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Introduction

Devaki Jain

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Introduction

In the first decade after Independence, when India was seeking to re-establish an identity, every aspect of its life needed to be explored, considered, recognised. Some of the images that had been formed while it was a colony had to be effaced and more authentic ones offered. An earlier book on *Women of India* edited by Tara Ali Baig and brought out by the Publications Division in 1958, was compiled in that spirit. It described the achievements of Indian women and illustrated how they were partners with men in a variety of activities. Most of the contributors to that book were outstanding women, specialists in their field.

Today in the 1970s the curiosity is of a different kind—as is to be expected. The country has had twenty-five years to establish an identity, to display its characteristics and capabilities. In fact, some women ask "Why a book on women? Why not on the men of India?"—implying that there is really no need to single women out, that they are part of a society, and its problems and hopes are their problems and hopes. Such a reaction in a sense measures the change between the fifties and the seventies.

There are others, however, who believe that women in India and elsewhere do have to identify themselves and press their case for a better place in the society, that the task of the women's movement is not yet over.

Then there is the controversial hypothesis—supported by persons in India and abroad—that there is something unique about Indian women. They seem to be participating more than

in other societies at the highest levels of leadership and decision-making with confidence and ease.

Finally, there is the phenomenon which has made all this curiosity and interest urgent and important—the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the West. Whatever be the extravagances of the literature and discussions pouring out from this movement, it has brought to the surface the issue of the role of men and women in society in general. It is questioning the traditional roles that have been assigned to the sexes based on biology and custom, nature and culture. It is challenging men and women to assess themselves again. It has certainly made people self-conscious about making stereotyped statements on the capabilities of women.

The movement may not be new in the sense that people of all ages have commented upon the power and energy of women, on the significance of the roles they can play. The same people have appealed from time to time for nations to tap the intelligence, the energies of women. Some may have said that even through the family and household, women's power can be harnessed. Others may have widened this sphere to embrace all activities. The general theme has been to deplore the tendency to relegate women to areas where they play no role in decision-making or where their dignity is undermined.

The women's liberation movement, however, has widened the sphere of these old messages. It has created an interest amongst all kinds of people all over the world to find out more about women and the roles they are playing. The number of books being written, commissions and committees being appointed to study the status of women, is a reflection of this interest.

But is it possible to define, to give content to the terms equality, liberation, status?

At first sight, it may seem simple enough to separate the areas of hard facts—say, statistics relating to economics, law, education

and so on—from the soft areas of judgement. But this simplicity is an illusion. Even in deciding what are the elements to be chosen to, say, establish equality with men or in deciding the criteria to be used in judging the data, value creeps in. For example, the formulation of goals for women in terms, say, of equality with men, is only one view. Another formulation could be—what goals would women set for themselves, irrespective of what the men have or want?

Which of these two formulations would be acceptable to any set of persons would depend on whether women identify themselves as a category in some ways different from the men—say, with different dispositions and interests—or not.

Among ardent feminists the basic biological difference is accepted, but doubt is cast whether this difference should be extended to aptitudes. The assumption that women are more naturally the tenders of home and children, is now challenged in the West—as home and children have often imprisoned women, beyond endurance. In their demand that men share or take over domestic responsibility there is a suggestion that there are no real differences in drives and dispositions.

On the other hand, some of those who are doing research in hormones and behaviour suggest that the physiological apparatus does influence aptitudes, the quality of emotional needs and expressions. Women have certain special structures because they create and deliver a complete organism—namely, a baby. This biological function of procreation of the race develops in her certain reflexes and aptitudes. Characteristics like softness and warmth of the female body may be playing a satisfying role for the infant. These features of the women's body are consequential to the hormonal milieu of the female. Sensory signals arising from suckling and physical contact with the baby, provide gratification and a sense of fulfilment. It is suggested that the patience and sense of achievement so obtained goes a long way to make her better adaptable to social stresses.

Liberation, another term in use, becomes very vague unless one postulates an objective. If child and home care are considered "lower" chores, then liberation for women would mean *not* having to do these. But if child and home care provide a source of joy and fulfilment—then liberation may have to be from other types of bondage, for example,—liberation from a constricting, male view of women.

Status, if seen as a derivative, the result of a pattern of relationships between men and women—a pattern composed of images they have of themselves and each other—certainly cannot be evaluated by quantifiable measures either. Status for one set of women may be in relation to what other women have—now or in the past; to others what men have, and to a third what attributes they think men would respect. Status really lies in the eyes of the beholder.

There is bound to be a great deal of difference of opinion between societies, between generations as well as probably within them in what is the preferred group of characteristics a woman should aspire for. It is doubtful whether the difference in this area can ever be finally resolved. It is a question of morals rather than facts.

The endeavour in this book of essays is to see if the Indian experience has anything specific to add to the discussion on the role of men and women in societies and on the issue of equality of men and women. Most of the authors are persons who have views and ideas for policy in the subjects they handle. Hence the book does not claim to be a document of applied research but a collection of reflections.

Since not only the selection of writers and topics but the inferences drawn from the essays might perhaps reflect my biases, it is best that these are revealed at this point.

I think imitating men is an unsatisfactory goal for women and such a tendency must be a *reaction* to a situation where women

feel ill-treated by men. Technological change—apart from religious and social attitudes—must be held primarily responsible for the unhappiness of women in the West. Motherhood has meant being house-bound; beauty has meant exploitation. But in as much as their rejection of traditional roles springs from the vulnerability it has implied, it is not, in my view, a sufficiently free choice.

If the goal is not only to improve physical conditions but also achieve a "status", a regard by others in the society which lends authority, power, then action, it seems to me, should be not in the direction of denying a separate identity but in removing obstacles, such as immobility, an optionless occupation of menial tasks, humiliation in terms of non-participation in decision-making and so on. Child care, being beautiful, being protectively handled and protecting in return, the extra touches of self-denial and self-neglect involved in child-rearing, all can in certain circumstances mould women to be "superior" to men—command the respect of men and children.

Merging into the population need not always be an advantage. Keeping one's colour can be a definite advantage when the colour confers privileges or denotes certain attributes that are well regarded or feared. The Negroes in America in their first bid towards equality with the majority of whites, sought to merge with them by in some ways pressing down their distinguishing features and imitating the whites. Now they assert their colour to gain equality. This assertion has brought to them more respect, in my view, than the earlier imitation.

It seems to me that it is recognition of the distinctive features of womanhood, an identification of its advantages, and the exploitation of those by women that will give them status.

It is also my view that the situation in India is not yet as much a class war as it is sometimes made out to be in some of the Western countries. The co-ordinates of the situation here are different. There has not been the particular kind of separation

of sexes and exploitation which engenders a reaction. However, there are many articulate women here too who would vehemently deny any favourable description of the condition of Indian women. They would reject the thesis that the tolerance, self-sacrifice, acceptance of roles by them have sustained a certain harmony and beauty in Indian life. They would point to the cost—namely, the health and freedom of the Indian women. They would point to the damage done to personality development by traditional society.

Accepting the validity of this view, I would still suggest that a sound understanding by men and women of the biological difference and its implications may provide a more enduring basis to any quest for liberation and equality than its denial.

I believe that in India, at least in the dominant traditional sector, there is a recognition of this difference and an adaptation of beliefs, institutions and practices to accommodate it. I think this has yielded qualitative advantages to Indian women—as indeed it has made for disadvantages. Therefore, the questions which seem important and urgent to me are: What are these beliefs, institutions and practices? Is there some inspiration here which can help avoid the imitative march towards equality which seems to dominate the women's movement in the Western countries? Is it possible to work out a way of life where the advantages are harnessed and the hindrances removed?

It is my hope that these essays collectively will give some hints towards answering the questions.

The volume consists of two parts. In Part I, the first five articles by Romila Thapar, Lakshmi Menon, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Ashok Rudra and M. A. Sreenivasan scan the historical background, describe the kinds of experience women had in different eras in India's past — near and distant, try to account for the reason for variations, and then reflect on how these experiences might affect the role, the behaviour of Indian women today.

The next six articles by Andre Beteille, Veena Das, Margaret Kalakdina, Shyamala Pappu, Ester Boserup and Ashish Bose attempt a closer examination of the current patterns, highlight the most notable features in the life of Indian women today and point out areas for further study and reflection by policy makers.

In Part II descriptions are presented of different groups of women. Verrier Elwin's essay on Tribal Women is taken from the 1958 edition as it is still the most sensitive and comprehensive study of the subject. The essay on Muslim Women shows the similarity of problems of women in India irrespective of religion as well as the effects of differences in religious and social practices. An attempt is made to take a close look at the poorer, more inarticulate women in rural as well as urban areas by Olivia Stokes, G. Morris Carstairs, Susan Mody and Sharayu Mhatra; while Imtiaz Ahmed, Kapila Vatsyayan and Mina Swaminathan present some of the achievements of Indian women in specific fields. Women from three professions monopolised by them—nursing, the monastic life and prostitution—are interviewed by Gita Aravamudan and Parvathi Aiyappan.

What emerges from the views and experiences collected in this volume is a troubling, complicated but challenging picture of social change in India and its consequence.

Indian civilisation seems to have given woman a place in society where she could exercise her ability, her judgement, without having to forfeit any of her essential femininity. Though historical events and ideas disfigured some of this structure, the 20th century as well as the breakthrough given by the freedom struggle removed some of the disabilities in one rapid sweep. Indian women could claim, at least *de jure*, to have some of the most advanced political and legal provisions. Technological change with its effects—urbanisation, emergence of nuclear families, the separation of men and women for work—is, however, changing the relationship between men and women more than all the historical onslaughts.

The picture of men stampeding to work far away from home, in fast trains—while the women cook and wash, tend the children and wait for their return, already covers a small part of India and might even become representative of it. Though the middle class women's plea may be for opportunity to work with men, for the woman working in the fields as an agricultural labourer, the dream is to give up the fields and tend the home primarily. The labouring woman then becomes the middle class woman, toiling at home for husband and children. She will possibly return again to work but under totally new social relationships.

Without the family or community as umbrella, without the traditional equation between men and women, without the old self-image of the women themselves, these women become vulnerable. Like their counterpart in the West their physiology becomes a hindrance, traditional beliefs another weight on their feet. These groups, subject to change, require legal protection, new types of assistance by the State and society.

Another phenomenon that is brought out is that while in other countries, especially amongst the economically advanced ones, women outlive men, in India men outlive women.

Could it be due to the neglect of women in India? Could the preference for the male child in Hindu life lead to a kind of homicide? Or could it be that in the developed countries males die off earlier than females because of the stress of earning a living and coping with family life? An overall look at demographic and related data shows that women are bearing the greater share of the burden of poverty, poverty whether measured in terms of scarce resources—food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and rest—or in terms of the lack of control over nature—famine, drought, floods, disease.

Another set of revelations relate to institutions, practices and their implications. In this analysis it is noticed that every asset has a liability—and hence once again the problem of inference and judgement has to be faced. For example, girls brought up

in Indian style—as less preferred to boys—learn to shoulder responsibility, to look after themselves and others, to manage the kitchen or younger children, or other circumstances whatever the constraints, and later to adapt themselves to new situations with no fuss. This preference for the male child, therefore, in a paradoxical way pushes the female child into being the physically as well as emotionally stronger person. Having to withstand discrimination, having to care for brothers, to bear responsibility lays the foundation for the strong wife and mother of the future. Men in contrast learn to depend on women—first mother and sister and later wife.

Motherhood is deified, not fatherhood—everything life-giving is a mother. This puts a value on being a mother, especially of sons. The son's relationship with the mother, it is said, is another phenomenon that enhances the position of the woman in a family—as well as develops in the men a regard, a worship for the mother, the women. On the other hand, motherhood may be worshipped, but at a cost to the woman. She pays for it with her life. Incidence of death among women in the reproductive age due to child-birth —at child birth or due to the physical strain of many pregnancies—is higher than among men in the comparable age bracket. A son may worship his mother but aggression by her over the daughters-in-law is the cost.

A relationship which plays a central role in enhancing or enslaving a woman is marriage. The act of marriage is not merely a legal, contractual arrangement amongst Hindus but a sacramental act. The various factors that conclude marriage, build into it ties which are permanent and, at least psychologically, unbreakable. As most girls are brought up to believe that marriage and motherhood are their destiny, the knowledge that she will get married—and marriage presumably within a known set of relationships—may give a sense of security. But this kind of security is generally not known to girls in societies where choice is free, and the man has to propose to a girl—in a sense, where the girl has to "arrange" her own marriage. However, the same arrangement can cause acute anguish and personality repression, especially amongst those who opt out of tradition, out of the Sita image.

It seems that women in the poorest sections of rural society toil, serve their men and children. Their concerns are primarily food, health of the family, the children and the men, the men's behaviour. Those in the equivalent level in an urban environment show the marks of poverty, disease and death. Their concerns are again behaviour of the men, but also income, opportunity—fear of stigma. Urban poverty and social change seems to make women vulnerable—most poignantly seen in the register on prostitutes.

However, from the rural environment there also emerges a picture of strong women enjoying each other's company, enjoying their roles, thoughtful in their reflections on life. Whether it is those from Guriama or the Tribal women, the Rajput women or the women from the landed gentry of the South, there seems a gusto, a temperament that suggests strength, a sense of equality if not superiority over men.

Just as these portraits give some reason for satisfaction, some evidence for claiming that there are valuable elements in Indian society which help develop women, a glimpse of the girl students of Delhi University warns against careless transformation—change without design or ideology. They reflect again the urban phenomenon—breakdown of tradition without a substitute ideology. The girls seem idle and colourless.

If it is argued that the acceptance of roles by Indian men and women—in the traditional sector—gives a certain dignity, a position to women in the society which is valuable, then countless arguments can be evoked from all disciplines to show that role-playing is a binding or unfree type of behavioural pattern. It thwarts personality development, limits horizons. Yet it is the non-acceptance of role-playing, the uncertainty of behaviour in changing societies that has broken down relationships. Whether it is between man and wife, or parents and child, it is assertion of individuality which has been as painful to the society as it is pleasure-giving to the individual.

Philosophically speaking, there is a case not only for permitting

this quest for freedom, but for allowing the destruction that such assertions can engineer. Those who support revolutions are unafraid of the chaos that precedes a new order. These issues cannot be settled easily—and certainly not at the philosophical level. But it does seem pertinent and, in my opinion, useful and urgent to consider the practical implications of certain prevailing and popular liberal ideals.

Observing and experiencing the social changes in the last decade, it seems to me that some of the social phenomena of the advanced western societies—alienation of child from parent, dissatisfaction of wife with husband—the general sense of social breakdown, is the logical consequence of the ideology of individualism. One trend that hints at the validity of this suggestion is the preference for community living of the younger people of some of the wealthier nations. Their attempt at imitating peasant society where man and woman share the daily activities of work and home, where women pool kitchen and child-rearing effort, makes for a blurring of individual identities.

Collectives, the state, worship of a leader have been some of the other ways of containing the difficulties of individual assertion. Problems have been encountered here too. It is suggested that these systems sometimes go too far in inhibiting individuality, that sometimes it requires force for achieving performance.

Is it possible to work out an ideology where individuality is not suppressed but neither is the social unit entirely neglected?

Obviously this debate cannot be adequately dealt with, within the confines of this book. The glimpses offered here are merely to illustrate the number of areas that have to be taken into consideration in trying to plan a pattern of social change.

However difficult or inappropriate it may be to prescribe goals, define terms like equality in any universalisable form, goals are being set, relationships being changed and policies formulated.

Hence, it seems necessary to throw into the debate more ideas on goals and relationships un-self-consciously.

This volume, at least, shows that there is need for an ideology even in discussing women's roles in India. Without such an exercise in thought, a careful weighing of alternative paths, alternative visions of the future—change can efface the past, but lead only to a contingent future, unoriginal and imitative of other cultures. With foresight and relevant research, change in India can be harnessed for a future richer than the past, offering novel ideas to other societies engaged in the same endeavour.

May 1974 *Devaki Jain*

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Looking Back in History

Romila Thapar

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Looking Back in History

To write about women today is unavoidably to write about 'the emancipation of women'—an ugly phrase, reminiscent of serfs and slaves. The growing reality of the self-expression of women so laboriously culled over the centuries from a variety of human institutions, becomes a focal point of discussion. But if the discussion is to be at all meaningful it has to follow up a number of tangents, not all of them as yet coherent or comprehensive. Some of these tangents have been made more pointed in the recent writings of the Women's Liberation movement, the latest phase of the 'emancipation of women'. The movement, through a variety of protests, has sensitised, as it were, the role of women in society at various levels, from the most banal to the most esoteric and has illumined areas of human and social relationships. The literature which emerges from this movement is significant not because it goes into the making of manifestos, but because it reveals a point of view which is being articulated for the first time to any considerable degree—the deliberate, conscious perspective of the woman, and this gives added legitimacy to the writing.[1]

Women's Lib does not have immediate relevance to the Indian social situation. It is the product of an urbanised middle-class with a large number of women trained in professions as a result of expanding educational opportunities whose professional skills are wasted by their having to limit themselves to domestic work. It relates to the crisis in the concept of domestic work being somehow inferior both in terms of human intelligence and the use of labour and energy.

Thus either the status of domestic work will have to be raised to bring it on par with other professional work, or else, through a highly mechanised system the energy and intelligence spent on cooking and cleaning will have to be drastically reduced. In either case, the participation of men in household chores will be a crucial factor. It also relates to the changing situation of the family as a component of society in a developed industrial system, where the woman ceases to be essentially only the procreator of children and the property of her husband. The significance of the movement to the Indian scene is that by radicalising the analysis of the role of women in society generally, it has introduced a number of fresh perspectives to our understanding of women and society.

Within the Indian sub-continent there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals. Even the ancient erotic manuals of India have digressed at greater length on the capabilities and idiosyncrasies of Indian women, whereas the male remains comparatively uniform—perhaps for the obvious reason that these texts were written largely for the edification and education of the male[2]. The literature on erotica stresses the variation in female types—particularly the characteristics of women coming from different parts of the sub-continent. Traditional medical and quasi-medical concerns, on the other hand, centre on the debilities and weaknesses among men, impotence being a major obsession. In common belief it is the sexual and biological difference which is stressed as the basis for social differences. But often this is a rationalisation for quite other factors such as inheritance and property rights and family structure, which are the fundamental concern. The symbol of the woman in Indian culture has been a curious intermeshing of low legal status, ritual contempt, sophisticated sexual partnership and deification.

The role, status and position of women has been far from static, ranging from what is thought to have been a position of considerable authority and freedom to one of equally considerable

subservience. This freedom was characteristic of the first of the four great ages (*mahāyuga*), the Kṛta Yuga—the dawn of the time-cycle and the golden age. Echoes of it occur from later periods in the descriptions of the utopian lands and the stories about the gods. In the land of the Uttarakurus, the traditional ancestral homes of the 'pure', women were as free as the men[3]. The Madra women are described as being positively licentious[4]. Thus there was at least a consciousness that the subservient position of women had not been so since time immemorial.

The code sanctioned for the gods is invariably other than that sanctioned for men though it carries traces of the human condition. Thus even the Vedic gods such as Puṣān and Prajāpati, are known to have had incestuous relationships with either sisters, mothers or daughters[5]. It has been argued that these relationships are indications of an early promiscuous society where sexual taboos were minimal and the procreation of children a necessity. If this is so, then perhaps it reflects the insecurity of food-gathering tribes, where infant mortality rates were high and the women were primarily procreators and as such respected members of the tribe.

Indications of a change in status can be noticed in early texts referring to the origin of the notion of the state. The context is that of peasant societies, who having lived through a halcyon period of co-existence and peace, began to erupt as centres of violence and lawlessness with the stealing of each other's wives and the crop from each other's fields. Property and women, it is implied, are the source of trouble. To establish law and order, not only are the institutions of private property and marriage recognised, but a person is selected, or alternatively, requested to become the arbiter of law and thus maintain harmony. It is from this point on that the status of women begins to deteriorate as is evident from the narration in the texts (e.g. the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the Buddhist Canon and the *Mahābhārata*).[6]

A distinction must however be continually maintained between women in different social contexts in all periods of time. Unfortunately the early historical sources generally refer to elite groups—

the court, the aristocracy, the wealthy traders. The condition of other sections of society has by and large to be inferred from indirect references. The women of the aristocracy were regarded as gentle creatures, the mothers of future rulers. Marriage was frequently a disguise for a political alliance, and for those of lesser standing occasionally a means of mobility for the family. The great heroines of the past, the women of the epic and puranic stories, were either women in distress (*Sītā of the Rāmāyaṇa*) to whom the norms would not apply, or else those who belonged to societies with a strong tribal impress (Gandharī of the *Mahābhārata*). The aristocratic women led a secluded life, well-protected and isolated from the seamy side of things. References to women from respectable homes moving about veiled go back to the early centuries A.D. (*Arthasāstra*)[7] and the purdah of Islam intensified the seclusion of women.

The city elite on the other hand were not so strict about the seclusion of their women. The women moved about unveiled, and are often depicted sitting happily on the balconies of their houses watching the festive processions parading through the street[8]. Those Buddhist monuments and shrines, which were built through the donations of wealthy merchants frequently show the donor together with his wife[9]. Literature emanating from urban society portrays these women as forceful and not lacking in personality, some of which is directed towards an enrichment of their own lives. The urbanity of the *Kāmasūtra* is after all not dependent on the individuality of the male alone.

The women of the artisans' families and those of the peasants' doubtless had a less relaxed life. Here the pressure was not so much from social mores as from the needs of economic survival where leisure was limited and apart from domestic work, the women participated in the professional work of the men. But lack of leisure did not impinge on what would appear to have been a more equal sharing with the men of the limited income. Ecological and geographical factors were probably more intrusive at this level. Inhospitable areas and insecure borderlands doubtless emboldened both men and women to more equitable

adjustments in status and rights. This is not to suggest, however, that the peasant woman, as compared with other women, is always a freer human being. The constraints on a peasant woman in a patriarchal village society are often both extreme and conservative, especially if the family happens to be somewhat better-off than most. Perhaps the most independent among peasant women were those who had a distinctive economic role, such as the ones with individual access to the local markets, where, as vendors and traders they had a stake in their independence—a situation not too dissimilar from the contemporary rural scene in parts of north-eastern India.

It is thus impossible to give a uniform picture of the status of women in any particular period. The problem remains with us today as we still have in every part of the country a variety of social groups—tribal, peasant and urban—functioning in diverse ecologies. Only broad levels of generalisation are permissible, such as, that the purpose of marriage was the furtherance of caste (*jāti*) relations, essentially a social and political concern, and, where it existed, marriage was aimed at the consolidation of property.

In the legal texts, however, in the *dharma-sāstra* and similar literature, the blanket term woman is used, irrespective of the social origins or status of any woman. It is interesting that whereas these texts take great care to classify men with a minutiae of distinctions, women are generally treated as a uniform category. Furthermore the status of women as a whole is clearly defined, for they are unambiguously equated with the *sūdras*.[10] Even the *Gītā* places women, *vaisyas* and *sūdras* in the same category and describes them all as being of sinful birth[11]. According to another text the punishment for killing either a woman or a *sūdra* is identical.[12] Perhaps the most gruelling of all is the treatment of the widow, which at times borders on the inhumane and this is particularly disconcerting, coming as it does, from the *sāstras* of a culture which laid so much stress on respecting and caring for the aged. The subservience of women is precisely summed up in the Manu Dharmasāstra where it is stated that a woman should

never be independent. As a daughter she is under the surveillance of her father, as a wife of her husband and as a widow of her son.[13]

Such attitudes to women reflect both contempt and fear. The latter doubtless derived from the fear of pollution, since women were regarded as impure on many occasions. The association of pollution with women, apart from the usual ritual reasons, would also suggest, at the psychological level, the fear of someone who plays such a central role in procreation. Socio-legal treatises, such as the *dharma-sāstras* are not always a description of reality; in fact, more often than not they are indicators of a social ideal-guides and manuals to perfect action, although the underlying assumptions on which the laws are based emanate from actual social conditions. This is particularly so in pre-modern societies where legal rights and obligations are not always very distinctly demarcated. To that extent, these texts cannot be taken too literally. Similarly, in Islamic law, it is interesting that the legal position of women is distinctly better as compared for instance to Hindu law, yet their actual condition was hardly better than that of other women.

Caste differentiation among women in these texts occurs in the context of the performance of rituals, where often the ritual varied according to the caste of the performer. The custom of becoming a *sati*, by the immolation of the wife on her husband's funeral pyre, is discussed at length and brahmin women are specifically precluded from performing this rite in most of the texts.[14] The custom increased in freuqency in the period after the mid-first millennium A.D. and then too was more prevalent among those claiming *kṣatriya* status. Although never clearly stated it almost certainly, among other things, had to do with property rights and inheritance.

In the legal treatise of this same period, women came to be regarded as part of a man's property, particularly in those parts of the country where a combination of patrilineal society and private property was by now well-established as part of the elite culture.[15] This is best symbolised in the statement that a woman

could be given as a pledge, the interest being one-seventieth of her value, though how her value was to be computed is nowhere clearly stated.[16] Deprived as she was of the right to inheritance, her own right to property consisted of her *stridhana*, i.e. the wealth which she was given by her family at her marriage, which, although theoretically inviolable, nevertheless gave her little freedom, economic or otherwise.

The legal status was not irrevocable in practice, as is suggested by other types of evidence. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the social image. That it was not seriously questioned at the textual level would point to its tacit-acceptance by certain social groups, particularly those most concerned with both property and pollution. The low legal status of women was common to a number of 'classical' societies, pre-eminently the Roman, where the rationale seems to have derived from the emphasis on the patrilineal structure.

As a counterpoint to the legal texts, history provides evidence of alternative perspectives. These are, first of all, the rare but clear exceptions. Two of the more obvious come to mind: Gargi, a reputed scholar in an age when learning was closed to women because of pollution taboos; and Raziya, who ruled albeit briefly, at a court fiercely male-dominated by militaristic Turkish nobles. That such exceptions were possible would belie a too literal belief in legal status. Other nuances emerge from more subtle sources.. There is the interplay of patrilineal and matrilineal groups which has been active for many centuries until recent years. To identify these as Aryan and non-Aryan respectively is perhaps simplistic and confusing, since these latter terms cannot be precisely defined. But family and social relationships did follow either of the two dominant forms or an intermingling of the two, and this is sometimes suggested even by contemporary family structures.[17] This in part accounts for the regional variations in the status (both implied and actual) of women in various parts of the country.

Perhaps the most involved facet is that of man and the female diety—the mother-goddess, the goddess of the fertility cult, the

deity which remains to this day the most widely worshipped in villages and towns. Through all its different manifestations, whether it be the crude images of the Harappa culture or the consorts of the great gods, both malevolent and benign, or the more esoteric *saktis* of the tantrics, the mother goddess is the dominant deity, for she is implicit even in the worship of the lingam.[18] Traditionally in India, the mother-goddess was worshipped in tribal and peasant societies and in early urban centres. The Rigvedic culture is perhaps the only major culture in which the mother-goddess is conspicuously absent. Being a fertility cult, it can be argued that its dominance is restricted to pre-industrial societies —the decline of the cult of the Virgin Mary in north-western Europe being a case in point. Did the worship of the mother-goddess strengthen the fear of woman symbolising the power of procreation or was it subconsciously a compensatory gesture? This dualism is also reflected in certain rituals where the presence of the woman is essential.

The traditional attitude to sex reflects a striking absence of the guilt complex arising from original sin as conceived in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It was not until the impact of the Christian missionaries and Victorian mores that the notion of the guilt complex took root. The equation of freedom with licentiousness is often used as a brake to giving greater independence to women, where there is an automatic assumption that the moral standards for men and women should be different. The fetish that is made of virginity and pre-marital sexual relations is more often a rationalisation of the desire to keep women subservient than a genuine moral conviction. In the Hindu tradition sex is sinful only where it is socially illegitimate and the Buddhist tradition although carrying hints of puritanical morals never really converted the theory of sin into one of a guilt complex. Woman as mother was venerated but woman as an erotic being was not degraded. Far from being seen as sin, the sexual act was symbolic of creative energy. Such an attitude permitted the duality of approach to women. It is noticeable, however, that members of many of the tantric sects held liberal views on the status of women.

Throughout Indian history there has been a stream of social consciousness urging and encouraging a liberalisation of attitudes to the status of women. The two major heterodox religions, Buddhism and Jainism, both supported greater freedom for women than did Brahmanism. The Buddha initially objected to instituting an order of nuns but was finally persuaded by his disciple Ananda. The order of nuns in Buddhism and Jainism provided an alternative vocation to those women who wished to disassociate themselves from the usual functions of women in society.

This trend of thinking was continued in what has come to be called the Bhakti movement—in its various forms during different periods. The need of the Bhakti movement in the Bhāgavata tradition was a liberalising concept of religion embedded in the idea of the individual's relationship with a personalised deity. This enfranchisement from both theology and ritual was extended to relationships among men and women. An early expression of *bhakti* in the teachings of the Alvars and Nāyanmārs not only stressed the personal devotion of the individual to the deity of his choice, expressed in the easily comprehensible hymns composed in the most widely used language of the region (rather than in the more erudite Sanskrit) and divested of much complicated ritual, but also emphasised the right of women to *bhakti*, to their joining in congregational worship and to a generally freer life for them. This is also reflected in the early teachings of the Lingāyatas, in the preaching of the 'saints' of Maharashtra, to some degree in the teaching of Chaitanya in eastern India and to a considerable degree in the verses of the northern *bhakti* teachers, particularly Kabir and Nānak. Not surprisingly, it was the bhakti teaching which produced the women 'saints'—Āṇḍāl, Mirabai and Lalla.

The support for the heterodox religions and the *bhakti* movement came in the initial stages from similar groups of people; largely the urban traders, merchants and artisans and up to a point the more well-to-do peasantry. Royal patronage tended to be occasional, though the ladies of the court were often staunch

patrons of Buddhism and Jainism. The rulers tended to support these sects once they had become more established since, largely for political reasons, they had to be more judicious in their patronage to religious sects. The social composition of these sects was doubtless a further cause in their advocacy of a liberal attitude to the status of women.

The major impetus, in recent years, in bringing about a change in the attitude to women has come from the national movement for independence, a movement which had its inception in the nineteenth century and whose social aftermath continues to linger with us. Originally an essentially middle-class movement with its roots in various urban centres in the country, it was converted into a mass movement largely through the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi. In order to build a mass movement the slogan of freedom had to be extended to a number of 'depressed' groups—untouchables, peasants and workers and women. The participation of women in the national movement became a necessary part of the programme. This participation was also needed to mobilise entire families which gave added strength to the movement. The appeal to women *per se* was a major plank in Gandhi's policy and derived, perhaps marginally and subconsciously, from the earlier Jaina and *bhakti* ethic. Participation in the politics of the national movement was an act of patriotism and political life became a respectable vocation for a woman. This may in part account for the greater success of women politicians in ex-colonial countries as compared to the more industrialised countries of north-western Europe and the U.S.A. It may also account for the decrease of women politicians in the post-independence period in India.

Tied into the concept of nationalism was the debate on culture and society and the pendulum swung between what were regarded as the two poles of Tradition and Modernity: a debate which seems to have been intensified with independence. The 'burning questions' in this context during the earlier days were the age of consent to marriage, widow remarriage, property rights and education. Some advocated a return to tradition as the

only means of salvaging Indian society, but the definition of tradition remains extremely elusive. Others wanted either a social reform or a socially radical change of Indian society, which in a sense is as utopian as the first proposition. In addition, the demand for political reform also opened the pandora's box of social reform. Possibly, we have seen the culmination of the debate in the passing of the Hindu Code Bill in 1956, which in theory at least, provides both security and freedom to the Hindu woman, and may to that extent become the prototype of further changes in the civil code applicable to all Indian women, irrespective of their religion.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of the participation of women in political nationalism was an indirect result. It brought women into the forefront of thought and action without their having to go through the agonies of a Sylvia Pankhurst. There is now a tacit acceptance of many more women in a variety of professions than would otherwise have been the case; though this can by no means be equated with equal opportunities for women. The test however has yet to come. With increasing industrialisation and expanding education, Indian society may also have to face a Women's Lib movement at one end of the spectrum, whilst providing the basic amenities by which women can at least claim their existing rights, at the other end.

References

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2. The best known of these is Vātsyāyana's *Kamasutra.* Others of lesser fame are the *Kokasāstra,* the *Anandaranga* etc.
3. *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* III. 2.3.
4. *Mahābhārata,* Karṇa Parvan, 37
5. S. C. Sarkar, *Some Aspects of the Earliest Social History of India*
6. *Dīgha Nikāya* III. 93; *Mahābhārata,* Sānti Parvan, 67.
7. *Arthasāstra,* II. 23.
8. As depicted on sculptured panels from a variety of Buddhist and Hindu monuments.
9. As for example, in the Karle caves.
10. As for example in *Manu,* XI. 153.
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14. P. V. Kane, History of *Dharmasāstra,* Vol. II, p. 627.
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Women and the National Movement

Lakshmi N. Menon

Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon (b. 1899), Chairman of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, has long been associated with the U.N. Commission on the status of women, besides many women's organisations in India. She was Deputy Minister and Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India.

The movement for national freedom grows out of the frustrations, humiliations and injustices of an alien administration. In India, there were also other injustices and discriminations born of a social system based on rigid traditions and alien to modern ideas of liberty and equality. The differences of caste, the prevalence of untouchability, discriminations based on sex, were reinforced by the indifference of government towards social reform. The plea was that non-interference in religion and social customs of the people of India, however disagreeable and retrograde they be, was guaranteed in the Queen's Proclamation of 1857, when the British government replaced the East India Company. Therefore, the initiative for social reform should come from the people themselves.

This was not difficult. When Indians received Western education, it almost seemed that Macaulay's dream of creating brown sahebs was within realisation. They came into contact with the West, became imbued with the spirit of revolution in Europe and liberal thinking in England. Abroad they saw how democratic institutions worked and how rights were wrested from unwilling autocrats and enjoyed by the citizens.

It is not in vain that most, if not all, of our political leaders, were western-educated persons. They had their education in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and London, ate dinners at the Inns of Court to be called to the Bar, and were drawn into the inescapable ferment of progressive radicalism of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The impact of western thought overwhelmed

them. They saw through western eyes, India's immemorial past, its glorious and chequered history, its remarkable contribution to religion, ethics and morality. Such a country, with its enviable heritage, whatever its present state, deserved to be free from external control and foreign domination.

It was hoped, not without reason, that freedom will bring in its wake a new India, rich and prosperous, devoid of all forms of social injustice. This might be a milkmaid's proverbial dream, but, then it is such dreams and hopes that inspire ordinary human beings to great deeds.

The national movement in India did not begin with the idea that India should be liberated from alien control and domination. The early 19th century social reform and educational programmes initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, and the Brahmo Samaj dealt with definite social evils. The transformation of the movement for social reform to the demand for political independence, took some decades. It was given an economic base and content by Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji in his classical study "Poverty and un-British Rule in India". This book brought to light how Britain was responsible for India's poverty and economic backwardness.

The movement for political freedom did not even begin with the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. This organisation in its early years was something like an annual get-together of the affluent and the educated. While they were concerned for the welfare of the country, their activities were restricted to demands for small concessions; and they sought through well-phrased and polite resolutions the redress of grievances and pleaded for greater participation of Indians in the Services and administration. In the context of latter-day developments, these early attempts of the Congress may seem ineffectual. But then without taking the first step it is not possible to walk the mile.

The Partition of Bengal in 1905 turned our incipient nationalism

into a violent movement for freedom with terrorist proclivities. It was a reaction to the government's repressive policies towards patriots. India was hailed as Mother India; *Vande Mataram* became the song of the new movement. Violence was preached and practised as the only way of breaking the shackles of Mother India. Terrorism became dormant with the rectification of partition in 1911, but it was revived in the third and fourth decades of this century.

It was left to Gandhiji to wean the country from the gospel of violence. He gave ethical and moral content to an otherwise purely political struggle by repeatedly emphasising the importance of means. This called for harmony and tolerance, passive resistance and non-cooperation with injustice and evil, and elimination of violence and hatred.

Moderates like Gokhale, no less a patriot than any of his successors, argued passionately for education. Justice Ranade and his band of workers were equally concerned about cleansing the Indian society of its manifold evils and injustices to make the country fit for freedom. The slogan given by Tilak "Swaraj is my birthright" became an undeniable national demand for which preparation through education and social reform became imperative.

