. Social reform (or reaction) or the Bengal Renaissance. The practice of selling and buying slave girls, londis and chokris was not hidden from history by the reformers of that time. Neither Ram Mohan nor Malabari, in the early 19th or the late 19th century could have been blind to what was going on. Rather, these facts must have been erased from the narrative constructed by us later historians. The history of social reform in India, impoverished by these erasures, had to take recourse to a range of political and philosophical premises to legitimize itself. For some it has been Saidian and Foucauldian theories of the Western State like in Lata Mani's work which is furiously a-historical. In the case of many of us it is different blends of feminist theory – Marxist feminists or radical feminists. However, few of us take the clues in the reformers' language very seriously. Ram Mohan himself wrote against the acceptance of money in the marriage of a daughter but he contrasted it with the transaction of male and female children under the pretence of marriage which he said was practised by two thirds of the Brahmins of Bengal and Tirhut, as well as by their followers generally. Nor was he the first to mention such things. Anandibai, the wife of Raghunath Rao informed his nephew the Pesha Sawai Madhav Rao that Brahmans were selling their daughters which was not an auspicious indicator of the state of the kingdom. The Peshwa's directive prohibiting all members of the Brahmin caste from accepting any money from potential grooms at marriage of their daughters was not just an attempt to replace bride wealth and dowry giving, which has been urged by some historians, but also an attempt to regulate this sale. If poor Brahmins in Bengal and Maharastra in late 18th and 19th century stand accused of selling their daughters, which sort of daughters are these? From indirect evidence I have of such groups are, there are two possibilities. First, that the Brahmins were also the main group of slave holders by virtue of 'daan' of slaves by particular 'Yajamans', so that many instances of the sale of such 'daughters' might also have been ransoms against which these females were being married off. Second, if these are free daughters, then we are then left somewhat confused regarding the nature of Brahminical Patriarchy (a term coined by Uma Chakravarty recently). If these are liberationist impulses by the Brahmins, giving off their slave-girls in marriages against which they took 'paritoshik pon', they are not necessarily patriarchal but something else. If these are selling of free daughters Brahmins are in the

same category as those famine stricken parents regularly supplying the traffic with those they could not feed themselves. In other words, Brahminical Patriarchy is not an institution of the powerful but of the pitiful. I will stop here. To further develop this thesis, one would have to engage with Uma Chakravarti's recent work.

If we address widow remarriage from the vantage point of this 'add slaves and stir' theses, then exemption to the Brahmin's widows recirculating within a political economy of kinship is something that needs another think. Which kind of Brahmin wife are we talking about here? The one acquired by gift or 'daan' or the one who kept up her relationship in the natal household. Understanding the thorny problem of why then all Brahmin widows in the 18th century and 19th century did not marry needs more than the time expired concepts of demographic behaviour and production and reproduction. It leads us to distinguished between different kinds of Brahmin wives and widows. Why am I so certain that this is indeed what is going on? The Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856. Three decades before this bill was passed, I know from the records of the various Muslim households I have worked on, that there were both slaves and non-slave wives. The British officials tried to ensure the remarriage of slave widows after the death of the master-husband partly in order to obviate the dispersal of funds and partly to divest the more important actors within such households who wished to control these women and children as inherited slaves. The English officials argued that in Classic Islamic law (argument given today as well) there was no ban on widow remarriage, for after all the prophet had himself married a widow. But these officials were privately bewildered to find that in none of these hegemonic households was widow remarriage actually practiced. So they got into the act, arranging for the circulation of slave widows among kinsmen of the deceased master. All these were three decades before 1856. I think we need to rewrite the history of circulation of widows. We need to do it from this vantagepoint of this earlier kind of household. We need to take very seriously the research on households in earlier times that is only now being taken up.

The third issue I will take up is that of law under Company rule. This is something I will only touch upon because in gender studies law and legal form has acquired an enormous importance. Particularly in the context of today. The equality between laws and 'equality before law' is said to have been established by the English juridical system. I am not saying that there was no equality, my argument is what was equality before law was actually detrimental to the slaves. Because in earlier systems, the records show, slaves could not be punished equally with non-slaves. For slaves were given half the punishment due to non-slaves. In other words, when you equalise punishment and equalise legal personhood you are taking away certain exemptions of slaves. This will anger my feminist sisters but I will persist and say that if we are going to talk about patriarchy, let us also consider the role of certain middle class women traders, slave holding mistresses and elder women in furthering the cycles of sales and purchases within this system. There is enormous evidence now that there was a twin overlap in the market and in kinship economies which built each other up over time. But I am not going to take that on today.

In the final count, what I am arguing for is a multi-faceted, complex and variegated sets of relationship involving 'free' men and women, slave women, slave men and slavechildren. It is imperative that feminist historians lead the way in the final decolonisation of history and proceed to investigate households in historical time; and that they take into account men and women and children but according to the free, the slave, the eunuchs and others. Drawing out all the complex relationships that governed these variegated groups of people, not only according to production and reproduction but continuities of consumption, circulation and reification, distinguishing not between love and terror that ties us all, but between terror that is used to discipline the free from the love that is used to discipline the unfree. Distinguishing not between the love of the bondmaid and that of the wife, but speaking of love between the bonded, between the bondmaid and her master and the bondsman and his mistress. Finally, giving ourselves the permission to ask whether biological reproductive families are, indeed, as old as they appear or whether they are relatively new entrants in the Indian historical scene. To ask whether heterosexuality was indeed at all necessary. What were the purposes for building lineages and whether there

were already widely-flung nets over poverty wielded finally by those who reared orphans and called them sons.

Sudeshna Banerjee

Domesticate and Discipline: The Family As an Ideology of Women's Subordination,Calcutta, 1880-1947

My recently concluded project on domesticity, on the basis of which I have been requested to make today's presentation, is not exclusively or even primarily concerned with women's history or history of gender. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify at the outset how my work relates at all to the central concern of this workshop. It is important to emphasise that my work engaged with the nationalist 'woman question' only in so far as it was relevant to the question of nationalist domesticity and the way in which it has been problematised in my work. My engagement with nationalist domesticity was shaped in critical response to the postorientalist trend of representing nationalist domesticity as a counter-discursive derivative of colonial power/knowledge. And it is the imperatives of this critical intervention that has determined the way in which I have engaged among other things with the nationalist ideology of familial disciplining of women. As the world of anti-colonial domestic ideology comprised many more aspects than merely the 'woman question' I am having to sift out of my work the parts that relate to the ideology of women's subordination and string them together in order to make my presentation relevant to the proceedings of this workshop. Accordingly, relegating the wider critical concern of my work somewhat to the background, I highlight here the patriarchal dimensions of the particular ideological grid that I have studied, i.e., the nationalist ideology of domesticity among the Bengali Hindu middle class in colonial Calcutta.

The main thrust of my work has been to show that far from being a mere counter-discursive derivative of colonial power/knowledge, the formation and transformation of nationalist domesticity was a dialectical process. Crucial in this was the agency of the lived experience of the family-household. As the primary level of this group's reproduction of its class identity, material anxieties, status, and gender ideology, interacted with nationalist counter-discursive abstractions. Nationalist ideologisation of domesticity was not a one-way process in which the family-household was passively inscribed from above by a preconceived nation. While nationalist abstractions sought to 'recast' the home, the lived domestic experience of the class, in its turn, inscribed its agency on nationalism by acting as the fundamental lived unit which supplied one of the major paradigms through which an ordered anti-colonial nation itself started to be imagined.

It is within this wider framework that I have situated the nationalist ideology of the family as a mechanism seeking to control women's agency and sexuality. Clearly the nationalist discourses in colonial Bengal abound in gendered notions, symbolisms and essentialisations invested in an ideal domesticity. Feminist authors have shown how marriage, conjugality, motherhood, widowhood were all variously invested with gendered nationalist essentialisms, symbols and stereotypes. Indeed it was under the impact of the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism that the Bengali middle class came to signify domesticity and conjugality as the inviolate space where the colonised male protected his essential masculine self-hood having failed the test of manhood in the sphere of the state. Yet one cannot help feeling that in feminist studies on middle class domesticity in colonial Bengal there has been a slightly disproportionate preoccupation with gendered symbolisms and nationalist essentialisations as major determinant of the nationalist project. The equally important role of patriarchal stakes and anxieties at the household level has been largely neglected. My work, in keeping with its central argument, shows that that the gendered world of essentialisms counter-discursively derived from colonial power/knowledge dialectically interacted with the household dimension of patriarchy to cumulatively create the nationalist ideologies of the family. It has to be emphasised that Bengali Hindu middle-class patriarchy with its extended family structure had its specific political economy and

household-level anxieties about controlling women's agency and sexuality. This world of practical problems at the level of the lived experience of domesticity had as important a role in shaping nationalist discourse as the counter-discursive processes of nationalist myth-making.

However for a study of the dialectic I have found it pertinent to concentrate on the majority discourse in the nationalist milieu in Bengal as my work meant to be an exercise in social history, studying transformation of trends over a span of almost seventy years. The discourse on domesticity that was most massively and widely disseminated in late 19th century Calcutta derived its epistemic coherence from its clearly Brahmanical core. In it the rhetoric of women's subordination was heavily derived from Manu. Women were sought to be pinned down through a justification of womanhood that was narrowly focused on procreation and child-rearing. Foreclosing any space for companionate marriage or women's higher education, this discursive grid sought to block the way for other justifications to develop. The *sahadharmini* in this majority discourse was the scripturally ordained aide in the performance of the ritual and functional duties of the householder. Equipping her for an ideal intellectual compatibility with the husband was clearly not the intention of such a discourse which sought to rigidly restrict the world-view on women to the procreative rationale of Shastric womanhood.

It is important to identify the voice of household level patriarchal anxieties in this ideology. It manifests itself strongly in the rhetoric in favour of pre-pubertal marriage of women. Recent feminist scholarship has pertinently identified in the stake in child-marriage a nationalist assertion of masculinity by colonised Bengali male in the intimate sphere of conjugality; this assertion was in the awareness of political subjugation in the public sphere and in response to the colonial constructions about their alleged effeminacy. What is overlooked, however, is that the revivalist nationalist stake in child marriage also had another obvious determinant at the more immediate level of substantive patriarchal stakes in the organisation of the family. Given the dominant structure of patriarchy as an extended family, the 'necessity' of early domestication of the bride was elaborately and pervasively voiced in the majority discursive grid that I have analysed; the non-affinal woman of recent domicile was portrayed as potentially capable of instigating her husband to break out of the extended family.

The anxiety to preserve this structure of patriarchy was also reflected in the hierarchy of domination that was envisaged for the bride. The flood of didactic literature in the period sought to subordinate the bride not only to the husband but also to her parents-in-law and her other senior in-laws with equal rigidity. Such literature was extremely anxious not to concede the groom a right to choose his wife lest conjugal attachment individualised the conjugal unit. The stake in child marriage also involved the question of female chastity. I emphasise that this nationalist glorification of the chastity of the child bride was not simply a project of securing for the colonised male the autonomy that he had lost in the domain of the state and the economy. In the majority discourse on domesticity produced in the nationalist milieu of late 19th century Bengal, marriage of females before the age of sexual arousal was also clearly a moral mechanism for containing and disciplining female sexuality at the substantive level of domesticity.

The specific familial and household organisation of patriarchy among the Bengali Hindu middle class also determined why this majority rhetoric of women's subordination in late 19th and early 20th centuries did not require an explicit rationale of a division of work-space between men and women. The pre-existing practice of gendered spatial segregation within the vast majority of Bengali Hindu middle-class households, along with the pre-pubertal marriage of women, precluded the possibility of women staking their claim to the sphere outside the home. In the circumstances the rhetoric of gendered division of work space, the straightforward derivation of which marked the world of Brahmo and 'reformed' Hindu discourses, was irrelevant to the majority discourse representing the non-Brahmo, non-'reformed' majority among the Bengali Hindu middle class. This majority discourse on domesticity, therefore, needed an alternative rhetoric. Arguably, among the purdah-observing majority the secluded women's domain was also a problematically insulated zone

for nationalist male agency to discipline, particularly where many spheres of knowledge, strategically important for the nationalist agenda of knowledge to appropriate, was still peculiarly controlled by the woman's domain. In the majority discursive grid, therefore, the 'superiority' of and domination by the male in the household was justified with the help of a division not so much of work space as of knowledge -- a hierarchical and gendered notion of knowledge within domesticity. This division of knowledge thrived on the myth of the functionally knowledgeable but metaphysically ignorant and intellectually weak female; the constructed handicap of female intellectual incapacity was then constructed as 'natural'. The male was said to possess the capacity for speculative metaphysical overview. This metaphysical knowledge, in its turn, was constructed as the ultimate knowledge in this world. The man, therefore, was the thinking person capable of *nishkam dharma* (the ideal of non-attachment) and consequently had the right to authority within the family. The woman, 'devoid' of this metaphysical self-knowledge and world-view, was *kamini* (lust incarnate) had to be rigidly controlled by the male and was necessarily suited only for the subservient functional roles of housewife and mother. In the matter of salvation, to which the empowering project of Brahmanical knowledge was related, the woman had no ability to help herself. In order to lay her sexuality and power of procreation at the disposal of the male, Brahmanical discourse had made her existence and even her salvation entirely dependent on that of her husband; her only *dharma,* therefore, was *patibratya* (devotion to the husband as the only means to salvation). The husband, of course, was her *param-guru* (supreme mentor). Brahmanical ideology thus sanctified and institutionalised the self-acquired instructing role of the male in a way that justified his complete control over the sexuality, existence and salvation of the wife. The supposed superiority of the male was sustained by prescribing a subtle balance between his supervisory role on the one hand and on the other his detachment from any 'demeaning' involvement in petty trivialities of domestic chores'.

This specific rhetoric of division of male and female roles in the family itself was also largely induced by the specificity of the familial organisation of patriarchy in 19th century Bengal. It should be borne in mind that the pre-existing patriarchal practice was to preserve order in the *andar* through a partial empowerment of elderly women. At the abstract level of nationalist myth-making, it was relatively easy to deploy the icons of willingly submissive womanhood. But where the nation was confronted with the practical problem of controlling woman's agency in the lived world of the household, the dominant ideology found the situation much more problematic. Indeed, didactic literature was marked by a multi-layered discursive manoeuvring which sought to accommodate the mature mother and the 'new woman' in the same nationalist project of recasting women according to the priorities of the nationalist male.

By focusing on the neo-Brahmanic as the dominant ideology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we can see how at the more practical level of domestic order (rather than at the more abstract level of myth making), cultural nationalism was involved in a tense and complex manoeuvring to accommodate two vital agencies within its project. These were the agencies of the mature mother as *grhini,* on the one hand, and the bride or *badhu* as a young mother or mother-to-be, on the other. A crucial concern of neo-Brahmanic morality as a nationalist project was to effectively subordinate the procreative power and 'nurturing role' of women to the national requirement for healthy and well-nurtured sons. At the same time, given the concern of patriarchy to preserve the extended family structure in which it was organised, the mature mother had to be relatively empowered to control the young bride on behalf of patriarchy. Paradoxically, therefore, neo-Brahmanism's espousal of the rigidly disempowering rhetoric of women's subordination derived from Manu, coexisted with a moral recognition of the partial empowerment of the mature mother within the household. Problematically for its hegemonic project of 'recasting' women, the neo-Brahmanic morality had to tackle the predicament that the mature mother could not be 'recast' in a way detrimental to her authority in the *andar*. Her agency, therefore, needed to be subordinated to the male head through a more subtly disempowering rhetoric, that would, however, not impair her authority over younger females in the *andar* particularly over the *badhu*. I argue

that the rhetoric of division of knowledge and faculties supplied the much needed mechanism whereby the *grhini* remained more 'knowledgeable' in relation to the *badhu* but the at the same time the authority of the male head of the household was infinitely privileged over hers by the dint of his 'exalted' knowledge relative to the functional, worldly knowledge of the *grhini*.

My presentation so far has emphasised the importance of the dialectic between nationalist essentialism, on the one hand and the lived experience of domesticity, on the other, in determining the nationalist ideology of women's subordination within the family. The other related argument developed in my work is that such a dialectical process opened up -- indeed demonstrably so -- the possibility of transformation in the world of nationalist ideology even during the colonial period, contrary to the impression of changelessness conveyed by many scholars regarding the world of anticolonial nationalism (feminist scholars on middle class nationalism in colonial Bengal are no exception to this trend of giving the late 19th century ideological situation an illusion of permanence). If the lived experience of the household was the level where very real material stakes, class and gender was substantively reproduced then the very dynamism of this reproduction in conjunction with changing socio-economic scenario was only likely to transform the nationalist ideology of domesticity including the modes of disciplining of the women's domain. Indeed, tracing the story of the world of ideological articulation among Calcutta's Bengali middle class over a span of almost 70 years (c1880-1947), I detected clear indications that the rhetoric of women's subordination transformed during the 1930s and 40s. This leads me to again emphasise that patriarchal language of familial control over female sexuality and agency should not be ahistorically construed as universal or changeless. The specificities of given historical situations as well as historical change over time determine why and how this language is strategically reconstituted if only to perpetuate male control over women's minds and bodies

My study revealed a close connection between this discursive shift on the one hand and the lived experience of patriarchy during the 1930s and early 1940s. A section of patriarchy -- most specifically the lower middle class elements -- reeling under various pressures, material and discursive, had to abandon the earlier defence of women's seclusion and was, therefore, left sounding distraught and ambivalent. The 1930s, indeed, marked a deep moral predicament. The majority sensibility of the class favouring total domestication of women was deflected within the same group by the pressure of changing circumstances specific to this period. Whether the majority within the middle-class patriarchy liked it or not, from the latter half of the 1930s 'what changed significantly was the presence of women in all major events of the times'. Indeed, the 1930s were a decade of great paradox in this regard. While the majority within patriarchy maligned women coming into political activism and into employment, unprecedented possibilities were also created during this decade for women's emergence in the 'outside'. Patriarchy was not in a position to control certain developments that came in a clustered way during the 1930s. Moreover, patriarchy wilted under material pressures that were militating against women's seclusion.

It was noted that by the late 1930s 'a noticeable number of girls had broken purdah despite a strict regime of prohibition'. 'Free movement of women [of middle-class families] was steadily increasing', according to perceptive contemporaries as well as Census reports. More problematically, this decline of purdah was accompanied by a significant rise in the female age of marriage and a remarkable increase in the incidence of secondary, and in some cases college, education among women after the Child Marriage Restraint Act took effect from 1930. Finally, the same class which had forcefully denounced women's involvement with work outside the home, was now often forced in its lower echelons to consider the possibility of daughters earning a living as school-teachers. Even an author who feared that the higher education of women would encourage cross-caste consensual marriage, could not help feeling that it would have been better if women could work to supplement the income of the family. It is true that the decline of purdah by itself did not involve women with paid jobs or active politics and that women going out to work were very limited in number in the 1930s. But for patriarchy it was a situation with dangerous

possibilities. A near future, when economic pressures and 'irretrievable changes' would force patriarchy to helplessly give in to women's involvement in both worlds, threatened to materialise, unless some rhetoric was deployed to prevent this spatial levelling from affecting the 'natural' division of work within the family. So it is important to note that this was the time when the early nationalist gendered rhetoric of division of knowledge and faculties got reinscribed by the more universal gendered rhetoric of division of work space, for the first time.

However it would be wrong to presuppose that the steady decline of the earlier rhetoric of women's subordination from the 1930-40s meant that it was unequivocally and neatly displaced by a equally comprehensively formulated rationale of control. Rather, as is often characteristic of transformation induced by pressures in material existence, the 1930s-40s saw a discursive flux in which a disturbed patriarchy frantically searched for a revamped language of control amidst a mutiplicity of emergent discourses competing with each other. One development, however, was clear -- there was a discernible shift towards a search for a more 'humane' rhetoric of control amidst the growing realisation among the middle class majority that in an atmosphere of women's emergence from seclusion, the rigidly procreative -- almost 'animalising' -- justification of womanhood was outmoded.

By the early 1940s, such a rigidly procreative rhetoric had become embarrassing to articulate as a moral statement in print. Among the sections more aware of the new discursive trends, therefore, the need was felt for a more 'humane' rhetoric of control. It should be noted here that in contemporary writings questioning the neo-Brahmanic morality, there was a constant reminder that women were humans. However, it was not merely male, intellectual criticism that weakened the persuasive power of the neo-Brahmanic rhetoric of *patibratya*. There is evidence that men registered a growing scepticism about this rhetoric among women -- the very people who were sought to be subordinated through this persuasion.

This discursive shift may be illustrated with the help of a particular kind of source material that I have found interesting and illuminating. These are *biyer padya* i.e., poems written on the occasion of marriage ceremonies by mainly relative of either the groom or the bride as the case may be. I actually resorted to deconstructing the numerous specimens of *biyer padya* that I collected covering the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. From a study of these it seemed that the formalised and glaringly inegalitarian rhetoric of *patibratya* noticeably decreased in these poems from the late 1930s onwards. Simultaneously, the theme of emotional love came to be explicitly stated. What is equally important, however, is that a new language of patriarchal control over the bride was sought to be deployed in these poems. The ideal of the 'joint family' structure of patriarchy and the subservience of the bride to it was now safeguarded by couching the discourse of 'duty' of the bride more in the language of emotion than in that of sacramental institutionalism.

Increasingly from the early 1940s *biyer padya* among the more educated within the middle class explicitly upheld the concept of romantic love and avoided the mention of any harsh rhetoric of total subordination. Although in the late 1930s there was still the occasional use of the word *patibratya* in a number of poems, it was clearly a more casual reference now. People hardly any longer elaborated on the rigidly subordinating rhetoric invoking the husband as god. Significantly, the questionnaire conducted by the 1931 Census revealed the waning of the notion of *patidebata* among the middle class. Out of the thirteen messages of felicitation/blessing printed on the occasion of a particular wedding in 1943, only one explicitly used the concept of *patibratya*. The others, though often equally moralising in their intent, used the concept of emotional love and confined their advice to a prescription of 'making the in-laws happy' and standing 'committed' to the 'union of hearts'. However, by the early 1940s, such a rhetoric of control, as the transformation in the world of *biyer padya* indicates, had become embarrassing to articulate as a moral statement in print. In this transforming atmosphere of the 1930s and 40s, emotional appeal appeared to have a greater persuasive potential than the Shastric rhetoric of women's subordination. However, to ensure that the accommodation of romantic love in the moral rhetoric did not

individualise the conjugal unit in relation to the extended family, such poems read as following, for example,

Make everybody your own,
Bind yourself to them by a bond of affection.
Let everybody's love for you keep you ever-smiling.

Elderly women the family now took upon themselves to reminded the couple (through *biyer padya*) that it was important for them to make others in the family as happy as themselves. In this matter, too, the older rhetoric 'sheltering' the bride 'at the feet of the elders' tended to be replaced by an emotional buttress to women's subordination to patriarchy. In the late 1930s and 40s the bride was to 'love everybody and make everybody happy'.

Jayoti Gupta

Constitutional Principles and Contradictory Structures of Property Codes: The Bengal Experience Reviewed

I thank the organisers for allowing me to present some of my findings and some of the ways in which I have proceeded with my work. This really is not my forum. I have sat the whole day listening to other speakers and the kind of rigour displayed by the historical materialists. And I have to apologise since this is strictly not my field.

The topic of my presentation today is constitutional principles and the contradictory structures of property in Bengal. Before I get down to explaining what I am talking about I would like to say that this exploration began with an interest which is little reflected in this particular paper. I began by actually trying to understand the kind of changes which were taking place in the area of agrarian relations in West Bengal in the period from 1960 to 1988. And in the course of doing that, I found that many of the issues -- the variety of elements constituting them -- of the nature and process of agrarian transformation in West Bengal could not be explained without reference to women's right to property and productive resources. I also realised that to understand this latter I had to go back much further in time. My fieldwork ended in 1988 and the final report was finished in 1998. Since then, I have been working backwards into history in trying to understand the points and conjunctures which could perhaps explain logic of property rights in the agrarian sector.

My focus on the agrarian sector is easily explained. Cultivable land is the major source of wealth in our economy as well as within the agrarian sector. So it is important to define the rights within the structures of landholding and see how actually these are (or can) be addressed in another situation or in a transitional situation. This part of my research is still at a preliminary stage I take this opportunity to highlight some of its concerns which are, I think, very important in relation to the papers I have listened to since the morning.

I fully appreciate that Nationhood is at the core of the formation of the patriarchal ideology. But I believe that it is also critical to understand the connections these had with actual processes in the agrarian sector. The manner is which I wish to progress with the theme given the orientation of this conference is as follows. First, I will try to explain why I have tried to establish a relationship between constitutional principles and the structures of property codes. Constitutional principles had a direct effect on the following factors: the definition of the rights of the people of the Indian Nation; and the framework of the legislative in regulating socio-economic and political life. The agrarian sector was an important area to be addresses. These principles were set anew after India gained independence but they did not emerge from a vacuum, they were shaped by the colonial past and emerged through the struggles to create a new order over the old. The foundations were laid and it was up to independent India to change it, remould, break away and to find ways of creating the new. The efforts of establishing the new had to draw links from the past. The past can go back several years. My presentation today will address the more immediate sources of developments that were to shape the constitutional provisions in the area of legislative, executive and judiciary and of the several events shaping the history of

independent India. We will briefly summarise the debate round the question of property rights of women; the relationship between the constitutional provisions guiding these laws and the contradictory nature of the relationship between different property structures.

The issue of property can be studied from various aspects and one can focus on different points of departure. Do I mean by the word property a substitute of productive resources? The arguments of this paper are based, primarily, on analysis of the responses elicited during the formulation of the Hindu Code and its legilsative passage in independent India. I have also specifically investigated some of the elements in structures of property in contemporary West Bengal. At each stage of investigation, I have attempted to raise certain questions which I hope will help to formulate some further directions of research which, I believe, require immediate attention. Therefore, what I am going to say today is part of my on going study of the definition of women's rights to productive resources. At a more general level, the study includes the nature and process of agrarian change. As I go along, I will also raise some questions that come automatically to mind like the failure of The Hindu Code Bill and the formulation of the Hindu Succession Act 1956. There were several acts, which were brought in together which included succession, inheritance, marriages and divorce. And this came, not as one code as envisaged earlier, but as several Acts. The process of codification of the Hindu Law had begun way back in 1937 when the first bill was introduced in order to give women right to property. The reason why I concentrate on the Hindu Code Bill (or the Acts they became) is because these laws guide about 86% of the population of this country. This does not justify my omission of other property codes that were relevant for the other (than Hindu) communities but I was not able to handle all the different codes together. The Hindu law is also important because it later became the principle on which land reform was affected -- no distinction was made between different communities in this regard. But at the same time there were certain contradictions between these provisions and the provisions of the Hindu Code Bill.

There were various debates around these issues in 1941. A Committee was set up to re-investigate some of the lacuna, which were found to be in the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act (1937). The Rau Committee was also charged with exploring the question of the absolute rights of the Hindu widows over property inherited from their husbands vis a vis the limited interests in the estate of the deceased husband in joint family property as granted in the 1937 provisions. It was also to address the possibility of daughters' right of inheritance to property which was missed out in the 1937 Act. From 1941, since Rao committee was constituted, and upto 1956, the year in which the various Acts of the Hindu code was passed, there were several debates which led to first to a withdrawal of the Hindu Code Bill. The shelved bill was brought in again later. The various points of view of representatives in the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies are contained in the proceedings. But an even richer source for the various arguments for and against legal changes is contained in the written statements submitted to the Rau Committee in 1944. These reflect the voices of many people across the country including traders, teachers, lawyers, women's organisations and other groups in Indian society. The response which I have come across from Bengal are mostly from Hindus. I do not find people from any other community commenting on the draft code, which was circulated in 1944. In 1945, the responses were published in two volumes. I have just concentrated on the section on Bengal.

The responses can be placed in different categories according to the respondent: there were different women's organisations there were legal and social bodies and there were also individuals. There were also those in favour of the code and those who were opposed to the code. And what is interesting is that the largest opposition came from lawyers' organisations, but also from women's organisations. Among the women's organisations, there was, suprisingly, one 'Mahila Atma Raksha Samity' of Tamluk District.

The various responses covered a wide range from the orthodox, some moderates to the extreme radical. The Rau committee decided that it would go according to the middle range responses. But the middle range responses were never really explained fully, i.e., what constituted the 'middle' range. If we look at the reposes from the women's organisations, we find very few who opposed one clause and supported another. But some appeared

progressive at one time but would not agree with another clause at another time. The extreme radicals were defined as those who whole-heartedly supported the code bill, even daughters' equal inheritance rights alongside sons and the widows' (wives and daughters-in-law) absolute rights over conjugal family's property, rights of divorcees and the provision for inter-caste marriages. These were the more controversial provisions. The Hindus were divided by two different codes of property -- inheritance and succession that is Dayabhaga and Mitakshara. According to the Dayabhaga rule, if there was joint property – the coparcenor would enjoy absolute right over the property and it would be up to him to decide whether to sell the property, divide it or even give it away. According to Mitakshara, there is a principle of survivorship and succession by which, in the joint family, all the male heirs of four generations are natural heirs to family property and no one in that chain can disinherit or sell the property and, without the permission of the others, they could not even claim partition. Later they were allowed partition. But only the men were natural heirs to the property. The daughters were not. The daughters were also not heirs in the Dayabhaga system but later on the daughters rights was included in the Hindu Code Bill. Daughters became successors both in the Dayabhaga as well as in the Mitakshara system. But the Hindu Code Bill when it was finally framed adopted the Mitakashra system and I will explain the system after I go through some of the responses which came at that time.

The respondents from Bengal who supported female inheritance argued that in the Dayabhaga system, sons inherited absolute right and fragmentation was already possible, so there was no legitimate way to exclude daughters on the ground of fragmentation of holdings and property. Some of the women's organisations, however, argued for the daughters' right to the matrimonial home, not just right of residence but a proprietory share. Some of the women's organisations pointed out that given the tradition that the sons maintain the family home, the sons should be allowed to keep the family home and give the daughters the share of the family house in cash, but not right of residence or a proprietory share. Some suggested that there should be a share of the property for unmarried and widowed daughters but not for married daughters. Indeed, even now, married daughters do not have a right of residence in the parental home. They went further and said that married daughters should not be given any right in the dwelling house of her parents. Some of the women's organisations argued that if the daughters were to inherit equally with the sons, they should also be bound to look after the parents. Then they also suggested that daughters should be bound by law to clear the father's debts even those the father may have incurred in maintaining the brother's family. It was probably these qualified positions which were regarded as 'middle' range by the Committee. These responses carefully avoided any challenge to the overall patriarchal structure and tried instead to introduce some small reforms. It was not so much a change as a sort of running hard to stand still. One response that stands out is a petition from the women security prisoners of the Presidency Jail. In this petition, the women argued the importance of recognising the daughter as an individual in society and sought recognition of her contribution to the society based on her individuality. A joint petition was submitted by various women's organisations arguing the necessity of daughters' property rights, the right to divorce and the possibility of inter-caste marriage. All these were progressive demands especially given the vocal opposition to them but these demands were not backed by reasons in support of these rights. The more leftist women's organisations had another kind of problem in that they did not believe in private property so the question of introducing anything on the lines of women's right to private property did not arise. But they did not engage with issues of individuation of women either. Perhaps, as Amiya Bagchi pointed out in the first session, individuation need not be linked with Capitalism. So it is not individuation in the literal sense of the word that one is trying to talk about, it is the individuation within the framework, say, of citizenship.

The opponents of the code talked about how this kind of partial individuation – women's rights as a daughter or as a widow -- was a threat to the systems of caste and family, property and class reproduction. Thus if a woman's right of inheritance was recognised, this itself was like an individuation vis a vis the concepts which completely wrapped them in motherhood or wifehood, ascribing only a dependent status within the

Hindu family. The proposed changes were a threat to the family, not just in the abstract. The family was embedded in notions of jointness, and as basis of community and class. The Hindu family was believed to be guided by Hindu rules, where property and patriarchy – whether seen as a collective of family or class or whether we see those two being regulated by the ideology of patriarchy -- were all being threatened even with the partial rights which were to be given to women. And they did not hesitate to attack the Hindu Code on the lines that this will threaten the Hindu joint family.

Besides, in the backdrop of the debate was the emerging two nation theory. The opponents of the Code argued said that since there was not even a nation at that point it was not clear which groups could or could not comment on the formation of a Hindu Code. Many of these opponents saw the code as a threat to their class. The Hindu Code proposed compulsory monogamy while those who opposed the Code felt that there should not be any restriction on monogamy because, they said quite openly, the role of the Hindu woman in marriage was only to produce male heirs. This being the primary function, if she fails to produce a male heir, men should have the flexibility of moving on to another wife until one has his male heir. They said that this right underpinned the whole philosophy of Hindu practice and Hindu family and by the latter, they always indicated joint property. Interestingly, they attacked all women's organisation who supported the Code as upper class, elite, western-educated women not representative of the rest of the population whereas in defence of the non-regulated, non-codified Hindu law, they talked about the protection of the joint family and joint property. We know historically that joint property and joint family is also a concentrate of capital which does not operate even today on a very extensive basis. There is always an attempt to maintain joint property by the propertied section. Though the term elite and upper class was used to discredit women supporters of the Code, the opponents were really speaking in defence of property of upper class joint families. Joint families were not among, say, agricultural labourer households, after all. The Hindu Mahasabha actually submitted a detailed report in which they said that Hindu women's organisations opposed the Code on the same lines of the Hindu Mahasabha. They felt there was a threat to the nation, and they did not have problem in defending the non-codified law as protection of joint family or the caste system. They opposed inter-caste marriages. And interestingly they all opposed codification. They said that the call of national unity or Akhand Hindustan was fascinating indeed but it was to be remembered that the Hindu Code of intestate and testamentary succession would not apply to agricultural land except in the Chief Commissioner's provinces. Therefore, they argued, for three fourth of the entire Hindu population and bulk of the social wealth of the country, the Hindu Code would be a dead letter. Their main opposition to codification was on the basis that the shastras allowed space for change and since India was, they believed, a country of diverse people and culture, Hindu law should be allowed to continue to incorporate diverse traditions. Codification would make Hindu law static and not permit it to grow to encompass all the different cultures.

It is interesting that codification invoked in the 1940s many of the arguments that have emerged today over the Uniform Civil Code. In Maitrayee Mukhopadhyas's book one can see a fear of using the term uniform civil code. The rightists of course often argue that if the uniform civil code is going to be equal to Hindu code, then we need not raise the question of uniform civil code at all. So the question of uniform civil code, Hindu code and National code are often collapsed. There is always vehement opposition to the codification of any law. And this is because the meaning and content of codification is never clear to begin with, even when a uniform civil code is proposed on the grounds of common citizenship. There is, in fact, duplicity throughout in the discussions on the Hindu code or the uniform civil code. These are some of the arguments, which also came from the opposition in the 1940s. It is easy to be carried away by the opposition argument. They quoted from the shastras and deployed a detailed knowledge and rigour which is characteristic of defensive positions but they also showed great clarity in identifying exactly what it was they were seeking to protect. Whereas the middle range and the left were never

clear about what they were asking for and why, whether it was individuation of women's rights or even partial rights.

The opponents were vehemently against inter-caste marriage and the law on compulsory monogamy. They argued that central to Hindu culture, practice and family was the ritual of 'Pinda Daan'. And that this why one of the lawyers in Bengal, Manjari Gupta, once told me that there was no point in studying the question of property or Hindu law unless you learn Sanskrit and deconstruct the 'Sradhha' ceremony. The entire political economy of the property structure is hidden in the ceremony of the Sradhha. As I do not know Sanskrit it is still unclear to me why the son's giving the Pinda entitle them to the property. But it apparently follows that since the daughters are incapable of doing the Pinda Daan, they cannot inherit. I do not know what qualities are required to do the Pinda Daan -- and why daughters are presumed incapable. The law on compulsory monogamy, they felt, would result in conversions. They argued that most Hindus were monogamous and a second marriage was justified for the purpose of acquiring a son and heir. If the first marriage does not yield a son, a man would have to marry and would get converted to Islam in order to do so.

They also argued against absolute right of property for the widow. Women, they said, are incapable of handling business, so a widow would be likely to sell her property to any body who pretended to love her. They also argued against daughters' inheritance by invoking the Muslim inheritance system. They said that under the Muslims Rule of Inheritance daughters had a share ear-marked for them, but they allowed disinheritance under some circumstances. This meant, they argued, that Muslims property would remain intact while Hindu would be fragmented through division among daughters. I do not have the time to elaborate these arguments, but several were offered regarding fragmentation in holdings, increase in litigation and the duality of law. The opposition pointed out that property law was being split through separate provisions under the personal codes and agricultural law . Agricultural land interestingly was being kept out of the ambit of codification of the Hindu Law of inheritance.

In fact, the committee did not clarify many of these points -- for example how the duality (pointed out by opponents) was going to be resolved. Those who were actually trying to construct the alternative social project of change did not have enough arguments to push through their more radical agenda at the time of formulation of the Hindu code. Nor were they alert at the time when the Hindu code was passed. Part of the problem was that there were other legislation which were passed before the Hindu code was passed in 1956. One of the main area which was legislated upon was the agricultural wealth of this country. I would just like to point out three factors which we must keep in mind regarding the duality. First, according to constitutional principles, land is a provincial subject and therefore placed under the directive principles of the constitution. The constitution has a whole set of directive principles which were left to the provinces to act upon. Land reform was a critical part of this though certain aspects of land reforms were put in the concurrent list of the constitution so that the principle of land reform could not be challenged but the procedures were left to the different states. By the way, and in reference to this morning's discussions, equal wages too is put under directive principles. Second, the land succession bill was passed before the Hindu succession code was passed, though the debate around Hindu succession code began before independence. Also, the Congress Agrarian Committee had started discussing agrarian reform. We need to see the differences between the two in terms of a sets of legislation which guides the entire wealth of the country; determines the way in which family, caste and class are constituted and shaped through the sphere of production, distribution, consumption and exchange. And on the other hand we have a whole get of principles which guide only women's rignt to inheritance and right to social wealth. There is discrepancy between the general laws that guide the economy and the wealth of the society and laws which guide the access of women to these very resources. This duality is not new, it began in the colonial period during Warren Hastings. What we need perhaps to understand is the different forces in the economy which were at play. For example, in 1951 the First Plan was set in place with a thrust towards agriculture. But there

was already a major agenda of industrialisation. One of the first thing the Congress Government did in land legislation was to do away with Zamindari through the Zamindari abolition Act and later on the Intermediaries Abolition Act. Was there a conflict between those who actually sustained and controlled wealth in the agrarian sector and the necessity to break that wealth in order to feed the Industrial sector? The issue of industrialisation is also critical for examination of the Hindu succession code. Important considerations in the way the provisions were designed were to what extent property was going to be allowed to be broken up (or not) to facilitate industrisalisation.

