SILVER SHACKLES
Women and Development in India
by Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Culture and Tradition:</strong> Women's Place Ordained.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. The Declining Sex:</strong> Population Ratios and the Status of Women.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. A Promise Unfulfilled:</strong> Women's Access to Education.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. The Invisible Force:</strong> Women's Economic Contribution.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Powers to Change:</strong> Public Policies and the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Women's Development.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Summary and Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notes and References</strong></td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
<td>Rural/Urban Composition of Indian Population 1981.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II</strong></td>
<td>Expectation of life at birth by sex in India from 1872 to 1981.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III</strong></td>
<td>Population of males and females 1901 - 1971 (in thousands).</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV</strong></td>
<td>Ratio of female/male death rates by age groups 1976 - 1978.</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V</strong></td>
<td>Enrolment in classes 1974 - 75.</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls Enrolment in Elementary Education 1976 - 77.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VI</strong></td>
<td>Distribution of main workers by broad categories, 1981.</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VII</strong></td>
<td>Employment of women in factories, mines and plantations.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Notes

Taken from case material provided by OXFAM - supported projects — their application forms, progress reports and newsletters — and from accounts by OXFAM field-workers and project visitors.

1. Shantaben, Widow, Landless Labourer Mother. 8
2. Women's Development in Chhani Village, Seva Mandir. 32
3. Women's Income is Crucial 47
4. Neela Narsaiah — Bidi Worker 53
5. Working Women: Myth and Reality I (SEWA) 57
6. Working Women: Myth and Reality II (SEWA) 61
7. The Women Handloom Weavers of Cambay 63
8. Modern Textile Techniques Marginalise Women 67
9. Development! New Cotton Type Relieves Women's Labour 69
10 We the Self-Employed (SEWA) 85
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Maitreyee Mukhopadhyay
INTRODUCTION

“Although women represent 50 per cent of the world’s population and one-third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one per cent of world property.” - Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Copenhagen, 14th to 30th July 1980.

Women and Development

It is a generally accepted view among development workers today, both at governmental and nongovernmental levels, that development cannot be defined merely in terms of economic growth and a rise in the Gross National Product. Experiences in India and other developing countries have shown that these indicators of ‘development’ do not necessarily imply the elimination of poverty, discrimination and exploitation. The definition and content of ‘development’ ought, therefore, to be re-examined. Today there is increasing concern for the plight of the growing multitude of people who remain marginalised and dis-inherited. The most crucial aim of development should be the creation of a nonexploitative society based on egalitarian values where each individual has access to those resources which will enable them to realise their full human potential. The growing polarisation of social, economic and political power in the hands of a few members of society while the majority remain dispossessed and disinherit cannot constitute development.

In the context of this broad aim of development the issue of the role and status of women becomes a crucial one. The first major attempt to study the problem systematically was made at the World Conference of Women in Mexico in 1975. Within the Women’s Decade that began that year a very comprehensive body of knowledge has accumulated to support the view that women’s status has been deteriorating and that women constitute a vast section of the world’s population which has remained marginalised and dis-inherited in the wake of so-called development efforts. The review Mid-Decade Conference in Copenhagen in July 1980 unearthed the major trend, evident the world over and especially in the developing world, of discrimination against what constitutes half of the world’s adult population - its women.

It was recognised at this world conference that the implementation of the recommendations which were made for the first half of the decade had been unsatisfactory to say the least. The major impediment preventing the realisation of its goals is the fact that women’s problems are a non-issue for most governments. The situation is further aggravated by women’s powerlessness and lack of organised strength.
That the deteriorating status of women is not an isolated phenomenon in a particular country or society can be seen from the conclusions that emerged from the mid-Decade Conference. These findings provide a fitting, classic framework in the context of which the case study of a particular country like India can be better understood.

**The Global Perspective**

Throughout history and in many societies women have shared similar experiences. The distribution of the responsibilities of men and women in society has restricted women mainly to the domestic sphere and has unduly burdened them. Their activities outside this sphere have been habitually denigrated as inferior and unequal to men, and they have thereby suffered gross violations of basic human rights. They have been provided limited access to resources and participation in all spheres of life, notably in decision-making.

The inequality of women stems to a great extent - and in many societies - from mass poverty and the general backwardness of the majority of the world’s population. History does not adequately trace the subjection, exploitation, oppression and domination of women by men.

Women are not simply discriminated against by the productive systems, but subject to the discrimination that arises by virtue of being the reproductive force. While in most societies women’s reproductive role and their importance as keepers of the family is duly recognised, their actual and potential contribution to the economy is in most cases ignored. For example, it is commonplace in India to receive a completely negative answer from men responding to the query - What do the women of your household do? These cumulative processes of discrimination within and outside the family characterise the dual oppression that women suffer on the basis of their sex and social class.

“Although women represent 50 per cent of the world’s population and one-third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one per cent of world property.”

In reviewing the performance of the first half of the Decade, global trends and issues relating to women’s status and role emerged. It was seen that the situation of women in the backward sectors (among the rural and urban poor) in most countries had worsened. This was noticeably so with regard to the conditions of employment and education for women in the rural and the so-called marginal urban sectors.

This trend continues. In many countries the total number of illiterates among women is on the increase. However, in most countries a noticeable increase in educational opportunities for women is discerned in the middle and upper income groups. This has not, however, resulted in increased job opportunities. On the contrary, there is evidence of increasing numbers of women being forced into unemployment or being transferred outside the
formal sectors of the economy into the peripheral labour market in the developed countries, and in the developing countries into the informal sectors of subsistence agriculture, handicrafts and so on.

In many instances the transfer of inappropriate technology from the developed to the developing nations has worsened the employment and health conditions of women; displacement of labour has occurred and foreign models of consumption have followed such transfers. New discriminatory practices have appeared in both rural and urban areas. For example, in the urban areas of the developing countries increases in the employment of women have been largely the result of an increase in the exploitation of the cheap, semi-skilled labour of young and unmarried women.

As the crisis in the world economy grows more acute, the developing countries in particular have suffered most. And because of the real economic and social situation in these countries, it is women who have been the most adversely affected. Recent studies of the impact of international economic problems on the employment and working conditions of women show that, in fact, the adverse effects on the wage levels and job stability of women are more extensive than on those of men. For example, women are the first to lose their jobs on plantations that produce crops for export, and in the textile, clothing and electronics industries which are more sensitive to price fluctuations and to the protectionist measures recently introduced by some developed countries.

A world-wide phenomenon, affecting the developing countries especially, is the displacement of women from the traditional and agricultural sectors which provided gainful occupation to a vast number of the female population in the Third World. With the attempted rapid 'modernisation' of these economies, and with the consequent neglect of integrated rural development and inability to provide vocational and employment alternatives to those displaced by this phenomenon, women have lost their productive role in the economy and have been displaced from the process of development. The lack of access to land, credit and financial and technological resources has aggravated the impact of rapid displacements in the work activities of women.

In many countries, at the national level, a comparison of the performances of men and women in every sector of economic and social development shows that the wide gap between economic opportunities available to men and those open to women has not been reduced in proportion to the increases achieved in overall economic growth. Even in countries where significant increases in general wage employment were obtained, women have failed to share equally in this increase while men, due to greater job security, have developed opportunities for sustained employment in the labour force, learned skills and increased their wages. Women constitute a substantial and growing proportion of the underemployed sector of the population, especially in the area of intermediary services and activities of
the so-called tertiary and informal sectors. In those sectors women workers, like their male counterparts, are often underpaid and receive for the most part extremely low wages; they are also subjected to a high degree of job instability and have, in most countries, no legislative protection, and existing labour organisations do not always pay sufficient attention to their needs and demands.

The mid-Decade Conference was a stock-taking exercise which revealed the need for immediate concrete action on behalf of the world's women. Thus the acceptance of a new programme of action for the last five years of the Decade, concentrating on the areas of employment, health and education made a shift in emphasis from such abstract concepts as equality, development and peace which were the main themes of the Women's Decade. The focus on employment, health and education has concretised the measures that will promote equality, development and peace.

For women in particular, these are areas of crucial concern. In trying to work towards equality in the opportunities for employment, for example, organisations and governments will have to contend with the politics of the sexual segregation of jobs and the hitherto 'invisibility' of women workers in rural environments. This is unlikely to be achieved unless development planners are sensitised to the real factors affecting women's status.

Placed within this global context the problems of Indian women become more recognisable.

Women in India

The majority of women in Indian society live in poor, rural, peasant homes. Many work outside their homes and in addition are burdened by the toil and drudgery of domestic chores. Usually weakened by excessive childbearing and often deprived of the basic welfare services, these women nevertheless contribute 50 per cent of the total labour in agricultural operations. Yet they may not enjoy any of the normal rights that go with being a breadwinner, and their contribution is not always given due recognition. They have little access to training and education, and constitute the unremunerated family labour force; they are the first to lose their employment when jobs are scarce and are often discriminated against in wage payments. For those women who do not enjoy any decision-making power either over their own lives or in their community, the promises made by the Indian Constitution to ensure "Justice social, economic and political and equality of status and opportunity for all", remain an unrealised dream.

However, it should be emphasised that the poor status of women, their oppression and exploitation, cannot be examined as an isolated problem in Indian society. Although the status of women constitutes a problem in most societies, in the rigidly hierarchical and inequitable social structure which exists in India the relative inferiority and superiority of various roles is much more clearly defined. The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument or function of the social structure. In a society where religion
sanctions an institutionalised form of discrimination - because of the accident of birth, a Brahmin is born privileged while a Shudra (or Harijan) is condemned to perpetual damnation in his lifetime (and with no hope of redemption after death) - the underprivilege and oppression of women is a further manifestation of a deeply rooted religious and cultural tradition. Therefore, attempts at the removal of the inequalities and injustices that women suffer without a corresponding movement for social justice for all can only result in failure or perhaps in enhancing only the roles of a few women in the process.

Women in India do not constitute a homogeneous group and thus the problems they face in development vary in kind and degree according to the differences in class, community and caste backgrounds. In order to present a truly representative picture of the majority of women, emphasis will be laid on the problems of poor women, both urban and rural, who live below subsistence level, as well as those who move constantly between relative security and subsistence. For the most part these women live in the rural areas and are agricultural labourers, and the wives and daughters of sharecroppers and very small farmers. Women living below the subsistence level and on the borderline between relative security and subsistence constitute some 80 per cent of the female population.

It cannot be denied that opportunities for women have considerably widened at certain levels of Indian society and enabled women to achieve numerous advances in spheres which were never open to them before. But this development has remained severely restricted to a small coterie of upper class (primarily urban) privileged women. Their greater visibility and ability to participate on equal terms with men in social and economic fields provide no clue to the actual, desperate situation of the majority of women. In fact, judging the status of women in India from the position that such women enjoy can be distinctly misleading.

In the years since independence there has been a steady erosion of the position and status of women. The high female mortality rates, their illiteracy, their growing unemployability because of lack of training and education, the steady decline of their economic roles, their unequal access to medical and health services point to this.

A closer examination of these factors which condition the perception of the role of women is necessary to determine the extent of their displacement from development and to suggest ways and means which will help to arrest this trend.

The problem before the majority of women in India today is not equality but survival.
Woman labourer on road building programme, Rajasthan.
1 Culture and Tradition -
Women’s Place Ordained

"In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent." (Manu, a famous law-giver of circa 200 B.C.)

Any attempt to assess the problems of Indian women and the obstacles in the path of their development is incomplete without a look at the social structure, cultural norms and value systems which define and determine the roles of the sexes. Through the socialisation of the young (in which women play an important and predominant role) these values and norms are transmitted to the next generation, ensuring the perpetuation of the social structure and the forms of organisation that the structure breeds. Although many development efforts in India have aimed at reforming the economic basis of society, and through legislation and educational reform the social and political basis, the social structure has remained curiously unaffected. The social structure derives its resilience to change from the cultural and traditional norms which sustain and perpetuate it, so there remains a hiatus between social changes that were planned and what has actually resulted. For this reason cultural norms and traditions are extremely significant in assessing the role and status of Indian women, since it is most of these which have placed women in a position of great disadvantage.

The multiplicity of castes, communities, religions and regions in India make it difficult to generalise regarding the values and norms that affect the status of women. However, despite such variations some common features can be discerned which have had a most pervasive influence on their status. The economic class structure, for example, is a common mode of stratification that cuts across all religious, regional and caste variations. Those aspects of social organisation which are intimately linked with defining the status of women are the religious tradition, the family form, descent and inheritance patterns, marriage, the stereotyping of sex roles in the division of labour and the segregation of women. A cursory review of each of these factors will enable an appreciation of some of the reasons why the role of women has proved resistant to the process of social change.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION & WOMEN’S STATUS

Patriarchy

The predominant force on the social organisation of Indian society is patriarchy. This implies that every avenue of power within the society is entirely in male hands. In Pre-Aryan times matriarchies were a common form of social organisation in India but are now, except in isolated cases, extinct.
Shantaben, Widow, Landless Labourer, Mother
An Interview

Q: Do you have any land?
Shantaben: No, and I don’t have a husband. I was widowed about 3-4 years ago. My husband died of T.B. He lost six of his brothers the same way.

Q: What about your parents?
Shantaben: They are dead. I have one brother but he took all the land, he refused to give me any. After my husband died my brother-in-law took all his family land. My husband was the oldest so he tilled the land.

Q: Do many women in tribal society remarry?
Shantaben: The younger ones without children do. I had children so if a man were not to treat then well I could not stand it.

Q: How many children have you got?
Shantaben: Five, two boys and three girls.

Q: Did you lose any others after birth?
Shantaben: Yes, three.

Q: Do any of the children go to school?
Shantaben: Yes, the two boys.

My husband used to beat me and often got drunk. He very rarely spent money on us. He made me physically weak. I can’t cope with the children and the labouring and the housework.

Q: Who made this house?
Shantaben: My husband and his friends put up the frame, because I couldn’t lift the big logs. I helped put up the tiles, and I plastered the floor and the walls.

Q: Is there a lot of domestic work to be done?
Shantaben: Water has to be fetched, wood has to be collected . . . yes.

Q: How far away is the water supply?
Shantaben: I go to the river about ten minutes walk away down a steep slippery slope.
Q: What about wood for the stove?
Shantaben: I get spare wood lying about in the jungle.
Q: What paid work do you do?
Shantaben: No one is in a worse position than me. In other villages the big farmers employ local people. These people bring in labourers from outside. My daughter and I get some seasonal work with the forestry cooperative and at harvest time. Sometimes we work on the roads.
Q: What money do you earn?
Shantaben: On the roads I got 5 Rupees a day. I was paid every Saturday. On the farms it is only 2 Rupees.
Q: What did you do with the money?
Shantaben: Spent it on food.
Q: Do you save from your income?
Shantaben: How is it possible? Earn everyday, but everyday. When we have more money I buy more food. Then we have rotlas (sorghum bread). But otherwise it is bharku (rice gruel).
Q: What time do you start your labouring work?
Shantaben: I leave home at 7 a.m. and return at 5.30 p.m.
Q: Do you leave your children at home?
Shantaben: Yes
Q: Does anyone look after them?
Shantaben: No
Q: If you stopped work would your family survive?
Shantaben: No.
Q: How old were you when you started working?
Shantaben: When I was nine years old.
Q: Is there any other way you could earn an income? Do you know how to make anything, like basket weaving?
Shantaben hid her face in her lap: No. What can I do? I can’t do anything.

Source: Oxfam File — Guj 180
The family

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family and it is herein that the inferior status of women is clearly defined.

The family form which is most suitable to patriarchy is the joint family system which, despite various regional and cultural differences, is a major force in family organisation. The father, or patriarch, is the head of the family. It is he who owns the property and, as he grows older, is the trustee of the family property and fortunes for the other adult males.

The Indian joint family system, consisting of the co-existence of three generations under one roof, is more typical of the family organisation among the upper-caste, property-owning families. It is least characteristic among the tribal communities and the poorer, scheduled caste groups who may not own property. Among these groups the nuclear type of family organisation is favoured. However even in nuclear type families - which are also more popular in urban areas - the man is the head of the family. Female heads of households tend to be regarded as undesirable; the phenomenon is a trait of poverty or misfortune.

Like patrilineal forms of descent in any other society, in India the acquisition, ownership and transference of property is through the male members of the family. The major implication for women, therefore, is that they have no right to inherit property. Women are themselves considered property to be transferred from their family of birth to their husband’s family. If the male, who is the head of the family, dies, his property would go to other males entitled to co-inherit. Daughters, wives, widows and mothers could not co-inherit. Although the right to inherit property has in post-independent India been assured to female members by law, the law itself is a compromise with the traditional position, which does not recognise a female’s right to ownership of property. Further, the socialisation of girls within the patrilineal form of family organisation ensures that women will not be in a position to claim their legal rights; a woman’s lack of education, lack of legal knowledge, and dependence on the men in the family will prevent her from claiming them.

The self-image that the practice of patriliny creates for women is one of worthlessness, servitude and dependence. The role that women are expected to play in such families is an unenviable one. It is characterised by lack of freedom and many constraints and limitations which suppress individual development. In the first few years of marriage the girl who lives with her husband’s family is expected to learn and follow norms and disciplines of her new family. She is always under the tutelage of the other older females, specifically the mother-in-law. Consequently, a submissive and acquiescent role is expected of her. She has little or no participation in decisionmaking and strict norms govern her contact and communication with the men of the family including her husband. The norms and traditions controlling her behaviour are more rigid and punitive in nature among the
well-to-do middle classes. A daughter-in-law's status is invariably dependent on the kind and quality of the dowry that she brings with her. Matriarchs in such families enjoy the greatest control over their own lives and that of the family when their daughters-in-law are young and husbands are still active providers. The matriarch's dealings with her daughters-in-law are from a position of authority. Older women who have attained the status of matriarch may even be consulted regarding decisions affecting the family business and property. In this particular milieu the critical decisions affecting a girl's life are beyond her control. Marriage of the sons and daughters is decided upon collectively by the older members of the family. The acquiescent, submissive role that women are expected to play as newly-wed brides is not particular to joint families. Very few Indian women start their married life in their own households - they are expected to stay with their in-laws, at least in the initial period. A woman has thus to be adjustable, self-effacing and malleable. Any display of independence in thought or action provokes social disapproval.

A simple or nuclear family, as opposed to a joint family structure, allows a woman greater scope for a more definite, decision-making role within her family circle. As simple families are more characteristic of the poorer tribal communities and scheduled caste groups, there is some truth in the observation that "in certain senses women whose fortune it was to be poor enjoyed higher status than those who were rich." However, in qualifying this statement it must be pointed out that the status of women in these caste groups is doubly handicapped by the inferior status attached to their own caste and to the lack of prestige attached to the menial jobs which are their only field of employment. Thus, despite some measure of parity in the male and female role within the family environment, the status of these women in the larger society is the lowliest of the low.

**Socialisation of the young**

"The chief contribution of the family in patriarchy is the socialisation of the young (largely through the example and admonition of their parents) into patriarchal ideology's prescribed attitudes towards the categories of role, temperament, and status."3

The socialisation of girls within the family structure is in keeping with the life-long role of subservience and self-effacement that women are expected to play.

The first lesson a female child is made to learn, therefore, is that the differential treatment between her and her brothers is a fact of life. She is looked upon as a transitory member of the family and she learns to appreciate the fact that she is a liability and does not have the same rights as her brothers to the family resources. Since in poor families, where the mother has to work to help support the family, the care of small children is delegated, a female child most often performs the role of surrogate mother and housekeeper. In poor, agricultural labourer families girls are expected
to assume this role from the age of seven or eight. A female child is thus initiated into the child care and housekeeping roles early in life. This generates a realistic outlook towards her future role. The transition from a submissive daughter to a submissive daughter-in-law is, consequently, not an exceptionally difficult one.

A second aspect of this socialisation process is that greater limits and prohibitions are put on the female child’s freedom of association, communication and contact. These measures are thought necessary to protect female children, since sexual purity is an overriding consideration at marriage. On attaining puberty the restrictions become even more severe, limiting the world of a female child to a small coterie of family members and kinsmen. This is an immense constraining influence on her chances for self-development.

A third attribute of this process is an inculcation of the necessary resilience to meet, tolerate and adjust to, differing and varying demands of the family. The female child learns that the mother’s sole world is the family and that her vocation is the satisfaction of the immediate needs of its members. The degree of hardship, self sacrifice and self-effacement with which she has to cope in order to meet these needs and demands is irrelevant. What is necessary is that the mother is always there and able to act as a shock-absorber. 'The mother is the major self-effacer of the family.' The female child learns by imitating her role.

A fourth characteristic of this socialisation process is to make the responsibility of transmitting ritualistic behaviour that of the female members of the family. This ensures that in the observance of the norms of socio-religious behaviour women will remain the pillars which uphold those traditions which often resist the changes necessary for development.

The fifth and final attribute is that the female child is taught early in life to mother the male members of the family and be indulgent towards them. She learns from the behaviour of the women of the family and wins approval from them. By absorbing this type of behaviour towards the male, she is less likely to question differential treatment and more likely to continue the practice with her own children later in life.