Women's participation in the national movement was practically nil, in the early years, but in helping with social reform their sympathy was expressed in deeds rather than in words. This is not to be wondered at, as women were still in the thraldom of ignorance and tradition and till they were educated and freed they could contribute but little towards national freedom. It is not surprising that one of our early revolutionaries—Bhilhaji Cama —had to work outside India, against immense odds to build public opinion in favour of India's freedom.

The first Indian woman to enter into active politics and live to ee India attain reedom was Sarojini Naidu. She fulfilled the many concepts of political leadership in India. Hailing from a

family of scholars, daughter of a great scientist, a brilliant student, educated at Cambridge, a well-known poet, married outside her caste to an eminent doctor she became leader in her own right. The entry of a woman of such eminence into active politics was not only a great asset to the Congress but a real inspiration to the hesitant womanhood of India. The fact that she left home, husband and children to identify herself with the movement for freedom had a tremendous impact on women in determining their future participation in the national movement.

In the early decades of this century women still lived sheltered lives. Yet we see that many women like Sarala Devi Choudharani, Sarala Ray, Lady Abala Bose in Bengal, Vidyagouri Nilkanth and Sharadaben Mehta and Begum Hamid Ali of Gujarat, the Begum Mother of Bhopal and hosts of others, some known all over India and others respected in their own states like Sister Subbalakshmi and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy of Madras, and many others, their name is legion; were actively associated with educational and social work. Their sincere interest in the welfare of women has brought about a silent revolution and a good deal of the services have come to the women of India through the unrecorded efforts of these great women. Without their work and sacrifice political freedom by itself would not have been so effective.

The levels of women's involvement in the national movement depended largely on the methods of policies followed by the National Congress. We have seen that the latter half of the 19th century was marked by intense activity for social reform and expansion of education. Thus Sati was abolished, widow remarriage was legalised and the Special Marriage Act was passed to legalise marriages contracted outside the pale of established religions. With the establishment of the Presidency colleges and universities, higher education came within the reach of women also. Early attempts of women to go for higher education and professional courses did not receive much encouragement. However, it must be said to the credit of these pioneers, that they demolished the bastilles of orthodoxy and lighted the path for

generations to come—opening new avenues for self-expression and achievement.

So also in the field of political struggle, few women were associated with the National Congress, initially. They attended the sessions as wives and visitors. It was so till Mrs. Naidu strode in as a distinguished participant. The first woman to be elected president was Annie Besant in 1917. Eight years after in 1925 Sarojini Naidu became its second woman president. They did not have any woman to succeed them till Indira Gandhi was elected president in 1959-60. Participation of women in policy-making political bodies has been limited. Whatever participation there was at the lower levels it was confined to the urban women. The politics of violence pursued by the terrorists had a few women. Pritilata Waddedar in men's clothes and Bina Das, both from Bengal, are well-known among the few.

It was left to Gandhiji to give direction, strength and inspiration to a vast all-embracing national movement which was to draw into its vortex women in large numbers. By identifying himself with the masses, with the disinherited and the forgotten millions, he stirred the depths of our national conscience as no leader has done before or ever since. With remarkable foresight and with the experience he gained in South Africa he assessed the strength inherent in women. He realised that the only way to rouse them from their traditional role of domesticity was to appeal to their sense of patriotism and awaken in them national consciousness and social responsibility.

Gandhiji's message offered to the women of India an opportunity to break away from the past with all its frustrations. What is more, Gandhiji by linking women's participation with economic rehabilitation and social reform gave the much desired content to their participation.

Women, literate and illiterate, rural and urban swelled the ranks of the freedom fighters, took over positions of responsibility, courted imprisonment, were arrested in large numbers.

Such a mass participation under Gandhiji's leadership gave women a sense of equality with men, an equality which was unheard of in the tradition-bound Indian society. Certainly, a new era has dawned for women with recognition of their competence, innate strength and capacity for sacrifice and dedicated work.

The present position of women is largely due to two factors; the leadership of Gandhiji and the work done by women's voluntary organisations like the Women's Indian Association headed by Annie Besant and the All-India Women's Conference led by eminent patriots and national workers like Mrs. Margaret Cousins, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Rustomji Faridoonji, Begum Hamid Ali, followed by hosts of others, some of them still with us, who have given direction and strength to the liberation of women.

They had neither external assistance nor government support when they launched the organisation. Their perseverance and single-minded devotion have made it what it is today, the leading women's organisation. The organisation spearheaded the movement for equality of rights, equal inheritance laws and adult franchise. All these have universal acceptance now. Many women who are in public life today have had their training in voluntary organisations like the AIWC, YWCA, National Council of Women.

Today, therefore, more organisations in the forefront, like the Grameen Mahila Sangh, University Federation of Women —national and local, are making their distinctive contribution in specialised fields of their choice. While the greater part of their activities are confined to the urban areas, the Skippo Committee under the able leadership of Dhanvanti Rama Rao brings medical aid to rural women and children.

A special organisation to awaken and educate women in rural areas was the contribution of Gandhiji to the women's cause. He made women realise that the 80 per cent or more of Indian women living in rural India are a part of the responsibility of the educated. No programme of development can succeed, if

rural India is not awakened. So he created the Kasturba Gandhi National Trust to train workers for rural areas and bring the message of free India to the people in our villages. At local and village levels, women are contributing to national development. Today there is no activity, not even a demonstration without women. The women's movement is now national in every sense of the term and it is like salt in food—an indispensable part of India's normal life and activity.

With increasing dependence on government grants and external aid, the old *elan* is fast disappearing from voluntary organisations. There is a lack of identity with the cause and selfless desire to work for national advancement. India's value system is changed beyond recognition. One does not hesitate to say that the future of the country can be assured only if the women recapture the qualities which have dominated the lives of Ahalyabai, Rani of Jhansi, Ramabai Ranade, Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi, and many others who inspired women to pursue noble ideals, indifferent to consequence, and boldly and fearlessly work for the redemption of the motherland.

The Women's Movement—Then and Now

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

Mrs. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (b. 1903), Vice-President, World Crafts Council, was Chairman of the All-India Handicrafts Board. Her publications include: *Awakening of Indian Womanhood; Indian Handicrafts*, etc.

The initiative, courage and leadership women displayed in the political movement towards national independence or liberation from colonial rule assured them a ready and abiding place in India's new resurgent life. Today practically all doors are open to them, and women are seen filling a variety of posts and positions barring probably the army. The early fifties also saw the elimination of their legal disabilities and the adoption of the convention of equal pay for equal work for all. With this the women probably felt that they had indeed arrived. But tragically enough, with this also set in a stalemate which seems to have enveloped them like a heavy pall. It is as though gradually the vigour, drive and adventure had been shed. The majority lapsed back into the old routine. The ambitious ones only sought to reap what fruits they could out of the new opportunities. The reasons are many and complex.

There are not a few who say there has been no real women's movement in this country. What they have in mind is obviously a virulent feminist movement with a streak of the negative in it that perhaps made excessive dramatisation necessary, which was a feature of some of the movements in the west. There was a women's movement in India which began to take organisational form from the early part of this century, when new influences and fresh ideas began to flow in. It was a positive and broad based social force with a larger vision, not just a narrow circumscribed stream. It was in fact part of a great social upsurge for deep changes, which provided it with a healthy core and a rational demeanour. Society was not divided into two warring parties,

women versus men, rather into two segments, the liberal versus the conservative.

The emphasis here was definitely more on equal *opportunities* for women even while demanding equality under the law. It is of interest to note that the Indian women always asked for *adult* franchise, when demanding the right to vote. Even when concessions were offered to them such as enfranchising the *wives* of voters or reserving seats for women in elective bodies, they had firmly declined. It is perhaps also necessary to state here that the vote was not regarded as the only yard-stick of emancipation. Another equally happy feature of the movement was its non-communal, nay cosmopolitan, character. It embraced women of all communities and religions, both in its membership as well as leadership, always opposed sectarian issues such as communal electorates, and pursued larger problems of vital community interest. And thus a many pronged movement took shape.

It attached tremendous importance to education. The All-India Women's Conference in fact began as a crusader for more and better education, then found it necessary to spread out into other fields as family and community affairs are an integral whole that cannot be compartmentalised. The women demanded universal compulsory education at least for the primary to begin with, for all children not just for girls, while seeking certain facilities for girls and women teachers such as special hostels for the former and incentives for the latter. The Women's Conference went further. Most of its branches set up nursery and kindergarten classes which were very scarce and hardly known in those days. They set up middle, even secondary schools for girls in areas where girls were deterred from joining mixed schools.

Above all, the central body took a very wise and commendable step in setting up a college of Home Science, Lady Irwin College in Delhi, the first of its kind in the country and which it ran on its own through its own funds, as the government would neither recognise it as it was thought an outlandish venture, nor

aid with finance. There was also the problem of finding trained teachers for the college as none were readily available. Teachers had even to be sent abroad for the required training. It became in course of time a great landmark in women's education.

A special feature of this period was setting up girls' hostels, especially for the working girls. It was not confined to the elite as is often supposed, but mainly for the working women. It also made on the spot studies of working women especially in plantations and mines through special study teams which led to and were instrumental in getting through appropriate welfare legislative measures, especially protective legislation where necessary.

The women naturally attached great importance to children. Various measures for improving the condition of the child were formulated which ultimately took the form of a children's charter. All this was decades before the birth of the UN and its championing the cause of children.

The problems thrown up by the World War II and its termination, launched the women into new projects. The widespread famine led to the birth of the Save the Children's Committee, a wing of the Women's Conference, which set up Homes for the care and education of the destitute children, some of which took permanent root. The large number of women thrown out of jobs induced the setting up of an employment bureau.

The most spectacular was the running of mobile health vans in remote rural areas where medical care was unknown or scarce. Under the slogan of "Keep the Vans Moving", they were made to serve hundreds of villages from one end of India to the other, a great boon to many remote neglected areas.

Another postwar project championed was the supply of quality milk at reasonable rates. The distress caused by milk scarcity had led the Women's Conference to make a special study

of the problem and produce a very telling pamphlet. Later a regular campaign was launched and a great deal of pressure brought on the new State Governments to provide adequate milk. Bombay led the way by responding and organising milk supplies through regular booths which other States soon followed. A worth-while project of far-reaching consequences was conducting of training camps for preparing cadres of social workers, for there were no such institutions then.

The biggest and widest campaign was, however, for a change in the laws. The foundation for this had already been laid by the adoption of the fundamental rights at Karachi in 1931 by the Indian National Congress which declared that in free India there would be no discrimination on grounds of sex. The principle had now been enshrined in the new Constitution. But it was a far harder task to bring the existing laws into conformity with it. Though women had been lobbying for appropriate legislative measures for decades, the total changes now called for saw them launch into a terrific breathless campaign throughout the country and intense lobbying within the portals of Parliament. The fairly easy passage of these enactments was an acknowledgment of the crucial role of the women in the freedom fight and the new India.

Let us now try to analyse some of the contributory factors that have led to the decline and extinction of a movement among the Indian women. It seems that the political leadership which had so long been denied power with prosperity, who had for decades been ruled by vigour generated by Gandhiji and an idealism which a long line of venerated leaders had inspired, now felt free to indulge their petty ambitions and often a thwarted greed. The emphasis quickly shifted from idealism to selfishness, as also from the group, community and party to the individual. It was more and more a question of each for himself rather than the nation or community. Many felt that recompense was due to them for what they had suffered or foregone in the past. There was thus a slowing down of that old missionary drive. A certain complacency settled on those who had provided the leadership in the past. The repeated warnings of leaders

like Gandhiji or Nehru that life for India had only just begun and in this delicate embryonic stage needed the greatest care and most sensitive handling, went unheeded. Gandhiji with his unerring intuition expanded and finalised the constructive programme to provide content and substance to the idea of a free country. But no one paid much attention to it. No one cared to ask whether the millions who were moved to participate in the great freedom battle, would automatically settle down as disciplined citizens, charged with a high civic sense. Whilst Nehru talked of the great new adventures, most others who were now the rulers of the country were content with a tidy income and a smug abode. Another unfortunate tendency was for all fields of activity to get politicised. Politics, its idiom, technique, values seemed to pervade all national affairs.

On the women the result was even more tragic. The vast concourse of women who had poured into the freedom arena, had slipped back into their old grooves. They now had the vote, a most powerful weapon in their hands. They also had several legal rights. But of what avail, for, they were hardly aware of their power and potential strength. The women leaders too had got settled in, though in new social grooves of power and position that independence had thrown up. They forged no links with the wide mass of women, who are only approached briefly at voting time to secure their ballot papers. So the common women at large remained and continue to remain to this day, quite ignorant of their precious rights or how to use them for their own or public advantage. Thus this human mass with its vast latent power which was once sought after and when harnessed moved the very earth, lies today stagnant and unused for social regeneration or reconstruction.

Where a state assumes the role of a welfare establishment, there is an increasing tendency for the administration to enter more and more areas of activity, assume greater initiative and slowly develop a monopolistic attitude. Has this been responsible for the undermining of that colossal constructive urge and daring initiative which marked the public life of pre-independence days?

Slowly a feeling seems to have come over the people that little can be done without government help. These psychological trammels have also had an unhealthy, enfeebling effect on community activity. Yet in England where the Establishment claims to be paternal, individual initiative and community welfare activities are just as vigorous as in the pre-war days.

Gradually, voluntary effort and organisations lost their old mighty prestige and commanding position after independence as the authorities came to look with less favour on them. As some political chicanery also went on under the cloak of social welfare, private effort became more and more suspect, especially in the eyes of the Parliament.

These are significant symptoms of a dangerous malady in the body politic of a country which is wedded to democracy. Democracy has meaning and reality only where the people at large are sensitised to their rights, duties and obligations, and encouraged to exercise them.

We completely ignore the need for voters' *education* which must be distinguished from party propaganda which is freely poured out at election time. Every stimulus has also to be offered for their close participation in the local and national affairs from planning to implementation through various local development projects. Above all the crucial test of a democratic society, lies in the imaginativeness of the citizens, the bold adventure of its own independent leadership, and the success they show. In pre-independence days nearly 75% of the educational institutions and hospitals were provided by the people themselves through their own effort. When we proudly acclaim India as one of the largest democracies, we simply count the heads and the ballot papers cast, reducing an institution we wish to respect, to arithmetical figures, not conscious active human minds.

Barring exceptional cases and occasions, women in public life tend to pattern on men and their ways. It seems that in the new India after 1947, while the young got busy qualifying for and

pursuing professional careers which were opening before them with fair amount of ease, the elders sought security with all its creature comforts and assured public positions. Under the circumstances championing of needy causes seemed too much of a hazard and got neglected.

There are other reasons too for this lack of social sensitivity, a major one amongst them being the warped kind of education imparted to growing minds. Usually learning is taken as the gateway to a job, its merit being judged by the monetary return accruing therefrom. For, the importance of a professional is evaluated by the "Success" achieved, which invariably is in terms of affluence. Lip homage apart, it is not measured in terms of its ability to meet social challenges, or its sharpening of social awareness and acceptance of the wider social obligations. The larger functions of professions to embrace the citizens' fundamental rights and duties are never stressed in the imparting of education, nor the obligation to scrutinise, assess and strive to enhance the moral quality of human life. The professionals seem content to remain prisoners in their professional sanctum. So much for the young professionals. Neither does education encourage independent thinking to enable one to sift and sort out the nostrums that are fashionable and the popular ideologies which pour out from all the mass media, and realise that the validity or correctness of a proposition is not determined by the size of those who propagate or accept it.

Women, as family members or citizens, cannot be isolated from the entire society. The many needs and demands such as adequate facilities in housing, education, water, electricity, transport and the like apply to all. Also the need for clean air, food, administration and a hundred other factors, in none of which the women's voice is heard any more, because of the ignorance of the masses and the callous indifference of the classes. That the women have not promoted even a powerful consumer movement, a territory so close to them, on their own in a country like India, is proof enough of a deadly complacency. The oppressive problem of price rise is thereby used as a political baton by

opposition parties, not as an essential civil need by conscious citizens.

There are other vital issues that touch women even more, like dowry. It is socially a most degrading institution and economically hazardous, making a mockery of both law and human decency. Nevertheless today there is no movement even to stifle it, leave alone exterminate it. Here is an open and consistent violation of a law by all classes and at all levels. Again, child marriages are performed galore and the very Act for which women once fought, is nullified with impunity. Yet the women remain silent.

Similarly women who once showed deep concern over the fate of children and compiled a charter of their rights, seem now to have forgotten the most sensitive and vulnerable section on which rests the future of this nation, the children, comprising nearly 40 per cent of the population, a majority of whom remain undernourished. Nor is any account taken of the large proportion of unwanted children born to parents due to latter's ignorance, negligence or sheer irresponsibility, adding to the burden of poverty and the ranks of the destitute and unemployed.

Is this just a low tide in the usual ebb and flow of the human stream? And will the tide rise again to promising heights launching a fresh flow of powerful volume? Let us not forget however, that the human tide is stirred into motion by human initiative and not by an invisible spring. Will the woman's hand raise the tide again to a crest?

Cultural and Religious Influences

Ashok Rudra

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The woman of modern India is an enigma. How has she come to be what she is—given the conditioning she has received from her cultural and social environment down the ages?

The modern Indian woman is often an object of admiration by people of the rest of the world for the role she plays in the country's public life as well as for certain qualities that she seems to possess in greater measure than women of other cultures: a certain poise, a certain balance, a certain grace going with no mean measure of competence.

We would argue in the course of this article that this personality of the Indian woman could not have been the product of her social and cultural environment alone. The environment has been so unfavourable to her that if it were left to that alone to determine her personality she would have become a non-person with a deformed, embittered, retarded and delinquent mental make-up. We would formulate a hypothesis, namely that the formative influence of Indian women has had two opposing poles: one a certain concept of the woman of flesh and blood that has emerged out of the evolution of the elitist culture of the Brahminical tradition, and the other a certain religious world view in which the Female principle occupies a position of central importance, sometimes dominating it.

The role Indian women play and the position they enjoy in the present-day India would appear as enigmatic if one were to try to understand the phenomenon solely in terms of the history of social

values. The enigma would dissolve, so we suggest, if we should look above—from the society of women to the society of goddesses.

Let us, however, clarify, at the very outset, what Indian woman we are thinking of when we talk of the "Indian woman" of modern India. With all the different social groups based on tribe, language, religion, caste etc. and the stratifications based on economic classes cutting across them, and the further divisions brought about by different degrees of Westernisation, what woman do we have in mind? Could we say anything whatsoever that would hold equally good for the Santal day labourer, the Gujarati housewife, the Tamil office-going girl and the convent-educated, party-giving, executive wife from nowhere? It is obviously our assumption that there is such a common denominator of personality traits and behavioural patterns under all these diversities.

Corresponding to this common denominator we are hypothesising the existence of a matrix of connections between the many different cultures and sub-cultures across the different socio-anthropological groups at any given time as well as over time which matrix is the resultant of a compounding of social philosophy with religious thought. This matrix has taken shape slowly but stably over time, in a dialectical inter-action of an evolving social theory with the developing cults of Vishnu and Siva, but more importantly that of Devi and the various esoteric cults.

Let us take for granted the basic data: that Indian society has all along been (like all, or almost all, developed societies in the modern world) a male-dominated society, where the woman's place has been primarily confined to the home, her role limited to procreation, upbringing of children, and catering for the needs of men-folk by way of creature comforts. There might have been exceptions in some tribal groups or other communities, but they have hardly affected the country's ethos. Also, there is no difficulty in our accepting that things have not been the same during all periods, that women's position was considerably higher during the Vedic period than during later periods; but once again it does not affect the general picture, for during no historical period

did women enjoy equal position or status with men. This provides a basis for comparison with other societies, to all of which the above characterisation largely applies.

When one starts making the comparison between the role and position of women in modern India and that in the countries of the West, which are supposed to be so much more advanced, generally as well as particularly in the matter of emancipation of women, one cannot but be struck with certain unexpected contrasts.

Consider, for instance, women's role in politics and administration. The part that has been played by women in the Freedom Struggle and in the politics and administration of post-independence India has been more important than that played by them in most countries of the West. It is not just a matter of Indira Gandhi or Sarojini Naidu or Vijayalakshmi Pandit—individual cases, however remarkable, can always be swept aside as exceptions. What cannot be swept aside as a matter of exception is the tolerance extended by men in India to working under the leadership, guidance, or even orders of women.

It has been observed by students of the Western social scene that men as well as women in those countries would find it quite inconceivable to be governed, represented or politically led by women. If this be treated as no more than a matter of opinion, the solid fact remains that far from being elected or appointed to the highest offices of party or government, women in the countries of Western Europe had to fight street battles even to acquire the right to vote; and that right was not won in many countries until after the Second World War. There has been no woman President or Prime Minister in any one of these countries, nor has there been any significant participation of women in the higher ranks of administration. By contrast, women in India have not only reached the highest positions of power; have not only got equal political and civil rights as men without having to fight for them; they have been increasingly joining the higher ranks of administration and the various other public services and acquitting themselves with credit.

Indian woman's participation in the economic life of the country is perhaps not very important, but it is no less important than in the Western countries. Like everywhere else, working women in India are to be found predominantly among the lowest of occupations. In the service and professional sectors the participation rate for women in proportionate terms may indeed be higher in the Western countries but that is due mainly to certain non-significant occupations being kept exclusively for women in those countries e.g. the professions of waitresses, secretaries, receptionists, etc. But when it comes to more challenging jobs, whether that be of lawyers or engineers or aviation pilots, the participation rate of women in India is probably no less important than in those countries.

What is of greater consequence than the rates is the eagerness and even passion with which Indian girls aspire after these occupations in the teeth of the most formidable obstacles. This is to be contrasted with the very poor utilisation women in the West make of the much greater opportunities that are open to them. A related phenomenon is the remarkable earnestness and seriousness of purpose girl students in Indian universities demonstrate, often exceeding that of their male class-mates; a phenomenon noticed in other countries also.

Of course, it may be said, and quite rightly, that women who go in for higher education, who take to professions or take up politics, constitute a microscopic minority; they can make no difference to the fact that the life of the overwhelming majority of women continues to be beset with socially imposed disabilities and indignities and deprived of opportunities. But a minority phenomenon is not the same thing as an insignificant or an exceptional phenomenon: it can be and in this particular case it is of crucial and fundamental significance, given that the minority concerned constitutes the leadership elite of the society.

What in the country's heritage could have prepared the ground for this admirable performance by the women of modern India and the equally admirable tolerance exhibited by the men

of her times? It is difficult to trace this to anything in the country's inheritance of social values. Thus, the important part played by women in the country's politics, administration and the higher professions stands out in stark contrast to the poor estimate that has always been made of women's capabilities in these matters. Thus, Buddha gave the following reasons why women ought not to be entrusted with responsibilities: "Women are soon angered, Ananda, women are full of passion, Ananda, women are envious, Ananda, women are stupid. That is the reason, Ananda, that is the cause, why women have no place in public assemblies, do not carry on business and do not earn their living by any professions." ("Sullavaga, X.1.6"). In one of the Jataka stories, the Bodhi Satta is made to say, "Infamous is the land which owns a woman's sway and rule, and infamous are the men who yield themselves to women's domination".

According to the Mahabharata (Shanti Parva) the following categories of persons are to be excluded from the place where a king holds any consultations: "dwarfs, humpbacked persons, lean men, lame and blind men, idiots, eunuchs and women". Women thus were lumped together with the retarded and the deformed. (This, when treated as at all human—most often women were treated as objects and lumped together with other items of property—villages, gold and cows!) Manu, Shukra and Chanakya, the ancient lawgivers, confirm this barring of women from any responsibilities. Let alone being considered worthy of any positions of power in society, women were not even considered fit to be witnesses. Manu ruled them out because "their understanding is apt to waver". Yajnyavalkya and Vasistha did the same for considering woman as "lies incarnate".

But religious attitudes probably spring from much deeper regions of the human psyche than social values; and such is the complexity of the Hindu mind that while systematically nurturing these crude ideas about women's incapabilities, it at the same time peopled the heavenly abodes with goddesses with totally different qualities. Mother goddesses might have held sway over the minds of men in many ancient civilisations, but they lost their

importance in all the developed religions excepting Brahminism. In Islam, Judaism and Christianity, the supreme godhead is a father figure. Mother Mary probably represents a left-over of the Mother cult, but in an extremely weakened form.

In Hinduism, however, goddesses either dominate or at least play as important a part as male gods. In the Sakti cult the supreme divine power is conceived of as a woman, either as the benign and radiant Durga, distributing bounties; or as the formidable Chandi, killing Asuras; or as the dark, terrible, blood-thirsty, naked ogress -Kali- adorned with garlands of severed heads and arms, standing on the prostrate figure of Siva. This last mentioned posture suggests, as clearly as any such symbolism can ever do, the dominance of the Female principle over the Male principle. This dominance may not be there in the Vaishnavite and Saivite lines of religious thought and practice. Lakshmi and Parvati may be consorts of Vishnu and Siva with not a great deal of independent roles. But at the philosophical level, Prakriti is a complementary principle to that of Purusha on an equal footing. This equality, or even supremacy, enjoyed by the Female principle in the religious thought of the country is probably what lies at the bottom of men's acceptance of women as leaders in this country. If on repeated occasions the male gods all combined could not manage to save the world from the destruction caused by Asuras, and the job had to be entrusted to some Chandi or Chamundi it should not be surprising that men, steeped in this tradition, would not hesitate to entrust the defence of the country to a woman.

The same dialectic seems to have operated in the moulding of the Indian woman's personality in general. We have talked about the thirst for learning that Indian girl students seem to have. What could have encouraged this particular aspiration in women and the liberalism in men in this respect? Was not the idea of even school education for female children fiercely opposed by the conservative leaders of society as late as the nineteenth century? Prior to that, was it not centuries after centuries of dark and dense ignorance in which women of all classes were kept steeped?

Of course, one is wont to take the celebrated names of Gargis and Maitreyis as indicator of the access women had to higher education during the Vedic age. One can also point out that the darkness was illumined at places by the dazzling light of the resplendent Vasantasenas and other brilliant Nayikas of Sanskrit poetry and drama. But surely these examples only go to make the point that women were denied any opportunity for accomplishments within the sphere of their natural lives; they could acquire them only at the cost of leaving their homes, to become either sanyasins or courtesans!

If this is the thesis, we can take as anti-thesis the fact that the deification of learning has taken the form of the graceful Saraswati. How could scholars down the ages have sought the blessings of a female divine personality for success in their scholarly pursuits and yet believe that women were incapable of intellectual accomplishments?

We have begun the essay by noting the fact that Indian women are prized for their grace and charm, their balance and poise. But what could be the cultural roots of this personality? The life that women have lived hardly provided the soil for such flowering. India is the country where widows were burnt. Women have known hardships in all societies, in all civilisations. But surely nowhere else could the inequity of the treatment of women have surpassed that in India. It is not just that the birth of a male child has always been and still is hailed with joy, whereas that of a female child is considered to be a family misfortune. It is not just that there was child marriage and polygamy and restricted property rights and scope of exploitation by male relatives all round and the searing tyranny of the mother-in-law. Not only that while men could exercise a lot of sexual freedom, it was denied to women more totally than perhaps in any other civilised society.

Even this life of torture and all these restrictions on actions and movements, which often drove women to gruesome modes of suicide, does not add up to the full measure of the woman's lot. Far more terrible than all these social practices has been the

environment of ideas in which women have had to live. The restrictions and the disabilities on women have been imposed on the basis of a rationalised philosophy of woman that is indeed vile and vicious. As is well-known, there have been different Dharmas for people with different vocations: the Brahmins had a different Dharma from the Kshatriyas, the businessman from a professional thief; but women had only one Dharma—that of Pativrata. For a woman there is only one god—the husband, in whose selection she has no voice. She has only one duty—unquestioning obedience to her husband, unlimited service to him, however low he may be morally or however unfair his demands.

A case of the Sati ideal much cited by the different Puranas is that of the wife of a leper who lovingly carried her husband in her arms to a brothel at his command. In the Mahabharata, a reluctant queen is persuaded by her husband to submit herself to the sexual services of an appointed man following the Niyoga custom by quoting the following maxim from the Vedas:

> "A woman must do whatever her husband asks her to do, whether that be in accordance with Dharma or opposed to it."

This emphasis on woman's total subservience to men has been justified in terms of a view of women's weaknesses that is truly mean and despicable. The Brahmin law-makers made a veritable catalogue of the alleged vices of women that really speaks very ill of the mind that thought of them. Consider the following observations, which, for all their extravagance, are quite typical:

1. "Women are neither friends nor foes. They perpetually crave for ever new men. They desire any well-dressed male they see; but in order to obtain what they want they make a show of chastity. . . . In public women are very modest. But when they get their beloved in private they make as if to devour them. . . . They bestow more affection on men who satisfy them sexually than on their own children." (Devi Bhagavat).

2. "Oh, King! Do you not know that women's love, like that of wolves, is never genuine? That is why men of the world ought never to trust women and robbers". (Urvasi to Pururava, in Devi Bhagavat).

3. "Women remain chaste only as long as they are not in a deserted place and do not get the chance to be acquainted with any man. That is why it is necessary that respectable women should be always guarded by friends". (Arundhati, in Siva Purana).

4. "Women, even when they are of good family, beautiful and married, do not hesitate to transgress morals. . . . At the first opportunity they leave wealthy and good-looking husbands to share adulterous bed with other men. . . . Men desirous of adulterous sex have only to approach them with just a few words of flattery and they immediately get infatuated by them. . . ." (Apsara Pancha Chura to Narada, in Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva).

5. "With opportunity and secrecy and the right wooer, all women will go wrong. Aye, failing with others, with a cripple even"—(Buddha, quoted in the Milindapanha).

6. "Women constantly suck the blood of men like leaches. . . . That very woman whom man considers his beloved robs him of his manhood through sexual indulgence and of his mind, his wealth and all his possessions. Hence, is there any greater robber than a woman"? (Devi Bhagavat).

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

Nor is such characterisation of women a matter of exception: quotations like the above can be taken out of our ancient holy literature in their hundreds; while any contrary sentiments granting a minimum of decency to women are encountered only rarely.

Women of India had to keep their sanity, their balance, their dignity and their self-respect even while treating as god men those who thought of them so hideously. Their task was not made easier by the other aspects of ambivalence which marks so deeply the Hindu concept of the holy. On the one hand chastity is picked up as the supreme virtue of women, who are treated as congenitally incapable of attaining that virtue and therefore treated with contempt; yet, at the same time, the Brahminic mind spins out the lurid details of the lascivious adventures of Radha and her companions and this literature is made a staple food for the nourishment of women's mind. Similar comments may be made about the erotic temple sculptures adorning the outside of Hindu temples and the fact that the one common denominator of all the concepts of holiness that belong to the inside of the temples has been the concept of sex being evil.

However miraculous, modern Indian woman seems to have survived all this. She seems to have acquired a balanced personality that keeps an equal distance from the two poles of asceticism and excess indulgence, continence and debauchery, that seems to bedevil the Brahminic attitude towards life.

This emergence of the Indian woman, like lotus out of the mire, has to be treated as a gift of the goddesses of the country. The Hindu mind, which is inconsistent about many matters, has been inconsistent also about its attitude towards women. The same mind that produced the infamous catalogue of the supposed vices and weaknesses of women also created the goddesses of the country, and with what love and what respect have they been shaped! It is a remarkable fact that while most of the gods have been portrayed as morally lax, given to various sexual delinquencies, there is not a single goddess that has been

ascribed any of the vices that have been listed as being inherent to feminine nature. Not only the lecherous Indra, but most other minor gods—Varuna, Surya, the Asvinis—and even such a supreme god as Siva, behaved with precious little restraint over their lust. But what a striking contrast is presented by the goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati and the earlier Vedic deities like Usha, or even such minor characters as Sachi, wife of the wretched Indra. Nowhere in all the endless tales and anecdotes about them are they shown to behave with even a fraction of the misdemeanour that is exhibited by the gods. The goddesses, other than those of the Sakti cult, have been vested with remarkably charming personalities: full of grace and dignity, luminous with the glow of restraint, and yet not life-denying, but shining in the fullness of life. It is with this richness of personality that the goddesses seem to have blessed the Indian women.

It is not then surprising that men who are as deeply religious as they are in India and who have concentrated their veneration on the female personalities of Lakshmi and Saraswati and Durga and Kali would allow a feminist revolution in modern India to take place without really offering any serious opposition to it. It is a remarkable fact of history that the legal bottom has been knocked out of the institutional machinery of torture, exploitation and oppression of women that was fabricated and kept in place over thousands of years with hardly any organised social forces in the country fighting to retain them. Indian workers get the same wages, irrespective of sex, and this is not so in many advanced Western countries. Laws relating to marriage, divorce, abortion, inheritance etc. are at least as enlightened in India as, if not more. those of the citadels of liberalism in the West. Of course, the social reality may fall far short of the legislative provisions. But we have been discussing attitudes and values, and from that point of view the male-dominated society itself reforming its institutional framework in this voluntary fashion is indeed very remarkable.

Panchakanya—
An Age-old Benediction

M. A. Sreenivasan

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Panchakanya—An Age-old Benediction

"Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Tara, Mandodari."

They were the five names my mother always intoned while, with her right forefinger dipped in sesame oil, she pressed five neat round dots on the floor in front of the small mat on which my little daughter Lakshmi sat cross-legged, before she was given her Friday oil bath. "Panchakanya",[1] she then said, raising her voice, and drawing the finger across the five dots, she repeated "Chiranjeevi, Chiranjeevi",[2] as she wiped the oil on the child's hair and forehead. That invariably, was the prelude to the bath, the invocation and the benediction.

For Gopu, her grandson, it was different. His turn came on Saturdays and the names intoned were seven.[3]

Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Tara, Mandodari . . . What names to invoke, names of great women, each of different hue. How well they anticipate,—or did they inspire—Manu the lawgiver's dictum:—

"Let the names of women be good to pronounce—sweet, simple, pleasant and appropriate; let them terminate in long vowels and resemble words of benediction."

The prayers of a people, their rituals, the gods and goddesses they invoke, the blessings they seek are a reflection of their ideals and their way of life. A prayer may ask for daily bread, another for annihilation of the infidel. Yet another prayer, sublime,

impersonal, may seek nothing more—or nothing less—than to be vivified and illumined by the radiance of eternity, as in the Gayatri.[4]

Now let us take the five names my mother invoked, the benediction she chanted. Who were they? What ideals did they inspire? What culture did they reflect?

There is no saint among them; and but for a single exception no goddess. They were, all of them, devoted wives and mothers. All sought and received the grace of the Saviour, and their lives were full of significance.

Ahalya, the first woman created by Brahma, was the devoted wife of the sage Gautama. The great god Indra was so madly infatuated with her beauty that he descended to the hermitage and, taking the exact form of Gautama, deceived and seduced her when the sage was out for his morning bath in the Ganga. When came back to the hermitage, Gautama discovered Indra, who had lingered too long. Burning with fury, before Ahalya could say a word, the sage pronounced upon her a dreadful curse—that she be turned into stone. Ahalya, shattered and distraught, told him how she had been duped, and begged for mercy. Unable to take back the curse, the sage told her that only the touch of Sri Rama's foot would end the curse; and he consoled her with the prediction that this would surely happen. And so indeed it did.

Who does not know Sita, the paragon of wifely virtue and devotion?

The Ramayana is replete with descriptions of her beauty, her graciousness, her selfless love and devotion to Sri Rama, her suffering and sacrifice. There is a gem in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*, which I must not fail to quote here:—

"Sita followed the footsteps of Sri Rama in the forest," says Kalidasa "even as Smriti (the Epics and Puranas) faithfully followed Sruti (the Vedas)".[5]

Draupadi is a name to conjure with. Her story touches many an aspect of Indian life and tradition, from the institution of Swayamvara (the bride choosing her husband-to-be from among a number of assembled young men), and the sanctity of mother's instruction, to a formula in polyandry. The five Pandava brothers are in exile living in the guise of Brahmins, in Ekachakra. They hear of the Swayamvara arranged for the marriage of the lovely Draupadi, and go to it unrecognised. Arjuna's matchless skill in archery wins for him the contest for the hand of Draupadi. The brothers hurry back home and tell Kunti: "Mother, we have secured our *bhiksha* (alms) for the day." As usual, their mother Kunti tells them: "Share it among the five of you."

Those were their mother's words and they must be honoured.