The same sort of duality problems exist in the West Bengal land reform programme, even under the left front government. In the sphere of general resources,for both agrarian and industrial wealth, women are not recognised as independent units. For example an adult unmarried daughter is not recognised as an independent unit at par with an adult son. She is not allowed to inherit agricultural land by and large. The Hindu code does not specifically spell out whether they cannot inherit agricultural land. The provinces were left to work out whether they will inherit agricultural land or not. So in terms of wealth, the main resource of the economy, women do not have equal access. So, how is it that in the general structuring of the wealth of the economy (land), there is no differentiation between Hindu and the Muslim households? Why do we not discuss efficiency rather than fragmentation? How is it that the tax laws are not divided in terms of Hindu and Muslim? Why is it that only when it comes to women's rights to resources (in inheritance, in right to matrimonial property, as possible beneficiary to state's distributive measures) that we talk about whether she is a Hindu or Muslim or whether she is single, unmarried, divorced, etc.? It is women who are always subsumed within a collective -- whether it is family, whether it is class or community. The question before us is: if women were to come out of that subsumed status within these collectives, then what would be the larger set of social relations we would be able to establish? Would women be able to trace their path as individuals? This would require to us ask for rights -- not because men are taking dowries, committing bigamy, killing their wives for dowry, parents are not giving property -- but as individual citizens. After all, a woman's vote is also one vote and a voice in decisions regarding the structure of the state. There may be other problems of representation in our system of parliamentary democracy, but a woman's vote is not reckoned half a man's vote. Why is it not? Why, only when it comes to any other distributive measures or protecting collectivities, is women's rights the ones to be sacrificed? The answer may well lie in a more rigorous individuation of rights.

Discussion

Anuradha Chanda

I would like to raise a question about *"Bharar Meye"*. Was this kind of slave trading only for women, fathers selling their daughters or Brahmins their wives? About *Bharar Meye*, we get information from books like "Hooghly Jelar Itihaas". We also get information about trading not only in women, but a socio-economic condition totally ravaged by perpetual movements. I wonder whether the *Bharar Meye* phenomenon was a part of Portugese practice of abducting little children and selling them off.

I have a humble question for Indrani, not meant as a criticism. I agree with her disquiet about the entire renaissance question. A very senior colleague had one time told me that it was unnecessary to mention other parts of India, what happened in Bengal was so important. You can imagine my disquiet. Nevertheless, talking about the two parts of India that I do know, Bengal and Maharastra, it is important to draw out the contrast between, say, Vidyasagar and Jyotiba Phule. They are contemporaries and they talked about similar issues, but Phule's language was totally different. He said nothing about the shastras and was against the Brahminical system. He spoke from below. There was, of course, a Brahminical discourse in Mahrashtra. Tilak or Agarkar were had different things to say.

Secondly, a question to Sudeshna Banerjee about the family. She carefully excluded Brahmos from her paper, but even so I would like to draw her attention to the book written by Akshay Kumar Dutta *"Dharmariti"* in which he expresses anxiety about the condition of the family. Not only domestication of a wife, but how a wife without any education adjusts herself with a husband who is always reading. There is some mention of a law of divorce.

Lastly, I thank Jayoti for her wonderful presentation. Mahila Atma Raksha Samity's reactions to the Hindu code were very interesting. After the Shah Bano Case, not only Hindus but also Muslim women are aware that we all suffer from our relative codes. But yet we are not unified enough to fight for the introduction of a Uniform Civil code. Recently, I went to the meeting of the National Alliance of Women, Hyderabad. We were talking about the reservation of seats for women. Among the three groups, two groups broke up on the discussion about the necessity of reservation of seats for women in assemblies and parliament. From West Bengal, I said, we are unified in our idea of necessity of reservation, but many other people said that they were confused. Two or three Muslim sisters started talking about the minority position. But I sincerely believe that those were not their own convictions but the conviction of the community they live in. Whenever we fight for a demand for women, we come up against oppositions from women who are considering their position in their own community. I would like to know a little more on these issues from Joyati. I would also like to ask about the Hindu joint family tax laws. This category has become the holy cow of tax administration. There is almost an institutionalisation of the managing house system.

Nirmala Banerjee

Asha has set before us a fascinating story. Perhaps two clarifications would help us more: one, how did the inheritance come about? The second is a general issue. Could we perhaps know some more about Orissa of that time, like the position of women in the region? There must be some literature which portrays the general society which must be conducive to having this kind of series of Queens.

Rajat Ray

Let me generally say something about audience reaction. One of my class friends, she did not read history, she told me, "Itihaser lokgulo Paji ar saitan. Tara amader torture kare, physical torture." [The history-people are terrible, they subject us to torture, physical torture]. She was referring to our language. If we could talk in a language intelligible to a Class X student, then our points would get across better. Abul Fazal in the 16th century commented on the inter-intelligibility of some Indian languages and lack of this between other India languages. We do need professional historians to think about the inter-intelligibility of their language. If this is so, then what we should start by doing is to examine the terms that we ourselves use. I will pick two terms used today -- one is the term Orissa in antiquity the other is term slave-queen (in antiquity) and slave wife (in the 19th century). Before the 12th or the 13th century, the Bengali language and the Oriya language did not exist. Senior historians have shown that there was no Bengal in the Ilyas-Shahi period, in the same sense there was no Orissa in the time we have been talking about. In the 8th century there were various tribes. So, if we are talking about Queens who became rulers, what we need to know, first, is the culture region to which they belonged. Suniti Chatterjee has shown, very clearly, that during Heuen Tsang's visit to Orissa region in the 6th century, the language that he found there was predominantly Dravidian. That language has shifted much further down to Andhra today. It is imperative for us to know the cultural region and its gender structure in order to fit these queens in historical time.

Now let us come to the term slave-wife. The term actually used in the thesis, I understand, is concubine or slave-wife. The authoritative text of Muslim law has specifically says, confirmed by a Sadar Diwani Adalat of Calcutta, that a Muslim cannot marry his slave. On the other hand, if a son or even a daughter is born of a slave, they inherit just like

any other son or daughter. The rationale given is this that when you take a free women and use her body you have to make a payment for the use of her body, Mehr, which primarily constitutes marriage. Since the slave-girl is already the property of the owner, there is no question of a payment for the use of her body and therefore a marriage can not take place between the owner and the slave. If she becomes a free woman, the situation may change. On the other hand, the son inherits regardless of the mother's status.

It is all right to question the British commentators in the 19th century, but if we substitute over own terms for those of the British, if instead of concubine, we say slave-wife we are losing the alternative term. And we have to question whether such a term as Orissa in the 8th century or a slave–wife in the 19th century fit the legal and social contexts of the phenomena we are talking about.

Unidentified participant:

This is a question to Indrani as well and a take off from Rajat. To begin with, you have put the fear of god in me making me aware of all the things I need to look at which I never have. You talk of different kinds of wives including their stratified status in the family. As a women historian as well as a historian of women, how would you describe their differing experience in terms of the rights the hegemonic family relations give them, or in terms of women at differing levels of subjectivity. So how would you refashion your description of them? Would you look at them as different women being given different levels or kinds of rights within the hegemonic family? If I am a wife who has a son I have certain rights, if I have a daughter, I have a different position -- this is one way of looking at it. The other way of looking at it is that we are all subjects at different levels of subjectivity. So my question is how would you describe and refashion the question.

Sushmita Rakshit

Sudeshna I have a question for you. What do you mean by a Nationalist discourse? There are so many exceptions to what you are saying -- like Shree of Sitanam, Kamal of Srikrishna. Are these figures outside the 'Nationalist' discourse? I know that Bankim is classified as a positivist. Who do we mean as Nationalist: only Akshay Kumar Dutta type people or do we include novels?

Jayoti, what is the difference between movable and immovable property with regard to what you were saying?

Samita Sen

I wanted to respond to Indrani's paper. First, the issue of wife-murder. I went though the same set of documents (or so it seems to me from your presentation). The process of collecting statistics on wife-murder was begun by the Secretary of State, initiated from London, on the behest of colonial officials from the Caribbean. Indian labour in the Caribbean had a very unbalanced sex ratio with far more men. Apparently there was a very high incidence of wife-murder. Colonial officials there wondered whether murdering wives was a unique Indian characteristic. And they sent word to India for more information. The police were instructed to hunt out wife-murder statistics. Region by region, district by district, thana by thana the cause of death was recorded. The conclusion, at the end of a tortuous four-year exercise, was predictable -- no definite pattern was found throughout India in terms of caste, community, region or age. They broke it down by all kinds of categories to check for a pattern. In a sense this is the problem with categorisation. The term 'wife' itself is complicit in the whole range of conclusions about marriage. By mid–19th century, the penal code already has a chapter on marriage. Yet, they could never properly define 'marriage' and in every court of law, cases failed because 'marriage' could not be defined, and therefore, could not be proved.

As an opposite to the example you gave of 'put in slavery and stir', I will give you the example of the Bilaspur Chamars. There were, according to colonial records, several

marriage practices. Apart from the normal Shadi, they had the Churi and Paithu and several other forms of marriage which were essentially second marriages. In some cases, the first marriage too took this form when it was undertaken without the permission of the so-called natural guardian. The ceremony of churi is very simple, you buy a set of bangles (churia) and put it on a women and she becomes your wife. All the recorded forms of second marriages involved some compensation to the first husband. The second husband has to pay either the first husband or if he is dead to his next of kin. Colonial official of the region argued that this was a form of bride price, which was normally paid to the father at the time of the first marriage. When the Chamars come to the jute mills to work, mill managers, colonial officers and Indian observers interpreted the system as buying and selling of wives. Marriages with specific social meaning in Bilaspur acquired a singular 'exchange' interpretation in the city context.

Anuradha Chanda

I have a last question to Jayoti. Has the joint patta system been introduced and implemented? How is it working? How have women responded?

Asha Hans (reply)

Nirmala Banerjee asked about the inheritance of the Queens. In the case of the first queen, there is a definite answer. In some available plates, we find evidence that she was invited to assume the throne by the ministers. (That is how Indira Gandhi too came into power).

It is important to note that the Brahmins came from outside the region. Female succession may have had popular approval. I am not a historian and that is why perhaps I did not mention the name *Odra* -- that is what the region was called that time.

About documentation: The period I am referring to was the Anyar period. Perhaps, because documentation would have had to be done by Brahmins, Anyar people resisted. Female rulers conformed to the patriarchal system. Yet, the Brahmins did record any history, they may have left out the accounts of female rulers. We know very little of the gender structure of the region at that period. It was undoubtedly a patriarchal system though there was iconisation of motherhood. About the common people we cannot find very much. Nirmala suggested that we could look at the region in general at that time. It would not be easy since the Bahmalera region is ill-documented. The only evidence available are a few plates and temples. So we would have to go back to the temples and look at the sculptures.

Indrani Chatterjee (reply)

First, the Bharar Maye. In 'Hooghly Jelar Itihaas' we find some evidence of counting in the Portuguese period (16th and 17th centuries). Actually my evidence is from Sylhet: pan (price) among the Kshatriya and the Bangsaj Brahmans in Bikrampur district of Dhaka range from Rs. 600 to Rs. 1200. The poorer males among the same Brahmin group could not afford this brideprice. So they bought 8 to 13 year old girls off the boat coming from Sylhet. The buying price of such girls ranged from Rs. 100 to Rs.250. These purchases constituted an economic rationality for much poorer males even though they infringed social and moral injunctions. In the Presidency of Bengal and in Tripura we find girls in this age group being passed off as Brahmins. We have women identified as Aahirans sold for Rs. 60 as Rajputan. This is in the mid- to late-19th century. What is the Bharar Maye? They girls, brought from various different provinces in boats and sold as wives to men who were not very distinguished in rank. Do I think it happened in the 17th century alone? I do not. There is a tendency in the history written in the late-19th century to push back the antiquity of certain uncomfortable practices into a remote past -- slavery is one of them.

Sudeshna Banerjee (reply)

The question (by Nirmala Banerjee) about the contrast between Bengal and Maharashtra. We need to distinguish between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical enumeration and I am trying to push this for studies in Bengal, particularly for the late-18th and early-19th century. There is an over-inscription of what it is to be Brahmanical in the context of Sati and various kinds of practices which the social reform movement picked on. The Brahmin who sells his daughter, the Brahmin priest who is thrown out of different houses for using different kinds of rituals and secular new elite Brahmins – can they be seen as part of the same patriarchy? Such questions bring us back to the discussion about discourses. Broadly speaking, I take the Foucauldian definition of discourse but with a difference -- I distinguish between social formations and discursive formations. But is what I am talking about within the world of Nationalist discourse? Nationalist discourses have been understood generally by historians as anti colonial discourses. These have been determined by the colonised people's awareness of political subjection and their reaction to it. This reaction could be in terms of formal politics or statements or an alternative political economy. It could also be in terms of a counter-discourses. Actually I have been very ruthless about my interaction with sources. I have called sources part of nationalist discourse only when I have found a reference to an imagined nation.

Jayoti Gupta (reply)

The joint patta system was introduced in 1997 in certain areas. In many cases, the men did not bother to inform the women because they assumed that land was going to be retained in their control. In effect, just her name was included. There is no clear directive from the government. Also, the jointness is only in terms of husband and wife. Unfortunately, the women's movement, when they raised the joint patta, they did not raise it as a question of equal rights in matrimonial property. The joint patta became a way of avoiding rising cases of dowry and divorce and as a check on litigation. So it did not come about from a movement for rights, but from a question of protection.

The uniform civil code is already a long debate. Let me give you a different sort of example. In a survey now being conducted in Bengal, the majority of households covered are Muslim. When the women are asked about multiple marriages, all they ask for is maintenance. They do not understand why this provision has been taken away from their code. And they would also like property in their own name. They all oppose multiple marriages and also the system of dowry which has become very predominant among Muslim households. They want changes, but the kind of reform usually advocated.

Anuradha Chandra

I would just like to add one thing to what Indrani said. I have a feeling that in Bengal shastric injunctions acquired an importance it did not do in other parts of India, perhaps because of the Fort William College set up in 1800 which brought in the world of Pandit culture. The sanskrit-based Pandits had something to do with the domination of sashtras in the reform movement.

Tapti Roy

The Widow: A Subject of Play and an Object of Reform. Representation in Bengali Writings, 1850-70

I must begin by thanking Samita, Ratnabalidi and Anuradhadi for asking me to speak here. And I must add rather quickly that I am uncomfortable having to speak in a workshop on women's movement and women's studies for I can claim to be here only by default. My area of interest has been 19th century Bengali fiction and prose and my predilection has been for the 'lowly'. I realised that using such a category could signal incompetence. But I will desist from a longer explanation of the term because the danger of such a digression is that it could take the essay on a completely different trajectory.

I started this work many years ago by reading and making notes on prose fictions in all possible forms in which they appeared: plays, short stories, skits, long stories and, to some extent, novels. This had been done in a somewhat random and mindless manner. There were limitations of time and circumstances. Some three hundreds plays had to be finished in six weeks. Many years later when I sat down to read these somewhat frayed notes taken down in pencil that I stumbled upon the widow. She seemed to be all over and as a figure lent herself to so many different fictional modes – tragic, divine, licentious, gross and so on. As the widow picked her way through the clutter of writings she found a space marked out for her in which everyone else were actively engaged. The reformer proposed remarriage. The state complied with legislation. The society, bewildered, broke into two camps -- those in support and those against. And once this issue was transformed into the world of fiction of the period, the widow unwittingly allowed herself to be used for various narrative and descriptive styles and forms. She was as visible on the stage as the printed page. With another stab of guilt I found that the widow permitted me to identify and explore the common space in which men and only men belonging to dissimilar social levels interacted. This interaction that provoked fiction also made the period so contentions. Thus following the footsteps of the widow I was able to enter the world of fiction and the world of representation and to project the impressions as a different canvas of writing history. Needless to add these fictions are much more readable. This exercise of recreating the figure of the widow in another completely different situation has wider implications, which appear to have relevance for other concerns. In this case women's issues. Before I go any further, the title of my paper says I look at the period from 1850 to 1880, but I will actually look at the writing between 1850s and end of 1860s. Otherwise the paper would just go on and on.

In history, the issue of widow remarriage has been regarded in terms of the success of the state to carry through a legislation through reform in the condition of women and the failure of the society to reform the same condition. This is a problem that scholars have been interested in. What struck me was how the figure of the widow was trapped by her visibility: completely subjected to a certain given notion of what she stood for in this fictional writing and how the same image was used for two or more divergent positions with regard to her second marriage. Here I look at a few plays written roughly between 1855 and 1860. I will talk about the predominant frame in which the image of the widow was captured. This is best demonstrated in the essay on Widow Remarriage by Jogendranath Chattopadhyay complied in a volume called Bharat Bandhu published in 1859, three years after the enactment of legislation of the Bill Widow Remarriage Act. The author disapproved of the state's initiative in passing laws on matters which are determined by the will and dictate of society. Widow remarriage, he argues, cannot be enforced in the manner in which the absence of a male heir and bad governance allowed the state to intervene in Indian state affairs. Since a large section of Indians did not support the legalising of widow remarriage, it would be impossible, so he said, to make the provision effective. But Chattopadhyay

thinks that widows should be married again and his argument is very significant: "Every one is aware that compared to men women are highly sexed. When they are widowed they have no alternative outside of marriage because the prevalent practice encourages foeticide, prostitution and Hindu normal rituals of the household". Underlying this argument are two concerns 1) about changing times, colonial rule and the emerging Calcutta that merits a different discussion; and 2) women, although victims of change, become agents willingly and in return disrupt normative social behaviour and thus beckon male senses. Within the broad outline of this frame playwrights using the literary devices available at their disposal to create 'the widow' both to entertain and to inform. This transference of a social issue in characters and in situations in literature makes the latter an important source for writing social history of the 19th century Bengal.

The first drama on widow remarriage written by Umesh Chandra Mitra, called 'Bidhaba Bibaha Natak', appeared in 1856 and then ran into three more editions in 1857, 1868 and 1878. Its popularity in print was largely due to its success on stage. It was the second social drama to be put up for public stage. Performance had just begun. Directed by Keshab Chandra Sen, it was staged at Hindu Metropolitan College in 1860 with a production cost of nearly Rs 4000. Six years later Girindranath Tagore's son Gunendranath and Ganendranath inaugurated the Jorasanko Amateur Theatre Group performances of Kulin Kul-Sarbasya and Bidhaba Bibaha Natak. The author however had not intended the play for the stage. His purpose as he set it out in the preface was to aid a good but not a very popular cause, to alter popular opinion with the help of a melodramatic and tragic drama. Bidhaba Bibaha Natak centers around the family of an upper caste Hindu called Kirtiman Ghosh. He has a widowed daughter-in-law, Sukhomayee, and three widowed daughters, Sulochana, Rebati and Raikishori. Kirtiman is a conservative patriarch who would not hear of any modern reform and opposes the idea of widow remarriage. Padmavati, his wife, supports him. The young widows on the contrary lie in sheer torment, as Sukhomayee tells her neighbour's wife: 'do you not observe the sensuous season nearing spring? After all we are made of flesh and blood, how much pain can we possibly bear, are not we humans or have we ceased to be so the day we were widowed and achieved God –hood with four pairs of hands and feet.' The widows are thus very excited on hearing about the new law and Vidyasagar's initiative in trying to get widows married again. They have a further cause to celebrate when a neighbour Advaitya Dutta arranges a marriage for his widowed daughter with Prasun. The mother is outraged 'just because there is a law does it mean one really goes and marries. How will she marry again and live with another husband? Is this what comes of reading books?' She refuses to let the girls attend the wedding but they all sneak out. Meanwhile Sulochana sees Monmotha, a neighbour, from the window and falls in love which is reciprocated with equal passion. Monmotha comes to visit Sulochana every night and the outcome is predictable. Sulochana becomes pregnant. Realising the shame she has brought to the family, she takes poison. The last scene, the most melodramatic, brings on stage all the principal characters of the Ghose family who react with differing emotions till the purpose of Sulochana's life and death is redeemed in universal sympathy. She delivers her last speech, 'Father, does every one share the same impulse, do we all have the same level of tolerance, those who are by nature good devote themselves to religious ways. Those who like us are excitable come to such tragedy. Sigh. If I had the shelter of my husband then would I have ever resorted to this then would I have had to commit suicide?' The father eventually admits that had he not resisted widow remarriage the family could have been spared such shame. Then he asks her for forgiveness. The curtain drops.

The reasoning in the drama concurred with the argument the treatise on remarriage in the 1850s put across. Vidyasagar himself had appealed to his readers in his second essay – 'Oh, people of Bharat, do you think once husbands die, women turn into bodies of stone, sorrow is not left, agony does not seem like agony, the unconquerable physical desires are erased? Your assertions have proved wrong by instances in apparent'. The urgency was to contain women's sexuality that was regarded natural within the confines of marriage in the care of her husband. The idol of the self-sacrificing sati had, evidently, been desecrated by the contingencies of urban diving. The remarried widow could claim her legitimate position

in the dominant scheme of the family and society. The significance of Umesh Chandra Mitra's play is that he situates the problem within the confines of a perfectly feasible high caste Hindu middle class Bengali home. As I would suggest, it could confront any of their own private worlds. Dinabandhu Mitra tried to detract from the issue by suggesting another dimension which retrieved the 'Sati'. In 'Neel Darpan' written in 1860 in a conversation, marginal to the whole story, Nabin Madhab's wife Sairindri and Aduri wonder how widows could get married if they were entirely attached to their husband as she was. This possibility is then explored by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and further by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay who argued that women should be given the choice. What they foregrounded was that prohibition of widow remarriage was for based on the ideals of wifely devotion. The ideal was defined in the context of the high-caste and high-class home. The arguments about the social evils consequent upon prohibition were forcibly denied. Two years after Mitra's first edition, a slim volume of 62 pages entitled Chopola Chittachapalye appeared in 1858. Although written in the form of a drama, Jadugopal Chattopadhyay had used a lot of verse. He candidly admitted that he was encouraged to write because of the popularity of drama. Among those who were exited by Bengali literature, his choice of theme in 1858 did not need any explaining. Beginning with an alternative title with elements of pun Chattopadhyay makes the most of all possible dramatic and recreational configuration in the subject of the widow. The story is about Chapala, the daughter of a respected landlord. The daughter was widowed at 14 years of age. She was not told for five months nor forced into the vigours of widowhood. As a local landlord, her father has to deal with the problems of several widow in that area. Taramoni, the young widow of his revenue-collector seeks his protection because she fears that she and her son may be duped out of their home and property by a brother-in-law. Barat, the landlord, says to himself, 'this woman is not very old but being a widow she craves for good food and clothes. For the sake of hunger it is fated that there is nothing she is going to stop at. Barat is then informed of an incident where a young widow tried to get her foetus aborted at the woman barber's house without telling her family. The abortion failed, she was unable to get up, and the word got around. The landlord is agonised and decides to get Chapala married again. The young daughter, meanwhile, fell in love with Charu Chandra and since the two fathers were liberal, Chapala and Charu Chandra got married giving the drama and the problem a happy resolution. The author, however, employed marginal and redundant characters in digressive dialogues to reiterate the dangers that lay in the women's intemperate sexual desires. I just give one instance – Malini is the flower woman unfettered by social morals. She thrives in social transgressions. She says to Charu Chandra, if I keep young widows happy, whatever I ask for they always give me. If anyone is trapped, there is no money -- these are monthly affairs. If widows get married, why would they resort to illicit relationships? If they conceived why would they want to abort? So long as widow remarriage does not occur, I am fine.

The widow offered the two imageries of women: the one reinstated in marriage and the other condemned to prostitution. Outside the fictional world too, these figures commanded centrality. In 1890s, she dominated the polemics over social reform, the validity of state legislation vis-à-vis social custom, questions of deshachar, Hindu marriage rights, rights of property, education among men and women, changes brought about by urban living under colonial conditions and so on. She could not have emerged at a more fortuitous moment for the decade marked as the take-off period in print industry. The market of books was fast increasing with the habit of reading and being read out to catching up as a favourite pastime in the changing circumstances of urban life. The excitements caused by widow remarriage provided ready-made theme. Thus the widow could be easily transported to the arena of public debate and fiction. Her character embodied tragedy, comedy, titillation, sympathy and disdain, around which the fiction could effortlessly be weaved. She would be as much the beginning of a story as its crucial catalyst. Wherever she appeared, she could move the narrative in so many possible ways. The public stage presented yet another platform to project the widow. Radhaballabh Mitra in Bidhaba Manoranjan Natak written in two parts published in 1856 and 1857 about the predicament of widows in high caste Hindu family situated the issue within the practice of polygamy among

Kulin Brahmins. A sequence is inserted, quite out of context, of the wife of one such absentee Brahmin husband conceiving out of the marriage-bed. Her parents raise a hue and cry about her husband having paid her a visit, having to leave early before the neighbours could see him. The illegitimacy is wrapped up in half-truths and make-believes. A number of other dramas began to list the stall. Biharilal Nandi's Bidhaba Parinay Natak, Jadunath Mukherjee's consolation to Hindu widows called, for reasons known best to him, 'Bidhaba Bilash Natak'. 'Bidhaba Sukher Dasa' was written by an anonymous writer. Harish Chandra Mitra's 'Shubosya Shighram' and 'Beshya Bikaran Natak' by Tarini Charan Das were some of the titles that explored the many possibilities of the widow in her re-incarnated images. Kedarnath Ganguly in 'Bangali Babu' written in 1869 strikes a different note. Shyam Babu is an educated Bengali Hindu who visits Mohini, a prostitute, who is also a widow. Sham's sister Khirodamoni is a widow too, in love with Mohini's brother who abandoned her. Khirodh is left pregnant, decides to take up prostitution. The women are less bitter and resentful about professional prostitution than having to go through the misery of widowhood. The play ends in the liberation of the two women.

I will end with two dramas very different from the rest. By now the widow had come to personify all form of oppression and suffering of women. By pervading the fictional world, she became a sort of metaphor of all forms of tyranny on women perpetuated by society. In a fascinating rejoinder to this position, a play called Anura Jubati Natak was published in 1867. The author writes the introduction in the name of the central character, Srimati Nitambini. In her voice, he says, that Nitambini wanted to be a companion to the widows of Bengal, but she had no hope of finding a place close to them because she was poor and the widow had turned world famous. Particularly because she was a widow and the author was unmarried. But, he said, they both chanted the same mantra, so Nitambini could consider widows her sister in this regard, and thus might make it to her side. Only if the readers turned their attention and looked at Nitambini, the purpose of their drama would be vindicated. Nitambini is the daughter of a Brahmin Kulin and she is unmarried because by the rules of hypergamy, she cannot marry into any but a few select families. Nitambini spews venom at Ballalsen and Lakshmansen, rulers of Bengal, who introduced the practice and prescription of Kulinism. Brahmin men were, therefore, empowered to marry several wives for money while a lot of the young Kulin girls remained unwed because their father could not pay the dowry. Even when married, their husbands left them rarely to return. They were as starved of 'normal' conjugal life as the widow. The 'pain' was equal in magnitude.

The last drama that I will talk about is exceptional in that it opposes widow remarriage. But it is not a singular exception -- there were many others as well which I cannot discuss today. The book was published in 1867. The translated title of the book reads, 'Widow's Marriage Dismissed'. The author used the word 'dismiss' in English to mean what it does. The Bengali synonym for widow is however interesting. The commonly used word is Bidhaba meaning without husband. In the title of this book the term used is 'rarh', a more colloquial term, a slang. The term rahr can be for a widow or a concubine or a prostitute -- all three of which suggest women outside obvious social discipline. The author in a short preface wrote that he was replying to Babu Gobinda Chandra Bandyopadhyay of the Dakha District who a year ago had written a book in which by means of allegories and references to the supernatural he had explicated his support for widow remarriage. The present exercise was undertaken to refute his propositions. Not very long ago, Brahma and Vishnu, the two leading gods in the Hindu pantheon visited the universe to see how various matters were being conducted. They stopped by at Dhaka where they presided over a court. A few conservative members came to appeal for divine intervention to resolve differences of opinion regarding widow remarriage. A certain Ishawar Chandra Vidyasagar has cited Hindu scriptures of purana composed by Parashar to vindicate the legitimacy of Hindu widow remarriage. These men were opposed to the idea on several grounds – first, if social customs had to be reformed according to ancient practices as argued by Vidyasagar it would be very injurious to change one custom without attending to the others. The defenders of widow remarriage should have tried to amend the inflexible caste

rules introduced long ago by the local king Ballalsen and Lakshmansen. They should have restored the ancient custom of women choosing their partners simply wihout the help or intervention of guardians. Second, young women were still not educated enough to employ lawyers to claim their rights in court. And thus the law would be rendered futile. Vidyasagar is called to defend his position. The audience overruled the defense on an irrefutable argument which is that if women were allowed to marry of their own choice on being widowed, there would be nothing to stop them from killing off their husbands and marrying whoever they pleased. The choice of prostitution that the vice of urban Calcutta offered had already foreshadowed the danger. There had been instances of husband-bashing. The practice of hypergamy was really in need of reform. It compelled women of higher caste to marry men of their rank and allowed a man to marry as many times as he wished. This meant that if a man of highest social rank with several wives died, they were all condemned to widowhood. Anther lawyer argued that women, if allowed to remarry, would be like caged snakes suddenly set free making it imperative for others to retreat to safety. Women should first be tamed by education, which will act as a pacifier for the 'serpent women'. The verdict of the Lords went against Vidyasagar, the judgement ran as follows: If widow remarriage is to be admitted then while there will be less instances of aborting foetus, instances of killing of husbands will increase.

The legislation on widow remarriage has been claimed a landmark in social reform. It was supposed to have delivered the cause of women. Yet, if these dramas and the different forms in which the widows were portrayed are taken into account, nothing could have demeaned women as much as the advocacy for or against a second marriage. The imperative to allow her to marry again was because she was turning into a pollutant in the main society. Adultery and foeticide had become something like pestilences and its cause was women's natural inclinations. Unlike socialised men, they had neither intellect nor the strength of character to overcome the susceptibility to physical desires. It was quite another matter that men did not have to practice restraint. The widow was either the sensuous figure who defied social inhibitions and turned vamps or equally sensuous women who had to be contained by matrimony. Whatever the position of the author, the motif of the widow exuding sexuality served popular imagination. Within the practices of given fictional and representational writing, the widow was tragically doomed. And this requires a little bit of explanation. The question that we have got to ask in this context is what is the significance of this element that is injected into recreating the widow and by extrapolation of women? How was the widow inscribed in the wider space of writing on society? These questions are important to be able to problematise what is described as spiritualising or deifying women. And, therefore, I have got to explain the term 'tragically dormant'. I think within the field of these scattered writings, constructions of the sensuous widow foreclosed certain options and compelled others. This imagery was construed to be catering to certain kind of class or popular taste. And this popularity of the widow as the sensuous figure disallowed her redemption into normal family relationships. She could be educated and very consciously refashioned for the gentle folk to deal with. But the widow could not be reinstated as a respectable married women. For then her sensuality would become inherent in the newly defined Bengali respectability – and that was too gross and vulgar and obscene to be allowed to remain particularly in the wake of the drive to sanitize certain sections of Bengali society and sanitize literature. In this limited but powerful and very vocal world of conscious Bengali Hindu elite, the widow could live as the other of the good pious wife or stay as the sacrificing sati who is not burnt but ceases to live after the death of her husband. Caught in these diverse imagining the widow had to completely surrender.

Aishika Chakraborty

Regulating Widows: the brahmacharya solution

Tapti Ray has already prepared the stage for further unfolding of the mysteries of widowhood. I have just started working on widowhood in colonial Bengal between 1850-

1930. And this is very preliminary work.

The passage of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was a critical event in Bengal's history. It is seen as a quintessential moment in the new elite's aspirations for an enlightened and liberated social order. At the same time, the reform, contrary to its appearance, betrayed certain pre-occupation that was not really about modernity but about definitions of tradition. Legal change of this sort was also limited, elitist and by and large unimplementable. In this paper I will discuss how the controversy over the Act made way for the creation of a new person of the widow. Hindu widows became important only because it became accepted that Hinduism by precept and custom forbade remarriage to a woman whose husband was dead. This became axiomatic indeed because the widow remarried ceased to be a widow. The crux of the 19th century widow problem lay in this paradox. One aspect of this paradox was manifested in the way widowhood was simultaneously portrayed as normal as well as a problem. The inevitability of widowhood was formalised in the life of a large majority of Bengali Hindu women yet it was universally believed that widowhood rendered women socially dead but sexually alive. In unconscious absurdity it was believed that the women who now because of the abolition of Sati escaped the funeral pyres of their husbands remained to live unsatiated and caused enormous social damage by their sexual adventures. Widows were also considered frozen resources in propagation of the race and symbols of unfulfilled and unfulfillable womanhood. A variety of moral and economical ills were associated with them. Widowhood was also associated with ritual pollution. And this is an aspect that I have not yet explored in this paper. The conceptualisation of the widow problem changed from the reformist to the revivalist era, at least the diagnosis of the problem altered in many ways, but certain common preoccupations obtained. Reformists questioned the unmarriagability of widows. Both the groups addressed the problem within the middle-class, and high-caste context. They revealed their discomfort, their inability to reconcile these 'surplus' women within Hindu patriarchal familial arrangements. Both offered remedies, reforms and rectification's but the notion of a changeless custom of celibate widowhood remained. Different images of widows were constructed in course of the debates over remarriage. The most powerful was the mythicised image of the unsullied deity, the immaculate and spiritual widow that displaced social reality by drawing on overpowering metaphors from mythical sources. She embodied in herself both the plight and the virtues of the nation subjugated under colonial rule and sacrificial femininity central to the political discourse of the time. The Gandhian ideal of celibacy also added dynamism to this construct. This highly iconic image was sometimes tempered, especially in popular novels, by intimate familiarised and personalised images of widows as mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. These widows were depicted in domestic roles and became the very normal locus of family tension. Past the age of sexual deviancy, solitary widows were often shunted out of the family as an old and retired household drudge. Tragedy was silenced in pathetic and uncared-for death. The immortal characterisation of Indir Thakurun in Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* tells such a story. In stark contrast to these two images, the pure and the intimate stood the sexual widow. She alternated as the aggressive seductress and the victim. While the re-worked image of the unsullied deity was put in the forefront of the nationalist intellectual canvas, the reformist concern for depraved widowhood could not be totally ignored and continued to stir public controversies. Authors writing in contemporary journals began a practice of classifications of widows. It ran parallel to efforts at census categorisation. The anonymous author of *Bangalir Strilok Diger Bartaman Avasthya* classified three groups of widows— *prachina*, those who were widowed at an old age, *yuvati*, the young widow and *balika*, the child or infant widow. In Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's essay *'Baidhabya Brata'* in *Paribarik Prabandha*, we find a similar kind of a division. The line of demarcation was explicit in its sexual focus. The older ones who were presumed sexually inactive were portrayed as " ill-fated hats, utterly useless, redundant and living as parasites", they were sometimes ask to take voluntary banishment from the household for life. The middle class family was becoming increasingly reluctant to feed extra mouths. These widows were sent off on pilgrimage to Kashi and Vrindavan. By no means did they confirm to the icon of the spiritually powerful widow. The main object of

concern was the *yuvati bidhaba*, the women who fell between the age of puberty and menopause. Their alleged sexuality and material insecurity made them, it was believed, prone to sexual laxity. Even the close pressings of domesticity failed to safeguard their chastity. The widows had to suffer social disgrace when accused of incest, abortion or infanticide. Finally there were the child widows, numerically the largest in Bengal, and was considered the most troublesome category. It was feared that the infant girls did not yet fully realise the dangerous implications of widowhood and later fell easy victims to their own instincts. It was around perceived sexual anarchy that the last two categories of widow that reformist concerns of remarriage revolved. Scandals about their immoral activities preoccupied popular erotic literature in which they were sometimes portrayed as prostitutes. While the fault was considered to be rooted in the moral weakness of individual widows, the reformers sought to legitimise their sexuality by allowing them to remarry. And in the second manual on widow remarriage, Vidyasagar explicitly stated, 'the swelling tide of adultery and abortion' was due to the lack of any provision of widow remarriage. It was argued that marriage could alone contain the sexuality of widows. The widow problem was thus gradually constituted as a moral as well as a social problem.

The increasing emphasis on morality made it easier for the next generation of male elite to cast the widow problem in abstract ethical terms, and widowhood in the revivalist era gradually acquired a different connotation. The misery and deprivation of widow hood was equated with the frail and the shattered state of the Nation-Mother. The widow in her vow of chastity became emblematic of India's resurrection. And her revulsion of foreign rule expressed all the tension inherent in widow remarriage. The best example can be found in Akshay Chandra Sarkar's *Dasamahavidya* when *Dhumabati* the widow was represented as the Nation-Mother. Central to this cultural nationalism was an ideological valorisation of marriage as a sacrament. This was done by contrasting both the perceived looseness of the marriage tie in the West and the relatively fluid co-habitation practices among the lower castes in India. The Brahminical ideology of *patibrata* was reinvented. It not merely determined a married woman's moral stand but also sustained the ritual status of the widow. An increasing emphasis on deathless fidelity and monogamy for women reinforced revivalist objection to remarriage. However they could not jettison the question of sexuality altogether because it appeared as a perceived threat to the newly drawn ramparts of the Hindu marriage. The revivalist offered *brahmacharya* as an alternative solution. The term *brahmacharya* was applied to the first stage in the life of the vedic Brahmin who had undergone the ceremony of being invested with the holy thread and practiced abstinence from sexual activity and other worldly attachment. It included a number of rigid disciplines primary meant to control sexual desire. It was also defined as the act of carrying or bearing the sperm (semen) and controlling the use of it: *'birya dharanam brahmacharya.'* So brahmacharya, the act of supreme control, regulated the sexual nature of a man. This notion was redeployed to dictate vigorous asceticism and physical penance for the widow. An obsessive importance was laid on the scriptures and prescriptions, which the *brahmacharini* had to follow meticulously. Manu Smriti acquired serious ascendancy during this period and it says, 'the widow shall not exceed one meal a day, nor sleep on bed if she does so her husband is cast out from heaven.' Widowhood was regarded as retribution for crimes committed during an earlier life and the *prayashchitta prakaran*; the process of expiation subjected her to numerous religious and cultural sacrifices.

The reformists, however, condemned such enforcement. The colonial officials too took a dim view of these. The proceedings of the legislative assembly during the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 says of these rituals of asceticism:

> It is difficult to say whether they were more remarkable for their cruelty or for their fantastic absurdity. Not only must she see no man, she must also avoid every approach to ease and luxury and pleasure. She must wear no ornaments. Her hair must be shaved. She must not see her face in the mirror and use any perfumes or flowers. Must not freely anoint her body and her dress must be plain, coarse and dirty. She must not rest on a bed. Her food is limited as to quantity as well as quality. Besides other fasts, perhaps a

> dozen in a year, the Hindu widow is to abstain totally from food and drink one day and night, twice a month during every light and dark period of the noon. All amusements are strictly prohibited to her. She is not to be present where there is singing and dancing or any family rejoices. This was a life to which a crackling girl of 5 years old taken from her dolls and toys and pronounced to be a widow was condemned for the whole remainder of her existence upon earth.

