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Understanding women’s issues - A feminist standpoint

“When seemingly ontological conditions are challenged from the collective standpoint of a dissident reality, they become visible as epistemological.”

Mackinnon

The present project began with an aim to document the experiences of women of North-East, their vulnerabilities, and their struggles against the patriarchal terrorism, as my personal interaction with women from the region gave me an impression that they are more susceptible to exploitative forces-both from within the family, and the state, than the women of other parts of India. But with the passage of time, I could not resist the urge to include in this volume the oppressive realities of women from mainstream India, as well. Further, there appears to be a new found interest in Muslim women’s issues, and more interestingly it is the Muslim women themselves who are questioning the authenticity of the dicta being imposed on them in the name of sharia (Islamic Jurisdiction). Emergence of Islamic Feminism as scholarship is a pointer towards it. An attempt has been made here to bring in these perspectives reflecting the Muslim women’s standpoint on the very issues which concerns them the most. Since Pakistan is an Islamic republic, it was pertinent to include the issues, voices and struggles of Muslim women from Pakistan. “The debate on standpoint theory has clearly reflected broader concerns in gender studies, especially the issue of how to research and theorize gender relations in such a way as
to integrate difference while simultaneously giving recognition to enduring inequalities of power between ‘men’ and ‘women’,” (Pilcher and Whelehan; 2006).

Women’s issues first began to be addressed in India when the State commissioned a report on the status of women to a group of feminist researchers and activists. According to the Report (1974) “Towards Equality” the heterogeneity of Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies contributing to the existence of multiple feminisms. “Patriarchy ‘according to Sylvia Walby is “a system of social structure and policies in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (1990), and “Indian society is oppressively patriarchal” (Suma Chitnis:1988).

Numerically women constitute half of the human race, but in general women occupy a secondary place in relation to men, on the bases of class, status and political power—the three recognized dimensions of inequality. A peek into the history will reveal that women have always been subordinated to men. According to Beauvoir, ”what peculiarly signalizes the situation of women is that she— a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other” (Beauvoir;1949), and this otherness takes different forms; one such form is her oppression. And as Kennedy observes “without understanding women’s unique stratification as women, is to overlook an overarching paradigm of oppression” (Kennedy:2003), …and that an ‘epistemology of the oppressed’ provides a different view on the hegemonic reality, (Hartsock,1998).

Indian women negotiate survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures as well as the patriarchal attributes. And, according to Sangari (2008),” violence is a foundational and systematic feature of all contemporary patriarchies. Women’s consent is often an
effect of the anticipation of violence, or the guarantee of violence, in
the last instance, to ensure obedience, inculcate submission, and punish
transgression.” This phenomenon gets reflected in a hierarchical
society based on exploitative gender relations. Gender roles refer to the
set of social and behavioral norms that are considered appropriate for
individual of a specific sex in the context of specific culture, and which
differ widely between cultures and historical periods….and therefore
are the products of socialization.(WHO).

It is very crucial to hear the voices of women, as to how they perceive
social evils and violent situations. “Feminism” according to Bhasin and
Khan (1986) “is an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation
in society, at work and within family, and conscious action by women
and men to change the situation”. It is very important for the feminists
to make special efforts to indicate, how sorrow, as the mass of women
experience it, is compounded by oppression.

Carole Patemen (1988) observes that “the patriarchal construction of
the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political
difference between freedom and subjection”. Systematic deprivation
and violence against women such as rape, sexual harassment and abuse,
female feticide and infanticide, dowry harassment, witch-hunting and
killing, malnutrition, morbidity, mortality related to reproductive
health, denial of rights, higher education and skills etc. make women
socially suppressed, economically exploited, and politically passive
and voiceless. Thus reflecting the fact that “power and patriarchy exist
in a symbiotic relationship in society” (Kennedy; 2003). .. This
anthology reflects the different perspectives and approaches to
resolving gender inequalities which pervade every sphere of social life,
preventing women and girls from fully realizing their rights to equity
and equality. And as Nancy Hartsock (1998), a key proponent of
standpoint theory observes, ‘women enjoy a structural position that (potentially) make available to women a ‘privileged vantage point’ from which to ‘understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more human social relations’.

History of Feminism in India

The history of feminism in India can be classified into three phases: the first phase between 1850-1915. The colonial ventures into modernity brought concepts of democracy, equality and individual rights. The first phase of feminism was initiated by European men who raised their voice against the social evils of Sati (widow immolation), and they also worked towards eradication of gender inequalities and promoted widow re-marriage, worked to reduce illiteracy, regulate age of consent and to ensure property rights through legal intervention. From 1915 to India’s Independence, is the second phase, when Gandhiji legitimized and expanded Indian women’s public activities by initiating them into the non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj. Women only organizations emerged. 1920s was a new era for Indian Women and is defined as “feminism” that was responsible for the creation of localized women’s associations. These associations emphasized on various issues related to women such as education, livelihood strategies for working class women etc. women’s participation in the freedom struggle developed in them a critical consciousness about their role and rights in independent India. The third phase, post-independence, focused on fair treatment of women in the work force and right to political parity. The Indian Constitution explicitly and categorically granted sex equality. There was provision for women’s upliftment through affirmative action, maternal health and child-care provision (crèches), equal pay for equal work, etc. The Constitution adopted a patronizing role towards women, who are
considered to be “weaker section” of the society and therefore need assistance to function as equals. (Choudhuri, 2005)

There is a difference between the agenda of the feminists of 1970s and the goals of present day feminists. While the former fought for the legal reforms and legally equal position in the society, the struggle remained outside the home and the family; the latter focuses on the emancipation of women—against subordination to the male within the home; against their exploitation in the family; against their continuous low status at work, in the society and in the culture and religion of the country; against their double burden in the production and reproduction; liberation from all forms of oppression by the State, by society and by men, (Bhasin and Khan).

Since Independence, every Five Year Plan provided for women’ upliftment. With each successive plan, the emphasis shifted from ‘welfare’ to ‘protection” and then to involving women as “partners in development”. This apart, there are legal and political structure of the country that affirm the equality of the sexes; there are several commissions and committees to look into the problems of women.

II

Despite the plethora of provisions and advancement made, women living in modern India are confronted with issues of discrimination, subjugation, oppression and denials. It is pertinent that we analyze the social realities from a non-patriarchal perspective. As Kennedy rightly observes: “Feminists who employ a woman –centered perspective are not only writing and communicating from their unique standpoint, they are defending the utility of “female” ways of knowing and challenging the universality that seem inherent to male- established concepts such
as facts, laws and science” (Elizabeth Kennedy:2003). In India the socio-cultural ideologies and structures often fail to honor the fundamental rights, and democracy. Further, Indian culture is dominated by traditions and customs for centuries - they are the integral and important elements of an individual. India being a democratic and secular country does not interfere in the religious and personal laws which often conflict with the Constitution (Vrinda: 2008). This present volume seeks to attempt at documenting the new and emerging issues confronting women and their response to the situation, thereof. The patriarchal undercurrents could also be felt in art and literature, in addition to the discriminatory practices which are being observed at home, in the work place, on the street against the female gender. An attempt is also made here to include papers, both dealing with feminist critique of religion, English literature, and films respectively. The anthology reflects various aspects of women’s lives, the discriminatory practices, subjugation, oppressions they are subjected to and their struggles against the staunch patriarchies. It is strongly felt that “understanding women’s lives from a committed feminist exploration of their experiences of oppression produces more complete and less distorted knowledge than that produced by men………adopting a feminist standpoint can reveal the existence of forms of human relationships which may not be visible from the position of the ‘ruling gender’,”(Sandra: 1986).

It was pertinent to trace the history of Women’s struggle and women’s movements in India before we move ahead with the various issues, and Vibhuti’s paper fills that void. Her paper “Women’s struggles and women’s movement in India” provides a detailed account of the genesis of the new women’s liberation movements from 19th century onwards and tries to bring out the different ideological shades in the movements. The paper provides exhaustive account of all the issues,
campaigns and their agenda, and then the emergence of women’s studies as a discipline. Vibhuti’s paper takes the readers along the journey of women’s struggle to achieve the ‘space’ which was much needed for Indian women. It goes into providing the details of fight against violence against women, campaign against unjust family laws, the legislative reforms, the reproductive rights of women, Anti-arrack /Alcohol Movement and the most important of all is the commitment of women’s movement for peace –initiatives in the disturbed areas torn by communal conflicts, ethnic tensions and mob violence. The paper is very informative and could be of immense help to students and scholars of women’s studies, alike.

The publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of women, “Towards Equality” in 1974, revealed that there still exist a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and related mechanisms on one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India. It clearly indicates that women’s empowerment is still a distant dream in India. Hence the Parliament urged the then Prime Minister of India to initiate a comprehensive programme of legislation and administrative measures aimed at removing as far as possible the economic and social injustices, disabilities and discrimination to which Indian women continue to be subjected. Gender budgeting is one of the efforts launched to bridge the gender hiatus and to ensure economic and social empowerment of women. In fact the Report provided the initial impetus towards the search for gender perspective on public expenditure. Sayed Afzal Peerzade and Sushma Angadi through their paper “Gender Equality and Gender Budgeting in India”, very comprehensively and objectively analyze the concept of gender budgeting as a response of the Government of India to ensure economic and social empowerment of women to bridge the gender hiatus.
The ubiquity of gender violence and the absence of legal provisions necessitated the Women’s movements in India, especially since 1970s, to address this issue and work towards introducing progressive laws. The Committee on the Status of Women in India in its report had brought into public discourse the issue of dwindling female sex ratio as an indicator of the status of women in India.”…..the declining sex ratio was both a discovery and the most convincing measure to provide body and substance to its grim findings”(Mazumdar & Krishnaji, 2001).

With the advent of reproductive technologies, a new method of violence and discrimination against girl children and women came to exist in India. Availability of these techniques, in a society which is strongly patriarchal and favours sons, has lead to further deterioration of female sex-ratio, eliminating girls from the social scenario by misusing the technique which is basically meant to detect the foetal abnormalities. The declining sex-ratio of 0 – 6 years from 1981 onwards stands a testimony to the fact. This decline has been noted in the further census is indicative of the misuse of reproductive technologies leading to sex selection. Sex determination and sex selection thus came to be established by feminists as anti – women and genocide, (Nanda :2012).

The practice of prenatal sex determination followed by selective female foetus abortion is one of the most striking examples of how advances in science and technology are employed for the furtherance of women’s oppression. Social pressure coupled with the presence of low-cost technologies have been reinforcing the inhuman practice of female infanticide which has been in existence in India for quite a long time. The law or at least law enforcing agencies have not succeeded in containing this practice, which continues to disturb the sex ratio against
female on an increasing scale. The gruesome crime pervades almost every social segment. The pro-sex selective abortion advocates feel that it helps families to cope with intransient problems, especially dowry. The females themselves facilitate such foeticide. Talmeez Fathima Naqvi in her paper “New reproductive Technology and Women’s Human Rights” provides a detailed empirical account of the happenings in India with respect to female gender. The inhuman practices of feticides and infanticides being practiced in India is reflective of the highly gendered society and further it also reflects upon the female psyche, as to why they do what they do, since it is the women who practice it. The author provides some psychological measures to empower women.

Vitsou Yano and Rekha Pande’s empirical study “Women’s Role in the Religious practices of Angami Naga Society” is from Nagaland, India’s sixteenth state which is a border region in the North- Eastern part of the country and is bounded by Myanmar on the east. They have made an attempt here to bring yet another issue confronting women in this part of India. They observe ‘Women’s history has been an excluded area when writing history. In this male centric historical Nagas before the coming of Christianity did not have a particular name for their religion even though they were religious people. Angami women or Naga women were as given less opportunity to take part in religious activities. A lot of taboos were laid upon them in religious matter. Till the second half of the 19th century, Nagas lived closely to nature and sense its mysterious powers and believed in the existence of single supreme God, benevolent spirits and malevolent spirits. The coming of American missionaries in the 19th century has made a drastic change in the lives of the people especially the lives of women. Though women were given more roles and more platforms in church and participate in religious activity, yet Christianity did not eradicate the patriarchal system but it uphold stronger with nature of patriarchy. This study will try to bring out the different debates on religious impact, inequality in both the religions, and how it affected
the lives of women. Women’s contribution, inequalities, role, etc, in religious practices before and after Christianity have been a silence while mentioning about the history of Angami Nagas.

The North-East region of India is a source, destination, and transit region for human trafficking –an obscene affront to the dignity and rights of the trafficked. The highway networks in the region connect many national and International destinations. Child trafficking be it for forced labor or sex is very rampant -within India, as per an estimate 2.3million women are in prostitution of which 6 lakhs are children. According to a UNI report the North- East is at high risk of trafficking due to displacement from armed conflict. Over 20,000 people are displaced in Assam, 70,000 in Manipur, 60,000 in Tripura and 3,000 in Arunachal Pradesh (International Displacement Monitoring Centre). The criminal business of human trafficking generates over 10 billion US dollars a year, making it the 3rd largest “activity” after drugs and armament.

Trafficking of women in Manipur in particular, and the North-East in general, exposes the failure of capital formation, production based investment, human resource development and pro-people planning while implementing the globalization process which made this region a fertile source for women trafficking. Inevitably, a pertinent question emerged; should Manipur and North-East export flesh trade to global tourists to import HIV/AIDS, as they have no other profitable commodity to export?’ observes the author. There is a lack of adequate legislation that recognizes that the trafficked person is a victim and not a criminal. Both the law as well as administrative policies has failed to address these issues adequately with imagination. As a result, many rescued victims are re- trafficked”, (Justice Sujata Manohar: 2005).
Ajailu Niumai’s empirical work” The politics of Trafficking amongst Tribal Women in Manipur-North- East India” tries to examine the new phenomenon of trafficking among the women and children in Manipur, North- East India. The North-East is generally perceived as an excluded region in India and the porous borders between North-East India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China allows flesh trade to spread there without any enforcement. The victims of human trafficking particularly women and children are doubly excluded as they face stigmatization, exclusion and discrimination in their society. The causes, she points out lies in poverty, ethnic violence, urban-rural migration, militarization under Arms Forces Special (power) Act of 1958, and globalization. Globalization, she observes, involves an extraordinary commercialization of women at the transnational level. The fast growing flesh trade has been particularly industrialized. The process of flesh trade industrialization generates huge profits in which unaccountable number of women has been transformed into human commodities. The contemporary consumers have access to ‘exotic’, ’rare’ and very young bodies of girls and children. Ajailiu touches upon an extremely sensitive, dark and painful reality, which is reflective of inhuman limits of the human greed.

It is very clear that violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assume men to be superior to women. Culture and social factors are interlinked with the development and propagation of violent behavior. Therefore if the experienced and conceptualized expectations
of gender do not change, then the situation will not change” (Kennedy 2003). “…..a systematic inequality between the sexes therefore exists in the social practice of sexual violence, subjection to which defines the women’s status, and victims of which are largely women and in the operation of the State, which de jure out laws sexual violence, but de facto permits men to engage in it on a wide scale” (Mackinnon: 1989).

Although these highway brothels appear to be an unorganized activity, the modus operandi shows a clear undercurrent of organized nexus and linkages. Observes Justice Anand “in the existing social scenario in India, vulnerability is a product of inequality, low status and discrimination, and of the patriarchal authority unleashed on children especially the girl- child. This is further compounded by the apathetic attitude of society, fueled by a mindset which views women as mere chattel,” (2005).

Most regions in India operate under extreme patriarchal structures and the easiest scapegoats for all their misfortune are women. In recent years thousands of women have been killed as a result of witchcraft accusations and many more have been tortured or exiled. There are to this day, very serious witch hunts in India that produce great fear, violence, and destruction in the villages. The Eastern and North-Eastern regions are the worst; these areas are the main home to the witch hunts, mirroring in many ways the great witch hunts of Europe and Massachusetts Bay Colony centuries ago. With a remarkable gap between rich and poor, common people must compete for their most basic rights of survival.

In the interiors of states like Bihar and West Bengal, ‘witches’ and their children are still hunted and killed; witch- hunting is one of the least talked about acts of violence. The murder of individuals and entire families accused of witchcraft is common in other states too, such as
Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. According to the Free Legal Advise Centers (FLAC), over 2,500 women have been killed in India over witchcraft accusations from 1990 to 2006; however, it is an issue that is muffled and has not been dealt with appropriately. In 2004 and 2005, over 670 were murdered for being witches, from 1991 to 2000 over 522 cases of witch-hunting have been registered in Bihar alone, so the problem is clearly not diminishing. The culprits in most cases, the angry mob and locally respected villagers, are rarely convicted and usually face light sentences of months in prison as a penalty for committing murder. Local police deal with such cases as a simple law and order problem, if at all, and fail to recognize the situation as a particularly serious or of special concern (IBN Live 2005). However, one should appreciate the efforts of FLAC which prompted the state of Bihar to pass the Anti-witch-hunt Act in 1991.

Analysis of individual cases would show ridiculousness of the accusations, obviously and atrociously absurd, yet innocent people fall victim to them every day. For instance the case of Budhaniya Majhi who had been dragged naked through the night and next day was the spectacle of a public meeting, comprised mostly of men. Her entire body was badly swelled and covered with welts and lashes from beating when the “village headman” who acted as the judge, asked,” Do you have proof that this woman is a witch?” A man answered that his father had fallen ill and died shortly after consuming food Majhi had given him. He added, “When my father died, a black cat crossed the threshold of our house. It was black magic that killed my father.” (Sutradhar : 2006). So far over 120 “witches” have been killed in Assam alone in the last ten years, it is the worst hit by this superstitious practice. Neeta Sharma’s paper “Stigma of witch-hunting –with reference to Assam” deals with the issue of witch-hunting, and delves
into the causes and, suggests some measures to contain this inhuman practice. Rakhi Verma (2005) rightly observes that “We cannot truly progress if our cities march in one direction and our villages in another “.

Karen J. Warren feels that since all feminists oppose patriarchy, all feminists should also oppose logic of domination, she refers to as “an oppressive conceptual framework” (Warren: 1994). Women have been associated with nature, while men have been associated with culture, and hence women are considered to be closer to the earth than men. Women were always considered to be the creators and sustainers of life. Today, with advancement in science and technology, in the name of development,” nature has been changed to that of a wild force that must be subordinated to a dominant mankind” (Basu: 2000)..Vandana Shiva calls this process ‘maldevelopment’, which sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence, (Shiva: 1989). The objective of Hmingthanzuali’s article” Women’s indigenous knowledge and the patriarchy of development” is to situate Mizo women’s knowledge in the environment history of Northeast India. Women in hill areas of the Northeastern region are strongly interconnected with forest in the historical and cultural context. Due to the strong patriarchal domination of development within the process of modernization women’s knowledge has been marginalized along with the emergence of colonialism and a recent introduction of postcolonial nation states. To give recognition for their knowledge they can neither make their voices heard nor exercise their rights at decision-making levels. So, this paper analyzes the historical intersection between forest ecology and women’s indigenous knowledge, the impacts of the recent forest management on women with some suggestions for the recognition of women’s voices in order to develop their knowledge in the present hilly region of Mizoram.
Of late Muslim Women’s rights have been a part of feminist discourse. Sharia is considered to be more repressive to women, as it is highly patriarchal. The fact is, much of “oppressive” Muslim practices are not based on the religion itself but on the socio-political aspects of most Muslim countries; hence a resolution must be made with this in mind. The problem faced by Indian Muslim women may be different from her sister in other Islamic republics. It is, then, important to unmask these practices which are assumed to be within the Islamic laws, and reveal them for what they really are: that they are neither divine nor condoned by the Divine (Al-Hibri: 2000.).

Every aspect of Muslim life is governed by Islamic law that is the shariah. The literal meaning of shariah is “the road to water hole”. It is the expression of God’s guidance for the humanity; it is a code of laws which the Muslims are to follow. Qur’an is the core of Islamic law, which is the literal word of God revealed to Prophet Mohammad, over a period of 22 years (610 AD-632AD), through the Angel Gabriel, to guide mankind. Being the word of God, it is eternal and immutable, (John Esposito: 1998). When dealing with the Islamic perspective of any topic, there should be a clear distinction between normative teachings and the diverse cultural practices among Muslims, which may or may not be consistent with them. Diverse practice in Muslim countries often reflect cultural influences (local or foreign), more so than the latter or spirit of the Sharia ,( Jamal A. Badawi: 2012 ). In her writings Najmabadi also points towards this fact. She says, Islamic feminists have to insist that gender discrimination has a social rather than a natural (or divine) basis and how this could open the door to new possibilities for gender equality”, ( Najmabadi Afsaneh, as quoted in Moghadam:2002.pg.1144).
Islam fourteen centuries ago, made women equally accountable to God in glorifying and worshiping Him—setting no limits on her moral progress. Also, Islam established a woman’s equality in her humanity with men. Women’s liberation was revealed by God to a man in the 7th century by the name of Mohammad, who is the last Prophet of Islam.

Islam brought the concept of human rights at a time when slavery and patriarchal tribal society were intertwined. Women at that time were most discriminated and deprived of their fundamental rights who as a result became the victims of multi-dimensional exclusion, Islam recognized the prominent role that women play in society and gave them unprecedented legal and social rights. Farida Siddiqui through her paper “Exclusion, Women’s Rights and Inclusive Islam” elaborately discusses the role of Islam in the inclusion of deprived and discriminated women with regard to their rights, to which they are inherently entitled, to be treated as human beings. The inclusive measures could be understood from fiqh, Qur’an, Hadith, and Sunnah, the main sources of Muslim women’s duties, roles and rights.

Women’s movements in the third world have, to a significant extent developed their own distinctive identities, and served to rectify many of the Euro-centric assumptions of Euro-American feminism. Third world feminism emerged from the experience of colonialism, and therefore unlike western feminism, insistently conflated gender with issues of cultural identity and colonial subjugation. Since Pakistan was established on the basis of religious difference, it has had, since its very origin a troubled relationship with religion, particularly political Islam.

The forces of political Islam received a significant fillip when Zia-ul Haq came to power in 1978, and made an attempt to legitimize his
usurpation of power through the invocation of the *Shari’a*. This had a direct, and regressive, impact on the position of women in Pakistan. The identity of the community and the Nation was crucially tied up with the ability of the men and the state to control and confine women to the domestic spaces. Sana Khan’s paper “**Struggles for the rights of women in Pakistan**” shall study the Islamisation drive in Pakistan and its impact on the women’s position. Of course women were not the passive spectators to these developments, and women’s movement with rare courage and perseverance, contested the state in its efforts to subjugate them, under the pretext of Islam. The present paper is an attempt to see the nature of their resistance and the extent to which they have succeeded in their efforts with special reference to Women Action Forum (WAF).

Also, the Islamic law of divorce is widely viewed as arbitrary and anti-women. It seems to give license to the husband to exercise divorce according to his arbitrary will, while the wife is left a destitute in the process. While it has been over emphasized by scholars of various hues, any conclusion that Islamic law is patriarchal is but only a simplistic reading of its provisions. Islam provides women with equal rights to divorce their husbands. However, there is procedural difference between the pronouncement of divorce by the husband and that by the wife. This seems to have been unduly over emphasized. The aim of the present paper is to analyze the various provisions of Islamic Law of divorce and to point out whether they result in any discrimination between husband and wife. Shahnaz Noor in her paper” **Divorce in Islam: The Rights of a Muslim Woman**” elucidates this difference and in the process contests interpretations which lead to such perfunctory conclusions that Islam is discriminatory towards women in matters of divorce.
Media is supposed to play a constructive role in our society, provide alternative, empowered images of women breaking down stereotypes and in shaping mindsets. From historical perspective women have made great advances in the last two decades- their share of jobs in all media has increased. Despite the many positive developments in securing women’s rights, it appears; patriarchy continues to be embedded in the social system, denying the women the choice to decide how they live. The existence of gender bias even in a ‘progressive’ industry like journalism is surprising and deplorable. P.L Vishveshwar Rao observes that genuine equality in terms of professional status and working conditions remain elusive for women in Media. Although feminization of newsroom is happening, the balance of power remain in favor of males. His paper “Issues and concerns of women in Media” touches upon almost every aspect of women’s life as journalist as to how women are denied their rightful share in the industry and points towards the ‘ghettoisation’. He also talks about the sexual harassment the women silently face, accepting it as part of the work culture. There appears to be a huge discrepancy in the benefits, working conditions and the special privileges accruing to women. Even as women have stormed many a male bastion in the media and wrestled the right to report and edit and travel and opine, they are still struggling to get their material dues in terms of appointments to decision making positions, promotions, maternity……He rightly observes ‘Feminization of newsrooms has to be accompanied by facilitation that can lead to empowerment. Unless this happens in a large measure, women in the media in India can not be said to have arrived’.

Indian film industry has been growing for approximately hundred years now and constantly remained patriarchal. It often reflected the stereotypical roles for men and women wherein an ideal wife is
portrayed as a devout and an epitome of sexual purity. “The art house film genre has provided a social criticism of the construction of womanhood and femininity and the condition of women in India”, (Jamie Charniga, et al. 2007).

Of late, there is a spurt of film makers experimenting with the female issues and “delve deep into the female psyche and give them strong identities…. and Deepa Mehta belongs to this genre of film making” (ibid). Fire is one of her directorial ventures, and is a second installment of her political trilogy of elements. She is considered to be an” emancipatory voice of traditional Indian women… an attempt has been made here to provide women an identity outside the realm of men and patriarchy by eliminating men from the equation all together”, (ibid). Shree Deepa, in her paper”Fire as a gynotext: an answer to gender conditioning” is trying to invoke Elaine Showalter’s Feminist critical theory and apply it to the movie “Fire”. She looks at the movie as a ‘gynotext’ (The term is borrowed from Showalter). The author also attempts to trace the two protagonists in the movie against the three historical literary phases that Showalter describes; the feminine phase, the feminist phase and the female phase. The attempt is to trace this ‘progress’ in this single movie and attempt to describe it with the concept of ‘gender conditioning’. This gynotext serves as an answer to ‘Gender Conditioning’. It is evaluated in terms of the choices that the protagonists take in their life.

Feminist movements have produced both fiction and non-fiction and created new interest in women’s writing. It also prompted a general reevaluation of women’s historical and academic contributions in response to the belief that women’s lives and contributions have been underrepresented as areas of scholarly interest (Blain; et al. 1990). The widespread interest in women’s writings is related to a general
reassessment and expansion of the literary cannon. Shugufta Shaheen, in her paper “A Room of One’s Own: An Indian Perspective” observes that, gender is a categorization of humanity similar to class, race or color. It signifies social structure, identity, practices and values.. Western feminists attempting to break through this prescribed mould are dissatisfied with their eastern counterparts. They are perceived as the ‘other’ and western perception of women’s liberation is imposed upon them with a missionary zeal not unlike the colonial and religious imperialism.

In this paper she is trying to analyze how women in certain canonical texts have been termed as ‘mad’ and will attempt to study the dynamics behind this derogative labeling. It will also look at the literature produced in English by some of the Indian women writers with a view to portray how the majority of the Indian women appear to be comfortable with the first wave of feminism. It will highlight selective Indian women writers who have chosen to identify with its second wave while very few appear to have come to terms with the third wave. Finally it will be a plea for a humanist approach rather than a feminist, orientalist, racist or any such exclusive groups. It will try to reiterate the importance of human dignity being of more prime relevance when compared to all other status and hierarchies.

“One way feminist can challenge the dominant discourse is by writing from and defending the unique perspective resulting from their position as women in a male-dominated society,” (Kennedy.2003). It is often that we observe all male attributes are considered rationale and given precedence, and in contrast all things
considered female does not receive any attention. “These generalizations have remained static for centuries and shown little sign of imminently changing, feminist thinkers have realized the need to carve out their own standpoint, one in which knowledge exists outside the male-centric realm of objectivity, and which incorporates experience, emotion, and women’s knowledge”. (Kennedy.2003).

It is with this very objective that the present project was conceptualized. I am sure the volume could be of great help to students and scholars of women’s studies and serve as a reference material. The very purpose of this project is to provide insightful empirical accounts of women’s experiences, from their own perspective, which is what women’s studies is all about.

Shahida Murtaza

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Women's Struggles & Women’s Movement in India

Vibhuti Patel

Introduction

In the 19th century, the male social reformers with the blessing of the British administrators, influenced by western liberal democratic values initiated the process of fight against female infanticide, widow-burning, segregation of women from the public life, prostitution and begging by the destitute women. They also organised public functions for widow-remarriages. As a result, their relatives, neighbours, community leaders and the organised religion boycotted them. In a way, it was a blessing in disguise because their isolation from petty politics gave them ample time and resources to interact with the power-structures to bring about legal reforms and establish educational institutions, shelter homes, training centers for women from where the first generation of teachers, nurses, skilled workers came out. Enormous amount of literature of that time, produced by the Indian social reformers in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali bears witness to their path-breaking efforts. The first generation of English educated empowered women became pioneers of the women's movement in the pre-independence period. Most of them channelised their energies in building pioneer women's organisations such as All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and Anjuman-e- Islam. The political agenda of AIWC was to fight against child marriage, mobilise public opinion in favour of voting rights for women, impart basic skills (such as tailoring, embroidery, cookery, hair-style, childcare, folk and classical music and dance, letter-writing etc) to women to become efficient home-makers. Cultural ambiance of AIWC suited the needs
and aspirations of the high caste Hindu women. For all practical purpose, YWCA was multireligious in terms of its areas of activities and beneficiaries, though its decision-makers happened to be the Christian wives of politicians, bureaucrats, professionals and managerial cadre who were in the close proximity of the British rulers. YWCA provided vocational training courses to groom nurses, typists, secretaries and teachers, classes in bakery products, flower arrangements, Western and Indian classical dance and music classes. Anjuman Trust was committed to the cause of women's education and skill formation, which would enable them to be home-based workers. They had to work within the matrix of purdah. YWCA women had to face outside world with nominal male protection. AIWC women had their male family members as facilitators. Women leaders from Anjuman Trust interacted only with the Muslim community. Differences in eating habits, dress-code and language barriers prevented them from collaborative ventures though their leadership was from the economically better-off section.

Non-violent means of protest actions under the leadership of Gandhiji, ensured massive participation of women in the national liberation movement. Women family members of the Congress leaders gave up purdah participated in public functions, rallies, demonstrations and experienced prison-life. Families, which allowed women to take political risks, emerged as powerful politicians. Some of the highly educated women joined educational institutions, diplomatic crew, public service boards, public and private sector industries. The rest became enlightened home-makers with a strong commitment for their daughters' education.
Women's Liberation Movement of the Seventies

Genesis of the new women's liberation movement lay in the radicalization of Indian politics in the late sixties. Rebellious mood of the youth, poor peasants, marginal farmers, educated dalit and tribal men and women, industrial working classes found its expression in the formation of innumerable special interest groups addressing themselves to the needs and demands of the local masses. Macro political processes were also finding major shifts in their rhetorics as the protest movements of the subaltern masses had taken militant paths guided by different political ideologies. The official communist parties faced major political challenge in the form of the Naxalbari movement in Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab. Middle class mass upheaval in Gujarat (popularly known as Navnirman movement) against corruption, price rise, unemployment, speculation, hoarding and black-marketing in 1974 was replicated in Bihar in the name of Sampoorna Kranti Movement under the leadership of a Gandhian leader, Jay Prakash Narayan. Unprecedented strike of the railway workers gave a proof of the political power of collective strength of the working class. Tribal people's struggles against destructive development which served the interests of the kulaks, moneylenders, contractors, bootleggers and indigenous industrialists thriving on the barbaric means of surplus extraction developed in Chhatisgarh, Singhbhum, Bhojpur, Srikatulam, Chandrapur, Dhulia and in the pockets of the North Eastern states. In response to the 1974 drought paralysing normal agricultural activities, the tribal masses in Dhule region of Maharashtra demanded Employment Guarantee Scheme. This historic demand has revolutionised the thinking of the development workers about responsibility of the state at the time of economic crisis. (Patel 1985)
In the Himalayan valleys, under the leadership of Gandhian community workers the struggle against arbitrary felling of the trees which led to deforestation and massive scarcity of fuel, fodder, water and seasonal fruits, landslides devastating villages after villages began. Women evolved creative method to protect the trees from the axes of contractors' henchmen. This movement was popularly known as Chipko because women hugged the trees when their adversaries made ferocious efforts at felling the trees. In Maharashtra, women activists and women intellectuals involved in progressive movements took initiative in forming a united front called Anti-price rise Women’s Committee and organised direct action against the culprits who created man-made scarcity of essential goods. Thousands of poor and lower middle class women joined the struggle under the leadership of seasoned and able women from the left and socialist background. Mrinal Gore, Ahalya Ranganekar, Manju Gandhi and Tara Reddy made their special mark in the eyes of the masses as a result of their unique ability to reach out to the women of different class backgrounds. Their intellectual self-sufficiency, ability to relate micro issues to macro political reality, simple lifestyle and non-bossy nature provided role models to the younger generation of women’s liberation activists of all political hues. Around the same time a conference of Women’s Liberation Movement Coordination Committee was organised in Pune. This had even larger socio-political and cultural base as right from young educated women, professionals, writers, teachers, industrial working class women, unorganised sector women workers, temple prostitutes and tribal women participated in the deliberations and highlighted their demands. Stree Mukti Sangathana in Bombay and Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad were formed in 1974. In Delhi, new leadership among women evolved from the radical students' movement and the democratic rights movement. Individual women in different political groupings all over India were feeling
discontented about patriarchal biases in their organisations but they came out openly against it only after the emergency rule got over. These were independent, self-determining and democratic movements, which questioned all hierarchical structures. In India, young people of that period had not participated in the dreams of the nationalist movement. Faced with multiple crises—economic, social and political, along with corruption, drought, inflation, unemployment, pauperization of the rural poor—the disenchanted youth responded with protest. Widespread, open discontent was expressed in action and consolidation of the action developed into powerful organisations throughout the country. These movements raised a number of diverse issues—land-rights, wages, employment, security at work-place, water availability, destruction of nature, oppression and exploitation of the Dalits (the untouchables) and the working masses. Many women participated in these struggles with enthusiasm, responsibility and creativity (Patel, 2002).

The UN Declaration of 1975 as an International Women's Year coincided with the Emergency Rule in India. By the time the Emergency was lifted in 1977, several women's groups had developed around democratic rights issues. The press swung into "action" after the imposed silence of nearly two years. Atrocities committed against women during the Emergency were openly documented and reported in the press. These atrocities struck a chord in most women's own experience of life in the family, in the streets, in the workplace and in political groups. The culmination of this process was reached in 1980 when many women's groups took to the street to protest. During the 1980s, the issue of women's oppression was depicted not only in discussion forums, seminars and `serious' articles but also in the popular media. Women, who had on their own identified the sources of their problems and indignity, began to acquire a language, an
organisational platform, a collective identity and legitimacy they did not have earlier.

The Status of Women's Committee appointed by GOI released a voluminous report in 1974. This report called Towards Equality was prepared by the scholars with an interdisciplinary perspective and was presented in the Parliament of India, where it received a tremendous response from the decision-making bodies, the state apparatus and the print media. Shocking description of Indian women's reality, which manifested in declining sex ratio, very high rate of female mortality and morbidity, marginalisation of women in the economy and discriminatory personal laws were some of the major highlights of the report. But the report failed to throw any light on violence against women in the civil society and by the custodians of law and order. Major achievement of the report lay in the policy decision taken by the principal research body like the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) i.e. to provide financial support to scholars committed to the women's cause, to conduct research into problems faced by women in poverty groups.