**Marriage**

Marriage is an important social institution governing a woman’s status in most societies. This is especially so in traditional, patriarchal societies such as India, where patriarchy decrees that the status of both child and mother is dependent upon the male.

The significance of marriage in the patrilineal system lies in the fact that a man in marrying acquires the means to carry on the patriline. It implies that the woman is merely transferred from one family to another. She has little positive worth or role in her own right. To ensure that the crucial functions of reproduction and socialisation of the young take place only within its confines, the patriarchal family insists upon legitimacy of birth. Thus in the
patrilineal system great stress is laid on the question of paternity. It is important that the paternity of offspring be fixed, since a male offspring will be the heir to the family name and honour and carry on the line. Since paternity is such an important issue a woman’s sexuality has to be controlled.

Before marriage the many prohibitions on association, communication and contact exercised on female children perform this function in her natal family. The early age of marriage of girls (sometimes even before puberty) is another way of ensuring the protection of the purity of the bride. In India today the early age of marriage is still a major problem although the law specifies a certain minimum age. However, the weight of tradition is great enough to defy all legal prohibitions. Child marriages were widely prevalent a century ago but have been curbed to a great extent. According to the 1971 National Census 13.6 per cent of girls in rural India in the age group 10-14 were married. Interestingly enough less than 1% of the women in the age group 25-29 remained unmarried in the rural areas and their urban counterparts constituted a mere 2%.

Another requirement arising from the need for fixing paternity and controlling female sexuality is the arranging of marriage partners. This responsibility - that of arranging the marriage and selecting the partner - lies with the elders of the family. Arranged marriages are therefore the rule and a girl or boy choosing their partner is an exception. This practice is further sanctified by the rules and regulations of the Hindu caste structure. Since there are very strict rules to promote and preserve the practice of endogamous marriages (marrying only within one’s caste) choice or selection of marriage partners has to be restricted to the caste group. The arranged marriage system provides a convenient institution for the enforcement of these restrictions.

In the whole process of arranging and conducting the marriage the girl is merely an object to achieve a desired end. She has little or no personal choice or say. Marriages arranged by the family are made with the aim of “strengthening already existing relationships or for creating new alliances”.

In hepergamous marriages (the system of a high caste man marrying a woman of an inferior family status in the same caste hierarchy) large dowries are used as an inducement. “The women in this system are like pawns, to be played carefully in the whole game of status building.” A woman has to face great humiliation in the process involved in arranging her marriage. She is likely to be paraded before a series of prospective in-laws before she is fortunate enough to be ‘picked’. Marriage and its conventions in Indian social reality today do little to improve the status of women; in fact it reinforces their poor self-image and sense of worth.

Marriage Rites
Marriage rites too bear witness to this trend of establishing an unequal status for men and women. The Christian marriage rituals are by far the most
egalitarian and yet "the bride has to be ceremonially given over to the bridegroom and the bride is exhorted to promise that she will love and obey her husband."

Although the Muslim marriage is supposed to be a social contract calling for equal participation of the man and woman, the woman plays little part in the way in which these marriages are performed today. The authority of her consent is delegated to others.

The Hindu rites are by far the most inegalitarian. They clearly establish the relative superiority of the male over his female partner. The most important rite is 'Kanyadan' (literally meaning the gift of a daughter) in which the daughter is transferred from being the possession of her family of birth to that of the husband's family. The participants in this important ceremony are the girl's father or parents and the bridegroom. The girl, wrapped up like a gift package in her finery is handed over. The wedding ritual also emphasises the worship of the husband as a deity. These rituals are strictly observed by upper caste Hindus (mainly Brahmins) but have been adapted in a modified form by other castes and some tribal communities also; 'Kanyadan' is practised by most groups.

Polygamy

Polygamy was very common in India a century ago. Although on the decline, the system still persists. Polyandry is practised to a very limited extent and is confined to a handful of small communities. From the point of view of woman's status it is worth noting that polyandry practised among a few patrilineal and patrilocal groups does not allow any share of the property to women or control over her children. Furthermore, she is obliged to allow sexual access.

The decline of polygamy resulted from the social pressure generated during the reform movements of the 19th century and later culminating in the independence movement which fought for a better status for women. It is now forbidden by law among most groups except the Muslim community. Its practice has created innumerable problems for the status of women. Because it is now forbidden by law, it is very difficult to unearth cases and besides, poor, illiterate women whose husbands are bigamists have no recourse to law. The primary motivations for polygamy are economic gain and the inability of the wife to bear children in general or male children in particular. Economic gain is the primary motive among tribal communities for whom the acquisition of more than one wife is an advantage, since their women are productive workers.

Marriage bargaining - Bride Price and Dowry

Marriage, therefore, involves the transfer of a girl from her natal family to her husband's family. Two types of transfer of material wealth accompany this. The first is bride price in which the groom gives material wealth to the bride's family. The other is dowry which involves the transfer of wealth from the bride's to the groom's family. These transfers are not voluntary in the
sense that parents or prospective grooms do not offer what they can afford. On the contrary, the conditions of transfers are stipulated by the parties on the receiving end.

Bride price is commonly practised among the patrilineal tribal communities. The form and content varies from region to region. It may involve cash or kind or both. Among agricultural families, domestic animals and farm implements sometimes constitute bride price and bargaining for it is common; it is paid by the groom to the girl's father in compensation for the loss of her services to the natal family. On the face of it this system seems to accede to women a better status than the payment of dowry does since it acknowledges the productive worth of women. However, this is not entirely true. The payment, besides compensating for loss, also buys authority over the girl. Thus the status accorded to the girl is again that of a possession to be transferred at the will of the father and groom.

Many scheduled caste and other lower caste groups also used to practise the system of bride price. Recently, however, many of these groups have adopted instead the custom of giving dowry. There are many social and economic factors responsible for this change. Among the poorest communities the payment of bride price has caused indebtedness. It is a well-known fact that many poor, tribal communities are today in the clutches of money lenders as a result of this practice. Furthermore, in many cases agricultural labourers have become bonded to land-owning families because of loans taken to raise money for the bride price. It is not uncommon among many underprivileged groups to find labourers who have been bonded for generations as a consequence of the loans some ancestor received at high rates of interest from wealthy landlords. The payment of bride price is a social evil both from the point of view of women's status and the strengthening of class exploitation.

The payment of dowry, on the other hand, has often reduced a girl's father to penury, indebtedness and landlessness. This oppressive system of enforced gift giving was at one time common among the upper caste Hindus and is now becoming a practice among many other groups. Dowry giving is common practice among the Muslim community also.

Dowry, stated simply, is what is given to the son-in-law and his family. There are many different rules and regulations governing payment of dowry which differ from region to region, and one caste group to another. It may involve payment in cash or kind or both. Gifts by the daughter's family to the groom's family are given not only at the time of marriage but on various social occasions for at least the first couple of years after the marriage. Thus "dowry is not an isolated payment but an array of gifts given over time. But it is also clear that amongst the ways of payment that constitute dowry, that given at the time of marriage is most important and conspicuous".

What this system of involuntary gift giving implies for the father of a daughter is clear. Theirs is a position of subservience which has resulted
from having a daughter. She is thus a liability. For women the system of dowry has perpetuated their inferior status. As it results in a drain of resources for the natal family, her position as a liability to them does little to improve her self-image. Dowry giving is a vicious circle since the payments made out by the family for a girl are compensated for by the payment demanded at the time of a son’s marriage.

The practice of dowry is associated with many social and cultural norms. It is often considered as a form of inheritance for the girl who has some rights to the wealth and property of her natal family. The right to inheritance is a common reason for dowry giving among Muslim communities. Dowry giving is also seen as a form of security upon which the daughter can fall back in times of crisis. However, the importance of this factor is minimised by the fact that the dowry given is rarely under the control of the girl to use as she wishes. Nevertheless, parents make large investments in gold to give ornaments to the daughter which, in the long run, is supposed to constitute her social security. It is also seen as a bait to secure favourable alliances.

This latter reason has become today the principal one. The amount to be given in dowry has increased phenomenally in the last 50 to 60 years. Prior to this, although some gifts were customary, the amount was a nominal one. The price of a bridegroom goes up with the number of academic degrees he is able to attach to himself. The wide disparities in income that have resulted within endogamous groups has made the payment of enormous sums as dowry a necessity for status building. As women’s contribution to the family economy decreases, their apparent worth and value also degenerates and this encourages the practice of dowry giving. Among traditionally well-off families women were not expected to be productive workers. A very low status was attached to work and labour. The ideal was a life of leisure and indolence. Dowry giving was in keeping with this view of life since it helped in procuring the means whereby a life of comfort and ease for the daughter would be assured.

Among the poorer communities - and especially among scheduled caste groups - where this phenomenon is in the ascendancy, the same logic applies. Female employment in these communities is today on the decline and the relative worth of these women as productive workers has decreased. With increasing unemployment even among men, a man in a position to work and earn is a much prized catch and the family has to go to great lengths to secure him.

Dowry giving is, therefore, a practice that feeds on the carcass of a society characterised by wide disparities of income and growing impoverishment.

The status of a girl is determined by dowry giving in more ways than one. Firstly, it serves to denigrate her position in her natal family. All her deficiencies have to be compensated for by the amounts given as dowry. If she happens to be dark-complexioned (which among colour conscious caste Hindus is a major drawback) her father has to raise the dowry amount to

16
March to Parliament

Bride 'beaten, burnt' against dowry

by mother-in-law

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, Aug 9

Several hundred 'women welfare' workers marched on the teen-club administration building in protest against the anti-dowry laws.
The demonstration was organized by the National Women's Welfare Association of India.

Women demonstrate against bride's death

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, July 4

A large number of women's organizations held a demonstration outside the Indian High Commission to protest against the death of a girl in Moradabad.
The girl was allegedly burned alive by her husband.

Raped by boss, burnt by husband

Express News Service
BHOPAL, May 18

A 20-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her boss and subsequently burned by her husband.

Brutal murder for dowry

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, April 22

A teenage girl was allegedly murdered and burned with a rod and a gas cylinder.

Express News Service
KANPUR, June

A 19-year-old girl was brutally murdered and burned with a rod and a gas cylinder.

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, July 4

A huge number of women's organizations held a demonstration outside the Indian High Commission to protest against the death of a girl in Moradabad.
The girl was allegedly burned alive by her husband.

However, the Kekada police have been unable to take action even after the complaint was registered.

The police have been unable to take action even after the complaint was registered.

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, July 3

A young girl, Shabana, died of burns in a factory owned by her husband.

Express News Service
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ensure a reasonable catch. If she happens to be highly educated, the amount to be spent on dowry will be more, since a groom who is more qualified will have to be obtained for her. Besides the humiliation that girls suffer in their natal families as a result of this practice, a girl’s status in the in-law’s family is also dependant on the kind, quality and amount of dowry she brings with her. It is not uncommon for girls to be persecuted and humiliated by the in-laws when the dowry payments are not up to the expectations of the groom’s family. Recently there has been a spate of dowry deaths in urban centres like Delhi. Dowry deaths result from the conscious and deliberate murder of a girl by her in-laws as a result of the conflicts arising from dowry payments. As inhuman as this may sound it has been a common practice associated with dowry giving. It is difficult to stem this because the deaths are made to appear as suicides and there is not enough social pressure on the families in which these deaths occur. A girl’s position, therefore, is an extremely precarious one and serves only to worsen her status in society.

The spread of education among the middle class has not in any way served as a deterrent to this practice. Urbanisation and education have, in fact, contributed in some way to the growing demands. It is not uncommon for a groom’s family to demand from the girl’s parents modern household amenities like refrigerators and television sets which are all status symbols of a middle class, urban existence. In fact, among urban and rural middle class families, the amounts given in dowry have assumed serious proportions resulting in increasing loss of property, impoverishment and insecurity for the daughters’ families. Highly educated grooms have no qualms about getting involved in what constitutes a market transaction and, in fact, their demands increase because of a higher educational status.

Although forbidden by law, dowry giving has in no way been eliminated as a result. In fact, this social evil will continue to thrive as long as the position of women is what it is in Indian society today. As long as women have their images and roles enunciated for them by the traditions and values of a male-dominated society, these practices will increase.

RELIGION AND WOMEN’S STATUS

The relationship between religion and the social structure is an intricate one. Whereas certain kinds of social structures give birth to particular forms of religious belief and are most conducive to maintaining these, religion, by and large, provides the legitimacy and ideology for social and economic practices. It is inconceivable that an egalitarian social structure with an emphasis on just political, social and economic institutions will provide the environment necessary for the sustenance of a highly stratified form of religion.

Thus in conformity with the predominant force on the social organisation of Indian society the religions practised in India have a predominantly patriarchal character. Whether in their explicit dictates or in their actual
practice, they reiterate the supremacy of the male over the female, the domination of the young by the old.

There are many religious communities in India and, to a great extent, in each of these communities the status of women is influenced by the image created by the specific religion. But it is an undeniable fact that the influence of Hinduism is the preponderant one, Hinduism having the oldest traditions, its influence on local interpretations of religions which took root in India much later - Islam and Christianity - being easily detected. For example, the caste system and the practice of endogamous marriages have been retained (although admittedly in a modified form) by some Indian Christian communities, despite the fundamentally egalitarian principles of this religion as originally preached.

Hinduism and the Image of Women

Hinduism has a curiously ambivalent attitude towards women. However, the dominant attitude is derogatory and unjust - women have absolutely no worth in themselves.

The ambivalence is due to the fact that on the one hand the Hindu tradition recognises and even reveres the Female Principle and elevates it to the status of a Divinity, while on the other hand it reviles the real flesh and blood women. The Hindu 'Shakti' cult acknowledges a divinity in feminine form and the Female Principle as being the source of all power.10

The Hindu religion also has a fair share of goddesses; but for flesh and blood women there is nothing but contempt and denigration. Quotations from the scriptures and religious texts do not merely expose the image of women in Hindu religion, but also demonstrate that this image has had a deep and enduring effect on the attitudes of the sexes towards each other and especially of women towards their own role. The Upanishads declaim "What is there that is beautiful in the cagelike body of a woman, who is an automaton made of flesh and possessed of joints, of tendons and bones?".11

The scriptures are replete with such teachings. As one writer has put it, "Some of these observations are so ignoble that one could expect them only from some unfortunate persons who have known no ordinary family women, not even ordinary prostitutes (who are by and large honest traders in the commodity they sell) but have drawn their knowledge exclusively from the society of the lowest pimps. But alas, these venomous oozings have taken place from the minds of men who have been the spiritual leaders of the society."12

In Hinduism a woman is not allowed to study the holy Vedas or perform any religious sacrifices (although the domestic gods have to be looked after by her).13 She is not even permitted to listen to the holy scriptures when they are being recited. In the caste hierarchy her status is equated with that of the Shudra and like them she is referred to as 'Papayoni' (of sinful birth). The Dharmashashtra, a religious text, lays down clearly the limited rights of the female sex.
The Hindu definition of a woman's role is summarised in this particular dictum of Manu (a famous law-giver of circa 200 B.C.): "In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman must never be independent." To this day this particular dictum has remained the most potent and pervasive influence on the attitude of Indian people towards their women.

The role attributed to women clearly implies that the true destiny of all women is marriage. It is her obligation to marry and beget male children. Her paramount duty is devotion to her husband and by serving him in thought, word and deed she can then attain heaven (this is specified in the Puranas, a religious text). In fact the women who are held up as models of virtue in various legends were completely and totally devoted and loyal to their husbands. The overwhelming significance attached to the vocations of marriage and motherhood is reinforced by the observance of Vratas (pledges, special prayers and ceremonies, somewhat akin to the Novenas of Roman Catholicism), the object of which is always either the husband or the male children. "They are observed for ensuring a long life and the welfare of the husband, for the realisation of the coveted goal of getting married and a suitable partner for life."14

The widow in Hindu society is usually shunned. As she has lost the legitimate reason for her survival - her husband - she is deprived of the few rights and privileges that married women have. She is separated from the mainstream of life and debarred from participation in religious and social functions. Among the higher castes widow remarriage is disallowed and there are severe restrictions on the way she dresses and the food that she eats. Although widow remarriage is practised among many communities and castes today, it is accepted with strong reservations. This is apparent in the manner in which these marriages are performed. As the widow who is to be remarried is no longer a virgin the observance of certain religious ceremonies is not permitted in her case. However, a man can go ahead and marry any number of virgins, any number of times with full religious honours!

Impurity is associated with menstruation and childbirth. Since these impurities relate only to the female condition and not to men, the claim of female inferiority is unequivocal.

The significance of these beliefs is that the attitude to women they have engendered is as alive today as when they were enunciated thousands of years ago. This has helped in the perpetuation of the culture of male chauvinism and domination. The hold that these concepts have over the behaviour pattern of the sexes, and especially women, make attempts at changing women's situation a near impossible task. Even among educated, better-off women who have had ample opportunity for exposure to liberal influences, many of these assumptions are accepted without question and practised without rational evaluation. Any revolt against the culturally ingrained attitude of female inferiority and subservience to the male is
contained by guilt. The disregard in which women are held in today's society in India can be attributed to some extent to the complete lack of value acceded to them by the religious tradition.

Islam

Islam was first propagated at a time when in Arabia fathers were burying their female babies alive. In that period, in the sixth and seventh centuries, when polygamy and concubinage flourished from China to Africa, Islam first granted women a legitimate position and rights. Islam preached that before the eye of God, man and woman were on an equal footing. A woman had every right to pray to the Almighty and was also considered an heir to the ultimate redemption. The Koran is replete with injunctions aimed at bettering the life of women. In the social context in which this religion was first propagated it brought about revolutionary changes in the status of women. The Muslim Personal Law granted women the right to ownership of property, made marriage a civil contract between two parties, male and female, and it imposed conditions on polygamy (a significant departure from the practices of other groups who considered polygamy the right of males). However diverse social and racial customs and traditions were assimilated into the new Islamic policy. "The exercise or the deprivation of the rights (that were given to women by Islam) depended alternatively on the particular socio-political conditions obtaining in different periods and different countries."15 Thus the Muslim Shariat Law (which exerts social control on Muslims), under the influence of diverse and different cultural norms, has led to an interpretation of the Koran often to the disadvantage of women.

It is quite possible that the introduction of Islam to India in the prevailing cultural environment which gave women an inferior position, meant that the interpretation of the Koran and Muslim laws was tailored to fit the local cultural values. The present position of Muslim women, therefore, is an extremely unfortunate one partly because, over the centuries, despite changes in the social and cultural context, the personal laws have remained rigid and unable to adjust to the roles that women were expected to play.

Thus the Koran's teaching that women should behave with modesty and decorum has been interpreted to justify the seclusion of women. The 'purdah' was and still is a symbol of this seclusion. This emphasis on seclusion has also denied Muslim women one of their liberal rights - participation in communal prayers. Although marriage was deemed a social contract, divorce was permissible for both men and women and widow remarriage permitted, but in adjusting to the prevailing social customs the liberalising influences of the laws regarding these factors was minimised. Today in Muslim marriages the woman's consent is a mere formality.

The right of divorce has become an unilateral one favouring the male (who can get away by the utterance of the word 'talaq' three times successively). Religion decrees the husband to be the head of the family and
that the woman should serve and obey him. Thus, in cases of divorce, the guardianship laws for the custody of children do not necessarily favour women.

Although polygamy, according to the original tenets of the Muslim faith, was conditional on the would-be polygamist treating both wives on an equal footing, in India this is neither practised nor enforced. Consequently, polygamy is practised which creates an inferior and insecure status for the women of the community.

Women’s rights to inheritance, as decreed by the Muslim law, have also by and large remained principles and are most often not translated into practice since women because of their seclusion, lack of education and awareness of their own rights, are unable to demand their just share.

Islam originally sought to protect women and accord religious sanction to women’s rights and privileges. In practice, today in India this religious tradition has humiliated and denigrated women, reducing them to dependent and helpless beings who cannot achieve any progress without male patronage.

**Christianity**

Although India has a small Christian community, the fundamentally liberal influence of its egalitarian tradition has helped to create a far better position for the women of this community when compared to other Indian women. However in adjusting to the Indian socio-cultural situation the practice and tenets of Christianity have undergone some modification. As has already been mentioned, one example of this compromise is the maintenance of caste stratification among certain Christian groups (although the Christian religion has no basis for this practice).

Christianity decrees that both men and women are created in the likeness of God and, therefore, have equal access to God and heaven. (However, women cannot hold any ecclesiastical posts or perform any religious ceremony within most Christian sects.) Although in the myth of creation woman is accorded secondary status to man, the institution of marriage among Christians, with its emphasis on mutual relationship, gives women a better status, especially if we compare it to the other two religious traditions. Furthermore, Christianity forbids polygamy which is a major step in acceding to women their equal and participative role in marriage. The image of women projected in the Christian faith is that of a strong and steady influence for the good. The concepts of altruism, duty to one’s neighbour, love for mankind and service as a duty have enabled Indian Christian women to carve out a role for themselves in many fields. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women of this community were far ahead of their counterparts in other communities in the spheres of education and participation in the vocational professions such as medicine, teaching and nursing. Thus, in India the Christian tradition has by and large influenced the status of women for the better.
Other Religious Traditions Operative in India

Besides the religious traditions already discussed there are small communities of other religions which assert control over the members of their respective communities, and shape and define the role of women. Among these mention may be made of the Jain, Buddhist, Sikh and Zoroastrian traditions.