As they always did, when faced with a knotty problem, the brothers sought the advice of sage Narada. Narada rules that Draupadi take each brother as her husband for one year; should there be any breach of the rule, the guilty brother should journey far away on a long purificatory pilgrimage—which Arjuna had later to undertake.

Then there is the story of Draupadi's 'Vastrapaharanam'—stripping her of her garment.

The wicked Kauravas, sworn enemies of the Pandavas, plan to insult and humiliate the brothers, and put Draupadi to shame. Duryodhana's brother Dusshasana drags her by the hair to a crowded hall where he tries to strip her naked in the sight of all present. Draupadi who was clad in a single garment, utters a prayer to Sri Krishna.[6] As Dusshasana tears each sari away, another sari appears under it, till after tearing at a thousand saries, he sinks exhausted, and Draupadi emerges triumphant, to the astonishment and humiliation of the Kauravas.

Tara and Mandodari, again, are great characters from the Ramayana.

Tara was the devoted wife of the brave and valiant Vali who fell to the arrow of Sri Rama. Tara, who had the vision of Sri Rama as a Supreme Being, vainly tried to dissuade her husband from opposing him. Likewise, Queen Mandodari, consort of the mighty King Ravana pleaded with her husband to return the captive Sita to her husband. "Sita cannot excel me. What has she that I have not?" she asked her husband, in true womanly style. But all her questioning and pleadings went in vain.

These, then, are the Panchakanyas. What a colourful variety of examples they represent! They are neither saints nor virgins. None of them is heavenly. All have "a touch of the earth", as Tennyson said, "the low sun makes the colour". And all are wives and mothers. For, the ideal of Indian womanhood is the mother, the one being in creation, lowly or high-placed, poor or rich that, though rooted on earth, is godlike in her capacity for unbounded love and devotion with no thought of any return or recompense.

The sculptures in our temples, in Halebid or Belur, Konarak or Khajuraho are, in the main, not of maidens or virgins but of full-breasted women, "*Ghanakucha Dwandvaika bhushaamani*" as the poet Kulashekara sang of the goddess Rukmini. No marriage ceremony is complete without the prayer for offspring:

"Garbham dehi Sineevali
Garbham dehi Saraswati"[7].

and the blessing given by the assembled priests and elders to the young bride was "May you have ten children, and your husband be like the eleventh".[8]

The concept of the Mother Goddess has permeated India's culture and tradition from the earliest Vedic hymns, through the great epics and Puranas, to the present day. Applauding her victory over the demon Mahishasura—which incidentally, earned her the title of Mahishasura-mardani,—the grateful gods thus sing her praise, in the *Markandeya Purana:*

"O Goddess, You are the Intellect (Saraswati) which knows the essence of all sciences; You are Durga, the barque that safely takes us across the stormy sea of existence; You are Lakshmi, enshrined in the heart of Vishnu; You are Gauri, dwelling in the body of Siva."[9]

References

1. Five Women.

2. Live Long.

3. "Aswaththama, Bali, Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhisana, Krupa, Parasurama."

4. Tat Savitar Varenyam Bhargodevasya Dhimahi Dhiyoyonaha Prachodayath.

5. "Srutherivakyam Smrithiranvagacchath".

6. "Shankha chakra gadha pane dwarka nilay-aachyutha
Govinda pundarikaksha Rakshamam Shrangatham".
It is interesting to note that this prayer is recited daily at the conclusion of Sandhyavandanams.

7. "Grant Conception, O Moon, O Saraswathi".
—(Yajurveda)

8. "Dashasyam Putranadhehi
Pathimekadasam kridhi".
—(Yajurveda)

9. Medhāsidevi Vidithākhila Shāstharasārā
Durgāsi durga Bhavasāgara Nowrasangha
Shri Kaitabhari Hrudayaika Kruthādhivāsa
Gowri thevameva Shashi mowli krutha prathishta.

The Position of Women in Indian Society

Andre Beteille

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The Position of Women in Indian Society

An eminent British anthropologist wrote not long ago that, while much was known about the position of women in primitive societies, there was very little scientific material available about their position in British society. It is much the same in regard to India. With a few notable exceptions, Indian sociologists have not devoted much serious attention to the systematic study of the position of women in their own society.

There is no dearth of discussion on what may be called the women's question in India. But, in the absence of systematic studies, this discussion often leads to opposite conclusions, and, indeed, it often starts from opposite assumptions about the position of women in society. Some argue that women enjoy a very high status in India and point to the number of distinguished women in high public office. Others maintain that the lot of Indian women is very hard, and a representation was made not very long ago to the Backward Classes Commission that women, as a whole, should be treated as a Backward Class in this country.

There are equally sharp differences of opinion about the changes taking place in the position of women in India. Some regard these changes as profound and pervasive; they point to the increasing participation of women in public life and to the changes introduced in their legal status. Others maintain that the position of women has changed very little and that Indian society continues by and large to be a male-dominated society.

I do not, for a moment, believe that these ambiguities can be

resolved in the course of a brief discussion. At the same time, no *proper* solution can be found unless we view these questions in their *proper* sociological perspective. Before we are able to say anything meaningful about the position of women in a society we must know something about the structure of that society. The position of women can change in a significant way only when this structure itself undergoes change.

What does it mean to view the position of women in India in a sociological perspective? It means first of all to break Indian society down into its basic structural divisions and to examine the place assigned to women in each one of them. The confusion that we find in discussions about Indian women often arises from our failure to take sufficiently into account the internal differentiation present in Indian society. The position of women is not the same among Hindus and Muslims, in the different regions of the country, and, most particularly, among the different social strata.

Secondly, the sociological perspective requires us to pay attention to the position of women not merely as it is supposed to be in principle, but especially as it actually is in practice. Here again, much confusion is created by both traditionalists and modernists. The former construct an idealised picture of women in traditional India from selected classical texts and, comparing this with her actual position in recent times, find the present less satisfactory than the past. The latter point to the many freedoms granted in principle, to women since independence and contrast these with the restrictions from which they actually suffered in the past. The sociological perspective urges caution against such comparisons, and demands that we compare facts with facts, and ideals with ideals.

Thirdly, our perspective requires us to avoid hasty evaluative judgements on the position of women in the past or present, or in this or that stratum of society. Those who write on the women's question generally come from a particular stratum of society, and are likely to be guided, consciously or unconsciously, by the moral

code of that stratum. We must remember that there is nothing final or absolute about this code. We cannot talk reasonably about the position of women in a particular section of society unless we view it in relation to its own moral code. Any evaluation we may wish to make will have to be made after and not before an examination of the values of the people concerned.

An analysis of any important aspect of Indian social life will have to start with a consideration of regional differences. The regions differ from each other both in their geographical features and in their historical development. Corresponding to these factors there are differences between them in material and non-material culture. To take one example, the systems of kinship and marriage are generally different in the Dravidian-speaking areas in South India as compared to the Indo-Aryan-speaking areas in North India. To take another, the role of women in agriculture is generally different in the paddy-producing areas in the east and south from their role in the wheat-producing areas in the north.

There are differences in the extent to which women are allowed freedom of movement in the different regions of the country. As someone who had grown up in cities in North India, I expected, when I went to do field work in a South Indian village, to find social life—particularly among the women—to be governed by a rigidly orthodox code. But I soon discovered that it is possible to combine a high degree of orthodoxy in ritual life with a certain freedom of movement among women. Women in South Indian villages enjoy greater freedom of movement than their counterparts in North India.

The segregation of women is, of course, closely associated with certain religious beliefs and practices. We can, therefore, expect to find important differences in this regard between the different religious groups. In general, segregation is practised to a greater extent among Muslims than among Hindus; this seems to be more an aspect of the Islamic cultural tradition than of Islamic religious beliefs. At the other end, women appear to enjoy

more freedom among Christians and Parsis than among Hindus.

Early marriage for girls, so common in Indian society, has at least some connection with traditional Hindu values and norms. Early marriage and early motherhood, apart from having important demographic consequences, also hinder the full participation of women in certain important fields of social and cultural life. There are significant differences between the different religious groups in the age at marriage for women, and one would expect corresponding differences in their domestic roles. It appears that social legislation has not had a very significant effect in raising the age at marriage, giving us a good example of the divergence between law and custom, which is so common in all human societies.

The division into regional and religious groups does not, of course, exhaust the range of cultural pluralism encountered in India. In the same region and within the same religious group one might find a variety of social customs. Thus in Kerala, the Nairs and Nambudiris followed very different customs even when they lived as neighbours and were bound by the closest social ties. The Nairs were matrilineal and matrilocal whereas the Nambudiris were patrilineal and patrilocal. The rights enjoyed by Nair women were in many ways superior to those of their Nambudiri sisters.

While it is true that women enjoyed more freedom among the Nairs than among most communities of comparable status in India, it must not be thought that women have necessarily a dominant position in matrilineal societies. In practically all societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, women have, in fact, a lower status than men. In matrilineal societies property is trasmitted through women, but this only means that it generally passes from mother's brother to sister's son. In most such cases the woman, instead of being under the control of her husband, is under her brother's control. Neither matriliny nor polyandry (where a single woman is at the same time married to several men) is a guarantee of the supremacy of women.

The customs of the over 30 million tribal people living in different parts of the country have certain distinctive features. Many observers have commented on the freedom from restraint that characterises much of their social life. Men and women participate freely and on equal terms in song and dance, and in other forms of collective entertainment. However, here also the influence of Hinduism (and to some extent of Christianity) has introduced restrictions which, as in most such cases, affect the sexes unequally. Thus, one encounters tendencies towards a lowering of the age at marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, and other restrictions considered desirable by non-tribal-people.

Perhaps the most conspicuous variations in the position of women are the ones we find between the different strata. Indian society is highly stratified, and the marks of stratification are visible in practically every sphere of life. Any analysis of the place of women in Indian society will have to take into account the fact that their role in social life in the upper strata is quite different from their role in the lower strata. Differences of this kind are to be found in every complex society, but the peculiarly rigid character of social stratification in India makes them more conspicuous here.

The most readily visible feature of stratification in Indian society is its division into a number of castes which are hierarchically graded. Brahmins, Cultivators, Artisans and Harijans were not only assigned different ranks, but there were many differences in their customs which were sanctioned by traditional rules. Among the most important of these rules were the ones restricting marriage between members of different castes. In addition to the general rule of endogamy which required individuals to marry within their own caste, there was also the rule of hypergamy according to which, under certain conditions, men of a higher caste could marry women of a lower caste or subcaste. Underlying these rules was the value placed on the purity of women which was the more jealously protected the higher the caste of the woman.

During the last hundred years, several castes and communities have attempted a kind of upward social movement which has been described as Sanskritisation. This is a process by which members of lower castes seek to improve their status in society by adopting the customs of the upper castes. This is often associated with important changes in the position of women, particularly at the middle levels of the caste hierarchy. The age at marriage tends to be lowered, widow remarriage is given up, the dowry goes up and women are discouraged from going out to work, all this being done in imitation of the traditional customs of the upper castes. In this way, at least in the rural areas —where the vast majority of our women live—certain kinds of upward social mobility lead to a restriction rather than an enlargement of the freedom of women.

Although the institution of caste is a characteristically Hindu phenomenon, divisions corresponding to castes are found also among other religious groups such as Muslims and Christians in India. In the case of the Muslims, the pattern of life among the high-status Ashraf groups is quite different from the life of women belonging to functional castes such as Julaha or Kalal. It would be misleading to talk about *purdah* among Muslim women in general, without taking these differences into account. Similarly, in a state like Kerala, which has a large Christian population, there are vast differences in the position of women between the Old and the New Christians.

In addition to the differences of caste, there are also important economic differences which divide the people of India. Even where the distinctions of caste are weak, those between rich and poor or between workers and non-workers remain. In traditional Indian society the most important economic differences were very closely associated with distinctions of caste. India is still largely an agrarian society, and if we are to understand the position of women in it we must examine their place in the different agrarian strata.

In the minds of most liberal-minded people the emancipation

of women is closely associated with their right to work. But there is also another side to the picture. In agrarian societies work is more often regarded as a hardship than as a privilege. If this applies to men, it applies even more to women. It is not true that women in India have always been confined to their homes. In rural India a substantial number of them work in the fields as agricultural labourers, and their work is invariably of the most onerous and arduous kind.

The Census of India provides figures representing the proportion of cultivators and of agricultural labourers in the total agricultural work force. These figures show that women constitute a large though varying proportion of agricultural labourers in the different parts of the country. In general, their proportion is higher in the paddy-producing areas of East and South India than in the wheat-producing areas of the North. In some of the most fertile rice-growing districts of South India women actually outnumber men among the agricultural labourers. There are various reasons for this, but it should be noted that wet paddy cultivation is a particularly difficult and unpleasant occupation, and it goes without saying that women are paid less for their work than men.

This is the context in which we have to examine the stigma which attaches to groups whose women customarily work as agricultural labourers. Working as an agricultural labourer in a paddy field is very different from working in an office as a secretary or a receptionist, and it is only natural that the two types of work should be differently evaluated in a society whose members are so keenly preoccupied with status. It is understandable too that among agriculturists a community which seeks to raise its social status should try first and foremost to ensure that its women do not work at jobs which are ill-paid and universally regarded as demeaning.

It follows from what has been said that although some changes may be taking place in the position of women in India, these changes cannot be of major significance unless the conditions

of work in agriculture (and in industry) are themselves radically changed. It is easy to be beguiled by lists of eminent women in the different walks of public life, but the basic social and economic conditions under which women live in the countryside have altered very little. Women work in the fields when they have to, and, when they do not, they are married away at a very early age much as they were in the past.

Marriage among the Hindus

Veena Das

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It is often assumed by the believers in economic determinism that the low status of women can be directly attributed to the constraints placed on them by their biological functions which do not allow them to participate in the productive activities of the economy to the same extent as men.

The argument runs as follows: Because of the fact that women are physically less strong than men, the latter have to perform the more arduous tasks in the economy. Further, a woman needs male protection during her child-bearing and child-rearing years and this dependence on men is responsible for the unequal control over physical and other resources that women have when compared to men.

It is not so much that the argument is wrong as that it is incomplete. For instance, among the hunting and food-gathering tribes, who are the surviving examples of the most primitive form of economy that we know of—the division of labour between the sexes is such that women gather food and men do the hunting. The actual contribution that women make to the total food resources of the group is greater than the contribution of the men and yet hunting is considered to be more prestigious than food-gathering. Obviously a purely utilitarian explanation does not explain the differential assessment of food-gathering and hunting in these societies.

Similarly, the woman's contribution to the economy in matrilineal societies is not significantly higher than her contribution

among the patrilineal groups but we find that the birth of a female child is greeted with much more enthusiasm and joy among the former. Thus to argue in purely utilitarian terms is to oversimplify the problem and can give the misleading impression that in some magical way the status of women will improve if they are given greater chances of making substantial contributions to the economic life.

I propose to take a different set of variables—viz., the norms of marriage and kinship among the Hindus and show the close correlation between these and the norms regulating the position of women. I do not wish to argue that the institutions of kinship and marriage are the main causal factors in determining the status of women but to show the interrelation between the two. Indeed, I think it is misleading to cast our explanation in terms of a cause-effect framework. We should rather look at the problem in terms of a set of variables such as relations between the sexes, structure of kinship groups, marital norms, division of labour between the sexes, control over domestic and extra-domestic resources by men and women, and the rights, duties, privileges and disabilities of women, which are so closely interrelated that a change in one variable would lead to change in others, but none of which can be given the status of a causal factor.

The notion that the honour of men rests in their women and can be violated by their conduct is an extremely common one in India. This leads to a direct control by men over the sexual and marital norms relating to women. Thus marriage is not considered as primarily an affair of the boy and the girl who are getting married but as an event which involves the entire kin groups of both spouses. It may be used for strengthening already existing relationships or for creating new alliances; but in any case the decision to marry a particular person rarely rests with a boy or a girl. In fact, it is important to remember that the idea of marriages based on romantic love is a recent one in human history. Even in the West this was not an accepted norm of marriage till the last century. Accordingly, we shall view the institution of marriage as a means by which alliances can be created

or strengthened between two or more groups such as families, clans, and royal houses.

The simplest form of such alliances is where a woman is directly exchanged for another woman. Given the universality of the rules of prohibition applicable to incest within the nuclear family, it is essential for men to look for their wives outside the family. The easiest way in which a man can secure a wife for himself is by giving his sister in marriage to another man and getting the other man's sister for his own wife. This is sometimes institutionalised in a way that two groups continue to exchange their women over generations. The high-caste Hindus usually do not approve of this custom and there are various proverbs in the different regional languages expressing disapproval of this form of marriage. It is called 'kunda-munda sambandham' by the Tamil Brahmins, meaning 'ball-ball marriage', and in Punjabi it is called 'atta-satta' which is a denunciatory way of referring to exchange. It seems that the high castes do not approve of this form of marriage as it conflicts with the Sanskritic ideal of the girl being given as a gift in marriage without accepting anything in return.

On the contrary direct exchange is considered a desirable form of marriage among lower castes, semi-Hinduised tribes, as also among the inhabitants of regions like the Himachal, which have not come completely under the influence of the Sanskritic Brahmins. In general, among these groups the sexual and marital norms relating to women are not as harsh as among the high-caste Hindus. Women are allowed greater freedom of movement. The girl's parents do not have to pay a huge dowry for her marriage and, in fact, it is the groom who has to give a 'bride-price' to the girl's parents. Similarly, divorce is easier and widow-remarriage has always been permittted. These customs are now changing rapidly as these groups are taking on the styles of life of the higher castes.

However, till recently it was only among the high caste Hindus that the gift of a virgin daughter was considered as an act of religious merit, the husband was ideally regarded as

a deity, divorce and widow-remarriage were considered to be morally repugnant and it was the duty of the kin of a woman to protect her purity and through her the purity of the entire group. This whole complex of ideas which is associated in the popular mind with the entire Hindu population was, in fact, found only among high-caste Hindus. It follows that among the lower castes, neither bride-price nor exchange-marriage is in basic contradiction with their other ideas. "You sell your daughters", say their high-caste neighbours to which the followers of the custom retort—"We do not accept our wives in charity". In addition, the groups among which exchange-marriage is practised point out that it provides a built-in check against harrasment by the girl's in-laws. If a man does not treat his wife well, then he can expect his sister to be ill-treated in turn. This also ensures that the systematic status difference between the wife-giving and wife-receiving family, that is typically found among the higher castes and often results in humiliating inferiority for the bride's kin, does not have scope for development.

The higher castes do not believe in direct exchange of women but a careful analysis of their marital institutions shows that they may give their daughter and expect in return either political patronage or intangibles like status and prestige. The groups which best exemplify this are the princely castes of Rajputs. The Rajputs are a numerically large category, and have a very wide spatial spread so that it is much more meaningful to think of them as a generic category rather than a group with well-defined boundaries. In such a large category of people differences in terms of status, wealth and power, are bound to be marked. The Rajputs, for instance, are divided into well-defined clans and lineages which are ranked. Thus the princely clans rank higher than the commoner clans and among the former the lineages of eldest sons rank higher than that of the younger ones. This is because of the rule of primogeniture by which the eldest son succeeds to the throne (or the headmanship etc.). Thus, in the political capitals, the dominant lineages were those of the eldest sons and since a ruler was likely to be suspicious of his younger brothers who would be contenders for the throne in the event of

his death without an heir, he would usually try to disperse them far away from the capital, into the provinces. As a consequence, in addition to status differentiation on the basis of lines of descent, the Rajputs also developed marked territorial gradations with the most blue-blooded Rajputs concentrated in the political capitals of Rajasthan.

The system of marriage among the princely groups described here is consistent with their political systems. Their marriage rules are described as hypergamous, by which we mean that a girl of a lower section can marry a boy of a higher section but not *vice-versa*. It is interesting to see the returns which the parents of the girl and the boy expect from such a system. To the girl's parents such a marriage is advantageous because they can use the fact of their alliance with a higher section to gain more prestige *vis-a-vis* those people of their own section who cannot boast of such alliances. But obviously the girl's parents must be ready to bear the social costs of such a marriage, or else it would be difficult to persuade the boy and his parents to consent to a match with a girl of a lower section. It seems that there are two factors which may induce the boy's parents to go in for such a match—one is the political support of the girl's group and the second is money.

As already indicated, the rule of primogeniture meant that only the eldest son could succeed to his father's position but the younger brother qualified if the eldest brother was to die without a son. In such a system one is bound to be suspicious of one's nearest patrilineal relatives. On the other hand, since marriages within the clan were forbidden, one's affinal relatives could be counted upon for support as they could not contend for the throne. Thus a man may be motivated to contract an alliance with a group which has lower prestige but which is powerful. Then he can expect political support and the bride's parents may expect to rise slowly in the status hierarchy by the prestigious alliance. There are dramatic instances of such status-climbing even in recent history where girls belonging to the royal families of doubtful antecedents have been married into princely families

of Rajasthan, and these alliances have helped the girl's parents to establish their claims for Rajput status.

Another means by which a boy may be persuaded to marry a girl of a lower section is by the inducement of a huge dowry. One suspects that among the lower rungs of the Rajputs and Jats, the dowry played an extremely important role in marriage negotiations. The women in this system are like pawns, to be played carefully in the whole game of status building. Because the girl belonged to a lower group, her incorporation into the husband's group was a very slow and painful process. She would be constantly reminded of her low status, the 'small' amount of the dowry and would be under constant pressure to get presents of a higher and higher value from her parents. The husband was very conscious of his higher status and would take every opportunity to make this abundantly clear, especially on visits to the natal family of his wife. The extent to which considerations of the girl's happiness could be completely ignored is demonstrated by a case in which a royal family belonging to the south which was trying to establish its Rajput status married its girls to a princely family of Rajasthan despite the fact that the girls could not even speak the language of their husbands.

Two further implications of the system are worth considering here. The highest group in the system would be left with a surplus of girls as only a limited number could be absorbed within the group if its men were to also accept wives from the lower group. In a system in which giving a daughter in marriage to a man of a different group is an implicit admission of the higher status of that group—the highest groups are left with the cruel choice of either forcing their women to remain unmarried or committing female infanticide. This is what leads one to suspect that in a hypergamous system the groups at the apex may have been the ones to resort to female infanticide. The problem of the surplus males among the lowest groups was more easily resolved by allowing them to marry outside the caste into tribal groups, such as the Kolis of Gujarat.

My second conjecture is that high rates of female suicide might also be associated with hypergamy, though not exclusively with it. In very general terms one can state that in patrilineal systems, the crucial variable which determines the position of a woman within the system is the degree of her incorporation into the husband's group. The greater the ease and effectiveness with which she is incorporated into the husband's kin group, the greater the chances that whatever the formal rules, her actual position in the group is not a completely subservient one. Now in the system that I have been describing, a woman was forced to live among people who explicitly regarded her and her natal family as belonging to a lower group. She would be constantly reminded of this factor and would be pressurised to extract more money from her already hard-pressed parents. Not until her own sons reached marriageable age would she be in a position to consider herself as belonging to her conjugal group. Suicide, in such cases, must seem an attractive way out of an intolerable position. The high rate of female suicide in regions like Saurashtra where hypergamy has been known to be prevalent and the fact that this is usually attributed to the oppression of in-laws lends initial support to my conjecture.

In contrast to the large groups with clear status differentiation that we have described, there are the small, exclusive castes like the Brahmins. The Brahmin castes are not numerically preponderant and sometimes they may consist of not more than 150 families, as the Nandi Brahmins of Gujarat. As can be expected, the notions of purity and pollution are much stronger among the Brahmins than among Rajputs and Jats who are more concerned with ideas of honour and shame. Given the small size of the group, status differentiation within the group is not very marked so that we do not find women being treated as pawns for establishing prestigious alliances. Nevertheless, women play a very vital role in the protection of the ritual purity of the group. The anthropologist Nur Yalman has argued that women are literally seen as points of entrance, as 'gateways' of the caste group. If men of ritually low status are to get access to them, then it is not only the purity of the women but that of the whole

caste group that is threatened. In very simple terms, the position can be stated as follows: Among these castes, the ritual status of the women can be considered as invariable. If they mate with men of higher status then the children will have a ritual status higher than that of their mothers. If they cohabit with men of the same ritual status then the children have the same ritual status as the parents and if men of lower ritual status mate with them then descendants will be born whose status will be lower than that of the mother. Thus for the protection of the ritual purity of the group it is vitally necessary to guard the sexuality of the women but not that of the men. It is only necessary that a man should be *married* to a woman of the same ritual status but it is not necessary for the men to abstain from sexual relations with women of lower castes. Two institutional complexes can be immediately discerned from the above propositions.

The first relates to the practice of pre-puberty marriage, the worshipping of the husband as the deity which is emphasised in the wedding-ritual itself and following from this a complete ban on divorce and widow-remarriage with glorification of such practices as the *sati*. Since the main threat to the purity of the group comes from the sexuality of women, the group must ensure that the women must be protected from men of ritually undesirable status who might pollute them. This is achieved by marrying the women to men of ritually correct status before they have reached the child-bearing age and thus transferring the problem of their sexuality to their spouses. Similarly, after the husband's death the woman is made completely unattractive sexually by such customs as shaving of head, and giving up of all ornaments and adornments.

Where pre-puberty marriages are not possible we find the practice of 'mock-marriages' by which the woman is at least symbolically married off to a ritually correct object. In this context, one should mention the Nambudiri women, a majority of whom were not allowed to marry. The Nambudiris were a very small and exclusive Brahmin group of Kerala. In order to keep the priesthood exclusive and for ensuring that property was not

partitioned between brothers, the Nambudiris only allowed the eldest brother to marry. The younger brothers could not marry but they were allowed to have mistresses from the neighbouring Nayar castes who were matrilineal. The Nambudiris achieved the aim of protecting their women's sexuality not by pre-puberty marriages, but by completely removing them from circulation and hence any possible polluting contacts. The Nambudiri women are the only Brahmin women of the South who had to observe strict purdah and who could not move out of the house without covering their faces with palmleaf umbrellas. So strict were the constraints on their freedom of movement that even in her own wedding ceremony a Nambudiri woman was substituted by a Nayar girl in those parts of the ritual that necessitated her movement outside the women's part of the house.

The second institutional complex relates to the custom of women of lower ritual status being allowed to cohabit, actually or symbolically with the men of better ritual status. We are all familiar with stories of gods descending on the earth to give seed to devout women in Hindu mythology. At the empirical level, the force of this idea is demonstrated in the institutions of temple prostitution, Kulin hypergamy, and the Nambudiri-Nair relationship. In the marriage ceremonies of several non-Brahmin castes, the bride is required to be symbolically deflowered by a Brahmin. The Kulin Brahmins of Bengal were in such demand as grooms for non-Kulin Brahmin girls, that a Kulin Brahmin would be married to a number of girls spread over various villages. He had no obligation to his wife or children. It was quite possible for a girl never to see her husband after the wedding night. The girl might have seen her husband only once but she was expected to follow the strict ritual routine of the widow on his death. Since the age difference between a Kulin Brahmin and his wives could be very great, the girls often became widows at a comparatively young age. The sad plight of such child-widows who never had a chance to develop a meaningful relationship with their husbands and yet who were expected to lead an impoverished existence in mourning for the husband, has been the subject of a vast corpus of Bengali literature. The legislative reforms, at

least in this field have been successful and though age at marriage has not gone up, the extreme hardships caused by Kulin hypergamy have nearly disappeared.

The relationship between Nambudiri men and Nayar women also derives from the great value placed upon good seed and hence upon men of higher ritual status in the caste system. As is well known, the Nairs are matrilineal, and have the institution of what is known as 'visiting husbands'. The domestic unit among Nairs is composed of brothers, sisters and sisters' children. A Nair woman can enter into a number of sexual alliances either with men of her own sub-caste or men of higher Nayar sub-castes and most preferably with Nambudiri men. The Nambudiris only allow the eldest brother to marry, but freely enter into sexual relations with Nair women; however, they protect their own 'purity' by not accepting any food from their mistresses. Incidentally, the acceptance of food from a low-caste mistress has very severe consequences as the man is treated as being polluted internally; but cohabitation only results in external pollution and is cleansed by a simple bath. Thus the same caste ideology of purity, which places such stringent taboos on the Nambudiri women, gives practically a free hand to the sexuality of Nambudiri men.

Let us now consider certain other types of marital institutions and see their impact upon the position of women. Among many groups in South India, marriage is prescribed or preferred between certain relatives. Among the Tamil Brahmins a girl is allowed to marry a younger brother of her mother, and among most South Indian castes the marriage of a boy with his mother's brother's daughter, or father's sister's daughter is allowed. It is to be noted that marriage with any type of relatives is not allowed. For instance, while the mother's brother's daughter may be a possible spouse for a boy, he would not be allowed to marry his mother's sister's daughter. Indeed, such a marriage would be considered incestuous.

While uncle-niece marriage was probably never generally practised because of demographic factors, marriage between the

types of cousins described above had greater numerical incidence. In addition, villages in South India are not exogamous, permitting marriages to take place within the village. In effect, marriage-networks in the South do not spread very far and after her marriage the girl does not have to move in among complete strangers. Many people think that this provided for better adjustment by the girl to her parents-in-law. Also, the prospects of marriage for a girl who was destitute or who was not very good-looking were not entirely bleak. Her mother's brother or father's sister would be under a positive obligation to arrange her marriage with his/her own son. An anthropologist, who has worked in the South, once related this instance to me. A girl's mother had died and the girl was not considered pretty by local standards. Her mother's brother arranged a marriage between his own son and her, and narrating this he told the anthropologist, "She is so dark that no stranger will be willing to marry her."

Against the advantage of marrying into a known family and a familiar locality so that the girl is not suddenly placed in an entirely new and unfamiliar environment, must be weighed the disadvantage that some psychologists have pointed out—viz., the possibility that sexual adjustment is difficult when the husband and wife have known each other since childhood. According to this argument, the familiarity which makes for easy familial adjustment also makes it difficult for a man to experience the same erotic excitement as he would for an unfamiliar woman. This argument, of course, presupposes that cousins will know each other before, which may not be necessarily true. Further, the very fact that the cross-cousins are regarded as potential spouses probably inhibits free interaction between them even when they meet. It seems necessary to test these notions on the basis of empirical data as intuitive reasoning can be quite misleading.

Whereas in the South marriage is a means of reinforcing an already existing relationship, in the North it is used primarily for establishing new relationships. When a marriage negotiation is finalised, people say, "We have contracted a *rishta*—a relationship." There is a ban on marriages between any blood-relatives,

custom which is demonstrated by the fact that in the rehabilitation of the war-widows in the recent war with Pakistan, it was found that many of the widows belonging to Haryana and Punjab were being forced to stay on with their parents-in-law till their husbands' younger brothers grew up to a marriageable age. The pathos of such a widow has been beautifully depicted in Bedi's "Ek Chadar Maili Si" though cynics may argue that this is kinder than customs like *sati*, or the usual disabilities forced on a widow among the Brahmin castes.

Polyandry or the custom of a woman having more than one husband, though not very common, is found among some sections of the Hindus. Again, some regions in Himachal have groups among which fraternal polyandry is practised. Sometimes a woman, like the mythical Draupadi, may be married to a group of brothers or she may be married to only one man but other brothers may have sexual access to her. This practice also is supposed to be conducive to keeping the property of the brothers undivided. Some writers have postulated an association between polyandry and female-infanticide, which would artificially alter the natural male/female ratio of the region. It certainly seems unlikely that the male/female ratio could naturally be such as to allow one wife for three or four men.

There are several variations in the marital institutions of the Hindus. Unfortunately, those who have looked at the problems of women have taken the Brahminical ideals of marriage as valid for the entire Hindu society. I have not attempted here to describe other variants, such as marriage among the matrilineal groups and the tribal peoples. However, I believe I have provided a general perspective in which the marital institutions of Hindus may be viewed.

One question which arises often in the context of a discussion on the marital norms of the Hindus is the question of the control which a man or a woman exercises over the choice of his or her spouse. In popular journals, the relative advantages and disadvantages of what are quaintly described as "love marriages"

vs. "arranged marriages" are subject of intense debate and discussion. It is not my intention to contribute anything to this debate. However, I would like to point out that the nature of marriage as an institution in India is significantly different from the nature of marriage as an institution in most Western cultures.

One of the ways in which the cultural meanings attached to kinship and marital institutions may be analysed is through the study of kinship terminology. It is significant that in the English language, for instance, the relatives by marriage are "relatives-in-law". This means that the relationship with them is, at the conceptual level, a "legal" relationship only. This is opposed to "relatives by blood", who are conceived as naturally related. Despite the many variations in the kinship terminologies of the different regions in India, I believe that it would be difficult to find such a contrast between "blood-relatives" and "relatives-in-marriage".

Everywhere in India (with the exception of matrilineal groups like the Nairs) marriage creates ties for a bride which are as binding on her as the ties of blood. After getting married she becomes incorporated into the husband's group. The terms for wife, such as *ardhangini*, *sahdharmini*, emphasise her non-duality with the husband. The son-in-law has a special position in his wife's household where he is treated as a privileged guest. Among some castes of U. P., even the term of reference for a son-in-law is *mehman*, guest. Thus the quality of affinal relations among the Hindus, regardless of region and caste, is quite different from the quality of affinal relations in the West.

I am not proposing that in Western countries affinal relatives may not feel close bond with each other. However, I would like to emphasise that whereas a girl in the West has a choice in this matter, a girl in India is obliged to love and honour her husband's relatives in much the same way as she is obliged to love and honour her own parents. She may, in fact, do neither—but that is a different matter.

To end on a personal note: is the idea of marriage based on free choice and enduring romantic love such an unmixed blessing? Where it is incumbent on the husband and the wife to keep alive the same romantic interest in each other, which first brought them together, a tremendous pressure is generated on the girl to keep herself attractive "to prevent the other woman from happening"—as an oft-quoted advertisement says. In such a culture the fear of age and of growing old can assume neurotic proportions. One can scan any of the women's magazines of these countries to see the kinds of arguments that the producers of such varied items as iron-pills, tooth-pastes, corsets, and sundry others use. All these arguments appeal to the desire of women to remain young, attractive and pleasing to their husbands. If the average life-expectancy of women is seventy, and from the age of twelve to fifty she has to appear physically attractive to the opposite sex, the mental pressures generated on women must be indeed tremendous. It is not surprising that the Women's Lib has made the image of woman as a sex-symbol a principal target of attack.

Here, in India, the reformers are trying to fight for more opportunities for women to be educated, to be allowed to exercise choice in all matters relating to livelihood, marriage, and to exercise control over their own fertility. But to take up the Western woman as model of imitation may create many more problems than it will solve.

The Upbringing of a Girl

Margaret Kalakdina

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The young in India are many, accounting for almost 48 per cent of the population, and the number threatens to increase in proportion to the adult population. What is ironic is that the proportionate increase is greater in groups which can least afford it, the under-privileged, where the large family is common. These groups are mostly the low-income groups in urban areas and the vast majority in the rural areas.

It is extremely difficult to describe the Indian pattern of child upbringing in model terms, as there are wide variations both ecologically and socially. How the mother in a tribal area brings up her child is very different from the way an urban middle class mother brings up her child. Nevertheless, a common trend is discernible; modified in some, and emphasised in others, ranging from the very traditional in remote rural areas to the very modern in the highly urbanised metropolitan areas.

What is the impact that this upbringing has on the child, the kind of adult he is likely to be, and the kind of problems he will face in his expected roles as a responsible adult? Since the early years of upbringing are empirically known to be critical for later personality development, upbringing will be discussed mainly in the context of the constraints and reinforcements that the family, and more especially the mother brings to bear upon the child, particularly the female child. An attempt will be made to describe with scant data and abundant hypotheses her projected roles as mother and daughter.

First of all, the mother's interaction with her young child is mainly physical care and physical closeness. Amongst the majority of Indians, economic constraints make the mother's world a tedious work-a-day one. Children are included in almost all adult situations. Consequently, the child's early awareness of the world around him is that basic necessities are hard to come by and that this is a normal expectation. What is important here is that learning from such situations is incidental and casual. The seeming acceptance of economic hardships is construed by some experts as leading to apathy in adulthood. Furthermore, mothers are by and large illiterate, and hence the pattern of upbringing tends to be traditional and non-scientific. The result of this is the approach-avoidance system in child care, where cause and consequence of certain aspects of care are attributed to the supernatural. If a child falls ill the cause is attributed to the malignancy of the 'evil eye', and rituals are performed to remove it. If a child recovers from illness the consequence is attributed to the benevolence of the godhead, as in smallpox, where the deity of destruction 'Kali Maata' is propitiated. Often, in order to avoid the influence of the 'evil eye', black strings or beads are worn or black spots are deliberately applied on the face; the intent being that black is disfiguring to the envious eye. So strong is the hold, that such practices continue to be carried over into the daughter generation of child upbringing, even in educated groups, in spite of the knowledge of the germ theory of disease. However, since the uneducated, rural-based women are in greater majority, it may be safe to state that child upbringing is mainly articulated within inter-generational traditional patterns of oral communication which, if for nothing else, continue to persist because of tried and known security in previous generations.