Between 1977 and 1979 new women's groups emerged in the cities like Delhi, Banglore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Patna, and Madras. They organised protest actions against dowry murders, beauty contests, sexist portrayal of women in media, pornographic films and literature imported from abroad, introduction of virginity tests by the U.K. immigration authorities, custodial rape and pitiable condition of women in prison. These groups were multicultural in their composition and worldview. As a result, their political agenda reflected the contemporaneous handling of the complex reality of women constructed by interplay of class, caste, religion, ethnicity and globalisation. (Melkote & Tharu, 1980). The spokesperson of these groups had an advantage of high level of ideological investment and the
experience of the radical movements of the late sixties. Their collective wisdom provided main backbone to the movement. Their newsletters, magazines and booklets in regional languages as well as in English provided creative way of handling Indian women's problems. Launching of MANUSHI in January 1979 was a qualitative leap in this direction. The need to study women's issues in academic institutions and to conduct research based on experiential material and affirmative action was beginning to be discussed among Indian women's studies scholars by the early eighties. The discourse on this subject has proved to be a fruitful exercise for activists, academics, researchers, policy planners and the UN system. The apex body of higher learning, University Grants Commission defined WOMEN'S STUDIES as a discipline that involved research, documentation, teaching, training and action. It is understood that women have subordinate status in our society so the knowledge base created by WS should be used for empowerment of women (Patel, 2009).

Dialogue Between WS and WM

It was in the early 1980s that women's studies' centres, functioning autonomously or within the university system, started accepting empirical and experiential evidence from the women's movement. It was a time when participatory research, action research and subaltern studies were gaining ground in the field of social sciences as well as among the social work institutions and NGOs focusing on specialized fields. This process indirectly facilitated the interaction of WS and the WM. Wide range of issues concerning women were extensively discussed with tremendous technical details in the first National conference on perspective for women's liberation movement in India in December 1980. In terms of alternative cultural inputs, this conference
was a trendsetter. Songs, music ballets, skits, jokes, vocabulary, plural lifestyles and multilingual dialogues this conference was a trendsetter. The conference made it possible for women from totally divergent political moorings to come together for democratic discourse. Four months later, in the first National Conference of Women's Studies in April, 1981 at SNDT Women's University, a wide variety of issues were discussed by activists, researchers, academicians, administrators and policy makers. These included the developmental process which bypassed women, the gender bias in textbooks, sexism in the media, gender blindness in science and technology, health needs of women and violence against women - rape, domestic violence and prostitution. The general consensus among the participants (both women and men) was that WS was pro-women and not neutral. It was seen that WS would build a knowledge base for empowering women by pressing for change at policy level and in curriculum development, by criticizing gender-blindness as well as gender-bias within mainstream academia, by creating alternative analytical tools and visions and by advocacy for women's developmental needs in the economy and in society. This Conference established a new trend by which, gradually, women activists were invited, as resource persons and participants, to academic seminars, consultations and training workshops.

**Participatory Technique**

Participatory technique is more used in training development personnel and organising awareness programmes. Action being an important constituent of WS, this technique is used to conduct researches on the existing movements and developmental projects. Those who have been working with women at grass-roots have felt the need of using various techniques to break the silence of women, to get their participation and eventually generate a climate of equality. The hiatus between the trainer and the trainee needs to be obliterated; the gap between
producer of knowledge and user of knowledge has to be removed (Rebello, 1982).

In WS, we have been saying that women's voices have to be heard; how they perceive dowry or violent situations are very crucial. While studying objective reality and micro forces, WS also examines subjective reactions, psycho related issues. To understand social oppression, personal involvement provides a deeper understanding of the problem. Hence WS recognizes the role of personal accounts in highlighting the dynamics of women's oppression in situations like draught, communal riots, caste riots, Bhopal gas tragedy, appropriate technology, family planning programmes, fuel, fodder, water management, income generation activities and developmental policies.

**Research and Action**

During the International decade of women by the UN (1975-1985) for quite some time researches on women and action on women were moving parallel. After the eighties, the chasm between the researcher and the activist sharpened, as funds started pouring into women's research. Many women activists worked for the established research institutions on a subcontract and freelance basis for below subsistence wages because the funding was used mainly for institution building and for the perks of the decision-makers of the institutions. The government through its ministries, such as Labour, Rural Development and Social Welfare and the UN system sponsored studies initially for the academics, which might have resulted into a hierarchical situation. Simultaneously with the growth of grassroots work and autonomous women's groups organising campaigns and lobbying for political action, a necessity to study the problem with participatory perspective arose. Foreign funders started supporting such actions or activists resulted in debates, whether one should take foreign fund or not? It
was believed to have implications of unequal power dimensions, apart from the fact that research priorities might be determined by the funders. Another dimension of this issue is concerning role of the researcher. If women's studies are both understanding and action, then commitment to social change is essential. Women's oppressive reality has not to be merely studied in a classroom but has to be eliminated. The logic of adopting innovative techniques like life history, autobiography, and experiential data provides self-awareness and motivation for change (Gotoskar, 1982). Articulation of one's experiences in terms of oppression or growing identity on the one hand indicates a changed situation wherein a woman is able to frankly and honestly express her inner turbulations and a critique of the most private relationship. On the other hand this realisation, some day, ought to lead to action for changing this relationship. It could come more rapidly if there is support available through the women's movement. Of course, there are levels and levels of action, but activity and empathy are of prime significance in women's studies.

As a result of the collective endeavour of women's studies scholars and the women activists, two important documents providing insights into enormity of Indian women's problems have come into existence. They are: SHRAM SHAKTI Report focussing on poor self employed women and women in the unorganised sector and National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000A.D.). These documents provide political agenda for the mainstream political bodies and the women's organisations.

**Methods of Functioning of the NEW Women's Groups:**

Most of the women who took initiative in formation of the new women's groups were extremely averse to authoritarian structures within the family, educational and religious institutions and society at large as all of them did not allow women critical thinking and a space to
grow as independent, cerebral and politically conscious human beings. Hence they were very clear in their approach that they would encourage each and every member of the group to articulate her thoughts and establish intimate working relationship based on the collective decision-making processes. Initially this method proved very effective in creating new cadre of women who were intellectually enlightened, politically articulate, well informed and supportive to each other within their small groups as there were no male political bosses to curb their initiative and make them rot only in routine activities of fund-raising, translating, typing, posting, cleaning and cooking for the members of their political groups. Such groups in Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Pune and Delhi brought out documents, position papers, manifestoes, pamphlets and reproduced whole lot of documents of the women’s liberation movements in the other countries containing debates which had direct bearing on our situation. They had tremendous urge to reach out to more and more like-minded women. Their meetings were throbbing with new ideas, powerful polemics on epistemological issues, at the same time they reflected deep concern for immediate problems of women. As they believed that women’s issues needed to be taken up on a day-to-day basis and patriarchal power needed to be challenged in both 'personal' and 'political' spheres of life. They simultaneously started support work to individual women, solidarity work for the mass movements and united front work on an issue to issue basis. But, at the same time they are committed to maintaining their own political autonomy and organisational identity. These groups kept in touch with each other by circulating their leaflets in English and regional languages, mimeographed documents and letters. They functioned purely on an informal basis and organised meetings in the homes of one of the members or sympathizers. Between 1977 and 1980, only in Maharashtra, a new culture of exclusively women’s workshops, women's conferences and women's gatherings, in
which women of politically diverse views were invited, was found. As these gatherings were multi-class and multi-caste (within the matrix of Brahminical Hinduism), women pursuing different occupations—right from agricultural labourers, beedi workers, industrial working class women, students, teachers, journalists, writers, researchers, white collar employees shared their experiences and put forward their demands.

**Proliferation of the Autonomous Women's groups:** - Nationwide anti-rape campaign in 1980 resulted into emergence and proliferation of the autonomous women's organisations in several cities and towns of India. These groups such as Forum Against Oppression of Women (Mumbai), Saheli (Delhi), Stree Shakti Sangathana (Hyderabad), Vimochana (Banglore) managed to get tremendous publicity in the print as well as the audio-visual media because at that time 'violence against women' was the most sensational and the newest issue. Family members, especially fathers and brothers of the women victims of violence flooded the women's groups. Later on, the women victims started approaching these groups on their own. While doing agitational and propaganda work against series of rape cases in custodial situation, domestic violence and dowry harassment, these groups realised that to work on a sustained basis and to take care of the rehabilitative aspects of violence against women, it was important to evolve institutional structures for support to the women victims of violence based on feminist principles of solidarity (mutual counseling) and sisterhood. Criminal legal system in India made it inevitable for these groups to establish rapport with the police for an immediate redressal to the women victims of violence. Condition of women in the remand homes and the Nari Niketans were so repugnant and barbaric that they could not be trusted for women's rehabilitation. In fact, many women who suffered at their hands approached the new women's groups. The
women activists had to deal with the attitude of victim-baiting and double standards of sexual morality, sexist remarks, sick humour from the staff of the police, the legal apparatus and the public hospitals. At each and every step, they encountered class, caste and communal biases. (Lalitha, 1980). These resulted into confrontation between the women's groups and the established institutions. But in course of time, they realised that it was necessary to suggest concrete alternatives in terms of legal reforms, method of interventions and the staff-training for attitudinal changes. For public education, literature written in convincing style was a must. Audio-visual material for reaching out to more and more people was necessary. Professional bodies and educational institutions were approaching these groups for understanding the women's question. In these context SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS focusing on agit-prop, media-monitoring, resource material for consciousness raising, creation of cultural alternatives, publications, research and documentation, bookstalls, legal aid work came into existence during the eighties and got consolidated in the 1990s. These groups played complementary roles in each other's development, though the process was not so smooth.

**Issues Taken up by the New Women's Groups:**

**a. Campaign against Violence against Women:**

The movement got momentum with the campaign against the Supreme Court of India's judgement against Mathura, a teenage tribal girl who was gang-raped by the policemen at the dead of night, in the police station in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra in 1972. After 8 years of legal battle in the Session's Court, the High Court and the Supreme Court by her sympathetic lawyer Ad. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Mathura lost everything - her status, her self-esteem and her credibility, the Court declared that Mathura was not raped by the men in uniform but
Mathura being a woman of ‘an easy virtue’ gave a willful consent for sexual intercourse. Vasudha and her three colleagues in the legal profession wrote an open letter challenging the Supreme Court’s verdict in an extremely poignant and logically convincing style. This letter was widely publicized in the print media. Two major points concerning this issue were: Reopening of the Mathura Rape Case and amendments in the Rape Laws that put burden of proof on women and had a narrow definition of rape. Around these demands, the women’s groups were formed. They collected signatures on their petitions, conducted study-circles where experienced lawyers spoke, organised rallies, sit-ins, demonstrations in front of the offices of the concerned authorities, prepared poster exhibitions, plays, skits, songs, slogans against violence against women, wrote letters to the editors of different news-papers, wrote articles in newspapers and magazines for the first time on women's problems. (FAOW, 1985)

Initially they concentrated on the women-specific issues such as wife-battery and dowry-murders, rape and eve-teasing, pornographic films, plays and literature on harassment of women at the work place. Militant actions, social boycott, gherao of tormentors, raiding of the matrimonial homes for retrieval of dowry had to be resorted to because of antipathy/lethargy of the state apparatus. From these experiences of direct action the activists of the women's groups got to know the power relations operating within modern families (working class, middle class and upper class), different religious communities and various caste organisations. (Patel, 1985)

b. Fight Against Unjust Family Laws:

While providing support to women facing problems concerning marriage, divorce, maintenance, alimony, property rights, custody of child/children and guardianship rights, the activists realised that the
existing personal laws and most of the customary laws were
discriminating against women. Hindu daughters were deprived of
coparcenary rights in parental property as per the codes of Mitakshara.
Christian women could not get divorce on the ground of husband's
adultery; it had to be coupled with cruelty, bestiality and sodomy.
While Christian husbands could just declare their wives as adulteresses
and divorce them. These antiquated laws were enacted in the colonial
period to serve the interests of the British bureaucrats who had their
legally wedded wives in England and were cohabiting with the Indian
(in their language 'native') women. Parsee daughters who married
non-Parsee men lost their property rights and non-Parsee wives of
Parsee husbands got only half the shares in husband's property as per
the Parsee Personal Law. Shariat Law subjugated Muslim women by
imposing purdah, allowing polygamy and unilateral divorce by men to
his wife/wives and by depriving divorced Muslim women of
maintenance rights. Underlying philosophy of all these personal laws
was that: women are not equal to men. They are governed by the
patriarchal ideology. Irrespective of their religious backgrounds, these
personal laws perpetuate patrilineage, patrilocality, double standard of
sexual morality for men and women and perceive women as dependent
on men. Individual women from different communities have
challenged the constitutional validity of discriminatory aspects of the
personal laws in the Supreme Court of India. Increasing number of
educated working women and housewives from all religious
backgrounds have been approaching secular women's organisations.
Main problems faced by them from their natal families have been
forcible marriage, murderous attacks in cases of inter-caste, inter-class
and inter-religious marriages, property disputes, incest and from their
husbands and in-laws have been adultery, bigamy, polygamy, divorce,
custody of child/children, property, incest etc. As the issue of personal
laws is intertwined with the religious identities, the secular women's
movement had to face tremendous hostility from the elites of the different communities, mass organisations, patriarchal secular lobby and the parliamentary parties cashing on block-votes. Individual women (divorced, deserted, single and married under duress) are questioning discrimination in the customary laws. Tribal women in Maharashtra and Bihar have filed petitions demanding land rights in the Supreme Court of India. Several women's groups (Saheli, Delhi, Vimochana, Bangalore and Forum against Oppression of Women, Mumbai) and human rights lawyers’ team (The Lawyers Collective, Mumbai and Indian Social Institute, Delhi) have prepared drafts containing technical detail of gender just and secular family laws. (D’mello, 1982)

c. Legislative Reforms:

During last 30 years, the laws concerning violence against women and girls have come into existence. India was the 1st to enact the Family Courts Act (1984). Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act (2005) was enacted due to pressure exercised by women’s movement to safeguard interests of survivors of domestic violence. The DV Act has broadened the definition of domestic violence to include violence against women senior citizens (abuse of “mentally unfit” certificate), incest & rape by family members and relatives forcing women & girls into prostitution. The marked features of the Act are: recognition of the right to residence, provision for the appointment of Protection officers and the recognition of service providers, trainings for Protection Officers and judges, awareness creation and budgetary allocation for legal, counseling and other support services.

From the very beginning of the women’s movement legal reforms has been the top most priority. Women’s organizations campaigned for reforms in the rape law (1980) and dowry prohibition Act. For thirty
years, campaign demanding Protection of Women from Domestic Violence resulted in an Act in 2005. Similarly struggle against pre birth elimination of girls resulted (Patel 1988) in inactions of the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act (2002), Public Interest Litigations to deal with sexual harassment at workplace filed by the NGOs resulted into Supreme Court Directive for Prevention of Sexual Harassment At workplace, 1997. We need common legislation for the region to deal with cross- country trafficking of women and girls for sex-trade and organ transplant.

Many cases of VAW also get resolved in the neighbourhood committee, community organisations and lok adalats (People’s Court). Women’s movement has emphasized that violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power-relation between men and women. If women are empowered by the community and official support, we can tilt the balance in favour gender justice.

d. Reproductive Rights of Women:

When it comes to reproductive rights of women, most of the efforts of the women's groups in India have been directed against excesses committed in the name of family planning programmes. Now, Indian Council of Medical Research, All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Institute of Research in Reproduction (IRR) has shown readiness to discuss scientific, medicolegal and operational dimensions of bio-medical researches conducted on human subjects. UNFPA (1998) and WHO have drawn guidelines about population policies that its focus shifts from targeting women for population control to women's reproductive rights. Ethical guidelines for bio-medical research are drawn. Still in the interior parts of India, poor women have been the main targets of the abusive sterilization operations and unsafe injectable and oral contraceptives. Recent researches on adolescent
girls and abortion have highlighted the problem of teenage pregnancies, trafficking of young girls for sex trades and complicity of the criminal justice system. Campaign against sex determination resulted into central legislation banning amniocentesis, chrin-villai-biopsy and sex pre-selection techniques for femicide. But, much is needed to be done to make the legislation effective in the real life. CEHAT and the Lawyers Collective have jointly supported a petition (Public interest Litigation in the Supreme Court of India) filed by Dr. Sabu George for effective implementation of the Act (Patel, 2009).

d. Anti Arrack/alcohol Movement: Since mid seventies, tribal women in different parts of country- Andra Pradesh, Manipur, Maharashtra have been fighting against alcohol/lecre sale inducing alcoholism among men resulting into devastation of families and domestic violence against women and children. In Andhra Pradesh, the anti-arrack movement was strong in 1992 to 93 and it spread into other states at different levels. More than 40,000 women uniting and blocking the arrack auction in Andhra was a historic chapter in the Indian women's movement. In Maharashtra, the elected women representatives in local self government institutions, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have forced the state government to declare their block/village/taluk ‘alcohol free zone’ if 50% of women in the area give their vote against sale and distribution of alcohol.

e. Women's Movement and Peace Initiatives The most important contribution of the women's movement has been its commitment for peace-initiatives in the disturbed areas torn by communal conflicts, ethnic tensions and mob violence. Media publicity on this issue is extremely important so that such work can be replicated in the places where such groups don't exist. During communal riots in 1992 and 2002 in Gujarat, women’s movement played pivotal role in proving
support to the victims of violence and also took up campaign against xenophobia and jingoism.

**Women's Movement and the Development Agenda:**

During 1970s and 1980s, the women's movement highlighted marginalisation of women from the economy. The efforts of women activists were directed in agitation and propaganda for women's rights, street-fighting against escalating violence against assertive women and team-building to counter sexual harassment at work-place. In the 1990, the women's movement is demanding its legitimate place within the mainstream with its own agenda of empowerment of women with partnership with men. It has been able to identify its allies in all sections of society. Its horizontal and vertical networking has created congenial atmosphere to execute development agenda with the help of effective use of information technology, communication channels, modern managerial practices, efficient law and order machinery. The most difficult areas have been providing educational opportunities for the poverty groups, dalit and tribal women, low-cost housing, environmental and occupational safety and human rights concerns. The state, political parties and beneficiaries of women's groups too have duty to ensure democratic and multicultural atmosphere within which the women activists can take judicious and gender-just decisions about allocation of developmental resources and development funding for construction of schools, community centres, sports-clubs, libraries and reading rooms, low cost hospitals and low cost housing for the poverty groups. Gender Budgeting as a tool is used by elected women representatives to promote gender equality.
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Gender Equality And Gender Budgeting in India
Sayed Afzal Peerzade & Sushma Angadi

It is a truth universally acknowledged that women do not enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men anywhere in the world. Socially, politically, economically and legally, women share fewer rights than men. Though, women represent half the resources and half the potential in all societies, they found themselves placed at a disadvantageous position. HDR 1995 remarks that, “Upholding the equality of rights is not an act of benevolence by those in power. It is needed for the progress of every society”. (UNDP).

Women are lagging behind men in all walks of life, even though we find concentrated efforts favoring their empowerment. Gender budgeting is one of the efforts launched to bridge the gender hiatus and to ensure economic and social empowerment of women. The present paper deals this issue with special reference to India. It is organized as follows: Section I introduces, in brief, the concept of gender inequality. Section II discusses the status of ‘women empowerment’ across the globe including India with the help of global gender gap index. A brief discussion on the concept of gender budgeting can be found in Section III. Section IV sheds light on gender budgeting initiatives in India. The vision of Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) and budgetary allocation for DWCD are analyzed in Section V. Concluding observations are accommodated in Section VI.

I

Gender inequalities exist in developed and developing societies in
varying forms and degrees. Amartya Sen (2001) has spoken about of
different types of inequalities. (1) Mortality inequality (2) Natality
inequality (3) Basic facility inequality (4) Special opportunity
inequality (5) Professional inequality (6) Ownership inequality (7)
Household inequality1.

Women in general and poor women in particular, are deprived of basic
economic opportunities and entitlements that are widely available to
men. There are large disparities between men and women in terms of
access to basic facilities, such as nutrition, health and education, as well
as access to employment and ownership of various means of
production. Gender discrimination robs girls and women of the power
to make decisions, to earn a living and to be free from violence, abuse
and exploitation. Women receive less attention and health care than
men do. Strong preference to ‘sons’ has given rise to ‘missing women’
phenomenon in many countries. Facts below reveal the discrepancies
between men and women in the world2.

1. Of the world’s one billion poorest people, three fifths are women
   and girls.

2. Of the 960 million adults in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are women.

3. Seventy percent of the 130 million children who are out of

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Sen, Amartya., “Many Faces of Gender Inequality”, *Frontline*, Vol. 18, No.22, October 7-
November 9, 2001.

2 *The State of World Population 2008*, Chapter 3, “Negotiating Culture:
Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women”, UNFPA, p.28, accessed on 16th
school are girls.

4. Although women spend about 70 percent of their unpaid time caring for family members, that contribution is not recognized.

5. With notable exceptions, such as Rwanda and the Nordic countries, women are conspicuously absent from parliaments, making up on average, only 16 percent of parliamentarians worldwide.

In this context, gender equality is important because it helps to remove gender hiatus; creates a world wherein both men and women are equal; overcomes women subordination; enables women to have control over their incomes, reproduction process, mobility, etc. When a woman is empowered, it does not mean that man will be powerless or less powerful. On the contrary if a women is empowered her competencies toward decision-making will surely influence in the betterment of her family. Gender equality will create a “social multiplier” where aggregate power will be greater than individual. “Gender equality produces a double dividend as it helps both women and children”. Diane Elson, an expert in the area of gender responsive budgeting, argues that, “if women themselves have more control over resources there will be gains for society as whole; but if gender inequality persists, there will be continuing losses for society as a whole”.

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5 Elson Diane., “Integrating Gender Into Government Budgets within a Context of Economic Reform” in Budlender Debbie, Elson Diane, Hewitt guy and
In order to study the status of women empowerment, it is necessary to study the concept of global gender gap index. The Global Gender Gap Index was introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006. It is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based biases and tracking their progress. The Index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health based criteria and provide country-rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups. The rankings are designed to create greater awareness among a global audience of the challenges posed by gender gaps and the opportunities created by reducing them.

The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between male and female in five areas:

1. Economic Participation: This area is captured through three concepts, namely, the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap.

2. Economic Opportunity: It concerns with the quality of women’s economic involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers.

3. Educational Attainment: In this category, the gap between women and men’s current access to education is captured through ratios of women to men in primary, secondary and tertiary level education.

4. Political Empowerment: This category includes mainly measures of the gap between men and women in political decision-making at the highest levels. This concept is captured through the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. The ratio of women to men in terms of

years in executive office (prime minister or president) in the last 50 years is also included.

5. Health Survival: This aims to capture the phenomenon of “missing Women” prevalent in many countries with strong preference for son.

The following Table No.1 shows the Gender Gap Rankings in few counties:

Table No. 1

Gender Gap Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
<th>Economic Participation</th>
<th>Economic Opportunity</th>
<th>Political Empowerment</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Health and Well-Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Dimension 1</td>
<td>Dimension 2</td>
<td>Dimension 3</td>
<td>Dimension 4</td>
<td>Dimension 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lopez August and Saadia Zahidi, 2005.

All Scores are reported on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing maximum gender equality. The above table shows the overall rankings, as well as the scores obtained in the five dimensions surveyed. It implies that no country in the world has managed to achieve a perfect gender equality.
Throughout the world, several schemes and programmes are launched to reduce gender gap and to achieve gender equality. These are all clubbed under the umbrella of ‘gender mainstreaming’, i.e., ‘the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development and implementation and monitoring’. Gender budgeting is also one of the important components of ‘gender mainstreaming’.

Gender budgeting is a dissection of the government budget to establish its gender-differential impacts and to translate gender commitments into budgetary commitments. Thus, gender budgeting looks at the government budget from a gender perspective to assess how it addresses the needs of women in specific areas like, health, education, employment, etc. It is important to note that gender budgets are not separate budgets for men and women and boys and girls. They attempt to disaggregate the government’s budget according to its impact on men and women respectively.

Gender budgets are also known as “Women’s Budgets”, “Gender Sensitive Budgets”, “Gender Responsive Budgets”, “Applied Gender Budget Analysis”, “Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives Into Budgets” 6, etc. All these terms refer to gender budget initiatives. In the process of preparation and presentation of budget, the gender lens is used to analyze budgets at national, regional and civic levels.

Gender budgeting helps in addressing the problem of inequality in a society as reflected in lower literacy rate and health care. It develops programs, strategies, interventions and policy initiatives from the

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perspective of their impact on status of women. It intends to create an enabling environment through various affirmative developmental policies and programs for development of women. It strives in the direction of providing easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services to enable women to realize their full potential.

For achieving the goal of gender equality, several countries, both developed and developing, have initiated gender budgeting exercises. Throughout the world, more than sixty countries have now introduced gender budgeting in varying forms. These exercises emerged out of feminist practical politics initially in Australia and later in a number of other countries. “The idea of gender budgets gathered further momentum when the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action called for the integration of a gender perspective into budgetary decision-making” \(^7\). Other countries that have initiated gender budgeting are South Africa, United Kingdom, Canada, Sri Lanka, Germany, Austria, Chile, India, etc\(^8\). By the year 2006, as many as 60 countries have resorted to gender budgeting to remove gender inequalities.

The following conferences, seminars and symposia have led to the birth of gender budgeting: The First World Plan for Action (Mexico, 1975), The UN General Assembly’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), The Second World Conference on Women (Copenhagen, 1980), The Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985), The World Conference


on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Cairo, 1994), The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Platform for Action) (Beijing, 1995), The World Social Summit on Development (Copenhagen, 1995), The 23rd Special Session of UN General Assembly (2000), Millennium Development Goal (2000), UNIFEM (2001), etc. In 2005, the second phase of the UNIFEM program was launched. It aimed at the application of gender analysis to government budgets, focusing on the use of ‘Gender-Responsive Budgeting’ as a tool to increase accountability, participation and gender responsiveness in national budgets. Gender budgeting initiatives have been supported by a number of multinational institutions, some of which are Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Community, the World Bank, and institutions of civil society, including many women’s organizations\(^9\).

IV

The Government of India has made concerted efforts for the holistic development of women. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of India, in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. These not only guarantee equal status to women but also empower the state to adopt measures of affirmative discrimination in favour of women. Despite several provisions made by the Constitution and other efforts for the betterment and security of women, the Indian women are still at the receiving end. The constitutional dream of gender equality has not

become true in reality. “All over India, women are the poorest of the poor: disproportionately, they lack access to education and other social services. Too often women are absent from decision-making, not only at the national, regional or local level, but also even within their own families”\textsuperscript{10}.

In India, analyzing public expenditure from the gender perspective received attention after the publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, entitled ‘Towards Equality’, brought out by the Government of India in 1974. Because of the Report, the Parliament urged the Prime Minister to initiate a comprehensive programme of legislative and administrative measures aimed at removing as far as possible the economic and social injustices, disabilities and discrimination to which Indian women continue to be subjected. This Report gave the initial impetus toward the search for gender perspectives on public expenditure.

The Government of India’s commitment to gender budgeting is strongly focused in the plan documents. In the initial plans women were seen as welfare recipients, however, in the course of time, the approach has changed. There was a shift from ‘welfare’ to ‘development’ and to ‘empowerment’ in the consequent plans. It is important to note that gender sensitivity in allocation of resources began from Seventh Plan (1987-1992), however, formal earmarking of funds for women started with Women’s Component Plan in the year 1997-98. The Seventh Plan (1987-1992) introduced monitoring of 27 major women specific schemes and the quantum of funds flowing into them. The Eighth Plan (1992-97) highlighted that the benefits of development from different sectors should not bypass women and special programmes on women

should complement the general development programmes.

Empowerment of women became primary objective in the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-02) which introduced “Women Component Plan”, where 30 percent of the funds would flow to women. The Tenth Plan (2002-07) and Eleventh Plan (2007-11) reinforced commitments to Women Component Plan along with Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) marked another significant step forward as it envisaged “immediate action in tying up these two effective concepts of ‘Women Component Plan’ and ‘Gender Budgeting’ to play a complementary role to each other, and thus ensure both preventive and post facto action in enabling women to receive their rightful share from all the women-related general development sectors”.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) held a workshop on “Engendering National Budgets in the South Asia Region” in July 2002. This was a major step toward gender budgeting in India. One important outcome of this Workshop was that the DWCD commissioned National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), New Delhi, to study gender-related economic policy issues. After a thorough study, NIPFP suggested the following formula to

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calculate pro-women allocation. For mainstream social sector ministries like Health, Family Welfare, Education, etc., where women comprise significant part of the beneficiaries, the following formula can be adopted:

\[ \text{Pro-women allocation} = (TE - WSP) \times WC \]

Where, \( TE \)=Total Expenditure; \( WSP \)= Women Specific Programmes and \( WC \)= Women Component specified as a percentage of the total outlay of the Ministry being exclusively spent on women. For other Ministries like, Agriculture and Cooperation, Small Scale Industries, Agro and Rural Industries, etc., where only a few programmes have Women Component, the following formula can be used:

\[ \text{Pro-women allocation} = (SCS \times WC) \]

Where, \( SCS \)= Specific Composite Scheme and \( WC \)= Women Component specified as a percentage of the total outlay of the Ministry being exclusively spent on women

Following the spearheading role by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, a few Indian states have taken initial steps toward gender budgeting. National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) has also played a vital role by carrying out gender analysis in 22 states. Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Maharashtra, etc., are some of the states which have taken steps to initiate gender budgeting.

For the holistic development of women, Government of India first set up a separate department under the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985. It was later converted into a Ministry with effect from 30-01-2006. Its vision is “Ensuring overall survival, development and protection of women and children of the country to
enable them to lead productive and wholesome lives as citizens”\textsuperscript{14}.

The Ministry comprises of two statutory bodies and four autonomous organizations. Its statutory organizations are: National Commission for Women (NCW), National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). The autonomous organizations are: National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD), Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK).

This Ministry runs around thirty programmes. We, however, discuss here four broad programmes/schemes of the Department of Women and Child Development and total budgetary allocation to the Department from 1996-97 to 2006-07. These are regarded as core programmes/schemes of DWCD.

1. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): The ICDS is a comprehensive programme designed to ensure the holistic development of children. It is one of the largest and unique childcare programmes in the World. It is a multi-sectoral programme and involves several government departments. It integrates several aspects of early childhood development and provides supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups and referral services to children below six years of age as well as expecting and nursing mothers. Its beneficiaries are children below 6 years; expectant and lactating mothers; and women in the reproductive age group of 15 to 44 years.

2. Day Care Centres (Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Working Mothers): The scheme is implemented through Central Social

\textsuperscript{14} Government of India, Ministry of Women and child Development, Annual Report 2006-07, p.3.
Welfare Board with the help of voluntary organizations throughout the country. Children below five years age are entitled to avail benefits of this scheme.

3. Hostels for Working Women: The scheme of assistance for construction or expansion of hostel buildings for working women with day care facilities for children is being implemented since 1972-73. Under this scheme assistance is provided to voluntary organizations, NGO’s, cooperative bodies and other agencies engaged in the field of women’s welfare, women’s education, public sector undertakings, women’s development corporations, local bodies, universities, state governments, etc., for the construction of Working Women’s Hostels to provide reasonably suitable accommodation to working women and for the purchase of ready-built hostels for the purpose. The target beneficiaries are single working women, widows, divorcee, separated women and girl students who are engaged in post-school professional courses.

4. Support to Training and Employment Programme [STEP]: This programme was launched as a central sector scheme in 1987. The scheme endeavors to make a significant impact on women in traditional sectors by upgrading their skills and providing employment to such women on a project basis by mobilizing women in viable groups, improving skills, arranging for productive assets, creating backward and forward linkages, providing access to credit, etc. The beneficiaries include marginalized, asset-less rural women and urban poor with special focus on SC/ST households, women headed households and BPL families.

The following Table No.2 sheds light on budgetary allocations to the above-mentioned four core programmes/schemes of Department of Women and Child Development.
Table No. 2

Allocations to Four Core Programmes/Schemes

(Rupees in Crore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ICDS</th>
<th>Day Care Centres</th>
<th>Working Women Hostels</th>
<th>STEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>681.90</td>
<td>23.05</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>733.90</td>
<td>23.05</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>603.14</td>
<td>23.05</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>855.76</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>935.00</td>
<td>18.50</td>
<td>7.02</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>1198.00</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>1442.24</td>
<td>25.80</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>1444.32</td>
<td>32.50</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Total Budgetary Provision</td>
<td>S emissions</td>
<td>C emissions</td>
<td>D emissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>1623.44</td>
<td>41.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>3142.25</td>
<td>41.50</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>4007.76</td>
<td>94.00</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>4681.00</td>
<td>103.00</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>5665.20</td>
<td>96.10</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>33.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>6026.40</td>
<td>91.52</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table No.2 shows the budgetary allocations for the programmes/schemes, namely, ICDS, Day Care Centres, Working Women Hostels and STEP between 1996-97 and 2009-10. A glance at the above Table No.2 shows that for ICDS the budgetary allocation between the period 1996-97 and 2009-10 has continuously increased except in the year 1998-99. For example, during the year 1996-97, the total budgetary allocation was Rs.681.90 crore which increased to Rs.733.90 crore in 1997-98 and declined to Rs.603.14 crore in the year 1998-99. The budgetary provision has continuously increased between 2000-01 and 2009-10, i.e., budgetary provision was Rs.935.00 crore in 2000-01 which increased to Rs.6026.40 crore in 2009-10. It can be observed that in case of Day Care Centre, the total provision has
increased between 1996-97 and 2009-10 with a slight decline during 1999-00 and 2000-01. For instance, the budgetary allocation was Rs.23.05 crore in 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99, and slightly declined to Rs.20.50 crore in 1999-00 and to Rs.18.50 crore in 2000-01 and has continuously increased and it was Rs.94.00 crore in 2006-07 and to Rs.103.00 crore in 2007-08 and has declined in the next two years 2008-09 and 2009-10. The total allocation for Working Women’s Hostel from 1996-97 to 2009-10 has actually declined and has increased in 2007-08 and again it increased for the next two years. For example, it was Rs.7.75 crore in 1996-97 which declined to Rs.4.50 crore in 2006-07 with mild fluctuations in between. In 2007-08 it was Rs.13.50 crore and declined to Rs.91.52 crore in 2009-10. In case of STEP also the budgetary allotment has decreased between 1996-97 and 2009-10. An allotment of Rs.16.00 crore was provided for the following years 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99. The total budgetary provision, however, decreased to Rs.15.00 crore in 1999-00 and further to Rs.13.00 crore in 2000-01. From 2001-02 to 2004-05 the budgetary allocation has continuously increased, it was Rs.18.00 crore in 2001-02 and Rs.22.50 crore in 2004-05 and it declined to Rs.12.00 crore during 2009-10.