The Zoroastrian tradition, which incidentally is one of the world's oldest, is perhaps the most just in its attitude towards women. Women enjoy a position of honour in the family. Marriage is a contract and polygamy is forbidden. Divorce is permitted and remarriage is an accepted norm. In the practice of religion women have equal rights with men. The only disadvantage to women in this community is the fact that if they happen to marry outside their religious group, the children cannot be initiated into the Zoroastrian religion, whereas this does not apply to men.

Jainism recognises the right of women to aspire to salvation. The Jain faith contains both nuns and priests and women can assume leadership roles in propagating the faith. However, there is also severe condemnation of women in the images portrayed of them as temptress and seductress in the religious texts.

The same ambivalence can be seen in the attitude of the Buddhist religion towards women. Although according to Buddhism both women and men are in a position to attain Nirvana, the female role is portrayed as a hindrance in obtaining deliverance. The Buddhist religious tradition contains both nuns and monks. But the status accorded to the Bhikunni (nun) is inferior to that of the Bhiku (monk). The ideal of women is similar to that among Hindus - self-sacrificing and a devoted wife and mother. In general, women are considered inferior to men both in the monasteries and in secular life.

Sikhism, besides giving equal status to men and women in religious pursuits, does not lay down the law regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. Since people from different Hindu caste backgrounds embrace the Sikh religion, marriage, divorce and remarriage laws are still governed by the norms of their earlier caste affiliations. However, Sikhism does provide a better image of womankind than Hinduism and its teachings debar its followers from condemning the woman as a temptress and seductress; but in social life women are not given the equality of status that they enjoy in religious pursuits.

TRIBAL WOMEN

Some distinctive features of social organisation characterise and set apart the tribal communities who comprise some 7-10 per cent of India's population.

With a few exceptions, as in the case of the tribals inhabiting the Garo and Khasi hills, most tribal communities recognise the male member of the family as the head. However, the woman's position in the majority of tribal societies in India is characterised by certain rights unknown to her non-
tribal sisters.

The life of the tribal people in India is hard, and for the womenfolk extremely arduous. In most tribal societies the women do all the work at home and in addition work in the fields and in other occupations. In some areas (as for example in Northern Uttar Pradesh and border areas of North Eastern India) women are solely responsible for cultivation and maintenance of the family - the arduousness of her life style is an attribute she shares with her non-tribal sisters.

The difference in status lies in the fact that a woman is considered an economic asset in most tribal communities. This fact, unlike in non-tribal societies, is conceded and the tradition of paying bride price at the time of marriage was a recognition of this contribution. In many tribal communities men and women choose their own marriage partners, although a family choice is also common. However, this does not prove to be a major disadvantage as in the case of non-tribal communities, since the right of separation and divorce in the event of incompatibility are assured. Furthermore, the tribal woman is generally not subjected to early childbearing. She has the same rights to divorce and remarriage as the male members of the community. Widowhood is not thrust upon her as a disability. Most tribal women remarry and are encouraged to do so by their communities.

In addition most tribal women enjoy a freedom of movement and association unknown to their non-tribal sisters. Tribal women visit market places, participate actively in social functions and are not segregated from men.
2 The Declining Sex: Population Ratios and the Status of Women

"...to fetch, to carry, to cook, to wash, to meet the lust in bed, to bear year after year a submissive silent slave sold to life for nothing."

There is growing evidence to support the claims that in India women in a specific age group die in greater numbers than men in the same age group, that they expect to have shorter lives than men, and that the proportion of women in the population is less than men and is decreasing. What is most disturbing about these facts, which have a direct bearing on the problem of women and their development, is that this trend, which was discernible from the early decades of this century, has accelerated since independence.

There has been a recent spate of alarmed interest among demographers who have difficulty in explaining this pattern. Why, for example, should the high death rates among women of childbearing age continue to persist and even rise, despite so much governmental investment since independence in health programmes for maternal and child care? In the years before independence this phenomenon could be explained away by the argument that there were no proper health care facilities to protect women in this vulnerable period of their lives. Is it that women do not have equal access to health care? What does this realisation mean for the present and future status of women? Why, for one example, do more female babies have less chance of survival in the first five years of their lives than do male babies? Is it because they are biologically less hardy? Or are parents committing infanticide of female offspring? Or perhaps the explanation lies in the surmise that female children are actually more neglected, thus reducing their chances for survival.

Whatever is the final outcome of the present debate, one conclusion is inescapable and unavoidable; women's lives are cheaper and more expendable than men's. Their inferior status stands in the way of their survival. Their diminishing utility in the social and economic fields has resulted in further deterioration of their status. This has limited their role to that of consumers and reproducers, eroding their productive roles, reducing their chances of employment, and confining them to spheres of work characterised by low pay and drudgery which have had a disastrous effect on their health and survival.

Decline in Sex Ratio

The normal distribution of population that prevails in most countries of the world reveals a higher proportion of women than men.
In India, however, the reverse is true. There are fewer women for every thousand men in the population. The gap between the sexes increased from 3.4 million in 1901 to 20 million in 1971. This gap widened dramatically over the decades 1951 to 1971. And although the 1981 census reveals a slight upturn, the ratio of 935 women to every 1000 men in that year is still worse than the ratio reported for 1871 or any other census year until 1971.

SEX RATIO (Females per 1000 Males) for all India 1871/72 to 1981

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A disturbing but prominent feature of this decline is that the Southern States, which traditionally register a higher proportion of females for every thousand males in the population, are also succumbing to the national trend. Except in Kerala, which has consistently maintained its record of a higher proportion of females in the population, the decline is discernible in most Southern States, specifically Tamil Nadu and Orissa. Interestingly enough Kerala has the highest female literacy rates in the country, the best and most widely accessible health service, and the lowest infant mortality rate for rural India. The lower female sex ratios have been traditionally common in the North, North-east and North-western States of India. This pattern has some implications for the status of women and their value in these zones.

Expectation of Life at Birth, Birth and Death Rates

As a rule, in most countries women have a higher life expectancy than men. In India too, in the early decades of the century, although life expectancy was low overall (23 years, 1901-11), women could expect to live longer than men. This trend persisted until 1911-21. In the decade 1921-1931 the expectation of life at birth was almost the same for men and women. Since then the expectation of life at birth has been lower for women, than for men. The extent of deterioration in the life expectancy of females is evident from the fact that up to 1960 women, on reaching 45 years of age, could hope to live longer than men. In the decade 1961-1971, however, women’s life expectancy did not exceed that of men until the former attained the age of 49 or 50.

One of the major factors contributing to the decline of the proportion of women in the population is their higher mortality rate. The evidence available from the general pattern of deaths seems to indicate that women’s health is more vulnerable at certain stages of their lives. Their vulnerability seems to be most acute in the age group 1-5 years and again in the age group 15-34 years (which is the childbearing stage for most women).
However, in recent years there has been a tendency for the death rates to rise steeply among other female age groups.

The female death rate was less than the male death rate up until 1901. Since 1911 it has always been higher. The highest difference between male and female mortality was recorded in 1961 (when the difference was 2.9 per thousand).

One of the major reasons for the differential rates is the higher female infant mortality. In most countries, more males are born than females. However, the higher death rates among male children in the age group 0-1 help to set the trend towards equalisation of the sex ratio. In the earlier decades of the century, this, too, was the pattern in India: in the period 1881-1931 the mortality of female babies was lower in the age group 0-5 years. In a dramatic reversal of this trend the female infant mortality rates grew higher in the decades 1931-1951. In addition to this the higher mortality among female children went well beyond the 5-year age group and persisted till the age of 9. This situation continued until 1971. The mortality rate for female babies increased for each of the census years 1961 and 1971.

There have been changes for the worse in the age groups affected by higher female mortality even in the last two decades. For example, as recently as 1951, the female mortality rate was lower in the age group 15 to 25. But by 1961 this rate had increased and by 1971 had increased further. Thus, in 1971, female mortality was higher than male mortality for every year of life from age 1 to 45. This is likely to deteriorate even further unless something drastic is done to arrest the trend. It may, therefore, be concluded that in recent years, and especially in the decades since independence, more women are dying at an increasingly young age than before (and also in comparison to men).

A plausible explanation for the higher rates of female infant mortality is the greater neglect of female children in the early years because of their relative lack of worth and value to their parents. Although this assertion needs further investigation and empirical proof, some studies of mortality trends seem to indicate that this is happening. Evidence from the death records of several cities in India indicates that the proportion of deaths from the twenty most important killer illnesses is always higher in the case of female children than male children in the age group 0-4. Female babies are generally supposed by demographers and the medical profession to be biologically hardier than male children in these age groups. The fact that they succumb more easily to these killer illnesses than male children can only be attributed to the fact that they are receiving medical attention at a stage when they can no longer be helped.

Studies undertaken by the National Institute of Nutrition show that there is increasing malnutrition among female infants and women. Whilst the incidence of diseases due to malnutrition is higher among females, hospital admission and treatment for these diseases is much higher for males.
The age group 15-34 has traditionally recorded a higher female mortality rate (except in 1951 when the rate was lower in the age group 15-25). This is the most arduous and strenuous period of women’s lives. Child-bearing is concentrated in this period and coupled with the hard physical labour that the majority of women in India have to put in in order to earn a living, it has resulted in a heavy toll of lives. The organisation of maternal and child health services in the rural and urban areas seems to have made little or no impact on this phenomenon, as is evident from the high maternal mortality rate. In India the maternal mortality rate in 1968 was 573 per 100,000 live births as compared to 200 in Sri Lanka and 100 in most other developing countries. In the developed countries 70 per cent of the births in any year account for the first or second child, whereas in India only 40 per cent of the births are first and second children. Despite the heavy loss of life in maternity, medical services in this country are so disproportionately organised that less than 17 per cent of total hospital facilities are geared to meeting this problem. This is yet another example of women’s lack of power and privilege.

In order to appreciate fully why women in the childbearing age are dying in greater numbers despite the great advances in medicine and health services, it is important to look at the conditions in which the majority of Indian women live and work. A major fact has already been mentioned - the hard and arduous labour in the struggle for existence. But this factor is combined with the lack of adequate and wholesome nutrition, rest, sanitary living conditions and basic knowledge regarding health. The squalor, exhaustion and helplessness that characterise the lives of the majority of poor women of India are the most important determinants of the high rates of female mortality in this age group.

If adequate and wholesome nutrition is taken as an isolated example, and its impact on the mortality pattern studied, it will be seen that “about 70 per cent of pregnant women in the country suffer from anaemia which contributes to increased risk to their unborn children and 40 per cent of maternal deaths”. In a World Health Organisation sponsored study among pregnant women it was found that the anaemia of Indian women was not overcome as easily as is the case for their western counterparts. Scientists have discovered that “even with the administration of 240mg. of iron, folic acid and vitamin B12 about 56 per cent of the Indian women studied were still anaemic by WHO standards, in marked contrast with findings in the West”. The scientists believe that several factors are responsible for the high prevalence of anaemia in Indian women in spite of iron, folic acid and B12 supplementation. “The leakage caused by chronic amoebiasis, malaria and other wasting diseases, intestinal parasitic and helminthic infections must be enormous and a chronic state of malnutrition and malabsorption must also impede absorption of iron and other blood forming medicines. The lack of safe drinking water and of proper arrangements for disposal of human fecal waste and animal excreta along with unhygienic surroundings must be the
Young women brickworkers, Pune.
prime cause. But the overriding reason must be the low social and economic status of women”.

Implications for the Status of Women

The fact that in recent decades the higher mortality rates have persisted even beyond the traditionally vulnerable age for women is a difficult phenomenon to explain. In the higher age group 35-49, the most strenuous period of childbirth coupled with arduous physical labour for survival is over. Women should have more leisure in this period since household tasks are relegated to the younger women of the family. They enjoy more authority and therefore greater access to the income of the family, enabling them to spend more time on their own health and leisure. Despite all these factors the relatively high death rate in this age group continues. This is probably because, with more and more families being pushed below the poverty line, more and more women have to continue in fatiguing and exhausting manual labour for longer periods in their lives. This, along with the cumulative effect of a life of deprivation, poor nutrition, overwork and strain, has resulted in the early deaths of the majority of women.

A pertinent question to be asked in concluding is why there should be an increase in the trend of mortality in all age groups in recent decades. Is it because the structural changes brought about by the pattern of investment and development have had a pernicious effect on the lives and role of women? The statistics seem to indicate that in the traditional society of the last decades of the previous century and the early decades of this century, the wastage of woman-power due to high death rates and widening sex ratios was much less persistent and regular. Was this because there were protective mechanisms operating in the social and economic conditions that helped to prolong the lives of women? For example, the highest proportion of women’s employment in the latter part of the last century was accounted for by household industries and family agriculture. While women worked hard in these spheres they had more freedom over the conditions of their work - the ability to stagger the hours of work and to share it with other female members of the household. They were more protected and less exposed to risk and infection, since they worked in their homes or in the immediate neighbourhood. With the destruction of household industries brought about as a result of colonialism and structural changes in the economy, more and more women are seeking employment of an unskilled type involving hard manual labour. The work conditions and hours are beyond their control and the distance to be travelled to work adds to the strain. There is increasing risk of infection. Women have to bear and rear children under the changed employment conditions which is a different proposition from performing these roles when gainfully occupied in their own homes, or in the immediate vicinity. Is it any wonder, then, that the proportion of women in the population is dwindling. If development is a process whereby a more equitable distribution of the benefits is brought
about, the first step in including women in this process would be to bring about such changes as would ensure their survival.
Women’s Development in Chhani Village, Seva Mandir

An English translation of Rajkumaris’ own words:

“I belong to a poor farming Rajput family, my father owns only half an acre of land. He works as a messenger and my brother works as a domestic servant. My mother and I work as labourers. We can say that without our labour it would be difficult to make ends meet.

“I did not go to school because of tradition and family circumstances. When Seva Mandir opened a school my father said – “what will my community think if I was sending a girl to study?” I went anyway, even though my father scolded me. I learned to write and sew and gained some knowledge of the outside world.

“There were about 15 other girls from my village who came to study. Being with them and talking to them everyday, we exchanged ideas, listened to each other and respected each other’s points of view. The village people did not like the formation of our group and often criticised us.”

When the foreman on Rajkumaris’ road gang cheated the workers of pay by forging their thumb prints and appropriating money due to them, she fought against it. She was threatened with lack of employment. “At this moment my parents were very angry and asked whether I went to the centre to study or fight other people . . . But I believe in continued joint effort, hence I am forever working for it and keep explaining these courageous ideas to the villagers. Gradually these ideas are having an influence on the rest of the women force of the village. While before only girls aged 15-20 came to study at the centre, now this year women of about 30 who have children are also coming.”

Source: Oxfam File — Raj 10
“We are poor, very very poor. But we are not stupid. That is why we despise our illiteracy. Can literacy help us to live a little better? Feed a little more? If learning can help us to do all these, then we shall make it our demand to learn.” Quotation from BSSL Manual “Amra Kano Parbo”.

That education is necessary and desirable to promote development is recognised by most people. Education, it is claimed, promotes rationality of thought, improves social mobility, and enhances a person’s capacity to respond to the demands of a changing world. These attributes are held to be valuable in their own right and the consequent high status attached to the educated person presupposes that they have acquired these attributes.

Women’s education has been advocated by social thinkers and reformers in India. However, the reasons for this advocacy have differed according to the understanding of the functions of education prevalent in any given period. Thus according to the 19th century reform movements education was seen as a desirable achievement for women to enhance their capacity to fulfil their traditional roles as good mothers and housekeepers. However, with the redefinition of development in the post-independence period as a process enabling men and women alike to realise their full potential and thus contribute to society, the need for women’s education has become an urgent one.

Education in this context of development is seen as an instrument which will enable those who receive it to change society for the better. Since the emphasis of this development process is on promoting equality, education is seen as a means to bring about changes towards more equality. Stated in ideal terms, therefore, education is a process whereby the capacity of individuals to shape their own environment is enhanced. Denial of education to women will result in their marginalisation and in the perpetuation of their unequal status.

It is in this context that the discussion of the educational status of women in India which follows becomes relevant. Emphasis has been laid on women’s unequal access to education resulting in phenomenally low literacy levels among them.

Evidence seems to indicate that the educational system in India is sex and class discriminatory.

It is also pertinent to question whether the content of this education which promotes change should necessarily be radically different from other types of education. In fact it may be said that because the content does not reflect
the ideal goals, education as it exists in India today has become the prerogative of a certain class. It is used as an instrument for status building in an unequal world, to perpetuate that inequality. Thus women, and especially those who are poor, cannot participate in this education because it is not relevant to their needs (besides other social and economic constraints).

Literacy

The literacy rate in India, as compared to that of other countries, is still very low. According to 1981 census figures the literacy rate for men was only 46.7 per cent and that for women a mere 24.8 per cent.\(^1\)

It is now a widely acknowledged fact among demographers, educationalists and development workers, that the problem of illiteracy in India is primarily a problem of female illiteracy. The statistics relating to literacy rates bear out the truth of this statement. Firstly, as the table illustrates there was an enormous increase in the number of literate persons, both male and female, during the period 1951-1981.

Population and Proportion of Population Literate and Illiterate, All India 1951-81 (Absolute figures in Millions).\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total illiterate</th>
<th>Total literate</th>
<th>Illiteracy per 100 of population</th>
<th>Literacy per 100 of population</th>
<th>% decre. in illiteracy per decade</th>
<th>% incr. in literacy per decade</th>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>139.71</td>
<td>158.70</td>
<td>181.10</td>
<td>239.30</td>
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<td>185.36</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>181.10</td>
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However, as can be seen, despite the great advances in literacy among men and women in the decades 1951-81, there has also been, in the same period, a phenomenal rise in the absolute number of illiterates. The rate of literacy increase slowed down for both men and women in the decade 1961-1971 as compared to 1951-1961.\(^3\) but while it picked up slightly for males in 1971-1981, the increase in female literacy continued to show a marked decline.

Thus, a second, very important feature of the changes in literacy patterns is the differential rates of increase in literacy for men and women. Whereas the percentage of literate males in the total male population has increased from a mere 9.83 per cent in 1901 to 46.6 in 1981, the rise in the percentage of female literates in the total female population for the same period has been from 0.69 per cent to 24.8 per cent. This reflects the general pattern of differential status that men and women have in Indian society.

It is evident that many women have become literate over the past few decades. Many women, in other words, have achieved "access" to
educational opportunities, but not all. Out of the 331 million females living in India in 1981, 214 million lived in rural India. Whereas the rate of literacy among the 73 million urban women was evaluated as 48 per cent, the rate of literacy among the 245 million rural women was a nominal 18 per cent.

The problem of female illiteracy in India is, basically, the problem of illiteracy among rural women.

At this stage it is pertinent to question whether the problem of rural female illiteracy is common to women from all sections of rural society or whether it is concentrated among particular economic and social groups. There is ample evidence to indicate that there is a wide disparity of literacy levels between women from non-scheduled caste and non-tribal backgrounds and those of scheduled caste and tribal families.

Of the 28.1 million literate females in the rural areas in 1971, the majority, 25.6 million, was accounted for by the non-scheduled caste and non-tribal community, 1.7 million belonged to the scheduled caste community, and 0.7 million to the scheduled tribes. A large majority of the scheduled caste population are landless agricultural labourers or come from families of small farmers. For these groups, therefore, unequal access to educational opportunities has determined their poor levels of literacy. Increasing inequality between different sections of the population is a characteristic feature of underdeveloped societies. This is true of India also. It has resulted in wide differences in access to essential goods and services. Women being among the weaker sections of such a society have been affected the most by these imbalances. Women from traditionally socio-economically underprivileged backgrounds have suffered most, as is evident from at least one of the variables - education.

The majority of illiterate women are in the adult age group. 67 per cent of women in the age range 15-24 are illiterate, and 88.6 per cent of the age group 25 and above. This has major implications in framing rational policies to promote literacy among women. This is because the great majority of women are beyond the ambit of formal education. The only alternative is to involve them in a process of non-formal education. There are many constraints involved in organising non-formal education for this group. The majority are probably married. A great many of them who live below the poverty line and on the border between relative security and poverty, are burdened by domestic work and earning a living. The consequent lack of leisure and energy greatly limits their chances of participation.

A CASE STUDY

The magnitude of the problem of framing rational policies to promote literacy among rural women who are from the poorest scheduled caste families and are in the age group 15-35 can be illustrated from a case study of a small village-based programme in rural West Bengal.
Our organisation, Chetana Vikas, a small rural-based organisation working with the rural poor in West Bengal, began its work in 1980 with adult education. We found that, initially and in the long run, it was easier to organise centres for adult men in the villages than women.