The birth of the female is traditionally less favoured than that of the male. Being born a boy is itself a privilege. Investment in the upbringing of a girl is relatively less; as the major goal being marriage, she is looked upon as a transitory member of the family in contrast to the boy. He is the transmitter of the family name to future generations, the one to propitiate the family manes and occupies the significant role in conducting family

rites. Consequently, the girl is inducted into house keeping and child care roles early. If older, she is told she is a model for the younger siblings under her care, which pattern often begins as early as five and six years in agricultural families. Frequently she assumes the role of small mother 'chhoti ma', the rewarder and punisher of behaviour of those under her care. She is discouraged from showing aggressive modes of behaviour, and the feminine model of grace, modesty and self-effacement is frequently reinforced. Since in most strata of society she is hardly expected to contribute to the economic status of the family, she is usually regarded as a liability, to be married off well and as early as possible. With the boy, there is greater indulgence and less severity in the upbringing process. The mother's status increases with the birth of a boy. The developmental stages of the boy are marked with many more ceremonies than that of the girl. Parents, especially the mother, are indulgent towards the boy as he is an investment for old age. This, in turn, creates in him a greater bond of emotional dependency which is reflected in his conflicting ties between wife and mother in his adult life. What does this difference in upbringing do to the female child?

The early induction of the female child gives her a reality orientation to the roles demanded of her during the life span. Consequently, she goes through the roles of a disciplined daughter, a submissive daughter-in-law, a sacrificing mother, and a dominant mother-in-law. Perhaps one might suggest that her role as a daughter-in-law is the most difficult, calling for adjustment to unfamiliar expectations of a new family. Nevertheless, the certainty of the sequential roles and the temporary phases give her the ability to accept the vagaries of these periods. Perhaps the expectations of the powerful roles of mother and mother-in-law sustain her through the submissive phases of daughter and daughter-in-law.

A second attribute arising out of differential upbringing is the protective caring given to the female child, mainly through prohibitions. When the young girl reaches puberty, she is restricted in movement outside the environs of her house, unless escorted. These restrictions limit communication with the outside world.

The weight of participation in family decisions is minimal, unless she happens to reach the age and status of mother, mother-in-law or grandmother.

A third attribute that seems strongly imbued in the female child is the resilience to meeting the many demands of the family. Consequently, a more emotional involvement develops in day to day requirements than is true of the male, especially in relation to food and health maintenance. As a mother she is more concerned with events which bring immediate satisfaction, like preparing and serving meals, than with events of deferred gratification, like encouraging children to expand their general knowledge. She is more than likely to deprive herself vis-a-vis the comfort and convenience of her family. Perhaps this develops in her calm strength in crises in the family, or perhaps the suppression builds up a self-image of self-persecution. In any case, willingly or resentfully, the mother is the major self-effacer in the family.

A fourth attribute is that eventually the female child is the repository of transmitting and maintaining rituals and rites in the family. As the female head of the house, whether in the role of the mother, mother-in-law or grandmother, the woman initiates and maintains ritualistic behaviour concerning the developmental stages of the child. For instance, the naming ceremony '*namakaranam*', the first feeding with solid food '*annaprasana*' and the first tonsure '*mundana*'. Consequently, women are found to adhere more scrupulously to the non-verbalised but very salient norms of socio-religious behaviour. We see the reflection of this behaviour in the children of even modernised families, who participate scrupulously in religious ceremonies when occasion demands, and yet very easily turn to discotheques and liberalised dating patterns without much apparent conflict. Sanction of liberalised behaviour is more true of the male child in our society in comparison with the female—a kind of double standard prevailing.

A fifth attribute is the reinforced nurturant behaviour of the female child towards the male. 'Mothering' is inculcated at an early age, and is enhanced by the existence of many mother surrogates

in the extended family. Thus, modelling of behaviour in imitation of the many females around gives the girl the opportunity to practise various types of sanctioned female behaviour.

Another salient attribute is the deferential learning inculcated in the young. Children soon learn that the locus of power is in the father—the disciplinarian, that the mother can be more easily persuaded to give in to demands either willingly or in irritation, or better still that the maternal or paternal grandmother is likely to be more indulgent than the mother. Now the female child is more subject to this interactive process than the male child, both in terms of quantity of interaction and exposure to a wide-ranging quality in interaction, so that she is more easily habituated to variations, gaining perhaps a better sense of empathy in this process than the boy. In this closed circuit of interrelationships, where often the orbit is the kinship group, perhaps the female is more easily dominated by the family ego than by the individual ego. By this very reasoning, the female child is a far more dependent individual than is the male child. While both sexes receive closer physical proximity, late weaning and indulgent toilet training, it is far more for the desired male child than the female. This brings about in adulthood a timidity and hesitation for decision. Some evidence does exist that in male adults there are low levels of constructive aggressiveness and motivation to achieve. We may hypothesise that this is perhaps more strongly evident in females, bringing about a predominantly negative self-image in contrast to the male. Such types of ambivalent behaviour, where parental approval is sought for in decision-making, exists in selection of jobs and marriage partners for both the sexes, more so for the female. This deference to authority is plainly visible in the highly stratified hierarchical systems prevailing in our bureaucracy. Whether this sense of subservience to age, authority and status builds up an apathetic individual where girls learn to suffer in silence, or whether it provokes acts of intolerance when constraints are removed, is a matter for consideration. Certainly signs of this are seen in college-going youth who are exposed to the world of academic freedom on one hand and the world of family constraints on the other. If

the female is educated, this may heighten the effect of role conflict.

Thus we see that differential treatment in the general pattern of upbringing for the two sexes constrains the sphere of activity of the girl and yet at the same time gives clarity to her role perception in terms of femininity, a pragmatic approach to problems encountered, self-effacement, resilience in dealing with vicissitudes and in being the transmitter of socio-religious norms.

What are the elements of this profile? It is said in the Sastras:

> There is no shelter like the mother
> There is no refuge like her
> There is no defence better than her
> There could be no one dearer than her.

More than one Dharmasastra writer has declared that the father is a hundred times more venerable than the teacher; but the mother is a thousand times more venerable than the father. This symbolism of the mother figure as the teacher of bravery, sacrifice and morality is coincidental with the abstract concept of all-embracing motherhood, Mother Earth,—'Dharti Maata', Mother Country—'Bharat Maata', Mother of Destruction—'Kali Maata' and such like symbolism. Traditionally, therefore, the image of motherhood is upheld. In real life, it is paradoxical that the mother is the silent toiler, and the assimilator of major family crises. Perhaps this imagery, though fast disappearing, offers a model which gives her the ability to withstand change to a greater extent than the man.

The constraining contemporary forces on the development of the young woman are mainly economic and social. The more traditional the set-up, the greater the influence of these forces. In the latter milieu she is illiterate, circumscribed by the family and its caring, and little opportunity for self-development. Perhaps the supportive force that projects her image as nurturant is the historical religious significance of motherhood. And certainly the accelerated forces for development of her potential are education and job opportunities. Therefore, those women who are or have become enlightened mothers are mainly from the elite groups. This fact is borne out by those women who have achieved leadership positions in our country, combining feminine strength and feminine docility. This dualism apparently is the adaptability to traditional inner-directed pressures on one hand and modernising stresses on the other, without behaviour symptomatic of schizophrenia. Modernisation accelerates the change in the structure and relationships of the family. It goes with the appearance of nuclear families, and with increased utilisation of technology.

What does movement towards modernisation do to the child upbringing pattern? The disintegration of the joint family places the responsibility of house keeping and child care solely on the woman; man, still being traditional, may assist minimally in such tasks. If the woman is working, whether to augment income as is frequently the case, or for self-satisfaction as is infrequently the case, anxiety builds up and the threshold for tolerance of former leisurely patterns of child care is lessened. Consequently, children become unwitting victims of inconsistent child care. Increasing anxiety and guilt in the working women brings about confusion in role performance. While the system of living in the extended family minimises the sense of insecurity, it suppresses individual development and independence. Whereas, increase in nuclear families increases the sense of insecurity, it gives opportunity for individual development. The educated daughter-in-law resists submissive roles; the school-going daughter is more sophisticated than her less literate mother. The woman of today must meet the challenge of equipping herself in scientific knowledge of child care, and of being able to accomplish competently both household tasks and child care in the face of increasing opportunities for jobs outside the home. What will this new woman be like?

In this analysis we must look to extra-familial institutions and

the assistance they can give to mothers. The country is geared towards modernisation, in different spheres at different rates. The institutions of health, education, welfare, and the availability of consumer goods, are spread over the country, although very thinly over rural areas. The impact and assimilation of the benefits of such institutions are more responsively received by the young rather than by the parent generation.

With increasing competitiveness in schools, parents, especially from the middle class, press the child to achieve, whereas the child is taught in the home to share and to consider others before oneself. This is likely to bring about conflict in terms of the discontinuity between home and school norms. With disparity in educational levels children believe that they are culturally more advanced than their parents, thus widening the gulf between parent and child and more so in the uneducated groups. In turn, the unprepared mother is expected to undertake the preparation of her children for self-reliance, responsibility taking, for creativity, for motivation to achieve and for the value of a technological era. This is a relatively unknown process. How will she relate modernising institutional practices to her relatively conservative practices; what is her self-image in this changing milieu?

To answer these questions is perhaps too premature. To hypothesise is perhaps permissible. The traditional mother from one succeeding generation to another will probably become less traditional. Extra-family institutions such as health care, increased knowledge in nutrition, and understanding of family planning and education, the availability of non-agricultural occupations have been empirically identified as modernising influences. Without these means, the hiatus between the mother's practices in child upbringing and the scientific practices of these modernising influences will perhaps increase. Secondly, the degree of impact of these influences differs from different sections of society in various geographical and ecological strata. The urbanised are more exposed to them than those in rural areas, the upper elite more exposed than the underprivileged. The impact, however, will be felt in some measure and at some rate in all families.

Caught in the throes of her traditionalistic orientation, the unread woman is unready for modernisation. Perhaps she prefers the security of traditionally known methods. Perhaps she is seeking refuge in the historical symbolism of motherhood. Will she be able to retain her mystic femininity with her pragmatic approach to the realities of the situation? Will she reconcile herself to the fact that modernisation is more available to her children than to herself, will she shed the dependent submissive role and attempt competition in her society not as a representative of her sex, but as a human being? If the mother is to have an undistorted image of herself as the main socialiser, she must be assisted to find the bridge between traditional and modern modes of upbringing.

In this task of assistance, institutional strategies should be evolved to support the mother and not supplant her. We would suggest here, firstly, assistance in maintaining the joint family ethic so that the sense of familialism pervades the ever growing nuclear families, which might be threatened by isolationism. Secondly, we would suggest the need to bring about continuity between home and school norms of upbringing, or at least accelerated communication about these norms between them. Thirdly, we suggest that whatever the modernising institutions, they should guide the mother in her skills to bring up a child who will be achievement-oriented and innovative, minimising the unwanted outcomes of an over-aggressiveness, which loses contact with human concern. Fourthly, it is suggested that in this process of assistance, over-institutionalisation of the critical functions of the mother, such as emotional care, should be guarded against.

Women in the Labour Market

Ester Boserup

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It is a characteristic feature of labour markets all over the world that certain jobs are performed only by men, while others are performed only by women. In most societies there are some works which may be done by both men and women, but this is somewhat exceptional. The general rule is that a particular operation is either a male or a female task. This is true of virtually all agricultural tasks and it is equally true of a great majority of the jobs in urban industries and service establishments.

This division of labour according to sex is often explained as a natural result of physiological and psychic differences between men and women. But apart from the obvious case of child-bearing, there are extremely few convincing examples of sex division of labour being truly explainable in terms of natural differences between men and women. This is apparent when the sex pattern of work in different parts of the world are compared: in different human communities, quite different tasks are labelled as male and female work.

To be an independent farmer is a male task in India and in Europe, but in many other regions it is a normal occupation for a woman to farm on own account and perform all the manual labour needed on a plot of land without any male assistance. In African agriculture, more hours of work are performed by women than by men, and these women own and sell the crops they have produced in local markets. (A similar system exists in some Indian tribes, and in some other Asian countries). Likewise, Indian and African sex patterns are quite different in market trade and other

retail trade. In many African countries most retail trade is in female hands. Here again, there is a similarity between Africa and tribal peoples in India. Among tribal peoples there are female "tradesmen" like in Africa, while the typical Hindu pattern with male tradesmen is a characteristic not only of India but of North Africa and many other parts of the world.

But if men in India perform a number of tasks, like that of farmer and tradesmen, which women are doing in other countries, we also see differences where it is Indian women who undertake work which is performed by men in other parts of the world. For instance, very few countries have a parallel to the women in the building trade, who are such a characteristic feature of the Indian scene. While women in most countries outside India would think it an unsuitable occupation to be an assistant to a male brick-layer, men in most European countries would find it an unsuitable occupation to be a typist and stenographer, as is customary for men in India. In other words, the idea that the specialisation of the labour market in male and female tasks is related to natural differences between the sexes is proved wrong, when we make a comparison between labour markets in different parts of the world. If it was true that the specialisation was rooted in physiological and psychic differences between the sexes, we should expect to find that the same tasks were male or female all over the world. Clearly, the key to understanding these patterns is in the field of culture rather than in human physiology or anatomy.

The Division of Labour within the Family

If the specialisation in the labour market in male and female tasks is unrelated to special physical or psychic differences between the sexes, why then do we find a sharp division of labour between men and women in all countries in the world.

In order to understand the division of labour in the labour market, it is necessary to consider the division of labour within the family in primitive communities with subsistence production.

Even in the most primitive society, the members of a family use a multitude of different products: They eat many types of food, use jars, pots and baskets for storing, preparation and transport of the food, they use many different tools as well as clothing and dwellings. They have also many services to perform: to prepare the food, to clean the dwelling, to take care of the sick, to bury the dead, to play music and dance at tribal feasts, etc. This means that young people have much to learn before they are able to care for themselves, and that much time used on teaching and instruction of the next generation can be saved, if men teach the boys half the tasks, while women teach the girls the other half of the tasks.

However, within intermarrying groups, it is necessary that all boys are taught to perform the *same* tasks, and that all girls are taught *all* the tasks which boys are not taught. Otherwise, the system cannot work. It must be avoided that in a married couple both can spin, but none of them knows how to weave.

Thus, in a community where each family produces all the goods and services consumed by that family, the sharp distinction between male and female tasks is a necessary result of the simple fact that families are formed by the union of men and women. When the fathers teach their sons to perform half the jobs and the mothers teach their daughters to perform the other half of the jobs, everybody needs to teach and learn half as much as would be necessary without such a rigid division of labour between men and women. It is customary in all primitive communities to ridicule and despise men who perform female tasks and women who perform male tasks, and this custom can be seen as a social sanction by which the sex division of labour is enforced and perpetuated.

This obedient attitude to economic sex roles is preserved in all higher civilisations, where boys and girls are taught, both in their homes and in schools, that decency requires them to stick to the type of work which are traditionally male and female jobs in the society to which they belong. This ingrained custom

dates back to a distant primitive past where it had an obvious productive function, as mentioned above.

It is worth noting that only within groups who intermarry is it necessary that the same tasks should be male or female in all families. In fact, in a given local community female and male tasks can be seen to vary widely as between exogamic ethnic groups. And there is here a kind of cumulative effect: When human groups with different division of labour between the sexes are living close together, the different customs contribute to create a lack of sympathy and a disinclination to intermarriage among them. Intermarriage is then seen not primarily as unpractical, but as undesirable in itself, because people with different customs are ridiculed and despised. This attitude contributes to preserve rules of exogamy and to preserve a certain amount of hostility among ethnic groups living in the same region, even in cases where their members have come to work closely together within a modern labour market.

The rationale of a sharp division of tasks in either male or female gradually disappears as economic development moves some tasks out from the home and transforms them into specialized occupations. But the idea that men and women should avoid doing work which by custom belongs to the domain of the other sex is so firmly rooted in the national culture in all countries that male occupations usually continue to be male and female occupations continue to be female also after such activities have been moved from the home to specialised workshops, service establishments or modern industries. In India, where spinning and weaving for own use were suitable jobs for men, textile industries have mainly male workers, but in Europe where home spinning and weaving were female occupations, men regard spinning and weaving as proper for women only, and all textile industries are "female industries" with few, if any, male workers, except for supervisory work, repair of machines, etc. Some Indian textile industries started with recruitment of large numbers of women, because their first owners were Europeans or under European cultural influence.

Economic development does not only move certain activities away from the household to specialised workshops and industries. It affects also the amount of work done in the home. Some activities which used to be subsistence production become a source of money income as larger quantities are produced for sale. For instance, some crops become cash crops and some home crafts and services may be performed for other households in the local community. Such changes must necessarily interfere with the customary divisions of labour within the family. If the cash cropping or the craft which is now performed for sale was hitherto produced by men (or women as the case may be), the work load will now tend to get heavier and they may need help from the other sex in some operations.

In such cases, men or women may agree to undertake new tasks and change the traditional division of labour, but relatively often they refuse to do work which is not considered appropriate for their sex. The result may be that men (or women) accept a disproportionate share of the work load, or else that the introduction of the new money earning activity is given up or retarded because of the prejudice concerning sex roles in production. Many attempts to foster agricultural development have failed because men refused to weed a crop, which women had no time to weed. Or the introduction of cash crops was retarded because women refused to help with a new crop and insisted on cultivating only the usual food crops, which were considered proper work for women. Such refusal to change traditional sex roles in the labour market occur not only in India but in all parts of the world. African men are often unwilling to cultivate food crops as cash crops, because food production is supposed to be a female task, and men in many parts of Latin America are unwilling to engage in commercial poultry production because it is traditionally a female task.

However, tradition alone does not prevent or delay a change of sex roles in the process of economic development. In addition there is the employer's interest in maintaining a sharp line of demarcation between male and female tasks, since this enables him

to have the work reserved for women done more cheaply. In some countries, women are paid less than men for equal work, but in countries where this is not allowed a situation of *de facto* unequal pay can be maintained by classifying particular tasks as female and placing these tasks in a lower wage category than male tasks, which require a similar degree of qualification. The interest of the employers and the prejudices of the employees against a change of sex roles tend to reinforce each other, and, therefore, the sharp distinction between 'male' and 'female' kinds of work encounters little resistance either in developing or in industrialised countries. It is only in recent years that discussion has begun in some industrialised countries about the need to change this ancient custom in order to obtain more flexibility and more equality in the labour market.

The Hierarchy of Work between Men and Women

In the labour markets of industrialised countries, the sharp distinction between 'male' and 'female' tasks goes together with a hierarchical ordering so that women perform the least qualified jobs which require supervision, while nearly all more qualified jobs, and the supervisory jobs, are filled by men. This feature is not, like the distinction between male and female jobs, an inheritance from the division of work within the families in a distant past. Quite the opposite, in primitive family production we never find such a hierarchical division of labour with men as supervisors and women as supervised. Also in primitive family production there is a hierarchy of supervisors and supervised, but the distinction is not by sex, but by age. Older men supervise the young men, and older women supervise the young women. Older men and women have different tasks, but each of them works independently, without supervision, and all the young and less experienced are supervised by older persons of their own sex. Thus there is no hierarchy between men and women in the performance of productive work within the household, even though in other walks of life women may be under control by the men.

This age-determined hierarchy of work continues to prevail in

domestic work, for instance in India, where young women are supervised first by their mothers and, at a later stage, by their mothers-in-law. By contrast in the modern Indian labour market, the European custom of men as supervisors and women as supervised is introduced in step with the entrance of Indian women into employment in the modern sector, except, of course, in fields like schools for girls, where the whole staff is female.

It is pertinent to ask, at what stage in economic development a change takes place from an age-hierarchy to a sex-hierarchy in the labour market. In agriculture it seems to happen when the plough and plough animals are introduced. At this stage men usually leave hand labour to women, while they themselves perform the operations with the animals. As regards non-agricultural activities, the decisive moment when the change takes place seems to be when productive activities move from the premises where the family is living to a specialised workshop or shop. As long as an activity is carried out as a home industry located in the dwelling of the family, women usually continue to work independently, if the activity is traditionally a female occupation. But when the production or service is established in special premises, married women with children tend to drop out, because it becomes more difficult to combine job and family obligations.

When this happens, only young women are available for this kind of employment, and these inexperienced workers are now—like the young boys—trained and supervised by the older men. These may be inclined to be more careful with the training of the boys, since the girls are expected to work only a short span of years on the job. Thus, a new pattern for the division of labour gradually emerges: older men supervise young men and young women, while the older women stay at home with the children. This stage is intermediate between the original age-hierarchy and the modern sex-hierarchy in the labour market. The young girls are likely to accept this division of labour, partly because it is customary that older people supervise younger people and partly because the young girls often consider their relatively short visit

in the labour market as somewhat transitory and unimportant compared to their later role as wives and mothers.

In India and other countries of old civilisation, where specialised crafts were developed already in ancient times, it is considered normal and 'natural' that independent business and supervision of labour is the preserve of men. But not so in countries which never developed specialised groups of craftsmen and traders, but passed directly from the stage of family production for subsistence to the purchase of imported products from foreign tradesmen. In such countries women continue to be independent producers, and large numbers of women earn their living by crafts, trade, and services performed on own account. In many countries in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America the number of women working as independent producers is much higher than the number of female wage earners. By contrast, in Europe and other countries with an older urban tradition there are few women among independent producers and large numbers among the wage and salary earners.

From Family Education to Vocational Training

The transfer of production from the home to specialised premises is not the only explanation for the change in women's status in the labour market by which they became the subordinates of male supervisors. Another factor explaining the deterioration of the female role in the labour market is the inferior position of girls and young women in the educational system in general and especially in the vocational training system.

School education is prestigious in all countries where only a part of the population is literate. It is, therefore, a serious handicap to women that they have less school education than men. In those income groups where more boys than girls visit schools, the boy comes to look down upon the girl who stays at home under the instruction of her illiterate mother, while the boy enjoys the prestige of being an 'educated' person. In the old times when neither boys nor girls went to school, ignorance and superstition was

a characteristic of both sexes, and the girls had less reason to feel inferior than many of them have today, when male school-leavers can regard themselves as the representatives of new enlightenment, while their illiterate sisters remain in the old universe of superstition and ignorance.

A school teaches the pupils more than to read and write. It also teaches how to organise one's thinking and how to express one's ideas clearly and logically. Persons who went to school have an advantage in a discussion over persons who have not been to school, just as a person with many years of schooling has an advantage in oral disputes over persons who dropped out of school at an early stage. Since the average girl visits school for a shorter span of years than the average boy, and since more girls than boys never go to school, the school system contributes to create and uphold the idea that men are spiritually and intellectually superior to women. This, in turn makes women inclined to accept being treated as inferior in the labour market, even in cases where the vocational qualifications of men and women are similar. It thus becomes acceptable to women and natural to men that the latter should hold the supervisory and well-paid jobs and the former the jobs as assistants at low pay.

In communities where girls receive an education and training which makes them feel inferior to men in the labour market, it is inevitable that young women who enter the labour market will suffer from a deep feeling of insecurity and insufficiency. It is not surprising, therefore, that they seek security by sticking to certain jobs and occupations, which are traditionally regarded as 'female' in the society to which they belong, while only a small minority want to enter into open competition with men in the fields which are considered as unsuitable or at least unusual for women. Therefore, the crowding of women in certain occupations would seem to be primarily due to their own desire to be employed in supposedly 'feminine' professions while men's wariness of accepting women in the 'masculine' occupations may be a less important factor.

When women feel that they are inferior to men in the traditional male occupations, they are inclined to seek compensation by claiming special competence and superiority to men in a small number of occupations, which are related to the traditional female role. Teaching of children in primary schools is an important example of this: In some countries in Europe, primary schools prefer to have children taught by persons of both sexes, while in other countries, mainly American, the agreed assumption is that 'by nature' women are better teachers for young children than men. This prejudice against men as teachers at pre-school and primary levels is likely to have the effect that teaching at these levels attracts many able women, but few able men. And this skewed selection of applicants, in turn, provides a spurious confirmation of the prejudice. This kind of solution in special fields, combined with better vocational training of men than of women and a basic belief in male superiority in the labour market at large must inevitably reinforce the conviction about the innate differences in the abilities of the two sexes.

The gap in formal school education between boys and girls is now narrowing in most countries, including India. But in the field of vocational training the gap appears to be widening, since more and more young men receive vocational training in school and in the job, while few girls in developing countries get any vocational training, except for the small numbers who visit the university. A vicious circle is developing: ordinary girls are supposed to need no special training because anyway they are thought to be eligible only for jobs which require little qualification; and without any vocational training they can take only jobs which require no particular qualifications.

In many cases young women attempt to escape from this vicious circle by keeping away from the labour market and doing only domestic work in their own home. The result is that we get a perpetuation of the traditional pattern of one-earner, poor families with many children instead of the desired shift to a pattern of two-earner, less poor families with few children.

The absence of female vocational training is both an effect and a cause of high birth rates: The increase of the labour force resulting from high birth rates improves their competitive position in the labour market. And untrained women marry earlier and get more children than vocationally trained and working women. This vicious circle cannot be broken by a retreat of women from training and work, but only by speeding up economic development, so that both male and female youth can be absorbed in the labour market.

Legal Provisions—An Assessment

Shyamala Pappu

Mrs. Shyamala Pappu (b. 1933), Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, is presently Senior Central Government Counsel, the first woman to hold this post. She has been practising law since 1955.

The law relating to women in India requires drastic alterations. Though there has been considerable legislation in regard to women during the post-constitution era, in reality the position of women today is not very different from the pre-constitution days. The equality clause in the Constitution has made little or no impact on the social and economic life of women in India. A woman continues to be a dependent—economically, socially and even psychologically. Her status is that of a daughter, wife or mother and she seldom feels an individual in her own right. Legislation enacted during the last two decades is out of reach for most women because, by and large, they have neither the mental awareness nor the financial resources to take advantage of these beneficent provisions.

It is a great pity indeed that even though the Constitution recognises the fact that women have been subjugated for long by being denied basic rights and has provided for the enactment of special laws to improve their position no concrete steps have been taken by the Indian legislature in this direction so far. It may be noted in this context that in admission to state-owned and state-aided educational institutions imparting technical and other vocational education and in practically all appointments under the state, reservation has been provided for in favour of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes by means of legislative and executive measures but the claims of women have been singularly overlooked.

Hindu Law, as it existed, when the Constitution came into

force, imposed various disabilities on women. A woman had only limited interest in the property she held. This meant that she could not exercise the full rights which a male owner could; for instance, she could not alienate property except for certain enumerated reasons called legal necessities. She could not be a coparcener and seek partition of the joint family estate. She was not legally competent to make an adoption—her consent was not required in an adoption made by her husband—and a widow could adopt only with the authority and direction given by her deceased husband. A testamentary appointment made by her husband could defeat a widow's right as guardian of minor children. She could not appoint a guardian by testament. An illegitimate daughter had no claim against the putative father even to maintenance, whereas among the Shudras, an illegitimate son was admitted to a share in the putative father's property.

These disabilities were sought to be removed by the enactment in 1955-56 of laws relating to marriage and divorce, succession, adoption, minority and guardianship.

Marriage and Divorce

However, many of these laws require improvement. For example, one that calls for immediate attention is the law relating to divorce. Law recognises sacramental marriage, marriage before the Registrar of Marriages and any other form of marriage recognised by customary law. When it comes to divorce, this law is not so simple. The Hindus are granted divorce on certain limited grounds which are generally hard to prove, but, significantly, divorce by mutual consent is not one of the grounds mentioned. Likewise, the Christians have to allege and prove adultery in order to establish a matrimonial offence before divorce can be granted under the Indian Divorce Act. The Parsis have to get the approval of ten assessors chosen from their community who pronounce on the divorce proceedings. Muslim males obtain a divorce by the mere utterance of certain words in succession whereas women have to establish certain enumerated grounds. Strangely,

in none of these laws (except in the Special Marriage Act, 1954) is there any mention of divorce by mutual consent. Consenting spouses, generally, resort to change of religion and create a ground for divorce.

It is imperative that this deplorable state of the law be rectified and provision be made for divorce by mutual consent. If mutuality be the basis of marriage, law should enable the parties to separate when the mutuality ceases.

It may be noted that under Section 29(2) of the Hindu Marriage Act, any right recognised by customary law or conferred by any special enactment is specifically saved and preserved. By this provision, the Nair Regulations which provide for the execution of a registered instrument of divorce get preserved and divorce can be granted without the intervention of the court by the mere execution of a registered document. Further, under the laws applicable to the Bunts of South Kanara, divorce can be had by the unilateral act of one party filing a petition in the court. As said earlier, all these are good laws even today by virtue of 29(2) of the Hindu Marriage Act.

In this state of the law where some sections of the population are entitled to larger rights, is it not fit and proper that the legislature amend and codify the law and make it of uniform application to all? It is submitted in this context that when the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 providing for divorce for the first time came to be enacted, the framers of the Act forgot that the Indian law of divorce has always been a liberal one and it was not necessary to import Anglo-Saxon notions of rigidity into it.

The Unmarried Mother

In some Western countries, with the emergence of women as socially and economically independent beings, there is a demand for recognising an unmarried mother and her child as a family unit. In recent seminars held in various regions of the world, this problem was kept in sharp focus. A draft resolution was

introduced in the twenty-fourth session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women. This resolution recommended that maternal affiliation be recognised as a consequence of the factum of birth, and further, that the unmarried mother be granted full rights and privileges granted by the law to a parent. In most of the socialist countries, the right of the unmarried mother is recognised and safeguarded under the Constitution itself.

Sooner or later the Indian legislature will also have to attend to the problem of the unmarried mother. There are, for instance, victims of rape or other unfortunate circumstances or of hostile aggression as in Bangladesh and the problem of rehabilitating these victims becomes a social reality. Many of them are driven to a life of prostitution because society refuses to accept them. If legislative protection is given to the rights of the unmarried mother, she can be saved from this eventuality and ensured a respectable place in society.

The problem of the unmarried mother is understood when we look at a few sections of the Indian Penal Code. Section 309 of the I.P.C. provides that any attempt to commit suicide is punishable with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.

To liberalise abortion laws and thereby reduce the rigour of the Indian Penal Code which makes any termination of pregnancy a punishable offence, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed recently. But this Act does not improve the position because it provides for termination of pregnancy only on limited medical grounds. To illustrate, the Act permits termination of pregnancy by a registered medical practitioner if it is of a duration of twelve weeks provided, however, that the said registered practitioner is of the opinion, in good faith, that the continuance of pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman or "grave injury" to her mental or physical health or where there is a "substantial risk" of the child being born with physical or mental abnormalities "so as to be seriously handicapped". The Act requires two registered medical practitioners

to opine similarly in good faith before a pregnancy of a duration longer than twelve weeks can be terminated.

This requirement is very difficult to fulfil because many registered medical practitioners would hesitate to issue the requisite certificate for fear that it may be debated in courts that the practitioner concerned had not formed the necessary opinion or that the said opinion, when formed was not *bonafide*. Again, the concept of "grave injury" to the mental or physical health of the pregnant woman is such a nebulous concept that a registered practitioner may well hesitate to take the responsibility of sustaining the opinion in a court of law. Worse still, while the pregnant woman is still busy trying to find a medical practitioner who would be willing to certify that her pregnancy is terminable, she may cross the twelve-week period, inviting the necessity of producing two such certificates. It is suggested that this requirement should be dropped. The Act should provide that if a couple is desirous that the next child should not be born for reasons economic or otherwise, they should have the right to approach the first available medical practitioner and to have the pregnancy terminated.

Another good reason for doing away with the medical certificate under the Act would be the fact that registered medical practitioners are not easily available in rural areas where the Act is most needed. Also such a requirement may lead to abuse in the hands of those who may be so inclined.

Another serious weakness of the Act is that it does not consider the implications of poverty. For example, rape or failure of contraceptive are permissible reasons, because they cause injury to the mental health of the victim. But malnutrition, which plagues a majority of Indian women and which gets exaggerated with frequent child-bearing is not a good enough reason. Nor is the straight-forward economic reason of not being able to afford another mouth to feed.

The most important case of omission is that of the unmarried

mother about whom there is not a whisper in the Act. It goes without saying that it is in such a case that the consequences of child-birth are most serious. Looking at the object of the Act, it is hard to understand how an unmarried woman is not entitled to the same protection as a married woman. The distinction made does not seem to have any rational nexus to the object sought to be achieved and one wonders if such an enactment cannot be held to violate the constitutional guarantee of equality provided under article 14 of the Constitution. In a similar situation, the U. S. Supreme Court struck down a similar classification on the ground that it was opposed to the equal protection clause of the Constitution (Eisenstadt Vs. Baird, 1972).

Even abandonment of a child is punishable under Section 317 of the Indian Penal Code which provides that any intentional abandonment of a child is punishable with imprisonment of either description for seven years or with fine or with both.

Problem of Illegitimate Children

Faced with this state of the law, the Indian Parliament took its step towards solving the problem of illegitimate children when it enacted in Section 20(2) of the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, that: "A legitimate or illegitimate child may claim maintenance from his or her father or mother so long as the child is a minor."

This brought uniformity among Hindus in this branch of the law. The old law recognised the rights of illegitimate sons only among Shudras and there was no law for the maintenance of illegitimate daughters. They could, however, claim maintenance from the putative father under Section 488 of the Criminal Procedure Code. In such a proceeding, the maximum amount that can be awarded by way of maintenance is Rs. 500 and therefore, this section provides only very limited relief.

Another revolutionary step has been taken by the Indian Parliament in introducing the Adoption of Children Bill, 1972,

which provides for parents of illegitimate children to adopt their own child. Section 4 as it stands today, allows the mother or father of an illegitimate child alone or jointly to adopt such a child whether or not they have completed the age of 21 years or are older than the child by 21 years.

Under the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, it was an essential requirement that the difference in age between the adopting parent and the adopted child be at least 21 years in the event of a man wanting to adopt a girl, and *vice versa*, hence the second clause was necessary.

Common Civil Code

The Adoption of Children Bill, has further been made applicable to all citizens, irrespective of their being Hindus, Muslims, Parsis or Christians. This step is a tremendous stride in the promulgation of a common civil code which is a crying need of the day. A common code of personal laws applicable to all alike will be easy of understanding and implementation.

It may be worthwhile for the government to appoint a high-powered committee to study all personal laws and suggest steps towards the enactment of a common civil code for all in India.

Muslim Law

Hindu women have been dealt with at length because it is they who suffered disabilities primarily and it is their personal law that has undergone legislative changes. They, incidentally, are the majority community in India.

As far as Muslim women are concerned, they have a right of inheritance and this law remains unchanged even today. Under Muslim law, however, the right of divorce is easily available to males but the same is denied to women with the same degree of ease even though marriage is characterised as a contract and not

a sacrament. The legislatures at the centre and the states in India have made practically no changes in the personal laws of the Muslims so far.

The Christian, Parsi and Jewish women are governed by the Indian Succession Act as they have no personal laws like the Hindus and Muslims. Under this law, women can succeed to property and suffer no disabilities regarding property rights. They, like all other women in India, need reform in regard to the law relating to divorce.

Notwithstanding these laws, what measures are necessary to make women free and equal in the true sense of the word?

The State should make special laws enabling women to have compulsory free education. This is imperative because the education of girls is usually subordinated to that of boys on account of tradition. It may be noticed that such a provision would be permissible under Article 15(3) of the Constitution, which enables the legislature to make special provisions for the advancement of women.

Women ought to be given preference in matters of appointment on the ground that they are socially and economically backward in the same way that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are given preference. In every appointment under the state at least ten per cent of the posts should be reserved for women for at least an initial period of 25 years.

Equal wages for equal work should be ensured in all employment—whether it is under the state or otherwise.

Free legal aid and advice should be made available to women on a priority basis. Without such aid, their rights already granted would remain unasserted due to ignorance and lack of funds. Several illustrations can be given to show the importance of this service.