After analyzing the important programmes/schemes of DWCD, we proceed to discuss the total budgetary allocations to DWCD programmes/schemes from 1996-97 to 2006-07.
Table No.3

Total Budgetary Allocation to DWCD Programmes/Schemes
(1996-97 to 2006-07)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Schemes/Programmes of DWCD</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>In Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>ICDS: Budgetary Provision</td>
<td>16,667.71</td>
<td>69.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>World Bank Assisted ICDS Projects</td>
<td>2,257.91</td>
<td>9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Expenditure on Training Programme</td>
<td>483.8</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Day Care Centres</td>
<td>364.9</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Contribution of GOI to UNICEF</td>
<td>36.99</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Budgetary Provision of NIPCCD</td>
<td>98.56</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Other Schemes: Budgetary Provision</td>
<td>92.24</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Condensed Courses for Women Education</td>
<td>60.95</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Hostels for Working Women</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Support to Training and Employment Programme</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Description</td>
<td>Amount (Cr)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Mahila Samriddhi Yojana</td>
<td>165.04</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Programmes</td>
<td>37.99</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Training-cum-Production Centres</td>
<td>172.8</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Short Stay Homes</td>
<td>142.58</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Awareness Generation Programme</td>
<td>38.85</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>National Commission for Women</td>
<td>48.23</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Rashtriya Mahila Kosh</td>
<td>17.02</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Balika Samriddhi Yojana</td>
<td>165.59</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Integrated Projects for Development of Women</td>
<td>159.11</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Indira Mahila Yojana</td>
<td>147.5</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Swadhar</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Scheme for Rescue of Victims of Trafficking</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>National Nutrition Mission</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Nutrition-Other Schemes</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No.3 sheds light on the total budgetary allocation for various programmes/schemes of the Department of Women and Child Development between 1996-97 and 2006-07. It can be noticed that highest budgetary provision is made for ICDS which is Rs.16667.71 crore (69.93 %) and lowest budgetary provision is for National Nutrition Mission which is Rs.1.12 crore (0.39%). The other significant programmes/schemes are, 1) World Bank Assisted ICDS Projects (9.47 %); 2) Day Care Centres (1.53 %); 3) Budgetary Provision of NIPCCD(0.41 %); 4) Condensed Courses for Women Education (0.26 %); 5) Hostels for Working women (0.37 %); 6) Short Stay Homes (0.59%); 7) Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (0.071%); 8) Balika Samriddhi Yojana(0.69%); 9)Indira Mahila Yojana(0.61 %); 10) Swadhar(0.12 %), etc.

We now proceed to make a comparative study of the total expenditure of the Union Government and allocation to the DWCD with the help of Table No.4.

Table No. 4:

Total Expenditure of the Union Government and Allocation to DWCD

(Rupees in Crore)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
<th>DWCD</th>
<th>In Percent *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>202024</td>
<td>875.07</td>
<td>0.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>232176</td>
<td>948.10</td>
<td>0.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>267927</td>
<td>1274.23</td>
<td>0.475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>283882</td>
<td>1371.83</td>
<td>0.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>338487</td>
<td>1512.00</td>
<td>0.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>375223</td>
<td>1705.00</td>
<td>0.454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>410309</td>
<td>2253.64</td>
<td>0.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>438795</td>
<td>2653.91</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>477829</td>
<td>2454.19</td>
<td>0.513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Total Expenditure</td>
<td>DWCD Allocation</td>
<td>Proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>514344</td>
<td>3931.11</td>
<td>0.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>563991</td>
<td>4852.94</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>680521</td>
<td>5853.00</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>750884</td>
<td>7262.00</td>
<td>0.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1020838</td>
<td>7278.00</td>
<td>0.712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Finance, Union Budgets from 1996-97 to 2009-10. * Shows the budgetary allocation of DWCD as proportion of Total Union Government Expenditure

Table No.4 shows that the total expenditure of the government and the budgetary allocation for DWCD have continuously increased from 1996-97 to 2006-07. During the year 1996-97, total expenditure was Rs.202024 crore and allocation for the Department of Women and Child Development was Rs.875.07 crore. This increased to Rs.2653.91 crore (0.604 % of the total expenditure) in 2003-04, to Rs.2454.19 crore (0.513 % of the total expenditure) in 2004-05, to Rs.3931.11 crore (0.764 % of the total expenditure) in 2005-06 and to Rs.4852.94 crore (0.860 % of the total expenditure) in the year 2006-07. It was Rs.5853 crore (0.86 %); Rs.7262.00 crore (0.96%) and Rs.7278.00 crore (0.712 %) during the years 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 respectively.
It can be observed from the above Table No.4 that the budgetary allocation to DWCD has continuously increased from 1996-97 to 2006-07. The budgetary allocation to the DWCD, however, as a percent of the total government expenditure was around 0.45 percent between 1996-97 and 2001-02, thereafter, it has continuously increased except in the year 2004-05. The figures in the above Table No.4 indicate that the total allocation to the Department of Women and Child Development is not even one percent of total expenditure between 1996-97 and 2009-10. It is also quite clear from Table No.4 that the budgetary allocation to ‘women exclusive’ programmes/schemes is less than budgetary allocation to ‘women-child’ programmes/schemes.

VI

The goal of women equality is much-cherished one. It connotes emancipation of women, their all round development and a guaranteed access to the sharing of resources. It is a development which enables them to participate in the decision making process. An ‘empowered and enlightened women’ is not an asset to herself but to the entire society and economy. She creates a ‘social multiplier’.

In several countries, including India, gender budgeting is initiated as one of the important tools of reducing gender inequalities. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is functioning in India since 1985 for the development of women and child. This Ministry is implementing several programmes/schemes for the development and empowerment of women. Although the targets are ambitious, it is found that the budgetary allocation to this Ministry is very meager in relation to the total union government expenditure. It is below one percent. Expenditure on women-specific programmes is much less than expenditure on programmes where both women and children are beneficiaries. There is, thus, a glaring gap between commitment and public action. Here is an urgent need to have a relook at the budgetary
allocations made to the Department of Women and Child Development.

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Technology defines our era and impacts of technology are numerous and in every walk of life. As a matter of fact technology, market and development are considered gender-neutral but in our country technology brought about a dramatic negative impact on women. Women are getting sidelined not only from job market but the ultrasound machine has come to serve as an instrument of female infanticide, murdering the infant before it sees light of day. Social pressures in India, and the presence of low-cost technologies, have led to sex-based abortion of female foetuses, and an increasingly smaller percentage of girls born each year. Indeed, female infanticide and sex-selective abortion may safely be characterised as the most extreme expression of the preference for sons. In India, the practice of sex-selective abortion or female feticide (in which an unborn baby is aborted or killed before birth simply because it is not a boy) is only the latest manifestation of a long history of gender bias, evident in the historically low and declining population ratio of women to men. Moreover, the medical fraternity in India has been quick to see entrepreneurial opportunities in catering to the insatiable demand for a male child.
The inhuman practice of female infanticide has been in existence in India for quite a long time. It is a matter of record that the British found it in vogue, particularly among the upper echelons of caste hierarchy and made attempts to stop it. But earlier the girl child was killed after birth.

Traditionally the methods included stuffing the newborn’s mouth with black salt, lacing the milk she drank with either pesticide, toothpaste, sedatives, the juice of the poisonous oleander berry or the grains of paddy husk that are capable of slitting the tender gullet.

**Expanse and Magnitude**

India has been witnessing the systematic extermination of the female child, with the ultrasound machine serving as an instrument of murder. Though the government enacted the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act in 1994, which came into force in 1996, situation far from improving, further worsened. A concomitant rise in the number of private clinics providing sex determination test was seen as a result of banning such practices in government hospitals. Until recently, the technology was prohibitively expensive. But (before the Act was amended (2003) the technology had reached even in remote areas. As a result, the sex ratio recorded in India
got all the more disturbed: in 1971 there were 930 females for every 1,000 males. A decade later this figure had increased to 934, but by 1991, instead of continuing to rise, the ratio dropped to 927, lower than the 1971 figure. This sex ratio is one of the lowest in the world. UN reports reveal that between 35 to 40 million girls missing from the Indian population. A surprise raid by police and health officials in the town of Patran in Patiala district unearthed a 10-metre (30-foot) well - located behind a private clinic - which contained the remains of at least 50 female foetuses.

Prenatal techniques for sex determination were introduced into India only in the early seventies. At first, mostly affluent women had access to prenatal tests because the technology was prohibitively expensive. When the non-invasive and cheaper technique of ultrasound was introduced, the Indian families quietly turned to it to fulfil the desire for sons. Before the law came into effect, an alarming number of pregnancies underwent these simple tests as more and more couples customized the make-up of their families by terminating unwanted foetuses. For instance in Mandya, in Karnataka, where the sex ratio is abysmally low, sex determination tests are done for Rs 10,000, it is explained.

The Child Sex Ratio (CSR the number of girls in the age group of 0 to 6 years per thousand boys of the same age group) has been worsening. Declining sex ratio in various parts of the country, specifically the ratio
of the girl child, compared to the boys in the age group of 0-6 years has been a cause of deep concern. During the last ten years (since the last census from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001), this ratio has declined significantly in almost all parts of the country, barring Kerala, and notably in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab (one of the worst sex ratios in the country), Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Prevalence of female infanticide in post-independent India has likewise been reported from Madurai District of Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Unsurprisingly, the state of Punjab is cited as the worst offender -- the ratio has dropped from 875 in 1991 to 798 girls for every 1,000 boys in 2001, says ‘State of the World’s Children 2007’ the UN children’s agency annual report. Haryana, which records a sharp 60-point drop, from 879 girls in 1991 to 819 in 2001, is a close second.

Notably, Punjab and Haryana, which have traditionally seen low sex ratio, have recorded an increasing trend but still remained at the bottom of the list. As per 2011 census Haryana has 830 female children and Punjab 846 against per 1000 male child. Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, all in north India, are other states where girl-children are largely unwanted. Cosmopolitan city of Delhi, the nation’s capital, has witnessed a 47-point drop, from 915 girls to 868 in 2001. Even in ‘globalised’ Bangalore, the ratio of girls to boys is just 811 to 1,000.
India’s already abysmal sex ratio figures are getting worse by the day, with 80 per cent of its districts recording declining child sex ratios since 1991, as thousands of girl-children are killed before or at birth. This is according to a report by UNICEF on the global status of children. Thus, the all-India sex ratio is 927 girls for 1,000 boys, which puts the country right at the bottom of the global charts, worse off than countries like Nigeria (965) and neighbour Pakistan (958). According to the report, only China -- with whom, ironically, India is competing in the economic growth sweepstakes -- with 832 girls per 1,000 boys ranks below India.

The gruesome crime pervades in almost every social segment. It is not restricted to the lower strata of the society, but prevails in a large way in the educated middle and upper middle classes. Also, the incidence of female foeticide seems more prevalent in urban areas--despite higher levels of education and affluence -- as compared to villages

According to a report, 26 per cent of Haryana’s young bachelors are unable to find spouses because there are not enough women in the state to choose from, thanks to the prevailing trend of suffocating female babies with common salt (The Statesman)."If you don't welcome a girl child today, you won't have a daughter-in-law to welcome in the future," said Dr Adhao. One of the shocking example in a village in Jaisalmer, (Rajasthan) a “barat ” (wedding procession) arrived after ten years. There were only 12 girls in the village of a population of
2000. A woman supported by her husband decided to initiate a change when she literally gifted life to their female baby, while everybody else around them was killing their daughters; probably because she had already lost three sons before her birth [The Times of India, New Delhi, 6 May 2008].

In the two decades since the wide availability of ultrasound equipment, the number of girls born in India has declined steeply, despite a law banning doctors from revealing the sex of a foetus to parents. A ban on the government departments at the centre and in the states, making use of pre-natal sex determination for the purpose of abortion--a penal offence--led to the commercialization of the technology. Private clinics providing sex determination tests through amniocentesis multiplied rapidly and widely. These tests are made available in remote areas, with marginal farmers willing to take loans at 25 per cent interest to have the test. Advertisements appear blatantly encouraging people to abort their female foetuses in order to save the future cost of dowry. The portable ultrasound machine has allowed doctors to go from house to house in towns and villages. In a democracy it is difficult to restrict right to business and livelihood if the usual parameters are fulfilled.

The PCPNDT Act prohibits sex selection by any means, before or after conception. But, as one survey in Chennai of 29 ultrasound clinics found, for the medical fraternity it is business as usual. Women patronise scan centres; they want to know the sex of the child. So, many
of them come without any pressure from their husbands or mothers-in-law. Doctors who promote scanning to determine the sex of the foetus are only fulfilling a demand in society. To the contention that the medical fraternity is colluding in the practice of female foeticide, Dr K R Balasubramaniam, president of the Tamil Nadu Medical Council says: Doctors are not a special tribe removed from society. Therefore, the faults of society will also be found among them. His blatant defence is only one aspect of the collusion between the medical lobby and Indian legislators in not preventing effectively the death of that most vulnerable being in India -- the female foetus.

The pro-sex selective abortion advocates feel that the technological tools are helping families to cope with intransigent problems, especially dowry. Health clinics, buoyed by record profits, are aggressively selling their wares. One clever economic pitch blares from tens of thousands of billboards through the country--"Pay five hundred rupees now rather than five lakhs later". Poor families, fearing expensive dowries that can cripple a family, willing undergo the tests.

**Genesis**

Son preference, discriminatory attitude towards women coupled with ever yielding female mindset is the root causes of the problem. Ajinder Walia (2005) studied in Punjab about the attitude for female foeticide and found that respondents who expressed a favourable attitude
towards female foeticide cited various reasons for it. In Ludhiana district about 59 per cent of the sample derived from the region expressed the reasons why they underwent or would undergo female foeticide. Out of this, an overwhelming majority (82.97) per cent cited dowry as the main cause for female foeticide. For them marriage had become an expensive affair. The rise in the cost of living had compelled them think seriously about having daughters. They have to pay a huge dowry to their sons-in-law so that they would keep their daughters happy. The greater the number of daughters more was the economic burden on the parents. About 86 percent of those who gave a nod to female feticide stated that girls failed to provide any kind of social security to parents. Parents could not expect their daughters to earn and feed them in old age. A negligible 3 percent of respondents even felt that female foeticide was a good way to check the growth of female population.

In Bathinda district about half of the total sample taken endorsed the act of female foeticide. An overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of them cited dowry as the cause. The farming families argued that they had to first raise a daughter and then spend Rs 15 lakh on her wedding. Whereas they did not get this kind of income from their land. It was a great monetary loss to the family. They reported the slogans given by doctors. “Better to spend Rs. 1000 now and save Rs. 10 lakh later”. In Bathinda a majority of 75 percent of those who approved of female
foeticide expressed that girls were an unnecessary investment. They repeated, “Bringing up a daughter is like watering a neighbourer’s plant”. They felt that parents brought up daughters, gave them the best of clothing and facilities only to be taken over by her in-laws. Even if a girl was earning, the parents had no right to that earning which was enjoyed by her in-laws. A considerable (60 per cent) of the respondents cited post marital problems faced by the girl, lack of social security provided by female children and denial of property to the girl child as the reason for approving female foeticide.

From the pro-abortion viewpoint, it is pleaded that a woman must be given freedom of choice whether she wants to raise a girl or a boy. In this, a woman’s right to choice is considered supreme. But this argument is only spearheaded by those who are unaware of societies that are diseased by the son-preference syndrome. At the same time they are ignorant of the mass extinction of the female sex occurring as a result of sex-selective abortions. They do not realise that their attitude of freedom of choice for women does not apply in societies that practice female foeticide. In these societies, women rarely have a say in the decisions that involve them or their body. They are not practicing their freedom of choice when aborting their child. Majority of them are pressured into doing so covertly.
Existing measures

What is a woman's role in all this? Does her choice or decision really matter about having an abortion, if she has to survive as a wife, as daughter-in-law in the family? Even if her husband supports the birth of a female child, she may prefer to have a male child in order to get respect from her in laws'. A woman does not have any effective say in this matter.

‘State of the World’s Children 2007’ is a scathing indictment of the efforts of both the central and state governments to enforce laws against sex selective abortions, as well as the killing of newborn girls. Though strict laws and penal actions are taken against violators, but the laws have not worked. Campaigns to encourage people to view girl-children as socially and economically desirable do not seem to have made much of an impact either. As observed, it is not poverty or illiteracy that makes families kill their children. The community too acts in strange ways to perpetuate the crime demonstrating gender bias in our male-dominated, patriarchal society.

Proposed solution

It is ironic to see that maximum sex selective abortions are performed by a lady doctor, in violation of Act. Women herself agree to undergo a sex selective abortion completely knowing that it would be a contribution to depletion of their own sex. It has been observed that not
merely education of women, but their empowerment can play a bigger role in avoiding female feticides.

It is disturbing to note that in female feticide women play a supporting role. In a number of cases it was seen that mother and grandmother facilitates the female foeticide. A straight reason they use to give is that being a woman they know what the woman means in this society.

Prevention of female foeticide is the responsibility of every member of the society as laws alone cannot prevent it. Families play a very crucial role by supporting a girl child mainly because this issue has social, economical and religious dimension. What is required is a ‘multi-dimensional approach and cooperation from every section of the society’ to combat this problem.

To make any substantial changes in parental attitudes towards daughters, it is necessary to change the social and economic roots of son preference. The key to such changes lies in improving the status of women, particularly the way she thinks about herself.

Most of the female particularly in Indian society have been having negative self concept. Self-worth is the value one has for his or herself, often times referred to as self-esteem. Self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, because self-concept encompasses self-worth (“Body Attitude”, 2001). However, self-concept includes an individual’s overall perception of their psychological and physiological
being, where as self-esteem is the judgment of worth an individual assigns to his or herself.

Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have high self-concepts, whereas individuals with low self-esteem tend to have self-concepts that are inconsistent and frequently changing (Von Bergen and Soper, 1996). As a woman self-esteem comes from core beliefs about our value as a person. If we want to increase our self-esteem we need to challenge and change these beliefs. This might feel like an impossible task, but there are a lot of different ways that we can do this. Positive self-esteem is the immune system of the spirit, helping an individual faces life problems and bounce back from adversity. If a mother considers that she is important person and her daughter will be as important as she is and or better than her then the situation will be quite different. Women suffer not because they are weak but because they feel they are weak.

The key to improving our self-esteem is to take conscious control of our self-talk. Negative self-talk is the prime cause for creating and maintaining negative self esteem. The things we say to ourselves in our mind, as well as the meaning we attribute to events in our life, combine to create the reality: we are what we think, we become what we think. Most people self-talk is roughly 95 per cent negative. They see the worst in themselves and in everything that happens. Putting a stop to such self-destructive thinking is vital. It is our thoughts and
expectations that shape and produce what we become. One excellent way to combat and overcome negative self-talk is through using positive affirmations. The belief that finally wins out is the one that we invest with the most emotional energy and constancy of thought.

There are many effective ways to remedy low self esteem. However, the key to success in life is to recognize the existence of the problem in the first place. Therefore, consider where self esteem issues may be lurking in our life, but manifesting in external problems. The key attitude for success in life is to take total responsibility for what happens to us. We must work upon ourselves continually in order to manifest what we want. Creating high self esteem is one of the best things you can ever do to totally transform every aspect of your life.

We have to keep in mind that nothing is impossible and I am one who can do better. As a woman we have to develop the ability to love and accept ourselves we can improve and develop any aspects of ourselves that we choose. Developing a healthy self-concept takes deliberate planning and concentrated effort. It takes acknowledging our intrinsic value as a human being, and then working to acquire the skills needed to confront the many challenges and adversities we encounter in life.

When we possess a healthy self-concept, nothing can rattle us, or take off our stride. We are confident, poised, and assured because we know we are equipped to handle whatever comes our way. We have to
empower ourselves not only financial and social empowerment but mainly the psychological empowerment is the need of hour. Generally, to empower means to give power (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), ‘to energize. Psychological empowerment reflects what Rowlands (1997) called personal empowerment, as something internal that one can develop and strengthen and is not dependent on others. It focuses on the ability of the individual to initiate change that will influence events in her life. It is to energize women belief and confidence that they can improve their condition through personal and collective efforts. The individual's appraisal of the situation and willingness to change the situation is central in empowerment process.’

It has to be kept in mind that male violence against women is an undeniable phenomenon. Fear of violence is a cause of women’s depressed state, lack of participation in activities beyond the home, as well as inside it. Within the home, women and girls may be subjected to physical and sexual abuse as punishment or as culturally justified assaults. The insecurity outside the household is today the greatest obstacle in the path of women so much so that atrocities within the house appear endurable.

Above all, women need psychological empowerment. Psychological disempowerment seems to be at the root of females’ inability to decide and stand up on their own. The causes of psychological deprivation are imbedded in the cultural ethos and nurturing culture. In our country,
"Wife givers" are considered as also accepted socially and ritually inferior to "wife takers". This is compensated through the provision of dowry. A girl child, young Indian bride is nurtured the feeling of being a non-individual person: her own wishes and interests are subordinate to those of male-members in general and her husband and his family, in particular. These “values” shape their attitude to life, and their expectations of themselves.

Psychological empowerment may move women from a command-and-control mindset to empowerment by recognizing and releasing into the women the power that they already have in their useful knowledge, and experience.

It is feelings of self-efficacy through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both family practices and informal techniques of acquiring efficacy information.

Indeed a war needs to be waged against the Female Foeticide in India. Fully understanding that an evil such as this cannot be addressed in isolation; we are also closely examining related social malaise such as dowry, women’s underemployment and exploitation in the society, education standards of the girl child as well as high school-dropouts amongst the girls, early marriages, arranged marriage system. But over and above and along with these, the women need to develop positive
self concept and self esteem for themselves. And this takes us back to the culture of upbringing and learning.

Let us remember: "Everything begins with an idea." (Earl Nightengale) and the idea is that ‘power can be taken, but not given’. The process of taking is empowerment in itself (Gloria Steinem).

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Women’s Role in the Religious Practices in Angami Naga Society

Vitsou Yano and Rekha Pande

History writing has never been an innocent enterprise. The project always involves silences, selectivity and homogeneity. It always denies marginality and discontinuity. Most Indian historians always seek to integrate or homogenize various histories of the northeast region of India to its Vedic past and to the larger national struggle for independence. On the other hand, the ethno-nationalist historians of the region, in their attempt to separate their histories from the ‘mainstream’, engage in the reconstruction of its own history. This history is also not free from silences, selectivity and attempts at homogeneity. The reconstruction of Naga history in the twentieth century has not been free from its own silences and selectivity. Women’s history has been an excluded topic for a long time while writing history. Due to gender disparities, the history of Naga women is all the more difficult to trace unlike the history of men. This simple linear narration and representation of Naga history, with its selective representations and silence, denies Naga women a place in the Naga history. Hence, the paper attempts to break into these silences and selectivity by examining the role of women in the religious practices of the Angami Naga society and analyses the role of women in both traditional religion and in Christianity.
Nagaland, the sixteenth state of India is a border region in the north-eastern part of the country bound by Myanmar in the east. It shares its national borders with three India states, Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Assam in the west and Manipur in the south. The various tribes which claim or identify themselves as Naga do not inhabit the present day Nagaland alone. They are to be found in parts of the present day Manipur, north Cachar and Mikir Hills, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Nowgong of Assam, in the northeastern part of Arunachal Pradesh and in some parts of Burma (Myanmar). Mystery and obscurity surrounds the origin and other details of the early lives of the Nagas. The identity ‘Naga’ is a modern political construct. These tribes though called ‘Nagas’ defy a common nomenclature. But based on their art, material culture, language tone, etc., many scholars theorized with their different views. Some scholars theorized that the Nagas have some link with Indonesia and Malaysia, belonging to Tibeto-Burma family. Nagas exhibit a racial inter mixer in great ranges from the Himalayas, Burmese, Japanese, Thai, Malaysia, Philippians, Polynesian, Indonesian and Melanesian. The Ahom Buranjis also have records that by the time the Ahom came to Assam in the thirteenth century the Nagas were already settled in their present homeland. The history of the Nagas is a fusion of blood and races among the various tribes. The Nagas, thus, are believed to have certain unique custom, unique ways of living and unique ideas which no other tribes exhibit (Singh, 1987, p.20).
Today, the Nagas are one of the Mongolian racial groups found in the northeast of India, inhabiting the hills between upper Assam and northern Burma i.e. along the Patkai hills both southwest and northeast. The Naga tribes have distinctive tribe names with a number of sub tribe names. Some of the Naga tribes are Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sema, Phom, Konyak, Rengma, Sangtam, Chang, Khienmyungam, Yìmchunger, Zeliangrong, Chakesang, Mao, Thangkhuls, Maram Kuki, Puchuri, etc. Each tribe lives almost in exclusive area since time immemorial.

The Angamis are one of the major tribes inhabiting the region in and around Kohima. They came through the southeast via the east and north of Manipur and then to Khezhakenoma along with the Lothas and the Semas. According to the Khezhakenoma legend, the ancestors of these tribes (Angamis, Lothas and Semas) were brothers who lived together with their parents in Khezhakenoma village. When the three brothers spread out, the Angamis came to the present Kohima area. In another legend it is also believed that Maikel Stone was the place where ancestors of the Angamis emerged from the earth. The Angamis are divided into four groups or ranges such as the northern Angami, southern Angami, western Angami and Chakro\textsuperscript{15}. The pre-colonial period Angami society consists of not only the present Angamis but also the Chakhesangs.

\textsuperscript{15} Chakro literally means below the road.
Most of the Angami villages are situated in the hill slopes. But today most of the villages are subdivided into two or three villages such as ‘Bawe’\textsuperscript{16} or ‘old village’ and ‘Basa’\textsuperscript{17} or ‘new village’. Though the Angamis everywhere speak the Tenyidie dialect, the tone varies to some extent from village to village and even from group to group. The term ‘Angami’ is an external identification, for the Angamis do not call themselves by that name but ‘Tenyimia’\textsuperscript{18}. The term covers not only the Angamis but several other tribes in and around Kohima, such as Rengma, Zelang, Mao and Chakhesang. It should be clear that all the Tenyimia are not Angamis but all Angamis are Tenyimia.

In the traditional Angami Naga society, women whether, as a wife, daughter, sister or mother was made to feel inferior to man. Though the so called early colonial period made the women feel inferior she somehow stood to raise her voice. Women were confined to the household and food gathering duties within the confines of the village state. The traditional Angami Naga society not only placed women in the family and assigned her little or no place in the social, political and

\textsuperscript{16} Bawe means old settlers. People living in Bawe are also term as people living in old village as they are the old settlers

\textsuperscript{17} Basa means new settlers or new village.

\textsuperscript{18} Tenyimia came from the word ‘Thanyumo’ which literally means ‘who did not go any further’ according to the traditional legend they came from the Burma and gather at khezhakenoma, (a village under phhek district bordering present Nagaland and Manipur) and from there they came down to Kohima but did not go any further. The tenyimia consist of the Angami, Chakhesang, Rengma, Zelang, Mao, etc.
religious institutions, women were also assigned enormous role in economic activities. Commonly applauded as a daughter, wife, sister, and mother, the traditional Angami Naga society considered women as an equal partner to men in word, but the word ‘equal’ could not be considered because women were not considered as equal with men in practice. Among the different tribes of the Nagas, the status and role of women in the traditional society differs a lot even though the Nagas were situated in one region.

Women’s Role in Traditional Religion

The Angami women, though present in important social, political and religious institutions, were absent in the historical imagination of the Angamis. The roles of the Angami women in religious activities were no less significant from the Angami men not only in the household ritual and worship but also in the public festivals. However, women were absent in the pre-colonial Naga history. Women in the Angami Naga society though took part in religious practices; the rituals in the public arena were conducted by men and not by women. However, almost all the household rituals and ancestral rituals cannot be completed without the help of women in the early Angami Naga society.

Nagas did not have a particular name for their religion even though they were religious people. Many scholars hold that the original religion that
the Nagas believe was nothing but ‘animism’, but there are also some writers and scholars who do not agree\(^{19}\) (Bendanganshi, 1993, p. 33). But the religion of the Nagas was in the form of Animism who believed in the existence of soul and spirits of matters. The Nagas lived closely to nature and sense its mysterious powers and believed in the existence of a single supreme God, benevolent spirits and malevolent spirits. Besides the supreme God, the Nagas also believed in the existence of ancestral spirits, village deities, household deities, etc. The deities were worshipped with reverence and were offered sacrifices with food and drink. The religion of the Nagas was also centered largely on fertility cults. A woman plays very important role in the religious activities. The mother following the father did all the household sacrifices and rituals followed by the children. The role of the Naga women has not been mentioned and included in many writings of the Naga history, thus there is a need for reconstructing and redefining their past.

Though there were no set methods, the religion or ‘\(tsana\)^{20}\) were passed on by word of mouth (Chase, 2004, p. 35). Angami traditional religion called \(tsana\) and nanyü\(^{21}\) was characterized by belief in spirits. Before discussing the role of women in the religious activities in

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\(^{19}\) Writers like Bendanganshi, who viewed that the traditional religion was like that of Jewish’s and Christianity.

\(^{20}\) \(Tsana\) means the way of ancestors.

\(^{21}\) Religious rituals
pre-colonial society, some Angami cults will be discussed first. Chief of all or above all creature was ‘Kepenuopfü’. Kepenuopfü was considered to be the creator and supreme being of all the living creatures. The word ‘Kepenuopfü’ literally means ‘birth spirit’ which was also considered as the ancestress of the entire human race. The Angamis also had deities as ‘terhoma’ meaning spirits. But when the missionaries came and translated the word ‘terhoma’, they termed it as ‘Satan’. The concept and notion of all the terhoma turns out to be evil in the minds of the people. But the qualities of some of them were definitely benevolent. Kepenuopfü was considered male being but the term ‘pfü’ is feminine, which always carried a feminine sense.

The Angamis believed that kepenuopfü dwelt in the sky and when a person died his soul goes up to the sky to her. Some of the terhoma which the Angamis were aware of were like ‘Rutzeh’ the evil one. He was believed to be the giver of sudden death. ‘Maweno’ was the Angami goddess of fruitfulness. Physically, she was described to be very short with long hair that swept the ground behind her. She kept pebbles and paddy in her bag and when asked for gift she gives one and never two. These pebbles make the crops and cattle increase. Thus, those who saw Maweno were considered to be lucky. ‘Ayepi’ was a fairy that lived in the house and brought prosperity. She was not seen by many but her tracks sometimes were seen like those made by little human footprints in the paddy store or on the dusty floor.
Telepfü was another female spirit or Terhoma and she was a mischievous being. She carried people away but she did not kill them. She carried the people far away and makes them senseless, but allowed other people to find the person again. Other spirit or Terhoma like ‘Tsükho’ and ‘Dzürawü’ were two spirits: - husband and wife. Another spirit ‘Metsimo’ was a spirit who guarded the approach to paradise and ‘Tekhu-Rho’ was the god of tigers. Ruopfü was considered as the ancestress of all the spirits. Many think that kepenuopfü was ‘Kechi-Kerho’ who is also the spirit that inhabits stones. ‘Temi’ was a ghost who could not kill man but threatened and frightened the cowards. The majority of Terhoma were unknown by name, unspecified, vague inhabitants of the invisible world. ‘Ruopfü’ was also a female spirit which seemed to be the guardian angel. In some cases Ruopfü was seen as man’s own soul.

Thus, seeing the above cults, one would notice that the Angamis believed that there were more female spirits than male. Looking at the worship rituals of the Angamis, one find that it was carried out by certain officials of the villages. ‘Kemevo’ or the priest conducted all the important sacrifice in the village. He was usually the descendant of the founder of the village. He directed all the public ceremonies and fixed the days of the ceremonies as the office was hereditary (Hutton, 1969, p. 187). He was also the repository of the genealogical and

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22 Kemevo is the priest of the village. He leads all the religious rituals of the whole village.
historical tradition of his village, clan and kins. A female could never become a Kemevo. In some villages the post of the Kemevo was hereditary but in others it was not. It was taken over by the eldest member of the male member in the village. In the hereditary villages, the post of the Kemevo was taken up by the brother of the deceased Kemevo if he dies without a son because, the wife or the daughters could never take the post of the highest priest i.e. Kemevo. The reason behind the post not given to women was that women were confined inside the house and she had no idea about the village organization. Thus, when a Genna\textsuperscript{23} was announced by the Kemevo it was observed very strictly by the whole members of the village.

Angami women could not become priest or Kemevo but the wife of the Kemevo played a very vital role in helping her husband. All the family rites and rituals to propitiate the household deities, the ancestral spirits were led by the wife. The mother and the grandmother taught all the significant details of the religious rites and rituals to their children. Hence, women provided all the labour in preparing for these rituals and carrying out the rites. But all the important sacrifices for the so called Supreme Being were done by men alone, where women hardly even attended those rituals and sacrifices of the village level (Neumai, 2003, p. 18). Even though women could not become a Kemevo, there were some old women who were believed to have some power and know

\textsuperscript{23} Taboos or tabooed days for religious purposes.
about the future or about a missing person and healed sick people. These women can be termed as ‘themumiapfii’ meaning female shaman.

One of the most important festivals of the Angami tribe is Sekrenyi. ‘Sekrenyi’ is the festival for purification and fertility which falls on the second day after the full moon of the month of ‘keno’ (February) or the month of ‘kezi’ (March). The ceremony was done to ensure good health for the whole of the community for the coming year (Hutton, 1969, p. 197). On the day of the Genna, all the men folk goes to the village well to take bath and women were restricted from going and fetching water as they were considered to be unclean unlike men. After all the necessary rituals were done by men, women were then allowed to join in the festival.

Another festival of the Angamis was the ‘Tekranyi’ which was marked by singing and dancing. The singing and dancing was only for the unmarried youths but even married men could participate in it unlike married women who were restricted. This was the festival where women had the liberty to do almost all the Gennas with men and also make merry except that women in the first ritual should fix their eyes to the ground and should not look up. Hutton put in the reason that women were regarded as most immodest if they look about during this ritual. ‘Kavate’ was a ritual done exclusively by the women on the 5th of Rüde (December). This ritual was done for the manifold and plentiful wealth
of the family. The *Kavate* ritual was done by women and men were not allowed to join them. Every Angami festival begins with a ritual called ‘*Kizhie*’ which is done by women and not by men. If in a family, there were no female then a young unmarried girl will be called from some other family to do the ritual for that family.

The Angamis have different religious ceremonies for birth of a child depending on the sex. The *Genna* associated with women giving birth and other ceremonial rites pertaining to both mother and new born male or female infants takes about nine days to complete (Hutton, 1969, 218). But the birth ceremony of a boy child was different from a girl child. The birth ceremony was done according to the gender i.e., if it was a boy, then a cock was killed for sacrifice and if it was a girl then a hen was used. A plant called ‘*Zhahe*’ or ‘*Tsoheh*’ was also use for birth ceremonies. It was plucked by the mother where she adjures the baby to become strong and hard like the *zhahe* plant. But the *zhahe* plant was plucked according to the gender again i.e., different type of *zhahe*. A mother was generally valued in this community, thus a barren woman was not only deprived of complete self realization, but was also considered a failure as a woman and a wife (Melhotra, 1992, p. 153). Though there were differences in the birth ceremonies among the Angamis, the birth of a girl child as the first offspring in the family was considered favourable. Girls were considered to be more loyal, more
obedient and more helpful to their parents in the discharge of their duties.

Religious taboo upon women in traditional Angami Naga society was a common thing. For instance, Angami women were taboo or kenyü to eat the animals which have nails. This was because there was a fear that the grain in the ‘chünuo’ might deplete fast as women usually go and collect grains from the chünuo. Women were also forbidden to eat from broken earthen dishes while cooking fearing that their rice would get over soon as women are the one who measured and took out rice to cook. There were lot of taboos surrounding women and it might appear discriminatory for the modern interpreter, but many others feel that all these traditional taboos were considered as ‘protection’ for women from defilement.

Thus, the Angami women in traditional society though participated in religious rites and rituals their importance were not much acknowledged. But on the other hand, most of the religious practices without the participation of women remained incomplete. Though women in the Angami Naga society have played enormous roles in religious practices, yet, women were not treated equal as the society followed a very strong patriarchal system.