Some, like Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, were lyrical in hailing *baidhabya brata* as a glorious rite. But some condemned such austerity. In *Antahpur* (a women's journal), Netyakali Debi in an essay, "*Baidhabya Jibaner Chitra*", sympathetically argued, 'For a widow of seven or eight years the word brahmacharya sounded like lifetime torture. Expressions like cooling down the burning pain might appear unfamiliar and curious since a widow of eleven years hardly knew the nature of the pain, let alone the proper way to cool it down'. But the revivalist focussed on the moral and spiritual aspects of the rituals. They held up brahmacharya as the moral strength of the character of widowed women and also of the nation. The ideal of brahmacharya developed into a veritable nationalist icon. Akshay Chandra Sarkar writes on this subject in one of his less renowned essays, '*Hindu Bidhabar abar bibaha howa uchit kina?*' He distinguishes between *sahamaran* and *brahmacharya*. He considered the latter as a superior rite because life-long mortification required more perseverance, stronger devotion. To Sarkar, brahmacharya was a purposeless service, *niskam karya*. Sahamaran was a *swakam karya*, associated with strong passion. He said that the widow herself made brahmacharya the real, the natural and the normal religion of the Aryavarta. Brahmacharya was a rare virtue very difficult to acquire. It comprised two doctrines enunciated in Hindu Shastra, *'soaham'*, the God is Myself, and *'ekamebadvityam'*, the One and the Only. I quote from him (translation by editor)

> A Hindu woman knows what is the One and what is the Only. If she is devoted only to her husband, only then is she of good character. When the husband dies, and becomes one with Brahma, she becomes a brahmacharini. This brahmacharini image is at the same time that of a destroyer and of peace – she is like a shadow of the other world. There is no luxury in her beauty.... She transcends womanhood and becomes a goddess. This brahmacharini who has given up all forms of luxury does not comb her hair, wears simple clothes, is otherworldly and god fearing like Savitri. She is protecting Bengali society. Otherwise the temples of worship would have become the drawing room. In this superior caste Hindu society, the remarriage of widows is an absurdity. It would be as contrary as hot ice cream, a fine thought but impossible. Heat would melt the ice and if you want the ice, you cannot have heat. In high-caste Hindu society widows cannot remarry. If they want to preserve their Hinduism, widows can not remarry. If you want widow remarriage, there can be no Hinduism. A Hindu women's devotion to her husband is cool, it comforts your life. Widow remarriage may be possible amongst the lower castes – indeed they have always had this custom. But if we look at the history of high-caste Hindu society, we would realise that widow remarriage is impossible there. All of Kaliyuga gives witness against widow remarriage. Western egalitarianism argues that if a widowed man can marry why not a woman? Hindu religion does not believe in egalitarianism, they believe in the theory of proportions. Since A is not equal to B, then she will not get the same rights.... Some say that brahmacharya is impractical, so it cannot be religion. We say it is not a simple religion but a great religion.

In another article published in *Savitri*, a magazine, in the same year, Shyamasundari Debi made very similar arguments in a strong appeal to all Hindu widows of India.

> Hindu widows, my appeal is to all of you – child, young, or old whatever your age, spend your life in pursuing religion every day. If you forget your dead husband's love and marry another man you will never be happy. You may get good food and clothes, you will get children and grandchildren – but is this the main happiness for humans? Men also sometimes marry again and get advantages, you may also get advantages but you will loose your greatness. Without marrying if you can learn the rituals of religion then why do you want to become a servant of a Man?

There are at least three dimensions in this argument: one, the assertion of women's moral superiority in rejecting marriage vis-à-vis men; two, portrayal of marriage as a form of bondage and widowhood as a state of relative freedom; and three, acceptance of the spiritual glory of brahmacharya. Writing on a similar vein an anonymous author of the article, *Hindu Bidhaba,* in the *Bamabodhini Patrika* hailed brahmacharini widows as the bedrock of Hindu tradition. I quote

> As a Hindu I consider only three things sacred – the cow, the Brahmin and the widow. The service of the widow is never unutilised, whether as a maid or as a cook, whether as a nurse or as a midwife, whether as an attendant or a celibate worshipper, the pure and industrious widow is the most utilised person.

Brahmacharya enjoined explicit, observable and elaborate material sacrifices as the ideal vehicle of spiritual fulfillment. It underwrote the lowest economic allocation to the widow and was associated with unremitting drudgery. As middle-class household resources shrank, the widow became subject to a dual deprivation. Asceticism to a great extent was consonant with the Bengali bhadralok's economic crisis.

However, brahmacharya, despite its material and spiritual associations, did not guarantee the widow's sexual death. Cultural nationalists were faced with growing evidence of the impossibility of enforcing such a lifestyle on widows in urban society. An essay, *Bidhaba Acharan,* published in 1904, pointed out that "there was an unfortunate tendency towards luxury and laxity among the widows of Calcutta. In an affluent Calcutta household a young widow is allowed to take tea in the morning, a full meal at lunch and luchi and mutton. The widow did not adopt the conventional white thaan and nor did she discard the ornaments." Quoting from the popular saint of the time, Ramkrishna Paramahansa, the author says, "Ramkrishna had once said that if you wear a dhoti with a black border you feel like listening to 'Nidhubabur toppa', but if you wear saffron clothes your mind tends towards religious thoughts. Is this not true? It is cruel and heartless to make a little girl go through brahmacharya but since it is impossible to get her remarried, it is better to slowly take her mind towards religious thoughts. To be lax just for the sake of laxity is tantamount to anarchy. This is not the proper way. If you really want to improve the lot of widows, try to get them married. If the widows are giving meat to eat and tea to drink and permission to wear ornaments and good clothes then the babus who are trying to change society will praise you but it will be disastrous for the poor widows." One can argue that the central concern of the author is to uphold the legitimacy of marital sexuality because the widow was not permitted an easy and comfortable life without getting re-attached to a man.

I have made it clear that by early twentieth century, the whole concept of brahmacharya increasingly appeared as unnatural and enforced. As a long-standing custom it was enforced willy-nilly on widows who undertook the external rites of brahmacharya without understanding the so-called spiritual glory. It was argued that brahmacharya was a mere surrender to tyranny of *deshachar* and *lokachar*. As a principle, it strained the wear and tear of everyday life. So the failure of brahmacharya led the middle class bhadraloks to re-invent the ritual as an internalised taboo within the nature of the widow. External expressions like physical deglamorisation and fasting were re-imbued inner moral connotations to make a claim on the widow's mind and spirit. Some novelists of the period

picked up the issue and sought to represent widows as naturally dedicated to celibacy or asceticism. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's short story *Patha Nirdesh* depicted asceticism as an instrument, which shut out a widow from her own sexuality. Brahmacharya resolved the conflict between the widow's desire for Gunindra, another man in her life, and her prejudice against remarriage. Brahmacharya was not always an expression of bereavement for the dead husband, often it was rather an expression of guilt, a penance against the widow's own immoral desires for another man. Sarat Chandra graphically dwelt upon the battle that Hemnalini fought with herself: "As the jail authorities beleaguered most dreaded criminals by raising the walls of the cell, similarly Hem tried to wall up the devil of passion residing within her own heart."

Contemporary women writers however expressed a more mixed attitude towards brahmacharya. Eminent poet Mankumari Basu, widowed at the age of 18, openly criticised the traditional values of her time in a number of verses like 'Sahamaran', 'Abhagini' and 'Patitodhyarini'. In 'Abhagini', the poet condemned the scriptures that were designed to kill an infant who was dressed up a celibate nun. However the most remarkable output of the revivalist project was 'Asrukana' (teardrops) by Girindra Mohini Dasi. Girindra Mohini was married at the age of 10, widowed at 26 and since then dedicated to the memory of her dead husband. 'Asrukana', a collection of verses, was published in 1887 and was the high water-mark of Bengal's intellectual revivalism. It contained a number of poems like 'Uphaar', 'Tumi' and 'Purba-chhaya' that expressed the bereavement and agony of widowhood. Chandranath Basu, one of the chief purveyors of the Satire ideology hailed 'Asrukana' as the 'History of a noble Hindu woman'. Contemporary critiques said that though Girindra Mohini was never a serious housewife, she was an ideal patibrata, a true devotee of her husband. Her dead husband dominated the entire existence of the widow's life. Asceticism received unprecedented attention both at the intellectual and official level.

State intervention was never a welcome option. In 1860-61, editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* wrote a strong editorial against events in a remote villages of Burdwan. If it was suspected that a widow was pregnant, villagers were asked to report to the local *thana*. The Medical Surgeon was directed to physically examine the woman. The law against abortion enabled the local gomasta, police and the headman to carry out such enquiries. The men of such widows' families were outraged at such interference from the state, which posed a challenge to their monopoly of power, control and surveillance of widows. They opposed state action coming in between women and family authority; such an external monitor was rejected out of hand. Explicit state interference in observance of asceticism, enforced on voluntary, ran grave risks. By 1886 the question of brahmacharya was equated with enforced celibacy and brought under official scrutiny by Behramji Malabari, the Parsee social reformer. The very prospect of state intervention invoked serious opposition. In fact, in course of garnering opinion on the plausibility of legislation against enforced widowhood and brahmacharya, the government found that the Hindu elite was clearly divided. According to Chandramohan Bandopadhyay, (President of the Jessore Indian Association), the term 'enforced widowhood' was a 'misnomer'. Brahmacharya was the widow's own 'peculiar notion of chastity' and not the result of social imposition. 'The widow voluntarily sunk in the abyss of her unfathomable miseries, unmoved by luxuries and temptations.' So, the reformist effort to get them remarried was absurd and an impossible task.

However, the widow problem continued to turn on the question of sexuality. When brahmacharya was glorified as an attempt to morally undermine the remarriage option, the official counter-position was that the prohibition of remarriage was impolitic and unjust. Because, 'these young widows, being forbidden to remarry almost without exception became prostitutes.' Several cases of murders and incest were cited as a fall-out of the prohibition of remarriage. In fact, the official reports made a very clear and specific link between widowhood and prostitution. In 1923 and 1929, official enquiries into the state of prostitution concluded that Brahmin widows seldom remarried and frequently became prostitutes. Especially Kulin wives (and widows) were thought to practice clandestine prostitution. The indigenous male elite in 20th-century Calcutta was also developing new linkages between widows and prostitutes. In the early 20th century, the term *'rarh'* was used

to denote both the widows and the prostitutes to signify their sexual availability. The bhadralok sought to break this old connection. The term *bidhaba*, the respectable widow, was made more current to set apart from the widow from the prostitute, for whom the term *veshya* was increasingly in use. Rigid contours were drawn between the modes of continence and incontinence along with the crystallisation of idea of a irrevocable marriage. So the one who denounced all earthly pleasures and remained chaste was considered a widow and the one who failed to comply with brahmacharya and suffered a 'lapse' was labeled a prostitute.

In struggles of a nascent nation, the only space left for a widow was that of a committed and complete brahmacharini. Her unimpeachable sexual morality – chastity and fidelity -- became key to the self-realisation of the nation. And brahmacharya became a dynamic concept open to continuous re-definitions. It was perhaps the only possible solution available to the cultural nationalists who rejected remarriage but could repudiate the sufferings involved in ascetic observances of widowhood. The enforcement of celibacy on the widows was celebrated as the true ideal of the Hindus. As the project of remarriage was abandoned, the possibility of a radical opening up of the 'women's question' seemed closed firmly to the end of the century. However, anxiety about the construction of an ideal femininity continued to beset the middle class elite. There was in fact no lasting resolution to the widow problem.

Discussion

Indrani Chatterjee

I just wanted to ask a few simple questions for my clarification. One is to Tapti -- whether in the writing between 1858 and 1867 you get shifts according to age of the widow. Aishika -- I wanted to know something about shifts over time. While you do give us a sense of different political opinions on the widow?

Papiya Ghosh

I work on a very different kind of household where there are also widows but they do not need any of these ideologies of Brahmacharya etc. They do very well in not having widows remarried because there is also in that kind of household a clear acceptance that the persona of the wife is merged into the person of her husband upon marriage. So if the husband dies, the widow is almost like a demon spirit that is left behind and has to be constantly tamed. For that there is no ideological justification in the Quran. So I would like to know where justification is important and how it becomes important.

Tapti Ray

Something on Brahmacharya. I refer to an essay written in 1885, "*Bidhaba Bibaher Shastriyata O Juktijouktikata*", by Debendranath Mukhopadhaya. Here he really questions the concept of celibacy and Barhmacharya and he argues, there is nothing in the Hindu tradition that confirms that religiosity and celibacy are one and the same. Then he translated Brahmacharya literally as being in the state of serving Brahma. Now what stops a woman from doing that if she takes another husband? It is believed that she has to devote herself to Brahma because her late husband has become one with him – *bilin*. Brahmacharya is simple service. Now if the husband has become one with Brahma –that is fine. But if he does not, then is she denied Brahmacharya? Besides, her husband is not the only man to attain Brahma. Several other men have attained Brahma as well. 'Would the widowed woman be serving only her husband or would she have to deal with other husbands as well?' They are all one with the Brahma. Therefore even while serving Brahma, she is not being 'ekacharini' she is not being monogamous.

Now to come to Indrani's question. I am interested in the widow as a fictional figure. Invariably it is the story of the young widow because it is directly linked to her 'Jouban'. This 'Jouban' is once again literary sort of configuration of which one can draw lineage from the 18th century, from Bharat Chandra, say. It is the state of being young rather than the age. Where the young heroine is the central woman character, she has to be young and vulnerable to nature. Because she is young, spring makes a difference to her emotional stage and attitude and so on. So, youth, the season and natural susceptibility to sexual desire was a package in the figure of the widow in this period (1850-1867). Also, I have been very selective, there is a wide range of material and it is impossible to talk about the whole of it. I thought I was looking at 'lowly' literature, but there is a lot of interaction. And Umesh Chandra Mitra is the point where the lowly and the high interact because he is part of the educated elite.

Aishika Chakraborty

Yes, there was a shift after 1890 after the Age of Consent Controversy, there was a gradual movement towards suppressing the widow's sexual desires. And the conservative mentality of the Bengali Bhadralok dominated the period after 1890 to the 1930s.

Rajat Ray

As I was listening to both papers I briefly wondered why the papers made such an impact on me personally and the audience generally. Both Aishika and Tapti were talking about change in ideas – certain evolutions of discourse. At the same time however lurking behind both papers was something appealing to us at a deeper level. And I would call this the psychic level, the emotional level. I would suggest that they both think more about this psychic dimension. If we take the 17thcentury, Europeans travelling in India were struck by two things-- about the Moors, the purdah and about the Hindus, Sati and widowhood. The Moors in enforcing purdah, they said, were guided by jealousy. Now if you try and apply this insight to the area Tapti and Asihika were talking about today, I think at every point the jealousy motive breaks down and something else seems to come to the fore. I do not know how to describe this. The nearest I can think of is fear, a nameless fear. I would say (my thought is not clear on this) that there is a social fear as well as a personal fear. There is both the husband's fear and the social fear of the breakdown of the control over women's sexuality. What leads to so much fear about control of women's sexuality? I am thinking about Durgeshnandini, the novel, romanticising the sexuality of the unmarried young maiden. Formerly, of course, young women were married off before reaching puberty so there was no question of this kind of fear. In your period, the actual maiden is not there. She is in literature. But as soon as you have conceded the imaginary existence of the maiden you must by implication concede the same hunger, the same romanticism in the widow. And it is because of this parallel development that fear about the widow becomes accentuated.

And while you are exploring this psychic dimension, I would suggest you look also at another related emotion in the same sphere – the father's feeling about his daughter. This is a very old feeling that goes back to Rajballav Sen in 1740. We see the resurgence of the same feeling in Ashutosh Mukherjee around 1910 (approximately) which leads to the marriage of his widowed daughter. The daughter's suffering is an important motive. But if you look at the same figure – Ashutosh Mukherjee is the first student union president in Presidency College, but later on the President of the cow protection society in Bengal. There is a contradiction here. The president of the cow protection society marries off his widowed daughter. There is a conflict not merely of ideas here but of emotions.

Sudeshna Banerjee

To Aishika a question about the term 'the widow problem'. Was it used in that particular way? Was it being defined? And what is the exact Bengali equivalent -- *Baidhabya*

Samasya? The second question is regarding the concept of the 'frozen asset', the widow's reproductive capacity being looked upon as a frozen asset and not being used in the interest of the nation. Could you really periodise that? Do you, when you go through the whole lot of literature, find a particular point from which it starts being talked about? Would I be wrong in suggesting that probably it was from 1911 onwards or may be from 1901 onwards when there is concern about the Bengali Hindu being a dying race. This also applies to the conflation between the image of the widow and the prostitute in the 1920s.

Aishika Chakraborty

The focus was on: 'Hindu society is deteriorating, these widows are not getting married their ability to bear children is being curtailed'. Actually I am still working on the periodisation of notions of unproductive and surplus women. The 'widow problem' did not appear as *bidhaba samasya*. I have not seen the actual words being used. I am using the term to connote the way widowhood was problematised. Widows were placed outside the pale of conjugality. And given the Hindu patriarchal arrangements, women deprived of roles defined by marriage (widows, spinsters, prostitutes) were placed beyond the pale of wifehood or conjugality and constituted a problem. And I call this the widow problem.

Anuradha Chanda

The ethical elements both of you talked about (the question is more to Aishika) was juxtaposed with western 'licentiousness', especially in the nationalist discourse. But Shyama Sundari argued, 'We have taken the concept of widow remarriage from the Muslims *(jaban)* and foreigners *(mlechho)*'. So it is both anti-Western and anti-Muslim. In current fundamentalist discourse we see a similar juxtaposition of Western and Muslim immorality versus Eastern morality.

Unidentified participant:

In South India (Madras Presidency) Western education for girls got off in the 1870s. And one of the motives for its introduction was education of widows, so that they could become teachers and run the schools and colleges. And to take up one thing Rajat Ray mentioned, fathers who were concerned for their widowed daughters but could not accept re-marriage sought education as a solution. They would offer their little girls to older widows who were teachers. And this is one primary way in which elite female education took off. I wondered if there was any discussions in Bengal in the period you considered – education as a way out the 'widow problem'.

Unidentified participant:

I must congratulate both the speakers. As a sociologist I am familiar with the literature of that period. I found your discussion interesting, especially the use of the term 'surplus' and the availability of surplus reproductive capacity. There are just two things I want to ask. First, whether in the 19th century widowhood was linked to the kind of property restructuring that had taken place in the 18th century, i.e., Permanent Settlement in Bengal. The second is about the question already raised about male fear. One expression of it may be in terms of insecurity and jealousy (as pointed out by Rajat Ray). I was wondering if there is also the question of establishing paternity for consolidating property, i.e., questions of patriliny. These questions would mesh with consolidation of class taking place alongside and an accessory in regulating productive forces.

Supriya Choudhury

It struck me that there is a fluidity between literary and non-literary, non-fictional types of discourse as referred to by Aishika. There is clearly a literary imaging or positioning of the figure of the widow, there is a literary representation of widow. Is there any representation

of a successful widow remarriage? And we do know that there are a number of instances – exceptional, but still remarkable and well remembered - of widow remarriages. That is to say of widows who are remarried and educated by their husbands or there is a successful conjugal relationship established on this basis. How far were these relationships represented either in the literature or in other forms of discourse?

Tapti Ray

Regarding property, an important question but something I could not bring in. Property is crucial to the question of widow remarriages in the way the legislation was framed. My world, however, is literary and from here I cannot answer your question. Just to say there were successful widow remarriages is not enough. There are of course a number of successful widow remarriages, of Vidyasagar's son, for example. But I do not actually try to relate what is happening within literary world and Bengali society – because one does not match up to the other. I have always had a problem in linking the literary area with what is actually happening. The way we can actually lead our investigation is to try and look at the problems and tensions within one – literature is my case.

About fear -- for me it is the fun and the play that is interesting in this period. The fear comes later within the literary genre.

Aishika Chakraborty

There is quite a lot of discussion in this period about the economic dependence of widows and these are usually also related to the professionalisation, education and employment. In many cases, widows were encouraged to take to teaching or the medical profession. Lower middle class and middle class widows were encouraged to take some vocational training to be able to make a respectable living. It was also believed that it would prevent them from going into prostitution which was another occupation open to them. There was a continuous thrust and emphasis towards education and to make a respectable living.

Fourth Session: second part

Papiya Ghosh

Gender Politics and Bihari Muslims

What I am going to be presenting comes out of my work on the Pakistan movement in Bihar. I am also examining the politics of Reservation during the 1990s. Recent researchers are beginning to underline the diverse experiences of the Muslim women in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, but comparative regional analyses within India have had less attention. Not entirely unrelated to this is the near absence of Muslim women, who total almost 60 million in India, in the debates of political empowerment. This paper unravels some leads for a research agenda regarding the very different histories of real and iconised women. This is attempted by examining certain dimensions of gender constructions and the ideologies of movements and parties and women's agency between 1920s and 1990s.

The entry point is the intersection of broadly two processes -- first, the crafting of an Islamic identity un-yoked from the specifics of class, biradari and region and second, the contestation between the ashraf and the non-ashraf. Much of the gender politics of pre-1947 Jamiyat-al-ulama-i-Hind, premised on cultural autonomy as in Congress composite nationalism, got carried over to the mid-1970s in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. The Imarat-i-Shariah which was set up in Bihar in 1921 is part of this ensemble, and is a quranically derived legal-spiritual institution outlined by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad for the implementation of the Shariat. Besides detailing the 'Islamic concept of family and society' in its interface with the Congress and the pre 1957 Muslim League its network of Shariat

courts (darul qazas) have been mediating practice of Islam. Exploring how it has been squaring custom and text in case relating to co-habitation and inheritance practices will historicise sub-regional variations. It will also tell us how the Imarat-i-Shariah has contributed to the All India Jamiyat-al-ulama-i-Hind's attempts at erasing local customary practices. I feel that this is crucial for situating the debate on comparative rights of communities and individual citizens.

In the context of the growth of politicised religion in the 1990s, this paper looks at two interventions which engage with the Hindu right as well as patriarchal structures within the Muslim community. One, by the Tehreek-e-Niswan (1994), which is affiliated to the CPI-ML (liberation) and All India Progressive Women's Association. Second, by the Pasmanda (Oppressed) Muslim Mahaz (1997), a collective of Dalit and backward Muslims.

Towards resisting majoritarian attempts at appropriating and communalising the universal civil code demand, the CPI-ML (liberation) supports strengthening the voice of reform among Muslims. This is part of the formation which includes the Inquilabi Muslim Conference (1992) and the Muslim Intellectual Forum, Bihar (1993) to represent the 'specific needs and demands of the Indian Muslim community'. The Tehreek-e-Niswan intends to invoke women's ijtehad (re-interpretation) and the participation of liberal intellectuals to rethink specific aspects of Muslim personal law relating to talaq, polygamy and inheritance along the lines of re-interpretations undertaken in Africa, Middle East and South East Asia.

The Tehreek-e-Niswan has not gone beyond supporting a Family Council Bill (1996) draft on the issue of talaq which has remained silent on the question of inheritance. What it suggests is that the triple talaq should be substituted by Talaq-e- ehsan, which is spread over a period of three months during which it can be revoked. They also envisage a right, which belongs to men but can be delegated to women for life and spelled out at the marriage agreement. Whether or not it is included in individual marriage contracts, Tehreek-e-Niswan does not follow up its agenda of taking on patriarchal structures (mardana- tasallut) within the community or consider the need to theorise the diverse biradari patriarchies. Meanwhile the AIPWA, to which it is affiliated, opposes the proposed the 33 per cent reservation in the legislative assemblies and parliamentary seats for women, and Inquilabi Muslim Council is dismissive of fragmenting the community's ittehad (solidarity) along 'caste lines'.

Some backward Muslims have been politically active in Bihar since the 1920s. During the 1990s, several biradaris mobilised separately as well as through the Backward Muslim Morcha (1994) for reservation as OBCs and Dalits. Most recently the Paswanda Muslim Mahaz started by Ali Anwar, a journalist and activist, underlines the low represenattion of backwards and dalits in politics and government, despite their comprising 80 per cent of the Muslim population. The PMM demands scheduled caste status for dalits and 8.44 per cent out of the 27 per cent reserved for backwards under the Mandal commission. This attempt at shifting away from the ashraf agenda of monolithising Muslims via 'personal laws and the Babri Masjid' aims at a companionate, enumerative enlisting of dalit and backward women in politics and its campaigns. It plans to give out that the reversal of the Shah Bano Judgement played into the Hindu right and the conservative Muslim leadership. It also intends to fight for equal wages for the huge number of bidi-workers in Bihar. And they also demand equal education for men and women. It has put together statistics on the under-representation of the backward Muslims in the legislative assembly over the years -- between 1952 and 1990, there were only 47 backward Muslim out of the 245 legislators. They have not put together similar statistics about Muslim women. Statistics show that forward caste legislators in the Bihar assembly has declined from 45 per cent to in 1995 to a mere 10 per cent in 1998. The percentage of scheduled tribe women has gone up from 5 per cent 1985 to 30 per cent in 1995 but similar figure for Muslim women without any biradari disaggregation is as follows – 9 per cent in 1980-85, 6 per cent in 1985-90, none in 1990-95 and none again 1995 onwards. This bit of information has not been deployed.

The point I would like to make is an overview in 1990 suggests that there are signs of redefining women and not just as community signifiers and Muslim/minority women. The resilience and reconstitution of Ashraf and non-Ashraf patriarchies show all of this contestation of politics of difference and politics of empowerment, some suggest new questions for our consideration. Meanwhile I would like to mention that the Imarat-i-Shariah, which saw itself since 1920 as the sole speaker of community rights, has removed itself from the Pasmanda-Muslim-Mahaj and got in touch with the All India Milli Council, All India Muslim Personal Law Board. They have also (a bit of information I picked up but have not been able to confirm) put about reservations about the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj on the internet. These backward caste organisations get in touch with diasporic Indian Muslim organisations, American Federation of Muslims, telling them that it is all well for them to talk about literacy campaigns, but that they did not have any idea about the reality. The dalit and backward class Muslim women in a locality (mohallah) of Patna have been exposed to this kind of a leadership. When I spoke to them, they said that the organisers told me to meet them and that one of them would read out the poem which she had presented at a huge meeting in Patna in which there were only 10 women out of thousands of participants. It was a bandh day and that ten of them turned up was remarkable. When she was reading it out, she started stumbling, so I asked about her education. I found that they are tracking very alertly, though they did not have any organised meeting among themselves, the discrimination they face. All scholarships meant for dalit and backwards, they said, were unavailable for Muslims because such status have not been granted. The backward Hindus corner these privileges. For them issues like personal law and Babri Masjid, though important, did not even merit mention in the preliminary conversations. I would like to make another concluding remark -- when talking about gender history of the eastern region, can we just expand a bit from Bihar, Bengal and Orissa and try to see the overlaps in terms of migrancy trends and bonds as well as legal-spiritual overlaps? The Imarat-I-Shariah has a branch in Orissa and there are khankas in Bihar who have fellows in Bengal and Bangladesh. The backward caste organisations have links with the women's movement in Bengal . When we are talk about U.P., Bengal and Bihar – this is the area in which 50 per cent of Indian Muslims live.

Kavita Panjabi and Shivani Banerjee Chakravarty

Fracturing the Nationalist Discourse on Gender: The Women's Movement in Tebhaga

Abstract

The Tebhaga Movement itself received short shrift in mainstream nationalist literature, so expectedly, there is a complete silence on Tebhaga women in this historiography. It is in left histories then that both Tebhaga and the widespread participation of women as activists and leaders has been well documented. But, elaborate though they may be, these histories nevertheless use the criteria modeled on formal leftist male activism. They subsume women's political issues and activities under the rubric of their contribution to Tebhaga, focussing merely on the additive roles of women. There has been virtually no gender sensitive analysis of their political activism or how to tap the only sources now available to us: oral narratives of those women, and men, who were still alive in West Bengal and Bangladesh. We have covered four areas in Bangladesh – Narail, Nachol, Rangpur, and Dinajpur; and three in West Bengal – Jalpaiguri, Mednipur and Kakdwip.

In the course of interviewing we realised that the focus of our research was no less than a grassroots women's movement that had spread right across undivided Bengal on the eve of independence. For the first time in the history of India, peasant women insisted on the right to be recognised as workers. Given that as peasants they were also active producers they demanded greater control over the domestic economy too. Also for the first time they charged husbands for domestic battery in public. And they insisted that the sexual exploitation of women by jotedars and zamindars be placed on the agenda of the party, and

be banned. Thus these narratives dispel the assumptions that feminism of western/upper class women concentrate on self-empowerment and body politics, while those of third world/impoverished women focus only on hunger and labour.

The history that emerges is also one that fractures the monolithic nationalist discourse on gender:

> The *Sahadharmini* of Gandhian politics becomes a limited image: many women participated actively as single women, widows, and leaders of men too, sometimes even against the wishes of the menfolk in the family. Often it was the sight of women demonstrating that inspired other men to join the movement. Networks of political solidarity were forged both amongst rural women and across the rural urban divide.
>
> The construction of the *bhadramahila* as a chaste woman in opposition to the lower class/caste as one of loose morals, that divided women and precluded the possibility of solidarity across class and caste, was consciously deconstructed within Tebhaga. Urban middle class women within the MARS and CP united with village women as activists in an anti-imperialist and class struggle. As more women entered political struggle the rigidity of taboos that controlled women's sexuality also diminished, though not obviously.
>
> The nationalist ideology of motherhood as a glorious spiritual task of shaping future citizens of the nation and its association with *ma* (*devi*) and *matribhumi* (motherland), that controlled women's sexuality within the family and confined them to the domestic sphere gets fissured too. Mothers took on the political task of fighting for their families' and their own survival. Some took to the fields, demonstrating against jotedars and the British police; others opened up their homes extending their motherhood to activists.

The transitions from the confines of the home to the fields of political activism were achieved through quiet but widespread metamorphosis of domestic modes of being into relations of political bonding transforming the entire movement into an extended family. We demonstrate that the women did not merely play supportive roles, but actually gave the movement an organised form and made possible its wide spread.

This emergent grassroots women's movement was finally crippled with the trauma and dislocation of the partition. We found that in the consequent process of reconstruction the left parties had paid scant attention to women's issues in both Bangladesh and India. The rural women's groups that had been created with the active support of the left either died a quiet death as in Bangladesh and some parts of West Bengal such as Kakdwip, or continued, as in other parts of West Bengal, greatly diminished for decades.

Our wok thus presents a historical precedent, in India and Bangladesh, of the radical transformation in gender relations that the collaborative efforts of left political activism and women's movement can facilitate, and of the indispensable nature of women's contribution to peasant struggle. And it enacts a constructive critique of some of the gendered blind spots of left movements in these two nations.

Discussion

Ratnabali Chattopadhyay

I would like to put one question to Papia. In 1947, after the partition, there was, at least in West Bengal, a concerted attempt to reconvert some of the people who belonged to what came to be known as the twilight zone. For example I have dealt with patuas myself who were supposed to have been both Hindu and Muslim. They were not graded as a Hindu caste at all. They were supposed to be people of two religions, they had two names and they participated in both kinds of religious rituals. After 1947, there was a concerted attempt

which went on for quite sometime to reconvert particularly those who claimed a more Muslim identity into becoming the lowest caste of the Hindus, persuading them that thereby they would get some social advantages. Do you find anything like that in Bihar?

The other question is to Kavita – I am asking her to rethink some of her propositions. I had a definite disquiet when she talked about participation of women in a particular kind of politics which to me seemed to me very much like class politics even from the narratives which she gave us. So why does she think that we need a formulation to take us away from class politics in order to bring out the situation of the women more clearly in the narratives and also in the movement? As a women and a Marxist, I have never thought the gains of the Tebhaga movement -- either as a women or as a Marxist – to be lost. I think the way the Mahila Samiti has grown has been one of those gains. And the way the women were interpreting their own position shows that they were aware of their own class position and that of their enemy. So why is it that we have to make a formulation, which would consider this class position redundant.

Papiya Ghosh

In Bihar too such things happened, as to the Patuas, in 1920s. So I was wondering up to when do you notice this happening in Bengal? From 1960 to the present, I have not come across anything of this sort. But what comes out very strongly in the discourse of the Backward Muslims, Pasmand and Mahaz, is that 'We are Mulvashis', so this was something their due. There has not been any Hindu right-wing organisation active in Bihar to reconvert them.

Kavita Punjabi

This paper was not positing the class position as redundant because what I was trying to show was various kinds of combinations and intersections. On the one hand I was talking about peasant women wanting to join the movement as workers because it was the jotedars and zamindars who sucked their blood – this was not only in the context of sexual exploitation, it was also in the context of economic exploitation. The question of sexual exploitation came up later in the movement. While there are differences in class among the women – amongst middle class women and the rural women, they are working with each other. What is happening is a certain coming together across class perspectives – especially in the context of sexual exploitation. And that was what I wanted to show through the songs. But I do not have straight flat notion of class, because there are certain clear contexts in which class reinforces gender politics. There are also certain gendered blind spots within class struggle that divide women across classes – even when it is not a question of economic divisions – and this is a patriarchal function. It is these nuances I am trying to portray.

Why was Dinajpur an exception? We did ask some of the activists. Urban Dinajpur, they said, was cosmopolitan with a lot of Vakils, teachers, etc., coming from other towns in Bengal and settling down there. In terms of the peasants, most of the peasants in Dinajpur were Rajbanshi peasants. The gender relations among the Rajbanshis was more egalitarian, especially in terms of work and relationships within the family. I could then extend the same explanation, say to the Santhals. In Nachol, why was there not such a progressive perspective as among Rajbanshis? Among the Dinajpur Rajbanshis for example – questions of domestic battery or the question of sexual exploitation by the Zamindars and of work were being articulated partly because these were major problems. In Nacchol we do not know of that degree of sexual exploitation by Zamindars as we know in Dinajpur. The incidence of domestic battery amongst the Santhals was not really very high. And thirdly, it was accepted that women were equal workers amongst the Santhals, even though there was the double bind of household work. They also had control over the domestic economy. So these are the reasons why they came up so much in Dinajpur and not so much in Nacchol.

Unidentified participant:

Kavita, the nationalist movements are different because the status of women becomes an issue. Nationalist leaders attracted women by promising equality. Did the leaders use the same strategies to mobilise womenn the peasant movements? And did you find any change in their gender status afterwards? The second issue is that in most nationalist movements, an iconism of motherhood was always there and it seems to have existed in peasant movements too, in a different way. In the Indian context, nationalism also meant linking the state and motherhood. In Tebhaga, with a peasant party in leadership and a sort of a national link, did the issue of motherhood come up and did the women ever mention that they had a view of the state or was there a time when men looked at the state as mother? Were these issues even touched upon? Did the women ever think of militarism as an issue?

Papiya Ghosh

I have a number of friends in Pakistan investigating Bihari Muslims. I was wondering if there was not only an overlapping with what you were talking about in Orissa, Bihar, Bengal and I would also include Assam. But I wonder if you came across anything that links Bihari Muslims (where women are concerned) to the Pakistan movement?

Kavita Punjabi

The evidence from the women in the Tebhaga movement indicates that they did not enter the movement looking for equality with men. It was not the question of gender politics that brought them into the movement. There was such acute starvation and oppression, that the demand for equality was a meaningless concept unless questions of access to food, to shelter, to livelihood were addressed. It was an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement. At rock bottom, it was a movement against hunger. But what happened next was that as the movement developed and more women came into the field of political activism and began dealing with other kinds of problems, further gender demands came in. Even with the women in the Mahila Samitis, it was more a question of 'Atmaraksha'. The moment the Atmaraksha Samiti came in, the notion of atmaraksha was broadened into defense against poverty, hunger and deprivation. The Mahila Amtaraksha Samiti had really gained ground during the famine. So it was within these contexts that women entered the movement and the women's movement developed from within.

The second question was of the status of the mother. Among the peasant women, we do not find that perspective at all. In fact as I said earlier, if anything was looked upon as the mother, it was the political collective. The women also said that it was the party that gave birth to us as activists. In terms of militarism, there was a lot of militarism in areas like Kakdwip which followed the Randive line of armed revolution. There were women who were trained to carry arms and wage battle. But in the context of other places, there are very few instances of militarism. But, yes, you had women taking up arms, going in marches and attacking jotedars. Militarism in a local context, you could say.

The Mahila Samitis are continuing from Tebhaga onwards. I have been looking at this in different areas in Bengal. In Bangladesh, of course, there is no continuity in most of the areas and in West Bengal, in Kakdwip, two years ago a Mahila Samiti was started up. In Jalpaiguri, the Mahila Samiti is continuing with the same women leaders. Mahila Samitis were started among the Orangs — some had names, others did not. So while the urban Mahila Samitis continue, I do not think there has been much continuity. I have not yet worked this out fully.

Papiya Ghosh

The Bihari are spread across the sub-continent. So there were quite a few of them in the 66 Red Cross camps spread across Bangladesh after the 1971 war. In Karachi and other parts of Sind and within Karachi different waves of Bihari Muslims have settled around different

areas – Kachi, Abadis, for instance. And the earlier lot from the middle class background would have been enlisted. I am interested in catching up with that aspect of the Bihari Muslims. In fact a lot of people have told me regarding Pakistan: "Koi women per project banado to ghus sakte hai" [If you can design a project on women, you might be able to enter Pakistan]. It would be worth working at how women were involved in MQM politics or the Jamaat-e-Islam. And the kind of difference in experience a certain generation of partition migrants encountered between Bihar during the years of nation-making and Pakistan which has been going through so many shifts. The same goes for Bangladesh. And this fact would be important that a lot of South Asian feminists are trying to get together a charter of women's rights within South Asia.

Malini Bhattacharya

This question is to Kavita – once again class and gender which has come up in quite a complex way in your paper. But right at the beginning of your paper, when you talked about the issue of Tebahga coming to them from outside. No. I think this is where the crux of the matter lies. Because you see a peasant women is both a peasant and a women and as you said yourself being a worker and a producer, the struggle that she wages against the jotedars – against the 'Barkhoda' and 'Chotkhoda' – is both as a woman and as a producer. I think at that particular moment of history the peasant identity gains a kind of precedence over what one might call gender issues. Just because it does not relate to gender you cannot say that this is less a part of their identity. I think the identity of a peasant woman is at question here. We should not look at the question as class versus gender issues but as gender issues within class issues. A literary work you might look at in this context is Manik Bandyopadhyay's 'Itikathar parer Katha' – a very important novel in which he discusses the question of the identity of a peasant women as a composite identity.

Arati Ganguly

The Mahila Amtaraksha Samiti was started during the famine when people from different parts of Bengal converged into cities – particularly Calcutta. These women came with their families begging "phen dao pran dao". And the people who hoarded rice, the 'Kalobazaris' were selling food at a very high rate. There were also men who bought women and supplied them to military bases or used them for common prostitution. These women were all from different villages of West Bengal. Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti was formed to fight this menace under the leadership of the Communist party. The Mahila Amtaraksha Samiti's main goal was to protect the women of their respective villages and that is how this idea of their having loose morals came about. Malini just mentioned Itikathar parer Katha – I would like to mention some other stories also – 'Dussahaniya' and other stories.

Malini said, if I understood her right, that Tebhaga movement was led by the Communist Party but local Communist leaders were actually forced into it. There was a *mahajani sabhyata* (moneylending culture) and people used to borrow *dhan* (paddy) and had to pay back in '*desabari*' meaning that they had to pay back one and half times more of what they took. So they had to borrow more and pay more -- a vicious cycle. I had talk with Sunil Sen and also with Kangsahari Haldar. Kangsahari Haldar was a leader of Kakdwip area and gave details of the plans and programmes of the Tebhaga movement. I also heard from Abdul Zabbar from Harwa. He said that Minakha and other places in North 24 Parganas also had women's involvement. I met Kulki, already quite old, who gave us very detailed discription of what they did. Their slogan was "police ele maro jhanta" (if the police come, beat them with brooms), whenever they armed themselves with broomsticks.