For example, an Indian woman whose husband had sued her for divorce from Nevada (U.S.A.) failed to reply to the bill of summons within the time prescribed because she could not afford counsel to contest the case. The result was that divorce was granted with no provision for maintenance of herself and her minor son. In this case, the husband had misrepresented to the court that there were no dependents and the court proceeded on that basis, there having been no opposition from the wife.

In another case, the brothers of a woman from Punjab had sold the property inherited from their father, after fraudulently getting her thumb impression. Years later she realised that she had rights of inheritance under the Hindu Succession Act, but had not been given her share. Ignorance of the legal provisions had prevented her from asserting her rights.

Family Courts

The establishment of family courts is yet another aspect which will have to be taken in hand immediately by the legislature. In some Western countries there are special courts for adjudication of matrimonial matters. It is suggested that such courts with exclusive matrimonial jurisdiction be established immediately. These courts will render justice speedier and also ensure privacy which is necessary in such matters.

The need for such courts can hardly be over-emphasised when it is noticed that in the normal course a divorce proceeding takes anywhere from five to ten years. (In a recent case, the man was 60 and the woman 54 by the time they concluded the proceedings in the Supreme Court, the litigation having commenced 20 years earlier). Even after this lapse of time the court may not grant divorce in view of the restricted grounds available to parties. It is, therefore, suggested that the latest trend in England be followed in India as well, namely, that if the court comes to the conclusion that the marriage has broken down irretrievably, divorce ought to be granted.

Future Legislation

Once the legislative reforms mentioned above are effected and women are able to emerge as socially and economically independent beings, reform will have to be undertaken to amend and codify the law of marriage and divorce to enable the parties to marry at will and to separate at will; to establish family courts to enable speedy and effective justice in matrimonial matters; to enact uniform laws of maintenance to enable the economically weaker of the partners to be maintained; and to provide for the woman to be the natural guardian of her child. Today the law recognises the father as the natural guardian because the mother is economically dependent and is in no position to look after the child on her own. Once economic independence comes, this position will have to change.

A Demographic Profile

Ashish Bose

Ashish Bose (b. 1930), Professor and Head of the Demographic Research Centre, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, is the founder-Secretary of the Indian Association for the Study of Population. He has published many books and research papers.

In perhaps the earliest book on the population problem of India published in the twentieth century, Annie Besant draws attention to the statistics on child widows, the terrible death toll of women between 15 and 30 and the illiteracy of the country. She commends the book "to the thoughtful study of the young politician and to the library table of the older politician as the most valuable and handy book of reference."[1]

In spite of the progress we have made ever since that book was published sixty years ago, the issues raised by Annie Besant, like early marriage, the high mortality rate of women and massive illiteracy, still continue to haunt India. Some of these questions will be briefly discussed here.

The Neglect of Females?

The first problem which strikes the demographer is the question of the declining sex ratio (females per thousand males) in India over the decades.

India is the second biggest country in the world in terms of population. This is true of the female population also. In 1971 the female population of India was 264 million—much more than the total population of USSR or the USA. But unlike in the USSR, USA and most western countries and also Japan, the male population of India exceeds the female population. In 1971 there were 930 females per one thousand males. In 1901 the sex ratio was 972.

The male population has always grown faster than the female population since 1901, except in the 1941-51 decade which was affected by the partition of India. During this decade the male and female population grew more or less at the same rate.

Between 1911 and 1921 there was an actual decrease in the population of India because of the influenza epidemic of 1918. But the overall figure conceals the fact that during this decade there was a negligible increase in the male population and a decrease in the female population. Mortality was specially high among the adults and more particularly among adult females, the disease being generally fatal to women in pregnancy. As the report on the 1921 Census points out, "the high mortality among women may have been due to the fact that in addition to the ordinary tasks of the house, on them fell the duty of nursing the others even when themselves ill. The figures show that the excess mortality between ages 20 and 40 amounted in some cases to nearly four times the mean."[2]

Apart from the calamities like epidemic influenza, there must be other factors which explain the declining sex ratio over the last several decades. Various hypotheses have been put forward to explain this phenomenon, like the higher under-enumeration of females in the Indian census, the higher mortality rate of females, the marked preference for sons, the neglect of girl babies, the general neglect of women at all ages, the adverse impact of frequent and excessive child-bearing on the health of women—especially those in the reproductive age group, and the higher incidence of certain diseases in women.

All over the world more boys are born than girls, and this is true of India also. But in the developed countries, more boys die than girls, or in other words, the survival rate is higher among females and so also the expectation of life at birth. In India more boys are born than girls but more girls die than boys and the expectation of life at birth is lower for females than for males.

The figures for the registered birth rates and death rates are

not as reliable as the figures yielded by the Sample Registration System (SRS). According to SRS data for rural areas of 12 States of India as a whole, the infant mortality rate for females was 148 per thousand live births compared to 132 for males. The neo-natal mortality rate, according to SRS data of 1969, was 74 per thousand for males and 76 for females, while post neo-natal mortality rate was 59 for males and 72 for females.

But the evidence from SRS data is conflicting when one considers individual States. In some States the male mortality rates were higher than those for the females. For example, in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh the female infant mortality rate was higher than that of male, but in urban areas the male infant mortality rate was higher than the female. In Punjab the female infant mortality rate was higher than the male both in rural and urban areas.

The explanation which seems to have received general acceptance is this—that though over the last several decades, there has been a reduction in the mortality rate due to the progress in the field of public health, the control of widespread epidemics like cholera, plague, small-pox, malaria, and the application of modern medicines, the reduction in mortality has been greater in the case of males than in the case of females. This is generally attributed to differential improvement in health conditions.

Though in the absence of adequate and reliable data it is not possible to arrive at any firm conclusion on the causes of the decline in sex ratio, or the differential improvements in health conditions, these phenomena are a serious cause for concern and seem to suggest that neglect of women in India is a persistent phenomenon.

Literacy and Education

The Education Commission (1964-66) in its report asserts that one of the most distinctive characteristics of life in modern India

has been the phenomenal development in the education of women. It points out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was hardly any provision for the formal education of girls. Even at the opening of the present century, not much progress had been made. In 1901 the percentage of literacy amongst women was only 0.8. The number of girls enrolled for every one hundred boys was only 12 at the primary stage and four at the secondary. The total enrolment in higher education was only 264 (which included 76 girls studying in medical colleges and 11 in colleges of education).

In 1950-51 there were 39 girls for every one hundred boys in classes I-V. The estimated figure for 1965-66 is 55 girls per one hundred boys. In the case of enrolment in classes VI-VIII, the ratio has gone up from 21 in 1950-51 to 35 in 1965-66, while in the case of enrolment in classes IX-XI, the ratio has gone up from 15 in 1950-51 to 26 in 1965-66.

The Education Commission report points out that "education in mixed schools is being more accepted at the lower primary stage where 85 per cent of the girls enrolled are in mixed schools and at the higher primary stage where the proportion is 78 per cent. But there is still a considerable resistance to it at the secondary stage where only 40 per cent of the girls enrolled are in mixed schools. These resistances, however, are softening down to some extent at the university stage."[3]

One of the dismal features revealed by the 1971 Census, however, is the extremely low literacy rate. It was 18.7 per cent for females, 39.5 per cent for males and 29.5 per cent for the total population. The highest literacy rate for females (37.4 per cent) was in the age group 10-14, while the highest literacy rate for males (63 per cent) was in the age group 15-19. This shows the higher incidence of literacy in the younger generation. However, a sensitive index of literacy is the female literacy rate in rural areas. The rural female literacy rate in India is only 13.2 per cent, while the urban female literacy rate is 42.3. Kerala has the highest literacy rate both in rural and urban areas, while Rajas-

than has the lowest literacy rate both in urban and rural areas. A detailed analysis based on the district data reveals that out of the 352 districts in India, in 83 districts the female literacy rate in the rural areas is less than 5 per cent and there are another 113 districts where the female literacy rate is between 5 and 10 per cent. Of the 83 districts belonging to the first category, 64 belong to the States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Of the 113 districts belonging to the latter category, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh account for 73 districts.[4]

Among the total female literates, 40 per cent have no educational level (they are really semi-literates), 7.8 per cent are matriculates while only 1.4 per cent are graduates and above. The great majority of the Indian women and men are illiterate and semi-literate and an insignificant fraction of the population is educated. The image of the Indian women created by some women holding high position in some sophisticated spheres is only the image of a small elite group of women.

Marriage and Family

According to unofficial estimates based on census data, the average age at marriage of females was 13.2 years during the 1901-11 decade. It increased to 16.1 years during 1951-61. According to the latest estimates, based on 1 per cent sample tables for 1971 Census, the average age at marriage has further gone up to 17.2 years during 1961-71. In 1961, 17.2 per cent of the female population aged 10 years and above was unmarried. In 1971 the comparable figure was 22.0 per cent. In the rural areas 15.8 per cent of the females aged 10 years and above were unmarried in 1961 while in the urban areas the comparable figure was 24.2 per cent. In 1971 the proportion of unmarried increased to 20.2 per cent in rural areas and 29.2 per cent in urban areas.

It is difficult to measure the incidence of child marriage. The 1961 and 1971 Censuses did not tabulate data by marital

status for the age group 0-9. An indirect evidence of child marriage is furnished by the data for the age group 10-14. In 1971, in rural India 13.6 per cent of the girls in the age group 10-14 were married and 0.1 per cent were widows, while in urban India 3.9 per cent were married and the number of widows was negligible. Less than 2 per cent of the women in the age group 25-29 and less than 1 per cent in the age group 30-34 were unmarried in the rural areas. The figures also show that 2 per cent of the women in the age group 25-29 and 4 per cent of the women in the age group 30-34 were widows in the rural areas. In 1961 the comparable figures were 3 per cent for the age group 25-29 and 6.6 per cent for the age group 30-34. This indicates that the incidence of widowhood has come down. Nevertheless, early marriage and early widowhood still persist in rural areas though the incidence of both these is on the decline.

Fertility

The fertility of Indian women continues to be high. The estimated birth rate in India for the 1941-51 decade was 39.9 per thousand while for the 1951-61 decade it was 41.7 per thousand. The slight increase may be due to statistical factors but the important point to note is that for the last 20 to 30 years the birth rate has been around 40 per thousand.

According to the Sample Registration data, in 1970 the birth rate was 37.0 in India. It was 38.8 in rural areas and 29.7 in urban areas. According to the SRS data, in 1969 in rural India as a whole, the average number of children per mother in the age group 40-44 was 6.4. The practice of family planning is far from universal. In recent years the family planning movement has made some progress but according to the Family Planning Department, in 1971 only 13.2 per cent of all couples in the reproductive age group in India were "protected" by one or other method of family planning. The figure for protected couples varies from 0.7 per cent in NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) to 23.7 per cent in Punjab.

Broadly speaking, States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan which have very low literacy levels as well as a high proportion of rural population, have the lowest acceptance rate of family planning. However, there are exceptions. For example, Orissa has a fairly good record of family planning which is close to the record of Kerala which has the highest literacy level. But surprisingly, even in the almost exclusively urban territories of Delhi and Chandigarh, the acceptance rate is far from high. This explains, to a considerable extent, the absence, of any marked rural-urban differential in the fertility pattern of Indian women.

Recent SRS data, however, indicate a lower birth rate in urban areas compared to the rural. In 1972 the urban birth rate in India was 30.5 per thousand compared to 38.4 in rural areas.

It is possible that better health facilities in urban areas tend to reduce pregnancy wastage leading to a higher *live* birth rate in urban areas. But it is difficult to come to any firm conclusion because the evidence is conflicting.

Women at Work

According to the 1971 Census, there were 31 million women workers in India, out of which 28 million were in rural areas and 3 million in urban areas. In rural areas the great majority of women workers (87 per cent) were engaged in agriculture and less than 2 per cent were engaged in manufacturing industries other than household industries. In the urban areas the service sector claimed the largest percentage of women workers (38 per cent) followed by agricultural labour (17.5 per cent), while manufacturing industries other than household industries accounted for about 13 per cent of the female work-force.

In rural India as a whole, 13 per cent of the women were in the work-force while in urban India the comparable figure was less than 7 per cent. Unlike in western countries, even in the biggest cities the participation rate for women does not exceed

9 per cent. In western countries the service sector is generally "manned" by women. Of late, in several Asian cities women are being increasingly employed in the service sector but women continue to play a minor role in the urban work-force in India. The norms of social status of women and notions of social respectability condition the employment of women, especially married women, in non-household industries and the service sector. Conservative families have little hesitation in allowing women to work as teachers and doctors but would hesitate to see women working as shop assistants and office girls. However, there is some evidence that under the impact of economic necessity and also due to the gradual process of modernisation, the attitude towards such work is less rigid at least in the ubran areas. But it is difficult to say if the attitudes are changing in the rural areas.

In his monograph on "Women in the Working Force in India", Professor D. R. Gadgil comments:

> "One of the most persistent aspects of Indian socio-economic structure that has been impressed on me through a study of the results of socio-economic surveys is the usual close correspondence between economic position and traditional social ranking in Indian rural society. Ability to keep away from manual work has been an important distinguishing sign of socio-economic status among us. Therefore, non-participation of women in any work and particularly manual work outdoors is everywhere considered as value. It is clear, however, that the practical force of this value differs widely from region to region and that the difference is apparently associated with the socio-political and cultural history of each region. For example, even in Maharashtra the stratum that considers itself as at top in rural society shows clear signs even today of the prejudice against field work by women. But the total quantitative effect of this is small."[5]

According to the census, the non-workers were divided into a number of categories. In the case of women, household duty was

recorded as the main activity of 51 per cent of the total number of non-working women. In the age group 15-59 household duty was recorded as the main activity of 73.5 per cent of the women in that age group. In the rural areas 73 per cent of the women in the age group 15-59 reported household duties as their main activity while in the urban areas the comparable figure was 75 per cent. Thus the incidence of household duties as the *main* activity was a little higher in the urban areas compared to the rural areas. However, in the age group 15-59, the higher participation of women in studies and the lower marriage rate account for the lower incidence of household duties in urban areas compared to the rural.

More than 89 per cent of the women workers are illiterate, according to the 1971 census.

Women in Politics

The sex breakdown of the members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from 1952 onwards for each of the five general elections indicates that the number of women M.P.s was the highest in 1962 while it was the lowest in 1952. The number came down in the 1971 mid-term general election, namely, 22 women and 496 men. The participation of women in politics is not therefore as widespread as it is often made out to be.

Though the proportion of women who vote is less than that of men throughout the period, participation in elections by women has increased at a faster rate than that of men.

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Statistical Appendix

The computational work was done by Miss Jatinder Bhatia, Research Analyst, Demographic Research Centre, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi.

List of Tables

Table No.

Table 1: Growth of Female population in India, 1901-71

Year	Total population (millions)	Female population (millions)	Females per 1,000 males
1901	238	117	972
1911	252	124	964
1921	251	123	955
1931	279	136	950
1941	319	155	945
1951	361	175	946
1961	439	213	941
1971	548	264	930

Table 1. The female population of India which was 117 million in 1901 increased to 264 million in 1971. During this period, the total population increased from 238 million to 548 million. During the seven decades 1901-1971, the male population increased by a little over 130 per cent while the female population increased by about 126 per cent. The differential rates of growth of the male and female population brought about a continuous decline in the sex ratio of the population. As seen in Table 1, the sex ratio which was 972 in 1901, declined to 964 in 1911, 955 in 1921, 950 in 1931, 945 in 1941, improved slightly and became 946 in 1951 and then continued its decline again and was 941 in 1961 and 930 in 1971. Thus during the last seven decades, there has been a decline of 42 per thousand in the sex ratio.

Table 2: Decennial growth rates of population by sex, 1901-1971

Year	Total	Males	Females
1901–11	5.73	6.28	5.40
1911–21	–0.30	0.13	–0.75
1921–31	11.00	11.18	10.59
1931–41	14.23	14.52	13.92
1941–51	13.31	13.34	13.49
1951–61	21.64	21.97	21.29
1961–71	24.80	25.52	24.03

Table 2. In this table, we present the decennial growth rates of population by sex for each of the last seven decades. It will be observed that in every decade (except 1941-51), the male population increased much faster than the female population. It may be recalled that figures for the 1951 Census were influenced by the partition of India in 1947 and widespread disturbances. It may also be noted that during the 1911-21 decade, the total population of India (adjusted to the present territory of India) decreased by 0.3 per cent. But the sex breakdown shows that the decrease was confined to females only; the male population in fact registered a small increase of 0.13 per cent while the female population decreased by 0.75 per cent.

Table 3: Sex Ratio in the States of India, 1971
(Females per 1,000 Males)

State	Sex Ratio
Andhra Pradesh	977
Assam	897
Bihar	954
Gujarat	934
Haryana	867
Himachal Pradesh	958
Jammu & Kashmir	878
Kerala	1,016
Madhya Pradesh	941
Maharashtra	930
Manipur	980
Meghalaya	942
Mysore	957
Nagaland	871
Orissa	988
Punjab	865
Rajasthan	911
Tamil Nadu	978
Tripura	943
Uttar Pradesh	879
West Bengal	891
Union Territories	
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	644
Arunachal Pradesh	861
Chandigarh	749
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1,007
Delhi	801
Goa, Daman and Diu	989
Lakshdweep	978
Pondicherry	989

Table 3. Interestingly enough, except in the State of Kerala and Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the sex ratio was below 1,000 in all States and Union Territories of India. The lowest sex ratio among the States of India was recorded in 1971 in Punjab, where it was 865 per thousand, and among the Union Territories, the lowest sex ratio was in Andaman & Nicobar Islands where it was 644, while the highest sex ratio was recorded in Kerala where it was 1,016 and among the Union Territories, Dadra and Nagar Haveli recorded 1,007.

Table 4: Sex ratio in cities with population of over one million, 1971

(Females per 1000 Males)

City	Sex Ratio
Calcutta Urban Agglomeration	698
Calcutta (M. Corp.)	636
Greater Bombay (M. Corp.)	716
Delhi Urban Agglomeration	798
Delhi (M. Corp.)	806
Madras Urban Agglomeration	903
Madras (M. Corp.)	904
Hyderabad Urban Agglomeration	917
Hyderabad (M. Corp.)	928
Ahmedabad Urban Agglomeration	830
Ahmedabad (M. Corp.)	833
Bangalore Urban Agglomeration	874
Bangalore City Corporation and Trust Board Area (C)	877
Kanpur City Urban Agglomeration	762
Kanpur (M. Corp.)	769
Poona Urban Agglomeration	361
Poona (M. Corp.)	885

Table 4. In this table, we give the sex ratio in nine biggest cities of India. Of course all these figures are affected not so much by sex differentials in mortality as by migration. It is well-known that migration to the cities in India is predominantly adult male migration. This is reflected in the figures in this table. Calcutta Municipal Corporation had the lowest sex ratio, namely, 636 females per thousand males. Indian cities continue to be predominantly male unlike many western cities which are predominantly female.

Table 5: Sex ratio in selected countries

(Females per 1,000 Males)

Country	Sex Ratio
U. S. A. (1970)	1,054
Argentina (1970)	1,014
Brazil (1970)	1,011
China (1953)	930
Indonesia (1971)	1,018
Iran (1966)	932
Japan (1970)	1,037
Pakistan (1961)	900
Philippines (1970)	1,010
Czechoslovakia (1970)	1,053
Hungary (1970)	1,064
Italy (1961)	1,063
Poland (1970)	1,058
Spain (1970)	1,049
U. K. (1971)	1,060
Australia (1971)	988
U. S. S. R. (1970)	1,170

Table 5. In this table we give the sex ratio in a few selected countries for the sake of comparison. It will be observed that in countries like USA, UK, USSR and Japan and also in Philippines and Indonesia, the sex ratio is well over 1,000.

Table 6: Expectation of life at different ages for males and females, India, 1951-60

Age	Expectation of Life	
	Males	Females
At birth	41.89	40.55
1	48.42	46.02
2	48.92	46.75
3	49.11	47.12
4	49.03	47.19
5	48.72	47.01
10	45.21	43.78
15	40.99	39.61
20	36.99	35.63
25	32.98	31.60
30	29.03	27.86
35	25.33	24.89
40	22.07	22.37
45	19.15	19.91
50	16.45	17.46
60	11.77	12.98
70	8.07	9.28

Table 6. In this table we present data on the expectation of life at birth, and at different ages for males and females separately. It will be observed that only from age 40 onwards, the expectation of life of females is slightly higher than that of males. But at all ages below 40, the expectation of life is higher for males than for females.

According to the latest Census estimates, the expectation of life at birth was 47.1 years for males and 45.6 years for females during 1961-70.

Table 7: Infant mortality rates for selected States (SRS), 1969

State	Rural		Urban	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Andhra Pradesh	131.7	126.0	—	—
Assam	154.2	104.4	110.7	92.4
Gujarat	153.2	177.8	—	—
Haryana	82.9	76.1	—	—
Jammu & Kashmir	106.3	98.9	79.1	40.5
Kerala	64.8	48.5	—	—
Maharashtra	101.0	113.4	—	—
Mysore	114.5	104.4	60.1	54.4
Punjab	80.9	115.9	70.3	86.7
Rajasthan	167.6	170.2	97.0	84.2
Tamil Nadu	115.0	109.8	—	—
Uttar Pradesh	153.9	205.9	119.0	99.7
Estimates for all the 12 states	132.3	148.1	—	—

Table 7. The sample registration data collected by the office of the Registrar General for different States of India, give conflicting evidence on differentials in rural and urban infant mortality rates. In the largest State of India, Uttar Pradesh, the female infant mortality rate in rural areas is as high as 206. In other words, one out of every five children born dies within one year of age in rural Uttar Pradesh. The lowest incidence of infant mortality in rural areas was in the State of Kerala, where it was only 48 per thousand live births.

Table 8: Age-specific death rates,† Rural India, 1969

Age-Group	Males	Females
0–4	58.3	70.2
5–9	5.8	7.4
10–14	3.0	2.7
5–14	4.5	5.3
15–19	2.1	4.2
20–24	3.9	5.5
25–29	3.7	5.5
30–34	4.1	6.4
35–39	6.5	6.1
40–44	8.5	7.6
45–49	13.2	9.4
15–49	5.3	6.1
50–54	18.7	16.2
55–59	28.3	20.2
60–64	44.0	38.7
65–69	59.9	52.2
70+	123.0	119.5
Total	18.2	20.1

† Age-specific death rate: Number of deaths in a year in any specified age group per 1,000 persons in that age group.

Table 8. This table gives the death rates for rural India as a whole for males and females in different age groups based on sample registration data of the Registrar General. It will be seen that for the age group 5-14 as a whole, the female death rate is 5.3 per thousand compared to 4.5 for males. It will be seen that in the youngest age group 0-4, while the male death rate is 58 per thousand, the female death rate is 70 per thousand; whereas in the oldest age group 70 and above, the male death rate is 123 per thousand, while the female death is 120 per thousand. In the five yearly age groups from 0-4 to 30-34, the female death rates are higher than male, except in the age group 10-14, while in the age groups 35-39 and above the male death rates are higher than female. However, the overall position is that in rural India in 1969 there were 18 deaths per thousand for males and 20 deaths per thousand for females.

Table 9: Age distribution of population, 1971

(Percentages)

Age-groups	Males	Females	Total
0–14	41.9	42.2	42.0
15–19	8.9	8.4	8.7
20–24	7.6	8.2	7.9
25–29	7.2	7.8	7.4
30–39	12.5	12.6	12.6
40–49	9.7	9.0	9.3
50–59	6.3	5.8	6.1
60+	5.9	6.0	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9. In this table, we give the age distribution of the male and female population in 1971. It will be observed that 42 per cent of India's population is below 14. In the case of males, it is 41.9 per cent and in the case of females 42.2 per cent. Only 6 per cent of India's population is above 60: it is 5.9 per cent in the case of males, 6.0 per cent in the case of females.

Table 10: Mean age at marriage: 1901-1961

Decade	Males	Females
1901–11	20.2	13.2
1911–21	20.5	13.6
1921–31	18.4	12.6
1931–41	20.2	15.0
1941–51	19.8	15.4
1951–61	21.4	16.1
1961–71	22.2	17.2

Table 10. The 1971 Census asked a direct question on age at marriage of all currently married women for the first time in the history of census operations in India. The relevant data are not yet available. However, estimates on the average age at marriage have been made on the basis of the marital status distribution and the age distribution. According to these estimates, the average age at marriage for males has increased from 20.2 years during the 1901-11 decade to 22.2 years during 1961-71. In the case of females, the comparable figures are 13.2 years during 1901-11 and 17.2 years during 1961-71. In other words, during these seven decades, the average age at marriage has gone up by two years in the case of males and by four years in the case of females.

Table 11: Mean age at marriage, India, 1961-71*

	Males	Females
Rural	21.6	16.7
Urban	24.3	19.2
Total	22.2	17.2

* Provisional. Based on 1 per cent sample tables, 1971 Census.

Table 11. On the basis of the provisional figures, we observe that the mean age at marriage of females is higher by 2.5 years in the urban areas as compared to the rural. In the case of males, it is higher by 2.7 years in urban areas as compared to the rural.

In rural areas the mean age at marriage for males is higher than that of females by 4.9 years and, surprisingly, the difference is even higher in the urban areas, namely, 5.1 year, though the rural-urban differences are small. In other words, the gap between mean ages of husband and wife is roughly of the same order, namely, 5 years, both in rural and urban areas of India.

Table 12: Number of districts in each state where the average age at marriage of females was below 15 years in 1961

States	Total Number of districts	No. of districts with average age at marriage of females below 15	Per cent of total No. of districts
Madhya Pradesh	43	33	77
Bihar	17	12	71
Rajasthan	26	17	65
Uttar Pradesh	54	26	48
Andhra Pradesh	20	7	35
West Bengal	16	5	31
Maharashtra	26	8	31
Mysore	19	3	16
INDIA	318	112	35

Table 12. A detailed analysis of the district-wise figures indicates that in more than one-third of the total number of districts in India in 1961, the average age at marriage of females was below 15 years. Most of these districts are in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Table 13: Number of districts in each State where the average age at marriage of females was below 20 years in 1961

State	Total No. of districts	No. of districts where the average age at marriage of females was below 20 yrs.	Per cent of total no. of districts
Andhra Pradesh	20	20	100
Bihar	17	17	100
Gujarat	17	17	100
Maharashtra	26	26	100
Madhya Pradesh	43	43	100
Mysore	19	19	100
Orissa	13	13	100
Rajasthan	26	26	100
Uttar Pradesh	54	54	100
Punjab	19	18	95
West Bengal	16	15	94
Madras	13	12	92
Jammu & Kashmir	9	8	89
Assam	11	7	64
Kerala	9	3	33
INDIA	318	303	95

Table 13. The district-wise estimates also reveal that in 95 per cent districts in India the average age at marriage of females was below 20 years in 1961.

Table 14: Percentage distribution of female population aged 10 years and above by marital status : 1961 and 1971

Marital Status	Year	Rural	Urban	Total
Unmarried	1961	15.8	24.2	17.2
	1971	20.2	29.2	22.0
Married	1961	67.5	61.1	66.5
	1971	66.3	59.3	64.9
Widowed	1961	15.8	14.0	15.5
	1971	12.9	11.0	12.5
Divorced/Separated	1961	0.8	0.6	0.7
	1971	0.5	0.4	0.5
Unspecified status	1961	0.1	0.1	0.1
	1971	0.1	0.1	0.1

Table 14. There is some indirect evidence, however, that the age at marriage is going up judged by the proportion of unmarried at a point of time. A comparison of the figures of the percentage distribution of female population aged 10 years and above by marital status in 1961-71 is given in Table 12. It will be seen that 17.2 per cent of the females were unmarried in 1961 compared to 22.0 per cent in 1971. This resulted in a decrease in the percentage of married women. The relevant figures are 66.5 per cent in 1961 and 64.9 per cent in 1971. A general improvement in the expectation of life and a greater incidence of widow re-marriages might have resulted in a decrease in the proportion of widowhood. The percentage of widows decreased from 15.5 per cent in 1961 to 12.5 per cent in 1971. The census figures on divorced and separated women may not be particularly reliable but there is a trend towards a decrease in the incidence of divorce and separation as judged by the figures for 1961 and 1971. However, the figures are rather insignificant compared to the total female population. But interestingly enough, both in rural areas and in urban areas, there is a decline in the incidence of divorce and separation judged by the number of females who were reported as divorced or separated at a point of time during the censuses of 1961 and 1971. As figures on the number of marriages are not available, it is not possible to work out the divorce rate on the basis of number of marriages.

Table 15: Percentage distribution of female population by age, marital status and residence, 1971

Age group	Total Rural Urban	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced and separated	Un-specified
0–9	Total	100.00	–	–	–	–
	Rural	100.00	–	–	–	–
	Urban	100.00	–	–	–	–
10–14	Total	88.1	11.7	0.1	–	0.1
	Rural	86.2	13.6	0.1	–	0.1
	Urban	95.8	3.9	–	–	0.3
15–19	Total	42.9	56.3	0.3	0.4	0.1
	Rural	36.9	62.2	0.4	0.4	0.1
	Urban	63.8	35.6	0.2	0.2	0.2
20–24	Total	9.1	89.4	0.9	0.6	–
	Rural	6.2	92.1	1.0	0.7	–
	Urban	19.1	79.7	0.7	0.4	0.1
25–29	Total	1.9	95.6	1.9	0.6	–
	Rural	1.3	96.1	1.9	0.7	–
	Urban	4.5	93.5	1.5	0.5	–
30–34	Total	0.9	94.5	3.9	0.7	–
	Rural	0.6	94.6	4.1	0.7	–
	Urban	1.9	94.1	3.5	0.5	–
35–39	Total	0.6	91.7	7.0	0.7	–
	Rural	0.4	91.7	7.2	0.7	–
	Urban	1.1	92.1	6.2	0.6	–
40–44	Total	0.6	84.5	14.2	0.7	–
	Rural	0.5	84.5	14.3	0.7	0.1
	Urban	1.0	84.9	13.5	0.5	–
45–49	Total	0.4	78.5	20.4	0.7	–
	Rural	0.3	78.7	20.3	0.7	–
	Urban	0.9	77.7	20.9	0.4	0.1

(Contd.)

Table 15: (Contd.)

Age Group	Total Rural Urban	Never married	Married	Widowed	Divorced and separated	Un-specified
50–54	Total	0.4	62.5	36.5	0.5	0.1
	Rural	0.4	62.8	36.3	0.5	–
	Urban	0.8	60.9	37.7	0.5	0.1
55–59	Total	0.4	58.1	41.1	0.4	..
	Rural	0.3	58.7	40.5	0.4	0.1
	Urban	0.6	55.1	43.7	0.5	0.1
60–64	Total	0.3	36.7	62.5	0.4	0.1
	Rural	0.3	37.1	62.2	0.4	–
	Urban	0.6	34.9	64.0	0.4	0.1
65–69	Total	0.4	34.7	64.5	0.3	0.1
	Rural	0.4	35.1	64.1	0.3	0.1
	Urban	0.7	32.6	66.3	0.3	0.1
70+	Total	0.5	19.5	79.6	0.3	0.1
	Rural	0.5	19.8	79.4	0.2	0.1
	Urban	0.9	18.4	80.2	0.3	0.2
All ages	Total	45.2	45.6	8.8	0.3	0.1
	Rural	44.3	46.3	9.0	0.4	–
	Urban	48.8	42.9	8.0	0.2	0.1

Table 15. In this table we present the marital distribution of the female population in five-year age groups for rural and urban areas separately. It will be observed that in the age group 10-14, 13.6 per cent of the girls were reported to be married in rural areas and 3.9 per cent in the urban areas. Obviously, this is in contravention of the Child Marriage Restraint Act under which the minimum legal age at marriage for females is 15 years. The age group 25-29 reveals the highest percentage of married females in rural areas, namely, 96.1 per cent, whereas in the case of urban areas, it is the next age group i.e. 30-34 years which records the highest percentage of married females, namely, 94.1 per cent. In the age group 60-64, 62.5 per cent of the females are widowed while in the age group 65-69, 64.5 per cent are widowed. In the female population aged 70 and over, almost 80 per cent of the female population is widowed.

Table 16: Average number of children born alive to current mothers by age groups, India (Rural), 1969

Age Group	Average number of children
15–19	1.3
20–24	2.1
25–29	3.5
30–34	4.8
35–39	5.8
40–44	6.4

Table 16. The data on registered births and deaths are highly defective in India and it is not possible to draw any conclusion on the basis of these figures. One has therefore to rely on actuarial estimates and survey data. According to the sample registration data collected by the Office of the Registrar General, in rural areas of India the average number of children born to mothers in the age group 40-44 was 6.4. This indicates the high fertility pattern in rural India. The available evidence also suggests that there are not large differentials in rural and urban fertility in India and this results in an overall high fertility pattern.

Table 17: Per cent of live births by live birth order, India (Rural), 1969

Birth Order	Per Cent live births
All orders	100.0
1st	20.5
2nd	18.1
3rd	16.4
4th	14.5
5th	11.6
6th	8.2
7th	5.3
8th	2.8
9th	1.5
10th	1.1

Table 17. Data on order of births (i. e. the sequence in which the live births have occurred) reveal an interesting pattern. Of all the births which took place in rural India in 1969, according to SRS data, 20.5 per cent belong to the first order, 18.1 per cent to the second order and 16.4 per cent to the third order. That is to say, the first three births account for 55 per cent of the total births in rural India. The fertility level could be substantially brought down, therefore, if family size was restricted to three live births. The concept of "improvident maternity" was introduced for the first time in India by the Census Commissioner of India for the 1951 Census.

Table 18: Percentage of couples protected by states upto 1971-72

Sl. No.	State/Union Territory	Estimated No. of target couples in the reproductive age group in 1971 ('000)	Percentage to total couples in India (%)	No. of couples currently protected due to									
				Sterilisation		IUCD		C.C. users		All methods			
				No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
1.	Andhra Pradesh	8,071	8.23	1,041,105	12.9	58,339	0.7	62,455	0.8	1,161,899	14.4		
2.	Assam	2,303	2.35	104,740	4.5	39,192	1.7	6,354	0.3	150,786	6.5		
3.	Bihar	10,713	10.92	529,689	4.9	113,862	1.1	28,880	0.3	672,431	6.3		
4.	Gujarat	4,692	4.78	708,346	15.1	46,923	1.0	93,991	2.0	849,260	18.1		
5.	Haryana	1,595	1.63	135,976	8.5	88,426	5.5	76,390	4.8	300,792	18.8		
6.	Himachal Pradesh	640	0.65	37,498	5.9	14,017	2.2	3,196	0.5	54,711	8.6		
7.	Jammu & Kashmir	863	0.88	46,865	5.4	20,414	2.4	3,827	0.4	71,106	8.2		
8.	Kerala	3,107	3.17	483,073	15.5	88,152	2.8	8,870	0.3	580,095	18.6		
9.	Madhya Pradesh	8,000	8.16	662,171	8.2	118,514	1.5	70,497	0.9	851,182	10.6		
10.	Maharashtra	9,154	9.33	15,18,489	16.6	72,623	0.8	166,245	1.8	1,757,957	19.2		
11.	Mysore	5,027	5.12	390,395	7.8	67,187	1.3	43,764	0.9	501,346	10.0		

(Contd.)

Table 18: (Contd.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12.	Orissa	4,146	4.23	502,162	12.1	126,208	3.0	73,189	1.8	701,559	16.9
13.	Punjab	2,156	2.20	210,681	9.8	147,220	6.0	152,057	7.1	509,958	23.7
14.	Rajasthan	4,810	4.90	194,099	4.0	54,313	1.1	44,933	0.9	293,345	6.0
15.	Tamil Nadu	7,316	7.46	992,520	13.5	99,688	1.4	87,525	1.2	12,79,733	16.1
16.	Uttar Pradesh	16,512	16.83	711,782	4.3	266,883	1.6	94,909	0.6	1,073,574	6.5
17.	West Bengal	7,333	7.48	589,059	8.0	66,179	0.9	55,346	0.8	710,584	9.7
18.	Meghalaya	152	0.15	488	0.3	427	0.3	722	0.5	1,637	1.1
19.	Nagaland	70	0.07	238	0.3	50	0.1	—	—	288	0.4
20.	Manipur	163	0.17	1,670	1.0	3,646	2.2	915	0.6	6,231	3.8
21.	Tripura	277	0.28	12,865	4.7	646	0.2	1453	0.5	14,964	5.4
22.	A. & N. Islands	17	0.02	721	4.3	200	1.2	279	1.6	1,200	7.1
23.	Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA)	49	0.05	84	0.2	272	0.5	—	—	356	0.7
24.	Chandigarh	41	0.04	2,249	5.5	1,869	4.6	3,593	8.7	7,711	18.8
25.	D. & N. Haveli	14	0.01	300	2.2	13	0.1	160	1.1	473	3.4
26.	Delhi	651	0.66	57,126	8.8	23,493	3.6	117,477	18.0	198,096	30.4
27.	Goa, Daman & Diu	124	0.13	8,609	6.9	1,471	1.2	2,878	2.3	12,958	10.4
28.	Lakshdweep	6	0.01	91	1.5	18	0.3	105	1.8	214	3.6
29.	Pondicherry	85	0.09	9,448	11.1	6,194	7.3	997	1.2	16,639	19.6

(Contd.)