**Women and Christianity:**

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24 Chiinuo is a huge cane basket to store and keep the grains.
Two historical events in the nineteenth century which forever changed the Naga history was the invasion of the British in the Naga inhabited territories (from 1853 to 1876), and the coming of the American missionaries who Christianized the Nagas. The later event was more significant for the Naga society as a whole and for women in particular, for it forever changed the historico-political conditions of the Nagas. The two events were watershed events for the Nagas. For Naga writers like Horam, these two events threatened Naga culture but humanized them. As he put in as, ‘…..the danger that ever threatened Nagas cultural identity was the introduction of Christianity by the American Baptist Missionaries’ (Horam, 1988, p. 85). Though the cultural identity and the traditional custom had been affected yet it had a wider humanizing influence, a new gospel of love and tenderness, together with new benefits like, schools, dispensaries, and ideas of cleanliness and also opened a way to the modern world, which ultimately improved the life styles and conditions of women.

There was no doubt that the coming of Christianity to the Naga Hills brought tremendous changes in the lives of the people. For the first time Dr. Edward Winter Clark (E. W. Clark) in 1869 arrived among the Ao Naga tribes. Dr. E. W. Clark in December 1872 began to visit the hill region of the Ao people, the abode of the ‘Head Hunters’. Then, Christianity began to spread among the Naga people. Under the
supervision of Rev. Charles Dewitt King (C. D. King), a mission station was started in Kohima, the country of the Angamis.

In January 1832, the Angami Naga country was for the first time visited by Europeans when Captains Francis Jenkins and R.B Pemberton with a party of 100 soldiers and 800 coolies or porters (to carry their baggage and provision) marched from Munepore (Manipur) to Assam through the Angami territories (Elwin, 1969, p. 114). Their main objective was to search for a route between Manipur and Assam. The Angamis were the first Naga tribe who came into contact with the British. As a result of this contact, the Angami areas were the first to be annexed by the British. The coming of the American missionaries into the Angami country brought about changes in the Angami society and also in the role of women.

Many Naga historians and writers today consider the conversion of the Nagas to Christianity as a blessing, as an important historical development which brought them out from ‘darkness to light’. On the other hand, in reconstructing the historical past, some of the Naga historians and other Naga writers took pride in the ‘democratic political institutions’ (Ao, 1998, p. 43) and ‘village republics’ of the period which the others categorized as ‘darkness’. These historians could not escape this contradiction in their projects. Instead of looking at history as merely a transition from ‘darkness to light’, one needs to locate the historical realities from a different perspective. This study takes the
women’s perspective and tries to understand this historical phase by placing Naga women, particularly Angami women, at the heart of the debate.

The efforts of many American missionaries with the new faith Christianity to the Naga Hills was a turning point for the tradition and the culture of the Naga people. There had been major changes in all the fields, be it social, political, economy, religion, etc, the western culture has up to some extent conquered and influenced everything that was in and around the region. Not only did the living condition of the society changed but also the lives of the women in particular changed completely. Initially, the works of the missionaries were opposed by the Nagas. The teaching of the Christian doctrine was seen as threats to the traditional indigenous forms of worships and rituals. The first converts were not even allowed to live inside the village boundary.

Mrs. Mary Mead Clark (M. M. Clark), wife of the first missionary to the Naga Hills, Dr. E. W. Clark was the first to work for the welfare of the women in particular. Under the leadership of Mrs. Clark, women began to participate in many Christian activities. The evening meetings in the village were attended by both men and women but it did not fully meet the needs of the women, thus meetings were held exclusively for women. Among the several institutions championed by Mrs. Clark, establishment of school and fellowship were note worthy and these acted as primary agents of social change. Besides religious teachings,
one of the important emphases was on the proper understanding of women. The coming of Christianity and the work of Mrs. Clark for women was a turning point in the lives of the people. She encouraged women to serve their husband and children and to maintain their family properly thus in return served the church and the society.

The spread of Christianity brought about numerous problems and disorder in the Naga society. The conversion among the people led to disunity between village, families, friends, etc in the initial period. The missionaries discourage warfare between various tribes, villages and individuals. Worship of spirits and superstitious beliefs were stopped. On the other hand, most of the missionaries were considered as government spies by the villagers. However, very soon the missionaries were able to have trained converts among the Ao, Chang, Phom, Angami, Lotha etc., and there were responses of women converts as well. As mentioned above, conversion brought disunity among the people in the village, as the old orders of social life and culture began to be interrupted by the new faith. The earlier, converts were at first pushed out of the village, in which women had to suffer more than men. They were branded as rejected people when they were driven out of the village (Nuh, 1986, p. 62). But in some villages, the converts were not dislocated from the society but were forced to follow the socio-religious rites and observance of the village. The so called spiritual awakening at this period purely depended upon individual
decision. Though it brought in religious changes at first, it gradually affected all the cultural aspects of the people.

Naga women in general had benefited a lot by the coming of Christianity. Education was introduced for both boys and girls. The concept of ‘women stays inside’ began to crack up as women started coming out of their home to participate and study. Clark encouraged learning of English language for women. Evening literary class was introduced where women come and learn after their works were done in the fields or at homes. The setting free of slaves gave the women slaves a better position in the society and to exercise their own will power.

In some villages, conversion among the Angamis was totally an individual decision. But there were certain cases where women were compelled to convert to Christianity because male members of their family were also asked to do so. There were also women who had to take permission from their brothers or father in order to convert to Christianity. Due to conversion there were certain institutions which began to lose its significance such as the Feast of Merit25, midwifery, shamanistic practices, Morung26, warfare, etc,. There was also a

25 Feast of Merit was a feast given to all the villagers by the rich man in the village. This feast is given in order to show his thanks to the deities for his success and achievement either from head hunting trip or other achievements.

26 Morung is a dormitory for young unmarried people. This is a place where young people learn the basic things of life. There are some tribes who have the dormitory for both girls and boys. But the Angamis do not have female dormitory like some other tribes.
discouragement of ethnic life style clothes and traditional and the adoption of an alien culture.

The marriage system began to change with the coming of Christianity among the Angamis, where marriage became strictly monogamous. Marriage rituals and ceremonies which earlier lasted for many days slowly faded with just one day marriage rituals. Bringing the bride to the groom’s place at night also vanished with start of Christian marriage. Like the pre colonial period, even after conversion to Christianity, the Angami girls were given the liberty to choose the husband. Some of the customs such as, a bride taking her weaving articles and ornaments were encouraged even after converting to Christianity. Unlike the traditional society, the system of easy divorce among the Angamis became harder, i.e. earlier, divorce was among the simplest of rites. The new faith led people to have just one husband or one wife. With the conversion among the Angamis the number of divorce became less. Among these lesser divorce cases it was still easy to get it and where remarriage continued without much difficulty. Among the Angamis, divorce were given to women mainly on grounds that women were unfaithful, incompatible of temper and failure to bear children (Elwin, 1969, 307). After the conversion, marriage and divorce were not flexible like in the traditional society. Women began to feel more confident to raise their voice against the oppression by society in general and men in particular.
One of the most important things that the Angamis gave up with the coming of Christianity was the consumption of ‘Zu’ \(^{27}\) i.e. the traditional drink made from rice. Giving up zu was a pre-condition of the conversion. The missionaries taught people to give up drinking ‘zu’ as it was considered an offence before God. Zu was normally prepared by womenfolk and with their conversion, they began to quit making it. Almost all the rituals and sacrifices of the traditional religion used, zu as one of the main item. With the increase of converts there were more disputes arising out of rituals and feasting. This disputes grew up most in times of J. P. Mills, ICS, the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills. He was much opposed by breaking up of the Naga customs.

The burial system of the Angamis began to change its rituals and Genna (taboo). Putting the ‘mekho’ or the cane basket, weaving articles and other women’s necessary articles on women’s grave began to disappear. The putting of food on the grave was stopped by the Christians. Earlier, women who died of miscarriage or child birth were not given proper ceremony or no ceremony (Elwin, 1969, p. 510) but the Christians began to conduct funeral service for such kind of deaths.

The sekhrenyi festival (festival of purification) continued even after the conversion of the people. The missionaries taught them to discontinue the traditional practices with their ritualistic festivals, but people

\(^{27}\) Zu is made out of rice and it is also known as Rice beer.
continued to follow this to some extent. Women were not allowed to fetch water on the day of *sekre* i.e., the first day of ritual, though they were Christians. Christian women even maintain the *genna* during *sekhrenyi* as a sign of respect to their customs and practices. There were even Christian women who participate in song and dances during festivals inspite of the missionaries stopping them from doing it. Be it individual, household, clan or village as a whole, *Genna* was followed very strict before the advent of Christianity. When a *Genna* is announced, it is the women who need to be more careful about it as they worked more than men as *Genna* also meant ‘people observing a holiday’. Morung (young bachelors’ dormitory) disappeared with the modern period and young people began to live in their own house.

Church became the main institution around which Naga society revolved. Women in traditional society were only confined to perform rituals for household deities and ancestral deities but not for ritual in the whole village. Church as an institution gave a common platform to both men and women. The permit which was not given to a widow to participate in ancestral worship was now wiped of where women even widows could stand and participate in the church.

Church played an important role in relation to women’s welfare and vice versa. Churches had women’s departments, where women looked after the welfare of women in general. But again, there were some churches where a man was put as the secretary for women welfare.
Women group were allowed to do all that they can do in the church ministry under the supervision of their secretary. The role of the church and its contribution towards development of self awareness among women and the upliftment of their status was immense (Aier, 1998, p. 100). But patriarchy held firmly even in the church, where women could not achieved equality with men as they were barred from the ordained ministry i.e. from the priestly function.

Education made many wives and mothers earners, which increased their social standing. From traditional Naga society women worked equally in the field as men. The new period led the mother where she did not necessarily confine herself to household drudgery, but was free to engage in other social and economic matters based on her competencies and abilities. There was a greater sense of responsibility and more participation in the society after conversion to Christianity.

The economic participation of women also increased. Women participation in agriculture continued as their main occupation. The *liedepfii*²⁸ or the first reaper continued to be followed before every harvest. But there were some Christian families who started with prayer before the harvest. With new ideas, women apart from agriculture work started selling agricultural products and handicrafts. The idea of

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²⁸ *Liedepfii* is name given to a woman who reaps the harvest as the first person. In every Angami Naga society she plays a very important role as a first reaper as no one in the village can start reaping the harvest before her.
agriculture became broadened with new techniques and ways in terrace cultivation among the Angamis. This gave women new opportunities, self respect and independence (Chase, 2004, p. 205). Women started selling agricultural products and other products which has been encouraged by the missionaries. The Angami women usually got more involved in business than men. Her economic contribution was thus equal and sometimes more than her counterpart. Angami women wove and sold them to maintain herself and her family. Thus the Angami women grew vegetable in the kitchen garden and wove shawls etc. for commercial purposes. Education had indeed made a drastic change in the economic conditions of women; though the property right is not wholly given to a girl child there were cases where women were allowed to inherit land. An Angami girl still does not have the right to own the ancestral property, manage, sell or inherit immovable properties. There are some gifts given to her during her marriage but that does not mean that she gets an equal portion like her brothers from her father.

Angami women in the villages continued to work in the fields where as, some women in mission center areas like Kohima began to work in other jobs according to their qualifications. Education had empowered women to avail more knowledge outside her home which eventually increased her skills and assisted her to get dignified jobs that will facilitate her confidence, status and independence, where economic
independence is regarded to be a major factor in the empowerment of women.

When it comes to political participation of the Angami women, they did not take part in any of the decision making or participate in the village level even in the early colonial period. They were absent from the political domain in the village. In an Angami village, the clan elder exercised his authority within the village. There was also a distinction between public and domestic sphere in decision making. To the extent that authority of women in household has repercussion outside it (Melhotra, 1992, p. 164). The village male elder’s made the rules. Women were excluded from the decision making body. With the coming of Christianity women also had gained a representative to the village body. But it was of little significance as there were more number of males than females.

Thus, women began to participate more on religious ceremonies i.e. in church activities. Since there was not much ritual and sacrifice, women continued to take part in festivals even though they were Christians. But converting to Christianity did not make the Angami woman forget her role in the family as wife, daughter, sister and mother. Indeed she felt more responsible and self confident to run a family. The church offered them a sense of belonging and created space for them to participate and contribute. But men’s decision and policies continue which not only affected the women’s work but also the general work of
the church. There was also a new sense of freedom from fear of traditional practice that had confined them within the cultural norms related to purity and impurity, right and wrong, food taboos, etc..

There have been changes in the status of the Angami women over the past one hundred years. There has been ignorance on the part of the people in questioning the pre-modern status of the Angami women. One needs to see the changes that have taken place in the status of women after the coming of Christianity. Women in pre-modern Naga society apparently exercised authority in matters relating to marriage, divorce and family affairs. In modern period, women were perceived to have greater equality of status with men. The power of modernization has offered new options for women that have contributed to a change of role.

Traditional beliefs and practices continued to afflict the Angami women even after considerable modernization of the Naga society. Even in the new religion and new social formation, Angami women, whether it was in the social, economic, religious or political sphere have been denied roles equal to male members of the society. The freedom they got became much more pronounced in the later years, but even in the initial years women found themselves departing from their traditional roles.
With the new western system of education there had been a far reaching impact on attitude of the society. The impact on women was unprecedented. Education offered them a hitherto unknown world of interaction and participation where they recognized themselves as having the potential and in fact the responsibility to act as contributory members of the society in new way.

The Angami family remains a patriarchal system unchanged. The father is the head of the family and he owns all property. Every decision is taken by the male head though consent of the wife was sought for. After the coming of Christianity, the family as whole began to have a broader view about everything. Though the status of the wife was lower than the husband she continued with her household duties but she began to play more visible roles by participating in other societal activities. A wife in colonial period gets more privilege compared to her role in the pre-colonial period.

A woman in Angami Naga society from time immemorial has been an important figure in all walks of life, yet their important roles seems to be invisible while writing history of the Nagas. Her role in religious practices in both traditional religion and Christianity seems to be treated the inferior even though without her, the rituals were incomplete as mentioned above. The coming of Christianity has been a turning point in the lives of every woman in the Angami Naga society,
but this turning point did not clearly eradicate the disparities between genders.

Christianity and modern education did bring about numerous changes in the conditions of the Angami women. However, it failed to break the age old traditional patriarchal character of Angami society. It failed to replace the nature of traditional man-women relationship dependence. The church did not really change the structure of the society. The role played by patriarchy in relation to both the traditional patriarchal assumption of the missionaries did not allow women to attain full equality with men in church, where church itself acted as an agent of patriarchy. Yet women were still dependent on man for their well being. Christianity still taught the women to be faithful, dutiful wife, good mothers and obedient daughters. The traditional Naga society was a patriarchal society, and even with the coming of Christianity the society continues to be patriarchal in nature. Though Christianity has given a platform and more role to women to participate in churches and in public arena, yet the disparities between the genders cannot be lessened in any way.
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The Politics of Trafficking Amongst Tribal Women
in Manipur - North East India.

Ajailiu Niumai

Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the new phenomenon of trafficking amongst tribal women and children in Manipur, North East India. I have conducted a brief fieldwork in June 2008 and again during the month of March in 2009 wherein interviews were carried out amongst some girls who have been trafficked to Malaysia and Singapore via Guwahati and Kolkata. A group discussion was also conducted with the students’ leaders, elders and social activists in order to get their perspectives on this critical issue. Besides, the local newspapers and websites were consulted to collect further information on tribal girls who have been trafficked overseas. The international territorial borders in the North East are largely open and unmanned, which allows flesh trade to spread there without much enforcement against it. Young women are taken across the international border to work in brothels for coercive sex labor. The North East is generally perceived as an excluded region in India and the victims of human trafficking particularly women and children are doubly excluded as they face stigmatization, exclusion and discrimination in their society.

Sex labor victims from North East can be sold for as much as 600 US dollars in the global market as pointed out by Impulse NGO Network based in Shillong, Meghalaya. Since the late 1990s, thousands of people have been displaced in the North East by regular clashes between various militant and tribal groups. The
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said up to 200,000 people were displaced in Assam and 15,000 people in Tripura in 2003. Nedan Foundation (NGO) from Haryana conducted 7 months research in Kokrajhar district, a Bodoland Territorial Council of Assam, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2006. The staff of this NGO visited 25 relief camps of internally displaced persons [IDPs] in Kokrajhar and found nearly 200,000 people living in these camps without proper food. They also discovered that traffickers carry out recruitment drives in the relief camps by making false promises of jobs as domestic helpers in big cities. This study revealed that around 100 young women had gone missing from the camps during the years 2004-2006. Regional analysts fear that such "missing girls" may have been sold into flesh trade. Interviews by Nedan’s field teams with 60 teenage flesh trade workers in Dimapur, Nagaland revealed that many girls had been trafficked with false promises of sales jobs in India’s metropolises. Most of these girls were from broken and poor families in this ethnic ridden region, (retrieved on 10th February, 2009, http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=34306).

Meghalaya has also become a supply zone for trafficking. The reasons include ethnic conflict that forces people to migrate and live in displacement which adds to the prevalent economic impoverishment. The Supreme Court of India banned timber felling in Meghalaya which was a commendable step in attempting to protect the environment but there was no alternatives given by the Government to the rural population whose means of livelihood depends on the timber. Here, the push-pull factor is apt because poverty and unemployment pushes the rural populations to migrate to urban areas in search
of jobs which eventually lead their women and children to flesh trade. The displacement of people due to the construction of many Mega dams such as Barak, Tipaimukh, Singda, Maphou, Ithai, Khuga, Mapithel have also led to a huge migration in urban areas and there were a large number of children who were in need of special care and support, with unsound financial resources, in which women were coupled to enter the flesh trade as the only means for survival. Additionally, Proximity to the infamous Golden triangle in Myanmar has facilitated the free flow of narcotics and arms through the region. Also, extremely porous international bounders add to the existing problems. Sometimes, illegal arms trade was done in name of flesh trade across the borders. A few Burmese girls were caught with arms during trafficking in Mizoram in 2008. The dubious recruiting agencies have trapped many children and women from North East region by promising jobs like airhostess, free education in US/UK, free foods with lodging facilities and the like (http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=kshow&kid=1399).

Ram Shankar Singh (2009) opines that human trafficking is the illegal and highly profitable recruitment, transport, or sale of human beings for the purpose of exploiting their labour -- is a slavery - like practice that must be eliminated. The trafficking of women and children into bonded sweatshop labour, forced marriage, forced prostitution, domestic servitude and other kinds of work is a global phenomenon. Traffickers use coercive tactics including deception, fraud, intimidation, isolation, threat and use of physical force and/or debt bondage to control their victims. Women are typically recruited with promises of good jobs in other countries or provinces and lacking better options at home,
agree to migrate. Through agents and brokers who arrange the travel and job placements, women are escorted to their destinations and delivered to the employers.

Trafficking is the third most lucrative illicit business in the world after arms and drugs and a major source of organized crime revenue. The industry generates an estimated $7 billion to $12 billion annually and International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates traffickers net an additional $32 billion a year once the victims are in the destination country. ILO said the largest number of women trafficked in Asia are from within or from the region. This is further theoretically supplemented by Manuel Castells, in his book ‘The Rise of The Network Society’ who focuses on the global criminal economy as an inalienable companion of globalization, which is very true of North East India and South East Asia coming closer under the rubric of globalization. Manuel Castells aims to formulate a systematic theory of the information society, which takes account of the fundamental effects of information technology on the contemporary world.

The South East Asia and South Asia are home to the largest numbers of internationally trafficked persons, at an estimated 2.25 lakh and 1.5 lakh respectively. Trafficking of women is the recruitment, transportation, transfer and receipt of people for the purpose of exploitation (labour/sexual) by coercion, fraud, deceit, threat, abuse of power or position of vulnerability. It is an internationally organized criminal phenomenon clearly indicating human rights abuse. Due to persistent inequalities worldwide, women are more vulnerable to this slavery like practice, which is a consequence of structured gender inequality in the form of violence.
A brief background of the state is essential to be highlighted before analyzing the politics of trafficking amongst tribal girls. Manipur is bounded by Nagaland in the North, Mizoram in the South, Upper Myanmar in the East and Cachar District of Assam in the West. Manipur covers an area of 22,327 sq.kms with Imphal as it’s Capital (Census Directorate, Imphal). The geographical situation of the State extends from 93°03’ to 94°47’ East longitudes and 23°50’ North to 25°41’ North latitudes (Gori 1984:1). Manipur is divided into two main regions, comprising of the valley and hill areas. The total valley area is 2238 sq.km whereas the hill areas occupy 20,089 sq. km. The altitude of the valley above sea level is 2600 feet approximately and the height of the hills above sea level is around 6000 feet. The State is connected to the rest of India by road and it has flight connections to Guwahati, Silchar, Kolkata and Delhi but train service is not available. The State has a Legislative Assembly of sixty seats of which nineteen seats are reserved for Scheduled Tribe (ST) and one seat is reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC). The State is represented in the Lok Sabha by two members (one from the inner/valley constituency and the other from the outer /hill constituency) including one member in the Rajya Sabha. The National high-ways consists of NH-39 road connecting Nagaland and Assam, 39-Indo-Myanmar road, 53-New Cachar Road, and 150-Jessami-Tipaimukh Road.
Manipur is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic State and most of the ethnic groups are under the experience of some form of flux with regard to the definition of their respective ethnic identity. In such a background, it’s vital to mention that the process of globalization facilitates prostitution and trafficking of women including children. India’s Look East Policy also aids promising opportunities and challenges for the future of North East region and portrays the region as a business hub of South Asia because of its geographical location. But, this policy coupled with globalization-facilitated women especially from Manipur to be trafficked to other countries. The trafficking of women and children is a critical violation of human rights. It is also one of the most ruthless organized crimes transcending cultures, ethnicity, religion and topography worldwide.

GLOBALIZATION AND TRAFFICKING OF TRIBAL WOMEN

Globalization involves an extraordinary commercialization of women at the transnational level. The fast growing flesh trade has been particularly industrialized. The process of flesh trade industrialization generates huge profits in which uncountable number of women has been transformed into human commodities. The contemporary consumers have access to "exotic," “rare” and very young bodies of girls and children. The flesh trade is expanding and becoming sophisticated which caters to all types of demands with the technological revolution. The rise of the new media has also seen many websites recruiting women for all sorts of jobs disguised under words like ‘escort agencies’. Since these cannot be physically pinned down, the
perpetrators of such operations are rarely brought to book. They operate under the guise of dating and adult sites. Since 1990 onwards, the liberalization of the Indian economy in the wake of globalization has immensely reduced traditional livelihood means for the marginalized communities especially the tribes. The withdrawing of traditional livelihood skills, illiteracy and the like has facilitated the poor tribal women to enter into the flesh trade.

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internationally organized criminal phenomenon clearly indicating human rights abuse. Due to persistent inequalities worldwide, women are more vulnerable to this slavery like practice which is a consequence of structured gender inequality in the form of violence (http://ibnlive.in.com/news/india-tops-in-women-trafficking/21162-2.html). The feminist Cynthia Enloe (2000) revealed the gendered workings of high politics, without which the entire machinery of war, diplomacy and governance would have long since collapsed book ‘Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics. Enloe’s radical analysis of globalization reveals the crucial role of women in international politics today. Cynthia Enloe pulls back the curtain on the familiar scenes like governments promoting tourism, companies moving their factories overseas, armed forces serving in other nations and also shows that the real landscape is not men. According to Enloe, women's apparently problems in their marriages, families, workplace, in their coping with ideals of sexuality and attractiveness are the issues of politics at the global level.

In the past years, the criminal networks which traffic women and children for financial gain have increasingly controlled the flow of migrants across global borders (http://www.interpol.int/public/THB/Women/Default.asp). It is appropriate to complement Jaffrey Sachs (2005) affirmation that under extreme poverty, households cannot meet basic needs for survival and in moderate poverty basic needs are met, but just barely. Poverty compelled the tribal women in Manipur to enter into flesh trade against their desires, culture and norms. Some of the tribal people live in poverty without alternative job
opportunities. Hence, they place their hopes on others such as the dubious recruiting agents to secure jobs especially for their women that eventually lead them to the flesh trade. The question arises whether poverty can be alleviated among the marginalized tribal women using globalization and technology?

The tribal women who were forced into flesh trade are especially vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unwanted pregnancies because of lack of quality information and language barriers. The migration experts opine that trafficking of tribal girls is widespread within India but because of the great demand in South East Asian capitals, traffickers are beginning to traffic them outside India in the hope of making a fortune. To a certain extent, the government of India is also responsible for trafficking of tribal women in Manipur. They are not provided with enough employment opportunities (retrieved on 21st Nov, 2008, http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=44154). The process of globalization and liberalization have facilitated tribal women especially from Manipur to be trafficked to other countries such as Malaysia and Singapore via Guwahati and Kolkata as "Spices of India" by recruitment agents on the pretext of getting these girls housemaid jobs.

Trafficking of women in Manipur in particular, and North East India in general, exposes the failure of capital formation, production based investment, human resource development and pro-people planning while implementing the globalization process which made this region a fertile source for women trafficking. Inevitably, a pertinent question emerged; should Manipur and North East export flesh trade to the global tourists to import HIV/AIDS, as they have no other profitable commodity to export? Sen Sarkar (2005) confirms that in a
globalizing world, trafficking in women and children for economic and sexual exploitation continues and exploiters have little or no respect for the rights of victims of trafficking.

In January 2008, some of the poor tribal teenage girls from Manipur were flown to Singapore and Malaysia as housemaids by the job recruiting agents. After eight months, a Zeliangrong Naga tribal girl from Manipur managed to escape from a Kuala Lumpur night club, who ultimately alerted the Indian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, which then sought the assistance of Malaysian Police to rescue the other tribal girls (http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/probe-int o-trafficking-of-indian-women-into-se-asia_100107000.html). One of the escaped teenage girl revealed that they were lured by Phillip Gangmei, a local agent of Abel and Joe Private Limited, based in Singapore having a strong presence in the North East. These girls were forced to work in the brothels and massage parlours that attract well-heeled locals as well as tourists. After being rescued, these five girls were housed at the NGO called David Pasteur Christian Home for destitute in Kuala Lumpur.

Subsequently, India’s Ministry for Overseas Affairs investigated the dubious recruitment agents and started an enquiry against them. The rescued girls told the authorities that they were lured to Singapore with promises of jobs as maids for six months. But, they were later made to work as bar girls and prostitutes in nightclubs of Singapore and Malaysia. Manipur and Nagaland police have made some arrests in 2008 in connection with the case of agents luring girls to the neighboring countries. An Indian High Commission official said NGOs had indicated that there are around 150 women from Manipur, Assam and Nagaland been duped by recruitment agents in the past few years
Tribal women trafficked to other South East countries face insurmountable hurdles; because they stand little chance of returning home, let alone make the big money they have been promised when they were lured from their village and forced into prostitution. The girls undergo a long tortuous voyage of betrayal, disgrace and physical abuse. India’s National Commission for Women, the All India Christian Council and the North East Support Centre has called on the Malaysian High Commission in New Delhi to seek help in checking the trafficking of women.

Unlike drug trafficking where penalties are high, it is an easy walk for human traffickers with the authorities prepared to pocket part of the profits and “close an eye” to trafficking crimes in their midst. The flesh trade is also seen to be shifting from the main capitals of the region to towns and even villages because of the spread of opportunities and transport facilities. Meena Saraswathi Seshu (2008) opines that women who have been trafficked are more vulnerable than men and more likely to be in a situation where they are unable to control and protect themselves from HIV transmission. She argues that as illegal migrants engaged in the illegal trade of trafficking; they are very often subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of authorities, including immigration and police officials, whose systematic involvement in the trafficking is eminent and documented. Women can be violated, controlled and abused by forcible detention, lack of access to restoration and police corruption.

Trafficking of tribal women persists because of the advanced communication technologies, insufficient penalties against
traffickers, regional imbalances, economic disparity, low income, limited resources, gender inequality or marginalization, corruption, political instability, ethnic/indigenous minority, hill tribes, refugees, illegal migrants, low level of education and porous borders between North East India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and China. Sometimes, the women are obliged to pay heavy debts for their passports and visa, and they are threatened with violence. They are also physically abused, controlled, raped and get trapped as illegal immigrants overseas. A question arises as to how do the traffickers operate through employment or travel agencies, entertainment companies and advertisement in newspapers?

STIGMATIZATION OF TRAFFICKED WOMEN

A discourse on social exclusion cannot be accomplished without analyzing gender issue. Women are considered a ‘minority’ although they constituted almost half of the total population in India. Being a woman belonging to a minority community in India mean that she is automatically disadvantaged, particularly in the economic sphere. Generally, it is perceived that poverty and social exclusion affect men and women in different ways, and involvements that do not reflect this gender distinction have reinforced structural inequalities for women. Women’s subjugation is rooted in the structures of Indian society, which are patriarchal. Not all women in Manipur and Nagaland are excluded but they as a ‘minority’ are likely to be excluded more than men. Women from these states are most vulnerable and excluded because they hail from excluded and neglected region. Their mongoloid racial features also act as a disadvantaged in certain cases as many people acknowledged them mistakenly as ‘Nepali’ women. Nepal has been in the international limelight
because of their women being trafficked across international borders. The contemporary discourse on social exclusion is relevant to understand the minority women such as the North East tribal women who have been labeled, stigmatized and excluded from the mainstream society.

Biswajit Ghosh (2009) argued that even though trafficking is largely a borderless organized crime, India is fast becoming a source, transit point as well as a destination for the traffickers. The crux of the problem is that human trafficking, being a highly secretive and clandestine trade, remains mostly under-reported and untraced in spite of the fact that several international initiatives have been taken to impel governments into action. Ghosh pointed out that the increasing volume of human trafficking is also a reflection of the lack of political will on the part of the states as evident in the plethora of instances to allocate inadequate resources to combat the problem. He asserts that the problem is therefore much deeper and wider than their meager reportage to the police. His arguments are relevant to the situation of human trafficking in Manipur and Nagaland. The states do not have statistics of women and children being trafficked and these states definitely lack political will to prevent human trafficking and have not formulated inclusive policies for those trafficked victims.

Known local agents often lured tribal women and children. For example, 4 girls from Loktak project area of Churachandpur district in Manipur were trafficked with the promise to provide domestic jobs at Singapore. However, they were rescued by the Nagaland Police at Dimapur on 22nd July 2008 (Sangai Express & Nagaland Post). The trafficker Mr. N.K. Sony Kamei of Majuron Village in Loktak project area was arrested at
Bishnupur Police Station although he was bailed out later. Similarly, 22 children from both Chandel and Churachandpur Districts of Manipur were rescued on 13th August 2008 from Life Children Home based at Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. They were rescued by Child Line Foundation (NGO) and District Administrator Chennai and handover to the Chandel authorities in Manipur on 30th August 2008. These children were wrongly declared as orphans and have been carried under the approval of Local Tribe Council in the guise of providing free education. There are high chances of these victims being used as forced labour or removal of organs for commercial purposes [http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=show&kid=1383](http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=show&kid=1383). It is inevitable that women and children have been living in violent situation in Manipur. The trafficked women are often stigmatized and they have been deprived of the systematic rehabilitation programmes.

**TRAFFICKING AND LAW**

Article 23 in the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution prohibits “traffic in human beings and other similar forms of forced labour”. The two laws that address trafficking and prostitution are the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act of 1956 (SITA) which was enforced in 1958 and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1986 (ITPA), also known as PITA, an amendment to SITA. SITA is problematic in some ways as the prescribed penalties discriminate on the basis of gender: a prostitute, defined under SITA is always a woman. A person arrested for soliciting under SITA could be imprisoned for up to a year, but a pimp faces only three months. SITA allowed prosecution of persons other than the prostitutes only if the persons involved "knowingly" or “unwillingly” made
women engage in prostitution. Pimps, brothel owners and procurers could pretend to be ignorant of prostitution and escape punishment. The client is not viewed as an offender and could not be sanctioned under SITA. SITA only addressed street prostitution; prostitution behind closed doors was left alone which is a loophole that actually promoted the establishment of brothels. The law permitted penalization of women found to be engaged in prostitution under certain conditions. For example, Section 7(1) penalized a woman found engaged in prostitution in or near a public place. Section 8(b) did the same for a woman found seducing or soliciting for purposes of prostitution. Offenses under SITA were bailable, but a woman picked up from the street by the police usually did not have money or the influence to keep her out of custody (http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/tch_wo.htm).

Malavika Kumar mentioned that women are often apprehended from known red-light areas whereas their brothel keepers and pimps are left untouched. In cases of organized prostitution, this results in continual debt bondage for the amount paid by her keepers as a fine or as a bail amount. Kumar argues that India has adopted a tolerant approach to prostitution whereby an individual is free to carry on prostitution provided it is not an organized and a commercialized vice. India is also a signatory to international conventions such as the Convention on Rights of the Child (1989), Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) and the latest South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and
Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002).

India needs a specialized legislation to deal with trafficking even though the existing Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, deals with the offences of kidnapping, abduction, buying and selling of minors (Sections 359-373 of IPC). The IPC is narrower in scope to deal with the wide range of activities involved in trafficking which do not neatly fit into “kidnapping” or “abduction”. We see that kidnapping is also done by militant organizations. The only similarity between trafficking groups and the militant organizations is that both are network-centric aided by multiple nodes connected invisibly through cell phones and sophisticated communication tools without a centre. Therefore, we cannot break them since there is no single ‘centre’ or ‘epicentre’. This is elaborated in the book by John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, Networks and Netwars (2001) published by RAND corporation as a security alert. In order to ensure effective implementation of the existing law there is a need for awareness of all concerned in the criminal justice system, including judicial officers, prosecutors, medical experts and Police. Moreover, there should be partnership with the NGOs to ensure law enforcement, rescue, prevention, counseling, rehabilitation and re-integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A comprehensive sociological research is needed to sensitize the trafficking issue involving people from diverse segments including victims. The civil society must realize the intensity
of this menace by raising ethical questions and also seek media campaign.

- Advocacy on women and child rights and raising awareness amongst potential victims, police and clients of prostitution needs to be encouraged. Anonymity of the victim has to be safeguarded particularly in issues like court cases and police appearances to safeguard their life and prevent blackmail.

- Unconditional protection to victims (no agreement to give verification).

- Penalties should not be imposed for victims in countries of origin, transit or destination.

- Destination nations must establish mechanisms for legal passage and easy deportation and also take steps to pre-empt deportation by blacklisting certain agencies.

- National legislations should ensure the right to compensation to victims.

- Prevention strategies and approaches in countries of origin must be reflected in poverty reduction and social change policies.

- Governments must strengthen legislations against the perpetrators of trafficking and evolve new laws for transnational activities so that loopholes like visa on arrival and misuse of tourist visas are not abused.

**CONCLUSION**

The causes of trafficking lies in poverty, ethnic violence, urban-rural migration, militarization under Arms Forces Special
(Powers) Act of 1958, and globalization. Many women and children were pushed to the street and workplaces and trafficked outside the region to other parts of India and South East Asian countries. Children from Manipur are also notably trafficked through use of adoption procedures such as the case in Tamil Nadu. It is extremely important to stop them from leaving their villages by addressing issues of poverty, human rights and legal protection against exploitation. Many studies only treat the symptoms of such a malaise but the root causes should be first taken into consideration and then acted upon to prevent recurrence of such incidents. It is essential to examine whether individuals crossing an international border especially between North East states like Manipur, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar are perpetrators or victims. The passport, visa and other immigration papers that individuals have used to cross the international border and also the strategy used by organized recruiting agents for trafficking women have to be scrutinize thread-bare.

Combating and preventing trafficking is a shared liability between the countries of origin, transit and destination. The real, long-term impact of the various initiatives will be greatly reduced if they are not matched by actions in India, Malaysia and Singapore. Furthermore, it is critical to ensure that Manipur is prepared to re-rehabilitate the victims who return because victims often fall in the hands of traffickers a second time or face psychological trauma. The victims require a multidisciplinary approach such as security, legal assistance, psychological support, medical care and rehabilitation. And, government must reject the practice of criminalizing victims of trafficking and placing their lives at risk through deportation, detention or
imprisonment. The need of the hour is that the State Government of Manipur and Central Government of India have to work closely with its counterparts in South East Asia to stop the trend. Lastly, Foreign Policy initiatives should also become gender sensitive as we see that in International Relations (IR), very few thinkers of policy makers take cognizance of this aspect (J. Ann Tickner’s “You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements Between Feminists and IR Theorists”). We may end on an optimistic note that there may be more meaningful and fruitful interactions between feminist viewpoints and national and International policies and this would inaugurate a new agenda.