The first major reason was the dearth of literate women with minimum educational levels necessary to impart literacy skills to others. Of the few literate women in each village, the majority were from families whose class and caste backgrounds alienated them from the learner group who were mostly scheduled caste, landless and very poor. Since the educational method stressed awareness building among the learners and used literacy as a tool towards this end, teachers who lacked empathy for the plight of the poorest women could not be expected to serve this purpose. Thus the careful selection and training of women workers (who besides being literacy teachers would be primarily organisers and friends) to be empathetic and work in a non-paternalistic manner took well over a year. By this time 15 men's groups were functioning and had gone well ahead in both literacy and development programmes. Organisers for men were easier to locate because of the more widespread distribution of literate persons in the socio-economic groups (evidence of the fact that families encourage boys' education).

The next major hurdle we faced was the complete lack of leisure time of the women of the target age group. Contrary to popular mistaken notions that women display no interest in their own self-advancement, most groups we worked with intensively were very eager that an opportunity for adult education should exist in their village. Adult women came in great numbers from the poorest, working class families to the planning sessions. Many married women in the age group 15-35 enrolled in the groups. However, within a month of their commencement the groups comprised learners who were unmarried and in the age group 14-18. Although many older married women had enrolled initially, they were unable to continue beyond the first fortnight. On investigation, we found that the women's lack of leisure time and unending working day was the major reason behind this high drop-out rate. For the women the work day ends a few hours early and is followed by four hours of domestic labour. The cooking, washing, cleaning, fuel gathering and child-minding are the responsibility of the women of the household. In the evenings, although men enjoy leisure, the women have to look after infants and toddlers and to feed the family. They are on duty from the time they get up to the time they go to bed. We found that the unmarried girls, who also work for their living, are encouraged by the older married women of the household to take advantage of the adult education classes, and thus these girls comprised the learners in the groups.

Case studies of three brave women who attempted to break the bonds that secured them to their endless rote of chores will clarify the point that is being made.
Bandana

Bandana, a scheduled caste woman, twenty years old and the mother of two, enrolled along with her unmarried sister-in-law for the adult education class. Bandana’s husband is a landless labourer. She is a domestic servant who works for two landowning families for 6 hours in the morning (from 6 am to 12 noon). Her work comprises cleaning utensils, fetching water, making cow dung cakes and most of the post harvest and grain storage work. It is a familiar sight to see Bandana with a child on either hip, going about her work in the morning. She returns home at noon and her meal preparations begin. Her family eats at 3 pm although the children have small snacks at intervals.

Bandana’s older child who is 2 years old and the younger infant of 9 months were both left in the care of her husband when she attended the classes at 7 pm, for the first few days. Whenever either child was unwell Bandana absented herself since nobody else would take the responsibility of looking after a sick child. For some time she took to bringing one child with her. Her interest in the discussions and her rapid literacy acquisition were remarkable. Bandana was extremely intelligent and in addition very interested in the sessions. After periods of absence from the sessions she would rejoin and quickly pick up what had happened in her absence from her sister-in-law. In between the sessions she would go out at intervals to find out whether the children were all right and if there was anything the family needed. Sometimes she returned carrying a child with her. On one occasion Bandana absented herself for over a week. Her sister-in-law explained that her child was sick. We visited her to enquire about her absence and she told us sadly that she would no longer be attending. Haltingly and with despair she related that on one night when she was attending the adult education session, her husband had left the sleeping, older child on the exposed verandah of their mud hut. It rained and the child was drenched. It caught a chill and developed what was later diagnosed as pneumonia. Bandana’s relatives and family blamed her for the neglect. She told us how much she wanted to attend and spend her evenings with us, but it was a great mental strain for her to do so many things simultaneously.

Kuro

Kuro, 35 years of age (elderly by Indian village standards), a widow and mother of two children also enrolled in the adult education class being organised in Gotistha village. Her stay in the class lasted 14 days. Kuro’s children, a girl and boy, are 12 and 10 years old (a 17 year old daughter was married last year). Both the children work to maintain themselves. The daughter is a domestic servant and the son a cow herd. Kuro is a vegetable vendor. She does not own any land. Because she is self-employed her daily work routine is heavier, since she has to attend to everything connected with her line of work. She gets up at 4 am, hastily prepares something to eat for her and the children’s breakfast, washes, cleans and is off to catch the local
bus to the market by 6 am. The market is 15km from her village. She carries heavy loads of vegetables on and off the bus and spends the whole day at the market. On two days of the week she also attends a market 40km from her village. This means that she has to travel 15km by bus and then take a train the rest of the way. So she spends even longer hours away from home.

On her return in the evening at around 5.30 pm, she has to attend to her house and her own meals. She cooks for herself and the children. Her daughter helps and often completes the cooking if she is late. But the daughter herself is overworked. Because her mother is not at home the whole day, the total responsibility for fuel-gathering, water-fetching, washing, cleaning, gathering roots and vegetables is hers (besides her job as domestic help which takes the greater part of the day). The little boy works all day at the cattle owners and he has no energy left in the evening.

Kuro sets out again at around 7 pm to repay the landlords from whom she borrows the vegetables. On three days of the week she has to go around the village buying vegetables from the land-owners to sell at the market.

Kuro always arrived late at the adult education sessions and was always exhausted by the time she arrived, making participation in the proceedings difficult. She had finally to give up the struggle as the summer season began and the work day lengthened.

Khairaunissa

Khairaunissa, 25 years old, a Muslim woman with four children (two of whom were under 5) also attempted to devote time in the evenings to learning. Her husband is a landless labourer and Khaira contributes to the family income by weaving palm leaf mats. She also works for the land-owners in their houses in post harvest and grain storage operations. She cannot work in the fields during planting and sowing seasons because Muslims do not allow their women to do so. Her work day starts in the morning with the cooking, washing, cleaning and feeding of children. She gathers fuel, makes cow dung cakes, goes root gathering, fishes in the pond, and cooks the main meal between 12 noon and 2 pm. She spends the whole afternoon on her mat-weaving, either procuring the raw material or preparing it before she can actually weave it. The two under-5 children have to be attended to all the time. The evening meal is prepared early but the whole evening is spent on mat-weaving and cleaning up after the meal.

Khaira began attending the sessions with both her under-5 children in tow. She left the classes early because she had to serve the evening meal. She stayed awake longer hours to devote time to her mat-weaving. Despite her heroic attempts to save time to devote to her classes, she could never spare enough.

Her adventure into the brave new world ended stormily one day. Her husband stormed into the class, grabbed the children and abused her in filthy language that if she had so much time to spare to sit and gossip she could very well do more work in the home.
Our experience shows that making a dent in the situation of female illiteracy in the rural areas is a Herculean task. In the project area which we cover our literate female population will remain more or less unchanged because the 13-18 year olds, 150 of whom now comprise our learner group, are a shifting population who will leave the area once they are married.

Formal Education

The Constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens irrespective of race, sex, caste and community and directs the State to "endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years".7 By 1966, the Indian Education Commission in its Report (1966) realised that the country was nowhere near fulfilling this task. It therefore recommended that the plan to include the whole population in free and compulsory education should be phased in the following manner. Firstly, by ensuring five years of minimum education for all children by 1975-76 and seven years of such education by 1985-86; secondly, by a system of part-time education for those children in the age group 11-14 who may have dropped out of the educational system at the primary stage; and finally to make efforts side-by-side to eradicate adult illiteracy. These targets recommended by the Education Commission are nowhere near fulfilment when the figures relating to women's participation in the educational system are studied. "Shortfalls have been particularly large in the case of elementary education, more so in the case of girls."8

The foundations of the formal education system, as it exists today, were laid in the first half of the 19th century. It was divided into three main stages - primary, secondary and university. The major objective of this education system in the early days was the production of government servants. Women had no access to this system in the initial stages since they were not expected to become government servants. Between 1850 and 1870 a few girls from urban and middle class families entered the formal system in response to social pressures created by reformers, missionaries and enlightened government officials to include women in formal education. By 1854 there were an estimated 197,000 girls in primary schools.9 Significant advances were made towards enrolling girls in the system of formal education in the following nine decades.

The expansion of women's education began at the primary level and was mostly confined to that level in the first few years. Enrolment of girls in the secondary school stage was slow. However, the admission of women to university did not pose as many problems in India as it did in the western countries. At independence in 1947-48, the total number of boys enrolled at all levels of education was 11,134,665 whereas for girls the figure was 3,550,503, one-third of that for boys.10

The difference in the number of girls and boys enrolled at primary and other levels of education continued after independence. By 1977 total
enrolment by girls in the 6-11 age group was 67.5 per cent of the total female population in that group; one girl out of three was thus not attending school and the drop-out rate was high. In the 11-14 age group only 25 per cent of the total female population in that group was enrolled, a figure which drops to 11 per cent in the 14-17 age group (compared with 26 per cent for boys), secondary education still being the prerogative of the urban upper and middle classes. At university level the figure drops to 2.5 per cent of the 17-23 age group, although the proportion of women to men is greater at the post-graduate level. Women have enrolled in substantial numbers for teaching, medicine and fine arts, but not for commerce, law, agriculture and engineering. And, like secondary education, 'higher education is mostly confined ... to urban upper and middle classes'.

To summarise, the following points need to be emphasised regarding the organisation and expansion of formal education and its impact on the majority of young girls and women. There has been a marked increase in the enrolment of girls in formal education in the post-independence era. However, the enrolment of girls in every level of education is much lower than that of boys. Furthermore, the high drop-out rate among girls, which incidentally is 74 per cent for girls as compared to 62.4 per cent for boys at the primary level, makes enrolment figures in determining the educational status of girls almost meaningless. Enrolment in Class I (age 6) does not necessarily guarantee that all those enrolled receive minimum formal education.

Universal education, as promised by the Constitution, can be said to be completed only when those enrolled in Class I are retained till Class VIII (age 14). According to this criterion only 22 per cent of the total population of girls in the age range 11-14 are beneficiaries of compulsory minimum schooling promised by the Constitution for all children in this age group. A minimum of four to five years of education is necessary to prevent students from reverting to illiteracy. This is borne out by the fact that, despite the increase in enrolment at the primary school stage from 20.1 per cent in 1950-51 to 67.5 per cent in 1976-77, the literacy rate of females has not increased at this same rapid rate. It may be concluded, therefore, that many of the girls among the 70 out of every 100 who enrol in Class I but drop out before reaching Class V, revert to illiteracy. Finally, the secondary stage of education has left the majority of girls who are poor and come from the rural areas completely untouched.

What does this imply for the status of women and their role in the process of development? Firstly, it means that women's work remains limited to those spheres characterised by lack of skill and thus low pay. Education helps to upgrade a person's skills and improve their chances in the labour market. Lack of education and skill denies women access to employment avenues which results in their displacement from the labour market. Jobs in modern industry, for example, are only available to those with some basic education, since changes in technology and greater mechanisation
necessitate the employment of skilled persons. Women, because of their lack of basic education, lose out in the employment race.

The second implication is that a girl's lack of access to schooling as opposed to the boy's in the family, tends to reinforce the notion of male intellectual and spiritual superiority. Schooling is a prestigious thing in India. Since more boys than girls attend school and are also likely to spend a longer period of their lives in formal education, the idea that boys are more capable of the superior intellectual pursuits required for schooling tends to be reinforced. This attitude is transferred into the field of employment also, where men hold better-paid supervisory jobs while women are limited to the more menial, ill-paid jobs. If the trend of formal education continues in the manner in which it is proceeding at present, it will continue to discriminate against the poorest sections of society since they will always be excluded from its benefits.

Women and girls have little access to education for social, cultural and economic reasons. One of the primary reasons is, perhaps, the roles that girls have to play in the poorest families. From a very early age they have to help with the domestic chores and looking after their younger siblings. Thus, when they should be in school they have already assumed responsibility for a full-time job. In such families children become productive workers from a very young age. Girls work as domestic servants for the better-off families, or help to tend cattle or collect fire-wood. They supplement the family income in this way, or at least earn their own maintenance. This is also true of boys in this section of society. However, a boy is less likely to be withdrawn from school or prevented from enrolling, since investment in his education is likely to pay dividends in the future in terms of his increased chances of employment and consequent economic support of the family. Among those rural families who depend entirely on the selling of their labour in order to survive, both boys and girls may never see the inside of a school.

The high drop-out rate from primary education among the poorest children can also be attributed to a variety of other reasons. Their major handicap is that they are first generation learners and, therefore, cannot rely on their parents for help with their school work. Furthermore, the teaching methods adopted in Indian schools are not especially designed to meet the needs of first generation learners. Thus, learning is a discouraging and frustrating process which results in students losing interest and the motivation to continue. Another disadvantage that such children have is an economic one. They may not possess even the elementary educational materials — books, pencils, etc. which make learning possible. In addition to going to school these children have to perform other duties to help supplement the family income, this being more true of a girl's situation than a boy's. Over-worked and poorly nourished, these children often cannot continue in school beyond a few years.

Besides the reasons mentioned above there are other factors militating
against the participation of girls in the educational system. Greater limitations are put on a girl's freedom of movement which may prevent her from going to school after a certain age. Girls are married off at an early age, thus confining them to the status of a daughter-in-law which curtails their freedom of movement, association and communication even further. Among the poorest sections of society girls will be expected to work after marriage, but in low-paid, unskilled jobs. Since the education system in its present form does not help these girls in the acquisition of skills pertinent to the kind and range of employment they are likely to get, there is little rationale in investing in their education. Furthermore, many parents object to the continuing education of girls on the grounds that education breeds a certain independent attitude to life, and greater expectations from life which may stand in the way of their adjustment to the role of a self-effacing and dependent wife and daughter-in-law.

The Problem of Access

The matter of growing inequality of access to education cannot be resolved by the expansion of today's formal education system. Most poor women live and work beyond the orbit of this system. The experience of the past two decades shows that formal education has been of little use to such women. Only a more comprehensive system of informal education, tailored to the real needs of the vast majority of poor women, is likely to provide a more effective way of tackling this problem.
4 The Invisible Force: Women's Economic Contribution

"My field is in the hills, it takes so much weeding. For how many years will we die from toil? How far will we have to walk with our bundles of grass? How much water will we have to draw from the well? How much is my baby crying in the house. And how much do my breasts fill with milk hearing him cry? How much will I go on weeding my field in the hills?"

From "My Field in the Hills" - Amar Sheikh, 1940s.

Development, as opposed to economic growth, has to be concerned with the problem of reducing inequalities between the various sections of society, particularly their access to the resources necessary for the fulfilment of basic needs and the strengthening of self-reliance. The restructuring of economic roles to maximise the participation of the majority of people in the economy is fundamental to this thesis of development. Since prevailing social relations determine, to a large extent, how goods and services are produced and how the benefits are distributed, strategies to change social relations to ensure a fairer deal for all must form a part of economic development planning. In India, although the right of economic participation is a constitutional one, access to economic roles and opportunities is controlled by the social relations governing production, marketing and credit availability. A woman’s economic role is further regulated by the social relations between men and women prevailing in the society.

As will become evident, the course that economic development has tended to follow in the past few decades has had a disastrous effect on the economic role of women. Women have been displaced from the development process instead of becoming participants in it. With the steady erosion of their economic roles, women in India have begun to lose their credibility as economic assets to the family and society and have become, increasingly, liabilities to their families. A woman’s worth is increasingly becoming limited to her reproductive role. There is mounting evidence to indicate that one of the major reasons for this is the lack of appreciation among public policy makers regarding the contribution of women to the economy, a contribution which has been minimised as a result of the transition from a traditional to a modernising economy in which new roles have yet to substitute for the loss of old ones. Although the genesis of this deteriorating trend preceded the period of planned development of the economy in the post-independence era, it has not yet been arrested.
Prejudices regarding the 'proper' role of women in society and their 'marginal' role in the economy have, to a great extent, determined the shaping of public policies which have tended to treat women as subjects of welfare and development policies instead of considering them as active participants.

The dwindling role of women in the Indian economy can be considered to be one of the factors contributing to growing economic disparities between the different sections of society. Most women in India who need employment and attempt to earn money are heads of households with many dependents, or members of households in the lowest income brackets which need the active participation of both men and women in the household economy. Improving the productivity of such women contributes to income distribution by helping the poorest members of society. When women lose their economic role, the opposite results.

Maximising the role of women in the economy is crucial to the issue of women's development. A woman's ability to be economically productive enhances her status both in the family and society. Furthermore, women's employment has a direct bearing on the improvement of the quality of life of the family. "It has increasingly been found that the nutrition and health levels of households are directly dependent on the access women have in the household to cash or foodgrains."1

The Role of Women in the Traditional Economy

India is still today primarily a rural society. According to the last census count in 1981, 76.3 per cent of the population was rural. The agricultural sector remains the major field of employment, accounting for some 70 per cent of the total work force. The traditional rural economy has been in transition for many decades. The process of modernisation which began in the colonial era gained momentum in the years after independence.

This process disrupted the agrarian economy, greatly reducing the role of traditional economic occupations, resulting in the displacement of those engaged in these activities from an active participation in the economy. The present crisis regarding the economic role of women can be attributed to these disruptive forces. In order to comprehend how this transition has affected women's employment it is necessary to assess the economic role of women in the traditional Indian society.

In the traditional economy production was mainly for subsistence. The family was the unit of production and men, women and children participated in production activities. To make this system efficient there was division of labour within the family, assigning particular tasks to men and women. The roles of the sexes were complementary and not necessarily hierarchical. Women made a large contribution to the support of this economy. They were responsible for the care of children, the production of the major share of food consumed, marketing of handicrafts and produce, and domestic chores in general. With the onset of modernisation and
Breaking rocks for road-building. South India
industrialisation family production for subsistence was gradually replaced by the specialised production of goods and services. The work place moved from the family home or immediate vicinity to specialised workshops and factories. The traditional division of labour which was necessary to make the family production unit efficient became inoperative. It was substituted by competition between individual units of labour. Scarcity of employment opportunities sharpened the competition. The introduction of technology necessitated the hiring of skilled labour. Women's traditional skills were of little use in the new economy. They began, therefore to lose out in the race for employment. With the breakdown of the agricultural and household industries they lost their traditional occupations.

The traditional village economy in India consisted of cultivators, artisans and those providing services. In each of these spheres women played an important economic role. In many areas they were also responsible for marketing the products. Markets were local and easily accessible. Women were, therefore, producers, managers of household industries, traders and retailers. These aspects of their role still exist in traditional communities even to this day.

The decline of household industries, which began in the 18th century and has continued unabated, brought about a great pressure on jobs in agriculture. When agriculture could not accommodate the excess labour, people began to migrate to the towns and industrial centres in search of employment. This process is a continuous one and carries on to this day. Women who migrated along with their families found employment, in the initial stages, in mines, plantations and certain industries. When the process of industrialisation first began, industries like jute and textiles employed women and children. Gradually, with the introduction of technology and mechanisation, women's jobs, which were mainly low-skilled and labour intensive, were appropriated by machines. Women were then pushed out of these employment fields because they lacked the skills to adapt to the new technological changes. They did not have the opportunity to upgrade their skills and so were replaced by skilled men with enough basic education to make them capable of working in a situation of greater mechanisation.

This process of transition is by no means complete. The pattern of life and work described above is that of the majority of women in the traditional society. There have always been certain sections in the society who have prevented their women from working outside their homes and especially as manual labour. The norms relating to the withdrawal of women from the work-force were operative among those in the upper echelons of the social hierarchy. The seclusion of women, which was common among the upper caste and class strata, was mainly responsible for the non-participation of women in the work-force.

Another reason was, of course, that physical labour was considered demeaning. This attitude persists today among the middle class although,
Women's Income is Crucial

"Most women stop working only if they have a serious illness, and for the majority age or even pregnancy is not sufficient reason to work less. Because the women are illiterate and have low skill levels they have little choice of employment. While men can migrate to the nearby industrial belts of Surat district and earn more money, the women have fewer options, but they are left with responsibility for providing for the family. The earnings and work that women do both inside and outside the home are crucial to the survival of the family.

"In those areas of work where exploitation is the greatest, women from the tribal region have a large role. Selling firewood, 'pan' leaves and logs for furniture at dirt cheap rates, working on road construction teams and in stone crushing quarries, these all form part of the subsidiary income-earning activities which necessity has forced on women and girls.

"Even in the better-off tribal families major expenses are met from the women's earnings — like buying a dress. Children's needs and emergencies are paid for out of savings from women's earnings.

"Despite their contribution to the household, these women have no right to land, even if it was held by their mothers before them. While land may be given to a sister at the parents' death, her ownership of the land is seldom registered.

"Marginal farmers need women's incomes as they are able to support themselves off their land for only about three to four months of the year. With increased poverty, as land becomes scarce, women's earnings are more and more crucial both to their families and themselves. The type of goods consumed nowadays has changed. Previously money earned could be spent on clothes and 'luxuries', with food coming from the land. Now incomes are taken up buying food, and there is nothing left for luxuries."