Actually, these were the slogans and the background of this movement. Japanese aggression and the famine were both important in making people more eager to have their rights. The Communist Party did not start it, they were forced into it and naturally they took it up. Of course the Communist Party's ideal was the leadership of the proletariat – but proletariat meant only workers of factories. But the Krishak Sabhas came out with so much

force, it really became a very big movement. I will also mention that not only Ranidi, but also Ila Mitra was there. The role of women in North 24 Parganas like Kakuti and others were also important. The Mahila Samitis did become a platform for women in general. It was a forum and women, whether belonging to political parties or not, organised themselves. Later when the political situation became more complex, these women's organisations were also divided and nobody knew how to organise them to form a real force. I request Kavita to go through the book by Amalendu Sengupta - he brought together bits and pieces of the background history of this movement.

Unidentified participant:

I think Kavita reads too much into small things like the women calling each other comrades. This was the practice of the Anusilan Samiti for a long time. Many of the Anusilan Samiti survived the mundane through daily conjugal subversion, subordination and effort. They could retain their identities till the very end of their lives. So just because they came from middle class and because this was a peasant movement does not mean that the Anusilan people were not trained. In fact, husbands and wives lived decades happily, discussing Leninism, quoting from Trotsky, and calling each other comrades. If Tebahga was so exceptional, there would have been some remnants, some culmination. Kavita knows that the Mahila Samitis are entirely urban, say in Jalpaiguri. Secondly, 'Tista Parer Brittanta', a novel full of class analysis, focuses on the peasant and the exploiters, but we get glimpses of people who come in-between, for instance the *charua*, who have temporary residence on the char. These people are mocked – "O mor chorua gharua re" (O my charua with a house). Such glimpses have not been fully developed. This novel was not used by Debasish Roy to focus the gender issue. May be the class and the gender issue of the Tebhaga movement was not that clear.

Kavita Punjabi

I was making a very serious point when I talked about women addressing their husbands as comrades. They were using the term for a particular strategic purpose, also in the meetings. A woman stands up at a public meeting and says, 'Why does my husband beat me?' In 1940, the response would inevitably have been, 'this is a private matter'. But when a woman asked, 'Why does my Comrade beat me?' she was invoking the egalitarian ideology of the entire movement. It was not possible not to answer such a charge or to treat it lightly. The socio-cultural world of Dinajpur began to experience subtle shifts in relationships within the home in the context of domestic battery, because the term comrade invoked the entire ideology of egalitarianism within the left movement.

The second thing I want to talk about: I never wanted to say that Tebhaga was lost. The substantiality to land reforms and movements in West Bengal is a legacy of Tebhaga. What I was talking about was the women's movement in the peasant areas died out and was revived much later. No continuity existed in terms of the women's movement but it may have come down culturally within the family, which is a far more difficult thing to trace.

Unidentified participant:

This is a question to Kavita. I am taking off from what Malini has said. The movement was against oppression and land reforms but also against the Zamindari sexual oppression. How did they tackle these questions within the land reforms movement? And the example you gave of a women being abducted, and the meeting to consider abducting another women in retaliation, how did these gender issue get solved?

Kavita Punjabi

I could not strictly call this a land reform movement. It was a movement for greater control over the produce of land. The point is that none of these were isolated events. The oppression of the zamindars was going on side by side. And how they dealt with the

oppression of the zamindars varied from place to place. As I said in some places it became a party agenda and women were not allowed to go, in some places women would go in large demonstrations in front of zamindars' houses and confront the zamindars and the jotedars. These two things always came up simultaneously. Within the movement or within the activists themselves sometimes demands emerged for putting sexual exploitation by the jotedars on the agenda. It was usually articulated as a direct demand. But they were never seen in isolation. I have not been pitching gender versus class because even when I talk about the gender demands the women made, I also said that these came in the context of building an egalitarian ideology of the left movement. So exploitation by jotedars or demanding rights as workers or even greater economic control within the family were shifts in the notion of egalitarianism taking place, which were affecting gender relations. It is egalitarianism across classes but also within class. When talking about the political and the structural models of class, I was seeking to emphasise the difference between these two. In the structural notion, class is the political points of view vis-a-vis your position in the class structure. In terms of actual political activism, one's position in the class structure is not enough because there might be differences of caste, community or gender. These are important social relations under-theorised in Marxism but equally relevant to class struggle. I do not wish to separate these.

Supriya Chowdhury

I would like to remind you of Arati Ganguly's intervention in this context. The Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti originally intended to defend women against sexual exploitation by Zamindars but also from being collectively forced into prostitution as a result of poverty.

Indira Chowdhury

Papia, you mention three kind of talaqs – how are they enforced within the communities you are looking at? What role do the maulavi or religious leaders play? I ask this because the little I know from my reading on Muslims in Australia – certain maulavis interpret these injunctions to empower women.

Papiya Ghosh

Bihari Muslims Intellectual Forum (organisation of middle-class lawyers) is comprised mainly of men who have drawn up a draft of a family council suggesting that the triple talaq be substituted by Talaq-e-ehsan which is spread across 3 months and can be revoked during that period. They also think that they could include Talaq-e-Tehfaz in forthcoming nikahnamas. So, it is not yet in practice. I have not really worked very much on how maulavi decisions go.

Panel Discussion
The Historian and Women's Studies

Ratnabali Chatterjee

We had hoped to bring in scholars from different disciplines in this panel, but landed up with historians, except Ishita, who work in different areas, thematically and regionally. The panel is thus of historians interrogating their own discipline and at the same time talking a little about their own work, with women's history in perspective. I would like to reiterate what I said on the first day, that is, women's history has generally been posited as a project to recover lost voices. In this workshop we would like to do more than that. I wanted to take up the categories that constitute our present moments of reason and unreason. We have to

investigate how the categories of ancient, medieval, nationalism etc. were constructed. At the same time situate our work within this framework and see where women's history has added new dimension has addressed questions both of inclusions and exclusions. For example I will tell you (I have to actually talk about my own work) when I wanted to work on Art History, I was not at all aware of gender history but I was aware of certain other things. I was forced to relate my work to these. I had to address paintings as a result of social production, relate it to the other process of social production through which we were looking at medieval history as a category. If we see the medieval period as one of a feudal mode of production, I had to examine how the particular group of paintings were produced and within what kind of relationships of exchange. I had to ask whether you could call this feudal art, how much of the feudal ideology of Mughal rulers went into it. I do not think I at all addressed the question of why there were no professional women artists because I took for granted that art occupied a public space in the karkhanas. There was really no space for women to be artists except as patrons. But with time, I moved from looking at Art History as a part of a social production regime and to the question of lines and colours as constant factors. There is no one-to-one schematic relationship between a production of painting and a social production process, so how was I to negotiate changes in style? If I was going to look at it chronologically and as a part of the process of production, I had to link it to a layered schema. At the same time, I had to see what autonomy was left to the Mughal artist despite a particular relation of production. At the same time I was involved with questions of aesthetics, valuation of a work of art, whether it was more skilled or less skilled, had certain degree of excellence or not. Thus, I moved into questions of representation first seen in a sketchy paper Tapati and I contributed to "Indian women: Myth and Reality" edited by Jashodhara Bagchi. We were then looking at questions of representation. At the same time, we had to negotiate with all the other question which I have talked about. We had to see how a particular image of the women was incorporated within the repertoire of the medieval artist. How was it changing? Was the aesthetics formulated during the Mughal period carried over into the later period? I became aware that I had to open up greater nuances. For example, lets take the question of the 18th century. It was for a long time debated between historian whether it should be seen as the advent of colonialism and 'the darkest hour' of the dark ages? Or did aesthetic production survive, Indian artists continue? Also, I was looking at the representation of women's images coming out of the collective. And today you see us accosted with this kind of problem again. With Hussain's paintings. we suddenly come up against the question of the traditional image of the women that has been developed through the science of iconography. It is a definite discipline, which has a definite bearing with women's history. How did woman's image, constructed at a given period, change? What relations did it have with the artist-producers and the patron? How much of these images were internalised within the aesthetic perceptions of women? Do we have any clues to that, other than looking at the paintings? Suddenly in front of us there was a vast variety of sources to explore. I confess that I was very excited. But at the same time to bring them all together needed a focal point and I think I was given that focal point today. I was seeing all the tools, which we had gathered, suddenly falling by the way side when confronting the popular common sense into which the image of women had shifted. I looked at this image of the woman posited as the ideal Indian woman with all the virtues of chastity, grace and femininity. In this image, all the attributes of the courtesan were considered taboo.

I realise writing in newspapers (as Tapati and I did) did not help much. It did not reach the vast majority of male *kar-sevaks* who felt it was a necessity for their national identity to burn Hussain's paintings. The fact that Hussain had drawn a large gathering against the backdrops of Ramayana and Ramlila had no recognition in this popular consciousness. I can not say that I have been able to come up with any answers. But I am still looking for ways, through an academic discourse, to open up a more fruitful dialogue between the present and the past. I am sure all the other panelists will add to what I have said.

I think Ratnabalidi has set the cue, perhaps without even planning it. She has opened up some very important issues. I am really here as an outsider. Not only do I not do women's studies but I am also not an activist in the women's movement. So I am particularly thankful to the organisers of the conference for inviting me to speak at such a forum. But I speak here as somebody who is from the outside since I am not directly involved in women's studies or women's movement. There is involvement, concern, and sympathy. Nonetheless, I remain on the outside. I would like to raise some general points that arise from my empathy, involvement and concern. Actually when I was asked to speak here I was not very sure how I could relate my own work to issues raised in this conference. So I will raise some general issues. Now the panel is addressing the issue of the historian and women studies. The figure of the historian I would like to present, not just as an abstract practitioner of an academic discipline which all of us do, but somebody concerned with the study of the past and asking certain questions. I would like to think of the historian as an individual with specific locations in the present and therefore somebody who is clearly grounded in problems of politics in the present. And I think there has been a lot of thinking among historians on the extent to which histories are really addressed to the present or history is coming out of the present. And I think it is our positioning in the present that determines the kinds of history we have written. So it is not always that we are making an accidental discovery of a huge body of new material or the areas, which have not been studied by other historians, which we stumbled on to. The way in which history as a discipline has moved, the kinds of past we seek out and the kinds of questions we ask have clearly a lot to do with the questions which are being asked in other disciplines and often questions which are being asked outside the professional forum of history.

From here I raise a very general question about who are really doing women's studies? Why are men so absent from the field? (And this is not to trivialise the problem but to raise what seems to me a very serious problem) With due apologies to Sumit and Rajatbabu who are here (and I think they will fully accept that they are very rare specimens in this kind of gathering), when we are dealing with women's history, women's movement or women studies, men are absent. And it is primarily women who have claimed and wrested the prerogative, often really demanded that issues of gender and women be addressed in disciplines and in areas where they have been ignored for a very long time.

I also wanted to raise another kind of problem. When I went into looking at issues related to Art History, I felt a kind of compulsion as a social academic and also a kind of emotional compulsion to address issues relating to women and gender. I feel that I have not been able to quite do it in my academic work. This prompts me to think about how the personal gets involved with the political and with the academic. In certain ways, I think, the question of empathy and involvement has become very critical to the way historians position themselves vis-à-vis the subject of their studies. The issue has come up in various areas of history, historians are constantly making their own positions and locations transparent vis-à-vis the subjects they are addressing. And when the issue of women's studies come up, who is better entitled to speak and on whose behalf, this issue of who can really make for both an 'authentic' and a kind of empathetic representation, is central. It has been most frequently fore-grounded across the different disciplines from which issues of women's history and gender have been addressed and I think this is something I have to leave as a problem rather than something for which I have any answer. It is an issue that should be addressed in a forum like this. I think women studies has been one area where the boundaries between the academic and the non-academic, between what we see from certain professional and personal positions are constantly slipping away and they are almost impossible to hold on to. Very often it is in the one area where the issue of one's personal location and struggle can often be best projected to areas of professional and academic work.

Having said this I really want to take on very briefly one theme. My own work has been concerned with the study of images that are kind of translated and brought into the

present. So in a way we have no unmediated access to images whether they are of ancient, medieval or even a near contemporary period. I am currently looking at what has remained one of the motifs which is the kind of sexualised body of sculpture. I have been looking at the narratives involved around them, partly in the context of the kinds of debates which the Hussain controversy raised where it was really art history which was mobilised to the defense of Hussain to say that this depiction of nude imagery has been a part of our religious tradition. What is really glossed over is the extent to which the erotic has remained a highly problematic motif and how the sexual and erotic form has to be continuously displaced on to other kinds of iconographic and aesthetic registers in order to be accommodated in a certain kind of discourse. In both the disciplines of history and women's studies, the central issue of representations as of great concern.

Representation – I am thinking in terms of Agnostics and stylistic desires of codes, signs, symbols narrative strategies – so whether we are dealing with a cultural product which of course is an extremely stylised representation to whether we are dealing with an offical document – a so called objective representation of the reality of the past. We need to continually ask or raise the issue of representation. I also want to think about two broad senses in which the issue of representation can be placed. In fact in a very common sense way there are two different ways representations can be positioned and I am not thinking a bit about kinds of work recently done in film studies which have raised the question of two spheres of representations – one being the political, clearly evident in the question of democratic representation, i.e., somebody is elected to speak for, to represent a group or a community. This connotation continuously comes up in the sense of representations as speaking for a larger group or a community. I think I will raise this as a central problem as all those who have to work in women's studies always have to address this issue of how representative they are, how far they can speak for a broader unitary category like women. It also arises when we try and retrieve voices from other times, other cultures, often from clearly other classes from whom we are separated by time, region, culture and class. And nonetheless there is this constant issue of trying to capture the authenticity of their position and voices. This political connotation of representations includes both the representation of a large group of women but also representation of a certain individual position.

The other connotation of representation also commonly held is the aesthetic connotation where we inevitably think of representation as a style and as a re-presentation. That is, there is an objective reality and that there is a whole range of imagery which occurs across a range of cultural products. Here we turn to a world of texts, images, discourses and various other kinds of narrative devices and strategies through which women are presented and there of course we confront a range of codes, canons and stereotypes. The problem we continuously need to address is how far these representations will consciously stand apart because to be represented there is the notion to stand apart. Nonetheless, they also stand in for the real. I think the issue came uo partly during the discussion around Tapti's and Aishika's paper. We were really dealing with different kinds of texts some of which were didactic, some of which were purely literary and we faced the impossibility of linking this whole field of representations with a so-called real history. What was actually happening to the widow or linking up with actual social history through these texts became a problem. I feel that in this sense, the whole world of cultural representation becomes extremely critical to address both as ways in which they consciously stand apart and nonetheless also very effectively stand in for the real in different ways.

By way of conclusion I would like to say that these two kinds of representations, these two connotations which are offered - political and artistic - needs to be critically collapsed. The distinction has to be questioned and we have to argue that all representation is political. And representation whether political or so-called artistic functions always as a device for a larger group, whether as a cultural symbol or image. In either case we are really dealing with processes of substitution and displacement. The question of the so-called real is continuously slipping away before a world of images. Access to the real can only occur through a whole mesh of representations. At the end I would just like to refer to what I think has been a very important essay, a piece by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'Real and

Imagined Women' in which she says that politics is an offered representation. She analyses a whole range of medieval imagery of women to show that what we see as women's issues within the women's movement have been very effectively appropriated within a kind of dominant media discourse. To produce certain images of women, the state and media actively intervene by imaging women in certain ways. And this resonates with some of the more urgent political concerns of the women's movement. Since I have been working entirely with the world of imaginary women of the past and the present, women as figured in Art, I felt this was a very urgent problem. This world of women's images I worked with are so clearly imaginary and so clearly artistic, and yet they become very easily involved in terms of the great tradition in the context of a very troubled present. This came up during the Hussain controversy. I have to be aware that canon of images are continuously determining the kinds of worlds and positions we live in.

Lakshmi Subramaniam

I too first of all thank Ratnadi and Samita for actually giving me this opportunity to present some of my current research interests. I have been an outsider to women's studies-- I have worked on mainstream economic history for more than a decade. Only of late, when I started to pursue the history of Indian classical music as it is relocated and re-cast in the late19th and early20th centuries, I was drawn to some issue that gender studies or rather women's studies in particular has thrown up. So what I would like to do in the course of this brief presentation is to tell you about some of any own work on South India and also to pick up some issue which came up in the last two days. Some of the issues are directly related to my own field of enquiry. Taking the cue from what Ratnabali Chatterjee, Anuradha Chanda and Samita Sen put forward in the inaugaral session, I will argue that the question is not just of retrieving women's histories for a holistic understanding. It is particularly significant to talk about historicisation of categories. I realised this more acutely as I listened to Nurpur Das Guptas' paper and to Samita's point about the need to understand the functioning of patriarchy before the colonial state and before modernity. In other words we need to know why and how women reacted to modernity. What was the network of skills to which women had access? How did social processes of reproduction function? Unless we know all this, we might be at a loss to understand or explain the ease with which intervention, colonial or nationalist marginalised segments of women and continues to marginalise them now.

I have been concerned with the performing arts and with communities of dancers and musicians in the late 19th century. How were these musicians addressed by nationalists who were engaged in their tryst with modernity and in the larger project of retrieving heritage, the cultural heritage which was appropriate for the nation-in-making? How was the entire gamut of performing arts reconstituted in the context of the very new ideological imperatives of the new nation and its social proprieties and ethics, new notions of chastity and the construct of the ideal performer? What kind of image did the performers have to project? I would like to begin with the point that was made about the ganikas and the devadasis because it is central to my work on South India and I will draw upon Ratnabali Chatterjee's work on Bengal as well. It is of course true that ganikas are part of the patriarchal structure and have to negotiate within a very unequal social milieu, within relations of production that are definitely not equal. But I think one has to remember also how this category evolved. In other words, one needs to know also the access they had to certain skills. One is particularly struck by the access they had to education, which in fact enabled them to negotiate with certain levels of power that transcended the local. I was particularly struck by a book on female education, which points out that in the late 17th and 18th centuries, greatest number of females children in the indigenous schools, set up by Zamindars of in Arcot, Ramnad and Madurai, were daughters of devadasis. It were devadasi children who actually took to education. Even later, in the 19th century, reports on schools comment on the relative ease with which these young children took to education, not just to music and dancing but actually to formal education. Yet, this itself is not an empowering

phenomenon, because once you have the nationalist /elite project, this entire community was marginalised, their skills were just co-opted while they were stigmatised as prostitutes, essentialised as a category and then the entire repertoire of artistic knowledge was taken away from them. One needs to keep in mind the way the community was positioned within older political regimes, the way in which these older political regimes disintegrated, the way in which various interventions came from the colonial state and the way in which these communities were actually responding to the various changes. I have in mind only the community of women performers.

The other issue that actually interested me very much was Indrani's point about women themselves being a part of the networks which perpetuated sale and purchases, dowries and other excchanges. I feel that these networks could also at some points constitute a strategic mode. I have in mind two things here – first, the strong network of skills that functioned within the devadasi community. It is a strategic response in the 19th century, when the nationalists actually encounter them. Yuko Nashimora argues, "the relative autonomy of status among these Nargartar women is really a consequence of this space accorded to women within the caste group... to inherit and control property, participate in activity such as money lending.... [T]he ownership of Streedhan among these women is so well protected. All the gifts movable and immovable are all regarded as the women's assets and were in fact taken care and managed by the women's natal family". She is referring to women from a particular caste group in South India.

In the case of women artistes, musicians and dancers from traditional communities, networks of resources and skills were very important. This is particularly so because when they encounter the nationalist project and engage with modernity, they are brought face to face with new forms of technology, new methods of transmission of learning and an entire transformation of the public space. Thus, the question of access to skills, networks of resources becomes crucial. Without going into details, let me just quickly identify the process, which comes out vividly in the nationalist project of re-casting Indian classical music and dance. Within this larger field, reconstituting gender roles was crucial. There are two groups to consider – the community of devadasis in the case of dance and certain specific musical genres and also traditional male musicians. The community of male musicians is very important, particularly in North India where actual traditional practitioners of Hindustani music were Muslim Ustads. They too were subjected to new pressures with increasing attempts to distance Indian music from the debauched, illiterate and corrupt Muslim influence and to recast it within Hindu literature and tradition.

The nationalist project involved (a)making classical music accessible to the Hindu middle class thereby investing it with social respectability and (b)absorbing it within the education system involving strategies of standardisation, preservation and reproducibility. The need to reproduce music and keep it for posterity involved reconstituting the tradition and its performance in such a way as to cater to the new aesthetic requirements of the middle class audience. This is very important, this construction of aesthetics which is continuously being talked about in all nationalist writing in this period relating to music. This aesthetic sensibility explicitly carried with it notions of propriety and chastity. I am quoting from the resolution taken at the All-India Music Conference, 'Do not tickle the senses... aim for the spiritual'. This is the new rhetoric that is being employed. The project did succeed in expanding middle class interest in assimilating the arts. Universities were set up, many number of teachers' training colleges were set up, jobs were offered to men and women to practice and perform music. But where did this all leave the traditional performer?

I have had the opportunity of interviewing one or two very old men or women in Madurai and Salem last summer. Obviously, their responses vary. It must also be remembered that South and North India follow different trajectories. The All-India Music Conference in Gaekwad was followed by a series of annual Conferences in the north, where there were notices prohibiting entrance to *baijis* and forbidding them to perform outside the conference (lest they tempted the participants to go and see them). It was quite clear that the *baijis* were excluded from the new project of 'Indian music', which was being recast and put

together. In the south this was not so clear. The Madras Music Academy invited the devadasis. I have in mind three really famous women –Nagaratnam, Vina Dhanamuna and Balasaraswati. These women performed and gave 'lecture demonstrations', a practice which came up with the All-India Music Conference. The idea was to identify what was authentic and what not. What I find interesting is that these performances had a kind of symbolic value. I looked at the registers of Madras Music Academy from 1921 to 1953, there were about 10 performances of this kind. There were, of course, very few women Musicians from the middle class. D. K. Pattammal was the first and that too after she fought a huge battle with her father to which I will come back later. The point is these performances were really of symbolic value and did not really enable the devadasis to come forward and share there skills in a larger way.

Then there are people like Rukmini Arundel taking on the onus of sacrificing the entire form and in fact resurrecting a new dance form, all the erotic passages consciously and very clearly deleted. Balasaraswati responded in 1930 with her own version of what was authentic. She was in fact making a truth claim because she was using the text that was in vogue in the Kanchipuram temple till 1890. She was obviously using a text that was still in circulation. When Bala decides to take this on , this is very well argued by Avanti Madura and particularly by Indira Paterson, she bacame the 'devadasi voice' against the mainstream national elite. She was supported by the Tamil movement, and co-opted within its anti-brahmanical agenda. Once this movement does not take off in cultural terms, Bala actually leaves. The family of musicians and dancers particularly of Bala's family migrated to U.S A. I fact all we know of her family is from T. Vishwanathan and other men who were concerned with these issues. However, this is just one family. Of other families, I find that it is these devadasi women who actually take to broadcasting and recording in a very big way. It is of course the same picture in Calcutta – Gaharjan and Rasulanbai and others – most of the early recording were done by *baijis*. I have been looking at Micheal Kinea's lists of recordings. Right till late 1930s, most of the recording were done by women of the devadasi community. They made a lot of money which was they spend to pay their male Musicians.

The network of knowledge and artistic skills were often resources conserved within the family. I have interviewed two very old musicians who suggested that Vina, a legendary Musician between 1900-1920, taught any number of other (male) Musicians who came to the fore in Madras and made huge names for themselves. They kept their training a well guarded secret until one of them screamed. I happened to get the autobiography of Ramanujan who wrote, in 'Musings of a Musician', about these musicians taking training from Vina. He was himself very close to Vina Dhanamma. He felt it his duty to expose many of the Musicians who had learned a lot from Vina Dhanamma and never acknowledged it in public. When I asked some of the members of her own family whether she was prepared to teach her own style, her songs to her daughter or to her nephew, the answer that she is believed to have given was that she would never teach what she knew, because they would never understand the sensitivity with which she understood her body and her person. Interestingly, she was not even willing to teach her own daughters and granddaughters. I think one needs to look into these responses. These women came up with in their own responses in their encounter with modernity and the nationalist project and it is these silent voices I hope to retrieve.

Nirmala Banerjee

It is a fact that we are mostly women here. Actually we are talking about women's history amongst women. I was wondering if it is because of some kind of basic sympathy and involvement. How far are we academic about it? When we were talking about peasant women or Muslim women, how representative are we of them? What do we share with them? Are we back to biology then? How far do women's shared experience cut across class communities, areas, years of history? Why do we do women's histories, why do we examine women's themes? This was a question I was asked at my centre by my colleagues – just because you are a woman do you have to work on women's issues? I turned it around and

said, I am woman and I find myself involved in their issues what is wrong with that? Then I was given a whole lecture about how, as an academic, you have to stand back to look at the issues. It also relates to the question that the study of history is usually done from some sources and these sources -- whether a picture or a novel or a record -- are representations. How far do they form real history or real life?

Tapati Guha Thakurta

Lakshmi's presentation was so rich, I feel guilty about being so vague and general. Nonetheless, I think, it may be useful in this forum to bring in the more general issues. There were two aspects to Nirmala's questions. One is a question I had raised about who is best entitled to speak for and represent certain issues. I was not speaking just in terms of retrieving women's history but also about gendered readings of various kinds of documents and narratives. It is not necessarily a search for the figure of the women in the past but also a question of putting up an active interrogation of sources and records and trying to do gendered reading of those. I wanted to rate this as a very important problem. Clearly you could raise the issue at many levels. Given the whole history of studying popular movements, the issue of authenticity and representation becomes crucial, as in the case of the subaltern studies project. And I think it comes up in a very different way in women's history. The personal and political movements of women scholars and historians and activists become extremely important. In response to what the colleagues at the centre told you, Nirmala, it is, precisely, negotiating the boundaries between what is academic and non-academic which becomes extremely critical, not just in women's studies but across all disciplines. But as women doing women's studies one needs to foreground an issue and talk about it much more openly.

There is another issue about representations. Clearly all of us who want to do social histories in the past are looking at the cultural context in which sources are produced and for whom they are produced. But I think one has to be careful about how far we can treat them directly as evidence. What I wanted to problematise is that when we look at a whole range of cultural products, we treat them as social material. I have never had the training of doing purely formal and aesthetic readings. And I would have a great discomfort with a purely formal and aesthetic reading of these products. Nonetheless what we need to rethink is about the different kinds of realities of the past we can read from this kind of material. We can use this material as source but we cannot use them as evidence in any clear way.

Anuradha Chanda

I would say a few words about Women's Studies. I am a new initiate. What I found was that it was really about a questioning of conventional disciplines and academic neutrality. So Women's Studies is basically interdisciplinary. So, where does the historian stand vis-à-vis women's studies? Certain questions have already emerged regarding evidence (from Tapati's presentation). What is evidence? What a historian would consider strong and neutral evidence is, often, absolutely quiet about women. The question of evidence and sources is critical in the forum of Women's Studies. Can we really think of the discipline of History from another point of view to build a more holistic picture? The problem we always encounter in women's studies fora, where different disciplines are represented, is regarding the barriers of comprehension between disciplinary boundaries. What seems very clear to me as a Historian is incomprehensible to a philosopher. We have created our own areas with strong walls. These are walls that cannot be broken immediately but can be questioned and can be weakened. And this is where we should start.

Indrani Chatterjee

I agree with what has been said. I want to speak here about the double discomfort of being both a historian and a sort of insider in women's studies. I have to say this quite explicitly

because I find myself (and Iam sure there are many of us here who will empathise) speaking like an activists or in a feminist voice to historians and speaking in a historical mode to feminist activists. And the double disdain of both is what forces one to consciously choose a position and learn to inhabit it first before taking on the task of reading new evidence or reading old evidence with new questions. Both Ratnabali and Nirmala have talked about different discomforts, I wish to highlight the one arising from speaking to your discipline and being an insider in women's studies. But this entire debate again resurrects for me an old issue, which we never resolved. Is women's studies separate from or is it part of the movement? The debate goes on and on and we can resolve it. But we cannot resolve certain things, like we cannot resolve our discomfort. We have to live with it. And this discomfort is what basically feminist historians ask others to feel. Yet, historians are not going to choose discomfort. Nobody chooses discomfort as a mode of existence. It is our political choice to be uncomfortable in both our disciplines as well as in our real lives.

Unidentified participant:
The discomfort Indrani talks about has long history. Even Nirmala, a senior scholar whose work we have all virtually cut our milk teeth on, faced it. The discomfort comes from the fact that when any historian or feminist academic or women's studies academic chooses a theme or a perspective remotely gender-specific, immediately she is asked to justify that choice which may not be the case if the issue is seen as 'gender-neutral'. I can give you many examples, I am sure you can add to those examples yourself. The discomfort comes from being in the academy and raising questions, which come from outside the academy. They need to be raised to further our own disciplinary rigour. We all have a sense that we are furthering and refining our disciplines, but the specific direction, our questions and our tools come from outside the academy. That makes for discomfort because the rest of the academy is not with us. The discomfort is of not knowing where we are going but going on nevertheless.

Tapati Guha Thakurta

Between the moment Nirmala Banerjee talked about and the moment in which we are now, there has been a big change. We now perceive a clear institutionalisation of women's studies. But institutionalisation has not cured your discomfort. There are, still, other issue creating discomfort. I wanted here to raise another problem and you to respond to it. Women's Studies has also become a bandwagon on to which it is easy to tag on a lot of work, a lot of positions. Since it is easily draws money and projects, other problems related to institutionalisation has also come up. At the same time it has become public, institutionalised and official and, therefore, in many ways, women no longer need to justify within an academic forum why they do women's studies. Nonetheless, there are various kinds of discomforts remain, both personal and academic, which we can bring here.

Unidentified participant:
Women's Studies as a discipline, as an inter-disciplinary academic forum is institutionalised but is still in its infancy compared to, say, the discipline of history. Have our feelings of discomfort as historians lessened? With various degrees and inputs of criticality, one always feels uncomfortable ever day. Every moment one is trying to grapple with various subjects within one's discipline so I think women's studies, by adding a few more axes of criticality, probably makes one feel more uncomfortable. One also, probably, loves that discomfort.

Kavita Punjabi

It has been painful and joyous at the same time crossing boundaries not just as a nominal part-time activist but also as an academic. I have been sharing the two worlds, the discomfort of both and disdain of both. But I am from Comparative Literature, in any case a marginalised inter-disciplinary field and from there I have dared to tread into history. There

are two ways in which I look at this. One is in terms of responses. The more rigid historians have been critical of my whole project. What has been heartening is the large support system we have developed within the field of women's studies. Since I am completely new to the discipline of history and I do not consider myself a historian, I do not think I am doing real history (whatever real history may be). I am looking at women's narratives. It is heartening to realise that there is a broad area of encouragement for this kind of work. But at the same time it is really painful to have to move from one discipline to another, even within a larger perspective of women's studies. I am stepping into history from comparative literature. We are looking at narratives of women, which are constructions of the self, an area close to my own discipline. But I had to learn the modes of another discipline. This is exciting but it causes a deep anxiety. I am unlearning a whole lot of things. How am I going to get back to my old work? How well am I going to learn the new? I do not know whether I am going to regret it. I do not know how this is going to shape and influence my work in the future. It is a situation of flux, academically and intellectually. Inter-disciplinary work involves many such problems, which we will have to deal with.

Panel: second part

Ratnabali Chatterjee

There are two issues I would like to highlight. First, the insider-outsider issue. I inhabit both and I am interested in resolving this issue for myself. In the process of cohabiting the inside and the outside I have run into a few problems. Part of the problem is that it is not two but three spheres in which I exist. The first is that of the academic trying to deal with issues which we have been discussing, the second is that of an activist in the women's movement and the third is that of a participant in a larger political movement (as Ishita emphasised), a public and political movement which is broader than either the discipline or the women's movement. I have to try to draw all these spheres together. The problem is, again as Ishita pointed out, that these spheres have to be brought together, that is they cannot remain as fragments. When I say 'broader' I cannot define this term (nor has Ishita) in any precise way. This issue came up quite clearly in Kavita's discussions on Tebhaga movement. The significance of raising gender issues in the context of Tebhaga derives from the way in which women's participation remained unrecorded and women's issues could not be articulated as rights.

The redefinition of property structure in India before independence took place before the Tebhaga movement. Indeed the Telengana movement also preceded Tebhaga. In the Tebhaga neither the Communist Party nor those who addressed women's issues addressed the question of why a large section of our economy on which rested our wealth and power excluded women completely. Agricultural land remained outside the debate on codification, on inheritance law and even outside tenancy questions. Most tenancy reforms specifically excluded women from tenancy entitlements, even by inheritance. According to Ishita, the share croppers movement gained more importance than the question of women's right to land at that historical moment. From 1946 to 1978 when various reforms of the sharecroppers' situation were undertaken, including Operation Barga, there was ample opportunity to open the question of women's rights to land. But we did not do so. Even today, I hear of cases in 24 Parganas where a individual male sharecropper is registered without any provision for the wife. This cannot be dismissed as a problem of a 'small cake'. Operation Barga took place within a stable political situation and is claimed as a great achievement. But in all this we have never once addressed women's rights. It took us twenty years after land distributions started to demand joint patta. The women's movement did raise some of these questions but did not give it sufficient importance.

In defence of the left front government it could be said that in 1977-78 the situation was not conducive to a diversion into women's questions. I am uncomfortable with that explanation. But I am equally uncomfortable to be outside the pressing broader concerns of any particular time. This is the problem: why is my rights (as a woman) not defined or

included within so-called broader political movements? Why is class 'broad' and women not? And this is something that we need to address frankly. We have talked about the household. It is a problematic category if it must always come first . Both the household and class become, automatically, constructed as 'broad' with men's rights clearly defined and their individuality never subsumed. Women are ascribed certain roles, supposedly dictated by biology. The biological argument is misused when applied to social activities. Biology does not explain why different roles are rewarded differently, nor why these are hierarchised in such a way that only the women's individuality is lost. These are complex questions and the women's movement cannot be treated as outside of these.

I heard, recently, a member of a panchayat (also a member of the Kishan Sabha) say about one third reservation for women, that such a reservation reflected the balance of nature. Just as land is one third and water two thirds so is women to man. How do we read this statement? If we are to talk about roles may be we can overcome the problem regarding 'gender' versus 'women'. A framework of roles can be fitted into questions about structures of production, consumption, reproduction and exchange.

In the academy, we have the problem of disciplinary boundaries. I have no problem with the concept of women's studies, which has its own history of development. But, I can see why problems occur when one tries to carve out women's studies within history, which has a separate and established status as an institutionalised discipline. The problem can take different forms. For instance, how do we relate the history tribes to the history of women? Are the two separate? Does tribal history not include the history of its women? The same can be said of caste or class through which patriarchy is maintained. Once again the problem of ' the broad' comes up. We cannot separate women from their larger context. Women are half the population but they are treated as a minority, as a group operating outside general processes. This is not acceptable. The point is to question why women's rights are not a part of general processes and obversely how women's presence shapes general processes.

Sumit Guha

Several of the panelists began with a disclaimer of their entitlement to be here. Well, I must disclaim it even more strongly and therefore my gratitude to the organisers must be all the greater as I cannot pretend to have made any sort of contribution to the study of women's history. I have in fact done peripherally some work which might sort of come into the history of gender in a general kind of way at least in the South Asian context. There is a recent study I did on the continuum between tribal communities, warrior groups and state formation in mediaeval and early modern India. In this study I have argued that you had, before colonial rule, vigorously militarised Indians. You had in fact considerable groups who were part-peasants, part-soldiers part forest-dwelling foragers, who provided much of the irregular man power and support for the political systems of the time and who were important protagonists in the regional political arena. British rule de-militarised and systematically segregated the groups, creating a large element of what we now call the tribal communities of India. I have also argued that in fact the kind of special role of part-time soldiers that such communities tended to play resulted in a particular form of household and gender relations within them. A whole number of auxiliary productive tasks – the supply of agricultural production and so on - were in fact carried on by women in these households who therefore had a much stronger presence in production, and much more independent and active social roles. A great deal of initiative was required of them, especially in periods of insurgency when they had to do a lot of carrying of the provisions, attend to the wounded and provide various other kinds of support. That, however, when these communities achieved substantial political success in achieving local or regional dominance there was a shift in the gender relations due to the necessity of building up political alliance systems which were done via essentially marriage or gifting of women and these relationships broadly speaking is what we call hypergamous. Women were passed from inferior and subordinate lineages to politically dominant ones as a reaffirmation of political support and

also as a way of tying up larger networks. As a result, there was a changeover in women's roles. Their active, independent and productive roles were eroded. Their movement, their sexuality, their behaviour and even their exposure to the public eye came under systemic control in order to make them suitable tokens in this affirmation and display of political allegiance, political subordination and political loyalty. These hypergamous marriage systems therefore were strongest amongst communities with extended political networks and aspirations to rule such as in a number of Rajput communities in North India. It were the Rajputs, amongst whom the concomitant phenomenon of infanticide appeared in the 19th century when the old political function of these circulations began to breakdown. High levels of dowry accompanied female infanticide and this grew from a political strategy of local dominance by specific kinds of communities in different regions. That is the nearest I have got to any kind of study with any kind of bearing on women's history. Even here, as you can see, women's subjectivity does not really appear at all. I have identified the roles in which women were cast within a larger political framework and obviously the implicit assumptions of such an explanation is that by and large women conformed to ascribed roles, otherwise if they resisted in a systematic way this system would not have worked. That is the nearest thing I can offer as a credential for my presence here. I wracked my brains and could not think of anything else to pass at least the few minutes at the podium.

Since the question of history as a discipline and its relation to women's studies and women's movement has come up several times in the discussion, I would like to offer a few reflection upon that area. One of the things that did not come up in the discussions was in fact how history as a discipline itself achieved its disciplinary dominance. Now history is not the only way in which we can think about the past. Every organised kind of human society had some kind of sense about the past – about its past, how it came into being, how particular things, practices, people, families etc., came to be what they are. But the modern discipline of history has equally modern roots. It is not just reflection about the past. It has come into being by disciplining a whole body of other ways of conceptualising past – turning them into folklore, fairy-tales, myths, old wives' tales and so on. But these were all valid ways of conceiving the past of different societies and different social groups before they were put into these marginal categories in the course of the expansion of one particular disciplinary mode of looking at the past. I think that the discipline achieved a success, first of all, because (as a professional practitioner of that mode for twenty years, I think) it is the best way of thinking about the past. But I must recognise that objectively speaking it achieved success not because it was demonstrably the best way of doing so, but because it was associated with the rise of modern nation state. In fact the first reason why historians were institutionalised, why they received a range of institutional and structural support, in the form of archives, university professorships, departments and centres, schools and so on, in the curricular structure was that they were writing the life-story of the nation. They are writing and recovering the nation - different nations, nations at war with each other, nations within nations etc. Nonetheless, that was why academic history actually came to occupy that sort of central position in the recollection of the past. A central position, which is always contested, but which in a sense assumed that the nation was there. It was to be found or in a sense it was to be given a voice. So, for example, Mohenjodaro can be the first Pakistani City or in our text books it will be the first Indian city or perhaps at some point it is going to be the first Sindhi city if Sindh becomes an independent entity. The nation was always there which had various things within it. If that is the way history has taken shape, there has been, I think, an unconscious tendency for all sorts of other histories to take that model as the way in which history is to be done. So history has been histories of recovery of various things, say of the history of the working class. It has to recover things lost, buried, forgotten, etc. And the assumption is that they were there – just waiting to be found again. So you have to recover the working class, recover peasant insurgency, recover the subaltern classes and finally, perhaps, you have to recover women's history. So we have to recover lost voices, including in this case the all too frequently suppressed and lost voices of women in the past.