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WOMEN AND THE STIGMA OF WITCH HUNTING

(With reference to Assam)

Neeta Sharma

A witch is said to be generally a woman who uses magic or witchcraft for evil purpose. And witch-hunting is searching for witches or evidences of witch craft often involving moral panic, mass hysteria and lynching.

If we go back into a systematic study of history right from ancient to modern times, we can observe that history has a gory record of alleged witches with their supposed incarnations, branded and executed as harbingers of evil and sickness. Epilepsy, hysteria, chicken pox, impotence and more recently HIV/AIDS have been attributed to spells cast by witches. Church authorities conducted the ignominious Spanish Inquisition in the 15th century to denounce witchcraft, sorcery and alchemy, besides heresy and burnt even some brave young women like Joan of Arc at stake. The infamous 1962 Salem Witch trials in the US saw public frenzy whipped up by fantastic and thousands of people mostly women, who were burnt at stakes or killed by dunking, called trial by water. People condemned as witches were also hanged, strangled, drugged to an unconscious or semiconscious state and then either tied to a stake or pushed into a barrel of tar and set afire. Punishment for malevolent sorcery is addressed in the earliest law codes preserved both in ancient Egypt and in Babylonia. It played a conspicuous part. The code of Hammurabi (18th century BCE short chronology) prescribes that-

If a man has put a spell upon another man and it is not justified, he upon whom the spell is laid shall go to the holy river; into the holy river shall he plunge. If the holy river overcome him...
and he is drowned, the man who put the spell upon him shall take possession of his house. If the holy river declares him innocent and he remains unharmed the man who laid the spell shall be put to death. He that plunged into the river shall take possession of the house of him who laid the spell upon him.

The witch trials in Early Modern Europe came in waves and then subsided. There were witch trials in the 15th and early 16th centuries, but then the witch scare went into decline, before becoming a major issue again and peaking in the 17th century. Some scholars argue that a fear of witchcraft started among intellectuals who believed in maleficium that is harm committed by magic. What had previously been a belief that some people possessed supernatural abilities now became a sign of a pact between the people with supernatural abilities and the devil. To justify the killings, Christianity and its proxy secular institutions deemed witchcraft as being associated to wild Satanic ritual parties in which there was much naked dancing, orgy sex and cannibalistic infanticide. It was also seen as heresy for going against the first of the Ten Commandments or as violating majesty, referring to the divine majesty.

Witch hunts still occur today in societies where belief in magic is predominant. In most cases, these are instances of mob justice, reported with some regularity from much of Sub-Saharan Africa, from rural North and East India and from Papua New Guinea. Moreover, there are some countries that have legislation against the practice of sorcery. Saudi Arabia is the only country where witchcraft remains legally punishable by death.

The Indian Scenario

Coming to the context of India and especially the North-East, we see that labeling a woman as a witch is a common ploy to grab land, settle
scores and personal grudges or even to punish her for turning down sexual advances. In a majority of the cases, it is difficult for the accused woman to reach out for help and she is forced to either abandon her home and family or is driven to commit suicide. Most cases are not documented because it is difficult for poor and illiterate women to travel from isolated regions to file police reports. Less than two percent of those accused of witch hunting are actually convicted, according to a study by the Free Legal Aid Committee, a group that works with victims in the state of Jharkhand.

A 2010 estimate places the number of women killed as witches in India at between 150 and 200 per year or a total of 2,500, in the period of 1995 to 2009.

The inhuman trend of witch-hunting is prevalent in the state of Assam too. Though it is generally confined to schedule castes, schedule tribes, tea-tribes, and other tribal population yet sometimes witch-hunting occurs among the upper castes too. The question which arises is why even in this modern world with so much of progress and development in every aspect of life, the trend of witch-hunting still continues to exist? It can be well understood that the witch-hunting related tortures and deaths are not the remnants of the ancient barbaric world but it has some kind of relation with the process of modernization!

The villages and tea-gardens of Assam, where witch-hunting is still prevalent are not always cut-off from the civilized world. For the last one and half decade, each village in Assam has a primary school at the minimum and either has public health centre of its own or nearby medical facilities are no more a far off cry. Then why the blame of somebody's sickness or the death of animals is put on jealously of some other woman and she and her family is not only tortured but even sometimes hacked or burnt alive to death. Often these incidents are
ignored terming them as superstition. But it's important and necessary to understand that sometimes there may be socio-economic or even political reasons hidden behind such incidents. Moreover, inspite of schools and public Health Centers being established they are not managed or attended properly. Teachers in schools and doctors in health centers are unavailable most of the times.

When we try to analyze the problem of witch-hunting in Assam we notice that witch-hunting in Assam is prevalent mainly among the Bodo tribes and the Southali Tea Tribes. Both these tribes are lagging far behind in the field of education, employment, income and other facilities. The one thing which is common among the witch-hunting tribes of Assam is that they are forest dwellers. As men went hunting in the forests, women went into the forests to collect food- like fruits, roots, arum, leaves etc. Women also had knowledge of various medicinal plants, roots and leaves, which was inherited by their daughters and daughters-in-law. Thus the women occupied important status in the family because they not only served them economically but also were the food-servers of the family. The society not only recognized the strong status of women but also at times considered them to be possessor of divine powers. Later on, these tribes started permanent cultivation using the plough, instead of food-gathering and jhoom cultivation. In the Hindu society some restrictions existed in women using plough or being involved in cultivation. Once women got involved in cultivation and farming, immediately the question of their legitimate right on the production and also on the land arose. So, in the Southali agricultural system, unmarried women and widows had the provision of special rights. May be to deprive women of their traditional rights, it became important to identify them as unholy and ill-omen for the society.
It has been observed that in every society where witch-hunting is practiced, generally women who are lonely, economically weak or is a widow are targeted and victimized. Moreover an independent, outspoken and straightforward woman is also victimized because she is seen as a threat to the male dominated social order. The aim behind brutally and publicly punishing the women by all the villagers co-operating in the process is to send a message to such other women in the society. But one thing that comes out clearly is that in these societies, women still occupied a higher status and respect and were looked upon with a sense of awe because both in the Bodo and Southali tribes, all the traditional and customary rules and regulations are followed in the process of labeling a woman as a witch. The whole society is involved in the process, total "public jurisdiction" is followed and a well-known "witch-doctor" is brought even from far-off places, if need be on payment. A public meeting is called where the witch-doctor determines and announces the witch or the women, generally holding her responsible for all the diseases or deaths in the village. Often death sentence is announced as a punishment for the witch. Everyone male, female, children in the village participate in executing the death sentence, so that the blame does not come on any one or two particular individual but is equally shared by all the villagers. The 'witch' is stabbed and cut because according to popular belief, the concerned patient is cured or the society is relieved from the ill-effects of the 'witch', only when she bleeds. No one informs the police or the administration about such incidents, nor anyone co-operates with the police in the investigations. In the tribal communities a woman in the family comparatively has a say and a preference over the man, so socially in order to establish their dominance man punish the 'witch' publicly. In the name of social good, even women are compelled to participate in this inhuman brutal act.
In Assam cases of witch hunting have been detected mainly in three districts- Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Sonitpur. Along with the increasing number of witch hunting cases in the state, the cases are becoming more complex. Originally, incidents were limited to tribes meting out public punishments to those charged with practicing black-magic. Today witch-hunting cases often relate to personal rivalry, grabbing property or land and other divisive issues, apart from mere superstition. Lately there is also a trend of killing the suspected persons secretly, preferably at night, taking advantages of the darkness, so that no one can identify the culprits.

Moreover, in the past only women were vulnerable to be attacked as witches in traditional societies, but of late the attacks are focused on entire families, even if only one member is accused. For instance, five members of a family in Sadharu tea estate of Biswanath Chariali of Sonitpur district in central Assam were beheaded by their fellow villagers in March 2006. The hysterie mob then marched to the police station carrying the severed heads of the deceased persons. Again on June 10th 2008, four persons of a family under the Biswanath Chariali police station of the district were buried by the locals, on the suspicion of practicing witchcraft.

These incidents take place where there is severe lack of basic infrastructure including healthcare, education, sanitation, road network, drinking water and other facilities. But it is not only the disadvantaged and poor who have been targeted. In September 2008, Bishnu Roy, the senior most leader of North Salmara district of Koch-Rajbanshi Yuba Chatra Sanmilani, and his mother, in Abhayapuri police station of Bongaigaon district were targeted and attacked by a mob of 500-600 villagers on the suspicion of being witches.
However, the positive aspect which is emerging out presently is that, different NGOs and women social organizations and also student bodies are working and doing their best to develop awareness among these tribal communities against witch-hunting practices. Some people like Upen Rabha Hakasam and Mrs. Birubala Rabha are carrying out their crusade against witch-hunting at individual level.

Upen Rabha Hakasam, a professor at the Department of Folklore in Gauhati University has been fighting against the harmful practice over the years. He himself being a member of Rabha tribe has suffered a lot as some of his relatives too have become the victims of suspicion of practicing witchcraft or black-magic. He says, "I have been fighting against this social evil in our tribe for so many years, but there is hardly any change. The custom has been deep rooted in the minds of the people. Unless, there is a change in the policy framework, no one can do anything. I believe victims of witch practices themselves must come to the streets to assert their right for a dignified life, in the way the sex workers and homosexuals have done already. "Unless and until these victims themselves come to the street, I believe nothing will change and people with vested interested will always take the advantage of their haplessness." Hakasam adds. He says the lives of those facing expulsion from their villages has become miserable, they have to move to remote areas to escape the stigma , as their 'witch' brand spreads very fast to nearby areas. In those places too, where these victims find new livelihoods, they have to hide their identity, for fear of the past catching up with them again.

Hakasam says that the low socio-economic status of these tribes and communities in the state is a major reason why such practices continue. But he equally blames the people to believe in such baseless accusations, and this is not just among the poor. "It is surprising that even a section of the educated people of these tribes and communities
still believe in such superstitions, like the existence of witches. Also as some kind of religious rituals are attached to this belief, it becomes difficult for outside agencies or individuals to intervene in such situations and motivate them against such social evils”, he adds.

This is one reason why, even as incidents of witch-hunting have been increasing, there are not many organizations working to tackle this practice. Instead, it has been left to national organizations and other platforms to do what they can. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the apex student body of the Bodos, has launched a vigorous awareness campaign to fight against superstition of witch practices in the Bodo dominated areas. The ABSU, which has been running the campaign since 2004, has so far rehabilitated at least 40 innocent persons who have been expelled from their original villages on the suspicion of witch practices, says Lawrence Islary, a senior leader of the student body.

The improvement of basic healthcare and education in these areas may improve the situation to a great extent. Unfortunately, both healthcare and education infrastructure is very poor in all tribal dominated areas in the state. Absence of doctors is directly related to the problem. Villagers and tribes are compelled to visit local quacks for treatment of different diseases. During monsoons in particular, water-borne diseases like malaria, cholera and diarrhea often takes an epidemic form in the villages. If the treatment is beyond their limit, these quacks, just to remain on safe-side, accuse someone of the village of being a witch and declare that the bad spirit of that particular witch is responsible for diseases and deaths in the village! Such pronouncements and the prevailing superstitious beliefs in witchcraft provoke ignorant villagers to target their own neighbors and acquaintances.
In non-Bodo areas, there has been less progress against superstition and crimes linked to it. A lot more is needed to be done, across the state, to have a significant impact. Hakasam is also critical of the role played by the State Government. There has been no serious effort to punish the culprits, nor is there a proper investigation into incidents. In many witch-hunting related cases, the culprits are easily identifiable or in many cases they themselves admit their guilt. But serious punishment for such crimes is rare. This has encouraged the vested interests, aggravating the situation, say Hakasam. Unlike Bihar or Jharkhand, in Assam, there is no legislation to deal with the situation, despite the increasing incidents of witch-hunting.

Birubala Rabha is another lone crusader in the fight against witch-hunting. Born in 1949, in a very poor family in Goalpara district, she studied upto class V and was married off at the tender age of 15. Her elder son was declared to be attacked by a witch and the witch-doctor said that he would die within a year. The boy had some psychiatric problem and was admitted by Birubala in a mental hospital for treatment and he is still living. From 1999, Birubala Rabha with the aid of "Assam Mahila Samata Society" has been arranging meetings, camps and awareness programmes to make the villagers understand the absurdity behind the concept of 'witches' and 'witch-hunting'. Once for sheltering a woman, Birubala was declared a 'witch' by the villagers, Birubala Rabha was even tried to be killed. With the intervention of the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police of Goalpara, her life could be saved. Under her leadership the NGOs and Women Organizations have been doing a commendable job in the tribal areas like children's education, hygiene, anti-liquor drives, awareness camps against superstitious beliefs, like diseases caused by evil witches and witch-hunting. Even men were attracted by such good-will motives of Birubala Rabha and started attending these meetings and thus with her
courage, self-confidence and determination she has been able to engage the village men folk in social work.

For her commendable selfless contribution and social work Birubala Rabha in 2005, was among the 1000 (one thousand) women from 150 countries of the world, to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005. She was one among the 158 (one hundred fifty eight) women to be nominated from South-Asian countries for the Nobel Peace Prize. She also was awarded the Real Heroes Award on 10th March 2010, by the IBN 18 Network of India.

On April 17,\textsuperscript{th} 2011 yet another headline appeared of two women being killed in Assam's witch-hunt. The news has come along with some recent data of 2010 and 2011. The data talks of the reported cases, but many cases of witch-hunting go unreported. Moreover, suspected cases of 'dainis' from a village are not even recorded; only serious crimes involving bodily harm are documented. So it is not possible to collect the exact number of persons who have been killed due to suspicion of practicing black magic or witch craft. Some of the data of the last few years, collected from internet sources and district police administration are given below-

<table>
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<th>District</th>
<th>Cases Registered</th>
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<th>Total number of Deceased victims</th>
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<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>27</td>
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The above data are subject to little variations as many new cases might have been added.

Since the problem is deeply rooted in the tribals and santhals, particularly among the Bodos, Rabhas and Tea-Tribes of Assam, the only way to tackle the problem is to expand education facility, health and communication and transportation facilities in the areas. Only public consciousness can bring an end to this problem. People must get rid of superstitious beliefs and take the help of doctors when sick, instead of going to the quacks or witch doctors. Visual, audio and print media should play a vital role in spreading awareness among people.
School syllabus should incorporate essays and topics on such issues so as to sensitize young minds about such social evils. In a male dominated society, women should have proper education so that they are not carried away by such superstitious concepts and are able to raise their voice against any type of atrocity being committed against them. The society of Assam can get rid of the stigma of witch-hunting only when women make themselves strong enough through knowledge and education to voice their protest against such inhuman practices.

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INTRODUCTION:

Mizoram, one of the northeastern states of India is bounded by Cachar district of Assam and Manipur in the north, Arakan hills of Myanmar in the south, Chin hills of Myanmar in the east and Tripura and Chittagong hills tract of Bangladesh in the west. The inhabitants of Mizoram are called Mizo and comprise various tribal groups such as Lusei, Ralte, Fanai, Lai, Paite and Mara.

Amongst the northeastern states, Mizoram is one of the most rugged mountainous regions richly endowed with forest resources, where women are strongly interconnected with forest in the historical and cultural context. Traditionally, gender roles has assigned women as the main producers of jhum cultivation, gathering food, fuel, fodder, leaves, medicine and water for the family. Hence, women directly play
an important role in the use of forests which is very crucial to the success of conservation policy. This close relationship provides a better knowledge for women with regard to the utilization and protection of forest resources. Hence, this paper analyzes the historical intersection between forest ecology and Mizo women and their indigenous knowledge. It also seeks how and why the women’s knowledge has been remained unheard and looks for suggestions that would recognize women’s voices in order to develop their knowledge in current economic and environmental discourse.

**Feminizing Nature:**

Eco-feminists argue that cross culturally women have been associated with or are seen to be closer to nature because of their reproductive function and men on the other hand are associated with culture. In patriarchal thought while nature is seen as inferior to culture, women are seen as inferior to men (Agarwal, 1992). Sherry Ortner who developed this idea has argued that in every culture women are attributed a second class citizen (Ortner, 1974). In so far as culture universally attempts to control and dominate nature, men universally dominate and subdue women. Hence, celebrating the superiority of the feminine in relation to nature is an important path into cultural eco-feminism. Exposure to nature-based religion, usually that of the Goddess is essential in order to place women in high esteem as those who bring forth the life. (Spretnak, 1987).
Vandana Shiva, who elaborated the idea of a “feminine principle” in nature, stated that in Indian cosmology while nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance (Shiva, 1988). In the context of Mizoram, this idea of feminizing nature can also be linked with the earlier belief systems and practices. Before the advent of European Christian missionaries, Mizo religion was very close to nature. They construed the natural world as animated and created by spirits and goddess/gods. Forests and animals were considered as the property of goddess/gods of the villages. So, they believed that forests were under the protection of these deities and trees could not be cut without their permission. Hence, hunters had to seek the blessings of these deities by performing sacrifices.

Female deities such as Khuanu (Mother of the nature), Khuavang, Lasi (guardian of animals) justified the symbolic role of women as guardians and protectors of the natures. Such deities meditated between nature and humans, inspiring rituals and behaviors that helped to regulate environmental use and exploitation. For instance, the whole earth belonged to Khuavang divine, who designed all the rivers, trees and hills ranging from north to south (Ralte, 2007). It should be noted that the belief systems protected critical elements of natural environment in traditional society (Hmingthanzuali and pande, 2008). They therefore offered sacrifices to her in order to protect themselves
from misfortune and unnatural diseases. The Puithiam (priest) offered sacrifices by citing religious incantations:

“Mi that sa kapin khal ang che, Fanau maltluan chawiin khal ang che, Tuaktovin khup bihin khal ang che, Buh za thlovin khal ang che, Nuntluak pang dam in khal ang che”

This means,

“Bless me with the ability to hunt well, Bless me with children, Bless me with plentiful crops, Bless me with long life, Bless me with health”.

The main roles of Khuavang is clearly expressed in the above chant as a bestower of blessings, who could protect the people from all misfortunes and had powerful control over animals, crops, and sources of reproduction. Another woman often mentioned in the Mizo history was Pi Kawli, who was believed to be the creator of paddy (Parry, 1988). But unlike other female deities, she was never worshipped as a spirit, yet her name was chanted during the performance of Buh thai for Chawng sacrifices.* In this ceremony four or five men called Thai Parual trampled the paddy followed by a group of young men and girls who called out the name of Pi Kawli.

Lasi were the other female deities of the forests. The Mizos described them as beautiful women who lived in large groups. The Lasi seemed to be concerned only with wild animals over which they had complete control. They also possessed powers of bestowing hunters with the
ability of shooting animals. Men who received a sign from the Lasi and fell in love with them were called Lasi zawl (Lorrain, 1975) who were regarded as skilled hunters and were looked upon as being possessed of their spirit. The most famous Lasi in the Mizo folk tales was Chawngtinleri. She was also often called “chieftainess, creator and guardian of all the animals (Ralte, 1997). In order to get more blessings from Lasi they also offered sacrifices to her. Though they did not worshipped Lasi as goddesses, the Mizos regarded them as guardian angels that could protect them from all misfortunes like other deities.

Though it was not directly concerned about the subject of natural resources and their uses Christianity changed the Mizo’s traditional notions of nature. Ever since Christianity was introduced in the region in the last decade of the nineteenth century, their dependence on the female deities/goddesses had been dislodged. In the early twentieth century, in the ceremonies celebrating successful hunts the Mizo hunters would sing:

“Zion ni a lo en hman chuan, Hnam ze tin hian
Sa hi Buannelah a piang a, Chawngtinlerin a siam an ti
Immanuel lal siam a lo ni, Kan tan a rawn phal thin,
“Until Christianity emerged, Every tribe believed that-
All beasts were born in the forests, created by Chawngtinleri
Yet in the light of Christianity, We realized that it was Emanuel
Who created and gave them to us
To receive His love”.

After embracing Christianity, the Mizos believed in one supreme God who commands over the entire universe and they gradually lost their belief in female goddesses/deities. Along with the downfall of female goddesses, the Mizos also lost their traditional reverence for the environment. A Mizo feminist theologian Lalrinawmi Ralte argues in this context, “The absorption of ancient deities into Christianity, often followed by Church construction was another threat to sacred groves in Mizoram” (Ralte, 2007). As in the words of Gerda Lerner, an emerging patriarchal culture from the west dethroned the goddesses/deities and replaced them with male God to whom the female deities became subservient (Lerner, 1986).
**Women’s Indigenous Knowledge on Forest Economy:**

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) can be broadly defined as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge – technologies, know-how skills, practices and beliefs – that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment. The practice of is still intact among indigenous (local) communities in many parts of rural areas, which has made it possible for the indigenous communities to live in harmony with their environment for generations. In many societies the knowledge has been handed down orally from generation to generation (UNEP Definition). Some forms of knowledge are expressed through stories, legends, folklores and rituals etc.

Despite the growing awareness in promoting the system of IK, documentation of women’s knowledge has been largely ignored in current discourse. As a result of the recent initiative taken by the group of eco-feminists, the relationship between women and environment has been debated openly. Some scholars argued that women and men have historically had different roles in production relative to the environment (Merchant, 1990). As producers and reproducers of life, women in tribal and traditional cultures over the centuries have had highly significant interactions with the environment. They have significantly contributed to the management, conservation and use of
natural resources such as managing water, agriculture, plants, animals and forests. Their extensive experiences make them an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise on environmental management and suitable actions. This perception is relevant to the tribal societies of Northeast India particularly in the context of Mizoram, where majority of the population (52%) still depend on jhum cultivation and forest resources for their livelihood.

Agriculture has been the backbone of Mizo economy since earliest time. All the members of the community were involved in Jhum cultivation that demanded labour from both the sexes. Though men and women take part in jhum agriculture, there was a sharp gender division of labour. While accompanying men in harvesting, burning and clearing of the forests, the Mizo women played a very important role in seed collection, handling and storage. They also preserved and germinated seeds besides sowing and weeding of the seeds right from the clearing of the cultivation sites. To preserve small seeds, they used dry gourds or a piece of cloth and stored them on planks in a fireplace called thehhlan and for the protection of large quantities of paddy they used pareng (bamboo basket) instead of big tins or containers in order to avoid moisture. The intricate knowledge involved in performing this task has been transmitted from mothers to daughters, from sister to sister, mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law or from one village sister to another. Presently, this traditional technology is widely performed by
women in rural and remote areas to sustain their family as major population are still dependent on jhumming and as modern technology are not accessible to them. Women therefore are the repositories of this vast area of knowledge and owners of this traditional agriculture technology. (Hmingthanzuali& Pande, 2009).

Traditionally, collection of firewood was mostly in the hand of women. It is interesting to note that women were very selective while collecting firewood. They could discern between species, which were suitable for domestic use, and those that were not. Mostly they avoided using wood that produce sparks when burnt, for example the branches of trees like Thlanvawng or Gomari and Vang or Siris. Generally, they usually collected Herhse or Nahor, Nageswar, Khiang or Chilauni, Zairum or Von. Usually the firewoods were collected between the months of January to June and October to December and stored it on planks outside the house or above the fireplace in the Kitchen and used it according to the requirements of the family. Modern ideas might disagree with such “primitive” practices, but we can see that it protect wasteful use of forest ecology. Introduction of commercial economy disrupted the use of forest ecology so that collection of firewood has been shifted from women to male (Hmingthanzuali&Pande, 2009).
“Development” - Patriarchal Project and Degradation of Women’s knowledge:

Like other British colonial states, Western education is regarded as an important instrument of societal development and modernization in Mizoram. It opened the entry of objective reasoning and exposure, which again was bound to influence peoples’ perception of natural resources. The result was that in 1951 a massive 93% of the population was dependent on agriculture. But the government jobs were available in the 1970’s with the formation of the Union territory and then the state of Mizoram, which resulted in the rapid diversion of a section of workforce to service sector (Singh, 1996). Hence, the number of people directly dependent on forest and jhum cultivation had been reduced and people gradually dispossessed their own knowledge and became increasingly dependent on government management programs.

The consequence of new government and administrative posts during and after the 1970’s was the emergence of towns. To provide the requisite administrative infrastructure and staff, suitably located villages grew into township. Within a short span of time the process of urbanization represented the decreasing degree of the population pressure in the countryside. However, later these opportunities declined and such employment could not grow much further (Singh, 1996). Hence, shifting cultivation is still the source of income in both villages and rural areas. To replace jhumming the government introduced a
number of policies such as horticulture, terracing, and small scale industries under New Land Used Policies (NLUP). Between 1990-1996, the government spent over Rs. 132 crores to 41,000 beneficiaries. (1996a).

While development has always been linked with the introduction of western technologies and intensive agriculture, 'Modernization' resulted in the introduction of new forms of dominance in the Third World. To exemplify this, Vandana Shiva argues, “What is currently called development is essentially maldevelopment, based on the introduction or accentuation of the domination of man over nature and women” (Vandana, 1988). In the context of Mizoram, the Department of Rural Development, recently estimated that 80% of the population resides in the recognized villages. Besides, forests constitute the most important resource of the region, which cover 18,338 Sq. km representing 86.99% out of total geographical area of 21081 Sq. km. Majority of the families are thus dependent on indigenous knowledge and products of forest including jhumming, housing materials, firewood, and food products etc. Since women are the ones who are responsible for gathering those domestic needs from the forest ecology, this brings them close to the environment to have perspectives, values and knowledge, which is somewhat different from men. In spite of this, the role of Mizo women in generating “knowledge” seldom receives adequate attention from the state.
The first factor for the marginalization of women’s role and knowledge in forest management is the ‘limited rights to resources and equally limited say in the political processes’ (Barpujari, 2005). The Mizo society is a patrilineal, patrilocal and patrimonial society, where all the inheritance rights go to the male line. Though women contribute a major role in sowing, weeding and harvesting, land and family property rights have been denied to them and customarily only men have rights to inherit. Hence, woman has limited rights to say anything in any household management. Since Mizoram attained Union Territory in 1972, Reserve Forests have been put under the control of State Forest Department. Community under village council retained the management of forest other than government protected forest. Men represent the family in its external relations with regards to village affairs and form the village council.

As the village council is formed on the base of state political parties, in many villages management of forests has been politicized that often created conflicting interests amongst the communities. In such a situation women obediently have to work according to decisions made by male politicians, so that their perspectives, survival needs and knowledge failed to reach the ears of the higher authorities. The male dominated village council and their political interest also resulted in an increase in the private ownership of land. This is due to the fact that in
many villages, the Village Council gave many parts of their village land to the urban rich people in order to bargain Government officials. Government officials appointed to take incharge of village development are generally from urban areas that have no knowledge and love of the village (Thanzauva, 1997).

Bina Agarwal stated in her studies of rural areas in India ‘the existing developments strategies have made little attempt to tap or enhance women’s knowledge and understanding’ (Agarwal, 1995). In the recent introduction of innovation and developmental policies almost all the government plans are drafted by a committee composed by men without the inclusion of women and their aspiration. The state government has launched massive campaigns, distributed seeds for tree plantation and various crops and imparted technical skills and knowledge to farmers by conducting trainings. In spite of these agricultural reforms, most productive lands remain in the hands of few middle class men. Even when the programs reached the villages, only male members generally represented in these meetings to have access to various supports of agricultural production. Meanwhile, women are denied access to make use of their knowledge for commercial production and their sustainable roles for the family still left unrecognized.

Many times, we talk about gender gap between male and female in the society, but we should not forget that a wide gap has begun to exist
between different classes of women in North East Societies. While initiating development plan, we need to take ‘class’ between women into consideration. For instance, in 2002, the Department of Horticulture, Government of Mizoram (Under the program of Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture in North Eastern States) introduced a large scale cultivation of anthurium in Mizoram. The cultivation is estimated between 27,50,000 to 33,00,000 nos per annum and every year. One third (1/3) its production has been exported outside the state. The state government is proud to emphasize the success of women’s empowerment through this program as 98% of the cultivators are women. Samuel Rosanglura, Director of Horticulture recently stated that, “The spontaneous love for flowers, their hard work, dedication and determination with which they tended their crops is reflected in their achievement, that is, production of world class cut flowers. In the process, they have established sustainable livelihood to support their families, raising the standard of living, generated employment, paved the way for women empowerment and finally raised the economy of the state by creating a channel for cash inflow into the State”. (Samuel Rosanglura)

However, this empowering scheme has been limited to the middle class women from the urban site. Rural women are denied access to practice such cultivation, which require large capital (Fertilizers, efficient water supply, green house and extensive labour etc) for production. Such
form of empowerment has not reached the grass root level. Yet they are needed in the space of low wage labours for large scale production of the state. Hence, rural women have to practice their traditional knowledge for the survival of their family and are forced onto less productive cultivation. Despite this the policy makers, media and of course Women’s organizations (mostly dominated by middle class women) barely noticed the need of grass root women and their indigenous knowledge gradually lost recognition from the state.

Under the scheme of Joint Forest Management of India, the department of forest in Mizoram had implemented Village Forest Development Committee (VFDC) in the year 1998. At present, VFDC have been constituted in 192 villages. According to the constitutions of VFDC, there should be 6 executive committee members. Presently, one of the members of the biggest women’s organization, *Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkawm Pawl* (MHIP) represented women in each village/localities. Within three years, a woman member should be appointed as a president at least for one year. It is reported that VDFC appointed women to improve the position of women in the present society. Although the new scheme shows their concern for women’s empowerment through the appointment of women as members at the village level committee there is no record of women’s development done by VFDC. Nevertheless, majority of the leaders of MHIP comprise of educated middle class from the urban site failed to grasp
the needs of women from rural areas. The result is that their agenda on women’s empowerment has been set up from the upper level that has excluded the perspective of rural women and their knowledge. In this context Lalrinawmi was right as she argues, “…changes in land holding and the type of agriculture practiced were introduced without consulting women…while women suffered severe losses due to destruction of forest and jhum, they remained nevertheless resourceful due to a certain continuity of knowledge. Those who were educated became more ‘empowered’ according to the standards of modernity, but lost their continuity with regard to the traditional knowledge systems” (Ralte, 2008).

**Suggestions for the promotion of Women’s IK:**

To quest for a new alternative for the recognition of women’s indigenous knowledge it would be worthwhile to end this paper with some suggestions:

I. More active involvement of village women in decision-making at all levels.

II. To integrate not only local needs but also gender perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.

III. To strengthen or establish mechanisms at state level to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on
women by ensuring that women are not simply added to follow formalities.

IV. Formation of Village level committee that would accommodate equal representatives from men and women.

V. To build a separate platform in which women, particularly women from rural/village area would have a voice. So that the real keepers of knowledge would receive priority and development plan.
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*Chawng was a sacrificial ceremony performed by the chiefs and well to do families in order to become Thangchhuah, an important step to reach Pialral (paradise) after death.

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Exclusion, Women’s Rights and Inclusive Islam

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Exclusion is a modern concept that tries to understand the processes that generate inequality in the society, the consequences of inequality for individual behavior and social change. It can be understood as the inability of an individual or a group of individuals to participate freely in the socio-economic and politico-cultural spheres of life. One of the factors responsible for creating exclusion in the society is religion which is based on faith and cannot be questioned rationally and logically. Using this tool the dominant and powerful structures of the society from various faiths very strategically and systematically excluded certain groups of the society in order to maintain their supremacy over them. The most excluded among them were women. It was Islam, the monotheistic religion that recognized the prominent role of women gave them socio-economic rights and promoted inclusion of the discriminated, oppressed and excluded women in the society.

The process of inclusion of women began fourteen hundred years ago when Islam brought the concept of gender equality and honor at a time when slavery and patriarchal tribal society were intertwined. In pre-Islamic Arabia women were illiterate, abused and were not allowed to own property or terminate marriage. Recognizing the prominent role of women in the society Islam liberated women by giving them roles, duties and rights. Gender sensitive Islam was particularly more inclusive as liberation movement was not begun by Muslim women.
themselves but was revealed by God in 6th century CE to his messenger Mohammad, the last prophet of Islam.

1.0 Women’s Rights and Inclusive Islam

During the early days of Islam in the 7th century CE, women were not accorded socio-economic and legal rights all over the world. The condition of women at that time was terrible. Women had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man and if the man died everything went to his sons (Watt & William M, 1956). Prophet Muhammad, however, by instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, gave women certain basic safeguards (Watt & William M, 1956). Muhammad granted women rights and privileges in the sphere of family life, marriage, education, and economic endeavors that help improve women's status in society (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Reforms in women's rights with the advent of Islam promoted the inclusion of the deprived and discriminated women in the society. The following forms of inclusion for the excluded women, introduced by Islam in the society, may be understood from fiqh, Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah, the main sources of Muslim women’s duties, roles and rights:

1.1 Inclusion by Giving Women an Independent Human Identity with Dignity

Before the advent of Islam the ruling system was patriarchal among the early Arab nomadic tribes but the matriarchal system was more dominant. Human rights and an independent identity for women were not recognized in the society. The most important short-term objective for the Prophet at that time was to form a civil society by establishing social institutions and a civil constitution. Prophet’s intension behind this was to give women an independent human identity so that they are
recognized in the society in the same way that men were, and no longer defined as slaves, cattle or man's property. After the formation of the civil society in Arab the following verse was revealed to Prophet Mohammad in Medina which gave women an independent human identity:

"O believers, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will; neither debar them, that you may go off with part of what you have given them..."\(^5\)

The historical evidence indicates that sexual exploitation dominated the Arab culture, and prostitution was well established in the economic and social system. A verse in the Quran delivered the first blow to this status quo:

"But force not your young wives to prostitutions when they desire chastity..."\(^6\)

The Prophet steadily tightened the restrictions against exploitation of women. One of the most radical policies was to protect women from the charge of adultery, very prevalent at the time. If the slightest suspicions were aroused, women would be murdered outright. The Prophet accomplished this in a three-staged approach, where, falsely accusing women of adultery was recorded as one of the seven gunah-e-kabeera\(^7\) (mortal sins). Allah has made it clear in Quran that anyone who falsely accuses chaste believing women of adultery (or fornication) and lewdness is cursed in this world and the hereafter, and he will have a tremendous punishment. In this world, he will be punished with eighty lashes, and his testimony will never be accepted thereafter.
The Quran Says:

"Truly, those who cast blame upon chaste (but) indiscreet believing women are cursed in this world and the Hereafter. And there will be a tremendous punishment for them, on the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will testify against them concerning what they used to do."

A glimpse of the situation of the deprived and discriminated woman at that time is provided by Abol Fotouh Razi in his book *Interpreting the Quran* (Rajavi, 1995). Discussing verse 23 of the *Surahh Nisaa*, Razi writes:

"During the Age of Jaheliyat (ignorance) and early Islam, it was customary when a married man died, for one of his male heirs to place a piece of cloth on the widow or on her tent, thereby becoming her owner. The woman would be left on her own, without any rights or income, until such time as the man wished to sleep with her. If this was not the case, the man would seek compensation from the woman for letting her go, or would keep her as a slave until she died."