Source: Oxfam File — Guj 180
with greater economic pressure on these families, the prejudices regarding women working outside their homes is gradually breaking down.

The Present Situation of Women’s Employment

Women’s employment, as distinct from women’s work, has been declining steadily since 1911. The major features of this decline are as follows. The population of female workers has decreased both in proportion to the female population and in their percentage of the total labour force. The decline has been in every sector of employment except for a marginal increase in the percentage of white collar workers. The percentage of female workers to the total female population was only about 21 per cent in 1981, while in the same year women accounted for only 14.4 per cent of the total labour force.4

The distribution of women workers in the various sectors of employment indicates that agriculture has continued to absorb the surplus labour displaced from the other spheres of employment.

Participation of women in industry has stagnated and is now declining. This has been attributed to two major causes. Firstly, the demise of the household industries and, secondly, rationalisation and mechanisation of the modern industries. In addition, there has been a virtual disappearance of women from the areas of commerce and trade.

The sharpest decline in women’s employment was registered in the decade 1961-1971. The male and female population increased by 25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively in this decade. During this period the number of male workers increased by 15 per cent while the female workforce declined by 41 per cent. The ratio of female workers to male workers dwindled in every sphere of employment in the rural areas and in most sectors in the urban areas.5 Census facts and figures do little to provide an accurate picture of the quota of work women do. Field studies indicate that the workload of women has actually increased and become more arduous. They are “engaged in perpetual labour not only in household work but in various activities connected with the family’s livelihood”.6 This contribution is seldom recognised, since it is unremunerated and the woman is part of the family labour force.

The Problems of Women’s Economic Role

For any assessment of the problems of women’s economic role to be meaningful, a categorisation of women workers according to their socio-economic status is necessary. Three broad categories emerge as a result. Firstly, there are those who live below subsistence level and who constitute the largest category. They are found in the unorganised sectors of employment in the rural areas, where they are the agricultural workers, wives and daughters of very small farmers, and “those engaged in traditional menial services”, and in the urban areas where they are employed as domestic servants, migrant workers, construction labour, and in unorganised industry. The second category is a heterogeneous one comprising blue collar workers, and those engaged in the services and some
professions. In the rural areas they belong to land-owning cultivator families. This group moves between relative security and subsistence. The third category comprises women from the upper strata of society for whom employment is both a means for improving their standard of living and self-realisation. They are economically secure, better educated and enjoy a higher status as women in their families and work life.

**The Unorganised Sector**

The majority of women living below the poverty line⁸ are to be found in spheres of activity which are labelled as the unorganised sector.

Employment in the unorganised sector is characterised by low pay, long hours of work, low productivity, low-skill, lack of job security and, therefore, greater exploitation. ⁹⁴ per cent of the total female work-force operates within this highly exploitative system. Because there are no labour organisations to help to knit them into a work-force and also because of the varied nature of their occupations, the legislation which seeks to protect these workers is ineffectual in regulating their work conditions.

Women in the unorganised sector fall victim to two types of exploitative mechanism. The first, the institutional basis of poverty, affects both men and women. Land reform legislation, fixing of a minimum wage and providing credit through banks - all attempts by the Government to attack the institutional basis of poverty - have proved ineffectual, since traditional production relations that operate in this sector defy categorisation into concepts of 'employer', 'employee', 'labour', 'capital', 'rent' and 'interest'. Women are, by and large, more affected by the forms of exploitation practised than men, as is evident from the fact that even within the poor wage scales common to this sector of employment women are paid less than men.

Women are further exploited by the sexual politics implicit in the social relations between men and women. These define, to a large extent, the kind and quality of work women have access to and the manner in which the fruits of their labour are utilised.

The primary manifestation of this latter form of exploitation is in the continuing division of labour. The values and attitudes associated with the specialisation and differentiation of the tasks of men and women within the traditional economy have continued to persist, with either sex refusing to do the work not considered appropriate to their sex. This has resulted in women accepting a disproportionate share of the work-load and being responsible for all the household chores, besides having to work for a living.

In most parts of India it is considered shameful for men to take part in household chores. Women who work as farm labourers, either on their own farms or on someone else's, put in an average of fourteen hours of work per day. This includes, besides the hard manual labour necessary in agricultural operations, arduous tasks like collecting firewood and transporting it from distant places, fetching water and trips to and from the
fields to the house to cook, and serve the food. Although male farm labourers also do heavy manual work it is limited to the work hours. On returning home they have leisure. A woman’s work commences in the early morning and carries on till late in the evening. A similar situation exists in the case of those women who are wage earners in the non-agricultural sector. The resultant exhaustion and strain could perhaps be the contributing cause for the higher rates of female mortality in recent decades and the dwindling of sex ratios.

Women work as farm labourers on the family farms, or as wage earners or workers in the family enterprise, thus contributing to the earnings of the family. But their contribution is rarely recognised or admitted. Field studies from India’s prosperous wheat belt in Haryana indicate that farm work is actually done by the women of the household with some assistance from the men for ploughing. However, in most cases the men of the household are the farm managers and claim the income from the farm.9

Although unemployment is a chronic feature of the lives of the workers in the unorganised sector, the rates of unemployment are higher for women than for men. They are also greater victims of underemployment. In 1981 79 per cent of women were estimated to be unemployed as compared to 47 per cent of men.10

There are many examples of the type of jobs in which women find employment. The manufacture of ‘bidis’11 is an industry which has a proportionately larger share of women workers than men workers. It is so organised as to make it possible for women to feed the industry with the finished product while operating from their homes. In fact there are two types of workers in the bidi industry. There are those employed in the factories, and those who work in home production. The latter type of workers are predominantly women and children. Employers prefer to employ women and encourage home production because they can thus evade the rules and regulations of industry. They have no responsibility for work conditions and hours of work, and do not have to bother about minimum wages or payment of sickness or maternity benefits. 65 per cent of the work-force are women. The rolling of bidis does not require much skill. It is extremely labour intensive and marked by low productivity. The total labour time required for rolling a thousand bidis is 12 - 16 hours, and the average rate of payment is Rs4 per thousand. Often the materials for the rolling of bidis may be obtained by a family of bidi makers from a contractor (who is not the actual employer). In such cases the rates of payment are even lower since the contractor has complete control over the producer’s access to the raw materials.12

The ‘chikan’ industry (fine art embroidery on various types of materials) was at one time exclusively centred in the North Indian city of Lucknow. Here again the majority of workers are women. (In Lucknow women account for 97 per cent of the total work-force in this industry.) As in the case of ‘bidi’ workers, the women engaged in this industry are by and large
Woman sewing sacks, Self-Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad

Bidi making, Ahmedabad

Photo: Sunil Gupta
contract workers. They work in their homes and, since they are predominantly from the Muslim community, their seclusion prevents direct contact with the consumers. Consequently, they are totally dependent on the contractors and sub-contractors for access to raw materials and for work orders. There is a high rate of under-employment among these workers and only 7 per cent can obtain a full day's work. The wage rates are phenomenally low. 74 per cent of the workers earn less than Rs40 per month. As with all embroidery work, the strain on the eyes of the producer leads to failing eye-sight and most become incapable of continuing this work by the time they reach the age of 50.

One of the major reasons for women's work becoming increasingly limited to the unorganised sector is that women lack the mobility to acquire skills and training which would improve their job prospects. This lack of mobility is again connected with the prevailing social relations between men and women. Since women have to bear the major burden of domestic chores - which in a poor household is time-consuming and labour intensive - and as well to fulfil their biological role as child-bearers and take the major responsibility for child rearing, they do not have the time and opportunity to acquire skills and training for better jobs. Young girls, prior to marriage, do not have this opportunity, either because they lack formal education or because they are totally engaged in helping with domestic chores and, in addition, supplementing the family income by working in the family labour force or as wage earners. Home production, a source of employment conducive to their conditions, is one of the most exploitative employment sectors. In situations of acute unemployment and under-employment migration in search of jobs is easier for men than for women, whose identity and social position is dependent on that of their father or husband. Furthermore, it seems to be a universal trend that when the market economy replaces production for subsistence, men take over women's work. "It also appears to be a universal pattern that as soon as a working operation is mechanised, it is more likely to be taken over by men. While the women use the hoe for digging and weeding, men use the plough and operate the tractor. While hand-pounding of grains is a female task, the miller is always a man."

The phenomenon of low skill attainment among women and their consequent enslavement to jobs which are labour intensive, time-consuming and arduous, is a vicious circle perpetuated by the unequal access to technology. By disallowing women access to technology the myth is perpetuated that women's calibre is somehow inferior to that of men in the acquisition of mechanical skills. This in turn ensures that those areas of work which are primarily a woman's (as for example, domestic chores or post-harvesting operations in agriculture) are least likely to be speeded up with the introduction of labour-saving devices. This consequently results in women being bound to a perpetual round of time-consuming jobs depriving them of the time and opportunity to acquire skills. The vicious circle is not
Neela Narsaiah — Bidi Worker

“I have been rolling bidis for the past 30 years”, says 45-year old Neela Narsaiah. “I was married at the age of eleven and was a mother at 16. I have six daughters and a son, and was sterilized after my son was born. I came from Sholapur and I learned the art of bidi-rolling from a neighbour. I roll 1000 to 1500 bidis a day. We have to collect everything from the Seth’s house. The Seth paid 1.5 Rupees for 1000 bidis at first, but now it is 5 Rupees. I am still reeling under debt. You see, I had to spend 3-4 thousand Rupees for each of my daughters’ weddings. My health is now failing me. I am not able to roll more than 700 bidis. My arms are swollen from continuous cutting of the leaves. I resort to massage, without effect. My eyes burn and continuous breathing in of tobacco has made me asthmatic. When can I rest? My day begins at 5.30 a.m. and ends at 11.30 p.m.

“My life began with bidi rolling, and perhaps it is going to end doing just the same.”

broken by a rise in the economic status of the family. A woman's status is too low to merit improvement in the conditions of her work. An example taken from field studies conducted in Haryana (India's major wheat-producing State where a rise in agricultural incomes has resulted in relative prosperity among the farming community) will serve to illustrate this point. The field study was aimed at finding out more about the unpaid family workers who have to combine labour force status with household duties.

"The first case is of Buro and her family of nine; of these nine only six members live in the village. Buro's husband and grown-up sons are employed outside the village... The daughters-in-law live in the village with the mother-in-law. Buro has three school-going children...

"Buro and her daughters-in-law got up at 4.30am and immediately started their household work - grinding, churning, milking and feeding the animals, cleaning up the house, bringing water etc. The daughter was called at 6.00am by her mother to leave the bed. 'Beta khada hoja.' The call itself indicated that this girl was also expected to perform a role in the household and she should be on her toes. But no such demand was indicated when she called her sons to leave the beds. The boys got up at 7.00am. They were immediately served breakfast with lassi, chapatis and butter. Buro's son who was at home on leave went out on his bicycle at about 8.00am, when his wife and sister-in-law left on foot for the field nearly two miles away from home, to harvest wheat, their faces covered with veils. When the interviewer asked these ladies whether they had their breakfast, they had taken lassi and dalia,14 left over from the previous night. Apparently, they had taken their breakfast in an inside corner of the house where none could see them.

"Buro's daughter stayed back, took the lunch to the field for her sister-in-law and joined them in harvesting. Buro went to the field at 11.00am after serving lunch to her sons. They returned from the field at 6.30pm and set themselves again to the household grind. The main activities were around the animals, bringing them from the gora (cattle-pen), tying them, giving them feed, cleaning up of the cattle shed and the house, bringing water etc...

"When asked why the wheat should not be ground in the flour mill to spare women from the arduous job of grinding wheat, Buro's son replied, 'It costs money'. When he was told that a family owning such a big farm could afford it, he replied just half in jest and half in earnest, 'This keeps them physically fit; moreover, an idle brain will be the devil's workshop'. This type of reply was received from most of the men interviewed.
"The following is the distribution of woman hours per day contributed by three adult women and a minor girl in the family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household chores</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care of the domestic cattle</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 58 hours"\(^{15}\)

This example illustrates what is meant by family labour force, the low priority women have in access to technology, and the low prestige attached to the work they do, despite the long hours. This is reflected in the son's comment and is typical of the male chauvinistic attitude towards female roles.

Agriculture

The largest area of employment for women in the unorganised sector is agriculture. The role and problems of women in Indian agriculture are inextricably intertwined with the structural problems of the agricultural economy and also the 'invisibility' of women's economic contribution.

The structural problems arise as a result of the hierarchical pattern of land ownership, the nature of land relations and the utilisation of labour, and the credit system. There is a strong class-caste relationship in the ownership of land in that a high proportion of agricultural labourers are from the scheduled castes.

The invisibility of women's economic contribution in agriculture arises from traditional interpretations of such concepts as 'work', 'economic activities', 'productivity' and 'work place'.\(^{16}\)

The nature of women's food production, processing, storage, water and fuel-carrying, home production and marketing of products is such that there is no clear dividing line as to where her occupation ends and work for the home begins. They are in fact over-employed rather than unemployed, doing a variety of agricultural tasks in addition to household work, but the borderline between gainful employment and non-participation in the labour force is blurred in their case, particularly because they work in a subsistence non-market economy.

It is difficult enough to measure and classify economic activity for all employed in the unorganised sectors of the rural economy, but the difficulty in the case of female employment is compounded by the fact that women, much more than men, engage in a multiplicity of tasks, only some of which enter the market economy. Though they may be engaged in economic production, this may not be paid for in cash, or only some of it may be production for a market economy and some for domestic consumption. It may also form a marginal or subsidiary occupation. Moreover, there is frequent change, seasonally and even daily, in the mix of exchange and consumption.
For example, it is a regular and common feature of the lives of most women from landless families in rural West Bengal to go food-gathering. This entails collecting snails and molluscs from the pond beds and finding and collecting leafy green vegetables which grow wild in wooded areas and on the banks of ponds and reservoirs. This kind of activity takes up nearly two to three hours of a woman's working day. While they are out collecting green leafy vegetables or fishing, women also gather twigs and leaves to be used as fuel. Most of this work is translated into domestic consumption. If they happen to collect amounts over and above their household needs, the women sell these to land-owning families whose women do not, because of social norms, go food-gathering. Often the transaction is in kind and not cash. The cash amounts are small and immediately used to purchase food items required for the day (e.g., oil for cooking).

Another common example that may be cited here is the work put in by most rural women in the care of milch cows belonging to the household. It is difficult to define these activities as either housework or agricultural work. Thus under the traditional concept of 'economic activity' which is defined as work other than household work, it is impossible to reflect accurately what women do day in and day out to provide for their families. This has implications for development planning since women's role in agriculture is 'invisible' to planners. However, it also has implications for intra-household relationships. Those members of the family who earn a wage income (usually men) have more status in the family and the benefits of improved conditions generally accrue to them.

Those jobs in agriculture which are least likely to earn money or are low income, low skilled and low productivity jobs are usually female specific.

Female jobs in agriculture are breaking clods of earth, manuring, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and hulling. On farms which use family labour women perform these jobs without receiving any remuneration. The fruits of their labour are then sold by the male members of the family who ultimately control the way these resources will be used.

In dairying, women fetch grass for the animals, clean the cowshed and heap the cowdung and carry it to the fields, and milk the cattle. They cut and carry huge loads of grass and fuel from the forest. As a result of this hierarchical division of labour between male and female in agriculture, wage discrimination against women is rampant. It is difficult to implement the equal pay legislation because it is assumed that women work in less important, and less laborious jobs in agriculture than men. Even for the same jobs women get paid less than men, the assumption being that women are less productive than men (although no objective studies exist to support this thesis). It is estimated that on average women are paid 33 per cent less wages for the same operations in most States in India.\textsuperscript{17}

Although 40 to 50 per cent of the female labour force are unpaid family workers, the work of these women is not recognised either in an economic or
Working Women: Myth and Reality
I (SEWA)

Khaja Bibi, a construction worker says: "I carry 16 bundles on my head up 3 flights of stairs and my baby under my arm."

* * * * * *

Saira Bibi, block printer: "The block weighs a kilo and I have to lift it up, put it in the paint, lift it up, print the cloth, lift it up, put it back in the paint. In one hour we lift that block up and down at least 100 times. It puts a lot of strain on our arms and shoulders."

* * * * * *

Sidar Bibi: "I sit down at my sewing machine at 10.00 a.m. after preparing the morning meal. I sew till 5.00 p.m. then I cook for the evening. After dinner, I sit down again at 8.00 p.m. and sew until 12-1.00 at night."

Sidar Bibi’s husband says: "My wife does household work and looks after the children. That’s all. She does not do any job."

* * * * * *

Usman Bibi says: "I and my daughters have led a comfortable life. My husband used to earn about 1000 Rupees a month. We never sent our daughters to school. We rarely went out of the house and never did any work except household work. Now my husband is dead. He left us nothing. My daughters and grandchildren are hungry, there is no food in the house, but we feel ashamed to go out and look for work. One trader offered to give us cloth to sew into quilts, but I feel ashamed to walk about the streets with a bundle on my head. My daughters are young women, how can I let them go out? So we have no work and no food."

legal sense. As a result women have no control over the productive assets in agriculture such as land and livestock, and little or no access to credit which is tied to land ownership. Property acquired during marriage is usually in the name of the husband. Inheritance rights of women are uniformly inferior to those of men.

The impact of technological change has in most instances had an adverse effect on women's employment. An FAO report shows that when ploughing is mechanised and acreage extended women work harder and harder to keep up. This is best illustrated by the case study earlier cited of Buro and her female family members. The use of the tractor has increased the acreage of their farm. The tractor is operated by the male members of the family for whom the work of ploughing has become less strenuous. However, for the women who do the actual cultivation - manuring, weeding, harvesting, threshing - the work-load has increased, since they are now dealing with bigger crops over a larger acreage without mechanisation of any of the operations they control. With the increased use of pesticides, for example, women's work burden increases. While spraying the pesticides is a man’s job, fetching water over long distances to mix the pesticides before these can be used, is a woman’s.

Although Indian women contribute some 50 per cent of the total labour in agricultural operations, most agricultural training programmes are aimed at men. This has resulted in two adverse effects. In regions where women were solely responsible for agriculture, as in the hill regions, there has been a displacement of women from the positions of authority and management resulting in lessening of food grain availability for the family. In the hill regions, with the development of orchards and terraced farms, men who earlier did not control agriculture have taken over the cash crop cultivation. On the other hand women have had to continue their traditional shifting subsistence cultivation in order to provide food grains for the family. Whereas the cash rewards for this kind of activity are non-existent, it is also more strenuous since the land available now to women is no longer the best land in the vicinity (which has been terraced) and is situated further away than previously.18

Besides the above problems in agricultural employment which arise for women because they are women (and an inferior social class), there are grave structural problems which also impinge on female employment in agriculture.

In order to analyse the problems of women in agriculture an understanding of these structural factors is necessary. It is equally necessary to understand that the division of agricultural workers into two categories - cultivators and agricultural labourers - does not give us a complete picture of the labour situation in rural areas. Cultivators are of many kinds. They may be absentee landlords who do not cultivate their own land but hire labour to do it for them, or rent out their land. They may be large (non-absentee) landholders who hire labour or have contract labour to
work on their land and as well rent out part of it. They may also be sharecroppers and very small farmers who not only cultivate their own land but work as labourers in other people's fields, since their own holdings are mostly uneconomical. Labour, on the other hand, may be casual daily wage earners, or contract labour (those whose wages are fixed). They may also be bonded labour - indebted to a landlord for loans taken from the latter which have to be paid for by working in the landlord's fields. It is not uncommon for a man to be bonded to a particular land-owner for life as a result of the usurious rates of interest on the loans given. A man in this situation is no better off than a slave. Sharecroppers and very small farmers may also work as casual, daily wage earners and contract labour.

A distinct trend in the land ownership patterns has been discernible over the past few decades. More and more families are depending on smallholdings for survival. There has been a steady loss of land and the number of agricultural labourers is on the increase. This trend has had a major effect on the economic role of women in agriculture. Their participation in agriculture as independent cultivators has declined substantially, and more and more women have been forced into agricultural labour. The number of female cultivators has decreased by 50 per cent in two decades and is in keeping with the general trend in the agricultural economy, with its growing pauperisation and the inability of the family farms to provide productive employment. The number of female agricultural labourers has increased from one-third of the work force to about half of it in just two decades (1951-1971). The major part of the growth in this section can be attributed to women's displacement from the role of cultivators and workers on family farms.