Table 18: (Contd.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
30.	Central Govt. Institutions	—	—	151,197	—	25,079	—	108,549	—	204,825	—
31.	Commercial distribution of	—	—	—	—	—	—	924,306	—	9,24,306	—
	ALL INDIA	98,087	100.00	9,103,736	9.3	1,551,518	1.6	2,234,462	2.3	12,889,716	13.2

Target couples—Number of married females in the age group 15-44 years.

The number of couples currently protected by sterilisations is obtained from the total sterilisations since the inception after allowing attrition due to mortality and ageing at the rate of 2.5% in the initial year and 5% each year thereafter. In case of IUCD insertions, besides ageing and mortality attrition due to pregnancy, removals and expulsions also have to be allowed for. As a practical working approximation attrition rate is taken to be at the rate of 1.25% in the initial month and 2.5% each month thereafter. The conventional contraceptives have no carry-over effect and protection lasts only during the period of use. Therefore, in case of conventional contraceptives the number of equal C.C. users as such have been taken.

Table 18. There has been considerable progress in the field of family planning in recent years on account of the initiative taken by the Ministry of Health and Family Planning. But the overall situation continues to be unsatisfactory. In States like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra and Gujarat, a higher level of performance has been achieved, while in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the success is far from impressive.

Table 19: Literacy rates by age-groups, India, 1971

Age-groups	Males	Females	Total
5–9	26.7	18.5	22.8
10–14	60.3	37.4	49.7
15–19	63.0	36.9	50.8
20–24	59.8	27.9	43.8
25–34	49.3	18.8	33.9
35+	37.0	10.4	24.5
Total	39.5	18.7	29.5

Table 19. The literacy rate in India continues to be low both for males and females. The literacy rate was 39.5 per cent for males and 18.7 per cent for females in 1971.

Table 20: Female literacy rates in rural and urban areas, States, 1971

States	Rural	Urban	Total
All India	13.2	42.3	18.7
Andhra Pradesh	10.9	36.3	15.8
Assam	16.5	50.9	19.3
Bihar	6.4	31.9	8.7
Gujarat	17.2	44.8	24.8
Haryana	9.2	41.5	14.9
Himachal Pradesh	18.2	52.2	20.2
Jammu & Kashmir	5.0	28.4	9.3
Kerala	53.1	60.6	54.3
Madhya Pradesh	6.1	37.0	10.9
Maharashtra	17.8	47.3	26.4
Manipur	16.4	40.4	19.5
Meghalaya	18.9	59.7	24.6
Mysore	14.5	41.6	21.0
Nagaland	16.4	49.5	18.7
Orissa	12.1	36.1	13.9
Punjab	19.9	45.4	25.9
Rajasthan	4.0	29.7	8.5
Tamil Nadu	19.0	45.4	26.9
Tripura	17.3	55.0	21.2
Uttar Pradesh	7.0	34.4	10.7
West Bengal	15.0	47.8	22.4

Table 20. The female literacy rate is the highest in Kerala: 53.1 per cent in rural areas and 60.6 per cent in urban areas, while it is the lowest in Rajasthan where it is 4 per cent in rural areas and 29.7 per cent in urban areas. In the large States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the female literacy rates are shockingly low.

Table 21: Distribution of literates by educational levels, India, 1971

Educational level	Total	Males	Females
Total literates	100.0	100.0	100.0
Literates without educational levels	36.9	35.4	40.3
Literates with educational levels	63.1	64.6	59.7
Primary	31.5	30.5	34.2
Middle	18.0	18.8	16.0
Matriculation or higher-secondary	11.0	12.3	7.8
Non-tech. diploma or certificate not equal to degree	0.1	0.1	0.1
Technical diploma or certificate not equal to degree	0.3	0.3	0.2
Graduates and above	2.2	2.6	1.4

Table 21. In this table we give the distribution of literates by educational level in 1971. This table shows that 15.3 per cent of the male literates were matriculate and above while in the case of females the comparable figure was 9.5 per cent. The educated classes defined as matriculate and above constitute less than 10 per cent of the literate female population.

Table 22: Education of girls, India, 1950-1965

	1950–51	1955–56	1960–61	1965–66 (estimated)
1. Enrolment of girls in classes I-V				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	5,385	7,639	11,401	18,145
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	39	44	48	55
(3) Percentage of girls in schools for boys	74.8	79.2	82.1	85.0
2. Enrolment of girls in classes VI-VIII				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	534	867	1,630	2,839
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	21	25	32	35
(3) Percentage of girls in schools for boys	26.7	51.8	68.9	78.0
3. Enrolment of girls in classes IX-XI				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	163	320	541	1,069
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	15	21	23	26
(3) Percentage of girls in schools	21.0	29.7	36.4	40.0
4. Enrolment of girls at the University stage (General Education)				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	40	84	150	271
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	14	17	23	24
(3) Percentage of girls in boys' institutions	56.0	53.1	50.2	48.2
5. Enrolment of girls in vocational courses (School Standard)				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	41	66	86	120
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	28	31	25	23
6. Enrolment of girls in professional courses (Collegiate Standard)				
(1) Total enrolment (in 000's)	5	9	26	50
(2) No. of girls for every 100 boys enrolled	5	7	11	14

Table 22. In this table we present figures for the progress of education of girls, according to enrolment in various classes. There has been a steady progress in the enrolment of girls in classes at all levels and the gap between boys and girls is decreasing.

Table 23: Enrolment in primary education, India, 1950-1965

Stage/Years	Enrolment as percentage of population in the corresponding age-groups		
	Boys	Girls	Total
I-IV			
1950–51	55.0	20.1	37.8
1955–56	59.5	25.0	42.6
1960–61	74.0	35.0	54.8
1965–66	90.2	47.6	69.2
V-VII			
1950–51	20.8	4.6	13.0
1955–56	25.6	6.9	16.5
1960–61	35.5	12.5	24.3
1965–66	49.9	20.7	35.6

Table 23. In this table we observe that in 1950-51, only 20 per cent of the girls in primary education age group were enrolled in schools. This figure shot up to 48 per cent in 1965-66. In the case of classes V to VII, the enrolment ratio for girls shot up from 5 per cent in 1950-51 to about 21 per cent in 1965-66.

Table 24: Enrolment in secondary education, India, 1950-1965

Stage/Years	Enrolment as percentage of population in the corresponding age-groups		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Classes VIII-X			
1950–51	10.9	1.8	6.5
1955-56	14.9	3.3	9.3
1960–61	20.4	5.4	13.1
1965–66	28.7	9.1	19.1
Classes XI-XII			
1950–51	3.3	0.5	1.9
1955–56	5.2	0.9	3.1
1960–61	8.0	1.6	4.9
1965–66	11.5	2.3	7.0

Table 24. This table shows a similar progress in the case of VIII to X classes and also XI to XII classes.

Table 25: Distribution of women workers into nine industrial categories, India, 1971

(Figures in Thousands)

Industrial categories	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Total	% of total	Total	% of total	Total	% of total
I Cultivators	9,127	32.6	139	4.2	9,266	29.6
II Agricultural labourers	15,211	54.4	584	17.5	15,795	50.4
III Livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations, orchards and allied activities	715	2.6	68	2.0	783	2.5
IV Mining and quarrying	91	0.3	33	1.0	124	0.4
V Manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs						
a. Household industry	999	3.6	332	10.0	1,331	4.3
b. Other than household industry	436	1.6	429	12.9	865	2.8
VI Construction	107	0.4	96	2.9	203	0.6
VII Trade and commerce	282	1.0	274	8.2	556	1.8
VIII Transport, storage and communication	39	0.1	1.7	3.2	146	0.5
IX Other services	959	3.4	1,270	38.1	2,229	7.1
Total Workers	27,966	100.0	3,332	100.0	31,298	100.0

Table 25. In this table we present data on the distribution of women workers into nine industrial categories. It will be seen that only 2.8 per cent of the women workers are engaged in manufacturing industries of the modern type, whereas 4.3 per cent are engaged in household industry. The great majority of women are engaged in cultivation.

Table 26: Working force participation rates by age and sex, India, 1971

Age Group	Rural India		Urban India		All India	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
All ages	53.4	13.1	48.8	6.6	52.5	11.8
0–14	7.5	2.9	2.7	0.8	6.6	2.5
15–19	62.1	18.3	33.1	5.4	55.2	15.4
20–24	86.3	20.2	67.4	9.4	81.2	17.8
25–29	95.3	21.7	90.5	11.6	94.1	19.7
30–39	97.5	23.4	95.4	13.0	97.1	21.4
40–49	97.5	24.1	95.1	14.4	97.1	22.3
50–59	95.4	20.7	87.8	12.6	94.0	19.3
60+	77.4	11.3	55.3	6.4	73.7	10.4

The working force participation rate indicates the number of workers in each age group compared to the total population in that age group multiplied by 100.

Table 26. This table gives working force participation rates in different age groups for males and females separately. Taking all ages together, we find that women workers constitute only 12 per cent of all women. But the census definition of "worker" does not adequately reflect the work done by women.

Table 27: Female working force participation rates in cities with population of over one million, 1971

Million plus cities	No. of female workers	Female working force participation rates*
Hyderabad	70,771	8.2
Ahmedabad	35,819	5.0
Greater Bombay	208,676	8.4
Bangalore	63,197	8.2
Madras	78,429	6.7
Kanpur	20,435	3.7
Calcutta	137,024	4.7
Delhi	82,657	5.1

*The number of female workers for every 100 females.

Table 27. This table shows that even in the biggest cities in India, namely, cities with population of over one million, the female participation rates are very low. For example, in Greater Bombay, only 8.4 per cent of the female population is in the working force.

Table 28: Percentage distribution of workers according to educational levels, India, 1971

Educational levels	Rural		Urban	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Illiterate	65.0	92.1	32.0	65.9
Literate (without educational level)	12.4	3.2	11.5	5.0
Primary	12.8	3.0	18.4	6.3
Middle	6.1	0.9	15.3	4.6
Matriculation or Higher Secondary	3.0	0.5	16.7	11.3
Non-technical diploma or certificate not equal to degree	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Technical diploma or certificate not equal to degree	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.8
Graduate degree other than technical degree	0.5	0.1	3.4	2.7
Post-graduate degree other than technical degree			1.1	1.5
Technical degree or diploma equal to degree or post-graduate degree			1.0	1.7

Table 28. This table presents the distribution of male and female workers according to different educational levels. In rural areas, over 92 per cent of female workers are illiterate while in urban areas, 66 per cent of the female workers are illiterate. The comparable figures for males are 65 per cent in rural areas and 32 per cent in urban areas.

Table 29: Occupational classification of selected categories of workers, India, 1971

Occupations	Males	Females
Engineering Technicians	2,02,600	2,500
Air Craft and Ships Officers	11,300	300
Life Scientists	200	100
Physicians & Surgeons	3,37,600	23,800
Economists and Related Workers	1,900	100
Social Scientists and Related Workers	1,06,200	16,000
Jurists	1,47,900	1,700
Elected and Legislative Officers	17,100	500
Administrative and Executive Officers	4,38,500	55,000
Working Proprietors, Directors and Managers Whole-Sale and Retail Trade	2,31,800	5,300
Village Officers	2,77,000	3,000
Typists	88,600	25,200
Domestic Servants	3,47,600	2,30,000
Money-lenders, Pawn Brokers	49,700	900

Note: Based on 1 per cent sample tabulation, Census of India, 1971.

Table 29. This table gives the number of male and female workers in a number of selected categories based on 1 per cent tabulation of the Census of India, 1971. For obvious reasons the whole range of occupational categories could not be presented in this table which gives only the glimpses of different types of occupations and the sex composition in these occupations. In view of the problems of sample errors, etc., these figures should be treated as indicative of the pattern rather than as definitive figures.

Table 30: Non-working women classified by main activity, India, 1971

(Figures in Thousands)

Main activity	No. of females	% of total
Full time students	20,664	8.9
Household duties	1,18,404	51.0
Dependents and infants	91,722	39.5
Retired, rentiers and persons of independent means	477	0.2
Beggars, vagrants etc.	275	0.1
Inmates of penal, mental and Charitable institutions	37	N
Others	526	0.2
Total	2,32,075	100.0

N = Negligible

Table 30. In this table we give the distribution of non-working women by type of activity. It will be seen that 51 per cent of the women reported household duties as their main activity. This table does not take into account the age groups. This is done in the next table.

Table 31: Percentage of women reporting household duties as main activity, India, 1971

Age group	Rural	Urban	Total
15–19	66.8	49.0	62.8
20–24	76.5	78.6	77.0
25–29	76.8	84.8	78.5
30–39	75.6	84.5	77.2
40–49	73.1	80.8	74.5
50–59	66.9	69.8	67.4
Total (15–59)	73.1	75.0	73.5

Table 31. This table gives the percentage of women reporting household duties as their main activity in different age groups. In the age group 15-59, 73 per cent of the women in rural areas and 75 per cent of the women in urban areas reported household duties as their main activity.

Table 32: Migration streams, India, 1971

Percentages

Migration type	Total	Males	Females
Rural to rural	70.8	52.7	78.6
Urban to rural	5.5	7.6	4.6
Rural to urban	13.9	23.4	9.8
Urban to urban	9.8	16.3	7.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 32. This table shows the volume of different migration streams: rural to rural, urban to rural, rural to urban and urban to urban. In India, it is quite common for women in rural areas to marry outside their village and this results in a large stream of "marriage migration". This is confirmed by this table which shows that 79 per cent of the females moved from one rural area to another rural area. The urban to urban female migration is only 7 per cent of the total migrants, while rural to urban migration accounts for only 10 per cent of the total migration. Urban to rural migration is the least important form of migration and accounts for only 4.6 per cent of the total migration.

Table 33: Distance and migration, India, 1971

Percentages

Migration type	Total	Males	Females
Short distance	67.4	54.9	72.8
Medium distance	21.5	26.6	19.4
Long distance	11.1	18.5	7.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 33. In this table we present data on migration by distance. In the case of females, 73 per cent of the migration is short-distance migration, 19 per cent is medium-distance and 8 per cent is long-distance.

Table 34: Sex ratio of migrants by distance, India, 1971

Migration type	Females per 1,000 males
Short distance	3,063
Medium distance	1,682
Long distance	980
Total	2,310

Table 34. This table gives the sex ratio of migrants by distance. Short-distance migration is predominantly female: there are 3,063 female migrants per 1,000 male migrants. In the case of medium distance, the sex ratio still continues to be favourable for women: there are 1,682 females for 1,000 males. But in the case of long distance, the sex ratio drops: there are 980 females per 1,000 males.

Table 35: Sex ratio of migrants by type of migration, India, 1971

Migration streams	Sex ratio
Rural to rural	3,447
Urban to rural	1,398
Rural to urban	963
Urban to urban	990
Total	2,310

Table 35. In this table we give the sex ratio of migrants for the four migration streams just discussed. In the case of rural to urban migrants, there are 963 females per 1,000 males compared to 3,447 females per 1,000 males in the case of rural to rural migrants. As already noted rural to rural female migration is basically "marriage migration."

Table 36: Male-Female disparities in regard to selected demographic characteristics, India, 1971

Sl. No.	Particulars	Females per 1,000 males
1.	Total population	930
2.	Rural	949
	Urban	858
3.	Religious community	
	Hindus	930
	Muslims	922
	Christians	986
	Sikhs	859
	Buddhists	962
	Jains	940
4.	Literate and educated	474
	Illiterate	1,342
5.	Age-group	
	0–4	969
	5–9	935
	10–14	887
	15–19	883
	20–24	1,008
	25–29	1,027
	30–34	990
	35–39	916
	40–44	882
	45–49	839
	50–54	847
	55–59	867
	60–64	923
	65–69	916
	70+	960
6.	Educational level	
	Middle	371
	Matriculation or Higher Secondary	277
	Non-technical diploma and certificate	327
	Technical Diploma or certificate	335
	Graduate and above	246

(Contd.)

Table 36: (Contd.)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Females per 1,000 males
7.	Marital status	
	Total population	930
	Never married	762
	Married	1,024
	Widowed	2,772
	Divorced or separated	1,630
	Unspecified status	328
8.	Workers	
	Total	210
	Cultivators	135
	Agricultural labourers	498
	Livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations, orchards, and allied activity	232
	Mining and quarrying	155
	Manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs	
	(a) Household industry	265
	(b) Other than household industry	88
	Construction	101
	Trade and commerce	59
	Transport, storage and communication	34
	Other services	165
	Non-workers	1,726
9.	Non-workers according to main activity	
	Full-time students	480
	Household duties	6,745
	Dependents and infants	1,084
	Retired, rentiers and persons of independent means	356
	Beggars, vagrants etc.	587
	Inmates of penal, mental and charitable institutions	254
	Others	190

Table 36. This table gives a summary picture of selected demographic characteristics, bringing out the disparities between females and males.

Table 37: Sex break-up of Members of Parliament from 1952 to 1971

Lok Sabha Election	Member of Parliament		
Year	Total	Males	Females
1952	489	471	18
1957	494	468	26
1962	494	462	32
1967	520	490	30
1971	518	496	22

Table 37. This table gives a breakdown of Members of Parliament by sex from 1952 to 1971. The peak period for female participation in Parliament was in 1962 when there were 32 female members out of a total of 494 members. In 1971 there were only 22 female MPs out of a total of 518.

Table 38: Percentage of votes cast by men and women electorates, India, 1957-71, Lok Sabha Election

Year	Males	Females
1957	55.8	38.8
1962	62.1	46.6
1967	66.7	55.5
1971	61.0	49.2

Table 38. This table gives the proportion of votes cast to the total electorate in the different elections of India to the Lok Sabha. The male participation rates are higher than the female in all years. However, there is a trend towards reduction in the disparities, except for the 1971 election.

Table 39: Percentage of votes cast by men and women electorates in States, Lok Sabha Election, 1971

States	% of votes cast to the electorates	
	Males	Females
Andhra Pradesh	64.4	54.7
Assam	58.4	41.6
Bihar	60.0	37.0
Gujarat	60.6	50.2
Haryana	67.8	60.5
Himachal Pradesh	48.4	33.4
Jammu & Kashmir	67.6	46.6
Kerala	65.8	63.3
Madhya Pradesh	58.2	37.6
Maharashtra	63.5	56.1
Mysore	61.7	52.7
Nagaland	56.8	50.4
Orissa	51.8	33.7
Punjab	63.4	55.9
Rajasthan	60.1	47.5
Tamil Nadu	74.5	69.2
Uttar Pradesh	52.2	38.8
West Bengal	64.8	58.7
Andaman Nicobar Islands	69.7	72.3
Chandigarh	62.8	63.1
Delhi	66.8	63.3
Dadra Nagar Haveli	71.5	68.1
Goa, Daman and Diu	57.0	54.9
Manipur	53.4	43.6
Pondicherry	71.9	68.3
Tripura	65.0	55.9
Total	61.0	49.2

Table 39. This table gives the percentage of votes cast for males and females separately in different States in the 1971 Lok Sabha election. The highest percentage of female voters among the States of India was in Tamil Nadu, followed by Kerala while the lowest percentage of female voters was in Himachal Pradesh, followed by Orissa. In Chandigarh and also in Andaman and Nicobar Islands the female participation was higher than that of males.

Sources of Data

Tables 1-4:
Computed from *Census of India*, 1971

Table 5:
United Nations, *Demographic Year Book*, 1971

Tables 6-8:
Office of the Registrar General *Sample Registration System*, Analytical Series No. 2, 1972

Table 9:
Computed from *Census of India*, 1971

Table 10:
S. N. Agarwala, *Age at Marriage in India, Kitab Mahal, 1962.*

Tables 11-13:
Goyal, R. P., *Recent Changes in Mean Age at Marriage in India, 1961-71*, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, 1974.

Tables 14-15:
Computed from *Census of India*, 1971

Tables 16-17:
SRS Data, *op. cit.*

Table 18:
Family Planning Department, Government of India, *Programme Information, 1971-72*

Tables 19-21:
Computed from *Census of India*, 1971

Tables 22-24:
Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66, Government of India

Tables 25-36
Computed from *Census of India*, 1971

Tables 37-39
Reports of the General Elections, Volume-II, 1957, 1962, 1967, 1971, Election Commission, Government of India.

PART TWO

Muslim Women of India

Qurratulain Hyder

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The situation of Muslim women in India cannot be discussed without taking into account their legalist religion and the Middle-Eastern ethos combined with that of India which have moulded their values and traditions. While the Muslim Personal Law has safeguarded their legal rights and independent status within the family, the custom of *purdah* has hampered their social progress. Therefore, before going into the role Muslim women have played through history, some comparatively unpublished facts must be borne in mind.

First, the Muslim Personal Law granted women some important rights which distinguished them from the women of other religious communities. *The exercise or the deprivation of these rights has depended alternately on the particular socio-political conditions obtaining in different periods and different countries.* New-born daughters were customarily buried alive in Arabia at the time the Prophet began his mission. The status and respect he gave to women transformed the basic character of the medieval society. Arab fathers began proudly to call themselves the "Father of Salma", "the Father of Hafza", etc. Polygamy and concubinage flourished from China to Africa. Islamic Law restricted polygamy and made it conditional. The freeing of slave women was declared an act of piety and children born of concubines were given legal rights. Children of slave parents reached the highest positions in society and even founded ruling dynasties. Slavery was not, however, abolished as it was part of the economic system of the time. (It continued in America till the last century.)

Islam gave women certain privileges which at the time (sixth and seventh centuries) women did not possess anywhere in the world, nor did they acquire them in the non-Islamic world till 1918. Women of the West acquired some of these rights after much agitation only in modern times. For instance, while in most other societies marriage was a sacrament and a lifelong, indissoluble bond, the Quran revolutionised the entire concept of marriage and made it a civil contract which could be terminated by either party; civil marriage and divorce courts were introduced in the West more than thirteen hundred years later. In accordance with the Quranic Law, a woman inherits and owns property and retains her legal identity and individuality even after her marriage. In the words of Lord Coke, an eminent British jurist, "Man and wife in law are one person. And man is that person. Not so in Islam."

The second point to remember is that the new religion spread to a large number of countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and Russia. Diverse social and racial customs and traditions were assimilated into the new Islamic polity. But the fundamental tenets of the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet were strictly followed by all Muslims whether they belonged to Siberia or China, Spain or Yugoslavia.

Thirdly, Law, though uniform in its basic injunctions, came to be elaborated later by five major Schools. Some of the Quranic injunctions regarding women were interpreted or codified in a way which became disadvantageous to women. Male chauvinism is not a new phenomenon.

Women's position in different times reflected socio-political conditions. During the Middle Ages when Islamic civilization reached its zenith, women went to war as nurses, soldiers and even commanders. They taught at the universities and became renowned musicians and poets, and a long list of names could be provided of women who so distinguished themselves.

Simultaneous with the academic and scientific achievements

of the age, certain sociological changes occurred which had a far-reaching effect on the Arab-Persian-Spanish Muslim society. The Caliphate adopted the grand style of the ancient Persian monarchy. The desert simplicity and egalitarianism of early Islam were replaced by a love for splendour and luxuries.

With the growth of commerce, and the acquisition of foreign markets, a new class of haves and have nots came into being. Society was divided into the ruling elite, the war lords, merchant princes, the professional classes (artists, jurists, doctors, teachers) and petty traders, artisans, slaves and farmers. Slavery flourished once again and women came to be bought and sold in the market place.

Under the Ommayad Caliph Walid II (eighth century A.D.) the Arab ruling class acquired a taste for opulence and licentiousness of Roman proportions. As courtesans and local and foreign dancing girls flocked to Baghdad the respectable citizens began to segregate their women. The difference between the professional entertainer and the respectable housewife laid the foundations of the system of *purdah*. The harem system was also introduced by Caliph Walid II who also copied the ancient Byzantine custom of employing eunuchs in the royal households. Female seclusion had also been in vogue in the royal palaces of ancient Imperial Iran. As the once democratically appointed caliphate became more like an hereditary office, the Iranian royal customs were adopted with great zeal.

However, under enlightened rulers women continued to enjoy greater freedom. Ommayad Spain produced many remarkable women who taught at Granada, Seville and Cordova at the time when the rest of Europe was engulfed in intellectual darkness.

In Abbasid Baghdad women presided over literary salons and musical soirees, conducted orchestras and worked as jurists. Abbasid princesses received foreign envoys and took part in statecraft. Women lectured on history and *belles lettres* at the University of Baghdad.

In 1258 the Tartar invasions destroyed Baghdad, ravaged the Muslim world and put an end to one of the most brilliant epochs in human history. In Spain the eight hundred-year-old Muslim rule ended in 1492.

However, the Tartars embraced the religion of the peoples they had conquered. Their women had always enjoyed the freedom of the Steppes. After embracing Islam, the Central Asian peoples produced many able women who ruled, albeit for short periods, in Trans-Oxiana, Iran and India. In 1236 Razia, daughter of Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash, ascended the throne of Delhi in accordance with her father's wishes. She styled herself Sultan and ruled over India from Sind to Bengal. She was a woman of extraordinary intelligence and ability. Her Council of Ministers hated being ruled by a mere woman, and she was killed in 1240, while personally quelling a rebellion near Delhi. Sultan Razia was woman born much ahead of her time.

As pointed out earlier, religious principles, environment, racial characteristics and social customs have determined the norms of the multi-racial Muslim society. In India the Muslims—mostly Turks, Persians and Afghans in the North and Arabs in the South—adopted many local customs. The majority of the converts retained many of their old traditions. The ruling class mingled socially with the Rajput aristocracy and adopted some Rajput customs.

Divorce and widow remarriage were alien to medieval Hindu society. Thus, while in the Middle East the women continued to divorce and remarry with great ease, the adage "A woman enters her lord and master's house in a bridal palanquin and leaves it only on the bier" became the unwritten law among the well-to-do Muslims. At the same time the custom of *purdah* was adopted by affluent Hindus.

For the rich and for the middle classes the veil became a hall-mark of respectability. The women of Muslim farmers, artisans and labourers have never observed *purdah* either in

India or in the Muslim lands. The poor do not need a status symbol.

In an age of general illiteracy higher education was confined to the upper classes. The majority of Indian Muslim girls were taught the rudiments of religion. They were also taught to read the Quran. They received primary education in *Maktabs* where they studied with boys up to the age of nine. After that they were shut up within the four walls of the house and married off as soon as they attained the age of puberty. Some were taught by women teachers at home.

Because of their privileged position the princesses and noble-women continued to make their mark in politics as well as in literature. Gulbadan Begum, Humayun's sister, is the famous author of her brother's biography, the *Humayunama*. Akbar the Great appointed Mahim Anka, his Turkish nurse, as the joint Prime Minister of India. Male historians refer to this period as Akbar's "Petticoat Government". Nurjehan ruled India as the Co-regent of her husband, Emperor Jehangir.

Most of the women who ruled as queens or took part in state-craft have been dismissed by male historians as "crafty intriguers of the harem". Even Habba Khatoon, the fiery nationalist poet of Kashmir who defied Akbar's expansionist policies, and the Deccan's Chand Sultana, who led her troops into battle to defend her kingdom against Akbar's invading armies, are not given their due in books of history.

Many Mughal princesses were excellent poets and writers. During the flowering of Sufism a large number of women mystics rose in most Muslim countries and came to be known for their learning and piety. They held discourses with men sufis and preached to the masses. Till today the tombs of women sufi saints in India draw crowds of devotees — both Hindus and Muslims.

Throughout history, notable personalities have been products

of their times. The turbulent eighteenth century threw up a number of military adventuresses and palace politicians.

In a decadent feudal age women usually made their mark when they gained power over men as charmers and entertainers. The courtesans and royal mistresses of France, the geishas of Japan, the "dancing girls" of India—all managed to exercise their influence in the royal courts. In the eighteenth century, during the break-up of the Mughal Empire, a number of "nautch girls" wielded political power.

The position of women deteriorated with the general decline of the East. When the Europeans began their "civilising mission" in India they only saw Hindu women as the victims of the custom of *suttee* and Muslim women as faceless members of the potentates' harems. Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh was the last of the breed of able queens and generals. The queen led her kingdom's army into battle during the revolt of 1857. Even after she was defeated she defied Queen Victoria's famous Proclamation and issued a counter Proclamation in which she asked a pertinent question: What had the administration of justice to do with a people's religion?

The defeat of the 1857 uprising had a traumatic effect on the Indian Muslims particularly in areas of the North. The final loss of political power in kingdom like Oudh stunned and embittered them to the extent that they began to hate the new order. The acquisition of English education was declared antinational and even an act of impiety. Moreover, during the heyday of missionary activities the question of sending Muslim girls to the newly established government and mission schools simply did not arise. The orthodox ulema's hold became stronger. Even the great reformer, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who opened the M. A. O. College at Aligarh in 1875, did not advocate the establishment of girls' schools.

Still, the leaders and reformers did realise the importance of women's education. Many enlightened aristocrats and men of the

professions engaged Eurasian or English governesses to teach their daughters at home. Exactly the same kind of development was taking place in Egypt, Iran, Turkey and other countries where the national leaders had started giving a modern education to their womenfolk. In their turn, these semi-Westernised upper-class, *purdah*-observing young women of India and the Middle East opened girls' schools in which they employed aged male teachers or they themselves taught. Because of the social eminence enjoyed by their parents and husbands these pioneers were in a better position to withstand social pressure or opposition mounted by the mullahs and the orthodox.

At the turn of the century the Muslim women of India entered national and literary life, almost with a bang. *Purdah* set them apart from other women of India, so they had to wage the war of liberation from inside the courtyard. In their demands for equality with men they were also equipped with the Muslim Personal Law. They only had to say: "Let us have the rights granted to us by the Quran and the Prophet." Not unexpectedly, they had to face stiff opposition from conservative men.

The Khojas and the Bohras—the mercantile communities of coastal India—were among the first to send their daughters to schools. The feudal North was the last to allow women modern education.

In 1896 Shamsul Ulema Maulvi Mumtaz Ali started from Lahore the epoch-making weekly journal for women, *Tehzib Niswan*. It was edited by his wife, Mohammedi Begum. From its very first issues it attracted a surprisingly large number of women writers. In 1908 the Maulana and his wife started the weekly *Phool* for children. It was edited by my mother, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, then a *purdah*-observing teenager who had been educated at home by European governesses. As Miss Nazrul Baqar, she also began to publish fiery articles in leading Urdu magazines and newspapers. She wrote reformist novels which came to be avidly and almost reverently read by a fast-growing female readership. She also wrote a number of children's books. Her aunt Akbari Begum's

reformist novel *Goodar-ka-Lal* (1907) was even included in the girls' dowries at the time of marriage. The publishers of *Phool* created an excellent body of children's literature, most of which were not mere translation or Indianised versions of European fairy tales.

All this happened more than 65 years ago

The contributors of *Tehzib Niswan*, living in the remote districts of the country, ardently wrote against the dowry system, superstitions, useless customs and expensive ceremonies. *These problems were shared by all Indian women.* The readers and contributors of the journal also consisted of some Urdu-speaking Hindu women, including women of the Nehru family.

The Muslim woman's awakening was truly remarkable. In 1907 Zubeida Khatoon Sherwania, a *purdah*-observing aristocrat of Aligarh, was writing mature, forceful poetry in which she evinced an amazing grasp of national and international politics. A Muslim woman barrister was practising at the Punjab High Court. Some women novelists had become best-sellers.

Literature and journalism soon became the domain of the Muslim women of India. As Urdu was the language of culture, even for some Muslim families of Bengal, it provided a forum for women to air their views.

The Muslim woman's penchant for writing had something to do with the Islamic culture in which the greatest importance was attached to precise written history, didactic and mystic poetry and *belles lettres*. Many women could read the Quran, often by rote, even if they could not read anything else. And they had always been acquainted with poetry.

It was during this period that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's friend and colleague, the poet Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali, rose as the champion of women. At the 1905 session of the All-India Muslim Educational Conference, he read out his powerful and stirring poem "*Chup ki Daad*" which has now become a classic. In this poem

he poignantly addressed the women of India and paid a moving tribute to their virtue, compassion and forbearance and the injustices they suffered in dignified silence at the hands of men. This poem created a sensation and became the Charter of Women Rights.

In 1906 Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, a young lawyer and former student of Sir Syed, opened the first English school for Muslim women in India. The Sheikh and his remarkable wife faced tremendous opposition even from the old-fashioned Hindu gentry of Aligarh. The Sheikh, however, went ahead and obtained the co-operation of Sarojini Naidu, Begum Abbas Tyebji, Lady Abdullah Suhrawardy, Lady Shafi, Nazar Sajjad Hyder, and Zehra and Ataya Fyzee. What was more, he received the patronage of Nawab Sultan Jehan Begum of Bhopal. The Begum was one of the most remarkable women produced by modern India. Three generations of Queens—mother, grandmother and great-grandmother—had ably reigned as the Ruling Chiefs of the State. Sultan Jehan Begum was an enlightened ruler and had the rare distinction of being appointed Chancellor of an Indian University. She served from 1920 to 1930 as the Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and provided leadership to men and women alike.

In 1908 Sheikh Abdullah also started the monthly journal *Khatoon* which advocated the abolition of *purdah*. During the same year Allama Rashidul Khairi began publishing the famous *Ismat* from Delhi. Rashidul Khairi was also a prolific writer who depicted the Muslim woman's problem and sufferings in his novel. Like *Tehzib Niswan*, *Ismat* also became a national institution. More magazines came out from different cities. Women now had a powerful press of their own.

Aligarh Muslim University, as well as the Nizam's Government, gave scholarships to women graduates to study in England. A number of English trained young women began working as lecturers, school inspectresses and doctors. Upper-class women continued to provide the leadership.

In politics the names of 'Ammanbi', mother of the Ali Brothers, and the Gandhian worker Bibi Amtul Salaam, became household words. The Muslim women of India were also greatly inspired by the modernised women of Kemalist Turkey. At home they were great admirers of Sarojini Naidu, called "Bulbul-i-Hind", the Nightingale of India.

A number of schools and colleges were opened across the country. The All-India Muslim Ladies Conference became active in the educational sphere. By the 1920s a considerable number of women had come out of *purdah*. Justice Karamat Hussain, a great benefactor of women, opened the Muslim Girls High School (now college) at Lucknow and the Crosswaith College at Allahabad

During the 1930s many women of the younger generation joined left-wing parties. Dr. Rashid Jehan was one of the co-authors of the explosive Urdu book *Angare*, banned by the Government of India in 1933.

During the late thirties Ismat Chughtai rose as a fire-eating writer of modern Urdu fiction. The romantic, polite woman novelist was soon replaced by the rebellious "social realist".

In 1936, Hijab Imtiaz Ali, the famous Urdu writer, also became the first woman pilot in India.

Women continue to enjoy their traditional eminence in Urdu literature. From the time the first woman novelist published her work during the 1880s, down to this day Muslim women have written thousands of novels. The number of short story writers has been legion. It is significant that the popular novels published in the various Indian languages today are not very different in style or content from the fiction churned out by women writers of Urdu of the earlier, less enlightened eras!

These women writers have the advantage of possessing a natural command over a highly expressive, sophisticated and lyrical language. The feminine style and diction known as Begmati Urdu,

or the language of the Begums, lent itself exceptionally well to literary forms.