Under such circumstances, it is clear that the mere mention of independent legal rights for women would be met with resistance. The Prophet, however, realized the equivalent of a bill of women's rights. His male contemporaries were put off by what they considered his bizarre practice of taking women so seriously as to accept their conversion to Islam, let alone the conversions of slave women, a subject of ridicule by the powerful men of the time. But not only did the Prophet of God accept women, the Message of God revealed to him addressed women. Gradually, verses were revealed which spoke of women's status and rights in the family and society, and finally verses about the equal status of women and men. The Quran states:
“If any do deeds of righteousness-be they male or female and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.”

In the above verses a woman's obligations to the Islamic principles and practices are the same as those of a man. Women are not exempted from any of these obligations because of their gender and this gives another dimension of equality of women in society. The Quran says:

"God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves..."

In the pre Islamic society in Arab the human dignity of the woman was not recognized. The daughters were thought to bring shame upon the family. The girl children were murdered on the pretext of poverty. They were buried alive by their own parents and relatives. The challenge before Prophet at that time was to fight against the prevailing inhuman traditions in order to ensure women and girls' right to life. He abolished all such inhuman practices and declared,

“He who brings up his daughters well, and makes no distinction between them and his sons, will be close to me in Paradise....”

Showing concern to the prevailing pathetic condition of women, Prophet of Islam performed Bei’at (the oath of allegiance) with each of his women converts and gave them respect and an independent human identity as women. He also promoted inclusion of women by insisting on their participation in the most important decisions that affected the Muslim society so that they as women are treated with dignity by the society in which they live.

1.2 Inclusion through Social Justice
The philosophy of the oneness of Islam means establishing social justice within the society in terms of human relationships. It means equality including the equality between women and men. The most radical implementation of social justice during the Prophet's time was the concept of gender equality. The concept of gender equality in Islam is stressed by the non-superiority of either sex over the other. It came at a time when it was necessary to elevate the demeaned status of women and grant them rights equal to those of men. Both women and men are equally called upon to work towards the realization of Social Justice -the primary objective of Islam. This is a general law that determines the relations between women and men and between social groupings. It is hence the responsibility of the leadership of any society in any given time, namely the enlightened women and men of that society, to strive for social justice and human equality, consistent with the social context and historic period in which they live.

The Quran aims at social development as the establishment of Quest for social justice which promotes the concept of equality. It means equality including the equality between women and men:

"Indeed, we sent our Messengers with the clear signs, and we sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that human beings might uphold justice...."¹⁴

1.3 Inclusion through Social Institutions
Muhammad’s revolution moved forward in the cultural realm, creating basic social institutions and contracts to safeguard women's human dignity and honor. The Prophet steadily tightened the restrictions against exploitation of women. The first step towards the inclusion of women was the creation of the new society; the Prophet signed a number of agreements, known as the Aqabeh (agreements) with those
who had come from Yathreb (Medina). In these agreements, the Prophet focused on the rights of women, specifying that the Muslims would refrain from adultery, not kill their girl children, not hurl accusations, not steal, and not commit improper deeds.

During the sixth year after the Hijrat\textsuperscript{15}, the campaign against violations of women's dignity entered a new phase. Previously, there was no specific punishment for accusing and defaming women, although owing to an unprecedented guarantee, that is four credible witnesses, the charges themselves were rejected. A woman's reputation and honor, nevertheless, were still at risk. Verses 23-25 of Noor (Light) rectified this problem:

"Surely those who cast it upon women in wedlock that are heedless but believing shall be accursed in the present world and the world to come; and there awaits them a mighty chastisement....."\textsuperscript{16}

Verse four of the same chapter states:

"And those who cast it up on women in wedlock, and then bring not four witnesses, scourge them with eighty stripes, and do not accept any testimony of theirs ever; those - they are ungodly,..." \textsuperscript{17}

The importance of this punishment can be better understood when compared with the punishment for adultery, which is specified in verse two of the same chapter:

"The fornicators and the fornicator - scourge each one of them a hundred stripes..."\textsuperscript{18}
1.4 Inclusion through Social Rights

Islam promoted inclusion of women by giving them social rights to enable them lead their lives with dignity and security. Islam recognizes that education determines the socio-economic development of a society hence allows women to get education. The Prophet says that seeking knowledge is a mandate for every Muslim man and woman. This includes knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith as well as other knowledge. Men and women both have the capacity for learning and understanding. Since it is also their obligation to promote good behavior and condemn bad behavior in all spheres of life, Muslim women must acquire the appropriate education to perform this duty in accordance with their own natural talents and interests.

Prophet Mohammad made it very clear to his umma’h (community) that it is a duty for every father and mother to make sure that their daughters did not remain ignorant of Islam knowing that after marriage they would have to play important roles as housewives and as mothers of Muslim children. In case the parents had failed to give such knowledge to their daughters, it was compulsory upon husbands to teach their wives the basic principles so that they would lead their lives according to the teachings of Islam. Ibn Al hajj says:

“If a woman demands her right to religious education from her husband and brings the issue to a judge, she is justified in demanding this right. It is her right that either her husband should teach her or allow her to go elsewhere to acquire education in Islam. The judge must compel the husband to fulfill her demand in the same way that he would in the matter of her worldly rights since her right in matters of religion are most essential and important.”¹⁹
The first and greatest influence on a person comes from the sense of security, affection, and training received from the mother. Since women have the nature of mother not by cultural tradition or sociological system but inherently women are better in providing unconditional love and care to the offspring. Biologically women as mothers are a source of psychological and physical bonding. Islam therefore places greater responsibilities upon women towards their children. At the same time, the obligation that children have towards their mother in Islam is also greater. Concerning motherhood, the Prophet said:

"Heaven lies under the feet of mothers…."  

This verse indicates the importance of the role and function of the woman as the mother in the society under Islam. Apart from motherhood, maintenance of home, providing support to her husband, and raising and teaching of children are among the first and very highly regarded roles for a woman. If she has the skills to work outside the home for the good of the community, she may do so as long as her family obligations are met. A Muslim woman is allowed to marry a person of her choice. She is allowed to keep her maiden name after marriage. A Muslim woman is allowed to terminate troubled marriage. In case of divorce she is also entitled to child support. Islam also emphasizes that a woman having children must be educated and conscientious in order to be a skilful parent. This implies that Islam recognizes the fact that the success of a society can be traced to the mothers that raised it.
1.5 Inclusion through Civil and Political Rights

In Islam, a woman has the basic freedom of choice and expression based on recognition of her individual personality. First, she, as an independent individual, is free to choose her religion. The Qur'an states:

"There is no compulsion in religion. Right has been made distinct from error...."\textsuperscript{21}

Women are encouraged in Islam to contribute their opinions and ideas. There are many traditions of the Prophet which indicate women would pose questions directly to him and offer their opinions concerning religion, economics and social matters. Islam at the same time does not forbid a woman from holding important positions in government. A Muslim woman's testimony is valid in legal disputes. In fact, in areas in which women are more familiar, their evidence is conclusive. An important right given to Muslim women by God 1400 years ago was the right to vote. On any public matter, a woman may voice her opinion and participate in politics. One example, narrated in the Qur'an is that Prophet Muhammad says:

“When the believing women come to him and swear their allegiance to Islam, he must accept their oath.”\textsuperscript{22}

This established the right of women to select their leader and publicly declare so.

1.6 Inclusion through Economic Rights

In an era of slavery when women had no economic standing Islam brought a very inclusionary perspective of economic independence of women by dividing wealth among women and men and by giving
them rights to earn money, to own property, to enter into legal contracts and to manage all of their assets in any way they want. Women in Islam are allowed to earn money through business or work and no one has any claim on their earnings including their husbands. Islam promoted inclusion by giving women the following economic rights:

- The Islamic *Shari’ah* recognizes the full property rights of women before and after marriage.
- Greater financial security is assured for women. They are entitled to receive marital gifts, to keep present and future properties and income for their own security.
- No married woman is required to spend a penny from her property and income on the household.
- She is entitled to full financial support during marriage and during the *’iddah* (waiting period) in case of divorce.
- A Muslim woman is guaranteed economic support in all stages of her life, as a daughter, wife, sister or mother.

These additional advantages of women over men are somewhat balanced by the provisions of the inheritance which allow the male, in most cases, to inherit twice as much as the female. This means that the male inherits more but is responsible financially for other females: daughters, wives, mother and sister, while the female inherits less but can keep it all for herself either for investment or for her financial security without any legal obligation to spend any part of it even for her own sustenance (food, clothing, housing, medication, etc.) as fulfilling his subsistence requirements would be the responsibility of the males in
her life—father, brother, husband or son (depending upon her marital status).

Women, whose human status had gone unrecognized in the savage patriarchal society, arose during Muhammad’s great revolution. The Prophet prepared the ground for women to take part in their own liberation and fashion their destiny. The revolution which began by banning the burying of live girl children, subsequently recognized women’s economic independence. The Qur’an in this regards clearly states:

"... to men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn...."  

Generally, Islam upholds that women are entrusted with the nurturing role, and men, with the guardian role. Therefore, women are given the right of financial support. The Qur'an states:

"Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend of their wealth (for the support of women)."  

This guardianship and greater financial responsibility is given to men, requires that they provide women with not only monetary support but also physical protection and kind and respectful treatment.

The Muslim woman has the privilege to earn money, the right to own property, the right to enter into legal contracts and the right to manage all of her assets in any way she wants. She can run her own business and no one has any claim on her earnings including her husband. The Qur'an states:
"And in no wise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others; to men is allotted what they earn, and to women, what they earn; but ask Allah of His bounty, for Allah hath full knowledge of all things."  

Muslim women have the right to inherit from her parents and relatives also. The Qur'an states:

"For men there is a share in what parents and relatives leave, and for women there is a share of what parents and relatives leave, whether it be little or much - an ordained share".  

1.7 Inclusion through Participation in Social Struggle
During the time of the Prophet it is understood that more than 150 women were holding responsible positions in different areas of the society. In the young society designed and built by the Prophet, it appears that women's entry into the turbulent social scene began with their inroads into the most "masculine" sphere of activity- battle. One of these women (who participated in the battle), Um Sanan, says: "When the Prophet chose to go to the Battle of Khaibar, I went to him and told him, `O Prophet of God, I will accompany you to your destination. I prefer to provide water and treat the ill and the wounded, if there are any, and I hope there will be none.' (Vaqedi, 1998)

On hearing this Um-Sanan says that the Prophet replied to her:

_God's blessings, you may come along. You will be accompanied by other women, from your own tribe ....... When he conquered Khaibar, the Prophet gave us a share of the war booty. I returned along with his wife, Um Salameh._
When we entered Medina, I was riding on a camel that belonged to the Prophet. Um Salameh told me that the Prophet had given me the camel I was riding.”

In the same book, Vaqedi writes: "The Prophet left Medina for Khaibar. He was accompanied by ten Jews, with whose help he fought at Khaibar and whom he gave war booty equivalent to that of the Muslim fighters. There were twenty women in his entourage which left for the battle scene, including Um Salameh and Safieh (the wife and aunt of the Prophet)…….Khaibar, the wife of Abdollah ibn Enis, was also among the mojahedin women. She was pregnant and gave birth during the fighting”.

Khaibar may have been the high point of women's active presence in their society, but not the beginning. The turning point had come with the Battle of Ohod, which occurred during the third year of Hijrat. During the battle, a lack of discipline by some men had turned a victory into a defeat, and many renowned men fled the field. More than seventy out of a force of several hundred were killed. At the height of defeat and despair, a number of women rose to the occasion. Among them were fourteen relatives of the Prophet, including his daughter Fatima, who was only ten and carried water and food on her back for the combatants and treated the wounded. More importantly, the women took up arms and fought, especially to defend the Prophet's life (Vaqedi, 1998).

The Prophet's intention in encouraging these women, especially the young and pregnant, to go to the scene of battle was not only to advance the cause. He, rather, sought a higher goal, the victory of these women over the stereotype image of being the weaker sex oppressed by the patriarchal society.
2.0 Educational and Spiritual Rights of Women: Perspective of Inclusive Islam

*Education is not only a right but also a responsibility of all males and females. Prophet Mohammad had keen interest in the education of women. Regarding women’s education, he declared that the pursuit of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim man and woman. Prophet Muhammad said:*

“It is the duty of every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge”.

Islam teaches that education of men and women is of equal importance. The Holy Quran holds learning as priceless and tells that only the learned can understand the signs of God and His wisdom, and come close to Him. Highlighting the importance of education, the Holy Prophet has said that every Muslim man and woman’s prayer to Allah should be:

“My Lord enrich me with knowledge…”

Prophet allowed both men and women to attend his lectures. As a result at the time of the Prophet's death, there were many women scholars. Whenever Prophet Muhammad felt that women were unable to hear him clearly, he used to go to them and repeat himself so that they get complete knowledge and have no doubt about anything (Anwar, Jawed 2005).

Hazrat Ayesha, Prophet’s own wife, was a highly learned woman who established first *madarsah* for women with a female teacher in her home. Men also attended Aisha's classes in the *madarsah* with a curtain separating the men from the women. The Prophet even commanded that the slave girls be educated in the *madarsah* (Anwar, Jawed 2005).
After the death of the Holy prophet his companions frequently used to go to Aisha for her guidance in matters on which there was a difference of opinion as she was widely considered an authority on many vital issues.

Another important dimension of the inclusion of excluded women was through spirituality in Islam. Woman's spiritual equality with man is repeatedly stressed in the Holy Quran. For instance it is said in Surah Ghafer:

"Enter into paradise ye and your wives, honored and happy"."\(^{31}\)

"Whose acts righteously, whether male or female and is a believer, we will surely grant him a pure life; and we will surely bestow on such their reward according to the best of their work"."\(^{32}\)

"For men who submit themselves wholly to Allah, and women who submit wholly to Him and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey Allah and women who obey Him, and men who are truthful and women who are truthful, and men who are steadfast and women who are steadfast, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity, and men who remember Allah and women who remember Him, Allah has prepared forgiveness and great reward."\(^{33}\)

These verses make it clear that Muslim women stand on the same level with Muslim men and that they can attain to all those spiritual heights to which men can attain. At several places in the Qur’an, believing men and believing women are addressed in the same language and are made equally subject to the same commandments and entitled to the same rights and privileges.
3.0 Muslim Women, Education and Arab World: Historical Perspective

The tradition of women's literary circles in the Arab World dates back to the pre-Islamic period when the eminent literary figure, Al-Khansa, would stand in the 'Ukaz market in Mecca, reciting her poetry and airing her views on the scholarship of others. From this, a culture of literary criticism emerged among Arab women, and under the Umayyad dynasty, Sukaynah Bint Al-Husayn established the first literary salon in her home (Khalidi, 2008).

From around 750, during the Abbasid Caliphate, women became renowned for their brains as well as their beauty (Moghadam, 1993). In particular, many well known women of the time were trained from childhood in music, dancing and poetry. Mahbuba was one of these. Another feminine figure to be remembered for her achievements was Tawaddud “a slave girl who was said to have been bought at great cost by Harun ar-Rashid because she had passed her examinations by the most eminent scholars in astronomy, medicine, law, philosophy, music, history, Arabic grammar, literature, theology and chess (Jamal Badawi, 1995). Moreover, among the most prominent feminine figures was Shuhda who was known as “the Scholar” or the “Pride of Women” during the 12th century in Baghdad. (Ahmad, 1994).

Historically, many Muslim women played an important role in the foundation of many Islamic educational institutions in the world. Fatima al-Fihri established the University of Al Karaouine in 859 CE in Morocco. This continued through to the Ayyubid dynasty in the 12th and 13th centuries, when 160 mosques and Madarsas were established in Damascus, 26 of which were funded by women through the Waqf (charitable trust or trust law) system. Half of all the royal patrons for these institutions were also women (Lindsay, 2005).
Colleges such as *Saqlatunia* Madarsa in Cairo were funded and staffed by women (Khadduri, 1978).

According to the Sunni scholar *Ibn Asākir* in the 12th century, there were opportunities for female education in the medieval Islamic world. He wrote that girls and women at that time could study, earn *ijazahs* (academic degrees) and qualify as scholars and teachers. This was especially the case for learned and scholarly families, who wanted to ensure the highest possible education for both their sons and daughters (Lindsay, 2005). Ibn Asakir himself had studied under 80 different female teachers in his time. Female education in the Islamic world was inspired by Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha—a renowned scholar of Hadith and military Leader. According to a hadith attributed to Muhammad, he praised the women of Medina because of their desire for religious knowledge:

"*How splendid were the women of the ansar; shame did not prevent them from becoming learned in the faith.*"\(^{36}\)

It was not common for women to enroll as students in formal classes, it was although common for women to attend informal lectures and study sessions at *Madarsahs*, mosques and other public places. While there were no legal restrictions on female education, some men did not approve of this practice, such as Muhammad ibn al-Hajj (d. 1336) who was appalled at the behavior of some women who informally audited lectures in his time(( Nashat & Beck, 2003).

While women accounted for no more than one percent of Islamic scholars prior to the 12th century, there was a large increase of female scholars after this. In the 15th century, Al-Sakhawi devotes an entire volume of his 12-volume biographical dictionary *ad-Daw’ allami* to female scholars, giving information on 1,075 of them (Nashat & Beck, 2003).
In nineteenth-century West Africa, Nana Asma’u\textsuperscript{37} was a leading Islamic scholar, poet, teacher and an exceptionally prolific Muslim female writer who wrote more than 60 works (Jean, 1989). The orientalist Ignác Goldziher showed that perhaps fifteen percent of medieval hadith scholars were women, teaching in the mosques and universally admired for their integrity (Ignac, 1886). More recently, the scholar Mohammad Akram Nadwi, currently a researcher from the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, has written 40 volumes on the “muhadditat” (the women scholars of hadith), and found at least 8000 of them (Carla Power, 2007). These remarkable examples from history shed light on the inclusionary role that Muslim women have been playing in the development of Muslim civilization since ages.

4.0 Women, Employment and Inclusive Islam

In the Islamic history there were no restrictions in women's full participation in the economic, political and social spheres of the society. Hazrat Khadijah e.g. the Prophet's first wife was one of the most important merchants of the time, and Prophet Muhammad himself was her employee. During the Muslim conquests, a Muslim woman called Amina bint Qais at the age of seventeen lead a medical team for the treatment of the soldiers on the battlefield. She was the youngest woman to lead a medical team of mobile dispensaries in one of these early battles during the time of Muhammad (Doreen Insgrams, 1983). In the early Islamic history women not only participated in various aspects of their society's public sphere, they also had the right to be elected to political offices. The appointment of a woman to oversee the affairs of the marketplace by Hazrat Omar, the second caliph also sheds light on the inclusive nature of Islam towards women in the society.

4.1 Inclusion of Women and Code of Conduct for Work: Islamic Perspective
Islam provides very considerate laws for the welfare of women in the society. Women in Islam are allowed to work or do business. Khadijah (Prophet Muhammad's wife), who was an eminent businesswoman, is called as a role model for females in the Quran. Islam permits women to work following a code of conduct guided by Shari‘ah. The conditions for the code of conduct are as follows:

- The work should not require the woman to violate Islamic law.
- Women should be mindful of their safety.
- If the work requires the woman to leave her home, she must maintain her 'modesty' just as with men.

Islam also advises to its followers that it is the responsibility of the Muslim community to organize work for women, so that she can do so in a Muslim cultural atmosphere, where her rights (as set out in the Qur'an) are respected (Badawi, 1995).

### 4.2 Inclusion of Women in Labour Force: Historical Perspective

The labor force in the Caliphate were employed from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, while both men and women were involved in diverse occupations and economic activities (Shatzmiller, 1994). Women were employed in a wide range of commercial activities and diverse occupations in the primary sector (as farmers, for example), secondary sector (as construction workers, dyers, spinners, etc.) and tertiary sector (as investors, doctors, nurses, presidents of guilds, brokers, peddlers, lenders, scholars etc.) (Shatzmiller, 1994). Muslim women also held a monopoly over certain branches of the textile industry, which was the largest and most specialized and market-oriented industry at the time, in occupations such as spinning, dyeing, and embroidery. In comparison, female property rights and
wage labour were relatively uncommon in Europe until the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries (Shatzmiller, 1997).

In the 12th century, the famous Islamic philosopher and *gadi* (judge) Ibn Rushd, known to the West as Averroes, claimed that women were equal to men in all respects and possessed equal capacities to shine in peace and in war (Jamil, 1994). In early Muslim history, examples of notable Muslim women Nusaybah Bint k’ab Al Maziniyyah a.k.a. Umm Amarah, Aisha, Kahula and Wafeira (Hale & Buell, 1853) who fought as soldiers or generals during the Muslim conquests and *Fitna* (civil wars) (Edvin, 2004).

In 12th Century Female staff was employed in Muslim Hospital when they were rarely employed in hospitals elsewhere in the world. The first hospital of Modern World called *Bimaristan* in Iran was the first to employ female nurses and first to employ two female physicians (Morelon, Régis and Roshdi 1996). The most famous being two female physicians from the Banu Zuhr family who served the Almohad ruler Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur in the 12th century. This was necessary due to the segregation between male and female patients in Islamic hospitals. Later in the 15th century, female surgeons were illustrated for the first time for *Cerrahiyyetu'l-Haniyye* (Imperial Surgery) in the Hospitals (Bademci, 2006).

### 4.3 Inclusion of Women and Division of Labour: The Islamic Perspective

Islam promoted inclusion of women by using the principle of *division of labour*, as a tool for their protection. It allots the strenuous work and hard outdoor life to man and makes him responsible for the maintenance of the family. It regards home as the first concern of woman. It allots the work of managing the home and upbringing and
training of children to woman. Islam believes that education and training of the children is the work that plays the most significant role in the task of nation building. By assigning this role to the mothers, Islam proves that women, even sitting within the four boundary walls of their homes, are capable enough to play the most dynamic role in nation building.

God declares in Quran that he created men and women to be different, with unique roles, functions and skills. As in society, where there is a division of labor, so too in a family; each member has different responsibilities. The Qur'an states:

"By the creation of the male and female; Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse..."\textsuperscript{39}

Islam exhorts Muslim women to engage herself in the cultivation of learning and allows her to participate when necessary, in social uplift and other schemes of national reconstruction. It is emphatic in its demand that women should in no case step into the shoes of men, nor should man encroach upon her sphere of activity. Each of the man and woman has his or her appropriate function, the due discharge of which constitutes the dignity, enjoyment, fulfillment and beauty of life. This should not be treated as a question of superiority or inferiority; rather it is a question of natural capacity and proper functioning, a contemplation of the diversity of the faculties of males and females as designed by nature. Respecting the laws of nature Islam assigns the role and duties to women by following the principle of the division of labour but at the same time also allows them to work or do business being within the limits of Shari’ah.

**Conclusion:**
By instituting socio-economic and politico-cultural rights to women Islam prepared the ground for women to take part in their own liberation and fashion their own destiny. It was Islam that removed the bondage in which women were held from the very dawn of history and gave them the social standing and legal rights not granted them in other cultures anywhere in the world.

It is difficult to find women in other cultures ever playing a dynamic role in the establishment of civilization in the history of humanity. The liberal western tradition sees itself as the intellectual inheritors of the Greek tradition that existed before Jesus Christ. Many of the intellectual traditions of the West are found to some degree in the writings of the early Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, all men, who had very disparaging views of women. Aristotle in his writings argued that women were not full human beings and that the nature of woman was not that of a full human person. Manu in Manusmriti is ahead of Aristotle where he writes that “drums, animals and women are fit to be beaten-up”. This Manusmriti driven view on women made women not to be trusted, to be by- nature deficient, to be looked down upon and always to be treated like animals in the society.

The Aristotelian view of women was also carried on into the early Christian tradition of the Catholic Church. Saint Thomas of Aquinas in his writings proposed that women were the trap of Satan. The issue of Adam and Eve added a dimension to the earlier Greek ideas of Aristotle; women were the cause of the downfall of man and therefore were Satan’s trap and should be looked at with caution and weariness because women caused the first downfall of humanity. This type of thought was persistent within the writings of the Church
fathers throughout the Middle-Ages. The Qur’an on the other hand does not make Eve responsible for the downfall. The French writers at the French revolution and Voltaire and the Russians were men. The civilizations of the world are basically based upon men. Islam perhaps, is the only civilization where a leading input in terms of transmission of knowledge and establishment of civil society was based upon the efforts of women too.

The dynamism of Islam's teachings leaves no room for doubt that hundreds of years after the emergence of the Prophet, Islam bears a message of comprehensive socio-economic equality between women and men. It is on the basis of these teachings that Islam not only calls for equality between women and men, but believes that affirmative action for the inclusion of women must be taken to fight against the age old socio-economic exclusion of women to enable them to live with security and dignity. A recent study on Muslim female academicians (Rodded Ruth, 1998) charts an extraordinary dilemma for the researchers in west. Ruth in her study writes: If US and European historians feel a need to reconstruct women history because women are invisible in traditional sources in west, Islamic scholars on the other hand are faced with a plethora of source material that has only begun to be studied. In reading the biographies of thousands of Muslim—women—scholars, one is amazed at the evidence that contradicts the view of Muslim women as marginal, secluded, restricted or excluded. Indeed the women in Islam are not excluded as inequality and injustice are against the very spirit of Islam and this very spirit of Islam makes Islam ‘inclusive-Islam’.
Endnotes:

• The word *fiqh* is an Arabic term meaning "deep understanding" or "full comprehension". Technically it refers to the body of Islamic law extracted from detailed Islamic sources (which are studied in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and the process of gaining knowledge of Islam through jurisprudence. The historian Ibn-e-Khaldun describes *fiqh* as "knowledge of the rules of God which concern the actions of persons who own themselves bound to obey the law respecting what is required (*wajib*), sinful (*haraam*), recommended (*mandūb*), disapproved (*makrūh*) or neutral (*mubah*)". This definition is consistent amongst the jurists (Levy, Reuben 1957).

• The *Qur'an* is the central religious text of Islam. The Quran is composed of verses (Ayah) that make up 114 chapters (surahhs) of unequal length which are classified either as Meccan or Medinan depending upon the place and time of their claimed revelation. Muslims believe the Quran to be verbally revealed through angel Jibril (Gabriel) from God to Prophet Muhammad gradually over a period of approximately 23 years beginning in 610 CE, when Prophet Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632 CE, the year of his death.

• In Islamic terminology, the term *Hadith* refers to reports of statements or actions of Muhammad, or of his tacit approval or criticism of something said or done in his presence. Hadith were evaluated and gathered into large collections during the 8th and 9th centuries. These works are referred to in matters of Islamic law and history to this day.

• The *Sunnah* refers to the words, actions, and confirmations (con-sent) of the Prophet Muhammad in matters pertaining to the meaning and practice of Islam. Another common term which
some authorities consider to be equivalent to the Sunnah is the Hadith (plural: Ahadith).

- According to *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Hadith), the seven **Gunah-e-Kabeera** (pernicious or mortal sins) as mentioned by Prophet Mohammad are:
  - Associating anything with Allah
  - Witchcraft
  - Killing one whom Allah has declared inviolate without a just case
  - Consuming the property of an orphan
  - Devouring usury
  - Turning back when the army advances and
  - False accusation of chaste women who are believers but indiscreet.
- **Jaheliat** is the Arabic word for ignorance, referring to era in the Arabian Peninsula before the rise of Muhammad in 611 A.D.
  - opcit, Surah IV: An-Nisaa (Women), Verse 11.
  - Ibid, Surah XI: Ra’ad(Thunder) Verse 11.
  - Muslim II, Section Beneficence.
  - opcit, Surah XXIV: An-Noor (Light), Verse 6-10.
- **Hijrat** is the Arabic word for migration which Muhammad and his disciples undertook in 624 A.D. from Mecca to Medina after it became impossible to spread the word of Islam in Mecca and following an invitation by the Jewish tribes in Medina to the Prophet to set up base in that city.
  - opcit, Surah XXIV:An-Noor (Light), Verse 25.
• Hadith, al- mudkhal, vol.2 p 277.
• Ibn Maja in al-Sunan, 2771.
• opcit, Surah II : Al-Baqara(The Cow),Verse 256.
• Ibid., Surah LX: Al-Mumtahana (The Test),Verse 12
• Ibid, Surah IV: An-Nisaa (Women), Verse 32.
• Ibid., Surah IV An-Nisaa (Women),Verse 3-4
• Ibid, Surah IV: An-Nisaa (Women),Verse,32.
• Ibid, Surah. IV: An-Nisaa (Women), Verse,7.
• Ibn Maja in al-Sunan, 1:81, 224.
• opcit, Surah.XX:Ta-Ha, verse 114.

**Hadrat Aisha** was the youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad and the most learned lady of her time. Aisha had an outstanding quality of intelligence and memory and, by virtue of these qualities, is considered to be one of the most reliable sources and teacher of Hadith. She had expertise in the Qur'an, shares of inheritance, lawful and unlawful matters, poetry, Arabic literature, Arab history, genealogy, and general medicine.

• opcit, Surah. XL: Ghafer( The Believer), Verse 71.
• Ibid, Surah. XVI: Ibrahimim, Verse 98.

**Fatima Al Fahiri** was the daughter of Mohammed al-Fihri, with whom she migrated to Fez, Morocco from Qairawan, located in present-day Tunisia and came earlier from west Arabia of Fihriids family origin. In 859, Fatima founded the world's first academic degree-granting university - University of Qarawiyyin, with money inherited from her father, a wealthy businessman.
• **The University of Al-Karaouine** or Al-Qarawiyyin is the first university of the modern world located in Fez, Morocco which was founded in 859 by Fatima Al Fahiri. It has been and continues to be one of the leading spiritual and educational centers of the Muslim world. The Al-Karaouine played a leading role in the cultural and academic relations between the Islamic world and Europe in the middle ages. The cartographer Mohammed al-Idrisi (d. 1166), whose maps aided European exploration in the Renaissance is said to have lived in Fez for some time, suggesting that he may have worked or studied at Al Karaouine. The University has produced numerous scholars who have strongly influenced the intellectual and academic history of the Muslim and Jewish worlds. The Al Karaouine institution is considered by the Guinness book of world Record(1998) as the oldest continuously operating academic degree-granting university in the world. In 1947, it was reorganized to become a modern university.

• **Sunan Abu Dawud**, 38:4366.

• **Nana Asma’u** bint Shehu Usman dan Fodiyo, (1793–1864) was a princess, poet, teacher, and daughter of the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio in northern Nigeria. After escaping an assassination attempt by the non-Muslim Hausa chief of Gobir, her father Shehu, a Fulbe scholar, launched a jihad in which the Muslim women were full participants. In 1808 the chief of Gobir and his Tuareg allies were defeated, and the Shehu founded the Sokoto caliphate. Nana Asma’u dedicated her life to disseminating Islam and upholding the caliphate. She set up an educational system for Muslim women, acted as a colleague and adviser to her brother and her husband, and managed the practical demands of implementing a new government. Nana Asma’u was well educated in Qur’anic
studies, classics of the Arab and Classical world, and well versed in four languages (Arabic, Hausa and Tamacheq Tuareg). Amongst her over 60 surviving works written over 40 years, Nana Asma’u left behind a large body of poetry in Arabic, the Fula language and Hausa, all written in the Arabic script. Many of these are historical narratives, but they also include elegies, laments, and admonitions. Her poems of guidance became tools for teaching the founding principles of the Caliphate. Nana Asma’u had a public reputation as a leading scholar in the most influential Muslim state in West Africa who is still held up as an example of education and independence of women as a precursor to modern feminism in Africa.

- **Bimaristan** is a Persian word meaning "hospital". In the medieval Islamic world, the word "Bimaristan" was used to indicate a hospital where the ill were welcomed and cared for by qualified staff.
- The **Manusmriti** also known as Manav Dharam Shastra (laws of righteous conduct, is the earliest metrical work on Brahminical Dharma in Hinduism. According to Hindu mythology, the Manusmriti is the word of Brahma (God) which is believed to be compiled by eponym ‘Manu’, a conservative upper caste Hindu Brahmin from North India. Hindu apologists consider the Manusmriti as the divine code of conduct and, accordingly, the status of women as depicted in the text has been interpreted as Hindu divine law.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

Sana Khan

Women’s movements in the third world have, to a significant extent developed their own distinctive identities, and served to rectify many of the Euro-centric assumptions of Euro-American feminism. Third world feminism emerged from the experience of colonialism, and therefore unlike western feminism, insistently conflated gender with issues of cultural identity and colonial subjugation. The other differences results from the prevalence of widespread deprivation and poverty in much of the third world, and from the realization among women in these countries that women’s oppression results, to a considerable degree, from the scarcity of resources. With a few exceptions, studies in the third world feminism and the women’s movements have ignored the contribution of women in Pakistan. The present paper shall fulfill the lacunae, by developing a more comprehensive understanding of the sources of women’s subjugation and the nature of their resistance.

Pakistan was established in 1947 on the basis of two-nation theory, claiming a separate homeland for Muslims in India. Since it was established on the basis of religious difference, it has had, since its very origin a troubled relationship with religion, particularly political Islam.
The forces of political Islam received a significant fillip when Zia-ul Haq came to power in 1978, and made an attempt to legitimize his usurpation of power through the invocation of the Shari’a. This had a direct, and regressive, impact on the position of women in Pakistan, for the assertion of political Islam based on attempts to efface women from public places, and surveillance of women’s movements, attire and conduct in social life. Political Islam equated nation with community or Alumma, and women served as boundaries, or symbolic markers of the community/nation. The identity of the community or nation is crucially tied up with the ability of the men and the state to control and confine women to the domestic spaces. This was also followed by a large number of laws and statutes, allegedly based on Islamic laws that sought to subjugate women, and ensure the domination of men over their women. Under the pretext of establishing a Islamic state, the government in Pakistan, supported by the forces of political Islam, intruded in the domestic spaces and reaffirmed the dominance of patriarchal forces. Of course women were not the passive spectators to these developments, and women’s movement with rare courage and perseverance, contested the state in its efforts to subjugate them, under the pretext of Islam.

Ever since its inception, Pakistan has had contentious relations with women. Created as a separate state for the Indian Muslims, the country was identified with an Islamic identity, and this had crucial
consequences for the women, as well. Islam came to be invoked by patriarchal forces, and the absence of a viable and established democratic system only served to strengthen the feudal elements. In alliance with the conservative religious groups, and assisted by the state, the feudal classes imposed a social order in which women were seen as no more than mere chattels, with almost negligible civil and political rights. The state became an instrument in the hands of feudal classes to subjugate women, and deny them autonomy and independence.

Since long women in Pakistan have been fighting a long and drawn-out struggle with the religious conservatives for their rights. Women’s struggles have not been entirely in vain, and even as their gains have been modest, they are still quite significant. The Muslim family law ordinance banned polygamy. All three constitutions advocated affirmative action to bring about complete equality, till the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) imposed a series of discriminatory laws against women-the Hudood Ordinance\(^\text{29}\), the Law of Evidence\(^\text{30}\) and the Law of *Qisas*\(^\text{31}\) and *Diyat*\(^\text{32}\).

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\(^{29}\) The Hudood ordinance deals with the offences of prohibition, theft, perjury and *zina*

\(^{30}\) The Law of Evidence states that the testimony of a women is half that of man’s in a Pakistani Court of Law

\(^{31}\) *Qisas* is a retaliation/punishment by causing similar hurt to the same part of the body of the convict as he has caused to the victim.
With the promulgation of Hudood Ordinances and Law of Evidence there was a sharp rise in the number of women incarcerated in Pakistani prisons. 33 These gender discriminatory laws served as a powerful weapon in the hands of the patriarchal forces in Pakistan to subjugate women. Zia insisted on the sanctity of the veil and segregation of women, thus coining the phrase ‘Chaddar and Chardvari’.34 The state moved to take control over the lives of women, their bodies and shape with the promulgation of ‘Sharia laws’. 35 Although the Hudood Ordinance governs both genders, but it is much more and severe on women as it is also evident from the lack of distinction between zina (adultery and fornication) and zina-bil-jabr (rape). Combined with the law of Evidence, provisions concerning adultery and rape turned out to be legal devices that enabled men to suppress women. 36 There were

32 \textit{Diyat} is blood money or compensation for murder, or other injury payable to the heirs of the victim by the convict.