A high rate of unemployment is one of the major problems of this sector. Unemployment is higher for women than for men. The latter can hope to find work, on an average, for 208 days in a year whereas women find employment for not more than 138 days. Women's situation as a result of unemployment is more acute, since most national employment programmes which are designed to provide employment to agricultural workers in peak unemployment periods are aimed at men and ignore the fact that women participate in these in equal numbers. As, for example, an International Labour Organisation sponsored study of the Employment Guarantee Scheme for rural areas (providing rural unemployed with jobs in public works like road construction, building embankments etc.) shows that 50 per cent of the workers are women. Work under the Employment Guarantee Scheme is available to the rural poor only in the agricultural off-seasons. However, unemployment periods are determined primarily by the peak periods of unemployment for rural men. Women's periods of unemployment do not coincide with men's. For example, men are busy during the ploughing season when women face acute unemployment. Thus even in peak agricultural seasons women do not necessarily have work and need public work employment more than men.
Unorganised Non-agricultural Sector

The non-agricultural occupations include various industries, trades and services in the unorganised sector. There is no reliable data about this group of workers. However, it may be estimated that approximately 4 million women work in it. Their major problems can be enumerated as follows. All workers in this sector suffer from insecurity of employment. Their lack of organisation as a workforce makes them easy prey for exploitation. Thus we find that there are no standard minimum wages for employment in this sector, neither are welfare amenities provided. Men and women work long hours and without any paid leave. Since it is not as easy to categorise workers in this sector as it is in organised industry, it is virtually impossible for law-implementing agencies to regulate the conditions of employment. The insecurity of employment combined with the lack of knowledge regarding legal provisions make unionisation very difficult. Employers, who are often contractors, take full advantage of women's lack of bargaining power to set up sweat shops.

Household industries and small-scale industries still provide a considerable amount of employment in this sector, despite a substantial decline in their importance over recent decades in the face of competition from factory-produced goods. The household industries are threatened with extinction for other reasons too. The producers lack institutional credit, their production techniques are poor and their productivity is low.

The conditions of work and the problems faced by women workers in this sector depend to a great extent on whether they are wage labourers or are self-employed.

A large section of the wage labourers are contract employees. This implies that they are hired to work not by the principal employer, which may be an organised industry or government undertaking, but by contractors. The major industries employing contract workers are iron and manganese mines and, to a lesser extent, rice mills, limestone quarries, ports, and iron and steel works.

Construction workers make up a large proportion of contract employees. 60 per cent of the labour hired for the construction works undertaken by the Public Works Department of the Government were contract employees. The work conditions of these contract employees in organised industry are supposed to be regulated by protective legislation. According to this legislation, workers are entitled to welfare provisions, fixed hours of work, basic minimum wages and weekly leave. Women workers are also supposed to be provided with creche facilities. Surveys of the work conditions of women in the construction trade indicate, however, a conspicuous lack of implementation of this legislation.

Women on construction sites work under the most appalling conditions. There is no surety of minimum wages, and what wages are available to them are siphoned off by the contractors or subcontractors who control their
Working Women: Myth and Reality
II (SEWA)

Mehroonisa says "It is very difficult for us to look after the children and also work at the same time. For example, I sew clothes at home. When my children were small, they would not leave me. They would crawl near my machine and pull at the pieces of cloth and put their hands near the pedal and the needle. With all this pulling and crying I could not work, and would hardly earn 2 Rupees a day. Also I was afraid they would hurt themselves on my machine. So I would feed them all opium and they would sleep the whole day. I think opium is not good for children, it damages their brain. It is our bad fortune we have to treat our children like this".

Rashida Bibi: "My daughter is often ill, but I do not want to take her to hospital because if they admit her there, then I will have to stay with her and then who would earn the money for the house? We cannot afford to miss even one day's earning".

Radhaben, 45 years old, is a headloader in the Ahmedabad cloth market. She goes to work at 8 a.m. and waits for work all day. If there are any loads of cloth to be carried from shop to shop she gets paid ten paise to pack and carry it. She earns 5 Rupees on a good day, but often has little work and cannot make more than a rupee or two. She has been working for 25 years for the same cloth merchant, but can be dismissed at any time. The price of wheat, oil, sugar has gone up manyfold, but Radhaben's earnings have remained the same.

Fatma Bibi is a home-based worker. She sews ready-made garments in her own house on her own sewing machine. The local government trader gives her the cloth, while Fatma Bibi has to buy the thread and oil for the machine. She gets paid piece rate. When her two daughters help and they work 10 hours, they can earn 8 Rupees a day. During the slack season she earns 2-3 Rupees: Whether she gets work or not, whether she gets paid or not, the piece rate depends on the convenience of the traders. The price of thread is continuously rising, the prices of essential foods rise higher than the inflation rate, yet Fatma Bibi's earnings remain the same.

conditions of employment. The exploitation of these workers begins with their method of recruitment. Their services are hired by sub-contractors, who most often obtain their labour from backward rural regions where unemployment is high. Baited by the promise of employment, such workers are enticed to the cities. Sub-contractors obtain work from the main contractors on a piece-rate basis but make payments to the labourers on a daily basis. This enables them to keep their profit margins high at the expense of labour.

The extortion continues during the period of employment, when deductions are often made from wages without sufficient explanation. The minimum work conditions promised by legislation are never adhered to. The work schedule invariably exceeds the stipulated maximum hours of work and there is no payment of overtime for extra hours. Although on government construction projects the principal employer can be held responsible for non-implementation of this legislation, in the absence of any enforcement body and labour organisations these conditions remain unrealised.

Both men and women suffer from this exploitation. Women are, however, particularly handicapped by the fact that most of these work sites do not take into consideration their special problems as women workers. Children have to be taken to work places and looked after in between periods of exhausting labour as best the mother can manage. Creches are conspicuous by their absence, and those which do exist are merely there to abide by the letter of the law. In the two principal cities of Bombay and Delhi a charity organisation runs a number of creches for construction workers' children. Although their role is laudable, one cannot ignore the fact that charity has subsidised large, profit-reaping organisations whose duty it is to provide just working conditions for their workers.

The majority of pregnant women on these sites work till the ninth month of their pregnancy and at least a quarter of them continue till the last day of delivery. The provision of maternity leave is an unheard-of phenomenon (although stipulated by law). Since there is no provision of minimum health services for the expectant mothers, malnutrition and mortality rates are high.

The problems of the construction workers are similar to those of the 'bidi' rollers and 'chikan' embroiderers described earlier, and stem from the same root causes - the poor bargaining power of these workers in the face of high unemployment and the lack of effective labour organisations to fight on their behalf.

A large proportion of women in the unorganised sector are self-employed although the proportion of self-employed women is on the decline. This decline further indicates an erosion in the economic role of women who are losing their independence as self-employed entrepreneurs. Self-employment is common in areas like weaving, the retail trade and food
## The Women Handloom Weavers of Cambay

Handloom weaving is a traditional cottage industry in India. A study by the Self Employed Women’s Association revealed the circumstances of the women who do this work and of their families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of women owning handlooms:</th>
<th>233</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married:</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 5</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s employment:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual labour</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industrial worker</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government service</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s literacy:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literate</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illiterate</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s literacy:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literate</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illiterate (mostly girls)</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 200 Rs a month</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-300 Rs a month</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-400 Rs a month</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401 Rs + a month</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebtedness:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In debt</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average size of debt</td>
<td>1,333 Rupees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of interest rate:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know rate charged</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>Nil.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The weavers of Cambay rely on 4 or 5 master weavers who provide them with piece work. The master weavers act together to fix the rate to be paid to the women. They provide yarn for the weavers, and charge them for its preparation. Most of the women’s debts are on loans from the master weavers for materials and equipment. Looms, which used to cost 200-250 Rupees, are now 1000 Rupees, making it difficult for young women to start in the craft. Family incomes have changed very little for many years.

The women weave for up to 11 hours a day, with one half of them doing 7 to 10 hours work each day. The vast majority of the women take 2-3 days to weave one sari, for which they receive 7-10 Rupees. A woman’s average monthly earnings are therefore about 62 Rupees and out of this she must pay 18-20 Rupees for yarn preparation etc.

Weaving, a common form of self-employment in the North-eastern hill regions and in the Southern States of Tamil Nadu and Andra Pradesh, is primarily a rural-based household industry. Women in Manipur provide an excellent example of self-employment leading to considerable economic independence. They have a special women’s market where the sellers are all women and thus their right to produce goods and market them has been institutionalised.

The retail trade in agricultural and non-agricultural products is a common form of employment. Markets all over the country have women traders who operate on a small-scale basis and often sell products produced by themselves or their families. Fish, vegetables, and fruit form their chief wares. All trade is on a day-to-day basis since these women have no working capital.

Self-employed women are handicapped by two major factors. Firstly, they do not have sufficient capital and cannot obtain it from credit institutions. Secondly, they cannot always find a market for their products. Other additional factors leading to the decline of self-employment among women include their lack of knowledge regarding modern marketing methods and management.

There are no training opportunities available for these women to improve their production techniques and marketing skills and, besides, they are easily displaced from the market by large traders who have both capital and marketing facilities. Development agencies unwittingly often contribute to this displacement by injecting capital and technology in order to improve productivity. In doing so they upset the traditional division of labour in which women’s contribution was significant, giving them considerable control over the income generated from their trades. An excellent example is provided by the integrated Fisheries Development Project started 25 years ago by the Norwegian Agency for Development in Quilon district in Kerala.

"While the intention was to improve the conditions for the poorer families and increase the local consumption and distribution of fish, the main activities today are trawling of prawns and freezing of the catch for export. The project, as such, completely ignored women in practically every aspect that it stood to cover. Only recently has any attention been paid to the possible effects on the lives and work of women of this new technology.

"Most women are now left to find new livelihoods in replacement of their previous occupations as fish traders and processors. Male merchants have entered the scene to transport the catch faster in lorries or on bicycles. Factories have been set up for processing and freezing of fish and prawns.

"Some women get employment as casual labourers in the new factories, but at lower wages than men. Women are left out of the management of the new technologies in the factories."
"Also this study indicates that a rise in the family income does not necessarily result in improved nutritional levels, though transistors, bicycles and wrist-watches find their way into the households."  

**Women in the Organised Sector**

"The organised sector in the Indian economy is comprised of: a) all public sector establishments, i.e. all services under the Central, State and Local Governments and occupations in public undertaking in the field of industry, credit financing, public utilities etc. and b) non-agricultural, private sector establishments which employ 10 or more persons." 

Data regarding this sector is much more reliable since the Government collects employment information from all establishments which come under the above definition. The workers in the organised sector are more privileged than their counterparts in the unorganised sector, since the regulation of service conditions is stipulated by law and there is much stricter supervision in its enforcement. Both labour unions and the governmental labour protection bodies provide the vigilance necessary for this enforcement.

The size of the organised sector has been growing over the past few decades. The Planning Minister, Mr S.B. Chavan, said that as per the Employment Market Information (EMI) data, the shares of the women's employment in the organised sectors had increased from 11 per cent to 12.3 per cent between 1971 and 1981.

However, between 1975 and 1981 the employment of women in absolute numbers had increased in all the organised sectors, except in construction. The percentage of women in total employment also showed an increase in all sectors except a marginal decrease in mining and quarrying, construction, and the wholesale and retail trades.

For a closer examination, the organised sector can be divided into two broad categories - industry, and services and professions. Since we are more interested in the problems of women who have been displaced from their economic role, we shall concentrate on the constraints of women in industry. The services and professions sector of employment has registered an increase in the number of women it employs - but is only a very small part of the whole.

The three main sources of employment in industry are factories, mines and plantations. The number of women employed in factories showed a rising trend from 1951 to 1964 after which it has shown a tendency to decline. This decline becomes more obvious when the percentage of female employees to total employees in this sector is compared over a period of two decades 1951-1971, showing a fall of 20.3 per cent.

Women's employment in mines also shows a declining trend, the percentage of women workers to the total employment in mines falling by 47 per cent during the period 1951-1971.
Tea plantations provide the only sector where women’s employment is seen to be on the increase. Women workers on tea plantations increased from 44 per cent in 1961 to 47 per cent in 1970. This increase is despite the fact that total employment in tea has decreased in this period. A dwindling trend in women’s employment is, however, discernible in the other major plantations like coffee and rubber. The reason for the higher recruitment of women in tea plantations is attributed to the fact that the job of tea-picking is highly labour intensive.

Three reasons are generally offered for the general decline of women’s participation in industries. Firstly, the protective legislation which seeks to provide additional benefits to women discourages employers from recruiting them, since women’s labour becomes expensive. Secondly, the policies aimed at equalising the wages of men and women have affected their employment. Thirdly, the structural changes in industry leading to rationalisation and modernisation have made women’s earlier roles in industry redundant.

Labour laws in India provide adequate protection to women workers. Employers claim that certain laws have had the effect of curtailing the employment of women in particular types of industrial jobs. For example, the laws prohibit the employment of women on night shifts. It is argued that with the introduction of the multiple shift system in industry this poses a serious handicap to the employment of women. There is also a ban on employing women workers in underground work in coal mines. Many claim that this has resulted in the decline of women’s employment in mines. This is not entirely true since it is seen that the decline corresponds with the “introduction of new methods of surface screening and coal handling”.

Wellness provisions for women are said to be one of the main causes in the decline of women’s employment. However, the amount spent on maternity benefits and other welfare measures (including creches) has been so negligible that it cannot be claimed that their provision has made women workers more expensive. The amount spent by employers on maternity benefits has come down in the period 1961-1971 except in the case of mines.

There are no rational reasons based on productivity differentials for the fixing of labour wages for women. An interesting example of how unfair, sexist attitudes determine the lower female wage rates is cited in the Report of the Committee appointed by the Government of India to look into the status of women. The example relates the experience of the Committee in investigating the work conditions on the plantations. It was found that in a tea garden situated in North Bengal malepluckers were paid Rs3.15 a day whereas women only earned Rs3.00. The management explained this differential on the grounds that there were differences in the required minimum output of work between men and women. “Since we also found that the majority of women are qualifying for the incentive scheme by giving a higher output than the fixed minimum we failed to appreciate the reasons for continuing this discrepancy.”
Modern Textile Techniques Marginalise Women

From a Research Worker’s Notes:

“In the cotton textile mills employment of women has declined drastically over the years. In Bombay alone the number of women workers declined from 32,900 in 1921 to 17,900 in 1951, down from 20% to 11% of the work force. Today women textile workers in Bombay number only 8,000, representing 2% of the total work force. As well as direct retrenchment of women workers in the face of automation, there have been informal and hidden practices — of discrimination, including firing women on marriage or pregnancy, non-implementation of protective legislation and sexual harassment.

“Whatever the reasons, social attitudes about women as workers, resistance of employers and male workers, denial of job training opportunities and ignorance of women about the job scene, all have a part to play.

“Retrenched women workers are often re-employed in subsidiary processes, or even employed on a contract basis. They more often end up in sweat shops operating on the putting-out system, pushed into the informal or unorganised sector. In these conditions they can get neither the statutory minimum wage, nor the benefit of protective legislation, nor any of the fringe benefits of the organised sector.

“In the context of the International Decade for Women, it is imperative to examine aspects of the marginalisation of women in the factory and the sweat shop so that policy recommendations and strategies can be evolved to protect women’s employment. This subject can have general implications in the context of the relocation of textile industries internationally and the creation of world market factories which are based predominantly on cheap female labour in countries like India, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka.”

Source: Oxfam File — Del 52
As in the agricultural sector, employers in the organised sector classify certain jobs as female tasks, since this enables them to have work reserved for women done more cheaply. This is a major hurdle in the path of wage equalisation. By labelling certain tasks as women's work employers seek to utilise the prejudices associated with the stereotyping of sex roles to their advantage.

Women's work in industry also exhibits many of the features of a sex hierarchy. "The sharp distinction between 'male' and 'female' tasks goes together with a hierarchical ordering so that women perform the least qualified jobs, and the supervisory jobs are filled by men."36 53 per cent of the women employees in the private sector and 20.4 per cent in the public sector are unskilled workers as against 33.5 per cent and 17.4 per cent for men.37 Besides being put on the lowest wages of the production process, women are kept there by the denial to them of opportunities for on-the-job training which leads to promotion. Employers confess that men refuse to do these jobs at the wage rates given to women. "In areas where men have to be employed for the same jobs, they are usually placed in a higher category, in order to maintain the sex differential."

The real explanation for the decline of women's employment opportunities in this sector is that the extent of employment in industry is determined by the degree of capital intensity and choice of technology. The higher the capital intensity and more sophisticated and labour-saving the choice of technology, the greater is the displacement of women from this sector of employment. This type of industrial development cannot, therefore, be said to contribute to women's development. The industrial development that has occurred in recent decades has had a detrimental effect on the economic roles of those women who need employment most in order to survive. Many women have, over the years, found their niche in the new and modernised industries. But these are women who were adequately prepared to meet changes because of their higher educational levels. Their preparedness was a consequence of their higher economic status. But for the majority of women who are poor and unskilled displacement has been the outcome.

In the older industries like jute and textiles women were employed in great numbers. Since many of the operations were manual, unskilled women with no basic education were able to cope and perform effectively. With increasing mechanisation those processes earlier done by hand became obsolete. Women were not given any training to acquire the skills to operate the new machines. They were thus displaced.

Besides being denied the opportunity to acquire on-the-job training, women are also handicapped by a lack of pre-recruitment training (especially vocational and technical). Most of the women evicted as a result of rationalisation and modernisation are semi-literate or illiterate. Illiteracy is a major obstacle in the path of their acquiring skills to handle sophisticated production processes.
Development!
New Cotton Type Relieves Women’s Labour

Unshelling cotton pods is hard and badly-paid women’s work. New types of cotton which do not require shelling are being introduced and less of the old cotton is being grown each year. Yet it provides the only source of income for families during the dry season.

Report from the Self Employed Women’s Association of Gujarat:

“Eighty four per cent of people in the area have no land. Most work as labourers, but there is no work in the dry season. It is then that the cotton needs shelling for processing at the factory. The work is a boon in the lean months. Many women take it on, even those who are not employed at other times of the year.

“Most of the women work at home so as to look after their children and household chores. They walk up to 2½ kilometers to the factory to collect the cotton and carry about 20 kilos of it home on their heads. Those women who work at the factory arrive at 4.00 a.m. to be sure of a place when the day begins at 6.00 a.m. The women work about 8 hours a day, they are not paid for their waiting or carrying time.

“To unshell the cotton, the women sit amid piles of pods and work with their fingers. Their hands get worn and sore, and they are exposed to cotton dust. On average they process 20 kilos of cotton a day. There is no fixed rate for the work. The women’s pay fluctuates from day to day, employer to employer and season to season. However they usually get 1.50 - 2.00 Rupees for 20 kilos of cotton.

“There is an increasing trend in preference of cotton that does not need unshelling . . . No development should be encouraged which takes away the traditional work from the hands of the women without providing alternative employment . . . Otherwise growth policies are detrimental to women’s integration in the development of the country. Unfortunately there is no watch-dog from the women’s side to observe the changes affecting the women’s life and work.”

The capital-intensive technology that has been adopted through industrial development in India can only result in growing disparities and higher unemployment rates. It cannot promote growth with justice.

Services and Professions

The tertiary sector, comprising those working in services and professions, is one of the only sectors of women's employment that has exhibited an upward trend. Nurses, teachers, doctors, lawyers, office workers, and business managers all belong to this sector. Although there is an overall increase in the number of women employed in these occupations, this does not necessarily augur well for the general employment situation of women. This sector of the economy is one in which no production of goods takes place.

"In an economy like ours, where an usually high proportion of total capital is invested in trade and commerce or where, because of social and political considerations, allocation of resources for defence, maintenance of law and order and certain social services like health are higher, the tertiary sector is somewhat bigger in volume than in other developing countries. As a result of this, employment in the tertiary sector in general and in the public sector in particular has grown at an increasingly fast rate. The expanded role of Government at all levels of the development process has been one of the greatest contributory factors towards this."

This cannot continue for long in an economy like India's. Without a corresponding thrust forward in the productive sectors of the economy, the growth of the tertiary sector in the future will level off and gradually plummet downwards.

The economic role of the vast majority of women in this country cannot change radically without a corresponding change in the economic structures and production relations, which perpetuate discriminations on the basis of sex and class.
5 Powers to Change: Public Policies and the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Women’s Development

“One reason that women are too easily excluded from national development planning is because they are victims of old-fashioned statistics.” - Monica Fong, Population Statistician FAO.

"The understanding of the women’s question continues to be governed predominantly by the urban middle class biases or the legacy of the social reform movement.” - Vina Mazumdar - “Women, Development and Public Policy”.

Political Equality and Indian Women

Women in India are guaranteed equal political status to men under the Constitution. This guarantee has, in many ways, proved to be a barrier of illusion preventing a glimpse of the actual powerlessness of the majority of Indian women. If their political status is to be judged from the percentage of women exercising their franchise, then women seem to be enjoying a fairly equitable position in political life. The proportionate difference between the number of men and women voters in three general elections is very small and has decreased progressively in recent years. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women indicates that more and more women are expressing their views regarding political preference, and exercising their franchise independently of their menfolk. But it would be misleading to assume from this that by being given the vote, women have been assured of their place in the sun and have stormed the male-dominated citadels of political decision-making. In fact the tale of human misery that constitutes the life and status of the majority of Indian women expresses, in unambiguous terms, their lack of political power.