What we have in fact are text, records and material traces of various kinds. Texts are consciously produced for an audience; and records are produced for perhaps one kind of

objective. There are objects that undergo change, for example, the development of certain sorts of bones and muscles and attachments can be studied from the remains of skeletons of communities that underwent change. We know many things about their status, about their health, behaviour, and characteristic practices from the material traces inscribed in the skeletal or other bodily remains of such persons.

It is always necessary in reconstructing voices from these sort of resources of the past to try and take into account what sort of text or source it is we are dealing with. People in the past were also trying to create voices. Typically, they were the voices of the gods. The major sites of contests were contests for religion or political authority. So it is the voices of the gods. But they are always expressed through particular devotees, worshippers, priests, prophets and so on. Very often there is a danger that we hear one kind of voice whereas in fact it was a completely different speaker. Indeed the voice through which past speaks to us is a simulated voice. For example I would like to site one text which I think falls into that category. Their is a recently translated Sanskrit text from Tanjore by Julia Leslie under the title of 'The Perfect Wife' and it purports to be a sort of description of qualities of the ideal wife written in the late 17th to early 18th centuries. But the point is it is written in Sanskrit. It is a language, which, at least formally speaking, women were not supposed to learn in the South. So it would not have been accessible to them. So who is the speaker and who is the audience to whom this is being addressed? Sometimes I have wondered whether it is not in a certain sense another variety or a form of a literary exercise and entertainment to while away the long hours between the afternoon siesta and the evening visit to the brothel for the literati of the Tanjore Court.

And even when we find voices there is a question as to whether we are finding voices or are we finding roles? That is something which you can find by looking at the sort of roles within the society that women can play and for that I think we need particularly to go to records, the second class of sources that I spoke of. There are administrative and judicial records, where people speak with other objectives or which are generated with other objectives. There are also a kind of individual records, for example we can accidentally find out about the gender composition of beggars in the Peshwar's camp around 17th-18th centuries from stray evidence. The context is that a particular official is ordered on the occasion of Muharram to give out alms to all the *fakirs* in the compound and also to feed them. However most them are sufficiently well-fed and they do not actually come for the feeding. But the official reports that there were crowds of widowed women, hanging around the camp, who turned up in droves. So then an order is issued, feed whichever *fakirs* turn up first and afterwards give the rest of the food to the women. So that itself tells you something about the composition of the destitute in a late 18th century – where do they come from and at least what their gender is. There are other sources like tax records; households headed by women receive a certain reduction in house-tax in certain areas. So you can work out how many such houses there are. So there are these kinds of sources and I think by a sort of clever use of these and the use of the traditional tools and craft of historians – comparison, contextualisation, cross checking of records, search for contemporary sources and materials - it would certainly be possible to write women's history. This is especially so for the area which my research field – Maharashtra and Western India, which are under-worked, it would be possible to go a great deal further in the study of women's history that we have gone so far. I hope that some other younger scholars will take this up in the coming years.

Ishita Muherjee

Thank you for inviting me. Without going into the controversy of being an insider or an outsider I go straight in to the topic. There are some puzzles regarding the historian and women's studies. Somebody was asking me in the recess what I am doing here. Though I do women's studies, I am not a historian. What I wish to do is to link up broadly questions of the women's movement, women's studies and academic disciplines relating to issues of development. What has history to do with this, and how can history go together with these? We all know, with or without acknowledging the fact, there is some sort segmentation

among disciplines. The segmentation is among people who are actively in the women's movement, fighting on women's issues, and those that seek to integrate women's questions in their own discipline. Academic interventions in women's studies and research in allied disciplines go in diverse directions. The process of development throughout the world goes on irrespective of both of these. What goes on? Actually we are confronting a debate between what exists and what should exist. So there is a common consensus regarding what should exist but it does not exist. This is were we as activists and people asking questions come together. But we cannot avoid these segmentations. Somebody was asking me about the value of this seminar – after all, whatever we say remains a discourse. It is only a seminar discourse. When we go back to our homes and workplace we forget the discourse and then we again assemble and come to another seminar to start the discourse.

Women's movements are broadly divided into two categories. One is only women's movement with women's issues and the other is a part of a broader movement. We see in our country participation of women on many broad questions. Although the gender question is not always in the forefront, people cannot avoid the questions being asked. When the broad political issues, the broad social issues and the broad economic issues come to the forefront, one cannot avoid the gender question and gender identity. The system did not allow these questions to come to the forefront but it came to the forefront like any other discriminatory process. It first came into focus during the anti-imperialist freedom struggle of our country. I am just recalling this because many of the women's movement we have been talking about were part of such broader movements. Although the gender question was not in the forefront, they had to be tackled.

When the question of development arose, gender dimensions came to fore. If I look into the issues of development then clearly the world is divided into two kinds of countries – the rich and the poor countries. We have a third world where we have Africa, Latin America, South Asia – and these are poor countries. Now in these countries although there is heterogeneity between the countries, there are certain common conditions, which have branded these as third world and all of us know the symptoms. If we consider the household as an individual unit, all of us know that what happens outside is reflected in the household. The discrimination expressed within the household is a part of what is happening outside. In the morning, there was a question of equality. Do we want equality of deprivation or a movement against depravation? Which is to get priority? Can one think of one without the other? What we are confronting in the question of development is the gendered dimension of poverty, gendered dimension of inequality, gendered dimension of racial discrimination and the gendered dimension of regional inequality. All issues have a gendered dimension. It is not that one supercedes the other –but one co-exists with the other. One remains within the other and both go together. When the question of development or of raising people above the poverty line comes -- what should be done? Our experiences have shown, throughout third world countries -- that even if you raise people above the poverty line, for the marginal people who have been just raised above the poverty line there can be females who are more poor than males. Thus, the women in within these families remain below the poverty line. So even if the household living standard is raised above the poverty line, the female cannot be raised above the poverty line. There is a gross poverty line and within it an intra household poverty line. But the issue is that if you cannot raise the entire family above the poverty line then how far can you tackle the question of intra-household disparity. If the size of the cake is small how far can you reach egalitarian distribution between and within the households?. If we look throughout the discipline of poverty -- ask the questions of employment, household labour, agriculture, industry and even the interaction with the rest of the world – we find this gendered dimension. There has to be some outside interference in terms of both the development process and gendered identity.

The second thing I would like to touch upon – the question of evidence in historical research. In development analysis also there is a huge secondary database from which we work. Questions have been raised as to whether this entire database is a gender aware database or not. Due to non-recognition of the work and activities in which women participate, they do not appear in the official database.

Yet many things depend on such database: the prospects of many of these activities, external interventions, either from women studies or from government initiative, or the women's movement. If these official database are not gender sensitive (which may well be the case since the official database often suits the purpose of the collector) there has to be an intervention at the level of data collection. The question of evidence that has been put forward in historical studies is also true for development scientist.

The third is the question of overlapping between the disciplines and women studies as a separate discipline. Now where the overlapping begins and where can we identify or locate these overlappings? Throughout the women's movement and in women's studies, the question which is talked about is that of empowerment. What is the nature of empowerment? When do women feel empowered? When do they not feel empowered? The question of psychology comes up here. What are the economic levers you should give so that the woman is empowered? But even if you give economic levers, psychologically, due to traditions, woman may not feel empowered. It is a question of feeling. In all cases of discrimination essentially it comes to feeling. Whenever a person feels discriminated the person is discriminated. The entire question of feminine psychology is significant. What is the origin of this feeling? What are the origins of the kind of development programmes which have been accepted? One can enrich one's discipline by interrogating these issues. And one needs to ask these questions in all these dimensions. What are the questions really asked by the people? They are related to their social, anthropological, economic and historical as well as psychological factors and we cannot do one side of it by neglecting the other side. This is where we find a merging of the disciplines. So we do not have to look at as separations – of the Historian, Economist or Sociologist. One can not answer the questions remaining fully within ones own discipline without interrogating other disciplines. The general question as it is posed in society is not a fragmented or a segmented one.

Samita Sen

I have been observing the outsider-insider controversy with some interest and entertainment. On the very first day, Nirmala Banerjee, our predecessor and pathsetter, began by calling herself an outsider. Historians who do not deal with women are outsiders. Women's studies scholars who are not historians are outsiders. This leaves most of the people in this room on the outside. I think the issue has arisen because of the framing of the title of the workshop. It is the term 'Women's History' to which we are talking when we call ourselves 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. Of course most of us end up in the outside since women's history as a discipline does not exist. It is not institutionalised as history is or women's studies is. It has not yet carved out a specific niche for itself either within the discipline of history or within women's studies. So in talking of ourselves as insiders or outsiders we are referring to a conceptual and contingent proposition. This is important to note because a lot of questions that have arisen in the course of this panel are about the fluidity of disciplinary boundaries and how these boundaries can appear to be defined in contextual ways at particular moments.

Tapati Guha Thakurta talked about two kinds of representations. First, the question of who speaks for whom. Nirmala Banerjee elaborated the point in the discussion afterwards. In the early days of my own doctoral research, which was on Women Workers in the Jute Industry in Bengal, a British co-researcher, Anthony Cox, argued with me that he, coming from a British working class family, a factory worker himself and a Marxist trade unionist, understood the situation of women jute workers in Calcutta better than I did. I was an elite Bengali woman and as such had less of an understanding of 'the working class situation'. He was implying that my distance from Bengal jute workers, even the women, was more than his and that I had no right to represent their voices or pronounce upon their politics. His own superior claim to do so was based both on being working class and an activist in working class politics. According to him, my ability to represent or talk about jute working-class women was based on a nebulous cultural sharing but more strongly on biology. His, on the contrary, was a political representation. He had no answer to my

proposition that women can represent women, not on the basis of biology, but on the basis of a political commitment to feminism. It is difficult even now for many Marxists to accept feminism as 'politics' in the same way as working class movements. Thus a feminist political representation is practically ruled out. History is, I think, replete with such questions. I agree with many of the panelists who have argued that many of the questions of women's history are not unique and that they have appeared in other historical debates earlier. The very terminology 'outsider – insider' appeared first in the context of working class movements. We have to see how the historians, their political agenda and the object of their histories are intertwined.

The other issue I would like to raise regarding women's history is the use of the term 'women'. Many scholars in the West now believe 'women' to be a deeply problematic category. Despite our assertion that 'women' is a political category, it is difficult to sustain a distance from biologism when we use the term, since there is no other way to define 'women' except by biology. The way out of this dilemma is to use the term 'gender' and to define it as a discursive category. Both in Indian women's studies and more specifically in Bengal's women's history, quite serious attempts have been made to take gender rather than 'women' as the category of analysis. It has been one way of drawing men into this field. We must not forget that after all Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakravarty has written what has turned out be the two most internationally influential essays on the subject. However, we are all slightly uncomfortable about such developments. The shift to gender in academic practice has tended to dilute, many of us feel, the feminist political edge. We have clung, therefore, to 'women's history' and to the term 'women' in a, not always conscious, commitment to the women's movement. There are many sensible arguments to defend this stand. I find myself both agreeing and disagreeing with Tapati Guha Thakurta. Band-wagons are the necessary adjunct of institutionalisation. Institutionalisation needs channelising funds and writing projects. This is true of any discipline and 'fashionable agenda' are ever-changing. At the same time institutionalisation creates certain limits. The creation of women's studies centres has made it more difficult to fully engage with a shift to gender. As a result, we keep moving between women and gender without seriously taking on board the theoretical or political implication of using the term gender instead of women. There is host of commonsensical ways in which we substitute gender for women without interrogating either. There is no reason why both cannot be used together. But they must be used differently. And, we have to be conscious of that difference. In this, I share Indrani's discomfort. When we adopt sophisticated categories like gender to make our academic work more rigorous we also become less comprehensible and objects of hostility in our political activity. The untranslability of the language of academic practice and its prejudices are often at odds with those of political movements. It is of course true that political movements, too, have such practices and prejudices, which set up barriers. Thus, the individual who wish to inhabit both these domains and to hold dialogue with both become particularly uncomfortable

Sumit's presentation reinforces the importance of the use of the term gender, especially in the context of history. Since the term 'women' continually inhabits both the world of biology and that of the social, examination of questions like historicisation of categories are better dealt with if we use the term gender. It is after all the term gender which opens up the possibilities of having fruitful dialogue with other categories like class, caste and community. For the historian, the term 'gender' is essential if we are to confront the politics of history.

Discussion

Kavita Punjabi

I am glad Samita brought up the question of academics and activists. We need to do more soul-searching to overcome barriers of communication. The problem lies in the absence, in India, of a distinction between women's and gender studies. In the field of development

there has been a conscious move from 'women' to 'gender'. Even in activist fora, there is a very strong consciousness of gender. I am not saying that activists have a deeper gender consciousness than academics. My question is whether we can choose between women's and gender history? Women history focuses on events and experience; gender focuses on discourse and representations. If we focus only on the latter we lose the former. At the same time, we must be critical about the way experiences are shaped, mitigated, influenced, transformed and articulated. Women's experience is a major site of social change and transformation. So far as discourse and representation are concerned, post-structuralism, within which they are situated, does not give us an alternative political vision. My own disciplinary critique prompts me to say that de-mythification is useful, but not ad infinitum. We have to be conscious when we combine women and gender perspectives. I, too, have problems in combining the two perspectives. Activists are more grounded in day-to-day reality while academics tend to deal more with discourse and representations. Our manners of articulation are shaped by our different concerns, but the differences are of emphasis and in the use of language rather than in perspective. To sum up, there is commonality and combinations of two perspectives but our differences lie at far deeper levels than merely the difference between 'gender' and 'women' perspectives

Samita Sen

Just a brief response. I was not talking about either 'women' or 'gender'. I was pointing to the need to be careful about our use of the two terms, and that we should not use one as a substitute for the other which we often tend to do.

Ratnabali Chatterjee

This dichotomy between activists and academics has come up repeatedly. I remember that at the Chandigar Conference I felt small, for the first time, for being an academic. In this workshop, the question has come up only at the last session perhaps because it has been so dominated by academics.

During the course of this workshop, we have been given another category to play with, 'experience'. Since Kavita brought up the question of post structuralism, I would like to raise the question of the subjective experience of opening up a text. The multiple ways in which subjectivity has a role to play assumes a more concrete shape for me now. I understand in very concrete terms what experience means – child birth, mortality at child birth – but there is something more to articulating experiences in a particular rhetoric, for me the rhetoric of history. We need to address these questions.

I would also like to point out the activists have been silent throughout these discussions, so I would like to invite some of them to speak.

Unidentified participant:

I am an activist not an academic. But I think we should work together and strengthen each other. I need feedback from you. Without your support, the movements, which we initiate in our narrow spheres, become diffused. Second, as an activist I have many questions about various changes taking place. On these too, I would like your feedback. I am a writer in a small way. I observe things around me – how women are living and what space they get in the family. These have prompted me to become an activist and these are problems on which I would like you to speak.

Nirmala Bannerjee

I belong to a much older generation, I did not get the benefit of a post modernist education. But I do not want to concede the term gender to such limited connotation. The term is useful to us not only to separate biology from sociological experience but also, as in my discipline, to give a control group. When you use gender you use men as a control group at every point.

So that what you are saying when you are saying that women are poor is that women are poorer than men of the same group and that this should be a matter of special concern. I am not happy to concede such usage.

Regarding something Sumit said about distinguishing among three kinds of sources – text, record and tracing. I would like to ask about the neutrality or objectivity of these different kinds of sources. Text is constructed for a certain purpose to represent a certain a point of view or position. Both traces and records are not as consciously created as text. Am I right?

Sumit Guha

The fact that a text was created is itself an evidence. So the fact that someone would construct a text with a particular overt message with a particular structure and so on tells us something about that person. Even a misleading communication must tell you something about the person attempting to mislead. In a sense, one has to read everything very carefully. There is a whole order of texts, for instance, very typical in traditional societies, which look back towards the past. You can recognise that kind of text and one has to be careful not to take it for an actual description of the time in which it was composed. There is no formula to work these things out. You can approach it as carefully as possible – and, of course, you may be wrong.

Ishita Mukherjee

The debate about women and gender is somewhat resolved in our discipline. Gender and development talks about the relative deprivation of women – relative to men.

To come to the question of the 'broad' movements, I was trying to indicate the kind of general movements that are part of the history of social change. Some of these movements have had a 'gender question' and some have not. It is the task of the women's movement or of women's studies to interrogate the absence or the forms of presence of 'gender' in the larger movements.

As in movements, so in the academy, women's studies has to interrogate gender bias. It would be a problem if gender issues were taken up automatically, as it has been, historically, in many countries.

Kavita Punjabi

Nirmaladi, it would be tragedy if we let post-structuralist language come between the older generation of feminists and younger ones. I do not think we are talking about different things. I used a short-hand, forgive me for that. I was talking about patriarchal control, which is premised in constructions of gender. Constructions are representations. So when we are talking about gender history, we can witness records of events of oppression, experiences of oppression only in through construction of gender. Gender history is absolutely crucial. I agree with you.

Asha Hans

About activists and academics – the first time I came across the conflict was in Canada. There was so much bitterness that I became curious. It appeared that activists thought that the academics had lots of money. Later, I heard from a group of activists in Bosnia that they no longer felt able to depend on academics because they found their language increasingly more difficult to understand. This latter is, I think, a very serious issue which we need to look at.

It is my pleasant task to thank everybody.

I would also like to say that while we began by saying that we would like to ask some questions, I think we have done much more than that. We have really added to many debates and if there was any question in anybody's mind regarding the rigours that we bring to our discipline, I think these two-days' exercise has put it to rest. May I then thank you all for making us feel respectable once again.

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Women in History

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Introduction

Veena Poonacha

In the rich cultural canvas of the sub-continent, Western India occupies a unique position: it has nurtured many great movements which have articulated some of the noblest human aspirations of liberty, equality and secularism. A critical dimension within these ideological currents, particularly since the 19th century, is that they have included the `woman question'.

Unravelling the multi-layered strands of this history indicate that women were not silent or passive; they have voiced their protest against the prevailing discriminatory socio-economic practices. Yet, within the framework of the historical wisdom which we have inherited, these voices remain silent, unheard and forgotten. It is essential to recover these voices from oblivion, to gather insights from women's lived experiences, struggles and contributions towards the making of human civilization, growth and progress.

Keynote Address

Maithreyi Krishna Raj

In a country as diverse as India, regional experiences vary enormously and each region has a specific history with regard to emancipatory movements, issues that became prominent, social-cultural features that retarded or promoted development, the quality of the leadership that emerged and the speed or tardiness with which major reforms were accomplished. As we approach a new millennium, it becomes important to understand what these trends in different places were in order not only to understand what works in say Maharashtra or Kerala and what does not in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh and why, but more importantly to learn from each other in identifying those background social conditions that are often critical to forging any new thrust. In one sense one may ask "Is not all the time looking back a rather wasteful exercise?" But if the purpose is to understand our diversity and the need to link policies and strategies to specific regional requirements it is well worth the effort.

In this context it is possible to ring an alarm bell over `successes' that turn into problems. A case in point is what has come to be known as the Kerala model, celebrated in development writing and given front rank status by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. His basic thesis being that Kerala has achieved an enviable record in human development indicators -- reduction of infant mortality, maternal mortality, high levels of education of both men and women, near univerrsal literacy, high standards of health, increase in life expectancy, reduction in fertility to levels pertaining to advanced countries and so on without much economic development entirely because of public action and women's agency.

Nonetheless, the thesis that social development is possible even without a thrust on economic growth has today translated into social development as a precondition for economic growth, for which East Asia is cited. While the first is true, the paradox, in the case of Kerala, is that social development of three decades did not translate into economic growth. Today these very successes celebrated as the Kerala model have produced problems. The lack of economic growth is threatening to erode the levels of social expenditure, as evident in the lower quality services and education. The state has a very high rate of unemployment.

Remittance due to the Gulf migration has benefited individual families particularly poor families but has not helped investment in industry which would have generated new employment. Strong unions across the state of organized and unorganized workers in agriculture and industry gave benefits in higher wages, but has discouraged industry and led to mechanization and flight of capital and labour to the neighbouring states.

In this scenario, women have been the worst hit: for the traditional sectors where women worked -- agriculture, coir, cashew -- were the ones that stagnated due to this flight of capital and labour. Gulf migration has brought in unforeseen changes in the socio-cultural norms. It has given rise to consumerism, men's alcoholism, violence against women and the rise of dowry. In addition it has created acute distress for many women coping on their own. Demographic success has led to an ageing female population facing serious degenerative health problems. Reduced fertility has also meant they have few family members to look after them. Yet mainstream scholarship highlights certain features only, e.g. a demographic miracle.

In addition, the mainstream answers to the riddle of Kerala deal with inefficient public sector enterprises, labour militancy and anti capital culture; it is only feminist historians who are looking within history into some fundamental flaws in the Kerala development. Professor Saradamoni has brought out the poignancy of the situation in her well documented research on the decline of matriliny and the ascendancy of patriarchal values. She has exploded several myths about matriliny and the popular versions that have gained currency in academic understanding. She shows how it was never uniform, it differed from caste and community. Further, it was not true that the male *Karanavan* wielded power and women had no authority or that in the reforms that were brought in women's voices were never heard. Why did this happen? She has unearthed some voices, but obviously these voices were a minority.

Today similarly, feminists point to the class reductionist politics in the much extolled `public action' of Kerala. While it is true that the public action benefited many and reduced the more stringent manifestations of caste dominance in the social, political, economic spheres, it did not assure any public space for women. A state that has such remarkable record in so many ways has no strong women's movement.

From the point of writing history and making history the above experience of a special place in the country, so special in so many ways, illustrates a few things. A feminist consciousness is necessary to dig below the surface, to uncover underlying flaws, to recover lost voices and to ask the right questions. The very uniqueness of that regional history improves conceptualization of issues. For example, what exactly is women's agency? How we trace the historical origins of present day problems also raises some fundamental problems in re-reading history. Our understanding of the past is always coloured from today's perspective and consciousness. Why did the Kerala women not see the reforms in matriliny as inimical to their future? Was it the influence of new ideas about family, about individualism? Was there some gain for individual women within their families? Similarly we see female education as a good in itself, it is true but in a context of insufficient opportunities it becomes a negative good, people prefer unemployment to doing manual labour. Or education becomes part of the marriageability. The content of education is again another matter. In re-constructing events to demonstrate `agency' or victimhood, one may be reading history selectively.

What happens to a particular group of women may have to be seen in the context of broader social, political changes in the society. This makes the feminist historians' task enormously difficult. They need several skills, a broad understanding of the region they are studying. Often to an outsider, however informed and however sincere, cultural specificities may escape them. I remember how at some seminars in SNDT when foreigners presented their research on Indian women we were often aghast at their assumptions and their interpretations. So, not only does this pose problems for women of one region studying another, it may well apply to women of one era studying women of another time frame! I would like to add just one more reservation before passing on to the business of today. In the methodology of Women's Studies we are often advocating `qualitative methods' as opposed to the dull and dreary surveys that obliterate real lives behind numbers. I have no quarrel with using case studies, ethnomethods, or personal narratives, there is, nonetheless, an inherent danger of authenticity in these alternatives. For instance, in some recent personal narratives of three generations of women, a woman wrote of heroic struggles and portrayed her ex-spouse as a "terrible, unfeeling monster".

This protrayal was untrue and did not correspond to the reality which many people knew. To gain the heroic feminist image there was so much self-glorification and so much denigration of others.

Similarly, another feminist claimed that she went through great privation and led the life of a working class woman scrubbing vessels or worse in peoples' homes to afford her education. She comes from an extremely privileged background and all this story of de-classing was to earn the mantle of heroism. Narratives are controlled entirely by the narrator and there is no way of checking the authenticity. This methodology needs to be handled cautiously. Every woman's battle does not deserve a *Param Vir Chakra*.

Some of the important areas of study in regional histories would include women's struggles from the grassroots. The recovery of the history of women's movements largely focus on the initiatives of a few visible and articulate organizations. It is necessary to look beyond and capture the experiences of those women who work silently for the upliftment of women. In this connection Women's Studies centres can play a crucial archaeological role by setting priorities for their research. Each regional centre should be able to document, analyze events, policies, organizations in their own region so that a reliable account becomes available and little known happenings become media worthy.

Apart from this, such material needs more exchange between regions. Yet unfortunately every seminar draws on the same `national' figures; we do not get enough opportunity to get to know what is happening in Orissa or the North East or Assam. This exchange of scholars and material must be sustained. It is not enough to provide translations in English. We really need to move in a big way to translate into other regional languages. This is done in Marathi and Gujarati and so many here are already doing that. But I mean it should go beyond individual or small efforts and get into commercial publishing. Like we have the Panchayat Raj update or the state wise special issues in some journals our Women's Studies journals could focus on regional history and bring out state specials. To locate new insights into women's histories, it may be necessary to tap alternative sources. This would perhaps include regional culture studies and the Ph.D. material produced in the various universities.

To conclude we have moved into difficult times when yesterday's solutions may not work, yesterday's theories may need recasting, demand reappraisals. In the struggle to reaffirm the plurality of Indian civilization, we have also to recognize the plurality within the women's movement and work out how to build bridges. Questions of identity, subject-hood, representation, agency are challenges to the hitherto comfortable assumptions of feminist solidarity.

First Session
Issues of Economy and Polity

Chair: *Maithreyi Krishana Raj*

Divya Pandey

Economic Role of Women in Western India during the 19th Century
A Historical Analysis

In the early 19th century, agriculture (as in other parts of the country), was the mainstay of the rural economy in Western India. Alongside agriculture, the village economy included crafts, spinning, weaving, cattle rearing, and the manufacture of agricultural tools. Women were an integral part of this system based on community interdependence. The early 19th century gazetteers provide glimpses of women's work and the prevailing sexual division of labour.

Women's participation, nonetheless, was largely determined by caste/class considerations. Women from the upper caste/class households (such as the Brahmins, Rajputs and Marathas as well as the merchant communities) were confined to the household, unless there were economic compulsions. In such instances, these women supported themselves through the preparations of wicks or by spinning cotton. Women from the peasant communities participated in agriculture, especially during sowing, transplanting and harvesting seasons, while women from the artisan castes were responsible for the subsidiary activities of each craft. The gazetteers report, for instance, that women did the sorting, reeling, spinning, sizing, warping, heddle-filling, joining and arranging all pre-processing of silk weaving. They were also skilled in blanket weaving, textile printing and dyeing, oil pressing, pottery, bamboo-work, food-processing, etc. It may thus be inferred that women had some control over family resources.

The colonial rule undermined the prevailing economic system. At the outset, the British neglected agriculture and rural industries. To secure their economic and political hegemony, for instance, the British concentrated on the building of railways. Their modification of the *ryotwari* land revenue system, to enable the growth of private property, eroded the indigenous concept of joint-ownership of property. Commercial crops, other than cotton, received a setback. The promotion of cotton cultivation in the Deccan was to meet the demand for raw material from the Manchester mills. In turn, the markets were flooded with cheap cotton textiles to the detriment of the indigenous handloom industry. The decline of rural industries, on the one hand, created a pressure on land, on the other, led to rural-urban migration. Women too migrated in search of jobs in the textile mills. These women were employed in spinning, weaving, cotton pressing and cleaning. After 1930, due to the introduction of Factory Legislations, there was a sudden decline in women's labour force participation.

Kunjalata Shah

Marginalization of Women in Colonial Economy:
A Case Study of Ahmedabad (1818-1915)

Through a critical examination of historical records (such as government, census and annual factory reports), as well as the Gujarati literature and folklore of the period, this paper analyses the colonial impact on women's economic participation in Ahmedabad, in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Its findings corroborate with the studies of scholars from other parts of India, that colonial economic policies adversely affected women's productive roles.

Ahmedabad, the prime city of Gujarat, was a thriving commercial and industrial centre in the pre-Colonial period. Famed for its paper, metal, woodwork and textile industries, its fortunes were said to have hung on three threads -- silk, cotton and gold. Women (from all castes, communities and income levels) worked in these manufacturing processes as well as in the indigenous handicraft industries. They were predominant in spinning, an important home-based industry, and comprised half the labour force in the silk and *kinkhab* (brocade) industries. Working either from home or in workshops, they participated in the sorting, reeling, winding, and printing processes.

The establishment of British rule in 1818 created major economic discontinuities -- a point acceded to in the official report of 1879. For instance, the influx of cheap machine-made English goods (especially yarn and fabrics), changing fashions and the establishment of textile mills (since 1861) undermined the indigenous handloom industry. It adversely affected women's work participation, particularly from communities (such as the Kunbis and the Muslims), who observed male/female segregation. So complete was this destruction of spinning as a home-based industry, that Gandhiji could not find spinning wheels in the city when he wanted to revive it in 1915. The

decline of other indigenous industries (such as *kinkhab*, silk, and paper), also marginalized women.

The initial phase of industrialization, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, opened new avenues of work for women from the lower castes such as the Wagharis and the Kolis. They were employed in reeling, winding, cotton-picking and as steam operated frame minders. The reduction of the number of working hours for women to eleven in the Factories Act of 1861, resulted in the retrenchment of 259 working women, the transfer of others to the less paying reeling and winding departments and the overall reduction of their wages by 25 per cent. Women's protests against the Act were futile; the Annual Factory Reports from 1892 onwards show a steady decline in their work participation. The predominance of male workers in the mills created an imbalance in the city's population. The last quarter of the 19th century, however, saw the entry of women from the middle castes/classes into professions such as teaching and nursing.

Neelima Bhave

Political Transition and its Impact on the Position of Women in Society: Maharashtra in 17th, 18th and Early 19th Centuries

Mainstream history has largely focussed on the fortunes of royal dynasties, wars and politics; to a lesser extent, it has examined the socio-economic conditions of the people. Women have been invisible within this framework of recorded history. In an attempt to recover women's histories, this paper examines the impact of political transition on the position of women in Maharashtra in the 17th, 18th and the early 19th centuries. The history of Maharashtra since the 12th century is broadly divided into the six epochs comprising the Yadavs, Muslims, Marathas, Peshwas, British and post-Independence periods. There is little information on the social conditions of the people until the advent of the Marathas. The rise of the Maratha political power under Shivaji in the mid-17th century did not alter the prevailing socio-economic structure. This was because the Marathas were the political elite in the previous regime: the Maratha Deshpandes held large fiefs, while the Patils were the village headmen. Each of them were assisted by the Deshmukhs and the Kulkarnis respectively in the collection of land revenue and maintenance of land records. The social scene was thus dominated by the Maratha *Watandars*.

As these positions were hereditary, the prevalence of family ideology is apparent. The women jealously guarded the family entitlements. Royal/aristrocrat women conspired to enhance and protect the power and prestige of their husbands and sons. In such a social situation, women could not lay claim, in their own right, to any public offices; their power and social positions were defined through that of their men. These women, nonetheless, had a private income known as *choli bangdi*. They were also entitled to a share in property, which they rarely claimed.

Mistresses and illegitimate children of the royal or aristocratic men were also not without rights. It also appears that the law protected the rights of ordinary women, such as maid servants (*kunbins*) and dancing girls. It punished anyone who offended the dignity of these women. Grant Duff, the first modern historian of the Marathas has written that unlike women from other parts of India, women in Maharashtra enjoyed freedom of movement and were treated equal to men.

The socio-political importance of the Brahmins was marginal until the advent of the Peshwas. Their political ascendancy under the Peshwas privileged Brahmanical norms of ritualistic religion and caste/gender hierarchies. This led to the decline in the status of women until the 19th century social reform movement.

Discussions

The key discussion points partly focussed on sources of history and partly shed further light on women's economic participation. Discussing the sources of history, it was pointed out that the absence of archival material to reconstruct women's economic history would require a quest for other sources, such as oral histories, folk songs, trade union records, etc. The kind of sources used would be determined by the period of history.

Ancient and medieval history could be reconstructed through the use of epigraphic sources. These sources often reveal the control that women had over land and other resources: For it occasionally records the large donations made by women to the various temples. The reconstruction of women's economic history during the colonial period, would require an examination of the official revenue records and gazetteers. Undoubtedly these records were largely concerned with land division and revenue matters; nonetheless, it is possible to glean snippets of information about women's work force participation from these records. Court records are useful sources of information. Women would figure in them in cases of disputes. A fresh look at these records could shed light on women's economic participation and control over resources.

Further reconstructing women's work force participation in Western India, it was suggested that contrary to the dominant image that women were primarily involved only in household industries, there is evidence that women also participated in the market economy. Despite the prevalence of the *purdah* in Gujarat, several Kayasth women were vegetable vendors. The various artisan/caste guilds in the pre-Colonial era were able to produce for the market and even for exports. They also employed women. The prevailing *purdah* norms had led to a `putting out system'.

There is also a change in the caste composition of women in various industries. For instance, previously beedi rolling was predominantly done by women from the schedule castes;while now it is increasingly being done by women from the backward castes. By juxtaposing official records with women's oral sources it is possible to reconstruct how women's work force participation was affected by factory legislations. Furthermore, contrary to the dominant image of women's passivity, it is apparent that they did participate in trade union struggles in the last decade of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

Discussions further highlighted how historical periodization is modified when examined from the standpoint of women and subsequently veered to the possible parallels between the development of capitalism in Europe/North America and India.

It was pointed out that the western theorizing of patriarchy had a hazy notion of Indian patriarchy/capitalist systems. Some of the areas which need further research are women's work and control over resources, notions of sexual division of labour, household economics, free trade, globalization, the impact of mechanization and large-scale factory production on women's work participation. Another important area of research would be the current trend of de-industrialization of Mumbai.

Second Session
Women's Education in Western India

Chair: *Mani Kamerkar*

Padma Velaskar

The Caste-Patriarchy Nexus in Educational Development:
Dalit Women's Education in the Late 19th and the Early 20th Century Maharashtra

The feminist project of recovering women's histories has paid scant attention to the Dalit (previously Mahar, presently Buddhist) women's struggles and to the impact of social change on their lives. Similarly, the extant data on Dalit history is replete with accounts of men's struggles, politics and changing consciousness, but fails to focus on women, caught in the intersection of caste and gender. This neglect in historical writings successfully denies Dalit women their agency and consciousness.

In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, education was seen as a means of social transformation. To the Colonial rulers, it was part of their enlightening mission; to the nationalist it was the means of social change. Education also commanded a powerful and symbolic value to a wide range of emancipatory movements, such as the reformist, anti-caste, Dalit and feminist. Since Independence, education continues to remain a discursive site for contesting socio-political ideologies.

Against this background, the study recovers Dalit women's histories -- their struggles and the development of their caste/gender consciousness in Maharashtra -- from historical documents (on education as well as the Dalit, social reform and the women's movements), autobiographies, speeches and writings (appearing in early issues of the magazine *Janta*).

The study reveals the interfacing of caste/gender in modern ideologies and politics, which has affected the spread of education in Dalit societies. It shows that the educational discriminations encountered by the community and individuals have determined the contours of women's consciousness. Further, it makes evident that the educational system, on the one hand, attempts to maintain the prevailing social hierarchies; on the other, it creates pockets of resistance and empowerment among the marginal and vulnerable groups of people.

Nina Haeems and Sonal Shukla

Dual but Not Divided Loyalties: Rebecca Reuben (1889-1957)

This intriguing title stems from a phrase used by Rebecca Reuben in an open letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. It neatly encapsulates the dual identities of women from the minority communities -- as Indians and as members of their own communities.

The presentation is part of a larger exploration of Rebecca Reuben's life and personality in context of the times in which she lived. The twin objectives of the study are as follows: 1) uncover the process which makes invisible the contributions of women from a small minority community; 2) reconstruct the social history of women from the progressive Bene Israel (Children of Israel) community (indigenously known as the Shanwar Telis, oil producers who do not work on Saturdays), who had settled on the west coast of India for centuries.

There is no historical record of their arrival and settlement. Tradition has it that they were shipwrecked off the Konkan coast at Navgaon. At different periods, a traveller, a Cochin Jew, and the Protestant missionary John Wilson discovered their Jewish identity.

In course of time this community had become farmers and artisans. In the 19th century many Bene Israel men joined the British army as soldiers and non-Commissioned officers. The first one to complete university education was Abraham Samuel Nagavkar who became an engineer. His daughter Sarah was Rebecca Reuben's mother.

Born in 1889 Rebecca Reuben emerged as a quiet community leader committed to the education of children and welfare of the Jews in India. A brilliant student, she was the first woman to top the Matriculation examination of the Bombay University in 1905 (which at that time covered the geographical area from Goa to Karachi). She chose to become a teacher, acquired teaching qualifications in England and headed the Israelite school in Bombay that developed into a major institution under her. She published articles and journals in Marathi and in English. Her Ashoka Readers were perhaps the most popular series of English readers created for students in non-English medium schools a few years after Independence. She was a member of the Board of Education of the erstwhile Bombay State and of a number of public institutions. And yet there is no reference to her in any of the writings on Mumbai or in any work on women's history in Maharashtra.

One reason for the erasure of Rebecca Reuben from history may be because of the high degree of migration of Indian Jews to Israel after 1948. A lot of research in women's history has been confined to the researchers' own communities, to the exclusion of the histories of women from other communities.

S.R. Shirgaonkar

Efforts of Protestant Christian Missionaries in Maharashtra for Women's Education (1813-1950)

This study delineates the efforts of Protestant missionaries in Maharashtra to promote women's education from 1813 to 1950 -- a period characterized by the rise and decline of British colonial power as well as the Indian social reform and nationalist response to it. Paving the way to the establishment of missionary enterprise in the areas under the East India Company dominion, was the Chapter Act of 1813. It encouraged Christian proselytization from United States of America, England, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Germany.

These missionaries (as part of their evangelical activities) established orphanages, shelters and schools. As the prevailing gender inequalities figured prominently in the missionary discourse, the missionaries established schools for girls. The first girls' school opened in Bombay was by the American Marathi Mission in 1823. Their effort led to the establishment of girls' schools in Ahmadnagar, Poona, Nashik and Khandesh districts by many missionary organizations. In course of time, it led to the establishment of high schools, boarding schools and teacher training centres.

The credit of opening higher educational institutions for women also goes to the Protestant missionaries. Their pioneering efforts enabled two girls to sit for the matriculation examination of the University of Bombay in 1884; subsequently, the Protestant-run Wilson College was the first to admit women into its programmes.

The primary school curriculum focussed on reading, writing, arithmetic and singing. The secondary school syllabus included History and Geography. The introduction of the grant-in-aid in 1858, required that the schools accept the curriculum framed by the Government. Nonetheless, the missionary schools continued to teach Bible Knowledge, needlework, knitting and embroidery along with co-curricular activities such as the girl guide movement, first-aid training, sports, debating, competitions and cookery.