33 Jilani and Ahmad, ‘Violence Against Women’, p.171

34 \textit{Chadar} means ‘veil’ and \textit{Chardvari} means within the ‘four walls’. The two terms together represent an identification of women domesticity and segregation.

35 N. Said Khan(ed.), \textit{Up Against the State}, (Lahore, 2004), p.152

numerous reported instances, where victims of rape were convicted of adultery. Thus adding to the trauma of the victim.\textsuperscript{37}

Pakistani women are trapped in a web of dependency and subordination due to their low social, economic, and political status in society. The majority of women suffer from all forms of poverty. In order to change women’s position and societal view of their inferiority, structural changes need to be brought about in the social and economic order that shape our social world. Following the implementation of gender discriminatory laws in the country, Pakistani feminist began to evolve strategies to build resistance and create awareness regarding women’s plight. The beginning of 1980s saw an unprecedented mass mobilization of women in Pakistan to challenge gender-discriminatory laws by Zia. Numerous women’s organizations existed such as APWA, Business and Professional Women’s Club, AnjumanJomhooriatPasadKhawateen, Behbood Association and many others but most important was WAF (Women Action Forum). WAF provides a significant platform to women, and launched a systematic countrywide struggle through advocacy programs, research, writing, pickets, lobbying, street agitation, and press campaigns.

The denial of human rights to women was strongly identified with the period of military rule under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq. The oppression of women appeared to be a part of the overall political strategy of the regime, which wished to perpetuate the rule of the orthodox section of society. Many argue that it was not being done for the sake of religious belief but for political expediency.

With the coming of Hudood Ordinance in 1979 by General Zia-u-l-Haq, Women’s rights which were never seen as a critical issue, hit the national agenda. Hudood Ordinance undoubtedly worked to the disadvantage of women more than men. The ordinance covers adultery, fornication, rape and prostitution (zina), bearing false testimony (qazf), theft and drinking alcoholic beverages. It was felt that there was a need to have a platform which would represent as many women’s organizations and individuals as possible and that the existing trend to deny or rescind women’s rights could only be countered by a co-ordinated effort of all women’s organization. Meetings were held with women’s organization and concerned women and the result of these meetings was the formation of Khawateen Mahaz-e Amal (Women’s Action Forum).\(^{38}\) Women Action Forum intended to be a platform and forum for women and women’s organizations.

Although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, family laws presume that women must stay within the seclusion of the home, while the man must be the leader of the family and bear the financial burden.

Many Maulvis\(^{39}\) had expressed reactionary views on working women, and Israr Ahmed’s\(^{40}\) statement that all working women should be retired and pensioned off, provoked an angry outcry from women. For fundamentalists, the issue of the veiling of women goes hand in hand with the segregation of the sexes and the division of the public and private.\(^{41}\) These social and cultural actions were being taken by the state to reduce women’s activities and visibility in public life, a series of legal measures were underway to reduce women’s power and status in institutional terms.

In 1978, General Zia set up ‘Shariat Benches’ of the High Courts of each of the provinces of Pakistan. These would consist of three High court judges and several ulema. These courts had the power to strike out any law which they found to be not in conformity with the Qur’an

\(^{39}\)Muslim equivalent of Priest

\(^{40}\) Dr. Israr Ahmed, a religious preacher who regularly gave qur’anic sermons on television in programme called Al-Hida,(he said this in an interview with the urdu language daily Jang)

and Sunnah. Muslim personal laws, family laws and fiscal matters were excluded from the jurisdiction of the Shariat Benches. In 1988, when General Zia was once again solely in power, the Shariat Ordinance was promulgated, this bought fiscal and personal laws under the jurisdiction of the High Court, but did not give the High Court the power to strike out laws considered repugnant to the Shariat; rather, it gave the High Court the power to give a reasoned opinion as to the repugnance of a particular law. The decision would then have the status only of a recommendation.42

It was with the promulgation of the Hudood Ordinances in 1979 that legal reduction of Women’s position began with full force. The second legal provision halving the status of women was the Law of Evidence. While women’s status was reduced through such measures, the most practical suffering for women caused by any ‘Islamic’ measure was by the application of zina (the Hudood Ordinance). The ordinance was being misused by men, mostly women’s husbands and other family members who, for various reasons, wanted to punish the women.43

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42 The ordinance lapsed because it was not placed before the National Assembly.

The concentration of General Zia’s Islamisation policies on women was due to several reasons. Firstly, women’s issues tend to evoke a strongly emotional response in the public since they are connected to the notion of izzat (honour); secondly, it is far easier to place restrictions on women in order to be able to claim the Islamisation of society than to make substantial changes in the social class structure; and thirdly, since women had generally not united, they were a weaker section of society than other groups.\textsuperscript{44}

There were various women’s organization existed which include APWA, Business and women’s club, \textit{Behbood} Association and many others, which protested against Zia’s policies. It was during this that WAF was born in 1981.\textsuperscript{45} It was largely due to WAF, that the women’s question has finally been raised at the national level. It is true that the number of active supporters to the streets in martial law is limited, but few other organizations or lobbies have managed to even equal the number of women, and certainly none has taken to the streets as frequently. These women supported in other ways or forms such as the \textit{jalsa} and meetings and signature campaigns. Larger number of women

\textsuperscript{44}Shahnaz Rouse, \textit{Shifting Body Politics: Gender, Nation, State in Pakistan}, Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2004

\textsuperscript{45}Said Khan, op. cit., p. 159
and men sympathize with the women’s struggle but their support, being sometimes expressed, often invisible, cannot be quantified.\textsuperscript{46}

WAF has given rise to a number of expectations, many of which it has not been able to fulfill, it cannot be denied that it has accomplished more in terms of raising consciousness. The role of WAF could be seen by the fact that in 1979, despite the existence of several organizations, feminist groups and individuals, the Hudood Ordinance was passed without a protest.\textsuperscript{47} By its charter, WAF defined itself as being a non-political, non-hierarchical lobby-cum pressure group, whose main objective was to raise consciousness and to promote and protect the rights of women in Pakistan. WAF also raise consciousness primarily among women about their rights, status and the discriminatory laws, instituted to weaken them further legally and socially. WAF methods included consciousness-raising, holding workshops, meetings, seminars and through the media, lobbying with policy-making bodies and mobilizing at the public level were also among WAF’s strategies. Given the diverse background of its activists, there were bound to be differences in perception of what the women’s question is in the


\textsuperscript{47}Mumtaz and Shaheed, op. cit., p. 123
content of Pakistan. Problems arose over how best to tackle it, which issue to take up which to give priority to and which to ignore altogether.

The statement of WAF’s chapter in Karachi\textsuperscript{48} had a greater tendency to pick up issues not specially related to women, such as the school teacher’s strike for better pay. The chapter in Lahore, Punjab’s capital city closed doors to men in all its functions except its seminars, and did considerable homework on what was actually contained in the Qur’an and what was mere distortion or interpretation on the part of those devising the laws. While its statements were far less radical than those of Karachi, Lahore was by far the most radical chapter in terms of action.

WAF used the press to its full advantage. Its statements and resolutions on all issues were printed in the press along with several issues related to the country as a whole. Thus press was used by WAF both as a consciousness raising device and a mobilization technique. Other methods included by WAF were meetings, seminars and panel discussions on wide-ranging topics. But after February 1983, WAF radically changed its mobilization tactics. During this time, both law of evidence and the \textit{Qisas} and \textit{Biyat} bill were threatening to reduce the status of women as to half that of men. In February 1983, the PWLA called for a demonstration in Lahore to the High Court to present a

\textsuperscript{48}Pakistan’s largest city and far more cosmopolitan than the rest of the country.
petition of protest to the chief justice, and the demonstration was charged and tear gassed but this made WAF known both nationally and internationally. From this time, WAF took to the streets in protest marches and often picketed outside the Governor’s House.  

However, Law of Evidence Bill was repeatedly shelved and when finally passed in 1984, was less discriminatory than original bill. Even Qisas and Diyat Bill were similarly shelved and never became a law. Without doubt it could be said that much credit of these victories belong to WAF for its campaign against these laws.

WAF opposed the Hudood ordinance and the Law of Evidence as well as other measures such as the dress code for television appearance and teaching. Women were the only group which actively and visibly opposed draconian laws and dictatorial measures during that time as political parties were banned and the worker’s and other movements had fragmented. These activists faced Martial Law authorities on the streets and were tear-gassed. Through picketing, demonstrations, letters, telegram and print media campaigns, and the writing of position papers on discriminatory laws, WAF carried a sustained campaign against the discriminatory laws and to have equality in all spheres of public and private life.

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49 Said Khan, op. cit., p. 163
The choice before WAF was whether to work at grass-roots level and raise consciousness and mobilize women there, or to concentrate on trying to make an impact at the national level, with some exceptions, WAF activists were new to public activities and had to depend on imagination rather than experience to guide them. WAF was happy to experiment with a new idea, and created its own style of work. Its first effort was to mobilize women through its signature campaign.

WAF also used methods such as public protest and mobilization of public opinion. Along with signature campaign, it conducted series of post cards and telegram campaigns. It initiated pickets and introduced the practice of distributing pamphlets. WAF adopted the practice of writing position papers and encourage others to write in media. WAF’s prime motivation was that of raising consciousness and reaching the widest possible audience. It is said that WAF made no attempt to mobilize the rural women as the majority of women are located in the rural areas and this was often criticized.

The Hudood laws made women a mere chattel in the hands of men. None of this has been taken by Pakistani women passively; they have responded with anger, vigor and initiative. It was the discriminatory nature of these laws which brought women out into the streets in the
early 1980s and repeatedly afterwards in support of the protection of their rights, and pitted them against the state.50


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Divorce in Islam: The Rights of a Muslim Woman

ShehnazNoor

Introduction

In pre-Quranic Arabia, men were free to repudiate their wives whenever it suited their whim or purpose. They were not bound to offer any reasons in pronouncing divorce. The mere expression of their will was enough to effect separation. Sometimes the husband would revoke the divorce and again divorce her, and again take her back, to divorce her again, and so on indefinitely. Sometimes, again she was divorced, but she was not free to marry. Women, under such circumstances were in a perpetual state of suspense. For their part, they had almost no right to dissolve their marriage on any ground whatsoever. Only in special cases could women reserve the right to divorce their husbands by seeking an agreement enshrined in the marital contract. As a general rule neither the Hebrews, nor the pre-Islamic Arabia recognised the right of divorce for women. The Quran allowed them this privilege which had earlier been denied to them by the primitive institutions of their country.

The Sharia recognises various forms like *khula, mubara, tafwid, faskh* that are available to the wife for obtaining divorce from her husband.
• **Khula**

*Khula* literally means to ‘take off’. Its secondary meaning is to take off clothes. Hedaya says that *khula* in its primitive sense, means to ‘draw off’ or ‘dig up’. In law it signifies an agreement entered into for the purpose of dissolving a connubial connexion, in lieu of a compensation paid by the wife to her husband out of her property. This legal connotation of *khula* appears to be based on how actually *khula* takes place. Galwash maintains when married parties disagree and are apprehensive that they cannot observe the bounds prescribed by the divine laws—that is, cannot perform the duties imposed on them by the conjugal relationship—the woman can release herself from the tie, by giving up some property in return, in consideration of which the husband is to give her a *kholaa*, and when they have done this, an irreversible divorce would take place.

**Khula in the light of Quran**

The justification for *khula* is generally believed to be based on the following verse of the Quran:

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A divorce is only permissible twice;  
After that, the parties should either  
Hold together on equitable terms,  
Or separate with kindness.  
It is not lawful for you, (Men),  
to take back
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Any of your gifts (from your wives),
Except when both parties fear
That they would be unable to
Keep the limits Ordained by God.
If ye (judges) do indeed fear that
They would be unable to keep
The limits ordained by God,
There is no blame on either of them
If she gives something of her freedom...

The verse deals not only with the pronouncement of *talaq* but equally incorporates a provision for *khula*. When the spouses have irreconcilable differences wherein the wife ignores the rights of the husband, dislikes him and becomes unable to live with him any longer, she is allowed to free herself (from married life) by giving him back what he had given her (in gifts and *mahr*). There is no sin on her in this case nor on him if she accepts such offer. Commenting on the said verse Maudoodi has made the following conclusions:

- **Khula** should occur in such a situation where there is an apprehension of exceeding the bounds prescribed by Allah. Though *khula* like *talaq* is not appreciated yet whenever there is an apprehension of preceding the bounds prescribed by Allah, *Khula* is preferred.

- Whenever a woman opts for *khula* she has to bear some economic sacrifice just as a man has to bear in case of *talaq*.
• Simply a desire to compensate would not suffice unless the person accepting the compensation consents.

• The act of khula gets completed with the consent of both the parties. This repudiates the view of those who consider a judicial decree as a condition precedent for the khula.

• In case a woman offers compensation and the husband does not accept it, a woman has a right to approach the court

Khula in the light of Sunnah

The wife of Thabit bin Qais came to the Prophet [SAW] and said, “O Allah’s Messenger, I do not blame Thabit for any defects in his character or his religion, but I being a Muslim, dislike to behave in an un-Islamic manner (if I remain with him)”. On that Allah’s messenger [SAW] said (to her), “Will you give back the garden which your husband has given you (as Mahr)?” She said, “Yes”. Then the Prophet [SAW] said to Thabit, “O Thabit! Accept your garden and divorce her once”.

The object of khula is to enable a wife to get a release from the marriage tie when she finds that the ends of marriage are not likely to be achieved by a continuance of their union or when she suffers ill-treatment from her husband or when she finds that it is not possible for her to live with her husband in harmony and peace.
• **Mubara**

When a divorce is effected by mutual consent on account of mutual aversion, it is called *mubara* which operates as a release and discharge on both sides. Generally *mubara* and *khula* have been clubbed together under the heading divorce by mutual consent. The incidents of the two look somewhat similar, they are indeed quite different from each other. The fundamental principle underlying *mubara* are reciprocity and a bilateral desire to dissolve the marriage and on the contrary in *khula* the desire to separate is of the wife. Like *khula*, *mubara* operates as a single, irrevocable divorce.

• **Tafwid**

As already stated the husband can divorce his wife and this he can do so by pronouncing *talaq* himself or he may delegate this to anyone person including his wife. This delegation of power to pronounce *talaq* to his wife is called *Talaq-e-Tafwid* and is well recognised in Muslim law. The foundation of *talaq-e-Tafwid* is rooted in the following verse of the Quran:

O Prophet! Say to thy consorts:
If it be that ye desire the life of this world,
And its glitter—then come!
I will provide for your
Enjoyment and set you free
In a handsome manner.
Basically this verse refers to the position of the wives of the Prophet [SAW]. Since their position was not like that of ordinary wives. They had special duties and responsibilities, consequently they are told here that they cannot continue in the sacred household and could be divorced if they merely wished for ease and glitter. It is explained by the Muslim jurists that Prophet [SAW] had, in obedience to the above injunction of the Quran, empowered his wives to choose either Him [SAW] or separation. It is inferred from this tradition that a husband can lawfully delegate to his wife the power to dissolve the marriage if she so wants. Talaq-e-Tafwid can be delegated either at the time of marriage or at any time thereafter and when the wife exercises this power, it effects a consecutive talaq by the husband, which is governed by the general law of talaq by men.

- **Faskh**

In addition to khula, mubara and tafwid a Muslim wife has a right to apply for and obtain a divorce on different grounds specified in the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939. The dissolution or rescission of the contract of marriage by judicial decree is known as Faskh. A Muslim wife can obtain a decree of divorce in case her husband’s whereabouts are not known for a period of four years; her husband has not provided maintenance for a period of two years; her husband is sentenced to imprisonment for a period of seven years or
more; her husband has failed to perform marital obligations for a period of three years; her husband in an impotent; her husband has been insane for a period of two years or is suffering from leprosy in virulent venereal disease; she was given in marriage before the age of fifteen; her husband treats her with cruelty or she can also obtain a divorce on any other ground recognised as valid for the dissolution of marriage under Muslim law. No doubt these grounds give a Muslim wife to obtain divorce but this does not mean that these grounds were not available to her before 1939. It is significant to mention here that only recognition was granted to these grounds in the form of a statute. These grounds are not exhaustive as is clear from the clause (ix) Section 2 of the Act, enables the wife to obtain divorce on any other grounds recognised as valid under the Muslim law. The main purpose of the general power of the Qazi in respect of Faskh is recognised in Muslim law.

• **Lian, Ila and Zihar**

*Lian* literally means to drive away. Here it means to drive away from the mercy of Allah on account of imprecations involving the curse and wrath of Allah. When a husband accuses his lawfully wedded wife of adultery, she has a right to apply to the *qazi* to order the husband either to support his accusation by taking the prescribed oaths or to admit the
falsity of his charge. The procedure for *Lian* is laid down in the Quran as under:

And those who launch
A charge against chaste women,
And produce not four witnesses
(To support their allegations)—
Flog them with eighty stripes;
And reject their evidence,
Even after: for such men
Are wicked transgressors;
Unless they repent thereafter
And mend (their conduct);
For God is oft-forgiving,
Most Merciful.

And for those who launch
A charge against their spouses,
And have (in support)
No evidence but, their own—
Their solitary evidence
(Can be received) if they
Bear witness four times
(With an oath) by God
That they are solemnly
Telling the truth
And the fifth (oath)
(Should be) that they solemnly
Invoke the curse of God
On themselves if they tell a lie.
But it would avert the punishment
From the wife, If she bears witness
Four times (with an oath)  
By God, that (her husband)  
Is telling a lie;  
And the fifth (oath)  
Should be that she solemnly  
Invokes the wrath of God  
On herself if (her accuser)  
Is telling the truth”.

If anything is being said about a woman’s chastity it cannot be taken lightly. It should be supported by very strong evidence and failure to produce evidence justifies the severe punishment for slander. It would stop people from making such serious allegations. But the case of a married person is different from that of the outsiders. Rightly comments Abdullah Yousuf Ali:

If one of them accuses the other of unchastity, the accusation partly reflects on the accuser as well. Moreover, the link which unites married people, even when differences supervene, is sure to act as a steadying influence against the concoction of false charges of unchastity particularly when divorce is allowed (as in Islam) for reasons other than unchastity. Suppose a husband catches a wife in adultery. In the nature of things four witnesses or even one witness would be impossible. Yet after such an experience it is against human nature that he can live a normal married life. The matter is then left to the honour of the two spouses. If the husband can solemnly swear four times to the fact and in addition invoke a curse on him if he lies, that is prima facia evidence of wife’s guilt. But if the wife swears similarly four times and similarly invokes a
curse on her, she is in law acquitted of the guilt. If she does not take this step, the charge is held proved and the punishment follows. In either case marriage is dissolved, as it is against human nature that the parties can live together happily after such an incident.

The penal law of Islam prescribes a severe punishment for adultery and so it takes a serious view of an allegation of adultery against a married woman. If a husband has accused his wife of adultery he has to establish his charge otherwise he will be liable for prosecution for defamation. If there will be no proof, the marriage will be dissolved by resorting to *lian*.

*Ilā*  

If a husband swore or said to his wife that by Allah he will not have sexual intercourse with her at the end of four months the marriage will come to an end and the two cannot live as husband and wife without re-marriage. But if before the expiry of four months the husband breaks his oath and does have sexual intercourse, then there will be no divorce but he shall give recommendation for breach of oath. Such an oath taken by the husband is called *ila*.

In pre-Islamic Arabia *Ilā* was a common practice employed by the husbands to harass their wives by depriving them of sexual intimacy without dissolving the marriage. This meant women remained tied
down to their husbands and could not contract second marriage. Islam put a check to the evil effects of this practice by imposing a penalty on the husband in case he repents and cancels his declaration within the prescribed period. Otherwise if he does not repent and cancel the declaration, he stands to lose his wife.

Under Hanafi law, the wife need not to ask for divorce, it comes to an end automatically after the expiration of four months. However, under Maliki, Shafi’s and Hanabli law there is no automatic dissolution of marriage, the wife has not to ask for divorce and same is true about the Shia law.

**Zihar**

The word *Zihar* is derived from the word *Zihr*, the back. In the language of law it signifies a man comparing his wife to any of his female relations within such prohibited degree of kindred, whether by blood, fosterage or marriage, as renders marriage with them invariably unlawful.

When a husband compares his wife with any of his prohibited female relations and keeps away from her the marriage will not come to an end, the woman will continue to remain his wife, but the husband cannot do sexual inter-course with her and she will remain forbidden for him howsoever long a period may pass. The husband can re-establish the matrimonial connection by paying the prescribed
expiation and there is no need for re-marriage. In case the husband resumes the matrimonial-connection without paying the expiation it would be a major sin. He can revoke his declaration by freeing a captive and in case he has no means he has to fast for two months successively, and if he is unable to do so he has to feed sixty needy ones. However, a wife is free to go to the court and seek divorce when her husband compares her with any prohibited female relations. It has been rightly stated that the law of *Ila* and *Zihar*, protects the wife against a particular kind of desertion by the husband and does not put in the hands of the husband arbitrary form of divorce. In pre-Islamic Arabia *Ila* and *Zihar* were used by men as a means to harass their wives, but Islam not only restricted these practices by imposing penalties on the husbands but also empowered the wives to ask for divorce. These provisions encouraged women to protect and safeguard their honour and dignity and to claim their right to divorce. Despite these available provisions there are still various apprehensions and misconceptions about the inferior status of women in matters of divorce in Islamic law. These misconceptions can be ascribed to two major reasons: In the first instance, Islamic law offers the man the freedom to divorce his wife by his unilateral action without the intervention of the court. On the other hand, the woman is not entitled to pronounce divorce herself; her proposal is left exclusively to the discretion and sweet will of her husband. Though such a provision appears to favour men, it is no more than a procedural difference which
has garnered unjustified attention. While it is certainly true that men reserve the right to pronounce divorce even in cases where women seek *khula*, can this alone justify his superior status?

A comparative analysis of the verses relating to *talaq* and *khula* clearly establishes the fact that a woman has more freedom in exercising her view than a man. For a man many hard guidelines have been prescribed before he can finally pronounce *talaq*, while a woman is more free to ask for divorce. For example, if a man dislikes his wife the Quran recommends that he focus on her virtues and qualities. Men have been suggested various other measures to harmonize their marital relationship and save their marriage. No such limitations have been prescribed for a woman except the condition that if she fears that she would not be able to keep the limits ordained by God. The freedom enjoyed by a woman in this regard is best illustrated by the above quoted *hadith* of the Prophet [SAW], whereby the Prophet [SAW] allowed Thabit’s wife to ask for *khula* when apparently no fault lied with Thabit either in his character or religion, except the fear that she would proceed in an un-Islamic way. However, it may be pointed out that a woman has not been given the license to obtain *khula* unless certain prescribed conditions are complied with. Basically Islam believes in the stability of marriage and discourages its breakdown either in the form of *talaq* or *khula*. The Prophet [SAW] is reported to have said:
If any woman asks her husband for divorce without some strong reason, the odour of paradise will be forbidden to her.

To conclude, a wife has more grounds for seeking divorce than her husband. However, it is important to recognise the reasons which allow the husband to pronounce divorce more freely than the wife. While the husband is allowed to initiate and pronounce the dissolution of the marriage tie, the woman in certain cases can also initiate and actually dissolve the marriage independently. Hence, it is important to understand the provisions of Islamic law in their proper context and completeness, in order to arrive at a more balanced view of Islam on the question of divorce. Unfortunately our patriarchal setup is unwilling to acknowledge these provisions even when they are available within the Shariah. The challenge therefore is to confront this patriarchal mindset and to ensure a semblance of equality between men and women in matters of divorce and related marital issues.

Reference:


6 II: 229.


11 *Supra* n. 2, p.507.


13 *Supra* n. 11.

14 *Supra* n. 9, p.183.

15 XXXIII:28.

17 *Supra* n. 13, p.185.


19 Section 2, The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939.

20 *Supra* n. 17, p. 452.

21 XXIV: 4-9.

22 *Supra* n. 17, Vol. II, p.897.


24 *Supra* n. 20, p.105.


26 *Id.*, pp.112, 114-115.

27 *Supra* n. 4, p. 326.

28 *Supra* n. 23, p. 318.


31 Quran, LVIII:3-4

33 *Supra* n. 22, p.107

34 Quran IV: 19

35 Quran IV: 34, 35; LXVI: 1; II: 228; LXV: 2.


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ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF WOMEN IN MEDIA

P.L. Vishveshwar Rao

Gender equality, or equality between men and women, is the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

ABC of women workers' rights and gender equality, ILO (2007)

Women have greater visibility and voice than ever before, and they exercise influence in every sphere of public life. In every corner of the globe the issue of women’s rights is a central pillar of political, social and cultural life and a key to continued development.

Nevertheless, in many countries there is no denying the evidence of the huge gaps between constitutional and legal guarantees and the daily realities of women’s lives. Media is no exception. Across the information and communications sector, at all levels, and within journalism women face inequality and lack of opportunities. Genuine
equality in terms of professional status and working conditions remain elusive for women in media.

**Feminization of Newsroom**

Although with feminization of newsroom is happening the balance of power remains in favour of males. Women journalists are largely absent in decision-making positions. The issue of women and the media appeared quite late on the international agenda. It was only in 1995 that the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a section on media in its platform for action. It referred to the need to increase women’s participation in the media and their access to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication, and the promotion of a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

Despite the fact that most countries have adopted laws forbidding discrimination on the basis of sex, it remains a major issue. Although some noticeable improvements have taken place in some countries, huge inequality between the sexes remains in the media profession worldwide. This lack of equality seriously impacts on the way women are portrayed in a media that shapes public perception. The improvement is there but much still needs to be done in terms of equal pay for equal work, equal access to leadership positions, flexible hours, maternity/paternity benefits, access to training and hard beats, an end to sexual harassment, victimization and bullying, fair gender portrayal
in the news and a halt to the migration of women journalists to freelancing.

According to IFJ 2001, survey gender inequality in journalism is a world-wide phenomenon. The percentage of women in journalism ranges around 50 per cent in countries such as Finland, Thailand or Mexico to as low as around 6 per cent in Sri Lanka or Togo. Significantly, the number of women in decision making positions was extremely low: Asia-Pacific: 0.1 per cent, Europe: 3 per cent, Americas: 6 per cent, Africa: 1.4 per cent.

Moreover, the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) highlighted the lack of female representation in the news. Women appear in only 21 per cent of news subjects; they are three times more likely than men to be identified in terms of their family status.

**Media a Draw for Young Women**

The growth boom for both print and electronic media, has opened up new and hitherto unavailable opportunities for media professionals. The media, especially electronic, proved a draw for young women who aspire to make a name for themselves. The high visibility of women as anchors, presenters and reporters, the glamour of being on-camera and the recognition that follows broke the walls of resistance in middle-class parents to their daughters joining the profession. As journalism courses in universities and under-graduate colleges
proliferate and draw huge numbers of girls, the media have opened their doors to women. Today’s situation is a far cry from 1960s when women journalists were an exception. Usha Rai, the well-known development journalist was the first woman to join the Times of India on the editorial staff in 1964. There was no woman in the reporting section, on the desk or the edit page. The only women in the newspaper were receptionists and telephone operators.

A contemporary of Usha Rai was Prabha Dutt who was in the Hindustan Times. The editor (male) of Hindustan Times refused to send Prabha Dutt to cover the 1965 India-Pakistan War as women reporting was unheard of let alone reporting from the war front. The irrepresible Prabha Dutt, however, went on her own and began to file dispatches from the front. They were so good that Hindustan Times had to use them.

In the 1980’s, Seema Guha of Times of India and Anita Pratap of India Today did a remarkable job covering the Sri Lanka civil war. Following in the footsteps of her late mother, Barkha Dutt of NDTV covered the Indo-Pak Kargil War in 1999. Her ‘live’ coverage from the war front made media history.

Well-known Women Journalists
In the new millennium, there are several women editors and columnists who have made a name for themselves in their specialized areas of interest. As entry of women into the media has become easy, they are entering and impacting in areas hitherto considered male preserves like political, business and sports journalism. On any given day we find bylines of women on every single page. There are a number of popular women columnists and journalists who have risen from the ranks and who today are at the top in their profession. Some of the well known names are Olga Tellis, Vimala Patil, Nalini Singh, Kalpana Sharma, Tavleen Singh, Barkha Dutt, Sheela Barse, Chitra Subramanian, Shahnaz Anklesaria, Seema Mustafa, Pushpa Girimaji, Sevanti Ninan, Nirmala Lakshman, Ammu Joseph, Mrinal Pande, Nirupama Subramanian, Pamela Philipose, Rasheeda Bhagat, Vidya Subramaniam, A. T. Jayanti, Meena Menon, Sakuntala Narasimhan, Malini Parthasarathy, Neeraja Chowdhury, Radha Venkatesan, Kaveree Bamzai, C.K. Meena, Ritu Sarin, Uma Sudhir, Maya Sharma and many others.

The Indian Fourth Estate has made significant strides and with it so have women journalists. From a common refrain “newspaper is no place for a woman” some 30 years ago, the women journalists are holding top/senior positions in many newspaper and magazine offices, even though this trend is largely confined to metropolitan cities and to
English language press. The presence of women in the Indian language too is improving, both in press and television.

The English language press in India is teeming with women. Admittedly, while most of them are in the lower rungs, there is no dearth of women in positions of responsibility as editors, assistant editors, bureau chiefs, columnists, foreign correspondents, special correspondents and chief reporters. Women breached the fortress in late 1970s and 1980s, and those generations of pioneers today occupy some top positions and are among the most-read and highly paid journalists.

A significant factor which has contributed to the changing nature of work among women journalists employed in the metropolitan cities is that, corresponding to changing times, a larger number of women have entered the profession in the past decade. Most women journalists in metropolitan cities assert that no longer are there any traditional “male areas” of reporting and that they have equal access to all beats.

**Equality in English Media**

To a large extent there is equality between the sexes in the English media in terms of opportunities, promotions and salaries. Women occupy senior positions, travel abroad on assignments, do political and crime reporting, write editorials. The newspapers, even if they do not consciously encourage women to reach the top, do not put obstacles in
their way. As a woman journalist commented, discrimination against women in the English language press was an “archaic” concept.

By and large, women in the English language media do not have the same problems as their sisters in the language press. They are better paid, and even if on contract, have better facilities at the workplace, have toilets and washrooms, get transport back home after night shifts, get maternity leave and various perks and privileges. While some papers like *The Indian Express, Deccan Herald* (of Bangalore) and *Times of India* have a long tradition of employing women as reporters and on the desk, some conservative papers like *The Hindu* have taken a decision to recruit women and in the last five years here has been a 25-30 per cent increase in the intake of women. Not Just in metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Delhi, but even in smaller cities like Pune, Nagpur, Jaipur, Baroda, Ahmedabad and Panaji, women journalists are well represented in the English media.

Some newspapers in Mumbai and Pune have more women than men and the women often joke with their women bosses to recruit a male “for a change.” Women journalists in the English media, by and large, come from a progressive milieu, from middle or higher class families of society, and work among people from similar socio-cultural backgrounds. They generally do not face conservative, traditional mindsets at the workplace or among colleagues.
In the English media, women are generally concentrated in features and Sunday magazine sections. Occasionally women are on the crime beat, but rarely do they do politics and legislature reporting. Women correspondents of outstation English papers in the state capitals are fairly common and they invariably cover politics too. They would have been appointed because of their seniority and at times because their work for news magazines requires feature writing too, and so, the preference for women.

Quite a few women believe there is no discrimination and no glass ceiling in major English language papers. However, there is a tendency to push women into feature writing and non-serious writing such as reporting parties and social events. The feature desks of almost all newspapers are all-women affairs. Some women believe this is “ghettoisation” of women, and keeping them out of “mainstream newspapering” does no good for their future in journalism. It has been pointed out that there is a tendency among women to focus on serious issues but with more jobs in non-serious journalism, the women tend to be herded into celebrity and lifestyle journalism. Like the women’s columns or women’s clubs of earlier times, women tend to get bogged down in the features sections in the present times.

With regard to the question of equal opportunity in promotions, it hinges on several factors, primarily on the positions in question. While journalism in India does have women finally in positions of authority
including resident editor, political editor, financial editor, chief of bureau, features editor, chief reporter and so on, it is significant that a woman is yet to head a national daily as editor.

**Women in Decision-making Positions**

Technically, newspaper managements have an equal opportunity policy but statistics show that when it comes to decision-making positions, the ratio of men to women is comparatively high. This may not necessarily be attributed to a gender bias but to the fact that there are far more men in the profession than women.

Women might have been well off in the English language press in terms of salaries and other perks compared to the regional language press, but with the contract system becoming a norm and with the individual journalist - male or female –negotiating the pay packet, women seem to be at a disadvantage. According to some of those on contract, the new system provides them with a “higher salary” as compared to their colleagues under the working Journalists Act even though the system is “arbitrary” and a lot more demanding. They admit to not knowing how to read a contract or how to negotiate. They have no idea of the benefits they can get or perks they should demand. They tend to accept what is offered and make no demands. Women are also not clear about the implications of the contract system, what to ask and what to expect as they are being pressurized to move to the contract system. The result is that they end up getting less than their male
colleagues who are junior to them or do not get normal benefits like leave, reimbursements, Provident Fund and so on. In fact, a senior woman journalist wondered if the substantial number of women in senior positions in English newspapers was due to the fact that the managements got them “cheap.”

**Discrimination and Harassment faced by Women Journalists**

Discrimination and harassment by the male superiors is common for women journalists in the regional media, while women in English language media do not seem to have as many complaints. Apparently women are seen as vulnerable, and those harassed have often borne it without complaining perhaps believing they are powerless to do anything about it. A trend that is worrisome is that women in distress get no support from their female colleagues, either in the organisation or from those in the profession. Empowerment of women journalists either in the regional or English language media is not such that they will fight for the rights of other women. Time and again, both in cases of sexual harassment and personal harassment, men rally in support of their male colleagues but among women there is no such support. As a senior journalist in the Tamil press said, “There is very little space for women. With whom do you fight? The enemy is invisible,” she said of the discrimination and harassment media women have to put up with. (NCW, 2004)
A senior Malayalam language journalist who spoke of the harassment of women both sexually and professionally put it succinctly: “A woman works alone and suffers alone…she finds no support ether at home or at (the) office. Men on the other hand, when faced with allegations, close ranks and stand by their colleagues.” This lack of support among women for their harassed women colleagues has been uniformly reported across all states (NCW 2004).

At the workplace it is a daily struggle for the women, especially when they are beginners. A sub-editor in Telugu daily said her male colleagues tended to blame her for every mistake in the copy. They try to suppress the women professional, constantly finding fault or criticizing their performance. She quit after three years unable to take the harassment.

Among the worst kinds of harassment and which is common to all women journalists and to which those in regional language media are extremely vulnerable to is scandal-mongering. This is a far more serious problem in the regional language media than in the English newspapers where an average person, whether male or female, is socially more free. The differential working conditions are the result of a socio-cultural divide.
Limiting Women

An old trend has gained new respectability but whether it will benefit women in terms of position and power within the organizations needs to be seen. The influx of women into the English media has been diverted to the features sections with the result these areas of work have become all-women’s sections, creating literally a newspaper within a newspaper, divorced from the mainstream.