The real test of women’s political status lies in the extent to which women have been mobilised to exert political pressure and focus attention on those problems which are today affecting their status and role. The record of political parties and women’s organisations in this sphere is one of dismal failure. There are exceptions in sporadic and scattered examples of women’s mobilisation, mainly centred in urban areas and involving outraged protests against dowry deaths and rape. But exceptions do not make the rule, and the lack of a coherent and committed women’s movement on the Indian scene is making itself felt. Women as a group have little or no political clout and are unable to make the problems that afflict them matters of national concern.
The impact of women on the political process is further minimised by the fact that very few women legislators and parliamentarians are advocates of the women's cause. (Actually the limited proportion of women who get party tickets and are elected is itself an indication of women's poor political status.) This is directly related to the problem of the absence of a women's movement. In the early years after independence, women who held responsible positions in Government were more committed to women's issues because they had been groomed by the freedom struggle, which was also identified by women as a struggle to improve their status. In recent years, however, there has been a perceptible change in the background of women being voted to office. Their credibility in political circles does not arise from their espousal of a legitimate cause, but from the position they enjoy within their own party. They usually represent the social and political elite from whom the problems affecting the majority of women are far removed. "During a recent debate in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament) on a private resolution for equal pay for equal work for women, not even one-third of the women members attended and only a few spoke." Since women's organisations do not control these elected representatives women's issues cannot be projected through them.

Political parties have remained, by and large, the domains of men. Their attitude towards women and women's issues reflect traditional biases. In the pre-election campaigns there is no concerted effort on the part of most of the major political parties to engage women in a discussion of the issues. The campaigning style also reflects how little importance political parties attach to enhancing the political consciousness of women. For the most part parties rely on winning the support of the prominent men of a village or locality in an attempt to ensure that the women will fall in line. Women are thus viewed as appendages to the male family heads. Their support has only to be canvassed for vote-catching purposes.

The problem of women's political status is inextricably linked with their poor social, economic and educational status. With centuries of subservience behind them women are ill-equipped to exercise political power. In the absence of organisations through which the exercise of political power can be nurtured this position is not likely to change very much.

Indian Women and the Law

The Indian Constitution emphasises the principle of equality before the law and subsequent social legislation is, by and large, calculated to remove all the legal obstacles to complete equality. There are certain lacunae in the laws which need reform, the most important of which relate to Muslim personal law, and some of the laws regarding polygamy, divorce, inheritance, adoption, child marriage and dowry. There is much scope for improvement of the provisions.

The labour legislation to protect women workers is also based on the
equality principle and is, on the whole, adequate and progressive.

The problem lies not in legislating against inequality but in the practice of
equality. With the traditional role of women as it is and their dependence
enhanced by their economic subservience and lack of education, women
are in no position to exercise their legal rights. Labour legislation to protect
the rights of women workers is a step in the right direction. But since only
the 6 percent of the total women workers who are employed in the organised
sector can be said to be covered by the law, the claim that legislation
protects the rights of women workers is an exaggerated one. With the
employment situation being what it is, as a result of structural changes in the
economy, women driven by necessity will continue to be easy victims of the
amorphous unorganised sector. Employers will continue to encourage the
growth of the unorganised sector which enables them to maximise their
profits without having to abide by the regulations imposed on them in the
organised sector.

Public Policy and Women's Development

It is only through the adoption of relevant public policies that a deliberate
and significant impact can be made upon the problems facing the different
sectors of the Indian political scene. India has subscribed to planned
development since the initiation of the Five Year Plans in 1951. The major
objective of this policy was to control and direct development, to translate
the goals of the Welfare State, as set forth by the Constitution, into reality.
Public policy, as expressed in the Plans and through the programmes of the
governmental implementing bodies, was made to bear upon every aspect of
the life of the Indian people. Priority areas - for example, economic
development - received higher financial allocations than, say, welfare
which, being an unproductive sector, was allotted a lesser proportion of the
resources. There were many changes in priority areas in successive Plan
periods as the impact of the earlier Plans made themselves felt. The fortunes
of the social welfare sector have also fluctuated in successive Plan periods
reflecting shifts of emphasis in development.

Although various departments of the Government are responsible for the
planning of programmes for women's development, these receive special
attention in the social welfare sector. The social welfare services were
intended to cater for "the special needs of persons and groups who, by
reason of some handicap - social, economic, physical or mental - are unable
to avail of or are traditionally denied the amenities and services provided by
the community". Women as a community, along with the scheduled castes
and tribes, and the physically and mentally handicapped, are eligible for
welfare. Their eligibility has been determined by the planners' perception
of their problems. They perceived woman's problems as arising from their
being handicapped by social customs and social values. The Five Year
Plans therefore lay emphasis on providing for women services which would
protect them as a weaker section of society. The services constituted mainly
health, education and related social welfare activities. Women's share of
the developmental resources fluctuated along with the fluctuations in allocation for welfare services in successive Plan periods.

"An examination of the Five Year Plans reveals that, in spite of the policy emphasis on welfare or investment in human resources, the share of investment in the social services in terms of the actual allocation has been steadily declining in successive Plans." It was assumed that the other national programmes would benefit women directly or indirectly, reflecting the attitude that prosperity in one sector or one class would gradually spread to all others. Except in the second Five Year Plan, the fact that the majority of poor Indian women are workers, and that special efforts are required to stem the erosion of their productive roles, was generally ignored. Agencies who are engaged in women's programmes, however, attach great significance to the problem of enhancing women's purchasing power. But since these efforts are limited to the welfare sector which is non-productive, they do not receive any priority in resource allocation.

Perception of women's problems as reflected in public policies betrays an essentially middle-class bias. The traditional middle-class attitude towards women is that they are primarily home-makers. The women of the middle-class do not generally participate in productive work outside their homes. Their role, by and large, is limited to that of consumers and reproducers. However, as we have seen, this is not the reality for the majority of Indian women who are poor. Driven by economic necessity they have to work in order to survive.

Consistent with the middle-class bias in public policy-making, the programmes have tended to reflect welfare-oriented and paternalistic attitudes to women's development and problems. The assumptions followed in designing the programmes were primarily based on the need to integrate women in the development process, and were as follows.

a. The need to harness women's idle time. A common impression was that women now have plenty of leisure time, since modern technology has made many home-making functions easier and less time-consuming. One has only to see the work burden of the majority of Indian women (as also the work burden of most women in the Third World) to understand that this assumption is both baseless and incorrect.

b. The need to enhance women's participation in development since non-participation entails, firstly, not receiving the fruits of development and secondly, because the contribution of such a vast section of the population should not be forfeited. This ignores the reality that most women contribute a large amount to development but their contribution is not recognised, since they are victims of old-fashioned statistics which do not reflect their economic role. The nature of women's work is such that there is no clear dividing line as to where her occupation ends and work for the home begins.
c. The development of ‘basic needs’ which entailed providing rural women with services which meet their health care, easy water supply, better sanitation, nutrition, education and particularly literacy needs. The fact that it is impossible to provide access to any of these services to the poorest women of the rural society without a corresponding betterment of their socio-economic role was generally ignored.

With the failure of the programmes designed on the above assumptions, planners turned their attention to 'income generation activity' for rural women. The first five years of the Women’s Decade witnessed a plethora of ‘Women and Development’ projects seeking to promote rural women’s training, and production of various handicrafts. The basic perception by planners of rural women’s roles however showed little change, and the crafts promoted were very often characterised by their household use eg lace making, sewing, embroidery, pickle and preserve making etc.

Some of the typical characteristics of these programmes, which were mostly financed by aid agencies because international bodies were concerned about assisting poor rural women, were as follows:-

i. The programmes bear little relationship to the major development thrusts of programmes in the rural areas. Very few have any relationship to agriculture which remains the major rural industry.

ii. The number of beneficiaries of the programmes is small and the infrastructure in terms of personnel is large and expensive. The marketing of the products is ill-developed and completely dependent on the outside personnel, resulting in its collapse upon the withdrawal of the project personnel and experts.

1980-85: The Sixth Five Year Plan

The Sixth Five Year Plan, which covers the final years of the Women’s Decade, makes some distinct departures from the earlier do-gooding, welfare-oriented approach of the previous Five Year Plans.

Firstly, the Plan recognises women as a special category requiring urgent attention in development strategies.

Secondly, it recognises that early marriage, repeated pregnancies with consequent poor health, and lack of opportunities for personal development, create the vicious trap in which substantial numbers of India’s women are caught.

Thirdly, a very positive contribution by the Sixth Plan is the substantive policy decision that from now on the Government will endeavour to give joint title to husband and wife for all asset transfers such as house sites, land redistribution or facilities in economic generation or subsidies programmes. It has accepted the criticism that in the past asset transfers to alleviate poverty had in fact intensified intra-household inequalities, as title delivery to male heads of houses had denied women access to rural credit which is largely tied to land ownership.
Fourthly, there is a major emphasis on women's employment to further their economic independence and emancipation. However, in this the Plan does not wish to separate women's needs into an isolated set of programmes but to create an awareness among planners and development administrators that women have special constraints in utilising the benefits society has to offer. Furthermore, in the National Rural Employment Programme there is a categorical assertion that specific attention will be paid to increasing women's participation which, if achieved, will make a substantial difference to the poorest women. Further, the assurance that the modernisation of the traditional occupations of women would be selective, and would include simultaneous development of skills for alternative employment, is significant. The acceptance of the concept that balwadis (mother's groups) and creches must be attached to schools - to free young girls from surrogate mother roles - and to project sites and residential colonies to enable women to participate more freely in economic activities is another important development.

Unfortunately, there are many conceptual and operational constraints in the Plan which may ultimately result in a wide gap between intention and implementation.

The major constraint of the Plan is that, although it is well-intentioned and in keeping with the realities of poor women's situation, it fails to evolve positive indicators about the kind of infrastructure necessary to implement its recommendations.

A primary conceptual disability of the Plan is that it recognises the family as the basic unit for development. Women's organisations have protested that, in doing so, planners are lumping together the least well-off and better-off within the household. This is contrary to the basic conceptual framework of the Sixth Plan which recognises that "lumping the very poor along with the relatively better-off sections in the community" results in benefits not percolating to the most deprived sections. In these circumstances the now demonstrated 'invisibility' of women's real needs to the planners will, as in the past, continue. In response to the adverse reaction from women's organisations the Sixth Plan has attempted a compromise. Although the family is still retained as the basic unit of development, it focuses attention on the more vulnerable members within the family.

Although the Sixth Plan lays stress on enhancing women's employment opportunities it does not provide the guidelines for how this is to be done. It is totally mute on the introduction of a special component within all sectoral programmes with earmarked, non-divertable resources and separate monitoring arrangements - the main plank of the strategy advocated by all national and international reviews in recent years (and reactivated at the mid-Decade Women's Conference at Copenhagen in July 1980). In terms of generating employment, mention is made of utilising the Women's Development Corporations. But at present only three States have such Corporations and there is no provision in the Plan to create any more - so
which agencies will generate employment, monitor the impact of programmes and assess whether effective access to opportunities in education, training and employment has been assured?

The Sixth Plan recognises the importance of creating an awareness among planners and development administrators at all levels regarding the real constraints facing women in reaping the benefits of development. However, it does not suggest any plan by which this can be done and is satisfied to leave the remedy to pious thoughts of re-educating the next generation. This major limitation is likely to subvert the good intentions of the otherwise sensible plan. An example that could be cited as to what happens when development administrators are not sensitised to the problems of women, is the tussle which is taking place in the Agricultural Department regarding revamping their training programmes so that the target audience for agricultural training programmes can be women (since women do 50 per cent of the agricultural work). An ambitious programme for training women and developing their skills visualised earlier was jettisoned because of reservations on the part of those who would have to implement it.

The Sixth Five Year Plan, although it makes a radical shift in public policy related to women's issues, nevertheless leaves one with the nagging fear that yet another five years will have elapsed without creating any basic impact on the problems that women face.

Non-governmental Organisations and Women

India has a large number of non-governmental organisations working with women. In fact, prior to independence, when there was no Government presence in social welfare, it was left to the non-governmental organisations to work in this sphere. Working with women, primarily in the field of education, was one of the activities frequently sponsored by these organisations.

The genesis of work with women was in the reform movements of the 19th century. This tradition was strengthened during the independence movement when Gandhi laid great emphasis on the role of women in national life. He encouraged women's organisations to identify the national freedom movement with their own struggle to achieve liberation from the shackles of discrimination, social prejudice, subordination and ignorance. Women's militant participation in the movement for independence was one of the contributory factors which built up the ideology of sex equality which, after independence, was enshrined in the Constitution.

After independence a number of new organisations came into being. They were primarily influenced by the approach of the Gandhian institutions working with women. In fact a large number of the non-governmental organisations working with women both in the rural and urban areas, were those which professed support for the principles of Sarvodaya. The major emphasis of these groups was on providing facilities
for health care for women to protect mothers and their children. Secondly, the emphasis was on education, since it was seen as a means to widen the horizons of women beyond their immediate family and locality concerns, and was also seen as a concomitant to women's participation in all aspects of social life. Finally, they incorporated training in productive activities to encourage self-reliance. Not only were non-governmental organisations working with women influenced by these priorities, but they also served as a basis for the formation of the welfare policies of the national Government.

Non-governmental organisations have played a major role in experimenting with different approaches and strategies of work in women's development. Because of their flexible operational style and greater empathy, they are able more easily than Government organisations to relate to local needs and issues, and to tailor their strategies to meet these needs. With the entry of the Government into the social welfare field, non-governmental organisations have increasingly become the project-holders of Government programmes. They have lost, to a great extent, the role they played in the early part of the Decade in pioneering movements for change in women's situation. Because of their growing dependence on Government patronage for the continuation of their programmes, they have become satellites.

There has been a perceptible change in the character of these organisations along with the reduction of their pioneering role; they have become more concerned with the provision of community services like health care, education, facilities for working mothers and training in income-generation. They have become less and less forums for the mobilisation of opinion regarding women's issues or pressure groups to bring about changes. The service delivery model that they have adopted does not equip women to resist subordination and discrimination, either in the home or in society, within the household or outside it.

Efforts of the non-governmental organisations have become restricted for a variety of reasons. These organisations operate with a limited analysis of the predicament of women and the root causes of poverty. This, in a way, directly relates to the kind and quality of leadership that these organisations receive.

It would not be a gross generalisation to say that the non-governmental organisations today are, by and large, controlled by women and men from a distinctly urban middle-class background. Their own value system colours their perception of the problems of poor women. A great degree of paternalism characterises their approach and involvement. This inhibits recipients from participating in equal relationships within the organisations, which only serves to reinforce the attitude of submission that women internalise through their other social relationships.

There are, however, other non-governmental agencies in the field of women's development besides the ones described above. These agencies
differ both in their strategies of organisation and the issues they tackle, and in the kind and quality of their leadership. They have their inception in movements for social justice, and their role is primarily to resist discrimination and indignity by organising women on a sex basis within their class or economic category. In most cases the leadership of such organisations is provided by those who have themselves suffered from the exploitation they wish to eliminate. Generally speaking, participants in such organisations perceive their individual plight in relation to the larger forces of exploitation and their action as contributing to wider social changes.

Although the overall objective of the various non-governmental agencies is the improvement in the status of women to ensure for them a fairer deal, their approaches to the problem vary widely. This makes it difficult to generalise the priority areas of work for such agencies.

Perhaps these priority areas in relation to women's development can be identified by comparing the role of Government with that of the non-governmental organisations in this field.

It is the Government's duty and responsibility to provide the necessary policies, infrastructure and resources to ensure the social, educational, economic and political role of women. For example, the crisis that has occurred in the economic role of women can only be effectively met in the Indian context by Government's decision to invest in those spheres of work which will offer more productive employment for women.

The role of non-governmental organisations, on the other hand, is to act as watchdogs in society to ensure that women's rights and privileges are not violated, and to step in and protest when they are. Their role is also to pioneer demands for provisions, protections and resources for women's development and also to operate in areas of concern which are neglected. Non-governmental agencies are better equipped to provide women with a basis for association, interaction and organisation. For example, Government can legislate to protect women workers in the unorganised sector. However, it is left to the non-governmental organisations to provide women with the forum which will enable them to take advantage of this legislation. Although the service model approach of voluntary organisations to the problem of women's development has been criticised, there exists a definite role for such agencies in providing those services necessary for improving the quality of life which are neglected by other agencies.

**Priorities for Action**

From this comparison emerge some priorities for action. These may be said to be of two types - lobbying and organisation.
Lobbying

1. Non-governmental organisations can act as watch dogs for women's rights

Indian women are at least fortunate in that legislation exists theoretically to provide them with equal rights. This provides a basis for action. Infringements of the law pertaining to women go unquestioned and unchallenged. For example, the issue of unequal wages for similar work continues even in the organised sector where labour organisations exist. The only reason for its continuing seems to be the social prejudice attached to female labour. Non-governmental organisations, whether in rural areas or urban, should be aware of the rights and privileges women have been given but which they are unable to exercise. They should protest in cases of violation. Another important role that non-governmental organisations should aspire to fulfil, is to provide the vigilance to ensure that women's interests are adequately represented in public policy making. Without these challenges the various forms of exploitation of women will continue.

2. Non-governmental organisations can act as pioneers

In the 19th century, when women's education was an unpopular cause, it was the non-governmental sector which initiated it.

As has been stated earlier, education, as it exists in India today, will continue for a long time to be sex and class discriminatory. This entails that more and more women and girls will be denied education, reducing their chances to participate in the development process. Non-governmental organisations have a major role to play in developing an educational strategy outside the formal system to meet the real needs of the vast majority of poor, rural and urban women who are denied access to education.

In recent years also, it has been the contribution of non-governmental organisations to develop health delivery models which answered the need for cheap, easily available, basic preventive health services in the far-flung villages. The Government's health structure is primarily urban-based, curative in orientation, with a high degree of dependence on professionals. Public policies regarding health care have begun to undergo a change in response to the pioneering work done by non-governmental agencies.

3. Non-governmental organisations can help to mobilise women

There are certain common problems that affect women irrespective of their class background. Whether it is a middle class housewife assaulted in the streets of Delhi, or a woman labourer raped by an employer, the problem of sexual harassment and exploitation is a common one that all women share in a society which attaches such little importance to women's worth and dignity. Similarly, dowry is a social problem which today cuts across religious and class barriers and is a common form of exploitation of women. The potential for mobilising women from a cross-section of society to exert pressure and focus attention on these problems lies with the non-governmental organisations. The practice of 'sati' in the 19th century was
eliminated as a result of social pressure. Furthermore, the mobilisation of women on common issues like rape and dowry will help to build solidarity among women. It will also provide them with much-needed experience of their power.

Whether working in the field of health or organising construction workers, non-governmental organisations must make common cause on these issues. The lack of a women's movement has resulted in women's deteriorating status going unnoticed. Such mobilisation will help generate a women's movement.

4. **Non-governmental organisations have an educational role to play**

Non-governmental organisations have a major role to play in disseminating information to the public at large and to educationalists, development workers and the media in particular, regarding the real issues in the deteriorating status of women. The greater visibility of a few upper class women has resulted in the common illusion that all is well with women. People are vaguely aware that women enjoy an unequal status; they are mostly ignorant of the magnitude of the problem.

**Organisation**

1. **Non-governmental organisations can create structures for the participation of women**

Without providing a basis for association and interaction for women, the common objectives of non-governmental organisations in improving women's status could be defeated. Therefore, the prime necessity in working with women in development (as opposed to welfare) is to allow women to associate around common interests. Whose interests and which women? Any strategy for change in the status of women must begin with those women who are most affected by poverty and are consequently underprivileged. Non-governmental organisations must, therefore, make a deliberate choice to associate with the poorest rural and urban women. Whose interests should serve as the basis of this association? To make any association meaningful the interests of the women who participate must be served - whether it be a group of landless labourers, or construction workers, or self-employed women. They have within their group interests in common both as a sex and as a class.

This association serves as the basis for women's exposure to the world outside the home and may be for many women the first experience of participation in a non-family institution. This should also enable women to analyse their own situation more objectively. Most women are aware that they live in a situation of exploitation. They do not, however, have the opportunity to reflect on it or draw a link between their predicament and the structures that are responsible for this and similar injustices. These experiences would build self-confidence and provide the knowledge for action. "Thus what would begin as a mobilisation of women for their own benefit could be the fuelling of the fire for action towards a just society."  

81
denying women the opportunity to associate and interact, non-governmental organisations defeat their own purpose. The experience of power that comes with participation and association in a non-family institution will be carried back by women to their intra-household relationships. Non-governmental organisations have to be sensitive enough to promote this growth of power.