To counter the prevailing prejudice against girls' education, the missionaries had to cajole and sometimes coerce families and communities. For apart from the feeling that education was unnecessary for women, there was a superstition that education would make a woman a widow. The other obstacles to women's education included: 1) the burden of housework on girls; 2) early marriage; and 3) the absence of women teachers. To overcome this problem, the missionaries opened "Normal Classes" to train teachers. There is a reference to a woman teacher called Chimani, in an 1818 report of the American Marathi Mission. It may be presumed that Chimani, who is referred to as a teacher about thirty before Savitribai Phule became a teacher, might have been the first woman teacher in Maharashtra.

Discussions

As in the previous session, the discussion in this session also focussed on historiography, theoretical issues and certain dimensions of women's history. Focussing on the various sources of women's history, such as autobiographies, oral histories, as well as other secondary and primary sources, the discussion interfacing of caste/class and gender identities. The Dalit assertion of identity, for instance, ensured that some benefits percolated to the community as a group; nonetheless, these benefits rarely reached women, who continue to perform their traditional occupations.

Further the rhetorics of the Dalit movement appropriates the oppression of Dalit women. Yet, the movement has not been able to overcome the prevailing inegalitarian gender ethos within the community. Dalit women are silenced because of their dual burden of caste and gender identity. To speak of their gender oppression is often seen as betraying the larger community interests. Yet to remain silent would imply that the status quo continues. The discussion subsequently veered on the need to reconstruct the history of women from the various marginal/minority groups. Discussing the contributions of missionaries to women's education, it was pointed out that although at the outset, proselytization was the motive for the establishment of schools, in course of time this goal took a back stage, for the Protestant schools in Western India had to follow the curriculum laid by the government.

Third Session
Expressions of Identity

Chair: *C.S. Lakshmi*

Neera Desai

From Articulation to Affirmation: Autobiographical Writings of Women in Gujarat

In comparison with Bengali and Marathi, autobiographical writings in Gujarati are few -- a point noted by many mainstream writers. Topiwalla's compilations from Gujarati autobiographies for the Sahitya Academy mention that the Gujarati language does not have a significant number of personal narrations or visionary narrations. What is available comprises reminiscences couched in cultural values which do not refer to the event as experienced but more as a happening. Out of the 110 autobiographies he identified, Topiwalla selected 45 extracts and among them there are only three selections from women's autobiographies.

Similarly bemoaning the lack of autobiographical writings in Gujarati, Parab (1996) says, "Nearly a century has passed after the commencement of autobiographical literature in Gujarati, we have however only two or three autobiographical writings and about five or six biographies." What is evident is that there are very few autobiographical

writings in Gujarati even when we widen the definition to include diaries, letters, etc. Among them, Gandhiji's autobiography sets a very high standard for personal narration. It indicates the need to write about the growth of one's self along with an accurate depiction of the social events.

The quest for women's autobiographies and personal narratives has its roots in the early consciousness raising sessions organised by women's groups to enable women to articulate their experiences, inner conflicts and to break the silence imposed on them by patriarchy. This quest for women's personal narratives is partly to reconstruct women's histories and partly to decipher the emergence of women's selfhood through such writings.

The present paper discusses women's personal narratives as represented in the writings of Sharada Mehta (1938), Dahigauri (1870) and Swarup Dhruv (1995). 1) Shardaben Mehta's autobiography provides interesting glimpses of women's struggles for education and participation in public life while carrying on with the burden of household duties; 2) Dahigauri's narrative written as a dialogue between herself and her husband Narmad, a well-known social reformer cannot strictly be classified as an autobiography; nonetheless it provides the sub text of women's resistance to patriarchy. When Narmad decides to marry a widow, he asks his wife where she would like to stay? In reply, she says that she would like to stay with him and in the process demolishes his arguments to reveal his patriarchal assumptions; and 3) Swarup Dhruv, in her narrative, describes the development of her selfhood and her conflicts with the mainstream literary circles. She finds fulfilment when she merges herself with the cause of the masses. These autobiographies provide significant insights into women's lived experiences and development of selfhood.

Pushpa Bhave

Women's Autobiographies in Maharashtra

Autobiographical writings and personal narratives by women have been in vogue in Maharashtra since the early decades of British rule. The genesis of this form of personal expressions can probably be traced to the *Varkari* traditions of the medieval period, when the *Bakti* saint poets like Janabai and Muktabai spoke of their life experiences in verse. These early autobiographical outpourings were couched in religious metaphors in contrast with the genre of personal narratives in prose that have emerged since the British period.

Given the overriding culture of silence imposed upon women under patriarchy, a critical question which arises when examining women's autobiographies is what motivated them to speak out. This question is crucial when we consider that there are more women's autobiographical accounts in Maharashtra than Gujarat. As Neera Desai has pointed out, there are few a autbiographical accounts in Gujarat. In contrast, Maharashtra has a rich legacy of women's autobiographical accounts.

Some of the prominent 19th century/early 20th century women's autobiographies include: *Smriti Chitre* by Lakshmibai Tilak (1868-1936) and *Amchya Ayushyati Kahi Athawani* (Memoirs of Our Life Together) by Ramabai Ranade (1826-1924). These narratives can be called biographies of their husbands rather than autobiographies. When both husband and wife have written their respective life stories, it is possible to delineate the differences in their preoccupations. For instance, Maharshi Karve sought to reinterpret the *kanyadhan* ceremony in the Hindu marriage as *atmadhan*, but this issue does not find mention in the narrative of Godutai. She also ends her narrative with a tantalizing statement, "If your husband marries again, what is wrong?" She also advises a widow to remain silent about the unwanted advances made by men. For she says that in the prevailing society, the blame is somehow pinned on the single woman. The recent trend of autobiographical writing by women tends to glorify the self. A case is the autobiography of Suneeta Despande "And Pine for What Is Not...".

While analyzing these accounts, we need to consider the construction of truth and falsehood. Apart from the problems of retrospective falsification which are likely to be present in personal narratives, there are also problems of subjectivity and occasionally, falsification. These factors should not be considered limitations of autobiographies as histories: for what is written and left unsaid, what is personal and not mentioned, or even falsification tells us something about the social context which creates these imperatives. For instance, the *tamasha* artistes will not admit to their caste background. They will imply that they entered the profession, because of their love for the art rather than because they were born into it.

Usha Thakkar & Makrand Mehta

Sadguni Hemantkumari: Samaj-Sudharani Varta (the Story of Social Reform): A Woman's Perspective of Social Reform

The Colonial critique of Indian society and its treatment of women posed a dilemma to the Indian elite. They were confronted with making a choice between retaining the age-old customs, rituals and traditions on the one hand, and on the other, reforming society to incorporate progressive values. Underlying this dilemma was a feeling that while it was necessary to remove some of the more blatant forms of discriminations, there was a need to retain the deeply entrenched cultural roots. This paper explores the dilemma faced by Gujarati society in transition as delineated in the first Gujarati novel penned by a woman writer, Krishnagauri Hiralal Raval (1871-1950).

The novel, *Sadguni Hemantkumari: Samaj-Sudharani Varta (the Story of Social Reform)*, examines the social reform agenda from the standpoint of women. It begins with an autobiographical sketch, in which the author says that she was born in an Audichya Sahastra Brahmin family at Lunavada, Panchmahal district. Married at eleven to Hiralal Vidyaram Raval, she was able to continue her education and become a school teacher with her husband's encouragement. The turning point of her life was when she won the Campbell scholarship to do a three-year teacher training course at the Mahalakshmi Female Training College, Ahmedabad. This course strengthened her resolve to dedicate her life to women's upliftment through teaching and writing.

Written in a simple direct style, the story revolves around the young, educated, talented and virtuous Hemantkumari who was married against her wish to a rake. Fettered by social customs and her husband's oppression, she seeks solace in reading, writing and building friendships with other educated women. The story unfolds as conversations between Hemantkumari and her friends on the various social reform issues such as the Age of Consent Bill, women's education, health and compatibility in marriage.

The aim of the novel is very clear: it is to sensitize women about their social oppressions. Yet, the writer does not impose her views on others; she tries to lend voice to different viewpoints through the conversations and discussions the protagonist, Hematkumari, has with her friends.

This dramatic technique of dialogues and discussions successfully captures women's voices, with all the immediacy and pathos of their lived experiences, at a turning point of the socio-cultural history of Gujarat. The period was dotted with several well-known social reformers including Durgaram Mehtaji, Narmad, Karsandas Mulji, Madhavdas Rugnath, Mahipatram, Dalpatram, Navairam and Govardhan Tripathi as well as conservatives like Manilal Nabhubhai Dwivedi.

The Impact of Migration on Patidar Women of Charotar

The data for this study emerged out of an ongoing research project on the Patidars of Charotar. It indicates the impact of migration on the institutions of family, kinship and marriage, leading to changes in gender relationships.

The current trend of escalating international migration of Indians has a long history, particularly in Gujarat. It can be traced back to the 13th century, when traders (mainly Muslims) migrated to East Africa and set up businesses. This sporadic trend became more deeply entrenched with the advent of the British and the introduction of indentured labour in 1834. Indians were sent to Africa, the Caribbean and other Asian countries as indentured workers. These workers (mainly men but also women) were exploited and abused. The women in particular were subjected to sexual exploitation.

The Patidars are an upwardly mobile, middle ranking Hindu community who have migrated since the 19th and early 20th centuries to East Africa and to other Indian states. Over a period of time, it is possible to discern a change in the pattern of migration. The earliest migrations during the British period were indentured workers; in the later phase, it was on the basis of work permits provided by the early settlers. These work permits were obtained on the basis of marriage alliances between the sons/daughters of the migrants and the Patidars in India. Thus marriage became an important cyclical reason for migration. Many educated Patidar men who went to East Africa to marry daughters from `Africawala' families return to Charotar to find marriage partners for their children from within the marriage circle. Such marriages were referred to as `Permittan Lagn' as they were contracted to ensure the man's chance of migration. The man in such marriages was often dependent on his wife's family who helped him to find a job and settle down. These facilities could be termed as `indirect dowries'. These women are in a relatively better bargaining position in marriage compared to women who migrate after marriage.

By and large, these marriages for migration (particularly the more recent migrations to western countries) have created a cultural transformation. The girls are socialized into aspiring for marriages with a man from abroad. Further the demand for sons-in-law from abroad leads to increased dowry demands and harassment of women for dowry. Women migrating after marriage find themselves isolated and without support. This vulnerability is particularly acute among women who do not accompany their husbands but are forced to remain with their in-laws after marriage.

The growth of a culture of migration has also created needless differences in the community. The growth of endogamous marriage circles creates divisions among the villages of the region. Certain village communities (such as Chagam, Panchgam, Bavisgam, Satavisgam, etc.) command a higher status in the marriage circle due to the size of the village, fertility of the land and the relative wealth of the village. This status was also enhanced through their increased access to education and jobs during the British period.

Discussions

Drawing parallels between the experiences of recovering women's autobiographies in Tamil, Marathi and Gujarati, it was stated that women's narratives had a distinct regional perspective. There were also different standards by which women's and men's autobiographies were judged. An autobiography of a Tamil woman called Ponni is silent about her husband, leading to conjectures and criticism. A similar omission in an

autobiography of a man would not be criticized. Women's autobiographies focus on the private domain of the family and kinship; it may not necessarily focus on the public domain of politics and social change. For instance, Godutai Karve's autobiography does not discuss the nationalist struggles.

An interesting question raised was what motivates women to write about their lives -- is it narcissism? Another suggestion was the development of a consciousness of the self (facilitated by the social reform movement) which led to the spate of autobiographies in Maharashtra. If so, why did the social reform movement not have a similar effect on writing of autobiographies in Gujarat?

Autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters and novels are all useful sources of history. They lend an indepth understanding to historical events and official histories. By juxtaposing them it is possible to understand the impact of social change on women's lived experiences. The novel Sadguni *Hemant Kumari*, for instance, shows that women actively engaged in a discussion on the 19th century social reform agenda. They were not, as constructed in mainstream history, merely passive subjects of the social reform agenda, which was carried out by men.

Fourth Session
Cultural Representation

Chair: *Pushpa Bhave*

Varsha Shirgaonkar

Erotic Lavanis: An Agenda for Sex-Power Mechanism

This paper attempts to apply Michel Foucault's theoretical formulations on sexuality and power to the historical development of *lavani*, a form of folk music and dance in Maharashtra, into an erotic art by examining the *Peshwe Daftar* and *Peshwe Diaries*. The origin of *lavani* is obscure. It is conjectured that its musical exposition preceded its crystalization into a dance form. At the outset, the *lavani* was not necessarily erotic, as many of them were invocatory songs/dances dedicated to a deity or a city. Its association with eroticism and the explicit portrayal of women's bodies probably pre-dates the Shivaji era, when it came to be allied with *tamasha* (a form of countryside entertainment in vogue since the Yadav rule). Known as the *fadachi lavani* (the *lavani* of a troupe), this form aimed at arousing male sexual desire.

There is no indication that it received court patronage during the reign of Shivaji. It received court patronage during the rule of the last two Peshwas, Sawai Madhavrao (1775-1795 A.D.) and Bajirao II (1795-1818 A.D.), leading to its development into an erotic dance. Known as *baithakichi lavani* (an exclusive musical recital), it developed into a more sophisticated exposition than the *fadachi lavani*. The practice of bringing women artistes (Kalavantins) from other states (in existence since the time of Shahu) led to its enrichment.

The political decadence during the reigns of the last two Peshwas led to the emasculation of the elite. Yet paradoxically, the heroines in the *lavanis* continued to glorify masculinity. Women's sexuality is thus used by men to regain their masculinity. Many of the *lavanis* portray the heroine as a nubile twelve-year old with full-blown sexual desires. This connection with physical maturation and sexual desires in India goes back to the hoary past when girls were seen as fit for marriage and motherhood as soon as they reached puberty.

The songs and gestures in the *lavanis* contain many sexual innuendoes and double entendres. Women's bodies are metaphorically described as fruits and flowers to be enjoyed by men. Following the downfall of the Peshwa rule, the artistes lost their royal

patronage and became destitutes. A few artistes maintained the precinct purity of the *baithakichi lavani*, while the others joined the *fadachi lavani* troupes, leading to further exploitation of the woman. In the 18th century, many of the *lavani* artistes were men enacting women's roles. In the 19th century, these male artistes were replaced by women from the lower castes such as the Mahars and Kolhatis. This indicates the ways in which the bodies of lower class women were seen as objects of enjoyment by the upper class men, while the sexuality of women from their own caste/class groups were adjudged differently.

Aditi Desai

Tribal Theatre

This paper was based on a project undertaken with funds from the McArthur foundation to popularize health awareness among the tribals through the use of alternative media. The project also attempted to revive tribal culture/theatre and history. It aimed at breaking the culture of silence and experimenting with developing women consciousness and self-awareness through their participation in an all women theatre group.

This process was a learning experience for the organizers: it shifted their perception of Indian history away from the dominant paradigm. For instance, they realize that the knowledge of India's mythical past (as depicted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata) was not widely known. This questioned the dominant assumption of a pan Indian identity of these epics. The tribal history presented a different viewpoint of Indian History. Attempts by the organizers to enact the Ramayana and Mahabharata in the tribal theatre resulted in a new interpretation of the epics, which carried within it the egalitarian gender code prevalent in the tribal areas. This tribal theatre also recovered local history and the experiences of women as lived through the vicissitudes of calamities, such as drought and famine.

Maitree Vaidya

The Goddess Image of Women in the Folk Tales of Kutch

The use of folk tales to reconstruct regional history has so far received scant attention, but nonetheless remain a rich source of information. Comprising legends, myths and other narratives on the one hand, they reflect the prevailing norms and value systems, while on the other provide glimpses of significant historical events that are imprinted in the collective psyche. Emerging out of the oral traditions of the community, folk tales reflect the specific socio-cultural and historical exigencies confronting the community. They are particularly useful in the reconstruction of women's history, for women's voices and lived experiences are neglected in the written history.

Undoubtedly, the use of oral narratives in the reconstruction of history has certain limitations: 1) they cannot be fitted into a suitable time-frame; and 2) they are often couched in supernatural beliefs and are modified over a period of time so that their historical relevance are barely discernible. Moreover, many of the narratives are generic and are found across the narrow geo-physical boundaries with minor variations. This however does not mitigate their relevance in understanding the social history of a region or a historical period of time. For instance, one of the reasons why scholars deduce that women enjoyed a high status in the Vedic Aryan period is because of the references to the goddesses in the Rig Vedas. Yet strangely in the reconstruction of subsequent history, there is very little reference to the goddess tradition.

Vested with the power to protect devotees from ailments, famines, and other natural calamities, the goddess images largely reflect the prevailing ideals of the mother

and wife roles. Indicating a similar pattern of goddess worship are folk tales from Kutch, a drought prone and inhospitable region, geographically isolated by a sea on one side and a desert on the other.

The goddesses that are worshipped in Kutch include: 1) Aai Ashapura (also known as the kuldevi of the Kutch, Jagaria Mata, Guglimata and Ashar), worshipped predominantly by the Jadeja Rajputs; 2) Ravechimata, the kuldevi of the Deda Rajputs of the Jadeja clan, whose temple was supposedly built by the legendary Pandavas and subsequently rebuilt in 1328 by Maldevji, the ruler of Anhilpur Patan and again in 1879, by Mataji Shambai Giriji; 3) the Avadi mata revered by the Charans; and 4) Shitalama and Habamata endowed with the power to cure smallpox and overcome drought respectively. Occasionally ordinary women (such as Gundal mata, Sangvari mataji) are exalted for their ascetism or because they have upheld family honour by committing sati. However contrasting with this stereotypical process of deification is the story of a woman of exemplary courage, Manbai who ended her life because she failed to keep her promise to protect the cattle belonging to the lower caste.

Discussions

Given the diversity of themes in this session, the comments were extremely varied. Broadly speaking, some of the discussion points in this session centred around the sources of historical knowledge. On the one hand, it was pointed out that the use of folklore was important to bring together the Little and the Great Indian Traditions. This recovery was of paramount importance: for the oral sources, with the migration of the tribals to the cities, their oral cultures were disappearing. The problem of using myths and folklore was that of periodization and assessing the historical veracity of the sources.

On the other hand, it was pointed out that the written texts were not apolitical. For instance, would it be historically accurate to use Colonial accounts to judge Indian princes? The experience from other regions has been that whenever the British wanted to establish their ascendancy in a particular region, they charged the prince or the other ruling elite of the region with debauchery, licentiousness and other excesses. Therefore, is it fair to characterize the last two Peshwas as debauched? The reply given to this query was that the effiminacy of the last two Peshwas was also evident in the indigenous papers. Here again, the group provided another interpretation of the Peshwa behaviour. Citing the presence of the British Resident in the region, it was pointed out debauchery was literally thrust upon them, once their political power and military functions were taken away by the Colonial state. Information was also provided to the classical roots of *lavanis*, which invariably began with the invocation of *shlokas* in Sanskrit. It was also pointed out that women did not participate in the *lavanis* during the Peshwa rule. It was men dressed as women who danced and sang the lavanis.

Fifth Session
Control Over Sexuality

Chair: *Meera Kosambi*

Aparna Paul

The Colonial State and Gender: Constructing Morality in 19th Century Western India

This paper describes the experience of women in prostitution under the Colonial regime. Apart from the sexual exploitation which they suffered, these women were also subjected to racial and colonial discriminations. There are also apparent differences in the

19th century colonial discourse on Indian and British prostitutes. While the former are depicted as sexually promiscuous, the latter are portrayed as helpless victims.

Further discussing the implications of the Contagious Diseases Acts introduced in the 19th century to protect the British Army from venereal disease, the paper describes the racial and sexual oppression of Indian women in prostitution, particularly in the contoment areas.

Generally there were 12 to 15 Indian women placed in *chakala* in the cantonments, who were expected to consort only with the British soldiers. Indian men were prevented from entering these places. This law effectively prevented the rescue of abducted women by their male kin from the brothels in the cantonment areas.

These women were registered with the cantonment magistrate. There were also prison like hospitals called the lock hospitals in which the women could be confined against their will. To these lock hospitals women were obliged to report at least once a week for medical check-ups which tantamounted to medical rape.

If a woman was found diseased she was detained in the hospital until cured; if found free of disease, she was returned to the *chakala* to continue prostitution. If the woman tried to escape, she was apprehended and fined. If a large regiment came into the cantonment, the brothel keeper was encouraged to scout the neighbourhood for recruits.

Subsequently the paper indicates the interfacing of the nationalist critique of prostitution with the protest movement spearheaded by the feminists of the 19th century against the double standards of sexual morality. Josephine Butler for instance attempted in her critique of the Contagious Diseases Acts introduced in England to protect the army from sexually transmitted diseases to focus on this dimension of the exploitation of women in the Colonies by the army.

Mridula Ramanna

Control and Resistance: The Working of the Contagious Diseases Acts in Bombay City

This paper underscores the various responses in Bombay to the Contagious Diseases Acts introduced in the 19th century. These Acts (first introduced in 1868 and again in 1880), were aimed at protecting the British Army, from what the Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India described as a `scourge'. The Acts provided for the compulsory registration of brothels and prostitutes as well as the medical treatment of those women. They also authorized the local governments to extend (with the prior sanction of the Government of India) the purview of the Act in any locality.

The 1868 Act came into effect in May 1870. Following which, Bombay was divided into six districts based on an enumeration of the number of prostitutes operating in each district. These districts (comprising many wards) had the same boundaries as those delineated by the Health Department. An examination of the official records indicates differences in the colonial discourse about the need for such an Act as well as the implementation procedures. In 1870, for instance, the Bench of Justices reluctantly shared the expenses of implementing the Act with the Bombay Government; its subsequent refusal to share the expenses led to the repealing of the Act, in 1872. The Indian response was extremely critical of the Act. The Indian private medical practitioners were skeptical about the efficacy of the Act in containing venereal disease in the city. The local press condemned the Act. *The Native Opinion* decried the double standards of sexual morality; it held that the Act should apply equally to men and women. In addition, the failure of the authorities who made no distinction between concubines and hereditary prostitutes caused resentment.

The Act also caused widespread panic because of rumours that the women were being subjected to outrage and indignity. Many fled to neighbouring districts of Bassein and Thane. This led to opposition of the brothel keepers and landlords who had lost their

tenants. It failed to check clandestine prostitution: the women used the cover of running confectionery and ice-cream shops to carry out prostitution, resulting in a public outcry. The merchants and traders of Forbes Street and Apollo Street, for instance, petitioned the removal of the prostitutes from C.S. Street. The Police Commissioner consequently closed five of these shops. In addition, the police found it difficult to get convictions as witnesses were reluctant to testify.

The revival of the Act in 1880 saw widespread protest from the local population. The debates were followed by various campaigns by citizens to remove prostitution from their area. The Act was finally repealed in 1888, without making any difference to the incidence of prostitution. Subsequently, medical facilities were provided to these women on a voluntary basis; but none availed of it.

Amrita Shodhan

The Creation of a Public Domain: Holi, A Tale of Transformation

The cataclysmic changes of the 19th century included the redefinition of norms governing male/female behaviour in the public space. Arising out of the various socio-political expediencies confronting the Indian elite (such as access to government jobs and social acceptance by the Colonial regime), this redefinition of norms included attacks on the more boisterous Indian festivals. This paper focusses on *Holi*, which was an important site for the redefinition of appropriate male/female public behaviour among the Gujaratis in Western India. Although the festival was widely celebrated by the various sections of the Gujarati community (including the tribals) the focus of this inquiry is limited to its celebration in the urban centres of Bombay, Ahmedabad and Surat.

The festival which was celebrated with gusto was an opportunity for the breaking down of caste/gender barriers, probably leading to sexual misconduct. Local communities would also attack their neighbours with mud, slime, verbal abuse, steal wood for the *Holi* fire and molest women from the neighbouring communities.

Alongside the ban on the more boisterous forms of celebration was the gradual transformation of the *Holi* myths. The stories about the *Holi* festival in circulation in the 1850s did not refer to any of the Gods from the Hindu pantheon, but rather the killing of women by the local communities for transgressing social norms. The *Holi* fire was purported to protect them from the wrath of the dead women's spirit. This story is in marked contrast to the prevailing legends about the *Holi* festival which identify the festival with the Vishnav worship. The roots of this association of the *Holi* festival with the Vishnav celebration of the triumph of good over evil can be traced to the late 19th century, leading us to presume that there is a connection between the social reform agenda and the process of redefining the legends.

An area which the reform targetted was the sexually explicit actions performed in the temples during the *Holi* celebrations. It would appear that the reformists had a high stake in banning such acts within the temple premise. It is possible to correlate the establishment of the more puritanical value system (as indicated in the ban) with the creation of new myths surrounding the *Holi* festival.

This transformation of the *Holi* festival also indicates transformation of other related areas of women's activities. It ushers in a redefinition of the ways in which women were allowed to participate in the public space -- in streets, the neighbourhoods and the temples. The study thus elaborates on the ways in which the ushering of modernity (closely allied with the Victorian ideas of sexual morality) actually undermined women's sexual freedom.

Discussions

Referring to the paper on *Holi*, the questions asked were on the definition of private and public spaces. It was pointed out the term `public space' referred to the political space and was not social. Further, it was asked if the study revealed differences in access to the public space for English and Indian women.

It was wondered whether the moral overtones of the social reformers had its roots in the Viashnav cult predominant in Gujarat at that time or if it sprang from the Victorian ideas of sexual morality which the Indians inbibed during the Colonial period through their access to English education.

Regarding the construction of sexuality as revealed in the two papers on prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts, it was asked whether there was a racial hierarchy of prostitutes, other than the existing hierarchy between English and Indian women.

Comparisons were drawn between the Colonial treatment of Indian women in prostitution with the current treatment of Nepali women in prostitution. The international trafficking of women and the refusal of governments to acknowledge their responsibilities towards them underscore the ways in which women are denied their nationalities. Comparisons were also drawn between the struggles of the 19th century feminists to challenge the state regulation of prostitution with the recent attempts by the Government of Maharashtra to legalize prostitution and (in response to the AIDS/HIV scare), to seek compulsory medical check-up of prostitutes.

Sixth Session
Movements for Change

Chair: *Neera Desai*

Vasanti Damle

Women and the Left Movement (1920-1947)

The background of women's participation in the Left movement (which began in India in the 1920s), can be traced to the 19th century social reform movement and the incipient nationalism of socio-political space for women's participation. With the exception of Parvatibai Bhor (a member of the Communist Party) and Maniben Kara (a member of the M.N. Roy group), women's entry into Left politics was through the influence of their male kin. In addition, most of the women (with the exception of Parvatibaiwho had a lower caste/class background and had not completed her schooling), were from the middle and the upper classes. Among them may be included: Ushabai Dange, Godavari Parulekar, Kapilaben Khandvala, Minakshi Sane, Dilshad Chari, Suhasubu Nambiar, etc.

The Communist movement also spawned many ancillary activities which attracted women's participation. They lived in the various communes at Raj Bhavan (Mai Khan) and also were part of the Kalapathak group formed in the 1940s to help the victims of the Bengal famine. These activities in turn led to the establishment of the Indian Peoples' Theatre which attracted women like Ismat Chugtai, Usha Urdhvareshe, Dina Sanghavi-Pathak.

It would appear from the various narratives that single women who joined the Communist movement found their marriage partners from within the movement. A mention may be made here of Comr. Leela or Laila Khan nee Surdarayya and Vimal Sardesai nee Randive, who joined the movement from an ideological commitment and subsequently married their colleagues. The political activism of many of these women tended to wane after marriage and motherhood. This raises critical questions about the

ability of the Left movement to transcend the barriers of gender. For, with the exception of Godavari Parulekar who even after marriage travelled on foot to inaccessible areas to establish contact with the Adivasis, few women continued to be active. Their participation was either confined to working within various mass fronts, such as the Friends of the Soviet Union/ISCUS, or to demonstrations whenever the party needed to whip up a mass base.

This contradiction between the professed ideology of gender equality and the reality of women's lived experiences are evident from the narratives of Ushabai Dange, Shantabai Kulkarni, Sunita Deshpande, Kamal Padhye, Champa Limaye, etc. There is only one instance in Western India when the Communist party criticized the treatment meted out by a party worker (Soli Batliwala) to his wife (Nargis Batliwala). This resulted in Soli Batliwala leaving the Party and writing a scathing criticism of it. The material was used by Overstreet and Windmillar for their anti-Communist propaganda. This account of women in the Left movement is not complete. It needs to be searched much more and reconstructed.

Soonu Dhunjisha

Parsi Women Activists of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Examining the contributions of Parsi women activists in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the paper argues that there was less community opposition to social reform among the Parsis than within other communities in Western India. This was because the prevailing gender discriminatory practices was not intrinsic to the Parsi culture; it had only been imbibed through the process of acculturation during the centuries of their sojourn in India. The four women studied here include: Dosabai Cowasjee Jussawala, Mehru Tata, Perin Captain and Mithuben Petit.

The first Parsi girl to attend an English school in 1842, Dosabai Cowasjee Jussawala, symbolized the liberalism of the 19th century. In her autobiography, she critiques the prevailing double standards in society and exhorts women to collectivize and struggle for their rights. Her ideas about social change indicate the conflicting world-views of the times. On the one hand, she believed in English education as a means of ensuring social transformation, on the other, she emphasized the need for the community to retain its cultural mooring.

The wife of the industrialist Dorab Tata, Mehru Tata did not believe in leading her life in affluent idleness. Deeply patriotic, she made her debut into public life in 1917 as a leader of a deputation of women asking the Viceroy to abolish indentured labour from India to the other British Colonies. Her concern for the upliftment of women led her to establish the National Council of Women in India.

Perin Captain, the fourth grand-daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji, was a distinguished freedom fighter. At the outset, she was influenced by revolutionaries like Sardar Singh Rana, Madam Cama and Veer Savarkar. Nevertheless, she was soon influenced by Gandhiji and participated in his non-violent Satyagraha. As the founder-member of Rashtriya Stree Sabha (established in April 1921) and the first woman President of the War Council of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee, she mobilized women's participation in the Salt Satyagraha and the Swadeshi movement.

Influenced by the Gandhian ideals of service, Mithuben Petit (who was awarded the Padmashri in 1961 by the Government of India), renounced her affluent background to participate in the social and political transformation of the country. Working closely with Kasturba, she started an ashram in Maroli where tribal and peasant women were taught to spin and weave *Khadi*. Her activities soon expanded to the other adivasi areas in the jungles of Rajpipla, Surat and Bharuch, where she opened schools for children and dispensaries/hospitals for the sick. In the course of her work, she participated in the Bardoli Satyagraha, the Swadeshi movement and the picketing of liquor shops.

Sonal Shukla and Nina Haeems
(Direction: Nischint Hora & Utkarsh Mazumdar)

Safia Khan ki Talashme/In Search of Safia Khan
(A video documentary produced by Vacha)

This documentary Safia Khan ki Talashme/In Search of Safia Khan is part of a larger study to recover the histories of women who participated in the nationalist struggles. It raises pertinent questions on the process by which the sacrifices made by women like Safia Khan are erased from the collective memories of people. In essence it seeks to reconstruct the story of Safia Khan through interviews with two women who had trained under her and the members of her family in Mumbai. It also uses some footage from a 16mm film shot by a relative on a visit to Pakistan as well as the earlier documentary *Bheetar Bahe Muktidhara/The Stream Within* produced by Vacha to recover women's voices during the nationalist movement.

While researching for the earlier film, the researchers found frequent mention of Safia Khan as a beloved leader who had inspired and trained women in the movement for Independence. It set them thinking about the reasons why the references to the work of such an important leader (whose portrait hangs in the Congress House, Mumbai, a major centre of nationalist activities in the pre-Independence years) was missing in the commemorative volumes published during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of India's Independence. They speculate that one of the reasons for the erasure of her memory might have been her migration to Pakistan after Partition. Following the trail of Safia Khan (1909-61), they uncover the story of a remarkable woman who inspired countless women to participate in the freedom struggle.

Born into an Ishnayasi Khoja family from Kutch, she was known as Safia Somji before her marriage. Her father was a solicitor and the family staunch nationalists. Very little is known about the factors which influenced Safia Khan's political activism and her emergence as a leader. It would appear that she was inspired by Veer Nariman and Yusuf Meherally who helped to shape her political commitment.

As a member of the Congress Party in the 1930s and 1940s, she had held several important positions during the freedom movement. These positions included: 1) General Officer in Command of Sevika Dal, the women's corps, for several years including the Quit India movement in 1942; 2) the Congress Dictator (i.e. the supreme leader of the Congress force in Bombay Region in 1938); and 3) a member of the powerful Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee (BPCC).

She married Hidaytullah Khan, a nephew of Khan Abdul Gafar Khan popularly known as the Frontier Gandhi. Following the partition of the country, she migrated to Pakistan with her husband, who was an engineer. Opposed to the partition of the country, Safia Khan never participated in politics in Pakistan. She continued visiting Mumbai to meet her family, her former colleagues and to shop for *khadi*, the only cloth she wore until her death in 1961.

Rehana Ghadially

The Campaign for the Women's Emancipation in an Isamaili Shia (Daudi Bohra) Sect of Indian Muslims: 1929-1945

Inspired by social reform and nationalist fervour of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the campaigns for women's emancipation among the Daudi Bohra Sect of Indian Muslims centred around the closely allied concerns of female education and *purdah*. The

Ismaili Shia Daudi Bohra Sect constitute an endogamous community of petty traders located predominantly in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. They live in self-sufficient enclaves (*mohallas*), and pay allegiance to a spiritual head called the Syedna or Maulana.

The campaign for women's emancipation was spearheaded by a Karachi-based group of social reformers called the *Young Men's Bohra Association*. Much of the debates on women's upliftment centred around the Islamic injunctions on the *purdah* and female education. While the orthodox claimed that there was scriptural sanctions for *purdah* and the denial of education for women, the reformers favoured a more liberal re-interpretation of the Koran.

This paper examines the various liberal and orthodox arguments published between 1936 and 1945 from Karachi in the Gujarati reformist journal *Aage-Kadam* (A Forward Step) and the Gujarati newspaper *Bombay Samachar* published from Mumbai in the decade of the 1940s and the 1950s. Progressive in their outlook, the *Aage-Kadam* and the *Bombay Samachar* carried extensive coverage on women. The *Aage-Kadam*, in particular, carried two exclusive columns on women. Entitled *Stree Vibhag* ("Women's Section") and *Stree Jagat* ("Women's World"), the columns were edited by women, although the contributions on matters relating to women were from both sexes. In addition, some news about women was also carried in a section titled *Jagat Darshan* ("World Panorama'). The *Bombay Samachar* on the other hand carried the orthodox and the liberal views on the campaign.

Tracing the roots of the reform campaign to the attempts by the reformist *sethias* who at the turn of the century attempted to introduce vernacular education for boys and girls, Ghadially argues that the question of women's emancipation received scant notice. It came to the forefront in the 20th century as it was seen as a prerequisite for family, community and national progres. The new woman envisaged by the reformers was one who would fulfil her traditional role in the family and at the same time bring her special quality of service to the public sphere. Targetting *purdah* as a barrier to women's education and public roles, the reformers based their arguments on religion and rationality. They pointed out that the clergy was not consistent in their application of the *purdah* rules.

Towards the close of the 1930s even women from traditional homes had given up the veil; the trend was becoming apparent not only in the cities but also in the smaller towns. They also started expanding their public roles resulting in a backlash evoked by the clerics.

Discussions

The discussions centred around the need to recover women's participation in the various movements. A useful source to recover the history of women's participation in the Left movements was police records. It was also wondered why when women enter the political terrain some of them are subjected to scandals while others are not. The discussion also emphasized the need to recover the histories of women from the minority communities to retain the rich plurality of Indian history.

Summing Up

Neera Desai

Neatly summing up the programme, Dr. Neera Desai said in the concluding session, "The seminar which covered a broad range of topics ranging from women's economic participation, to their cultural representation, control over sexuality and their participation in the various movements provided a flavour of the spectrum of historical research on women in Western India. Apart from providing glimpses of women's lives in the past, these papers also indicate the different methods used by scholars to recover women's histories. Some of the exciting developments in historiography (as indicated in the papers presented in the seminar) include the autobiographies, novels, biographies and even folk tales to uncover the lived experiences of women".

List of Participants

Aditi Desai	Ahmedabad
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Kunjlata Shah	Mumbai
Lakshmi C. S.	Mumbai
Maithreyi Krishna Raj	Mumbai
Maitree Vaidya	Baroda
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Mani Kamerkar	Mumbai
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Nasreen Fazalbhoy	Mumbai
Neelima Bhave	Mumbai
Neera Desai	Mumbai
Nina Haeems	Mumbai
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Shirin L.Kuchedkar	Mumbai
Simi Vij	Mumbai
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Subhadra Patwa	Mumbai
Sudha Karkhanis	Mumbai
Swati Banerjee	RCWS, SNDT Women's Univ., Mumbai
Usha Thakkar	Mumbai
Varsha Shirgaonkar	Mumbai
Vasanti Damle	Mumbai

They want our Land not our People

Report on the North-East Regional Workshop on "Women and Regional Histories" Guwahati June 24-25, 1999

Organised by: Women's Core Group, All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples

in collaboration with Indian Association for Women's Studies

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We thank the Resource persons, viz: Neidonuo Angami, President, Naga Mothers Association; Jarjum Ete, General Secretary, Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society; Chanmayo Jajo, Naga People's Movement for Human Rights and Sunita Debbarma, President, Borok Women's Forum; the Moderators and all the participants for setting aside their valuable time to attend the workshop. The success of the workshop was due to the active participation of the above persons without whom the workshop would have been another routine exercise.

We would also like to thank the CBCNEI for allowing us to have the Workshop in the campus and all the assistance rendered towards the success of the workshop.

Our special thanks to Mr. Joseph Lamkang, Care Taker, CBCNEI Guest House and Ms. Haokhothang, Manager, CBCNEI Canteen for their personal endeavors for our comfort.

Anjali Daimari
Convenor, Women's Work Group
All India Coordinating Forum of Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples.

The workshop on the "Women and Regional Histories", was held at the Conference Hall, CBCNEI, Pan Bazaar, Guwahati on June 24-25, 1999. Thirty delegates from different parts of the North East representing the Women's Organisations participated in the workshop. It opened with a Welcome Address by Anjali Daimari, Convenor, Women's Work Group, All India Coordinating Forum, followed by a self-introduction by the delegates.

Anjali Daimari while welcoming the delegates and participants gave a detailed picture of the work and concept of AICFAIP. In the note the broad framework for the Women's Work Group was also spelt out. That the All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples (AICFAIP) was formed in May 1997 in Mumbai by the Adivasi/ Indigenous Peoples movements from different parts of India along with some associate members who have been actively involved in the struggle of Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples in the country. AICFAIP is the outcome of continuous interaction amongst IP movements in India over more than 15 years.

Some of the work and concerns of AICFAIP would be to strengthen the process of solidarity and alliance building amongst struggle based Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples Organizations movements. To identify larger and specific issues and problems affecting them and help them deal with the issues concretely and generate debates and discussion on substantive issues.

Accordingly, to concretize the objectives of AICFAIP, four issues have been identified on a priority basis and four work groups formed:

a) Work Group on Status Report and Annual Report of Development in the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples regions.
b) Work Group on Biodiversity and Intellectual Property Rights.
c) Work Group on Adivasi/Indigenous Communities under threat and
d) Work Group on Indigenous Women.