In some organizations, the younger generation owners have brought in their modern thinking and have no doubt in the ability of women to deliver. For instance, 15 years go, Malayala Manorama did not allow women to appear the entrance test for recruitment to the group’s publications. In those days even receptionists in the organization were men. Today there are women in almost all departments, the change brought by the second generation of owners and their spouses.

Sexual Harassment: A Widespread Phenomenon

Sexual harassment is widespread but neither the victim nor the media bosses will speak of it. The managements deny that it occurs in their office and assert that if it happens they will not tolerate it and mete out severe punishment to the offender. The NCW report on Status of Women Journalists in India (2004) showed that sexual harassment is part of work culture in the newspaper organizations in India, but women journalists either do not know how to deal with it or choose not
to do anything about it for several reasons including social shame and fear that they are responsible for it.

While guidelines exist to deal with this issue, they are seldom implemented, enforced or even known about. Women in the media are vulnerable to harassment from colleagues who might arrive for the night shift drunk or the night staff leaving pornographic pictures and messages on their computers. Making sexist, vulgar comments is common in the editorial rooms of newspapers as are so-called humorous or snide remarks on women colleagues’ work. Most women hesitate to admit to being victims but speak of the experience of friends and colleagues. They also speak of “managing” such experiences / environments rather than dealing with them squarely or seeking redress within the organization since that is the only strategy of surviving in the job.

**Stress of Meeting Deadlines**

The woman’s traditional responsibilities as nurturer and career of family are a major obstacle in the professional growth of a woman journalist. The contract system of employment which emphasize consistent and quality performance puts the women under great pressure. Also the intense competition and the heavy workload in the media organizations that often stretches the work-day to 10 hours take a toll on women journalists. The demands of meeting deadlines and
programme schedules is one of the major work pressures on women journalists.

Even though most women journalists in the metropolis are clearly opting for reporting and writing on political, economic and business issues, they face the threat of a setback as the productive years at work (25-40 years) may clash with their marriage plans, setting up home and rearing children. A break means losing the best years of one's career and finding that the male colleagues have gone up the ladder.

Most women from middle-class, urban, educated families are fettered by conventions and customs of society and find it difficult to break out of the constraints imposed on them. The successful women journalists attribute their success to the support given by cooperative husbands, understanding mothers-in-law, and obliging mothers.

Even as the number of women in the profession has grown manifold and women journalists have made a mark in what was once considered a “male-domain”, the employers have failed to realize that better facilities for women would be beneficial to the organization. Despite the acknowledgement that women journalists are “more conscientious and hard working” than their male colleagues and are proving to be as competitive, if not more, the employers make no efforts to provide facilities at the workplace for those women who have family responsibilities to enable women to give their best.
Quite a few women, especially in the English language press, have put off having children in favour of their career. Most women who took a break to bring up children or even those who stayed home for a few months to have children believe they lost out on growth and promotions. Some organizations go out of the way to be considerate to women with young children, but mostly women are on their own where children are concerned. Young mothers would like childcare facilities in their workplace so that they can concentrate on their work instead of worrying about leaving the children with an unreliable maid or in a crèche. Organizations could consider providing childcare facilities not just for women employees but also for men as it would go a long way in building an enabling atmosphere for new and young mothers and fathers.

**World of Women Journalists in Language Media**

While women journalists have come a long way in the English press, the case is quite different in the language press, and more so in the metropolitan cities as against the rest of the country. Cities such as Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Calcutta have a large number of women journalists, whereas cities such as Patna, Guwahati, Lucknow have barely a handful. The main reason for this is not only do employers and editors still believe that journalism is not for women, but that women themselves are not inclined to join the profession. Despite a majority of the women coming from middle-class family background, their
families remain orthodox/protective about the women which acts as the main deterrent for most women, particularly in a field job.

The wide gap between English journalism and the Indian language press, can well be highlighted by citing a comparison made between the leading national dailies, in English and Hindi of three major groups of newspapers from the country’s capital, Delhi. The representation of women in The Times of India (English) is way ahead as against its sister publication The Navbharat Times (Hindi). Out of 16 reporters in Times of India eight are women including the chief reporter (nearly 1:1 ratio). In NBT however, there is a solitary woman reporter, out of a total of 12 reporters. Same is the case in other organizations that publish an English and a language paper.

On the editorial desk, the TOI has a woman deputy news editor and 9 women sub-editors out of a total strength of 22 in the department. It contrast the NBT has only one woman chief sub-editor on the desk of 12 members.

As for the national bureau (of out-station reporters), the TOI has five women special correspondents out of 17 whereas the NBT does not have single woman out of 8 correspondents. However, in the features section in the NBT, four out six sub-editors / writers are women.

In the TOI, women journalists have also made inroads into business/financial and sports reporting. The business desk has more
women than men (five out of eight) and in the field there are two correspondents out of a total of eight. In sports, out of a team of six reporters are women.

In The Hindustan Times and The Indian Express groups, the situation of men-versus-women journalists is as dismal. They don’t have a single woman reporter or a woman special correspondent in their Hindi language publications. The silver lining is that Hindustan (Hindi daily of HT group) has a woman executive editor (views) who is a well-known journalists in the country, Mrinal Pande.

In Times of India, Delhi, of the total 267 journalists, the women number 59 and men 208, that is women are barely 22 per cent. The female-male ratio among decision-makers such as executive editor, editor, resident editor, chief of bureau, features editor, news editor is 1:4:5. Yet, the organisation said it has an equal opportunity policy. The Hindustan Times group has about 240 male and 35 female journalists. The female-male ratio of the decision-making positions is 1:15. This group too says it has an equal opportunity policy.

Another pointer to the far-from encouraging situation of women journalists is the number of correspondents attached with national and regional newspapers, or freelancers accredited to the country’s Press Information Bureau in Delhi. Although the number of accredited women correspondents has increased, the men continue to dominate the
profession. Out of a total of 500-odd accredited correspondents, women number only 50-odd (Inderjit, 2007).

In the case of news agencies too, a similar situation prevails. The Press Trust of India, Delhi has one woman correspondent and 20 male correspondents whereas its Hindi section of five male correspondents is all–male. The United News of India’s Hindi section has one woman correspondent and eight men.

Clearly women in journalism in India have taken huge strides towards bridging the gender gap in the newspaper industry. However, a huge discrepancy exists in the benefits, working conditions and privileges accruing to women in the English language press compared to their regional counterparts. Women journalists continue to struggle to get their dues even while they juggle the dual responsibilities of home and work, professionalism and domesticity in a largely traditional society. While many gains have been earned, much remains to be done.

Even as the numerical gap is getting narrow, the same is not happening in terms of decision-making power. Women in media are yet to secure the same professional perks and benefits that their male counterparts take as a given.

Even as women have stormed many a male bastion in the media and wrested the right to report and edit and travel and opine, they are still struggling to get their material dues in terms of appointments to
decision-making positions, promotions, raises, maternity leave, transport facilities and a more gender sensitive remuneration package on the whole. Feminisation of news rooms has to be accompanied by facilitation that can lead to empowerment. Unless this happens in a large measure, women in the media in India cannot be said to have arrived.

**Empowering Women Journalists**

A conference, “Empowering Women in the Asian Media,” held in Manila in June 1988, suggested strategies for women journalists, media organizations and media associations to adopt in order to promote better participation of women in media management—which, in turn, is expected to improve both the position of women in journalism as well as journalistic practice itself. These are as follows:

*Women journalists* should:

- Support other women journalists; network with colleagues.
- Promote professionalism in the office.
- Dare to lead differently.
- Promote gender sensitization.
- Get the support of male peers and family members

*Media companies* should:

- Establish policies conducive to work and family issues.
Use technology for added work flexibility.

Conduct leadership training programmes.

Create and maintain balance in assignments.

Promote on merit.

**Media associations** should:

- Be involved in media campaigns and advocacy.
- Provide research and documentation on women in leadership; be a clearinghouse of information.
- Provide leadership and skills training for both men and women.
- Create and promote opportunities for networking.
- Advocate on behalf of women in leadership.

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“Fire” as a Gynotext: An Answer to Gender Conditioning?

Shree Deepa

“I do want to discuss feminist intellectuals as exemplary heroines, rather than as sites or markers, because I think we need exemplary heroines, and to look at experience of women who wished to live a full, serious and meaningful woman’s life.” (Showalter, 2000, Laughing Medusa, pp133)

In this paper Elaine Showalter’s Feminist critical theory is evoked and applied to the movie “Fire” directed by Deepa Mehta. The movie is viewed as a ‘gynotext’ (The term is borrowed from Showalter as encountered in Peter Barry’s Beginning Theory). Attempts are made to trace the two protagonists in the movie as borrowed terms of the three historical literary phases that Showalter describes; the feminine phase, the feminist phase and the female phase. The attempt is to trace this ‘progress’ in this single movie and attempts are made to describe it with the definition of the terms and the concept of ‘gender conditioning’. The primary question is: Does this gynotext serve as an answer to ‘Gender Conditioning’? It is evaluated in terms of the choices that the protagonists make in their life. The entire evaluation is limited to the idea that the film is a gynotext and not as a media text.

The word gynotext seemed very familiar at the very first contact. Peter Barry (1995) says “The feminist write a text and it is called Gynotext. It
is only read by women and criticized or analyze by women too. The analyzing of Gynotext is called Gynocritics. They want it read and analyzed by women only because to avoid the male-centered or patriarchal visions”. In another edition (2011) he attributes the term to Showalter, “Elaine Showalter, for instance, described the change in the late 1970s as a shift of attention from ‘androtexts’ (books by men) to ‘gynotexts’ (books by women). She coined the term ‘gynocritics’ meaning the study of gynotexts, but gynocriticism is a broad and varied field and any generalization should be treated with caution.” (pp118) But apart from these two serious encounters even many online dictionaries, Wikipedia and Google bounced with no serious research reference on the term or a clear definition. However, a title *Autobiography as Gynotext* (A. N. Mensah, 1996) was encountered. But it was just a one page blog. Lola Lemire Tostevin has a book titled *Gyno Text* (1983) according to Wikipedia. In this paper the term is used as a women’s text for women by women. The intention is to broaden the term and include all kinds of discourses that concern women. In this paper the definition operative is ‘that if any woman is associated in any capacity with the production it would be included and viewed as a gynotext. Anneke Smelik, 2009, observes that, “From the post-structuralist and structuralist perspective, it was not so much the content that mattered (what is the meaning of this film, television series, or video clip?) But on how meaning was *acquired*. It is a given that film should not be regarded as a *reflection of* meaning given in
advance but as a construction of meaning.” (pp 180) Elaine Showalter (1998) in a recent essay has observed that the term gynocriticism over the years has developed to offer a coherent narrative of women’s literary history. In relation to the literary mainstream, women’s writing has moved through phases of subordination, protest, and autonomy, phases connected by recurring images, metaphors, themes, and plots that emerge from women’s social and literary experience and from reading both male and female precursors. (pp 404-405). In this paper the plot (as mentioned by Showalter) of the film Fire is used and viewed as a gynotext. The plot for discussion emerges from my understanding of the film and from the responses of various critics and the ‘synopsis’ that was published by the director of the film.

Gender conditioning (Barry, 2011, pp123) as a term is being used in two senses; one, the primary preoccupation with the female gender, next, the phrase is being used as a socially compulsory, conditioned role that has been thrust upon the female population from the biblical times or the BC times. The word ‘conditioning’ is important because of all the experiments that were conducted by the psychologists from the classical and operant conditioning times on animals and their results were impulsively imposed on humans (here women) as Homo sapiens; in other words woman was/is treated as an animal. Further elaboration is not necessary it is well researched already. World Health Organization admits that sometimes it is hard to understand exactly
what is meant by the term "gender", and how it differs from the closely related term "sex". "Sex" refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. "Gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. To put it another way: "Male" and "female" are sex categories, while "masculine" and "feminine" are gender categories. Aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly.

The time has come for the women to break free from this conditioning and live a life of her own: A life that she wants, with her choices, on her own terms. The depiction of women in film, "Fire" help to broaden the definition of women by bringing the Western idea of gender freedom and autonomy to a stratified condition in India. Mulvey (in Smilek, pp 181) talks about the male fear of the female body and advocates that it has to be averted. According to Mulvey, this happens in two ways. The first is through sadism: the woman’s body has to controlled and inserted into the social order. The sadism is usually given in the narrative structure. The erotic gaze is often followed by violence, such as rape or even murder. The second way of averting male fear is through fetishism, where the female star is turned into an ideal beauty, a fetish, whose flawless perfection turns any attention away from her difference, her otherness.
In this paper analysis of the ‘progress’ (Showalter, 1998) of the two protagonists from the tripartite structure of feminine, to feminist and finally female is done. The two women Radha and Sita are introduced in the film as married women who are dutiful towards their husbands and the joint family. At the very outset Sita asks her husband “Don’t you like me?” to which he replies that they have been married only for three days. In India the feminine woman never asks such question, even if she does it is construed as a rhetorical question that be answered with silence or with nonsense. While Radha is introduced as a dutiful wife who cooks, cleans, respects and takes care of the household. When they both meet, Radha takes Sita to her room, explaining that when Biji (the mother-in-law) rings her bell, she needs something. In her room, Sita puts on a pair of jeans and dances to music. Radha opens Sita's door, taking her by surprise. The two women go into the main room where Biji is. Biji rings her bell, disturbed by the sight of Sita in the jeans. Sita goes back to her room to change clothes. The feminine, the society dictates and has conditioned, should wear women’s clothes, in this context, sari or salwar suit. The woman is not allowed freedom to choose the type of clothes she wants to wear. We see both as feminine characters, bound by the societal conditionings. In the interview with Phillips Richard (1999) Deepa Mehta observes, “Every society or traditional value, whether in the east or the west, has an incredible impact on human behaviour. So everybody in Fire —the women, the men—confront these problems. The younger man in Fire really wants
to get married to a Chinese girl. She doesn't want to marry him. He
doesn't want to be in a joint business, but this is the way things are
dictated. And so the complex pressures of society impose on all the
characters.” But in this paper the concern is with the gender construct
of the woman. She adds that “Fire is about particular individuals, but it
is also a universal question”. The question to ponder is about the means
and ways of breaking away from the patriarchal conditioning. An
immediate straight forward answer may not be visible and available,
but surely a path for me and my fellow sisters is visible. It has nothing
to do with sexuality but everything to do with the voice and choices that
we choose to express.

Ashok sits with a group of followers of his religious leader/swami,
Swamiji (Ram Gopal Bajaj), who talks to them. Ashok says one should
test oneself against temptation until desire leaves the body. Here Radha
becomes the object of temptation and the means to control. Woman and
her sexualities are viewed as pollution and sin. Radha’s meek feminine
nature permits Ashok to use her in such a manner. Even Sita becomes a
prospective machinery to produce babies. Ashok tells Sita that when
she has a baby, that will become her full-time job. Sita wonders why
this subject matter came up. Radha explains to her that she cannot have
a baby. The feminine woman becomes a baby making machine.
Radha’s remarks “no eggs” testifies this point, and Ashok has kept
himself celibate from that point forward as if to indicate that sex is only
to procreate. Jatin tells Ashok that he felt he had no choice in marrying Sita, due to his nagging. Jatin accuses Ashok of doing everything he does for Swamiji. Ashok hits Jatin. A few moments later, Ashok tells Radha to forgive him, saying to her, "My choices have made life difficult for you." Radha responds, "What is there to forgive?" This is classic feminine nature that patriarchy has conditioned women into believing and living a life in the Indian soil.

Similarly, that night, Jatin and Sita have sex for the first time - a loveless, mechanical act. Jatin lies back and goes to sleep. Sita cleans her blood off of the bed's sheet. Sex is polarized towards the orgasms of the man and women’s desires are never considered, cared for or required and are conditioned as such. Another night, Ashok lies in a bed next to Radha, testing himself to see if he will be tempted by her sexuality. She gets up and asks him if she could have children, would he need her? He says probably not. Ashok tells Radha that by helping him with his tests, she's doing her duty as his wife. The duty of the woman is the primary focus of conditioning that has happened over the ages. The duties are subtly prescribed and sometimes loudly dictated. Both the women follow the code of feminine nature imposed upon them by the men, society and by themselves.

At this point in the film, both the women look at each other and start thinking about themselves and their life. After their first kiss, they seem to be blessed with a mind of their own that results in them
understanding that tradition has become a button to make them respond like a monkey. This tradition is the conditioning and the role prescription that has turned our sisters into micro-chipped robots with the mute power of endurance masked as a virtue.

Later they continue talking and seeking clarification in each other and find comfort in each other. Radha and Sita fast together. Radha tells a story of a king, a queen and a maidservant to Sita and Mundu that ends with the queen fasting in order to win back her husband's love. Radha explains that the women fast to prove how much they love their husbands. Sita says the queen was a wimp and the king was a jerk. Radha summarizes that the queen didn't have many choices. It is this choice issue that interests me and also did interest the director. Deepa Mehta (Interview with Suparn Verma) says, “Fire is about choices, the choices we make in life which may lead to alienation. By the bisexuality theme in the film, it is shown an extreme choice. But the end result is that you cannot have everything in your life. Happiness does not fall into your lap; in fact, happiness is too ephemeral a word.” Women have choices she says, either to stay feminine or rebel against it. When the rebellion starts the feminine becomes a feminist (in Showalter’s definition). In the Press Conference on "Water" at the 2006 Taormina Film Fest, Deepa Mehta says, “The theme of Fire is the clash between traditions, and the desire of an independent voice” The voice is very important because every woman is on her own, at least in India
and she must learn to effectively use it against patriarchy. Because, however we may wish our messiahs are yet to come. The responsibility of giving or taking the voice against conditioning lies within us and with our more fortunate sisters in the world. Mary and Tejaswini enumerate the responsibilities of the feminist critics, “What are the responsibilities of feminist film criticism? Should we not go beyond identifying good and bad images of women to investigate the critique of patriarchy that a film like fire provides and, the characterization of the feminist self that it makes available? Indeed, we would like to argue that a critique of the film is necessary in order to advance our understanding of questions of feminism and sexuality today.”(pp 581) With complete agreement it is considered further as a gynotext. In an another essay the differences in handling of the script and the in/dependence of the gender of the director is outlined. (Deepa, Shree; pp 85-93)

After Radha and Sita kiss outside, on the roof of the building for the second time, Ashok calls Radha and after awhile, she comes to him. He asks her, "Why didn't you come?" She says that Sita says the concept of duty is overrated. Ashok tells Radha to prepare for him to test himself with her, and she says not tonight. In their bedroom, Jatin starts to mount Sita, but she doesn't want to have sex, so he lays off. The next day, Radha and Sita dance together in front of Biji, to jubilant Indian
music. Biji looks on disapprovingly as the two women sink to the floor together. Mundu, the servant watches in the next room.

The feminist phase sets in with full strength at this point in the film with both the women finding their voices and choosing to rebel against the conditioning that has kept them chained to the floor of their lives for so long. Mary and Tejaswini have brought in the frames of caste-class into the criticism, but I prefer that the film be viewed as a gynotext for a moment without the class-caste glass. However the remark, “No one would deny that as a subject of scholarship, the field of sexuality in India is a relatively new one and still largely uncharted.” (pp582). Radha slaps Mundu, when she catches him watching a movie while pleasuring himself. She tells him to get out, and he says that the "hanky panky" between her and Sita isn't good for the family name either. Radha asks Ashok to get rid of Mundu, but Ashok insists that he stays. On the roof, she and Sita meet and talk. Sita says that even if Mundu mentions what he's seen, no one will believe him. Radha admits that she is not so different than Mundu, in his selfishness.

Later Jatin recites some of Swamiji's words to Sita in their room. He tells her that he cannot stop seeing Julie, mentioning some of her good traits. He says Sita can leave him, but then says that life can be difficult for a divorced woman. The other option, he says, is for Sita to have a baby with him. At this juncture, the social conditioning is at its peak. There are clear statements and warnings given that a divorced woman
will have to lead a difficult life. The only other choice for her would be to submit her body for the baby-making process and become a piece of machinery.

It is the overrated sense of duty and the conditioning of the feminine and the denial of opportunity to speak, express the sexualities that have to be addressed urgently. Mary and Tejaswini also observe that, “As the relationship of the two sisters-in-law evolves, so too do their confrontations with their husbands, which is how the central narrative is propelled to its ultimate climax.” (pp 583) She calls him a "pompous fool." They slap each other. He says he likes this new feistiness and kisses her on the mouth. She looks at him in displeasure, so he knocks her down and leaves.

On the roof, Radha sees a bruise on Sita's face and asks her if it hurts. Sita says that she's treated "like a household pet" and "that's what hurts." The women hug each other. They have begun their journey toward complete freedom with each other for company. They have become feminists.

In the restaurant later, Ashok carries Biji upstairs, leaving Radha with a singing Mundu. Radha's gaze is contemptuous. Jatin announces to everyone that he won't be back tonight and leaves. Mundu sits down and stares at a photo of Biji, Jatin, Radha and Sita, with everyone crossed out except for Radha, who has a heart drawn around her head.
Alone together, Radha tells Sita that a long time ago, Ashok took a vow of celibacy. She explains what he does with her to prove that he's beyond temptation and therefore closer to God. Radha tells her that he's done this for 13 years. Radha and Sita hug each other. Mundu listens at the door outside. Sita says they're not going to stay there any longer. Mundu pulls Ashok away from his time with Swamiji, but then says nothing. Later, the two men go upstairs to the house. Ashok tells Mundu to pack his bags and get out of the house before he calls the police. Inside the house, Ashok listens at the door outside the room where Radha and Sita make love. He slams open the door, startling them and catching them in the act. He walks away, and then exits the house.

The women decide to leave, with Sita saying there's no word in their language for what they are. Radha says she has to talk to Ashok one last time, to tell him that her leaving is about her. She tells Sita that she should leave and they will meet later tonight. Sita packs. In the main room, Biji rings her bell as Sita leaves. Radha steps close to Biji, who sits up and then spits in her face. Downstairs, Ashok thinks about his wife in intimacy with Sita. Biji is the ultimate metaphor for the feminine conditioning. Many self proclaimed feminists will belong to this category if they refuse to comprehend in homophobia.

Ashok goes to Radha in the kitchen and tells her to come to the bedroom, so that he can test himself again. She refuses, saying she's
going to leave him. He says what he saw in the bedroom is a sin in the eyes of God and man. She openly repudiates his thinking that desire is wrong. Such conditionings have manipulated the minds of women to perceive that desires in women are wrong. This has nothing to do with lesbianism. How many heterosexual women can vocalize their desires to their partners? The concept is sin is disputable and manmade. It is again a patriarchal creation and conditioning. Now, Ashok snaps, throwing himself upon her. She rejects his touch. He is ready to throw his celibacy out the window when he understands that his dutiful wife is psychologically and emotionally away from him. He like many men and women around the world thinks that lesbianism is a disease and can be cured with proper approach and better sex. When he knows that the fight is lost, he says "Touch my feet," then pushes her aside. Radha’s sari catches fire on the stove. Ashok stares at Radha for a moment, then picks up Biji and heads for the door.

Back at the field from the prologue, young Radha closes her eyes and then says she can see the ocean. This scene is significant because she was instructed by her mother that she will see only without looking. Now Radha sees herself fully as a full-fledged female, free from the conditioning.

At the agreed-upon meeting place, Sita stands in the rain. She sees Radha shuffle over to her, looking shaken. Radha leans against a wall for support. Sita goes over to her and comforts her.
The climax is complete when the two sisters-in-law break free from the conditioning that held them captives. The Fire test in the kitchen, calling Jatin a “pompous fool”, slapping him back and the final embracing of their new sexuality completes the journey leaving them females. In this phase the women become their true selves and learn to listen to their body, intellect, soul and themselves. They are seen as standing in for each other. The evolution is complete and the women are free to make their choices. Naim (1999) confesses that the film “grabbed my interest” (956), she and other feminist critics voice out their dissent against the treatment of homosexuality in the film. It is viewed as a casualty. They (Naim, Mary and Tejaswini) conclude that the film reinforces the idea that neglected women turn gay. In a sense there could be some truth in it. But is not heterosexuality also a social conditioning? Adrienne Rich vehemently argues, “My organizing impulse is the belief that it is not enough for feminist thought that specifically lesbian texts exist. Any theory or cultural/political creation that treats lesbian existence as a marginal or less 'natural' phenomenon, as mere 'sexual preference,' or as the mirror image of either heterosexual or male homosexual relations is profoundly weakened thereby, whatever its other contributions. Feminist theory can no longer afford merely to voice a toleration of 'lesbianism' as an 'alternative life style' or make token allusion to lesbians. A feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation for women is long overdue.” (131)
It would not be wrong to completely agree with Rich on this account that feminist criticism ought to move from the mere tolerance of their fellow sisters and understand from their perspective. If the female body and its needs are tolerated with muteness and if the female sexuality is viewed against the patriarchal glasses, if fellow sisters do not support their own kind, then what use do we have for theories of feminism in this world. Deepa Mehta remarks in the interview with Hoschka, “The theme of *Fire* is the clash between traditions, and the desire of an independent voice.” This precisely is the reason that advocates for it to be studied as a gynotext. If possible it should be studied alongside other similar gyno/texts such as *Mitr, Men Not Allowed* and *Girlfriend.*

This *Fire* gynotext advocates that women have to choose in life. Ultimately, women have to take a risk. Anything that she hates, she has the choice of doing it or leaving it. She will risk alienation and a lot of hardships by sitting at home doing what you like, like painting or writing for yourself. But one has to make a choice because, before you know, it's death. And before death arrives we need to break free from the gender conditioning that is imposed upon us and lead a life on our own terms, lesbian or not. Sexualities ought to be choices that the woman makes and not what the conditioning dictates. In Radha’s words, “You know that without desire I was dead? Without desire there is no point in living. And you know what else? I desire to live. I desire
Sita. I desire her warmth, her compassion, her body. I desire to live again.”

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About the Author

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Gender is a categorization of humanity on lines similar to that of class, race or color. It signifies identity in relation to a social structure formalized through practices and values. It refers, not to the defining characteristics of an individual but ascertains how a person relates to a society which imposes restrictions on the freedom of individuals based on their gender. That this stereotypical bias found in society is almost universally detrimental to the female gender has been the cause of much debate which unfortunately has itself imposed unjustifiable conditions on women hailing from different societies in its attempt at propounding a uniform response to gender discrimination. Western feminists, in their attempt at breaking the mold of gender discrimination, appear dissatisfied with their eastern counterparts due to the latter’s inability to share their views on the issue. Eastern women naturally resent this imposition of concepts of gender bias as an entirely different set of parameters determine their own perceptions of discrimination and other gender related issues. The zeal with which western concepts of women’s liberation are imposed universally is often seen as a form of cultural imperialism by eastern women.

Western proponents of feminine liberation consider eastern women as being victims of barbaric societal practices which need to be
challenged. This refusal to admit eastern women into a unifying international sisterhood against gender discrimination by identifying them as ‘the other, is the primary source of resentment and translates into a patronizing attitude tantamount to that of missionary attempts at baptizing natives. The associated implications of a culturally superior group reaching out to rescue lesser articulate sisters who are deemed incapable of breaking the chains of discrimination on their own has naturally led to a determined refusal of eastern women to confirm to the dictates of western feminists.

Gender studies is an evolving area marked by fluidity and flexibility in terms of borrowing from other disciplines. It focuses on an all inclusive policy rather than an exclusive one. It moves both vertically and linearly to unite disparate variants into a unifying single. Homogeneity is the dictating factor and not ostracizing and rejecting non-confirming groups as the ‘other’.

The world has become fragmented with its geographical, linguistic, physical and other boundaries and the focus now needs to be extended beyond rigid regional boundaries and encompass global delineations as propounded by Spivak in her seminal essay *Death of a discipline*. This can be possible only when there is assimilation of heterogeneous elements with the self by respecting the ‘otherness’ and ‘uniqueness’ of
all the disparate groups around the globe without attempting to either ridicule or mould the ‘other’ to confirm to our own way of thinking.

Historically the role of women in the field of literature has been minimal. Virginia Woolf attributes two prime reasons for this glaring lacuna as being a lack of space; in terms of space required for uninterrupted and undisturbed creative activity and a ceremonial dependence which have prevented many a highly talented individual from producing literature which could make significant inroads into the predominantly male bastion of literary output. The fact that she may have been as intelligent as a Shakespeare or as ebullient as a Hardy does not seem to have provided her with any special privileges in a society more willing to tolerate condescendingly the rare literary genius from among the female population rather than acknowledge greatness on purely literary merits without resorting to a reading tainted with gender prejudice. Despite their subservient existence and failure to make inroads into literary circles women, when portrayed by male writers, have often been depicted as powerful, authoritative, decisive and intelligent which is a point of consternation for Woolf as she finds this dichotomy quite ironic. Shakespeare for example, has invariably portrayed most of his female characters as strong and influential individuals. There thus seems to be a very obvious discrepancy in the way that women are depicted in literature when compared to their
factual status and normal disposition in society. This most certainly arises out of the fact that earlier literatures were largely restricted to the portrayal of women by male writers who despite their best intentions were merely attempting to put forth what they perceived the female point of view to be. As such these portrayals were thrice removed from reality and could never be considered seriously in determining the female point of view.

Depiction of women as neurotic is quite common in literature. Very few women are portrayed as normal beings and a study of these characters compel the reader to delve into the depth of the biased depictions. Hemmingway in *A Farewell to Arms* delineates Catherine Baskaley as mad. Fielding also considers Mrs Moore and her daughter to be mad in *A Passage to India*. In both cases it is an unwillingness of the male author to understand the circumstances and reasons which dictate the seemingly abnormal behavior of these women who when evaluated retrospectively stand out as unique characters who were guilty of nothing but possession of an intellect which was unexpected and therefore intolerable among women. What comes out clear is that it is easy to label women as ‘mad’ or condemn them of heresy or witchcraft whenever they are beyond the intellectual depth of the male ‘gaze’ as is abundantly evident in Shaw’s *Joan of Arc*. Their emotional sophistication, keen insight, intuitive abilities and gift of prophecy unsettles the male intellect causing him to discard and isolate her,
refusing to let her voice be heard. In comparison Charlotte Bronte, in her work *Jane Eyre*, has made a genuine attempt at defining the reasons behind her character Bertha being accused of madness by her husband is in fact the victim of vile machinations of a deplorable male seeking economic gain. That he succeeds in convincing society of Bertha’s insanity is a reflection on then prevalent patterns of behavior which were predominantly male centric.

The male chauvinism prevalent in the Victorian era come forth most prominently in Hardy’s depiction of ‘a pure woman’ requires passivity and unquestioning submission qualifications for her sublimation as the ideal woman in *Tess d’Urbervilles*.

Despite the fact that most Indian writers in English are Eurocentric in their approach to literary expression, there has been hardly any notable digression from historic cultural assumptions as is abundantly evident in the writings of eastern women litterateurs. We thus find Indian women writers in English; Desai, Sahgal, Deshpande, et. al, though breaking through conventional boundaries are yet not able to present their women characters as truly modern and emancipated individuals. Their depictions continue to fit into the ‘First Phase’ of feminism and are identifiable as one, especially in the analysis of the female, with leading male writers of their time. Shashi Deshpande notes
Liberation does not mean casting of your humanity. Liberation never means doing without the family. No, no, not to me. Liberation does not mean leaving your marriage. We are human beings. Human beings are social animals and we need all these ties… . my only thing about liberation is that you don’t give into oppression and cruelty. Liberation means you refuse to be opposed, you refuse to give up your Individuality, you refuse to do things which go against your conscience. You realize the potential you have within you, you don’t let other people tell you what to do. You know what you are worth. You know what is your value. You take that into account, and this is liberation. This does not mean doing away with all ties.

The writings of Indian women writers while discussing the trauma and forced submissiveness experienced by women do not offer any radical or alternative solutions for resolution to the crisis they face. The characters of Indian women writing in English are depicted as arriving at a resolution through compromise, review adjustment, silence or even death. Naturally, such writings do not disturb the male intellect and as such they condescendingly tolerate these women writers. Indian women writing in English have blindly and passively accepted the stereotypical and per-formed roles without any serious attempts at correcting the fractured image which has gained acceptability in the public psyche due to repeated biased portrayals by their male compatriots. As such, even in the writings of women, female characters
continued to be depicted predominantly as housewives and often the subservient partner in relationships. However, the recent trend among both male and female Indian writers in English, is one of magnanimity with the Indian woman receiving a boost in her stature through depictions which portray her as an intelligent and often highly educated housewife. The authors go to great lengths in establishing her ‘modernity’ through narrations of her ability to mix freely with the other gender and socialize along with her husband on seemingly equal terms often sharing a few drinks with him and his cronies. Unfortunately depictions of liberation of women hardly ever goes beyond this point and the rare occasions where an exceptionally rebellious individual breaks the accepted behavior pattern by walking away from her defined role or indulges in an extramarital affair. She has to ultimately return, like a prodigal wife after a fruitless journey, properly chastised and repenting her amorous jaunts.

It may therefore be claimed that Indian women writing in English have not come of age. They are as yet confused, having failed to define goals and objectives of their own, independent of western taints of feminism which are not necessarily relevant in the Indian context. The predominant lacking is an inability to come to terms with their sexuality and desires which has left them grappling with issues of their own identity and being. The Indian women today may enjoy greater economic independence which seemingly facilitates opportunities for
an assertion of individuality on par with males but in reality she is still subject to suffering and suppression. Although aware of her rights, she is as yet confused and lacks the courage to act with conviction in pursuit of the emancipation she rightfully desires. Years of stereotypical molding have sapped her initiative and ingenuity. The plight is most prominently evident in the writings of Indian women litterateurs who despite being emancipated are too conscious of being women. They thus fail to communicate as individuals and end up being bogged down by their innate traditionalism arising out of a long history of subjugation. The term woman writer is also a categorization through gender. Writings should be free from any overt gender bias for an impartial rendition of facts and a proper portrayal of characters for otherwise it will be considered a prejudiced recounting leading to a threat of exclusion.

Conflict of interest between genders is unavoidable to a certain extent as with the intra-group conflict which exists in all area of human existence. The marginalization of women for millennia has led to set patterns of societal behavior which cannot be wished away instantly. In the Indian context, attempts at gender equality meet with resistance in the immediate vicinity of the home with prevalent patriarchal domination and resulting role definitions making it the first hurdle in the emancipation of women. Gender division in term of household
arrangements, in particular the division of labour in household activities, is still an area of contentious debate. However the voluntary acceptance of women as home makers should not be perceived as her submission to male dictates if she is duly compensated and acknowledged for her contributions. True emancipation will be a reality only if the choice remains with the individual and does not arise out of established practice and traditions.

Feminism does not merely imply sexual liberation or rebellion citing victimization and escaping from one’s duties and responsibilities. Similarly, being a caring mother or devoted wife does not imply that one is submitting docilely to oppression or forced labour. Feminism is the freedom of choice which allows one to formulate their own terms of existence free from gender dictates. A woman should feel free to decide whether her forte is domesticity, a career or a judicious mix of the two. Similarly she should be the lone decision maker as to the choice of either remaining in Purdah or otherwise.

Serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman who writes about women’s issues and experiences or takes up the cause of her fellow sisters is invariably labeled a feminist. It is thus not surprising that feminism too has become quite a restrictive and limiting term and the focus therefore needs to be extended to ‘humanism’. All human beings need to be categorized as one, without an ‘ism’, especially gender related, being a source of discrimination or
subjugation. Feministic and queer theory distinguishes between gender and sex and has been deconstructed by later theorists who question this distinction and do not regard gender as a marker of individual identity. Gender is often perceived as a problematic social construct and therefore needs extensive evaluation if a resolution of conflict is desired. If feminism be the mother of gender studies than gender studies are certainly the precursor of a fruitful study of humanity.

References:


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