2. Legal aid for women

To ensure legal protection for women some facilities have to be provided to enable them to exercise their rights under the law. Since neither Government agencies nor the legal profession provide free legal aid to poor women, non-governmental agencies could play an important role here.8

3. Non-governmental organisations and rural women

As we have seen from the foregoing discussion, rural women, who form the vast majority in this country, are in most cases providers for their families. With the gradual erosion of traditional roles and in the absence of skills which could provide alternative employment, women's task of 'providing' for the family has become increasingly strenuous. We have also seen that there has been a major shift in public policies relating to women's development which recognises women's contribution verbally but leaves one in doubt as to how the well-intentioned attempts to improve women's condition will actually be implemented. In these circumstances non-governmental organisations could play an important role in acting as a conduit between the concepts put forward by the Sixth Plan and their actual implementation.

In working for rural women's development and specifically in enhancing their economic and social role, some fundamental points need to be kept in mind by non-governmental organisations.

a. Women should be recognised as skilled workers in agriculture, and development should aim to upgrade their skills with scientific and technical knowledge, and increase their rewards and role in decision-making.

b. Rural women's right to own land and to obtain access to all forms of assistance for raising agricultural productivity in the way of credit and other inputs must form an essential strategy for development.

c. Policies for land distribution in the interests of social justice should recognise women as one of the target groups so that their claims are not over-rulled in the name of 'distributive justice'. In rural societies, where a hierarchical structure based on social inequalities has become the biggest obstacle to expansion of productivity, and land reform is seen as the most powerful instrument for eliminating structural inequalities, women's claim to own land in their own name should be recognised as an extremely powerful weapon for bringing about structural change and democratisation of the agrarian structure. Such recognition could provide the most powerful lever to remove the
Women's group, rural development programme, Rajasthan.

Vegetable-seller, Self-Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad
vestiges of feudal institutions and values that continue to dominate rural societies and obstruct the paths of development and social justice.

d. Since agriculture cannot possibly provide a livelihood to the whole of the growing population of rural areas, various forms of assistance, education, and training to diversify rural women’s occupations emerges as an essential strategy. Such strategies, however, need to be related to anticipated and projected developments in the region and not isolated and marginalised as Women and Development projects have been in the past. A belated recognition of rural women’s need for vocational training should not result in hasty attempts to extend training in a limited range of crafts and occupations considered ‘suitable’ for women, which have seldom resulted in providing an adequate livelihood for rural women in the past. Vocational training must cover managerial and organisational skills, as well as productive skills, if rural women are to deal effectively with the increasingly complex structure of the market economy that has transplanted the simple village economies of the past.

e. Easy access to cheap education, health care and child care facilities are as important as employment if rural women are not to be deprived of their right to play an effective leadership role in the process of rural transformation. An important aspect of strategies for providing these services should be to enable rural women to contribute their existing knowledge and skills, traditionally gained, to the process of organising and providing better educational and health care services. The commendable effort that has been made by numerous non-governmental organisations in the field of basic health care provision - by modifying and utilising the traditional skills of the village mid-wives - provides an example of development which harnesses people’s creative energies and secures participation.

f. Women have two full-time jobs - their domestic chores and their income-generating activity - and they have little access to labour-saving technology which would help to ease the burden of their work. Rural women spend much time in post-harvest operations which are manual and labour-intensive. Simple devices which could make their work more efficient and save labour would be a major contribution towards freeing women from arduous jobs. Non-governmental organisations which are engaged in the field of appropriate technology could make major contributions in this sphere.

4. Non-governmental organisations and women in the unorganised sector

Organisation of women in the unorganised sector should be a priority field for action, since the majority of Indian working women have to earn their living in ill-paid, insecure and exploitative jobs in the unorganised sector. Women’s need to combine their income-generation activity with the
"A vegetable vendor borrows 50 Rupees from a private money lender early in the morning, buys vegetables, trades in them the whole day and returns 55 Rupees to the money lender at the end of the day . . ."

"A patch worker gets work from a private trader to stitch rags of waste cloth into quilt covers. She is paid 60p per quilt cover, using her own machine, thread and labour. The cover sells at anything from 7 Rupees to 15 Rupees . . ."

"A junksmith buys metal, scrap and waste from a scrap dealer to make crude pots, and other household utensils. Working with primitive tools, she hammers 20-30 times to cut a hole in the metal, even in the 1980's."

* * * * * *

Bilquish Bano

My husband (a school teacher) was cruel to me. He would beat me and not let me out of the house. We had 2 children — a girl and a boy. Soon after my son was born, my husband sold off all my things — pots, jewellery and furniture and ran off with the money. I was left penniless with two children . . . I began to go to the traders to sort their chindi (waste cotton). This work was very difficult for me since I had always led a very protected life, always stayed at home. My mother came to stay with us and looked after the children while I was working. The traders paid me very little money — only 2.50 Rupees a day . . . I don't mind working hard, but I must have enough to feed my children and my mother. Many, many times, I have gone to work hungry. I do not mind that so much, but it is difficult to see the children hungry. Also, my house is very small, dark and airless. We had to move to this awful house after my husband left me . . . I left the chindi traders because they would not pay me more and worked in a printing factory, jerking gasoline out of cloth. There I ruined my eyes, but I used to make good money, especially on night duty. I also worked for a few days in a mill, but the male supervisor did not behave properly. I washed cement bags for a while, but then they got machinery to do it and I wasn't needed any more.

demands of domestic chores makes them easy victims of unscrupulous employers and contractors. As difficult as the organisation of women in this sector may seem, it has been done by non-governmental agencies in India and only they are in a position to undertake this task, because only they can provide the sensitivity necessary to deal with the working women’s specific needs as women (which political party affiliated trades unions cannot do).

Mention may be made here of the commendable and systematic efforts made by the Self-Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad, to organise women workers in the unorganised sector. SEWA has developed over the past ten years an effective trade union involving roughly one-third of the women in the city who are engaged in petty marginal occupations which include used-garment dealers, ready-made garment workers, vegetable vendors, junk collectors, egg and fish vendors and milkmaids. The most positive characteristic of this association is their flexibility and capacity to experiment. Determined largely by members’ needs, the forms and programmes of SEWA mutate and grow in different directions. As members articulate problems, SEWA expands its operations to experiment with solutions.

The Association, besides providing services to its members for bargaining and representation in matters related to trades and occupations, has also developed a women's bank through which the members' credit needs are met and savings facilities provided. Lack of capital appeared to be the most common and pressing constraint on all the women's trade groups. Because they were poor and assetless they had no source of borrowing other than the moneylender. The bank also helps in procurement of raw materials, tools and equipment; technical assistance in the production process; and help with marketing and education in financial management.

The Association has also developed social security and welfare benefit schemes for its members. In the social strata to which the SEWA members belong the concept of formal social security is unknown, and yet these are the members of the community most in need of it. SEWA's social security schemes include a maternity benefit scheme, widowhood and death grant scheme, a health scheme, creches for members' children and a literacy programme. In trying to establish a trade union specifically to protect the interests of women who had no direct employer, SEWA had to contend with existing Indian labour laws which do not recognise the legitimacy of a trade union of workers who do not work for an identifiable employer, that is, do not have a specific employer-employee relationship.

Involvement in the activities of the union provides ordinary, poor women with an opportunity to participate in decision-making and to work together to overcome their own problems and tackle the exploitation that such women commonly face.

SEWA provides a training ground in leadership by and for the poorest women of the city.
Summary and Conclusions

"How can one talk about the causes of rural poverty without ever mentioning women?" - Marie Angelique Savane, Senegalese Sociologist.

The decade that was dedicated to women by the United Nations in the cause of "equality, development and peace" is passing into history. A stock-taking of what had been achieved in the first five years took place at the mid-Decade Conference held at Copenhagen in July 1980. This review revealed that the situation of women in the backward sectors (among the rural and urban poor) in most countries had worsened. The deteriorating status of women - defined in terms of their lack and loss of employment, lack of access to education and health care, increasing mortality, lack of legal status - is a world-wide phenomenon and has followed a discernible, common pattern in most developing countries. The situation of women in India provides a case study which highlights this world-wide phenomenon.

The forms of social organisation prevalent in Indian society, primarily based on patriarchy, commit women to a position of inferiority and subjugation. Religious traditions, under the preponderant influence of Hinduism, provide the ideological basis for patriarchy and assign women an inferior role in the family and society. The Indian culture and the traditions that it upholds put women in a situation of great disadvantage.

There is growing concern in India today about the change in the demographic characteristics of the population. There has been a deterioration in the sex-ratio from 972 women per 1000 men in 1901 to 935 in 1981. Furthermore, the differential in life expectation at birth (which is a good indicator of development) - 52 years for females as against 53 for males; and infant mortality tolling 120 deaths per 1000 live births for boys but 131 deaths per 1000 live births for girls have added to the concern.

Women's access to education has been far from satisfactory. Of those in school in 1979-80, there were only two girls for every three boys in the age group 6 - 11 and one girl for two boys in the 11-14 age bracket. In terms of overall literacy for all age groups, there was one female literate for every two male literates. In the Census findings that have been published since, despite considerable improvements in female literacy over the decade, the gap continues to persist at an almost identical level. In 1981, while half the male population remained illiterate, in the case of the female population the figure was three-quarters.

Public policy, primarily as reflected in the Five Year Plans, attaches little significance to the real issues of women's status. In fact the attitude to women in public policies has always been to treat it as a marginal issue to be dealt with by philanthropy. Perception of women's problems as reflected in public policies betrays an essentially middle class bias. The traditional middle class attitude to women is that they are primarily home-makers. Thus
the fact that most women are workers has been ignored, and women do not feature in development planning. They are assigned some marginal benefits in the welfare sector. This common misconception has been somewhat remedied in the Sixth Five Year Plan which recognises the plight of the majority of poor urban and rural women. However, its recommendations to increase female employment, access to education and health may never see the light of day because of the absence of infrastructures to support this work.

India has a large number of non-governmental organisations working with women. The oldest women’s institutions have their genesis in the freedom movement and are greatly influenced by Gandhianism. Whereas once such organisations played a pioneering role in keeping women’s issues in the forefront of the independence movement, most non-governmental organisations have changed their role perceptibly since then. They have become increasingly the project-holders of Government programmes. Also their perception of women’s problems and ways to tackle them reflect, like their leadership, predominantly middle class biases.

Non-governmental organisations should act as watchdogs for women’s rights and also provide the vigilance necessary to ensure that women’s interests are adequately represented in public policies. Furthermore, these organisations can be pioneers in undertaking actions on behalf of women which have been hitherto neglected or ignored by society. Also, because of their grass-root contact and flexible organisation, they are in a better position to mobilise women to resist indignity, exploitation and humiliation. The spontaneous movements against dowry deaths which have grown up in and around Delhi have played a significant role in focussing public attention against this atrocity perpetuated on women. A similar example in recent years has been the espousal by women’s organisations of the ‘Mathura’ rape case which has led to reform in the rape laws.2

Another area of work in which non-governmental agencies have a role to play is in building women’s organisations and providing women with a basis for association and interaction. In programme planning they should pay more attention to the problems of women in the unorganised sector and the provision of legal aid. Non-governmental development programmes in rural areas must be involved in agricultural development since the majority of women live and work in rural environments and in agriculture.

In this, non-governmental organisations can serve as the conduit for the implementation of the concepts of women’s development put forward by the Sixth Five Year Plan. In working with rural women, they must recognise women’s role in agriculture, their right to ownership of land, alternative employment training besides agriculture (in keeping with major developmental trends in an area) and the need to provide basic health, child care and educational services alongside efforts to enhance women’s economic role.
These agencies have a vital role to play in educating the community at large regarding women's issues. Without a more widespread awareness of the real issues in the deteriorating status of women, the status of visible, upper class women will continue to be taken as an indicator of women's situation in general.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction


Chapter 1

1. The Indian caste structure is complex. The following is a brief outline of its main features.

Mainstream (Hindu) Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>Twiceborn classes or upper caste people or caste Hindus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASTE</td>
<td>Kshatriyas or warrior class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaishyas or merchant class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudras or worker class (e.g. artisans, craftsmen, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Line of pollution

LOW Scheduled castes formerly called Untouchable Class, or Dalits or Harijans (e.g. sweepers, leatherworkers, shoemakers).

Each of the classes is made up of many castes. Altogether, there are several hundred castes within the five main classes.

The tribal peoples do not come within this structure.

3. Millet, Kate, Sexual Politics. p.35.
6. Ibid, p.80
8. Bonded labour is the system by which a person taking a loan from an employer pays back by giving their labour. They are enslaved to the employer till such time as the loan is considered to have been repaid.
12. Rudra, Ashok op. cit. p.52
14. Ibid.
15. Hyder, Quarratulain (1975), 'Muslim women of India', Indian Women, Jain, Devaki (ed), New Delhi. p.195.

Chapter 2
3. Ibid. p.11
6. Ibid. p.10. Table 8.
7. Ibid. p.9
9. Ibid. p.11
10. Ibid. p.24
13. Ibid. p.25
14. Ibid.

Chapter 3
3. Ibid. p.3.
4. For note on caste system see Chap. 1, note 1.
7. Article 45, Constitution of India.
8. Draft Five Year Plan, 1974-79, p.191
10. Ibid. p.239.
13. Ibid. p.255

Chapter 4
3. Ibid. p.151
8. All India Poverty line of Rs 65 per capita per month in 1978-78 prices corresponds to minimum daily calorie requirement of 2400 per person in rural areas and the poverty line of Rs 75 per month corresponds to daily calorie requirement of 2100 in urban areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All India (weighted) 1977-78</td>
<td>50.82</td>
<td>38.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>54.09</td>
<td>41.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


11. Bidis are Indian cigarettes smoked by the working class.
15. Chakravorty, Shanti (1975), op. cit.
18. Ibid. p.168
19. Ibid. p.163
24. Ibid. p.171
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid. p.172.
27. Ibid. p.173
32. Ibid. p.187
33. Ibid. p.188
34. Ibid. p.189
35. Ibid. p.193
38. Ibid. p.215.
Chapter 5

2. Ibid. p.306.
3. Ibid. p.308.
4. Ibid. p.310
5. Sarvodaya is a non-violent Ghandian movement for social change, the descendant of Ghandi's "constructive programme" after independence. The organisation Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh (All India Association for the Service of All) formed in 1949, issued the "Sarvodaya Plan" in January 1950. "Sarvodaya" means "Welfare of all". The Plan set forth the idea of a non violent cooperative society without distinctions of class or caste, as well as shorter term objectives including land reform, decentralisation, and maximum and minimum wages. The activities of the Ghandian organisations affiliated to the ABSS are known collectively as the "Sarvodaya Movement".
6. Sati or suttee was the custom of Hindu widows immolating themselves on their husband's funeral pyre.
8. The government does provide legal aid but there is a lot of bureaucratic red tape to be overcome before one can avail of it. Most poor women, because they are unaware of the provisions, are not in a position to take advantage of this legal aid. They would approach the Sub-Divisional Courts where the legal aid exists only in name but not in reality. It is only in the major cities that the government legal aid programme has had some impact.

Chapter 6


2. The "Mathura" rape case arose in 1979/80 when a young girl of about 10 was raped by policemen, who were subsequently arrested. The case went to the Supreme Court and a ruling was given in favour of the policemen because of the existing rape law - a relic of British rule - which always gave the benefit of the doubt to the accused. The burden of the injured party having to prove her innocence was a considerable handicap to any victim seeking justice. The campaign which arose from this particular case was for reform in the law so that the burden of proof lay with the accused.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hyder, Quarratulain (1975) “Muslim Women of India”. In *Indian Women* edited by Devaki Jain, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi.


APPENDIX I

RURAL/URBAN COMPOSITION OF INDIAN POPULATION 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>658,140,676</td>
<td>501,952,169</td>
<td>76.27</td>
<td>156,188,507</td>
<td>23.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1981, Series I, Paper 2

APPENDIX II

EXPECTATION OF LIFE AT BIRTH BY SEX IN INDIA FROM 1872 to 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Expectation of life at birth in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872 - 1881</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881 - 1891</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891 - 1901</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901 - 1911</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911 - 1921</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921 - 1931</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 - 1941*</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981**</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDIX III

**POPULATION OF MALES AND FEMALES 1901 - 1971 (in thousands)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pop. of males</th>
<th>Pop. of females</th>
<th>Difference between males &amp; females</th>
<th>Sex ratio F/M</th>
<th>Decade growth rate of males</th>
<th>Decade growth rate of females</th>
<th>Estimated death rate per 1000 males</th>
<th>Estimated death rate per 1000 females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>120,911</td>
<td>117,485</td>
<td>3,426</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>128,385</td>
<td>123,708</td>
<td>4,677</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>128,546</td>
<td>122,775</td>
<td>5,771</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>143,055</td>
<td>135,922</td>
<td>7,133</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>11.29</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>163,825</td>
<td>154,835</td>
<td>8,990</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>14.52</td>
<td>13.91</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>185,528</td>
<td>175,560</td>
<td>9,968</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>226,293</td>
<td>212,942</td>
<td>13,351</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>21.20</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>283,937</td>
<td>264,013</td>
<td>19,924</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>29.47</td>
<td>23.98</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## APPENDIX IV

**RATIO OF FEMALE/MALE DEATH RATES BY AGE GROUPS 1976 - 1978**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (Years)</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 29</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 34</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 44</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 49</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 54</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 - 59</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 64</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 - 69</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all ages</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX V

ENROLMENT IN CLASSES 1974-75

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of enrolment to the population of corresp. age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I - V</td>
<td>6 - 11</td>
<td>402.67</td>
<td>245.89</td>
<td>648.56</td>
<td>101.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI - VIII</td>
<td>11 - 14</td>
<td>105.82</td>
<td>47.84</td>
<td>153.66</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX - XI/XII</td>
<td>14 - 17</td>
<td>53.37</td>
<td>20.92</td>
<td>74.29</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 - 23</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>30.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Girls Enrolment in Elementary Education 1976 - 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Total Enrolment (000's)</th>
<th>Girls Enrolment (000's)</th>
<th>% of girls to total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I - V</td>
<td>67,529.9</td>
<td>25,794.9</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI - VIII</td>
<td>17,007.0</td>
<td>5,428.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total I-VIII</td>
<td>84,536.9</td>
<td>31,223.4</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX VI

DISTRIBUTION OF MAIN WORKERS BY BROAD CATEGORIES, 1981 - PERCENTAGE OF MAIN WORKERS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total R/U</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Cultivators</th>
<th>Agricultural labourers</th>
<th>Household industry</th>
<th>Other workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1981, Provisional Population Totals Series 1 Paper 3, p. 31

In the country, 33.44% of the total population consists of main workers and 4.11% are marginal workers. The remaining 62.45% are non-workers (who have not worked any time at all in the year preceding). It would be relevant to recall here that non-workers also include those in the labour force who are unemployed.

Among males 51.23% are main workers and only 1.97% are marginal workers while 46.80% are non-workers.
In the case of females 14.44% are main workers, 6.40% are marginal workers and 79.16% are nonworkers.

The sharp contrast in the distribution among main workers, marginal workers, and non-workers between males and females is noticeable. Main workers among females constitute a small proportion in comparison with main workers among males while the proportion of marginal workers among females is comparatively higher. The proportion of non-workers among females is very high compared to that among males. The participation of women in economic activity would still appear to be on a very modest scale. Incidentally, this contrast can also be seen by comparing the absolute numbers. As against 6.69 mil. male marginal workers there are 20.37 mil. female marginal workers.

In the rural population, 34.77% are main workers, 4.69% are marginal workers and 60.54% are nonworkers. In the urban areas 29.17% are main workers, 2.25% are marginal workers and 68.58% are non-workers. The distribution of marginal workers and non-workers among females is noticeable. While 7.40% of females in the rural areas are marginal workers only 3.07% of them are marginal workers in the urban areas. Even with regard to main workers, as against 16.49% among rural females, only 7.5% of urban females are main workers. Correspondingly the proportion of non-workers among females in the urban areas is higher than that in the rural areas. It may also be mentioned that the proportion of main workers among males is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas with a corresponding lower proportion of non-workers among males in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Taking into consideration both main workers and marginal workers it would be evident from these proportions that both males and females are more fully engaged in economic activities in the rural areas than in the urban areas.

Source: Ibid. p.27

* In the 1981 Census main workers are those who have worked for a major part of the preceding year. Besides this the Census has a category of marginal workers - those who have worked any time at all in the preceding year but have not worked for the major part of the year. The two are mutually exclusive categories.
## APPENDIX VII

### EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN FACTORIES, MINES AND PLANTATIONS (1000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Factories</th>
<th>Mines</th>
<th>Plantations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau; Pocket Book of Labour Statistics 1982

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Employment in Plantations (1000)</th>
<th>Total Employment in Mines 1977 (1000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>972.9</td>
<td>747,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>930.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>941.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>894.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>917.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Women in all three plantations (coffee, rubber and tea) earned less than men during all the three surveys. The trends in the earnings of men and women over the period from the first to the third survey reveal that the difference between the earnings of men and women in all three plantations registered a steady increase. In tea, this difference rose from 11p to 98p, coffee and rubber from 46p to 117p and 48p to 142p respectively. (Third survey carried out in 197475).

Source: Labour Bureau; Indian Labour, Year Book 1979 (1982)