The broad framework for the Women's Work Group is as follows:

* Critical examination of the changing status of women in Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) societies.
* Role of women in the struggles of IPs.
* Identification of specific issues/problems faced by IP women in general, ins specific, at regional context and evolving responses to them at the local and national level and linking up with other women's organisations.
* Identifying the challenges facing IP women.
* Specific plan of action locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

That for the overall coordination and implementation of the program of the AICFAIP, a Core Committee comprising the Convenors of the various Work Groups/Regions and other resource person was formed with a full time Coordinator functioning from the office of 'The Other Media', New Delhi.

Further, the AICFAIP has demarcated the Indian Sub-continent into five regions, viz.: Southern, Central, Western, Jharkhand and North East India based on the concentration and distribution of Indigenous Communities and on the basis of history, for the convenience of work at the grass root level.

Under these circumstances, the AICFAIP received a proposal from the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) to explore possibilities of organizing a seminar/workshop in the North East on the theme " Women and Regional Histories". Hence, the Work Group on Women of AICFAIP took the initiative through a series of consultations and discussions on the proposal and direction of the program, so as to make it reflect on the condition and situation of women in our region. In a consultation Meeting with Indigenous Peoples' organisations and some individuals from the North East held at Guwahati on January 18, 1999 it was decided to organize the proposed workshop in the NE in collaboration with IAWS. Accordingly, a Steering Committee comprising of Ms.

Chanmayo Jajo (Convenor), Ms. Anjali Daimari (Convenor, AICFAIP's Working Group on Indigenous Women), Ms. Joystna Tirkey (Jharkand), Ms. Grace (NWUM), Ms. Shimreichon (Coordinator, AICFAIP), and one representative from IAWS as member was formed.

Introduction to the Workshop

Chanmayo Jajo, Convenor, Steering Committee of the Workshop in her keynote address stated that the claim by the Govt. of India that there are no Indigenous People in India is found to be quite contrary. Whereas, India can boast of having numerous indigenous group living in different nooks and corners including North East India. It becomes all the more important for the IP of N.E. India have one common platform/forum as they are faced with together to highlight the wrong and injustice done to the women folk by the society in different forms and seek for a just society where women are not discriminated but treated as equal --- for positive change.

The role of women in preserving and sustaining the bio-diversity and carrying the culture from one generation to the other is to be noted as the IP have lived in close harmony with nature. She exhorted the women in particular to come forward at this juncture when the identity of the IP is being threatened from different corners.

The Ethnic Identity & Literary Histories of the North East

Chanmayo Jajo, a human rights lawyer, chaired the First Session. Ms. Neidonuo President, Naga Mothers' Association spoke on "The Ethnic Identity & Literary Histories of the North East".

Role of Women in the Economic Activities & Environmental Histories of the North East

In the Second Session Ms. Jarjum Ete, General Secretary, Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society spoke on "*Role of Women in the Economic Activities & Environmental Histories of the North*". Gina Shangkham, President, Naga Women's Union, Manipur chaired the Session.

Assimilation Process & Homgenizing National Policies and their Impact on the People of the North East

The Third Session was chaired by Ms. Veronica K. Zatluangi, President, Mizoram Hmeithai Association (MHA) and presentation of paper was made by Ms. Sunita Debbarma, President, Borok Women's Forum (Tripura) and Ms. Chanmayo Jajo, Human Rights lawyer.

Sharing of Experiences

The third Session was chaired by Mr. Sukhendo Debbarma, Lecturer, Agartala University during which the various organisations were invited to present their experience on *organised People's Movements of Resistance against Suppression*.

Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society (APWWS)

Ms. Jarjum Ete, General Secretary of APWWS spoke on how her organisation has tackled the state suppression of women's aspirations; marriage at a young age; practice of polygamy; family suppression, etc. She highlighted on man made customs and how women have no place in the traditional institutions. She reported that her organisation is trying to empower women to decide their own destiny and to create the right environment for the next generation. Her organisation has also taken up issues regarding rape in different fora.

Naga Women's Union, Manipur (NWUM)

Grace Shatsang speaking on behalf of the NWUM stated that the Union was formed in 1994 with representation from every Naga tribe. She stated that there has been suppression of women at all levels. She also stated that various grievances faced by women, like rape of women by the Indian Armed Forces, denial of right to inheritance, preference given to boys for education, denial to women of a role in the village council, etc. She observed that some Naga tribes are now accommodating women in the village council. Some of them have started organizing themselves and are demanding for equal sharing of the workload in the family and are creating awareness on the rights and issues of women through seminars, meetings etc.

Zomi Mother's Association (ZMA)

Ms. N. Muangching spoke on behalf of the ZMA stating that the Association was formed in 1991 having 62 villages units. The Association is involved in promoting the welfare of the women and taking care of orphans and youths who have been affected by drug abuse, right to property by women, etc. She stated that the illegal migrants like the Kukis from Maynmar are creating threat to life and property of the IP in their ancestral land. This has claimed several lives and resulted in burning down of villages, displacement of villager's etc.

Mizoram Hmeithai Association (MHA)

Ms. Veronica Zatluanga, president of the Mizoram Hmeithai Association explained the Hmeithai meaning – 'widow', the Association was formed in 1987. The main objective of the Association is to help the welfare of the widows and orphans through organizing vocational training centers for the widows and their children. Cases of divorce in Mizoram are increasing and as such, her organisation initiated for social reformation and awareness programs. Some of the schemes undertaken by the Association include opening of residential school for the downtrodden children benefiting 110 children; extension of loan facilities for piggery farming to 168 widows; aid to self help groups benefiting 77 groups/units; running of cooperative stores by their members to sell groceries and necessary products at cheaper price with a view to promoting women entrepreneurs and at the same time to control prices; running of mobile medical unit in Mizoram by which about 3800 patients were treated just last month (May 1999). The MHA felt the need for having a common platform for the indigenous Women's organisations of North East India with the perspective to create & promote unity and understanding among the various women's organisation; sharing of information on various issues confronting the women; formulating joint action plans, etc.

Borok Women's forum (Tripura):

Ms. Sunita, President of the Borok Women's Forum (BWF, highlighted the history of Tripura starting with the state's entry in the Indian Union on October 15, 1949. Ever since, the IPs have been facing threat from the illegal migrants and continuing problem of influx from Bangladesh, reducing the population of the IPs to a minority in their own land. Various forms of violation of human rights by the armed forces under the umbrella of the Armed Forces (Special Powers') Act resulting in the lost of lives, arbitrary arrest & detention, rape etc are taking place unabated.

Boro Women's Justice Forum (BWJF)

Alaishri Boro, General Secretary of the Boro Women's Justice Forum (BWJF) presented a brief statement on the activities of the organisation. After its formation in 1992, the Forum identified many of the problems affecting women like denial of their education, social, political rights etc., in the Boro society. Such denial is by their own people as well as by the Government and other ruling classes. The Forum was almost orphaned after 4 months of formation when its President, Ms. Anjali Daimari was kidnapped by the Govt. agencies and thereafter detained in jail for 6 months. The forum faced another shock when its General Secretary, Ms. Golapi Basumatari was ambushed and shot dead in 1996 by unidentified gunmen while she along with other colleagues were on organisational work.

The Forum is of the opinion that the Boro people living in Assam have been oppressed and exploited by the ruling class and are being denied of their basic rights like, health, education, land and resources, economic and political rights. Besides the BWJF, the All Bodo Students' Union, all Bodo Women's Welfare Federation, Peoples' Democratic Front, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, etc are actively involved in their democratic struggle for the restoration of their rights. However, the response from the state and the Central Government have been using brute force resulting in loss of lives, rape of women, abduction and arbitrary detention by the security and police forces under the shelter of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, and other draconian laws. The tacit policy of planting and encouraging the settlement of illegal migrants (foreigners) in Boro Land has affected the demographic picture of the Boros. Development of their language and script has been denied and alien script imposed. Inspite of repeated appeals for help in eradicating the menace of malaria, which has claimed thousands of lives, even basic health rights have been neglected by the authorities concerned.

Naga Mothers' Association (NMA)

Ms. Neidonuo, President, Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) presented the activities of her Organisation after its formation in 1984. She stated that the tacit policy of the government in allowing free flow of drugs and alcohol has greatly affected the lives of the Naga people. NMA is running a De-addiction and Rehabilitation Center since 1989, conducting social awareness program on the various social vices like screening of pornographic movies, the prevention and affects of rape and molestation of women, etc.

Observations

These presentations were followed by discussions. Some of the points that emerged are given below:

1. Women expressed happiness in fulfillment of the felt need to come together since a long time.
2. To evolve ways and means to share and disseminate information, experiences and activities of Indigenous women in the region.
3. All the participants express that the condition of women, both in the patriarchal and matrilineal system has not changed over the years. Both systems have a negative impact in common, whether directly or indirectly.
4. The absence of right of inheritance of women among the IP (except in the matrilineal system) which is sanctioned by customary law is discriminatory and ways and means must be explored to overcome the existing problems. However, it was feared that the right of IP women to immovable property (e.g., when marrying a non IP man) may lead to the alienation of IP land. The existing customary laws need to be reviewed and codified.

5. The contribution of the IP women in the field of economics is immense from time immemorial but is yet to be given due acknowledgement by society.
6. Some IP women entrepreneurs are doing very well in diverse fields.
7. In the socio-cultural field, different women's organisations are involved in running de addiction and detoxification centers for drug addicts and alcoholics and are also running residential schools for the underprivileged children, mobile clinics etc. besides carrying out awareness programs.
8. The organisations took grave note of the tacit policy of the government in allowing unchecked influx of illegal migrants who are settling in the deep interiors, far flung areas of IP's territories and has led to change in the demography of the region.
9. The existing educational policies are not in tune with the needs and aspirations of the IPs. The history of the IPs has also been distorted or suppressed.
10. The imposition of the alien languages by the ruling class on the Indigenous Peoples and to suppress the attempt made by the IP to develop their own languages was deplored.
11. The organisations expressed serious concern over the degradation of the environment by the non-indigenous/Govt. agencies in the name of development.
12. The participants affirmed that it is shifting/rotational cultivation that has sustained the IP for generations together and it is in no way responsible for the degradation of the environment as viewed by the non-indigenous population.
13. The lavish/costly gifts presented by parents and relatives at the time of marriage is evolving into a dowry like practice amongst the IPs which is a threat to the egalitarian society and leads to the evil effects of the dowry system and commodifies women.
14. There was serious concern over the menace of drugs and alcoholism leading to loss of life, breakdown of familial values and degeneration of the youth and the tacit policy of free flow of drug and alcohol in the IP's territories.
15. Militarisation continues to create insecurity to life for women and children in particular and the public at large.
16. Imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers') Act, 1958 needs to be reviewed by the govenment and repealed.
17. IP knowledge system is not acknowledged but is being appropriated without the consent of the IP.
18. While preserving our own culture, care should be taken not to become isolated. While acculturation is unavoidable, indeed it is even desirable, yet it cannot be at the expense of the IP culture.
19. Women have written very little of their own history and must initiate the writing of their own history.
20. IP tribal women marrying a non-tribal and thereafter taking the surname of the tribal mother must be prevented as it is being done to enjoy facilities given to tribals under the Constitution of India and the laws framed there under.
21. The members seriously observed the process of religious conversion taking place among the IP, which is eroding the cultural identity and ethnicity of the tribals.
22. It was observed that for women entrepreneurs, one of the biggest obstacles is the male dominated banking system and lack of access to credit/loans.
23. The laws are being used to dispossess IPs of their ancestral land and resources.
24. The women seriously questioned developmental programs and policies, which affect IPs and their lands, especially women and the resultant displacement and loss of history, culture and identity.
25. It was observed that some of the inherent limitations and injustices existing in our tribal society today must not be seen merely as women's problems but viewed as a whole in the society's perspective lest it become a tool in the hands of vested interests as means to divide and create confusion in the tribal society.
26. It was observed that any gathering of the IP for discussion of their own issues and overall development is looked upon with suspicion and considered as a threat by the

majority and the governmental agencies, and this workshop was no exception as many intelligence personnel hounded the venue and participants during the workshop to the extent of demanding the list of participants and a copy of the resolutions.

27. It was observed that there is need for North East Indigenous Women to come together more frequently for better understanding and redressal, sharing of issues confronting IP women today under a common forum in the region.

Recommendations

1. The need to review the customary practices so as to accommodate equal rights, especially in family and inheritance matters, etc.
2. Women entrepreneurs be encouraged with all support systems in their economic endeavours and the economic contribution by women be acknowledged.
3. Women's role in the socio-cultural activities like running of de addiction/detoxification centers, health and educational programs be given due support and recognition.
4. The illegal migrants entering into the region be identified and deported by the concerned authorities and to check further influx.
5. The educational system and policies be made suitable to the indigenous peoples' needs and aspirations.
6. Imposition of alien languages and scripts on the indigenous people by the non-tribal majority is condemned and the effort made by the indigenous tribals for the development of their own language and culture should not be viewed as a threat, but should be encouraged and developed.
7. The IP will continue to preserve and conserve the ecosystem as they have been practicing with their indigenous knowledge and skills, which have sustained them for generations together.
8. The practice of lavish presentations during marriage, which creates indebtedness, be discouraged and discontinued.
9. The abuse of drugs, psychotropic substances and alcohol be curbed by effective implementation of the existing laws and creation of awareness about their ill effects.

Resolutions

The participants unanimously agreed to form a common platform for the Indigenous/Tribal women of North East Indian having the following objectives:

a) To strengthen links, networking and solidarity amongst the indigenous women and organisations of the North East;
b) To identify the challenges facing IP women including discriminatory and gender biased practices in our culture while at the same time affirming our culture;
c) Documentation and dissemination of our histories, issues, movements etc.;
d) To study the impact of assimilation process using educational policies, religion, language, technology, law, systems of governance, developmental policies, etc.
e) To respond to the various forms of suppression/oppression through organised people's movements with specific plan of action locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
f) To reaffirm our distinct ethnicity and streamline the role of women in struggle of Ips;
g) To identify specific issues/problems faced by IP women in general, in specific at regional context and evolving responses to them, at the local and national level and to link up with other women's organisations;
h) To undertake economic activities for self-development and self-sustenance.

The participants propose the common platform under the name and style.

3. The participants unanimously agreed to constitute an ad-hoc Coordinating Committee having the following designations and members:

a) Coordinator	*Chanmayo Jajo,* Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights
b) Co-coordinators	*Veronica K. Zatluangi,* Mizo Hmeithai Association
	Anjali Daimari Boro Women's Justice Forum
c) Member Secretary	Jarjum Ete Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society
d) Members	All participating women's organisations.

Keynote Address

Chanmayo Jajo

Today, we are gathered here as indigenous women of the North East. This is what gives us our identity.

The official stand of the Indian Government is that there is no indigenous group in India – every Indian is equally indigenous to the land. This is in line with the conventional dictionary meaning of the word 'indigenous', i.e., to be born in a region. But the emerging consensus is that, "…. *the concept of 'indigenous' embraces the notion of a distinct and separate culture and way of life, based upon long-held traditions and knowledge which are connected, fundamentally, to a specific territory. Indigenous peoples cannot survive, or exercise their fundamental human rights as distinct nations, societies and peoples, without the ability to conserve, revive, develop and teach the wisdom they have inherited from their ancestors*." (United Nations' Studies Series, protection of the Heritage of Indigenous people, 1997).

Some of us here have lost our land through occupation, settlement conquest, or by losing it to settlers who came from elsewhere. Some of our lands have been dispossessed by the government. However, what binds all of us is our social, cultural, economic and political characteristics which are clearly distinct from those of the other segments of the national population.

When we speak of the histories of the indigenous women of the North East, we find at the core the characteristics of community-centredness, consensus, democratic governance and harmonious existence with nature. As against this, the dominant system which is based on individualism, competition, individual suffrage and destruction of nature has been found to be a threat to our very existence. The imposition of statutory laws, development policies, economic structures and alien languages, education, cultures etc. have seriously threatened our land rights and identity. The impact of colonisation, Christianisation, Sanskritisation and modernization has been particularly profound for the indigenous people of the North East. How have we responded to the changes and how have we dealt with the dominating system?

While acknowledging that assimilation and acculturation will always be a part of life, we can only make space for those aspects, which are positive. Rigoberta Menchu writes in *An Indian Woman in Guatemala,* " The mechanism of acculturation is basic to any culture, all cultures live in a state of permanent acculturation. But there is a world of difference between acculturation and an attempt to impose one culture to destroy another." In the North East, the latter has been more our experience. To take only one example, today the indigenous people of Tripura, the Boroks, have been culturally, linguistically, geographically, politically, economically and socially discriminated by the new arrivals.

It is worth saying that when indigenous women themselves do not constitute a homogenous category, it is a facile policy on the part of Delhi to attempt to bring a national policy of one culture, one religion and one nation. As we look around this room, we can see how indigenous women themselves are from different traditional cultural background, age, social conditions, education etc. We cannot see the wisdom in adopting a national homogenizing policy in India.

As we look back on our histories, we will also ask whether things are alright in the indigenous world today? We know better than any other that women are all providers and workers in our families and communities. But our experience is one of being ignored, marginalised and silenced.

It has been expressed with anguish by many of us since long now, that the indigenous women of the North East are facing many forms of discrimination and oppression by our own communities. This has basically been due to the predominantly patriarchal system in the indigenous communities. The discrimination holds true even in the matriarchal and matrilineal societies of the people of Meghalaya. Indigenous women in the North East have little or no land rights except in the State of Meghalaya. They lack access

to information and education and are not allowed to participate in decision making in the traditional village institutions. Yet women have taken active part in the peoples' struggle for self-determination, human rights and economic development. Women have deliberately avoided confrontation of woman-man due to the larger issues, which have had to be faced unitedly as a people. Our history should confirm the accommodation made by the women.

At this juncture, I would like to borrow from the words of an indigenous sister from Colombia who has written: "It is not possible to speak in isolation of indigenous women without speaking of the entire community, of the men, of the children and the elderly, and all those who form our community." (*Indigenous Women: The Right to A Voice*). Our people's history has taught us that we can ill afford to pursue the luxury of gender justice at the expense of justice for our communities as a whole. Men and women together need to fight against the 'dominating system' and not with each other.

However, some of us have taken tenuous steps in dialoguing with our menfolk on the need to reassess our customary laws and traditional practices where they are discriminatory. We are heartened that some of our menfolk representing the church, cultural bodies, village elders and authorities have acknowledged the discriminations and are prepared to look into them. We hope this process shall nurture the internal and natural changes required so that our customs and traditions retain vibrancy and dynamism.

So even as we meet at this women's workshop, we shall undoubtedly still be discussing our men, our children and the elderly because our histories as women coincide and are inextricably linked with those of the other members of the whole community. Lastly, I say that where women have gone the extra mile, let us not demur in saying so.

Sunita Deb Barma

Assimilation Process and Homogenizing National Policies and their impact on the People of the North East

The people of the North East India, particularly, that of Assam, Twipra and Manipur have undergone a systematic process of assimilation for the several centuries. The Epic and Puranic sources inform that the Aryan culture came in Assam in the 4th century BC when king Janaka invaded Pragjyotisa, who, after having inflicted a crushing defeat on the Kiratas, paved the way for the infiltration of the Aryan culture and ideas. The process of assimilation gained momentum in the 6th and 7th centuries, due to the patronage of the Boro and Twipra kings. During these two centuries, the Boro and Twipra kings said to have brought Brahmins from Kanauj and Kashmir, who were given settlements through special and grants. Since then the assimilation process began in Assam, Twipra and elsewhere of the region, impact of which has been far-reaching and detrimental to the society, economy and politics of the nationalities concerned.

Assimilation Process: In the context of the people of North East India, assimilation meant conversion of the non-Aryan nationalities into the Aryan language speaking Hindus, adopting the Aryan culture and practices, process of which is otherwise called 'Sanskritisation' or 'Aryanisation'. The process of assimilation changed its face from region to region. For instance, in Assam where the Brahmanical culture made its first entry, assimilation meant conversion of the non-Aryans, who were mostly Mongoloids, into the Assamese speaking Hindus. Assimilation was so systematic in this part of the region that a new caste called the 'Koch' was formed out of the Boro converts. Before reaching the status of Koch caste, the Boro converts had to go through several stages of conversion. Thereafter, many of the Koches were upgraded to the 'Kalita' caste, which was the lowest category in the Assamese caste hierarchy. The Koches were a new group society who abandoned their original language and cult, transforming themselves into Assamese speaking Hindus.

Next to Assam is Twipra, which fell victim of the assimilation. Like in Assam, the non-Aryan Twipras underwent a process of conversion, transforming them into Bengali-speaking Hindus, though the ladder of caste hierarchy was not applied to the new converts

as systematically as it was done in Assam. The assimilation in Twipra has been more of Bengalisation than Hinduisation. Use of Bengali language has been so forceful that it pushed the language of the Twipras into oblivion. The process of Bengalisation created a group of 'pseudo Bengalis', out of the Twipra converts, who make abortive attempts of grafting of Bengali culture on their own. In Manipur the situation has been otherwise. There the process of Hinduisation has been so complete that the Meitei converts reached up to the highest category of the caste hierarchy. Though their language remained intact, the Bengali script replaced their script. The process of assimilation and Hinduisation has been installed even in Khasi and Jaintia hills, adjoining to the Assam plains. The other hill areas of this region have however not undergone the severity of the process of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation.

In the post Independence era the process of assimilation has assumed another dimension with Centre's idea of bringing the non-Aryans, non-Hindi speaking ethnic nationalities into the "national mainstream" of Hindi speaking people. Though the safeguard of the distinctive cultures and traditions of these nationalities has been assured by the Constitution, the Centre has launched a tacit process of Hinduisation of these communities. It is this idea of absorbing the ethnic nationalities into the 'Hindi-speaking mainstream' that has guided the Centre to adopt various homogenising policies.

Homogenising National Policies: The Centre with the objective of bringing the diverse nationalities under the bond of one language and identity has formulated number of policies at the national level. For instance, the curriculums of the educational institutions are designed in such a manner that they inculcate the idea of national identity has been further popularising Hindi among the people of the remotest areas of the region. It is needless to say that today, as many as 90 per cent of the North Eastern population can understand and speak Hindi. Though media campaign is not a proclaimed policy of the Centre, it is understandably a part of Centre's total effort of bringing the diversed nationalities of the country under the bond of one language and identity.

Impact on the people of North East: The people of the North Eastern region have regarded the process of assimilation, often considered essential from the national point of view, as detrimental to the society, economy and politics. Today, the assimilation process has backfired into numerous assertive struggles, whereby the ethnic nationalities aspire to restore their ancient glory of rich cultural heritage.

The immediate impact of assimilation fell on the society of the nationalities concerned. The process began with the misgivings that the non-Aryans were of low birth, and that they could be raised in their status by conversion into Hinduism. The Aryans mentally nagged the non-Aryans by looking down their culture and traditions, dresses, languages and food habits etc, until they agreed for conversion. After the conversion, the converts had to adapt themselves to the Hindu culture, abandoning their own traditions and cultures. In Assam plains, many of the smaller non-Aryan ethnic communities wholly converted into Hinduism, wiping out their rich cultures and traditions. Even the bigger nationalities like Boros, Ahoms, Twipras and Meiteis had to bear the brunt of the assimilation. The conversion created a number of problems for the societies concerned. The most immediate impact of the assimilation was the destruction of the social homogeneity, bringing sharp differences between the converts and the non-converts, making it difficult for them to share and co-operate in their day to day life. Secondly, the converts had to give up their cultures and traditions to adapt to a new culture. Thirdly, conversion also brought along number of evil practices of Hinduism like dowry system, costly ritual of birth, marriage, death and worships, adding to the economic hardship of the people.

Assimilation had even greater impact on the politics of those nationalities. This is more evident in the case of the Boros whose converts were shown in the list of the general electorates. The Census Report of 1881 and 1911 show how the converts, after reaching the 'Koch' category, were upgraded to the 'Kolita' caste of the Assamese Hindus. Even the other Boro converts, who were still in the lower category, were shown in the list of the general electorates. It is this high-handedness of the census officers that a correct Census Report of the Boro could not be found till this date.

The decrease in the population of the ethnic nationalities, due to conversion, was further deflated by the migration of the Brahmans and Hindus to their areas. Particularly, in Twipra, after its merger with the Indian Union, large-scale migration of Bengali Hindus took place, which reduces the Twipras into minorities. The situation has been further aggravated by the unceasing influx of the Bangladeshi Muslims. Nonetheless, the large-scale migration of bonafide Indians and outsiders has marginalised the ethnic nationalities, reducing them into ineffective political minorities.

Another indirect impact of the assimilation was the demographic change brought about by the large-scale migration of the Hindus to the North Eastern region. Bringing of the Brahmins, followed by large-scale migration of the Hindus, continued for the last several centuries and is still continuing. Particularly, large-scale influx of the Bangladeshi Hindus into Assam and Twipra has out - numbered the original inhabitants of this two states. In this regard, the case of Twipra has no parallel, where the Hindu immigrants have reduced the population of the ethnic Twipra to the ratio of 1/3 of the total population of the state.

Assimilation and migration of the Hindus brought along a comparatively advanced system of economy, which was more in line with the capitalist mode of production. The ethnic nationalities, particularly that of Assam and Twipra, who were still confined to the tribal mode of production, found it difficult to compete with the economy of the newcomers. They failed to adapt themselves to the new system of economy, and tied to their plot of land. As a result, many of them lost their plot of land in the hands of the moneylenders. The large scale influx of the Bangladeshi immigrants have aided to the wretchedness of the ethnic nationalities like Boros and Twipras. Most of them lost their lands in the hands of the immigrants, which reduced them into landless labourers.

Conclusion: The process of assimilation, which began during the time of the kings, continued through several centuries and is still continuing in different forms. The homogenizing national policies have accelerated the process in the recent years. The impact of assimilation has often been considered negative and detrimental to the society, politics, demography and economy of the ethnic nationalities of the North East. It is to react to this process of assimilation that many ethnic nationalities of this region have risen into assertive struggles for the restoration of their ancient glory and rich cultural heritage.

Chanmayo Jajo

Assimilation Process & Homogenizing National Policies and their Impact the People of the North East

"Assimilate" – absorb (people) to a larger group
"Homogenize" – make or become of the same kind; uniform"

In my mind, there is not doubt that there have been systematic national policies seeking to assimilate and homogenize the people of the North East by the successive Governments that have come and gone. It is doubtless desirable that the citizenry should owe allegiance to the state. To the end, the Government has tried to absorb everyone living within the boundary of India into the national mainstream and to homogenize him or her into one religion, one culture an done nation. There is no from for minorities and diversity in such a policy. This policy is unacceptable, undesirable and indeed unethical.

On the other hand, I recently read an article suggesting that the Kargil episode, in so far as the Pakistanis are concerned, probably had its impetus in the multi ethnic, multi cultural mosaic that is Pakistan. The writer suggests that there is a lack of basic cohesiveness in the Pakistani society because of such plurality. The article goes on to suggest that such internal equations have given rise to frequent and recurrent upheavals in that country. This perhaps seems to be a little besides the point where our topic is concerned. But I begin on that note because we all realise the geo-political reality of

interdependency among all peoples and nations today. How much of our ethnicity should we promote and perpetuate? Because it is equally our concern along with the other people of this country that we need peace, stability and development. Having said that let me now come to some of the ways in which the people of the North East have faced assimilation.

I come from the state of Manipur, which has hill districts and valley districts. The tribals inhabit the hill districts where the laws, which apply to the valley areas, do not normally apply. The village owns the tribal lands in common. In the valley areas, the Government owns the land and the people pay revenue to the Government for their lands. In this state of affairs, it has been the recurring endeavor of the valley people to extend the Manipur Land Revenue Regulation Act to the hill districts like Ukhrul. This would change the land holding pattern and the land tenure completely. The Government would become the owner of the land and it would have the sole discretion to use the land, as it thinks fit. The tribals would only hold the land at the pleasure of the Government. The risk of tribal land alienation would arise. The stiff resistance put up by the tribals has stalled such an attempt for now. However, there are central and parliamentary legislation which are applicable to the tribal and scheduled areas of the North East which have been used by the Government to divest the indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands. One such case is that of the Tiwas, the original inhabitants of the area in the Nogoan district of Assam where the Jagiroad paper (which is under the Hindustan Paper Corporation) presently stands. The Tiwas have not received adequate compensation or been suitably rehabilitated for their land. The Land Acquisition Act has often been resorted to by the Government to achieve their vested interests and on many occasions the provisions of the Act have been flouted to make their task easier. To take away the land of the indigenous community is to dislocate, dispossess and divest them of their culture and identity. The Acquisition Bill seeks to amend the Act. It essentially seeks to make the District Collector more powerful regarding acquisitions and compensations. Appeals will only be in the High Court. It will make it easier for the Government to divest people of whatever little rights they had hitherto in the name of "public purpose".

Apart from the land alienation, one of the overt tools of assimilation in the North East has been language. The politics of language has been used time and again to impose the dominant culture and system on the indigenous community. This is the common experience of the indigenous peoples of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam Manipur, Tripura etc. This has been an obvious tools because it is language that shapes and influences our thinking. In some of the languages of the indigenous peoples of the North East, there is no vocabulary for 'suicide'. Language helps to give us our identity. But the politics of the dominant communities and other chauvinistic characteristics have foisted the Hindi language on the indigenous tribals of Arunachal Pradesh, The Assamese language on the non-Assamese tribals of the state, Bengali on the indigenous tribals of Tripura, Meiteilon language on the majority non-Meitei tribals of Manipur, etc. Especially in the field of the higher education, this later becomes a disabling factor, as the indigenous students necessarily have to secure pass marks in the State language at which they have far less proficiency than the dominant community whose mother tongue it is. This in turn has its negative impact on securing state employment for the minority or non-dominant communities. Such policies are used to perpetuate the rule of the elite and to assimilate the minority or weaker communities. Needless to add that the history that is ever chronicled is scripted by the dominant community. This often forms the core of the history curriculum for the state's educational institutions. What is glaring is the fact that those who make such policies would not dream of sending their own children to the vernacular schools, but would invariably opt to send them to study in an English medium institution outside the state.

Religion too has been used as a tool of assimilation. In the case of the North Eastern states, non-indigenous religions, which have entered into the tribal areas and communities, have served to alienate the indigenous peoples from their culture and traditions. The old ways have been decried as evil, barbarous, outmoded etc. It is true that non-indigenous religions, whether Christianity, Hinduism etc. have served to make the indigenous peoples drift away from their cultural and traditional moorings. It is said of the

Philippines today that there are more Roman Catholics than Filipinos. Today, indigenous missiologists are grappling with the issue of indigenization of the Christian faith. Our culture and traditions may show a healthy gain in the process. This is significant, as Christianity is the major religion in Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and other parts of the North East.

The Indian form of democracy has also played a big role in the assimilation and homogenization of the indigenous communities of the North East. Almost without exception, each indigenous community has its traditional village institutions called 'kebang', 'ho ho', 'putu menden', 'hangva' and so on and so forth according to the particular tribe. These institutions govern and control all facts of community life in the villages. The representatives of each clan of the village constitute them. This allows for equal and fair representation of the villagers in all their affairs. This system of governance has been tested and tried for centuries. A few years ago, in the Gauhati High Court, a Gaon Burah from Nagaland was being cross-examined in an election case. The counsel for the opposite party seeking to discredit his testimony suggested to the Gaon Burah that as he was not on the spot at the time of the occurrence of the incident, he could have no knowledge of the same. The reply of the Gaon Burah was simple. He told the Court, "I am the Gaon Burah of my village. Nothing that happens in my village is unknown to me". The traditional village institutions remain as meaningful and as relevant today as they were to our ancestors. Democracy at its best, and communities, can be traced back to a large extent to the Indian electoral system and Indian politics.

The various models of development and the policies adopted to bring about economic growth in the North East have been marked more by their unsuitability and lack of pragmatism than any tangible benefits. To take one example, the tribals have long been blamed for the destruction of the trees, loss of flora and fauna, environmental degradation etc. So in the wisdom of the Government, the tribals were to be weaned away from the jhuming or burn and slash cultivation to other more sustainable methods. Pesticides, fertilizers and other "advanced technology" were introduced in the villages. The Government created Reserved Forests, which were to be managed scientifically as opposed to the management by the use of traditional skills and indigenous knowledge of the communities. However, studies and projects undertaken by the Borok people in Tripura and the Naga people in Manipur a year ago conclude that it is the traditional methods of agriculture and conservation which have sustained the indigenous peoples and their environment for centuries. It is not merely the techniques employed, but the deep spiritual relationship that these indigenous communities share with their land that has allowed for the variety and sustainability of all life forms. So to try and replicate the agricultural success stories of India like Punjab's Green Revolution in the indigenous regions of the North East or adopt the forest conservation programs which have been carried out in the other pasts of India smacks equally of attempts to assimilate and homogenize.

As the other resource person, Sunita from Tripura will undoubtedly be highlighting the burning issue of illegal migrants and the total demographic changes which have come about in some regions of the North East, I shall leave that aspect to her.

In all of the methods deployed to assimilate and homogenize the indigenous communities of the North East, the most nakedly aggressive has been the use of military might. At one point in the late 1990s, it was reckoned that there was one Indian soldier for every fourth civilian in Manipur. The fact could equally have been true of Nagaland in the 70s and 80s. Mizoram also witnessed large-scale army deployment around the same time. Presently, the military and para-military presence in Assam, Tripura, Manipur and parts of Meghalaya continues to be high. The movement for self-sovereignty began with the Nagas in the North East. Since then, other communities have also asserted this right. There are also many communities, which have been agitating for autonomy within the states. The reasons are manifold – historical rights to self-sovereignty, issues of under-development, inadequate revenues received by the state, unchecked illegal migrations etc. The Government's answer to such issues has been to unleash the military might on the people backed by laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. It is always the innocent

bystanders and the civilians who face the major brunt of the 'anti-insurgency" war. If remote villagers in the North East have invoked the extraordinary powers of the High Courts, it has rarely been for any other relief than to invoke the writ of *habeas corpus* for the release of some villager and/or their family members who have been picked up by the security forces and taken to the army camps and who have not returned thereafter or been seen again; men, women, youth and children have not been spared in the battle by the armed forces against the "insurgents". There have been some studies made by medical professionals, of civilians in the North East which has found the majority of the affected people to be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The decades of militarism which have not ended till today forms a vital part of the history of the indigenous peoples of the North East. Assimilate, or else..... This in turn gave birth to the Human Rights Movement in the North East.

It may therefore not be incorrect when the indigenous peoples in the North East sum it up thus, *They want our land. Not our people.*

Neidonuo Angami

The Ethnic Identity and Literary Histories of the North East

Introduction: At the outset, I want to make it clear that I am not a literary person and assuch, my presentation is based mainly on the oral sources which I believe would be of some help as a sort of clue to those literary persons who aim to do research on the topic.

Secondly, I want to make it known beforehand that although to the outsider, all the Nagas may look alike, having same habits and customs, to the Nagas and the keen observers, it is not as simple as that and it is not possible for an Angami Tribe or, for that matter, for any Naga to talk about any other tribe, not his or her own, in the right perspective. Therefore, being an Angami tribe, I'll limit my coverage to the Angami Nagas only.

Origin of the Nagas: Long before the advent of the British to our land and at the time when there was no means of communication with outside world, our forefathers were reported telling stories about the Russians which they called "Hedzura". They described the Russians which they called 'Rusmia' as a very inventive people. Rusmia did not care about the extreme cold weather because they wore clothes and caps made of animal skin. They also grew long beards. Our forefathers used to go to ' Hedzura' to exchange their cattle with iron materials when needed.

Another story is about the Chinese. The story goes that the Chinese were more inventive than the Russians because they lived in bigger cities with wider roads from where carts are drawn. They could not stay in China, because they tricked and killed the leader of the Chinese that they were forced to flee. Chinese were known as Chinmia by our ancestors.

The third story is about the time they reached the sea. When our forefathers reached the sea while moving towards south, they thought that they had come to the end of the world and as the climate was too hot, they believed that the same place must be the nearest point on earth to the sun.

From these three stories, it is believed that at one point of their migration, they came in contact with the Russians around Siberia and China border and later moved towards China and then moved further South towards the sea. Our forefathers settled near the sea at some stage of their migration and is proved by the conch, sea shells and cowries which our people use as ornaments till date.

How and why they moved Northward to where we are now settled is not known, but it is said that our forefather came to a place called Makhrora (Makhel in the present state of Manipur). It is said that he brought a branch of a wild pear tree as a walking stick and later on planted that stick in Makhel village. It grew into a big tree and survives even today with lots of branches.

Our forefather with his followers settled in this same village and died there. He was survived by so many sons. After his death, his sons spread out into different directions and settled in different areas. In course of time, behavioral and dialectic transformation took place and finally different tribes with different dialect, customs and beliefs came up. Today the Angami Nagas are living just North of Makhel in Nagaland state.

Social and Political life of the Angami Tribe: Traditionally an Angami village is an independent village. Although there are some exceptions, a village is usually found and settled by a particular person. In course of time, his children form different khels known as 'Thinuo'. Within the khel, there are clans and subclans known as 'pfutsanuo' (grandchildren) and lastly the families.

The village has no regular form of Government. Every individual follows the dictates of his own will but lives together with respect and strong sense of belonging to one another as a community.

"We talk freely, live freely and even fight freely too. We have no inhibitions of any kind, Wild? Yes, but free. There is order in this chaos, law in this freedom" said late T. Sakhire about the Angamis.

"In war and raids, the warrior would lead, in civil matters of the village and inter village relationship, the village is led by those who have skills in diplomacy, who know the ancient histories of the village. They are known as 'Pehumia' (elderman), and they have the quality of Peyu (statesman) but their authority is nominal, and their orders are obeyed only when they are in accord with wishes of the people. The minority is not bound to the wishes of the majority" [Keiyieielie Linyu *The Angami Church since 1950*].

The whole community which is called in Angami as "Mechu" is so important that from childhood the parents tell their children to be in the "Mechu". This has created a very strong sense of belonging in the mind of the children that even when they grow up, leaving the "Mechu" becomes out of question and till today this sense of knitted community keeps the Angamis together.

Religion and Belief of the Angamis: The Angamis believe in a god called Ukepenuopfu who is believed to be the creator of all things. The religious rights are performed by the *Phichuu* (high priest), *Tsiakrau* (the sower), *Liedepfu* (the reaper) and *Siaruliva* (the one who performs funeral rites).

The high priest: The main function of the high priest is to declare *penyie*, (taboo) days. There are about 50 Penyie, (taboo) days in a year. This Penyie are observed for different reasons. During the start of a cultivation, or when fire destroys, when the rain does not come, or when fire destroys, when the rain does not come, or when hailstorms destroy crops, earthquakes or during the eclipse.

When "Penyu" is declared it is "kenyu" meaning prohibition. When an elder says "it is kenyu to do that" then there is no point to argue with the elder but to obey. It is believed that misfortune is sure to befall on the person who goes against the authority of the elder. This word 'kenyu' binds the community members from going astray.

Tsiakra-u: He is the person appointed to perform the first sowing. Every year he does the sowing first on a fixed date. If someone does the sowing before him the high priest will declare "Penyie" which will be observed by the whole community. It is believed that once "Penyie" is observed for the person who breaks the rule, the person either dies or his life is doomed.