Nevertheless, social reforms and educational activities remained confined to the urban middle classes. It is true that women succeeded in their agitation against the custom in Punjab where the Muslims traditionally followed the Hindu Law of inheritance and denied their daughters the one-third share in property as commanded by the Muslim Shariat. Also, *as a result of women's agitation the Shariat Act was passed in 1939, which safeguarded the women's right to obtain divorce.*

All Eastern society has been family-oriented. Within the joint family the mother and the senior female relatives usually exercise authority at least in domestic matters. Since marriage between cousins is allowed in Islam, Muslims usually marry within the family circle. Thus a daughter-in-law's position becomes doubly secure. In case of marital friction the entire family exerts pressure on behalf of the girl. The parents-in-law must look after her because she is also a blood relative. The husband must pay her the dower (fixed by law at the time of marriage) during her lifetime. She can realise it from his assets after his death. After her marriage she retains interest in her father's family and automatically inherits half her brothers' share in property.

Still, the picture is sometimes not as rosy as it seems. Despite the passage in 1939 of the Muslim Marriages Act, the stranglehold of social traditions, the inevitable vagaries of human nature, family troubles can create problems when it comes to women seeking divorce. Quite thoughtlessly, many Muslims do not stipulate conditions for a divorce in the *Nikahnama* or the marriage contract. Eventually, the woman suffers in case she wants to leave her husband.

Although the reform of Muslim Personal Law has now become an obvious political issue, the fact remains that some of the antiquated by-laws must be modified and discarded within the framework of the five major Schools of the Shariat.

The period of the Second World War coincided with rapid social change and Westernisation amongst the well-to-do. More women took part in politics. During the 1940s burqa-clad women came out in the streets shouting slogans for or against the demand for Pakistan.

With the Partition the Indian Muslims suffered a heavy setback. Most of the enlightened middle classes migrated to Pakistan. The abolition of Zamindari impoverished the old, aristocratic families that remained in India. Peasants, artisans and the lower middle classes, which now form the bulk of the Muslim population, were deprived of educated leadership. They also suffered from severe demoralisation and economic impoverishment and insecurity for a variety of political and socio-economic reasons.

During the last few years, however, a number of visible changes have occurred in Muslim society.

A new middle class is slowly emerging, made up mostly of business men. School and college education has become a routine affair even for lower-middle class girls. Daughters of clerks, peons and even cooks have become graduates. It is significant that amongst the Muslims of Maharashtra, Gujarat and South India who belong to prosperous mercantile communities and are more forward-looking than the Muslims of the feudal North, higher education for women has become almost commonplace. In Bombay alone the Muslims run a network of girls' high schools where, because of heavy attendance, classes are run in morning and evening shifts. In Madras Mr. Bashir Ahmed Sayeed and his wife have opened a girls' college which is one of the finest in India. The Muslim Girls' College, Aligarh, has expanded beyond all the dreams of its founders.

Muslims have had to face a peculiar problem after Partition. During the first two decades, most eligible bachelors migrated to Pakistan in search of employment. The parents of college-educated girls found it difficult either to get husbands or jobs for

their daughters. In recent years the situation has eased considerably. A large number of girls have also become lecturers, college principals, and office workers. Independent India has also produced some Muslim women who have distinguished themselves as scholars, educationists, barristers and lawyers, artists, musicians, etc. There is an eminent eye surgeon, a well-known Indo-Anglian novelist, stage directors and documentary film producers, a host of social workers and a number of national champions in badminton, table tennis, cycling, etc.

Women's emancipation continues to be class-oriented in all communities in India. Among the Muslims, too, girls of affluent Westernised families have become air-hostesses, fashion models, beauticians, boutique-owners, etc. For the middle and the lower class girls the only opening continues to be the ill-paid, overcrowded teaching profession. Leadership has not yet emerged from the under-privileged class. Deputy ministers, women attending the U.N. sessions or leading cultural delegations to foreign countries and holding high posts, still belong to the social elite.

The rural and the urban poor continue to live their traditional, often miserable lives. For instance, the *chiken* workers of Lucknow remain ruthlessly exploited by the middlemen. For the peasant women, workers in the cottage industries, millhands, housewives living in the slums, life is as dismal as ever. And yet, the poorest of Muslim women retain a certain pride and independence, which is quite remarkable.

Muslim women are as modern and as backward as their counterparts in the various income groups in other communities. This is a fact generally ignored or overlooked by our mass media while discussing the "Muslim Question". The various economic and sociological problems of the Muslim community cannot be isolated from the problems of the general backwardness and poverty of the Indian masses. Unfortunately, of late, an image and a stereotype has been created of the "backward Muslim community".

True progress and emancipation for the majority of Indian women—Hindu and Muslim alike—will come only with the country's overall progress and prosperity.

Tribal Women

Verrier Elwin

Dr. Verrier Elwin (1902-1964), Anthropologist and man of letters. Born in England, but spent most of his adult life in India. Lived and worked among the Indian tribes. Author of many books including: *Folk Songs of Chhatisgarh* (1946); *The Tribal Art of Middle India* (1951); *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (1953); and *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin.*

This essay is taken from the volume *Women of India* published by the Division in 1958.

Tribal Women

The most important thing about the tribal woman is that she is—a woman. I stress this because there is sometimes a tendency to regard the tribal people as though they were something altogether apart from ourselves, almost as if they were of a different species. It is important, therefore, to emphasise that the tribal woman is, in herself, exactly the same as any other woman, with the same passions, loves and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues.

Even her functions are often the same. A remarkable statement on the position of women in a semi-Hinduised tribal society was recorded from a Pardhan priest of Madhya Pradesh by Shamrao Hivale and reproduced in his excellent account of that tribe, the Pardhans of the Upper Narbada Valley.

> "In the course of a single day, a woman appears in many different forms. When she comes out of the house early in the morning with an empty pot on her head, she is a sight of ill-omen. Anyone starting on a journey or going for a betrothal decides not to travel on that day if he sees her, for in this form her name is Khaparadhari, an evil spirit carrying a broken bit of earthenware. But within a few minutes the woman returns with a pot full of water and now she is Mata Kalsahin, the best and most auspicious of goddesses. The Pardhan who sees her then is ready to worship her. He throws a pice into the pot and goes on his tour full of hope and with a singing heart.

"The woman reaches the house and begins to sweep the kitchen. . . . Now she is the goddess Bahiri-Batoran, who removes cholera from the village. But when she comes out to sweep the courtyard and the lane in front of her house, she sinks into a common sweeper-woman. In a moment, however, she changes again, for she goes into the cowshed and becomes Mata Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune.

"Now it is time to serve the family with food and again her nature changes and she becomes Mata Anna-Kuari, the goddess of grain.

"In the evening she has to light the lamps in the house and now she is Mata Dia-Motin, the goddess who shines like a pearl. This done, she feeds her child and gently fans him to sleep and as she does this she becomes Mata Chawar-Motin."

This could have been written, with suitable variations, of peasant women all over the world.

Where the tribal woman differs from her more sophisticated sisters is in the kind of life she lives, her position in society and the inevitable influence that this has had on the way she behaves.

Hard Life

The life of most of the tribal people in India is very hard. The majority of them live in mountainous and forest country. Until recently the normal amenities of modern life have been almost entirely denied to them. There have been few hospitals, no midwives, no child-guidance or family planning clinics, no creches for a busy mother to leave her child. In most tribal societies, the women not only do the work of the home, they also do a great deal of the work in the fields. In a Naga village in Assam, for example, a woman's life was in the past unbelievably arduous. With most of the menfolk organised for war, there fell on her the heavy burden of work in the jhums (clearings) on the steep slopes of hills often a long distance from the home. Her life was

shadowed by anxiety for her husband, sons and brothers and by fear for herself and children who might at any time be attacked by raiders in search of human heads. When she returned in the evening, she might have to climb down 500 to 1,000 feet to the nearest water-point, for most Naga villages are perched on the tops of hills. There was the food to cook, the rice-beer to brew, the grain to husk, the children to nurse and a husband to console and cheer. She was always busy, and when there was no work in the fields she busied herself with her loom, on which she wove beautiful and durable cloth.

In other frontier areas of Assam there was not the same danger from head-hunting, but in some parts the women were exposed to fear of kidnapping raids. They might be carried off into slavery; they were subjected to cruel punishments. The burden of fear has now been lifted by the advance of the administration, but the burden of arduous work remains.

It has been and it generally still is a hard life, but it is a full life and a happy one. There is the village community, a living organism, and the home so dearly loved. There are the mountains and the rivers winding among them. There are the treasures of the wind and sky and sun. There is beauty on every side—and these people love beauty very much.

It is on the whole a free life. It is impossible, of course, to generalise about a kind of people who number more than 20 million, but generally speaking the tribal woman enjoys a high and honourable place in society and goes proudly free about the countryside. She can speak her mind and often has considerable influence on village affairs. The wives and daughters of the great Wancho and Konyak Chiefs, for example, have many privileges, not least that of performing the ceremonial tattoo, often a successful raid or, today, some ritual substitute for it.

Right of Divorce

The tribal woman is not, generally, subjected to early child-

bearing. She is married when she is mature, and if her marriage is a failure (which it seldom is) she has the right of divorce. The lamentable restrictions of widowhood do not await her. Should her husband die, she is allowed, even enjoined, to remarry; and in many tribes she may inherit property. In the matrilineal societies of the Khasi and Garo Hills, and in the South, she has indeed a dominant position both for property and family affairs.

This freedom is not absolute. There are taboos on women at certain times, and there are things that they must not do. During menstruation and pregnancy there are many rules, based on magical ideas, which severely restrict their movements. Some tribal communities have complicated systems of relationships which govern matrimonial alliances, and while some allow boys and girls to marry for love at their own choice, others insist on arranged marriages, which can be as unsatisfactory as in any other part of the world.

But by and large the tribal woman has a wide freedom, which she seldom abuses. She can go to a bazaar, even by herself. She can visit her friends. She can dance and sing, especially before marriage, as she pleases. She can laugh and joke with men without reproach. Her freedom becomes naturally somewhat restricted after marriage, but even then she can be herself.

Alongwith her freedom and independence, another striking quality of the tribal woman is her courage. As I have said, she has a hard life to face. The very high rate of infant mortality means that she may see some of her babies die at once and other children grow thin and wretched until they suffer an early death. She feels the loss of her children just as much as any woman of the cities. She herself may have to face appalling pain and constant sickness. She may have to make long journeys over the most difficult mountains and through forests haunted by wild animals. In the days of inter-village wars she had to move about a countryside where at any moment she might be killed or kidnapped.

Yet these women faced all these difficulties and dangers, with little to help and support them, with the utmost courage. I remember a Gond woman, whose baby had been dragged into the jungle by a leopard, picking up an axe and attacking the ferocious animal single-handed, thereby saving the life of her child. I have seen women stand up to the even more dreaded antagonist, the police official of pre-independence days, and rout him with a mixture of wit and abuse. One of the bravest women I have known who was also one of the most beautiful was a Pardhan who showed her courage in another field. Her name was Satula and she was a leper. She was of a beauty so exquisite that the whole of Pardhan manhood was at her feet. She could have left her husband and married a young and well-to-do youth at any moment and no one would have condemned her. Yet she stayed with the old man, tending him devotedly, bathing his sores, bearing his continual grumbling and abuse, without complaint, without annoyance. When he died and set her free, she married a younger man with whom she had long been in love. But she was, as I have said, a leper and she herself died soon afterwards, but before her terrible disease had made much inroad on her beauty.

The tribal woman is indeed in many ways the equal, if not the rival, of the tribal man.

But this equality is modified by a curious inconsistency. Writing of the Uraons of Bihar, Mr. W. G. Archer observes that in the social organisation of this attractive and progressive tribe, "the principles of succession are male, the method of government is male, the salient offices are male. The men are by convention and tradition the social superiors of the women. But if this is the convention, it is only partly the fact. In Uraon villages, the actual relation is one of equality. It is as equals that the men and women dance, it is as equals that a wife and a husband order their family affairs and it is as equals that they work and live together. There is thus a stress between the formal structure of tribal life and the actual feelings and emotions which thrust upon it."

Land of Women

This stress may be observed throughout tribal India, and some interesting techniques have been devised to resolve it. For example, the women of some tribes have created the mythological fantasy of the Land of Women, a happy country which does not include a single man among its inhabitants—it is ruled by women and only girl-children are allowed to live. The women there conceive when the wind blows them and, it is said, they manage their affairs with great success and in the greatest happiness. Should any man by chance be so unfortunate as to enter their territory the women make him prisoner, sometimes turning him into a goat or a cat, and he has to work for them as their slave.

This legend is very old and there have been many attempts to locate this remarkable country. In Central India it is supposed to be in Assam, in Assam it is believed to be somewhere in Tibet. But whatever its geographical location there can be little doubt that it exists in every feminine heart.

A similar means by which tribal women compensate for all the wrongs they suffer from men is the custom which was called in Madhya Pradesh the Stiria-Raj, the Regimen of Women. From time to time, at regular intervals a woman would have a number of dreams revealing that the normal course of society had been reversed and that women were now to rule. She would then one day, inspired by a force stronger than herself, get up in the morning and put on male attire. She would tie a turban round her head and take a sword in her hand. Thus attired, she would go out and call on the other women of her village to accompany her. They would dress and arm themselves in the same style and then would go in procession first round their own village and then to all the villages in the neighbourhood. This band of women had the right to beat any man they could capture and take away any property they fancied from their menfolk. A man who was captured had to buy his freedom by the gift of a chicken or a pig. It often happened that as the band of women

went on their way they would excite the women of other places and a sort of chain-reaction would be started which might spread across hundreds of villages.

I have already quoted Mr. W. G. Archer on the psychological need which this fulfils. He goes on to describe the *women's hunt* among the Uraons and Mundas, which seems to have originated in a myth describing how a number of Uraon women dressed as men routed a Raja and his army which invaded their country.

> "The myth shows that although the men may rule, it is the women who are also men. In its reliance on the success of a simple trick, it expresses Uraon pleasure in native cleverness and under this typically Uraon cover it mildly pokes fun at male incompetence. The balance is, therefore, righted. The women are recognised to be the equals of the men.
>
> "The hunt, with its brusque reversal of roles, has the same effect. It demonstrates that the country is as much the women's as the men's. For a single exciting day it downs all masculine dominance. It gives the women a new boldness and, finally, through the element of transvestism, it clinches the excitement with a slightly sexual tinge. The women in the act of becoming men feel themselves profoundly female. As a result of this expression in playful pantomime, female resentment at male control is neutralised. The feelings, which if permanently repressed might cause danger, are dispersed. The women in the act of asserting their rights realise from their gawky actions that the claim is unreal; and in peals of laughter the stress is dissolved. The importance of the *women's hunt* is that, through simple symbolism, the tribe keeps its balance."

Another technique whereby woman asserts her position in a number of tribes ranging from Orissa to the North-East Frontier Agency is the institution of the priestess. This exists in its most fully developed form among the Saoras of Orissa, where in every

village will be found one or more women who are dedicated to the task of divination and the spiritual treatment of illness. Among the Saoras these women are known as Kuranbois and they have a most important part to play in tribal society.

Marriage with Spirit

A girl is initiated into her sacred duties by a series of dreams, in the course of which she believes that she is married to a tutelary spirit in the unseen world. This marriage does not usually bar her from marriage in this world, but it means a great deal to her and she believes that she can have spirit-children from her unseen but very real husband. Not only does he give her these children but he 'possesses' her from time to time and by his inspiration assists her in all the work she has to do. These Kuranbois are in great demand by the sick and they go to them, sit by them and try to discover what evil spirit or ghost is causing the disease. Once they have discovered this, they suggest to the male priest the sacrifices that are required.

A similar institution exists among some Abor groups in the North-East Frontier Agency, and throughout tribal India certain women are capable of 'inspiration': they fall into a trance and prophesy.

Here in fact is a body of women dedicated to public service and fulfilling that dedication with grace and energy. Here are women, believed to be vitally in touch with supernatural forces, on whom one can rely, who respond to the needs of the sick and have professional thoroughness and affectionate concern, for the priestess really does care about her patients and the happiness and well-being of the community.

The trial priestess is indeed an impressive and honourable figure. She lives a dedicated life on the boundary bewteen this life and the next. The mysterious other-world is more real to her than the coarse realities of earth. She establishes in the eyes of her fellows the priority of spiritual things. To the sick and lonely she

is nurse and friend, guide and analyst. To those whose lives are broken by tragedy she is often an angel of strength and consolation.

There are many other topics which may be considered, for even one woman can provide a life-time of study for a man. But what I have written here will suffice to illustrate the important place which women hold in tribal society. Protected by their innocence and their fidelity they move freely about the hills. They have an important role in festivity and funeral; they can more than hold their own with their men; they are free and self-reliant, respected and loved by their menfolk and adored by their children. Their life is full, interesting and satisfied.

Women of Rural Bihar

Olivia Stokes

Miss Olivia Stokes (b. 1951) was educated at schools in New York and Helsinki and at Yale University. She spent two years in India (1971-73), working among Harijan children in the jungles of Bihar.

The life of the inhabitants of Guriama, a Bihar village, has probably changed surprisingly little from the time of the Buddha, except that their physical environment has grown, if anything, harsher. Through centuries of deforestation, the luxurious jungles have given way to hot, dry plains, and the once mighty Nairanjana shrunk into a small seasonal river. As there are neither road nor rail connections, the village has remained a fairly isolated and self-contained unit.

Guriama is dominated by a small cluster of upper caste landlords of the Bhumihar group. In the surrounding area are small satellite villages inhabited almost entirely by Harijans. For centuries the relationship between the two communities was that of landlords and attached labourers. The Harijans were landless and had no choice but to till the land of the Brahmins in return for a small amount of grain.

In the early 1950s Vinoba Bhave and his workers were able to convince a few landlords of the area to donate some of their less used lands for redistribution among the landless. Most of the Harijan families of Guriama thus received between two and three acres of Bhoodan land. With this redistribution of land the seeds of social change were planted. However, in spite of the efforts of Sarvodaya workers in the area to assist the Harijans to develop their land and to recognise their inherent power as a community, progress has been slow.

The poverty of the area is serious. At the time of my study

there was no rain for the paddy, which also meant no work from the landlords. Many families were living on one meal a day consisting of weeds collected from the fields and boiled as a vegetable.

There are certain differences between the Harijan and upper caste Hindu women which are immediately apparent. In order to survive, the Harijan men and women alike must work hard from morning till night. Husband and wife become a team, sharing the work in the fields and sharing the household chores. As a result the women have no time to hide in inner courtyards, but are open and expressive, joking and mixing more freely. But what do these women feel about themselves and their work? How do they psychologically cope with their living situations and what values do they draw from them? In what areas of their lives do they find fulfilment, and where do they find frustration? How much freedom do they feel they are allowed by their family and community in their daily lives? What do they see as the primary restrictions on their freedom? Do they simply accept their present living conditions as 'what has to be,' or do they connect it to a concept of social injustice? As these questions are highly introspective by nature, I tried to approach the subject through the natural flow of a conversation between friends and avoided the stiffness of a formal interview. I believe that the women's answers to these questions paint a picture that is typical of many areas of rural India where the forces of social mobility have not yet come into full play.

Soherey Devi

The first time I entered the one room hut of Soherey Devi, I found only two children, aged about two and three, lying on a *chauki*, quietly sobbing in the mud-walled darkness. Both parents were out. No one knew where. The room, about 7 x 15 feet, was empty except for the one *chauki* and a few eating utensils.

A subsequent visit found Soherey plastering her walls with round cakes of cow dung to be dried and used for fuel.

Just after their marriage arrangements were made, she explained, her husband's parents died. Her husband has no brothers, and so he himself went to fetch Soherey from her father's home to celebrate the *ruksadi*.

Soherey's day begins at 4 o'clock, "First," she said, "I must wash the pots and sweep. Then I go to collect wood and cow dung for fuel and grass for the bullock. If there is food I cook a mid-day meal. If not, I just sit or sleep. It is easier just to sleep. Then I do not grow anxious when my children cry because they are hungry. In the afternoon I must go again to collect grass for the bullocks, and then if there is food I prepare the evening meal. If I am needed I work in the fields too. I must plant the paddy, spread the fertilizer, turn over the earth around the maize, and help in the harvest." She used to work for the landlord as well. But now with the children and no one but her to look after them she had to give it up.

Though men tackle the heavier jobs, she feels that the women do more work. But she has no complaint. "If I don't work then my children will die. My children only get food when I work."

Her husband sometimes goes to Gaya (about 15 miles away) to work as a mason's helper. The last time he went for ten days and all he brought back was an undershirt for each of the children. She felt bitter about this.

She feels that simple foods suit her family best, and she is more concerned with filling their hungry stomachs than feeding them nutritious foods. If they fall ill she calls the Ojha. For a headache she grinds the leaves of the neem trees the Forest Commission has planted and applies them to her forehead.

Would she like to learn to read and write? "No, now it would be a waste of time for me to study. What can I learn? It is better for me to spend my time working in the fields or earning some money to feed my family."

In the evenings she often joins the other village women to sit and talk. "They talk about how there is no rain, and how without water for our fields we shall all starve. Mostly they gossip and complain about their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. But I don't have any, and so I keep quiet."

She has no special friends. She says, "To have special friends only brings difficulties. If I have a good friend then she comes and asks for things. If I refuse because I don't have anything to give, then she will think I am cheating her and will start a quarrel."

She spoke highly of her husband. He is always ready to help her in her work, and he always consults her before making any important decisions.

"Does he drink?" I asked.

"If there is money in the house, then he drinks. If there is no money, he doesn't."

"What do you think about his drinking?"

"It is good. Then he is happy. He sings and he jokes with me."

Monita

"I was married once, before I came to Guriama," Monita confided one day. "I lived with my first husband in Medanpur. Then my husband died, leaving me with two small sons. After his death his family did not treat me well. They would not give me enough food to eat, nor buy me clothes to wear. What else could I do, but to return to my father's home? I wanted to take care of my two sons, but I was forced to leave them behind. My brother was visiting Guriama, and there he met Sidheshwar Bhagat (who was a widower with one married daughter). My brother arranged for our marriage, and then I came here to live.

Yes, it is better that I am here, but I am sad that I do not see my sons who are still living in my first husband's home. I did not want to leave my husband's home or to remarry, but I was poor and had no choice."

Rukmini

Rukmini is the *dai*, the village midwife. The village midwife is by tradition the wife of the *Mochi*, the leatherworker, and is a member of the Harijan group. As there is not enough work for all the wives of leatherworkers to practise midwifery, only certain ones are authorised. Well over a hundred years ago the exclusive right to practise midwifery in the Guriama area was given to Rukmini's husband's family by the caste panchayat. The right to practise as well as the necessary knowledge is passed down from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. The area of Guriama is divided into eight *tolas*, each *tola* containing 50 families. Rukmini has taken four *tolas* as her working area, and the daughter of her husband's brother has taken the other four. When Rukmini grows too old to practise, her daughters-in-law, assuming they all want to practise midwifery, will divide her four *tolas* among themselves as one would divide land. At present her daughters-in-law are learning the trade by observing when she makes a delivery. This is how she learned from her own mother-in-law.

Rukmini delivers the babies of Harijans and Brahmins, Hindus and Muslims at a rate of four or five babies a month. "I go to the home of the woman as soon as the pains start," she explained, "and I stay until the baby is born." First I massage the woman with oil. Then if there is any difficulty with the birth I gently pull the baby out. I cut the cord and bind it with thread. I clean the mucus from the baby's mouth so that it can breathe, and I wash the mother. Then I must massage the mother's stomach and bind it tightly in cloth to push it back into shape." Rukmini is highly confident of her skill. She claims that only four babies a year die in childbirth and not a single mother.

Her fee for a boy baby is four annas, 2½ Kg. Kachcha grain, one old sari, and one old blouse. Female babies cost half the price. "But these charges are much too little," she complains. "Often I must stay with a woman all day and all night, and I don't even get proper food. Now there is a strike in my case. (The Panchayat of her caste is trying to set higher fees for both the *mochi* and the *dai*). I am also having much difficulty with the *mukhia* (the village headman, farmer). I have delivered ten babies for his family, and now he refuses to give me a single weight of grain. 'I have already paid enough money to your husband for his services as a *mochi*,' he says, 'and since I am serving the village, the village should give me free services in return.' What he speaks are lies. I worked hard for him and I should be paid. When I went again at harvest time to get payment, he threatened to ask for the services of another midwife. How can he do that?

"Why, my right as the only midwife in these four *tolas* is just like the right to own land, and no one can steal these *tolas* from me."

She feels that now she is too old to learn to read or write, but had she learned when she was younger it would have helped her in her present work. "Then I would bring medicines from Gaya and serve the village as a nurse."

I asked if she was familiar with Family Planning. She had not heard of it, but she said, "So many women come to me and touch my feet, begging for a medicine which will stop them from having more children. I do not know of any such medicine, but it would be wonderful if there was one. If a woman does not have any children then I massage her stomach in such a way that children will come. If I am successful, the woman is very happy. She pays me extra and gives a new sari...I know how to make children come, but not how to stop them."

Rukmini is proud of her strong position in the household. "I keep all the family's money myself," she said. After consulting

her husband she deputes her son to do the marketing. She sees two reasons for her influence. "My husband and I have a good relationship, and so he wants to consult me about everything. Also I am earning money and grain for the family and so my opinion must carry weight." She thinks that the other women of the village do not have as much freedom as she has. She said, "I have more power and less hesitation to speak than other women. If I don't get paid enough I go and fight for what is due to me, and I will argue with men as well. The other women suffer from a sense of inferiority, because they are not earning. They are frightened to speak and to make decisions."

"Are you treated with equal respect in every house to which you are called?" I asked.

"No, in the landlord's house I am ordered about and treated like a servant. But in the poor family's house I am treated well and respected."

"Do the other village women speak badly of you because you talk to men and spend the night in other people's houses?"

"No, for they know that I do it because it is my work. The village women all praise me. They say that I have a good nature because I am always laughing and smiling."

Bedimia

Bedimia is a very clever, forceful woman in her mid-forties with whom I held many interesting conversations.

Until they received Bhoodan land her husband was a *kamia*, an attached servant, working for the landlord in return for his father's marriage expenses. Bedimia feels that the landlord greatly exploited him. She says he did not give him sufficient food and used to abuse him. She still feels bitter. When food is short she sometimes goes for a day or two to work in the landlord's fields, but she does not like it. "What is the point of working

all day in the fields of the landlord for a little grain," she says, "when I should be eating the grain out of my own fields?"

Her husband, bent by years of service to the landlord, is a weak and timid man. Bedimia has always played the leading role in the household and has in fact handled the family business matters with shrewdness. It is she who bargains with the money-lender, and it is she who secured the Bhoodan land while her husband's younger brothers were away in Calcutta, thus preventing them from receiving a share.

I once asked Bedimia to describe the 'ideal wife'.

"She is willing to work both in the house and outside in the fields," she replied. "She feeds people well, and she doesn't start any arguments in the home or among the neighbours."

"What is the difference between your life and the life of a high caste woman?" I asked.

"In the higher castes the women have no work. They bring in labourers to grind the grains and spices, to bring the water, and to do the washing. They never go out to work in the fields. And so they spend their days fighting with each other and with their jealousies they cause the breakup of the joint family."

"Then whose life is better, hers or yours?"

"We are poor and hungry. Our life is worse because we are always anxious and can never rest. They have food and need never worry, and so for them it is better. But they fight with each other and that is bad."

"If you were to get rich would you then spend your life as you say a high caste woman does?"

"No, the 'duty' of the upper caste woman as decided by God is just to sit, and so they sit. But we are Bhuniya, and God planned

our caste differently. Our 'duty' is to work, and so if you make us rich we will not sit. We shall continue to go out for work and shall try to become still richer."

The Mukhia's Mother

The old woman crossed her eyes and sat perplexed for a moment, as though she had never been asked such an obvious, yet confounding question. "The reason we must live under *purdah*," she then replied, "is to protect us from the gossip of the lower caste women." The younger women all let out a sigh of relief that such an easy answer had been found. As I looked about the tiny courtyard with its great wooden gate and ten adjoining rooms, I saw that they were indeed well protected. None but the unmarried are permitted to leave the outer gate, and very few outside visitors enter in.

The old woman is the *mukhia's* mother and, as I quickly realised, is the queen of the inner court. In that tiny space four generations of women must play out the entire drama of their lives. "But once or twice a year we are taken to Gaya in a curtained carrier," one of the younger women, perhaps sensing my reaction, quickly added. "And in Gaya we are free to lift the *purdah* and may even visit the bazaar so long as we do not mix or speak to anyone. No one knows us there, so there is no danger or gossip." These women belong to the household of the very wealthy and powerful *mukhia* of Guriama, a Bhumihar Brahmin with a land-holding of 600 acres.

She plays a major role in the management of the entire household. "I, my husband, and our eldest son together decide on the management of the land, the giving of loans, the marketing, marriages, and all other matters," she proudly told me. She also acts as a liaison between the women of the household and the men. If the women need something for themselves or the children, if one of them is sick, or should they have any other difficulty, they go to the old mother who reports the case to the men. The women would never themselves go directly to the men, nor would

the old mother ever discuss family business affairs in front of them. "This is exactly how things ought to work," and the younger women all agreed.

When I asked the old mother how she got along with her many daughters-in-law, she let out a tirade of good-natured complaints against the 'lazy bunch'. "They never want to work, to cook food, or to watch their own children," she complained. "I have to do everything while they spend the entire morning from 6 a.m. to noon bathing and oiling themselves, combing their hair, making up their faces, and trying to look beautiful."

In fact the women have no work other than to watch the children and cook the food. One servant comes to sweep, another to bring the water and wash the dishes, and still another to grind the spices and prepare the vegetables for cooking. The laundry is sent to the *dhobi*.

The *mukhia's* daughter-in-law has been educated up to the tenth class. She is the only woman in the family to have received an education and is proud of it. "A girl must be educated in order to find a good match these days," she claimed. "And an education helps her to look after her children's studies, to know more about the ways of society, and to improve the social status of her family." Apart from education she thought that the essential qualities of the good wife were that she knows how to speak and behave properly, and that she should be good looking. (The latter had never occurred to any of the low caste women.)

While the *mukhia's* mother and his daughter-in-law spoke with reserve, the other women would do no more than blush, or nod in approval of their comments. Unlike the lower caste women, all of them appeared shy and embarrassed by my questions.

Anvaunisa

When I went to visit Anvaunisa, a Muslim woman of about thirty, I found her seated in her kitchen with a group of other

women. The old Muslim widow, Rahimun Khatun, had her grandson sucking at her breast. She obviously had no milk. It was just to soothe the child, as in the West we might use a dummy. Then Rahimun began to playfully scold the young women. She told me that they always leave her with their babies while they go off to massage their husbands and enjoy themselves. She suggested that I warn Anvaunisa to stay away from her husband as she was having too many children.

Anvaunisa's husband works in Calcutta, and she has visited him there several times. She wants very much to live there permanently with her husband. However, it is very expensive, and it would be difficult to find housing and food for her family. To find work is nearly impossible. She had thought of working as a maid servant, but her husband does not approve of her washing someone else's dishes or cooking someone else's food.

She was fascinated by the life of the city. She described how free the women were, how they wore whatever they pleased, and some wore only pants and tight-fitting blouses! And not only that; they married according to their own liking, which she thought was wonderful. Then she nudged me in the ribs and said that some waited until they had a boy inside them and then married. "I cannot afford expensive entertainment such as the cinema," she said, "but I enjoy what is free." I like just to walk down the big streets and see all the different kinds of vehicles. I visit the zoo, the parks and the fountains. Once I even went for a boat ride on the lake. In the city the women are free to do as they like. I would like that freedom. There is much to be enjoyed in Calcutta, but you need money. Calcutta was not made for poor people. I could leave the *dehati* fashion and adopt the city fashion, but it needs money." She pointed out that Calcutta had already changed her style of dress. She used to wear only long-sleeved blouses, but now she is wearing short-sleeved ones.

When she visited Calcutta she stayed in the house of her husband's employer. She never saw the house where her husband lives, but she knows that it is only a tiny mud hut with one

room which he shared with seven other men.

The women interviewed have all expressed quite different ideas on their living environment, but there are several notes which ring clearly throughout. The women feel helpless to improve their present living conditions, but are not passively resigned to accept them wholly either. They are in fact often very perceptive in their understanding of the social evils which surround them. They have a yearning for freedom, a will to express themselves, to find fulfilment through their work.

The creative and productive potential of these women is a resource which should not be allowed to be wasted.

Village Women of Rajasthan

G. Morris Carstairs

G. Morris Carstairs (b. 1916), Professor of Psychiatry, University of Edinburgh, has published *The Twice-Born* and *This Island Now*.

Village Women of Rajasthan

In January 1950, I visited a number of localities in Marwar, Ajmer-Merwara and Mewar, seeking a small village inhabited predominantly by Rajputs, where I could settle down for some time in order to study the people, carry out personality tests and observe the upbringing of children. My search ended in a hamlet, or *baria*, called Sujarupa, in the northern extremity of Mewar State. This hamlet of twenty-five mud and stone-walled houses, roofed with home-made tiles, became my home for the next six months, and I gradually came to know each of its households fairly well.

It was not long before I discovered that my hosts were not true Rajputs, as they had at first assured me, but instead were "make-believe Rajputs". That is, they were a section of the Rawat community, found over many parts of Rajasthan, who had collectively decided to come up in the world by adopting many Rajput customs, while trying to divest themselves of some former Rawat practices (such as widow remarriage, and the eating of buffalo-meat). For my purpose, having stumbled upon a community in transition, was quite advantageous, because they were more self-consciously aware of many aspects of "correct behaviour" than might have been the case with a more stable community, wedded to age-old unquestioned rules of behaviour.

Frequently, I encountered instances where the Rawats' process of "Sanscritisation" of their old customs was still imperfect. For example, these "Rawat-Rajputs" were now all farmers, although their forefathers of only a few generations earlier had been bow-

and-arrow warriors, like their neighbours, the Bhils and Minas of the Aravali Hills. In keeping with their Rajput identification, the Rawat men no longer used bows and arrows, but carried a sword; and yet during their funerary ceremonies after a death one found that symbolic bows and arrows were used to ward off dangerous spirits. Again, I found that several of the older men had taken widows as their first or second wives, though the practice was now formally abjured.

The womenfolk, like the men, tried to model their behaviour on that of the Rajputs, but with only imperfect success. This was doubly helpful, because it drew attention to their lapses from Rajput norms and because if they had been strict in their observance of *purdah*, my inquiries would have been correspondingly more restricted. As it was, many weeks had to pass before the women of Sujarupa became bold enough to talk freely when a group of them were alone with me. At first, whenever I encountered them, they would hide their faces under their head-clothes, or turn aside, while their voices (which had been strident enough a moment earlier) would fall to a barely audible whisper.

Gradually, the young women belonging to Sujarupa village itself began to leave their faces uncovered in my presence, a sign that they were coming to regard me as one of the community of village men and hence related to their family of origin, before whose male members a daughter of the family does not need to observe such restrictions. In time, even the older women and the young brides who had come to Sujarupa to live with their husbands' families, also began to treat me as a familiar "in-law".

The contrasting behaviour of these two groups became still more evident during the last three months of my stay, following the weddings of two of our young people, Moti Singh and Dakhu, son and daughter of Hama Singh, to a sister and brother belonging to the village of Togi, twenty miles away. Both Moti Singh and Dakhu were good informants, sharing with me the excitements of anticipation of their weddings which were, needless to say, major events in our village in that spring of 1950.

Dakhu, who was barely 16 and a spirited tomboy, carried out the ceremonials preceding her wedding in a somewhat rebellious fashion; more than once I heard her rebuked for interjecting a bawdy remark or one of the obscenities which frequently peppered the villagers' conversation, into a ritual intended to propitiate the guardian spirits of the village. Later, on her frequent return visits to Sujarupa, she taught me the significance of the familiar saying: "gaon men *chori*, pargaon men *ladi*". As a young bride (*ladi*) in a village which was still a strange place to her, she was often homesick for her home village, and for her carefree life as a girl-child (*chori*) of her extended family.

Until this time, which was half-way through my stay in Sujarupa, I had been impressed by the apparent submissiveness, if not actual servitude, of our village women. Every morning, before sunrise, I would wake to the sound of heavy grindstones as the women of each house ground wheat or millet for the day's chapaties. All day, I would see them busy, not only with the housework, and the care of children, but also in the fields, helping their men; and yet whenever I called at one of their huts, it was always the man of the house with whom I spoke, while his wife bustled about in a silence which was broken only by an occasional whisper, or an expressive—and usually negative—click of the tongue.