Liedepfu: Liedepfu means the "Reaper". It is performed by a woman appointed by the community. When harvest time comes she will first reap the millet and paddy and then allows the rest to follow. Before she performs the rites of reaping it is prohibited for anyone to reap the paddy to eat anything that is produced from the field.

Siaruliva: The person who performs the funeral rites and rituals is called "Siaruliva". He is appointed by the members of the community.

Festivals of the Angamis: The Angamis have seven festivals in a year, each having its own meaning.

1) *Sekrenyi or Phousanyi* – This festival of the year is the first and the most important one. The festival is performed in the month of February. From this festival the

menfolk sanctify themselves and pray for god's blessings in their works, hunting, war expedition, health etc. by sacrificing a calf each. In this festival *kracu* or *thkrahie* (a form of primitive music concert) and war dances are performed by different age groups of the community.

2) *Ngonyi* – This is the festival for sowing which is held in the month of April.
3) *Kerunyi* – This is the festival for transplantation in May.
4) *Chadanyi* – Festival of cleaning the footpath and water ponds in August.
5) *Khouphiinyi* – This is the festival of distribution of meal to the children.
6) *Vate* - Festival of conservation is performed in December after collecting all the products of the field. This is mainly the festival of the womenfolk.
7) *Terhiinyi* – The festival is mainly performed by the wealthy people of the village. In this festival, the rich man of the village perform sacrifices invoking the blessing of god and organises a feast for the whole community. This is the last festival of the year.

Conclusion: In conclusion, with the advent of western education and Christianity into the primitive life of the Nagas, our lifestyle has been transformed drastically from the primitive life to the modern lifestyle in just a matter of a century that even the good ways of the Nagas are being confused and forgotten in this rush for change.

But as the good and the bad always go together, the place of women in the modern society is also emerging rapidly to a better future.

Jarjum Ete

Role of Women in the Economy & Environment of the North-East India

The history of North East India may not have much mention about the roles of women, perhaps because they were not written by women. It may also be because the roles of the women are regarded so commonplace and taken for granted that it was not found uncommon or important enough to find any place in the annals of the region's history. Written history, perhaps, depends on the bias, perspectives and understanding of the author and the values of the time/period much more than many events. Despite the lack of written documents of the past, the tribals/indigenous people of the North East of India have their rich folklore replete with the stories of strong and hardworking women.

The perception and priority of the women about economy or environment, the two subjects which are being dealt with in this paper, are very subjective and limited. There would perhaps be hardly any woman who does not contribute to the food security of the family or provide water and energy for domestic use. The women of the North East India have been known to be good weavers who used to take care of the clothing of the family members. And obviously, they are also more concerned about the sources of fuel, food and energy and they have always been. Only problem is – the opinion or the role of the women has never been given much weightage and acknowledgement.

But, nevertheless, it is an attempt at highlighting the roles of women in the economic and environmental history of North East region of India, although these might not be found in the conventional world of history.

The *Nupilans*, women's wars, of 1904, 1939 and 1996 by the Meitei women of Manipur has much prominence in historical records. The first women's war was waged in protest against the management and disposition of labour resources made by the Britishers. The second one was against the War taxation and erosion of the buffer stock of community rice causing the death of the peasants. The most recent one was, of course, against violence and human rights violations in the state in the wake of insurgency and militarisation.

The *Meira Paibis*, the legendary torch-bearers, again Meitei women in the valley of Manipur, are famous for their 1970s *Nashabandi* patrols and 1980s anti-Narcotic Abuse movement in the state.

Talking of the Meitei women, their economic contribution to their society and state

can be gauged by even the simplest person by looking at the Ima Marup, the women's market – totally managed and controlled by the women themselves.

In Nagaland and the hill districts of Manipur, the Naga women through organisations like the Naga Mothers Association have contributed much towards bringing the elusive Peace to their part of the world, ridden with militancy and militarisation, making the innocents suffer at the hands of both the forces. The women have been walking the tight-rope of sanity in an insane world of blood-shed, bomb-blast, firings, killings, abductions, tortures, rapes and violence. They have been taking care of the young, old, sick and the invalids. They have kept the home-fire burning and cultivated the fields to sustain lives, when the men were either out – living in the jungles for fear of their lives or for their dear cause, or being hunted by the forces. Even at the face of such trying moments, the women took courage and lived on, with moral strength and forbearance.

These mothers and sisters have also been tackling the impossible situations of AIDS and drug-addiction through rehabilitation and nursing. But for the women in Nagaland, the people in general, and the menfolk in particular, would have lost all faith in God and hope in life.

The women of Assam, unlike their counterparts in the hill-states, have found their rightful place in history. Their economic contributions, particularly, has been acknowledged throughout. The sericulture industry and the traditional silk/eri/muga/paat weaving of the Assamese women is well-known world-over. The skills of weaving have been passed on from mothers to daughters and thus, today's growing demand for Assam silk has been due to the labours of the women of Assam – may they be the Bodos/Kacharis, the Mishings, the Mikirs, the Tiwas, the Ahoms and others.

Their role during the Independence movement against the Britishers and also the Assam Agitation against the illegal migrants, land alienation and many anti-people policies of successive Central governments, cannot be undermined. There may be many related writings in regional languages, but such writings have limited readership because of which not much is known outside the circle. The long-drawn Assam Agitation of the 1980s was also basically over the resource-management, particularly, tea, coal and petroleum, leading to economic deprivation to the natives; the labour import for tea-gardening causing large-scale demographic imbalances, illegal immigrants, migrants, subsequent land alienation etc.

In Meghalaya, the only tribal state in the region with matrilineal societies, often misunderstood as matriarchal, the women have historically and traditionally played major roles in the management of the common properties of the community and the family. The sacred groves of Meghalaya have been part of their traditional eco-management system. These sacred-groves are the bio-diversity gene-pool for the locality/area.

The women of Meghalaya are very hard-working and it is apparent to any on-looker at the first glance.

It is women in Meghalaya with the support of other like-minded people who have been questioning the mining of Uranium in the state. They are concerned about the health of the people and also that of the whole environment/ecology.

The many tribes of Arunachal have survived on agriculture – subsistence farming. And the women were the main workers, when the men were either out hunting for animals of off to wars. In most of the tribes, the women are very good weavers and they used to weave for all in the family during the fallow periods.

The Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society, the apex women's body in the state, has been after the people's representative government to make proper policies on land, forest and water as this tribal state, even after 50 years of public administration and 20 years of popular democratic government, does not have any policy guidelines. The people's government is encroaching and taking away community land and forest and water, depriving the people. The benefits of so-called economic development is being concentrated in a few hands.

But what is the overall position of the people of this region in the economic field – industries etc.? What is the basis of its economy? How much resources are in their control? Are they equipped to protect their rights over the resources? What is the state of food

security in the region? Is it possible for the people to survive without the government's Public Distribution System in case of any emergency – external or internal disturbances? What are the possibilities of sustainable economic development without depriving the people? and the role the women of this region could play in all these? – is the question.

So far, this region does not even have a manufacturing unit for plastic buckets or match box to call as an industry. The cash crop and mineral extraction industries like tea, petroleum gas, coal were started during the British rule. There is much scope identified in the fields of hydro-power, irrigation, mineral extraction, bamboo, cane, timber, horticulture, other minor forest produce, etc. What can the present women of the region do to contribute and also benefit from these sources?

Unlike the earlier era, the management of resources and policies for socio-economic development of the people and any region lies with the so-called people's representatives. And the women have hardly any voice in the decision-making bodies – traditional or modern. The benefits of their wisdom and experiences, their perspectives are not likely to have any place in the making of the policies.

It is high time, the beginning of a new millennium, not only to work for the people but also to decide for the people. Define the fine line between development and people's interest – environmental issues and the issue of livelihood and sustenance. It is also the time for them to make history and also write their own history - the insider's story, the story of women. And with many women of the region becoming educated and getting the right kind of exposure, they are well-equipped, at least, to begin writing history from their perspectives.

Remarks of Participants

"This workshop shall clear some concepts dealing with concrete issues. Also, indigenous women's platform would emerge. We would start being action-oriented basing ourselves on documentation that we collect/compile".

"Very glad to be in the midst of vibrant women activist who are all IP".

"Some practical and workable program is envisaged covering some down to earth problem on ethnicity, region-wise".

"To learn about each others background – to come closer as sisters".

"It is great that we could come together (IP women of N.E.) for the first time. We must work together so that we can preserve our indigenous identity'.

"I feel very happy attending this workshop. Like this workshop in N.E. Region is very important".

"I think this workshop will bring close contact with other indigenous peoples of North East and give strength to preserve their own identity'.

"While identifying gaps that exist in the region. I do expect that this workshop will bring closer ties for the up-liftment of indigenous women and work together fraternally".

"Better understanding among NE women and form a forum/platform for continuing this process. Next meeting in different state too".

"More women should participate in this kind of workshops to reorient ourselves and work for common cause of NE Indigenous people. We women & Children in particular'.

" To educate and to create awareness on women's rights and responsibilities in the North East".

"They want our land. Not our people".

List of Participants

Alaishri Boro	Boro Women's Justice Forum
Anima Basumatary	Boro Women's Justice Forum
Anjali Daimari	Boro Women's Justice Forum
Anupama Rabha	All Rabha Women Council
Apem Zimik	Student
Artax A. Shimray	AICFAIP
Bhanu Amphi	All Tiwa Women Association
Biakliani Sailo	Mizoram Hmeithai Association
Bordoloi R.P.M	Rt. Professor
Chanmayo Jajo	Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights
Dipti Bengia	Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society
Elizabeth Ng.	Naga Women's Union Manipur
Gina Shangkham	Naga Women's Union Manipur
Grace T. Shatsang	Naga Women's Union Manipur
Jarjum Ete	Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society
Kammei Sumitra Rongmei	Naga Women's Union Manipur
Lakshmi Rabha	All Rabha Women's Forum
Lucy Engjadim	NE India Committee of Relief & Development
Lydia Deb Barma	Borok Women's Forum
Muangching N.	Zomi Mothers' Association
Nabani Basumatary	Boro Women's Justice Forum
Neidonuo Angami	Naga Mothers' Association
Nilima Narzary	Boro Women's Justice Forum
Ning Ngaihlian	Zomi Mothers' Association
Peiningam Lamkang J.	Lamkang Women Society
Rolice Achumi	Advocate
Sunita Debbarma	Borok Women's Forum
Sukhendo Debbbarma	AICFAIP
Vanlalduni H.	Mizoram Hmeithai Association
Veronica Zatluangi	Mizoram Hmeithai Association
Yaken Yomcha	Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society
Zarzokini	Mizoram Hmeithai Association

Women and Regional Histories

The Southern Regional Seminar
Hyderabad
August 30, 31
and September 1, 1999

Organised by: The Department of History
School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad

in collaboration with Indian Association for Women's Studies

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List of Participants

This report has been prepared with the assistance of: Sheela Prasad, Reader, Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad, Dilip M. Menon, Reader, Department of History, University of Hyderabad, Rekha Pande, Reader, Department of History, University of Hyderabad

Aruna A., Research Scholar, Department of History consolidated the Rappoteurs reports for inclusion in this report.

[The Rappoteurs for the various sessions of the Seminar were: K. Sridevi, T. Senthil Kumar, G.S. Mamata Devi, A. Aruna and Lavanya]

Student Volunteers: Research Scholars: Santosh Kumar Praveena Rao , Sujatha G. Venkata Keseva, B. Sivasekharu, N. Srikanth, LSK Verma, Darbha Kausiki, Sharvana Kumar Raju, Suvarna Deepak, P. Swethambari, Abul Hussain, K. Nirmal Kumar, Sabina Fatima,

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We are grateful to our colleagues in the Schools of Social Sciences and Humanities for helping us in organizing the Seminar and actively participating in making it a success. In particular to D. Narasimha Reddy (Economics), Probal Dasgupta (Linguistics) and . Shivaram Paddikkal (Linguistics), Raghuram Raju (Philosophy) and Mamata Sagar, RS (Comparative Literature).

We are most grateful to B. Narasing Rao (Film Maker, Hyderabad) for being present at the screening of his film "Daasi" and discussing it with us and to Shareef (Art History, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad) for a lecture and slide presentation on "Deccani Miniatures".

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Summary Report

Aloka Parasher Sen

The Department of History in collaboration with the Indian Association of Women's Studies conducted the three day Southern Regional Seminar on "Women and Regional Histories" between August 30 and September 1, 1999. The seminar aimed at reviewing `Women's Space' in southern histories in domains like politics, literature, literary criticism, gender orientation in different relations, hierarchy, patriarchy and the formation of language. The seminar also identified the existing gaps and provided reorientation to existing research. A number of women scholars and activists representing various universities and research institutions participated and presented papers on different aspects of women's lives and documented their histories. An inter-disciplinary and comparative approach was adopted during the course of the Seminar.

A total of twenty-one papers were presented at the seminar by scholars from various universities and research institutions. The Programme Schedule and the Abstracts of the papers presented at the seminar are enclosed. A Special Urdu Panel Discussion on "Deccani (Rekti) and Women's Contribution" was organized on 31st August, 1999. Another panel discussion on "Women in the Andhra Region" was also organized on 1st September, 1999. The film "Daasi" directed by well-known film-maker B.Narasing Rao set historically in the Telangana of the early 20th century was also screened on 30th August, 1999 followed by a discussion with the Director. A Lecture and Slide Presentation on "Deccani Miniatures" by Shareef from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad was made on 1st September, 1999 to highlight how the writing of women's history could be enriched by using historical material like paintings. Nearly 120 participants from various universities/institutes attended the seminar on all the three days and participated in the deliberations. Besides, there was active participation by students from various departments of the University of Hyderabad as part of the discussions that took place at the end of each session.

A detailed report on the papers presented at the seminar and the discussion that was reported by the research scholars of the Department is being sent to Indian Association of Women's Studies as given below.

Preliminaries

From its very inception the Department of History [A Profile of the Department enclosed] at the University of Hyderabad has argued that a study of local and regional history should be the prime focus of its attention and encouraged research in this area. For the last two decades we have identified the social and cultural history of the Deccan as our research thrust area. Therefore, an invitation from the Indian Association of Women's Studies to organize the Southern Regional Seminar on *Women and Regional Histories* was spontaneously accepted by the Department ---- being a significant extension of its existing research interests and activities. The work done in the Department as part of the research degrees awarded is also a indication of this interest. A list of Ph.D and M.Phil dissertations that have been written on Women's History and related issues in the Department since its inception is enclosed for reference.

The earlier seminars organized by the Department had not excluded women from their purview but their themes had been broad based. It was not the simple question of focusing exclusively on Women that made this Seminar different from our earlier endeavours. We now extended our focus further South from the Deccan and, most important, took the initial steps at attempting a comparative perspective. While recognizing that within particular regions of South India intensive work on Women's History has been going on for some time, in organizing this seminar some effort went into identifying scholars working on similar themes across regions so that continuities and disjunctions between regions could be identified during the course of the discussions for the three days of the seminar. While planning this seminar it was firmly emphasized, agreeing fully with the aims articulated by the General Secretary, Indian Association of Women's Studies, that *ongoing and new research works* (emphasis added) on this theme was to be identified and brought together for the Seminar. This, it was envisaged, would enable us, on the one hand, to draw a comprehensive review of the work that had already been done and at the same time, help us to identify gaps that existed in research on women's histories of the different regions and sub-regions of South India.

The Southern Regional Seminar on *Women and Regional Histories* was inaugurated by Professor P. Rama Rao who had taken over as the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hyderabad. We thought it befitting to begin the Seminar with the rendering of a Rig Vedic hymn as a classical song by Darba Kausiki who had joined the new batch of MA Semester I students in July 1999. The verse articulated sentiments of people coming together to put their minds together and to talk together in the spirit of having a true exchange of ideas.

Meet together, talk together
May your minds comprehend alike
Common be your action and achievement
Common be your thoughts and intentions.

Common be the wishes of your hearts
... So there may be thorough
union among you
*(*Rigveda – X, 191*)*

Kausiki then, in her well trained voice as a classical singer, took us to the realm of the region by singing a popular hymn on the various rivers of South India from the Godavari to the Kaveri which all happened to be common names of women like Goutami, Krishna and so forth.

The articulation of these simple sentiments appropriately set the stage for welcoming the participants from different parts of South India while univocally suggesting that the Seminar was being truly held in the spirit of having a dialogue between scholars representing different ideological perspectives and disciplines. The Inaugural Session

which followed this Welcome was chaired by Professor P. Rama Rao who highlighted the importance of having such an activity on the University of Hyderabad Campus and also expressed his happiness at being associated with the function which also happened to be his first official engagement after taking over as Vice-Chancellor of the University. The Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Professor VVN Somayajulu welcomed the gathering and gave an introduction about the School of Social Sciences where the History Department is located. . Kalpana Kannabiran, General Secretary, Indian Association of Women's Studies introduced the organization to the delegates and gave a brief history of the activities of the IAWS. She also explained at length the motives that had led the IAWS to sponsor such Regional Seminars and Workshops. The Hyderabad Regional Seminar was of particular importance because the forthcoming IX National Conference on Women's Studies is also being held at Hyderabad in January 2000. Professor Aloka Parasher-Sen, Head Department of History explained the ideas and scope of the Seminar which have been detailed below.

Themes identified for the Seminar

In the note sent out to invited paper presenters certain broad areas and themes were identified by us. Thus the thematic divisions touched on issues of the historical roots of citizenship and identity with a particular emphasis on bringing in the question of gender in region specific contexts, on histories of women's work and property, on literary histories and the gender question, on the understanding of pre-modern ideologies and patriarchal practices and their reinforcement today, on questions of demography, women's health and violence and finally, on the way women were represented in historical sources of information which some times do enable us to write on more conventional themes like their participation in political processes during different historical periods.

Such being the themes identified by us, we consciously made efforts to invite scholars from a variety of disciplines, not only historians ---- but also those specializing in other disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities, like Geography, Psychology, Folk Culture, Political Science, Economics, Literature and Languages. In making this seminar truly inter-disciplinary colleagues in the Schools of Social Sciences, Humanities and Performing Arts contributed their ideas and also shared the burden of organizing the Seminar. Any good historical work, it is now well-recognized, must have an earnest dialogues with other disciplines and the focus on Women in History provided one such invigorating avenue.

In our deliberations for the three days of the Seminar, we began with our immediate past - the historical roots of our contemporary cultural, political, literary and social self. The centrality of the gender question was raised in all the papers on the first day. Each focused on a different region but all harked back to issues of modernity, nationalism, social reform and colonialism.

On the second day we moved back in time to our distant and intermediate pasts to focus on issues of myth and legend, religious devotion and social transcendence, political participation and finally, women in work and property. Some of these papers stressed on the persistence of ideas over time that define the space of women's mental, reproductive and economic life. On the second day a panel discussion on Women's contribution to the formation of Deccani, a special language in the form of Rekti which flourished all over the Deccan was organized. This has been a much neglected area of historical research and we were indeed grateful to the language specialists in this area to have participated in the Seminar and given valuable information on the subject. Living in Hyderabad one cannot but escape the simple but melodious sound of the Deccani language and therefore understanding its origin, especially in the hands of women, was a specially important aspect for discussion on the second day.

First Session
Notions of Patriarchy: women in literature and politics

Chair: *Rama Melkote*

V.Geetha

Notes Towards a Notion of Tamil Patriarchy

This paper attempted to work out a way of understanding Tamil patriarchy through the discourse of the self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu. She argued that despite the overt radicalism of EVR's critique of traditional norms which defined notions of masculinity and femininity and social roles within the family and community, there was a refusal to actually engage with the construction of masculinity itself. In the construction of ideas of Tamil pride and honour it was nearly always the idea of male honour which was taken as representative of the community. Geetha then looked at the possibility of a critique arising from the ideas of the Dalit intellectual Raj Gowthaman which tries to address the complications of the emergence of a radical Tamil identity in largely Brahminical and Sanskritic terms. He also argues that the whole process of the emergence of Tamil civilization involved a "policing of the senses" and the spelling out of different roles and spaces for men and women within society. The discussion was lively and sought to address specific issues like the patriarchal nature of the Dravidian movement, the intellectual influences on Raj Gowthaman and the possibility of evolving a newer political strategy within the politics of Tamil Nadu which would address the issue of gender.

K. C. Sukanya

Literary Histories in Kannada: Politics of canonization and women writers

This paper tried to situate women's writing in Kannada within the history of canon formation. The various movements such as the modern and progressive and Dalit attempted to address different strains within society, but the question of gender remained sublimated. When women writers took up the issue of gender this tended to be marginalized by the establishment as too sectarian an issue and at times this resulted in the holding of separate sessions at literary meetings on women and their problems. There was no attempt to integrate the problems raised by the issue of gender. Instead there has been a resort to categories which mask sectarianism in the guise of universalism by posing abstract standards of "excellence". By this yardstick new, radical literature rarely ever seems to make the mark.. The discussion that followed raised questions about the works of particular authors and evolving criteria for aesthetic judgment.

Second Session
Gender and Cultural Representation

Chair: *Susie Tharu*

G. Arunima

Gender and Masculinity in Malayalam Satire

This paper dealt with male satirists in early twentieth century Kerala and looked at satire as a form addressing the anxieties of a society in transition. In a largely matrilineal society modernity brought its range of discontents regarding the type of family form, new forms of association, the status of men and women and the need to reorder gender relations. One of the primary anxieties was regarding the new unit of the nuclear family within which the relative status of the husband and wife still had to be defined. Apart from this the creation of a public sphere distinct from earlier community politics created fears regarding a space within which neither caste nor traditional identities were fixed. Satire allowed a laughing at and probably a laughing off of these emergent strains.

K. Lalita

The Modern Woman: Constructions of gender in the history of modern Andhra

This paper was on women in modern Andhra and the impact of education in producing a certain form of modernity. Initially, devadasis were the first to enter the vernacular institutions set up by the missionaries in coastal Andhra. By the next decade, Brahmin women had begun to enter educational institutions but were apprehensive of missionary enterprise as corrupting of dharma. Women's education was geared primarily towards creating an ideal type middle class woman who would be geared towards domesticity rather than an engagement with the public domain. Questions of balancing tradition and modernity, the extent of westernisation that was permissible, these continued to be pressing issues till the onset of nationalism. Questions were raised about whether there were any dissenting voices to this domesticating project either among women themselves or social reformers.

M. Jamuna

Gender and Social Reform in Princely Mysore

This paper dealt with issues similar to those raised by Lalita earlier in the day. Issues such as infant marriage, female education and widow marriage were seemingly radical but worked within the paradigm of reform by cautious upper caste men not willing to go too far and reorder society. Again, when issues of education were raised it was clear that what reformers had in mind was a woman whose activities would be restricted to the domestic sphere. The Princely state was also extremely cautious in matters of reform treading softly even on issues relating to the abolition of the devadasi system.

Third Session
Subverting the Norm: goddess, saint, ruler

Chair: *Vijaya Ramaswamy*

V. Vasanthalakshmi

Women's History: From origin myth to local legends

This paper attempted which was an attempt to explore the various origin myths and local legends pertaining to mother goddesses. She categorized the mother goddesses into three types each one differing in their spatial and ideological milieu. The first part of her paper, dealt with the origin myths of mother goddesses narrating two different stories to show the declining status of the Mother. The first story is about the all powerful Mother who later loses all her powers to her own creation , the Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), through deceit. The second story reveals how the mother goddess was being persecuted by "kings" to the point of her being doomed to the most wretched place on earth- the cleaning tub of animal skins in a *Madiga* family. These myths show the decline of women's status- from a free, independent position to a powerless, servile, victim status and the ascendancy of male supremacy over the female supremacy.

The second category of goddesses , discussed by the author are the village goddesses who outnumber the Mother goddess both in terms of the followers and temples that are constructed for them all over Andhra Pradesh. Though the symbolic status of these goddesses for the productive and reproductive roles of women in village economy are crucial yet, when it came to the actual needs of the villagers her devotees were marginalized. The third part of her paper was an attempt to show through a study of legends the various reasons behind women being deified. Here the goddesses are purely local in nature and each has specific story attached to her. Taking nearly 30 to 40 legends that are popular in Andhra Pradesh, Vasanthalakshmi tried to reconstruct the value system that governed the lives and deaths of those women. In this part she focused on the 'violence against women' which resulted in their death. Stories were fabricated about such women who were later deified and worshipped by the local people.

R. Mahalakshmi

Karaikkal Ammaiyar and the Tamil Bhakti Movement
Outside the norm but within the tradition

This paper attempted to bring out the case of non-Brahmin women's voice by highlighting the story of Karaikkal Ammaiyar a Bhakti movement poet. In a brief introduction on the Bhakti movement she emphasised that its main ideology was the amalgamation of forest Gods into Brahmin tradition. She discussed the hymns of Karaikkal Ammaiyar written in a unique style and presented her as one of the earliest proponents of the Bhakti movement. Karaikkal Ammaiyar unlike others, did not play upon the concept of femininity but rejected it completely. In a brief biography of Karaikkal Ammaiyar, Mahalaxmi stressed that devotion towards Siva is was sometimes so extreme that she came to be called - a Tamil word meaning demon. Ammaiyar identified herself as one of Siva's demons at Sudukadu - the burial ground and broke away from the Brahmanical tradition. However, there was an ambivalence in her attitudes. Though she called herself a pey of Siva and stayed at the burial ground she never rejected her femininity.

A. Usha Devi

Women as Rulers and Patrons of Pre-Independence Telugu Land

This paper highlighted the "lesser-known" women rulers of the *samsthanas*/ princely states who forged an identity for themselves in the 19th century A.D. in the land of Telugus by taking up several social welfare programmes. She points out that most of the women rulers of these *samsthanas* took up to administration, not out of their choice but merely to protect their property rights after the demise of their husbands. Administration has not become difficult as most of them were well-educated in Sanskrit, Telugu, and English. Usha Devi then discussed the welfare schemes taken up by these women rulers in their respective *samsthanas*. According to her, the minimal control of the British on their administration, gave an ample opportunity for these women rulers to take up several welfare measures such as 1) providing free food (annasatras), 2) supporting poor students, 3) digging up lakes, 4) building temples etc. They also patronized and encouraged scholars from different fields of fine-arts, established libraries, press and publications and got many works published. The paper ended with scholars suggestion for the need to take up the study of the women rulers in the light of the social welfare measures they had undertaken in the 19th century.

Fourth Session
Women and Economic History

Chair: *D. Narasimha Reddy*

Vijaya Ramaswamy

Historical Perspectives on Women and Work in Tamilnadu

In the author's view, historians had to undertake the task of identifying the work performed by women in history. She pointed out the role of women in the textile sector as cleaners, washers, driers, and spinners, and discussed references in the Sangam literature to women performing agricultural work. She mentioned the term 'Ulathi' which in Tamil refers to the agricultural female who is involved in planting seeds, taking rest under a marutham tree, etc. She discussed the practice of preventing women from touching the plough and other main tools as they were accused of impurity. Vijaya Ramaswamy identified women as the preservers of the history and tradition through folk songs. A number of songs-relate the ills faced by women at work: exploitation of supervisor, low wage and so on. All these were mentioned in the songs of women such as the Ghee woman, Buttermilk woman, and women following other occupations. The speaker says that spinning was one field monopolised by women.

Lalitha Iyer

Women and Work in 18th Century Tamilnadu

Lalitha Iyer examined this concept based on archival source material dealing with women and property from 1739-1760. She spoke in particular about women in 18th Century Pondichery using the diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai- a clerk under the French. She

brought out the incidents of legal disputes which involved women particularly with regard to property. In many cases the concerned widows who fought for their share in the property of their husbands or fathers but for which they were given only the maintenance annuity. Then she moved on to discuss women in trade. Women from the Dubarshi communities dealt with the commercial activities. Many Eurasian women participated in the commercial activities. Bhangaru a women in Madras gave financial assistance to Arab and British merchants. Another women called Rangammal also finds mention in her work who lent money to other traders. she also discussed women as property pointing to the case of davadasi women who were treated as public property. Moreover, women from the landed castes and widows who did not own property were themselves treated as possessions to be exchanged or traded.

Fifth Session
Panel Discussion: Deccani (Rekti) and Women's Contribution

Chair: Vasanth Kannabiran

Jameela Nishat

Deccani Language and Women's Contribution

It was pointed out by Jameela Nishat, that historians and linguists have completely neglected the role of women in the development of this language. The Deccani women who were married to the Arab tradesmen and the kings from the North, were converted to Islam. These women were not familiar with Persian or Arabic. They started communicating with their husbands in their Marathi/Telugu accented language. Deccani was a result of this interaction. The symbols and metaphors were both from Sanskrit and Persian. Soon however the language received its first blow, when in order to get admiration of North Indian Literary gatherings, the Deccani writers Persianised the language. With the advent of Asif Jahis the language underwent astic changes and gradually the educated people of Deccani alienated themselves from their roots. The women, however living in the four walls of their homes, continued to speak the language and the language and culture was preserved by the muslim women.

Ashraf Rafi

Deccani Idioms and Contribution of Women

Rafi showed through the use of various Deccani idioms and Proverbs that the Deccani spoken by the women was something distinctly feminine. The day-to-day spoken language mirrors their convictions and commitments. These proverbs showed the habits and morals, the emotions and sensibilities and reflect the social bindings and subtleties of the Deccani culture. It reflected the day to day happenings in their lives. Since these women were secluded from the outward world within the four walls of their houses, they had no contacts outside, but they were responsible for bringing people together, by realising the sensitivity of human relationships. In the proverbs used by them they speak of their day to day happenings and experiences. When women from other regions were married to Deccani men they brought with them their own proverbs and these soon became a part of their own Deccani language, though none of these have formed a part of any formal dictionaries.

Urdu Poetry by Hyderabadi Women Poets of Twentieth Century

A poet from Hyderabad, Zahir traced the history of women's poetry in Urdu. There was a distinct upper class consciousness with subjugation before the male dominant society and middle class morality syndrome in most of the women writers in the early twentieth century. Later it developed in a more self assertive, confident and bold character which was necessary for the independent movement. Hence we find poets like Akhtar Hyderabadi and Noshaba, who expressed their female characters boldly and called for revolutionary efforts to free India. After independence, there was a brief pause, but soon women emerged in a more emancipated, modern and existential character.

Sixth Session
Gender, Creativity, Illness, Demography and Violence

Chair: *Probal Dasgupta*

U. Vindhya

Fractured Minds and Fractured Society
Women in psychological distress [a study in north coastal Andhra Pradesh]

This paper explored issues related to gender and psychological disorders. The study based on 11,726 women patients in Vishakhapatnam identified the socio-demographic background of these women in an effort to understand the social factors that relate to mental illness. The author recognizes that socio-cultural barriers affect women's psychological well-being and argues that we need to be sensitive to these factors. The paper concludes by observing that women also have tremendous coping ability in their situations of distress.

Sheela Prasad

Region, Demography, Gender: Mapping trends in Andhra Pradesh

This paper was an attempt to delineate or uncover the nesting of demographic regions at different levels of hierarchy in South India and A.P. in particular. In the process of such a regionalisation, the district of Nizamabad in A.P., emerges as a distinct demographic entity, revealing characteristics very different from the rest of its surrounding Telangana region. The paper then seeks to understand why Nizamabad shows a deviant pattern. Both the geography and history of Nizamabad have played a determining role in influencing its demography. The demographic indicators chosen for analysis are those relating to women only.

Mamata Sagar

Patriarchy and Resistance: Reading the Kannada novel Shivaganga

This paper traces the shifting agendas in women's writing in Kannada in the pre-1980's and post 80's period. To further make her point on the novel as a form that captures the regional history of women and the women's movement, the author attempts a reading of the novel Shivaganga by Champavathi. The novel, a story of Ganga, shifts

worlds/spaces between the rural/urban, private/public and national/international. The journey of Ganga takes place at both the physical and intellectual levels. The paper strongly argues about the importance of women's writing to be part of mainstream literature and not be dismissed as "Kitchen Literature".

A S R V Sunita

Conjugality and Violence: The past and the present

The paper documented the lives of two women belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds, but both victims of domestic violence. Using the oral history narrative the paper discusses the experiences of violence faced by the two women and their negotiations with the oppressive patriarchal situation in their respective lives.

Seventh Session
Panel Discussion: Women in the Andhra Region

Chair: Kancha Ilaiah

P.S. Kanaka Durga

Medieval Royal Charters and Inscriptions: Readings from a feminist perspective

Kanaka Durga, in her presentation, gave a reading of the text, texture and context of the epigraphs from a feminist perspective. She pointed out that the epigraphs carry at least two major biases, one, literary was being privileged over oral presentation and male gender was being preponderant over female gender. Her paper then showed how these two biases reflect themselves in restructuring the texts and textures of epigraphs issued in a given contextual form of the socio-economic formations which of course reflect the political setups and ideologies. In the epigraphs, one can perhaps make out a clear strategy that is male biased, literary oriented, classicist centric system evolved to subordinate women to their own, ideal stereotypes and perpetuate them. Examining certain types of epigraphs of the Kakatiya and Vijaynagar period, the author tried to show how these epigraphs become potential reflectors of gender relations and gender stereotypes of a given social order.

R. Swarupa Rani

Empowerment and Political Participation of Women in Telangana

This paper showed how the society and economy of Telengana underwent a gradual process of transformation inspite of the constraints imposed by the Nizam. The social and political movements that contributed to this transformation were themselves subject to the fact of having to operate in a princely state unlike the rest of the country. During this period issues related to women and women's emancipation were first raised by men towards the end of 19th and 20th centuries. One also witnesses the emergence of women and their active role in politics. The urban and upper caste women developing interest towards a political objective, initially through cultural and literary activities took a formal political stand. The women's movement that emerged at this time can be categorised into three groups, the elitist, which fought for women's education, women's franchise, property rights etc. the middle class who were broader in their vision and scope and raised the question of equal rights, opportunities, better educational facilities etc. The third

category was the peasant women who were radical in nature and carried on the arms struggle in Telengana.

Rekha Pande

Women's Discourse on Education
Problems and perspectives in the recreation of women's history

This paper looked at the Andhra Mahila Sabha, specifically the speeches delivered by women in 1913 and 1914 regarding women's education and tried to show how women's idea of themselves were shaped and controlled by male discourse and the degree of internalisation of this ideology by the women themselves. It raised an important question that our understanding of the past has been primarily from a male point of view.

The problem presents itself in a different form in the modern period where there is a fairly detailed documentation. If we look at the speeches delivered by the women in the annual meetings of the Andhra Mahila Sabha, it appears that through education women were seeking to redefine their roles and functions. A closer analysis however highlights the contradictions between the language of the debate and the ideology it was consciously and unconsciously advocating. While education for women was couched in modern terms to widen women's vision, her knowledge and wisdom, yet in reality the education that was being advocated was a reaffirmation of traditional social roles and images. The curriculum was to train women to be better housewives, mothers and wives. The paper concluded by pointing out that the historical structuring of society in which the production of knowledge and the control of the tools of this production lies essentially with men cannot be ignored in understanding the dimensions and parameters of the debate on women's education. This debate operating with in a patriarchal society, shaped not only the women's own debate on education but also exerted a tremendous influence on their consciousness of problems and their solutions.

Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar

Representation of Women in Telugu Short Story

This paper examined the significance of the women's question in the Telugu short story by men as well as the women writers. Writers like Guruzada, Chalam and Kutumbarao to more recent writers like Kavanasarma and Ketu Viswanathareddy have dealt with various issues like women's education, the freedom of her body and mind to her economic independence. Women writers like Kanuparti Varalakshmi, Sivaraju Subbulakshmi, Ranganayakamma, Abburi Chayadevi, Satyavathi, Volga and Kuppili Padma also deal with more or less the same issues concerning women. The paper shows through various examples that the women writers have responded very differently from men. The authors point out that they have historicised the texts in terms of not only when they were published but who wrote them, and suggest that there is a need either to record such differences and to make them a part of the existing literary histories or to write an alternate literary histories.

Eighth Session
Representation of Women in Deccan Miniature Painting
A Visual Presentation

Shareef

Shareef gave a lecture demonstration through various slides on the miniature paintings in the Deccan. He pointed out that these pictures are referred to as Deccani Kalams, meaning pen or brush. The pictures in this style are recognised by their small character both in actual size and treatment and unique and charming soft colours like pink, blue, green, pale brown, gold and white. The main theme here is royalty- palace scenes, fighting scenes, picnics, pleasure trips, themes of nature, poetry, noblemen and romantic themes. He pointed out that the Deccani paintings are known for their use of gold and silver, profusion of large plants, flowering shrubs, magical breeze of textiles and transparent daperies. The figures have long waistsashes, conical turbans, rich brilliant lapis luzuli backgrounds and rounded rocky hillocks.

Conclusions

Aloka Parasher Sen

The papers presented in this Seminar within the ambit of Regional History were a positive step in the direction of enriching the theory and practice of history. Researches into women's history have provided a truly inter-disciplinary space for expanding methodological and theoretical framework for historical research.

It was clear from the paper presentations that we had covered almost all the themes of contemporary interest and relevance in Women's history. These ranged from understanding how myths and legends were a valuable mode of representing women to the way more recently written and contemporary literature had imagined women. Both needed to be critiqued and this was done raising fundamental questions of how literature of various types as well as oral traditions could be used to write history. On the other hand, the Seminar also addressed questions of how different language source material could be used like Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu and Dakhni Urdu. Their richness and diversity added substantially to our understanding of the empirical data available for writing Women's history. The use of film and painting as central to the way a particular historical setting could analyzed, while unfolding the narration of women's lives in all their complexity and diversity, was also not ignored by us. Whereas the paintings highlighted the frames within which primarily elite women and royal ladies of the court, or courtesans and mendicant women were depicted, the film revealed the space that women of the oppressed and dalit classes had occupied, being both sexually and economically exploited. Further, contemporary case studies of health and mental health in particular, of women and their personal oral narratives to highlight issues of violence on them brought to the forefront empirical studies that in conventional historical studies would not be available to historians but, as the Seminar discussion revealed, were most central to understand lives of women were molded in our recent past and the present.

The region formed the background in most of the papers since each was a case study of a different region or sub-region. In some cases, as in the discussions on the birth of a new language like Dakhni Urdu, it was explicitly made central to all the historical and linguistic arguments without which these unique developments would not have taken place. Though the question of historical time was made explicit in all the presentations, the spatial settings of many of them were usually in the form of setting the stage of the historical narrative. In this sense the regional dimension of how it interjected with the gender question was not sufficiently highlighted. Similarly, in methodological terms the comparative perspective could have been further highlighted.. However, the main aim of the Seminar of bringing together ongoing and new work in the area of Women and

Regional Histories was substantially fulfilled. In fact, many of the scholars had presented their ongoing work for the first time. In some other cases studies that had been done earlier were presented with a specific focus on giving them a new interpretation. Lastly, the greatest achievement of the Seminar was that it was held within the ambit of the main discipline of History and had not been marginalized as simply a Women's Cell or Centre activity. In this sense the papers presented received an exposure of all students and researchers working on other areas in historical research who could critique the issues central to the writing of Women's history. There was also another dimension which none of us had expected would be a necessary outcome of the Seminar. The more traditionally trained students which conservative ideas on the roles of women in society were exposed to these ideas for the first time and reacted to them from their traditional perspective. This only added to the healthy and intensive discussions that marked the end of every Session. We hope that these will now create enough interest among the students to pursue further research in areas related to Women's history and thereby ultimately, transform the nature, content and theory history writing in general.

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