Even in the early months, several of my male informants warned me that their women could be quite strongminded beneath their submissive demeanour, and that they were very good at getting their own way. This was one of the many hints of an underlying tension between the sexes; another was the prevailing obsession with female witchcraft, which was much more prevalent than the occasional fear of sorcery employed by a male rival or enemy. At first, I found it almost inconceivable that these meek, seemingly unassertive women could be seen as powerful agents of the supernatural; but on 7 March, 1950, I witnessed a scene which revealed them in a rather different light.

On that evening, I had returned from Togi village after having

travelled there with the *barat* and taken part in the first two days of Moti Singh's wedding festivities. Most of the able-bodied men of Sujarupa were still there, although four older ones had remained behind, as had all the women. The moon was nearly full, a time at which children often played noisy games far into the night; but this time it was a noise of women's voices which aroused my curiosity. The time was between 10 and 11 p.m. On leaving my hut to investigate, I found a company of about twenty women and girls assembled in the lane outside Hama Singh's house; the bride-to-be, Dakhu, was also among them. One of them beat a rhythm on a brass tray, while the others sang obviously ribald parodies of formal wedding songs.

A mock wedding was being enacted, with one young woman dressed as the groom, carrying a sword. She was the more conspicuous because her white *angarkhi* and *dhoti* contrasted with the dark red *ghagras* and *ornas* worn by all the other women except one, also dressed in man's clothes. At first I took this to be Pitha Singh, the oldest man in Sujarupa, and a crotchety old fellow, with an explosively violent temper; but later I recognised that it was Uma, wife of Hari Singh and mother of Dakhu, who was performing a parody of this gruff mannerism. Other women, not in men's clothes, parodied the parts of the officiating Brahmin, the barber and the *dhobi* as the mock wedding proceeded, punctuated by fits of laughter.

Three men of the village joined me as spectators. Udha Singh said to me: "Their husbands are away, that is why they are playing games and having fun. Last night they played many games; now they will do some dances, and there will be a lot of fun."

When the "wedding" was over, the two in men's clothes changed into their normal costume, and after a good deal of chatter they all formed a ring, with Puran Singh's wife in the centre, dancing to the rhythm of a tune which the others sang in chorus. This was quite unlike the demure, formal, heavily-veiled dances which we had seen on previous evenings, when the menfolk were at home—proper "pre-wedding" dances, appropriate

to the season, which the men and boys liked to watch, while pretending to take no interest. Here, Puran Singh's wife freely showed her face and danced with great vigour, with sweeping gestures of her arms. She carried a rag doll, sometimes nursing it, sometimes waving it in her extended arms, sometimes putting it to one breast, and then the other. The theme of her dance was eloquent enough: an outpouring of a mother's resentment at her enslavement to her male child. At the climax of each long, chanted verse, she would sing to the other women "Who shall I give him to?" and they would suggest, in turn "To aunt, to uncle, to grandmother" and so on, at which she would throw the doll violently away, only to have it retrieved and thrust back into her hands, to begin the dance again. At a pause after several such verses, I heard women whisper and giggle, and though I caught the word "Sahib" and sure enough, when she asked again "Who shall I give him to?" the chorus came: "Give him to the Sahib" and the rag doll came flying in my direction.

Another dance followed, in which two young women mimicked the gestures of *darzies* (tailors) sitting at their work, and then another in which the dancers swung their arms round and round, to represent a spinning wheel, and then one in which the dancers imitated pouter pigeons. Next, a "sweeper-dance" was proposed, and someone brought a hand-broom; but one of the older women said: "No, this isn't the time to be sweeping". So they gossiped for a while, and then struck up another dancing song. They were still at it at midnight, when I returned to sleep, still hilarious, noisy and full of animation.

Next day, the wedding party returned from Togi, and the women of Sujarupa resumed their normal demure behaviour; but I felt that I had been shown a glimpse of a quite different side of their nature, one rarely given free expression. What struck me particularly, in recollection, was that this midnight spree had been one in which all the women had joined, from the young unmarried girls of the village to the old grandmothers. This was, therefore, an expression of feelings which all the women shared, although they could seldom be so openly declared.

Slum Women of Bombay

Susan N. Mody
and
Sharayu Mhatre

Susan N. Mody (b. 1949), teacher of Primary School English, Anjuman-i-Islam school for Girls, Bombay, was born and educated in the U.S. She has done educational work among women and children in the slums.

Miss Sharayu Mhatre (b. 1942) is a research assistant in the Department of Sociology, Bombay University, working on *Social change in 19th century Maharashtra* for a doctoral degree.

The women interviewed in this study live in one of the sprawling Bombay slums which seem an inevitable part of urbanisation in India and are so familiar to urban dwellers. The slum to which these women belong is mostly inhabited by Maharashtrians; 53 per cent are Hindus, 16 per cent Muslims, 8 per cent Christians and 23 per cent neo-Buddhists. (The neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra belong to the Mahar caste. The members of this caste are untouchables, who followed Dr B. R. Ambedkar in a mass conversion to the Buddhist religion.) They represent different ages and communities.

There are approximately 750 women to every 1,000 men in this slum. The majority of these women are in the age group 35-55. Literacy is almost nil for the women over 35, whereas in the 5-14 age group, 47.2 per cent are literate. In the 15-24 age group, 39.5 per cent and in the 25-35 age group, 29.5 per cent are literate. Only 12.3 per cent of the female population is employed. Of the age group 15-54, only 18 per cent are employed.

Type of work	*Percentage distribution of the working women*	*Average income in rupees*
Semi-skilled	20	80
Unskilled	30	62
Domestic	27.5	27
Petty Shopkeeping	15	28
Miscellaneous	7.5	25

Janabai

Janabai gives her age as 45. Though she appears much older, her tiny frame is erect and strong. Each of her arms bears two dozen green bangles and is covered with tattoos in decorative geometrical patterns. She refers to these as the only thing she will carry with her into death.

A neo-Buddhist, she was born in a village in Satara District, Maharashtra. She first came to Bombay as a child with her family but returned to the village when the family decided that their land offered a more secure income than urban employment. She never took part in the actual tilling of the land, but spent her time in the home. She was one of eleven children, but only three survived—Janabai and two older brothers. She never went to school. She says she would have liked to, but in those days girls were not sent to school.

Her marriage was arranged when she was about 12 years old. Her husband, a farmer of the same religion, paid a bride-price of Rs. 60. They remained in the village, Janabai giving birth to two sons. They left the village about twenty-five years ago because of an incident in which her husband, returning from the fields one day, stepped on a snake, which bit his chappal. He wound the snake around his umbrella and threw it into a nearby tree. The legend goes that a snake, once harmed, remembers the injury and seeks revenge. A month later they were disturbed in the house by the 'noises of a cock'. The neighbours said the snake had come to take the revenge, and Janabai advised her husband to leave the village to escape the snake. They decided to come to Bombay, and settled in the slum, where the husband's mother and brother were living. After one year, they moved into the room where they are now living.

They did not have to pay any 'pugree' for their room, which is about 8 feet by 10 feet, with an enclosed verandah of about 4 feet by 6 feet. The interior room, which is used as a kitchen-cum-washing area, is dark and sparsely furnished with one small

barred window close to the ceiling. The verandah, slightly more cheerful as it receives the daylight from a large front window, contains a small bed, a sewing machine which belongs to the community at large, several photographs, including large ones of Nehru and John Kennedy, and Janabai's eldest son's Wireman Apprentice certificate. They paid Rs. 600 to have water and electricity installed inside the house.

Janabai's children are almost all grown up now. In addition to the two sons born in the village, she has three sons and three daughters. One son died in infancy. The three daughters are all married and live separately. All three were sent to school. Janabai's eldest son, who is the only child to have completed the S.S.C. is also married and has one child. He and his family live with Janabai and her husband, as do the four unmarried sons. The youngest son, aged 14, is still in school; the other three have all left school, but have not found jobs. One son suffers from epilepsy and is under treatment.

The eldest son and Janabai's husband provide the family income. She says both work for a transport company which deducts Rs. 200 monthy from their salaries and supplies the family with provisions. Janabai manages the rest of the income, pays the rent (Rs. 10 per month), and runs the household. Most of her time is occupied with cooking, cleaning, washing, and looking after the ten hens she keeps for eggs and breeding. Although she sold vegetables in the market at one time, she now feels tied to the house as her daughter-in-law 'cannot cope' with the work on her own. This daughter-in-law, who was married to Janabai's eldest son at the age of eighteen, comes from Janabai's village and studied there upto seventh standard. Now she rarely goes out and seems to be entirely in the background in the household. Neighbours say she is often beaten by her husband. He has a mistress in a nearby tenement and thus neglects his wife even further.

Janabai is worried about her husband's health. He has been short-tempered and hard of hearing lately. She thinks something is wrong with his head. He has been taking shock treatment at a

local hospital, which seems to help, but the family must bear the expense. They fear retrenchment if they apply for medical assistance from the employer; the company does not know of this illness.

Janabai's social life consists of a visit to her married daughter in Colaba once a month, and the occasional community function. She does not see films, but listens to the radio for news and music. She returns to her village once every 4 or 5 years.

Although she feels it is necessary for women to work outside the home to meet the rising cost of living, the problem of caring for the children remains unsolved.

One of Janabai's sons is supposed to be the re-incarnation of her husband's father, as he was born at the same time that the old man died. They must, therefore, treat him with special respect. If she should beat him, her arms ache until she begs his forgiveness. He will be married soon, and Janabai is looking forward to the arrival of her new daughter-in-law to free her from the household. She wants to return to selling vegetables in the market place.

Shevanti

Shevanti is twenty-two. A Hindu of the Dakshini caste, she is attractive and animated and has an air of self-assurance about her, voicing her opinion with conviction. Originally employed as a domestic servant, she found this type of work distasteful and left it. While looking for another job, she did various kinds of handiwork—embroidered handkerchiefs, woven table-mats, and so forth, to get an income. After more than a year of unemployment, she found her present job in a ready-made garments factory. She earns Rs. 100 per month.

Shevanti was born in a village in Satara District, Maharashtra. Her mother, with the mother's brother, was a joint owner of some land. Because of friction between them, Shevanti's family came to Bombay. Shevanti was five years old at that time. She says her

father was in the military and the family stayed in army housing at Colaba for some time. Later, they moved to Sion, and recently to the slum where they purchased a room for Rs. 1,100.

The room is about 10 feet by 10 feet and is sub-divided to provide a separate area, which is rented out to another family. Shevanti's newly married brother, sister-in-law and sister also live with Shevanti and her parents. A long shelf holds tins of grain and foodstuffs, and in one corner there is a makeshift table with some books on it. The family paid Rs. 13 for an electric connection. They have no water tap, however, and must pay 25 p for every *ghada* of water brought from outside. They use a public latrine.

Shevanti never went to school, but has taught herself to read and write Marathi. She also speaks fluent Hindi, unlike most of the women in the area. She regrets not having had any formal education because it restricts her employment opportunities.

When Shevanti was twelve, a marriage was arranged for her with a Hindu boy of the same caste. He was a matriculate and lived in Bombay. According to tradition, Shevanti retured to her parents' home after five days with the husband. Her brother intervened at this point to encourage her not to return to her husband, who was, he said, shiftless and a good-for-nothing. The parents were persuaded that the marriage had been a mistake and a divorce was obtained after a year. Today, Shevanti is accepted as any unmarried girl; not many people know of the marriage. However, the neighbours criticise her for remaining single. Shevanti defends her position by saying that she supports herself and is not a financial burden on anyone. She is not concerned about getting married, but says she would consider marriage if she knew a suitable man.

Shevanti works from 7 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., six days a week. Her mother, younger sister and sister-in-law manage the household work, but Shevanti makes many of the decisions. She spends half her salary on provisions and sets half aside for other expenses. Her brother also works in a nearby factory. Her father has now

retired. At present her mother has a temporary job in Kuwait as a domestic servant. Shevanti says she is well paid.

Shevanti spends her free time visiting friends and doing handiwork. She is eager to join a local badminton club, but this would mean getting home as late as at 10 o'clock in the night. The neighbours would talk about her, she says. She rarely sees films because she does not like them. She reads Marathi newspapers and borrows magazines from a local library. She enjoys listening to the radio, especially to Marathi dramas, but rarely gets her choice of programmes.

Poverty is responsible for the parents' inability to provide for their children, she says. She thinks that the parents must be educated to be able to make correct decisions for their children.

Shevanti says that women must work outside the home, not only because it is necessary to provide extra income, but also to avoid being dependent on anyone else. She is proud to be self-supporting, and thinks that the only way to combat the rising cost of living is for each individual to seek employment. Shevanti's chief ambition is to organise embroidery classes to teach other women 'a marketable skill'.

Lucy

Lucy is a twenty-seven-year old widow, a Roman Catholic, who lives with her four children and a man in a room in the slum. The room is 8 feet by 10 feet with a tin roof. The walls have turned black from the kerosene fumes from the primus stove. In one corner of the room, there is a wall about two feet high which encloses an area of 2 feet by 2 feet. This is the *mori* which is used for bathing and cleaning utensils. A clothes line hangs between two walls. On this are hung the washed clothes. There is an iron bed in one corner. A broken-down wooden cupboard stands against the wall. The only light that comes into the room is from a small barred window high up on the back wall. Lucy does not have electricity, since she cannot afford to

pay for the electrical connection. She obtained a water tap inside the room after paying a fee.

Lucy's whole life has been spent in this room. Her mother left their village near Nasik after separating from Lucy's father and came with her son to the slum. Lucy was born in this room, which her mother bought for Rs. 150. The mother supported the two children by doing domestic work. Lucy attended a municipal school in the area. When she was in the fifth standard, her brother, who was working in the Railways, was killed in a train accident. Lucy had to leave school and she became a domestic servant.

Her deceased brother's wife and son lived with Lucy and her mother. The wife took a job in a local hospital and left the child in Lucy's care. She also made advances to a neighbouring bachelor, but he rejected these since she was a widow. The sister-in-law retaliated by spreading a rumour that he was having an affair with Lucy. To scotch this rumour, he married Lucy, who was then sixteen. She did not like the idea, but accepted it as the only way out of a difficult situation. The sister-in-law later remarried, but left her son to be raised by Lucy. He is now 18 and tills some family land in their village. He does not send money to Lucy.

Lucy's husband, also a Roman Catholic, was employed as a peon in the Railways. He died two years ago at the age of thirty-five of meningitis, a disease common in the slum. Lucy's four children range in age from six years to one month, and for a while she sold vegetables in the market to help support her children. However, she found it difficult to manage this job as well as care for the children; she gave up the job.

Now that the children are slightly older, Lucy is desperately looking for a job—any job, she says. The Provident Fund she received after her husband's death was spent on the funeral and repayment of old debts. She now receives a pension of Rs. 64 per month. This is supplemented by Rs. 25 per month from Lucy's church. She has enclosed the small verandah in front of her room

and rents it out for extra income.

A Muslim man from U.P. lives with Lucy. He earns two to four rupees daily, selling fruit. Lucy says that this is not a reliable source of income. She puts in the capital and he does the selling. He seems attached to Lucy and her children, but Lucy feels it is not right for her, as a widow, to have any personal happiness.

Lucy cooks only one meal a day. She says she cannot afford more than this and makes chapatis and occasionally a dal or a vegetable. Usually, the chapatis are eaten with tea. She and her children look under-fed and wear badly tattered clothes. Her daughters, aged 6 and 8, help her cook and clean the utensils.

Lucy spends her whole day in the house. She has gone out of Bombay only twice in her life—once to Virar with her husband, and once to Nasik to visit her father. She has not been out socially since her husband's death. She likes films, but cannot afford to see them. Sitting on the nearest suburban railway platform or at a nearby church seems to be her only recreational activities.

Lucy's neighbours treat her as a social outcast. Most mothers are reluctant to send their daughters to her house. They comment on her going out alone, and frown upon her relationship with the man she lives with. Recently, her daughter fell into a pot of boiling rice and ghee. The neighbours accused Lucy of trying to get rid of her children because her husband was dead. Lucy reports this sadly and shrugs her frail shoulders.

She mentions frequent incidents of wife-beating in the slum and suggests that, rather than take such treatment, women should support themselves and their children on their own. She thinks that employment for women is inevitable for economic reasons, but says that they must be relieved of a part of their household work.

Educating her children seems to be Lucy's sole aspiration for the future. She laments her own lack of education, which

hampers her employment prospects, and does not want her children to suffer the same fate. However, her meagre income makes this a difficult task. Her eldest daughter, who had to discontinue school after her accident, has still not gone back to school.

Kalyani

Kalyani lives in a room 5 feet by 8 feet with her husband and three children, aged 10 years, 2 years and 4 months. This room serves as the kitchen, bedroom and sitting room. A corner of the room provides a *mori* for washing and bathing.

Two pregnancies in quick succession and an accidental knee-injury during her last pregnancy have left Kalyani in a very poor state of health. Her whole day is spent in cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children. Their cramped living conditions and her poor health make this work particularly burdensome to Kalyani. Her husband, who works as a welder in a factory, is away from home from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., six days a week. His long working hours involve considerable overtime. He cannot find time to take Kalyani to the hospital for a follow-up treatment of her knee injury. He was advised to have a vasectomy after her latest delivery because she was so weak. However, he cannot take leave from his job, as he is not yet confirmed.

They came to Bombay about two years ago, from Calcutta. They left their home town because her husband lost his job there. He now earns Rs. 300 a month—about Rs. 100 per month more than previously.

Kalyani studied upto the Intermediate Science, and was working in a Family Planning Centre before her marriage. She says her marriage, arranged by her parents, put a stop both to her education and her employment because of objections from her mother-in-law and her husband. Her husband used to drink excessively and generally behaved badly, Kalyani says. They have been married now for 11 years, and Kalyani claims that there has been some gradual improvement in her husband's behaviour.

Her husband gives a different version of their marriage. He says that she was married before and that it was her first husband who drank heavily and used to beat her. He says that he was living with Kalyani and her first husband as a paying guest. The husband accused him of having an affair with Kalyani and threw her out of the house. He then took her in and married her. He claims her oldest son is not his, but of the first husband.

Kalyani's poor health and two very young children greatly restrict her social life. She cannot walk very much because of her painful knee. At home, her husband does not like her to join him and his friends in their conversations. She likes to read, but finds no time away from the children.

Kalyani also mentions wife-beating as a widespread problem in the slum. Complaints from the mother-in-law are generally responsible for these beatings, according to Kalyani. The men also drink heavily and then vent their frustrations on their wives. The beatings are often severe, resulting in broken bones and mutilated faces. Kalyani has herself spoken to some men in the area about this, but they say they must act when their mothers complain. It is not uncommon, she says, for the women to be actually turned out of the house. In such cases, the neighbours usually exert pressure on the family to make them settle their quarrels.

Kalyani favours women's employment. Most family quarrels are over money, she says, and extra income would help considerably. She sees household problems and social attitudes as the main obstacles to the woman who wants to work outside the home.

Christine

Christine is a lovely young girl of 13 who is engaged to be married to her first cousin. This marriage was arranged at Christine's birth. Her family is Roman Catholic, and their church does not permit a girl's marriage until she is 16. So the family is exerting pressure on the church to permit the marriage, and they

are likely to succeed.

Christine studies in the 7th standard in a municipal school. She likes school and wants to continue her education. She is reluctant to get married at this stage, but seems resigned to it if the family succeeds in persuading the church.

Christine lives with the nine other members of her family in a room about 8 feet by 10 feet. They have lived in this room since her parents came to Bombay from a village near Ahmednagar, 25 years ago. There is a sewing machine lying idle in a corner of the room, which Christine's father bought in the hope that it would provide a living to one of his four unemployed sons. The father is the sole earner and works as a fitter in Burmah Shell. Christine's fiance was educated by Christine's family and has lived with them most of the time. He too is employed in Burmah Shell. Christine's 'Cousin', a middle-aged woman with a slightly disfigured face, manages the household and the income. Although she is not legally married to Christine's father, she is in fact like a second wife and has replaced Christine's mother as female head of the household. She is defending family interests, the 'Cousin' says, in insisting on an early marriage for Christine, and adds that, after all, they are allowing Christine to continue her education. She mentions, with some pride, that they expect to spend Rs. 7,000 on the wedding.

Christine is the only young girl in the house, and she enjoys a few luxuries which other girls of her age in the slum can never hope for. She gets a small allowance and is taken on outings and occasionally to films. But she is not allowed out on excursions without either her mother or the Cousin. Christine sees her impending marriage as a threat to the life she now leads. Her smiling face becomes grave when the conversation turns to her marriage.

She thinks women should be educated and work outside the home. She glances hesitantly at her Cousin and says she herself would like to work some day in a factory.

Conclusions

It is generally believed that slum dwellers maintain close contact with their villages. This assumption is belied by the interviews presented here. In fact, it can be seen that all the respondents have lost contact with their villages and show no desire to return to them. Most of the women have grown to adulthood in the slums. This would indicate that the social environment of the slum is not simply one of village life transported to the city. It is, rather, an organic part of urbanisation. The entry of slum women into jobs that take them out of their homes is a product of this situation. Because of constantly rising prices, these women look to employment as a supplement to the family income. However, they face many difficulties in getting jobs—lack of education, a heavy load of domestic responsibilities, absence of child-care facilities. The middle-class resistance to working women is noticeably absent here. However, employment is not so readily available to slum women as to middle-class women.

In addition to the problem of finding employment, slum women must face the daily difficulties of their environment. Their living quarters are cramped. There is an acute water shortage. The scarcity of sanitary facilities leads to misuse of the little available open space. Although the men in the slums have managed to create some recreational facilities for themselves—e.g. sports clubs, the women have no access to these and no alternative facilities. Their social activities are confined to the home. These women are also subjected to frequent beatings by their husbands. In many cases, the woman is found to be living with a second or third husband having been abandoned by her previous mates. The husband may leave at any time, taking with him the family's livelihood. In many cases, the husband will return to the first wife when the children are grown and supporting the family. It is apparent that such marital situations make life even more insecure for the women.

Nurses and Nuns of Kerala

Gita Aravamudan

Mrs. Gita Aravamudan (b. 1947) is a freelance journalist, who contributes to *The Hindu*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and other periodicals.

The women of Kerala are conscious of being independent and of "having a job". One finds them employed in all walks of life, from the most mundane to the highly responsible; there are judges, engineers and doctors and there are the others in spectacular professions like the circus artists from Tellicherry.

The class of "professional" Kerala women under survey here are the ones who are in the middle of the scale: the nurses and nuns. These women, while not exactly occupied in mundane jobs, do not lead spectacular lives either, nor are they in any decision-making positions. Most girls from middle class families, particularly with a Christian background, flock to these professions because they offer security. These girls are not inhibited by the fact that jobs are not always available within their own environmental bounds. They are quite willing to leave their homes, endure the restrictions of hostel life and manage with very few luxuries. As a result of this, nurses and nuns from Kerala can be found anywhere in the country.

What then is the push which sends them careering to all corners of the earth? This was the major question I bore in mind, while talking to nurses and nuns coming from different kinds of backgrounds. I must admit that I started off with some pre-conceived notions which were soon proved wrong.

Being a non-Keralite myself, I tended to think that the Marumakkathayam (matriarchal) Nair society had fostered the idea of independence early among Kerala women. Subsequent talks with

both men and women who had lived under the old *tarwad* (joint family) system indicated that this was not really true. Under that old system, while the women were socially and economically quite independent of their husbands, they were very much under the control of the "Karanavan" or chief of the household who was often an uncle or brother. Therefore, Keralites in general feel that the emancipation of Nair women is a more recent phenomenon.

A major influence on the social life of Kerala was the advent of Christianity, which is supposed to have come down to this part of the country as early as 52 A. D. with St. Thomas the Apostle. It has taken strong root in Kerala culture. The church's message of service, along with the efforts of various missionaries to induce girls to work in their charitable organisations seems to have germinated the idea of girls leaving their homes to work. It is natural, therefore, that jobs involving "service" are the ones which have traditionally attracted girls coming from Christian environment.

The social pressures in more recent times, which have forced so many Kerala girls to seek employment, are those which are to be found everywhere in the country, but which have taken on a kind of concentrated force here because of some of the problems peculiar to this state. A dense population (548 people to a square mile) and a rather high percentage of literacy (60.16) are two of the most basic causes. A dowry system prevalent especially among the Christians is another incentive for girls to work. . . they want to collect enough money to attract good husbands. Many men seem to prefer wives with jobs and in fact the dowry is often reduced with the wage earning capacity of the girl.

Nurses

Even to a casual observer, it is remarkable how many Keralite nurses one can find in any hospital anywhere in the country. In Kerala itself one hardly ever finds a non-Keralite nurse. Over 80 % of the nurses seem to come from Christian families.

After speaking to several nurses, I found that hardly any of them came because they wished to care for the sick. They came mostly because it was a job which did not require a college degree, yet gave almost guaranteed employment. Only among the older cadre did I find women who had defied their families and joined this rather "lowly" profession.

Smt. Chandramathi, the Senior Nursing Superintendent, a small, brisk lady is one of those pioneers who became a nurse in spite of opposition from her rather orthodox Hindu family. She has been abroad twice, once under a Rockefeller Fellowship and once on a study tour sponsored by W.H.O. While talking of Kerala nurses and their migratory habits, she related a rather interesting experience which she had had. While in Canada, she had to go to Musgrave Harbour, a remote township, 63 miles away from the nearest big town, Gander. As she went around the hospital thinking she had really reached the end of the earth, the sisters there told her that three Indian girls were working as nurses at Fogo Island which was connected only by ferry to Musgrave harbour. Surprised and thrilled that there should be such adventurous Indian girls, she rang them up at Fogo Island. . . and found they were all Malayalees!

Talking of nursing in Kerala, Smt. Chandramathi said that since it was started by Swiss Missionaries, originally the emphasis was more on service and less on service conditions. This, she felt, had left its stigma and even today service conditions were rather below par. This probably accounted for the number of girls who migrated in search of better pay.

I spoke to several girls who had worked for a while outside the state and then returned because of family pressures.

Teresa Gomes, whose father is a shopkeeper, went to Bombay to become a nurse, and returned a few years ago to get married. She now works as a nurse in the Medical College Hospital. After leaving school, she said, she badly needed a job and one of the nuns in the convent in which she studied helped her to get into

this profession. But, says Teresa, she would not have minded becoming a teacher or taking up any other profession. Teresa's husband is a clerk in a printing press and she now has two children.

Shanthakumari, a 34-year old nurse, has worked in Bombay for seven years. She loved the life there and she stayed with her relatives. She too came back to get married. Shanthakumari's mother is a nurse. (This I found quite typical. Many of the girls said, they had become nurses because they had relatives in the profession who urged them to join.) "Also I wanted to travel and see some places," she said. This too seemed to be quite a common motivation.

Another young girl whom I spoke to, was a student in the college of nursing. She came from a fairly well-to-do Christian family and had worked several years in Delhi before returning to Kerala to study. She said that while the conditions outside were much better, she had found life there very lonely. "Girls going from here don't realise how lonely and difficult it can be," she said.

Manorama is a very enthusiastic young Auxiliary-Nurse Midwife who is eager not only "to stay in this job until I die," but also to better her prospects (so she is studying at the college of nursing) and to work for a while outside the state. Manorama is the daughter of a teacher from a village in Quilon district. Her father wanted her to work, but as a teacher. She even did some Hindi examinations to qualify as a Hindi teacher, but in the meanwhile she managed to get this job without her father's knowledge and so she became a nurse. She is probably the only girl I met who even after nine years as a nurse expressed an utter sense of dedication and true love for her profession. She has also persuaded one of her sisters to become a nurse.

Regarding the kind of girls who come to the profession and the problems of training them, Miss Peters, the Director of the College of Nursing, had plenty to say. Miss Peters, who became

an army nurse during the war comes from a well-to-do Christian family. She has travelled much (which was her original motivation to join the army) and done her M.Sc. in Nursing under a Rockefeller Fellowship.

Miss Peters is rather disillusioned with the nursing profession. Although it is actually a highly skilled job, calling for technical training, she said it was generally treated as a kind of mindless profession. The kind of girls it attracted, therefore, were not the type who would give it the thought and concentration it required. She also felt that in Indian society which still places a lot of emphasis on segregation of sexes nursing was looked down upon because girls had to look after men and often perform intimate chores for them. She felt the problem could be eased if male nurses were encouraged.

Another person who is faced not only with training but also organisational problems, is Devakiamma, the matron of the Medical College Hospital. This lady who comes from an orthodox Hindu family became a nurse after some tragic family experiences. She has now to cope with organising the hospital schedule with never enough nurses to go around. If patients complained that nurses have no time for them, she said it was no wonder because they were so overworked.

The nursing movement in Kerala started rather informally in 1906, when some nursing nuns from Switzerland were asked to come and help in the general hospital there. The half a dozen sisters who came were given a cool, spacious bungalow in the heart of the hospital complex. Gradually, they began taking in a few girls to help and it was only in 1934 that it became a formal profession.

Today, all the nursing nuns in the hospital are Indians. One old Swiss nun who came with one of the first batches, now lives there in semi-retirement. She spoke of the girls who first came to work as nurses . . . they were so enthusiastic and hard-working, she said. They came from good families and their upbringing was appa-

rent in the way they devoted themselves to their work. Strangely enough, most of them were Hindus, she said. Now, although no longer actively associated with the hospital, she had observed that the sense of dedication was missing. She felt since there was such a demand for nurses, one could no longer choose the type of girls one wished to train.

Nuns

There are over 12,700 nuns in Kerala, most of whom are Malayalees. Becoming a nun, offers a life-long security. So, even though the girls have to pay a "dowry" while joining the convent they are quite willing to do it, because they will be taken care of for the rest of their lives. Apart from this, of course, there is the strong religious feeling which makes every Catholic family anxious to give at least one daughter as the "bride of Christ".

Among the nuns I interviewed, many spoke of the "entire family rejoicing" when they went home on holidays. However, they also spoke of their anxiety to get away from the turmoils of family life and back into the insulated atmosphere of the convents.

One of the nuns, a lively young woman who is the headmistress of a convent school for girls, said that she for one loved convent life and found herself so fully occupied she hardly had time to think of her home. However, there were nuns who found they could not adjust themselves and had to leave. When a nun leaves the convent, she is given back her dowry. Sometimes in extreme cases, where the girl is unable to pay her bit, the convent pays her expenses and takes her in.

It was a little more difficult talking to the nuns. They did not want to talk about themselves, nor did they want any "publicity". They did not really like to talk of their personal lives.

When finally they were persuaded to speak, they talked of the spirit of dedication and "the call" and so on. Ultimately, when

asked why they personally chose such a life, they could only say that they felt inclined towards being nuns and their families and priests had given them all the encouragement.

Most of the nuns I spoke to came from middle class families . . . that is, they had not become nuns because they direly needed food and shelter, but because this kind of life gave the peace and security they lacked in their own homes. All of them had joined the convent at an early age (16 or 17 years) and none of them seemed to repent this decision. When asked how they were able at such tender ages to make up their minds to dedicate the rest of their lives, they spoke of the village priest who had helped them decide or of the example set by other brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts, who had become nuns and priests.

Since only about 16% of the population of Kerala lives in urban areas, one finds very few city-bred girls employed in these professions. The typical parental home of a nurse or nun could be found in any of the villages which stretch endlessly from one end of the state to the other. Many of the girls' fathers are farmers or teachers or shopkeepers. They often come from large families which they help to support. In spite of all the independence the girls (especially nurses) achieve by earning their own livings far away from home, they remain at heart simple village girls who are obedient to their parents' wishes, and who ultimately return home to marry partners chosen for them by their parents.

"I would like to go out of the state to earn a better pay, but my parents are not sending me," is a common complaint.

Regarding the nuns, it is just a question of switching over from being obedient to their parents or elders to being obedient to their mother superiors. To girls who have never had the luxury of total independence such a switch-over is fairly easy.

The remarkable thing about it all is that these girls in spite of all their travelling, in spite of their Western clothes, and habits, have remained essentially Keralite.

Prostitution—Notes from a Rescue Home

Parvathi Aiyappan

Mrs. Parvathi Aiyappan (b. 1902) is a social worker of Kerala, interested in education and family planning. She was headmistress of a government high school and has edited a women's magazine.

These interviews with prostitutes are from a Rescue Home in Ernakulam. This institution, started in 1957, has been declared as a Protective Home under the provisions of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act. An attempt is made to rehabilitate the inmates by providing employment, or by marriage or by restoration to their families.

With some exceptions they come from the lower middle and the labour classes, that is, the lowest economic groups. There are Hindus, Christians and Muslims among them. The present strength of the Rescue Home is 68, of whom 38 are Hindus, 26 Christians and 4 are Muslims. Hindus include backward classes and scheduled communities who usually belong to the lowest income groups.

Their families are just literate or illiterate. They grow up in an atmosphere of drink and beating of the wife by the husband. Left alone in the homes while the adults are away at work, the girls, without any one to check them, find themselves free and tend to go astray.

Prostitution as a profession comes at a later stage in their life. Some fall victims to treachery. Other who work as domestic servants succumb to the approaches of the men in the houses.

Bhanumathy

Age 26 years—Caste Blacksmith.

Bhanu is a member of a middle-class family having three acres of landed property. She has passed the Secondary School. Her parents are Aiyappan and Kutty. They have six children—five daughters and one son, who is the youngest. Bhanu is the third daughter. All her four sisters are married and are living with their husbands. Bhanu is good-looking and efficient. She knows different kinds of crafts and arts. But too much paternal affection spoiled her and she became uncontrollable in the family. She went to practise '*kadha-prasongam*'[1] and in due course she became pregnant by her master, who was a Muslim named Hassan and much older than her. So the parents were forced to give her in marriage to Hassan. Though he was employed earlier, because of his alcoholism his services were terminated by his employer. At present she has two children by him and they are being looked after by Bhanu's parents.

Bhanu is not only good-looking but also good at everything. She says that she will not go with Hassan and he is no longer her husband. She is fed up of life with him. "He is an ugly and dirty fellow who spends most of his life in toddy and arrack shops." She wants to stay in the Rescue Home till her '*Kandaka Sheni*'[2] is over.

Sarojini

Age 22 years—Caste Barber.

Sarojini comes from a family of casual labourers, economically and socially the weakest section of society. Her parents—Madhavan and Kutty—had two children. Sarojini is the second. Her brother is married and has settled down separately. Her father died when Sarojini was quite a baby. The mother remarried when she was barely two years old. Her step-father's name is Velayudhan. Sarojini passed the Secondary School at the age of 16. She discontinued her studies under pressure from her step-father. She knows certain crafts and used to earn Rs. 5/- per day.

Her step-father wanted Sarojini to be his mistress. Her

misfortune started with that. Sarojini left home one night with some cash which she received from a chitty and took a bus to Wynad. She went there in search of a job. She worked in the Ruby's Estate for some time. From there an elderly woman took her to Calicut on the pretext of finding her an ayah's job in a decent family. That so-called family was a brothel. She stayed there for three days. Somehow she managed to escape from there and came to Perumbavoor. She wandered there in search of a job, but in vain. While leading an immoral life the police caught her and brought her to the Rescue Home.

Here she corresponds with her mother's younger sister, who is willing to take her back. Sarojini is given training in tailoring and embroidery and she is good at it. She honestly believes that she will be able to lead a good life in future.

Ammini

Age 29 years—Caste Pulaya (Scheduled Caste).

Ammini's parents, Kunjappan and Thanka, are daily labourers. They had six children and Ammini is the second child. She cannot read or write. She was working in Cheenthalar Estate. While working there she got involved with Viswam, a lorry driver and eloped with him at the age of 16. They settled down at Pallimukku in a hut in the Porumboke land by the side of the river bank. She stayed with him for about six years. In the meantime, they had two sons.

One day Viswam's former wife, Madhavi Amma, came to the hut in search of him. In the evening, when Viswam returned, Ammini entrusted Viswam back to Madhavi Amma and left the hut with her children. Ammini went to her house at Peerumedu but her brothers asked her to leave the place at once. From there she came back to Ernakulam and led an immoral life to earn a livelihood. Her sons are now working with two families at Pachalam.

At the Home, Ammini is given training in embroidery and she is good at it. She used to correspond with her sister who now stays with her husband at Cheenthalar. She is hopeful that she will be able to lead a good life with her sister by working in Cheenthalar Estate.

Santha

Age 19 years—Caste Ezhava.

Santha belongs to a very poor family. Her education ended with primary school.

Her parents were Balan and Karthiyani. Balan was the proprietor of a small canteen. Her mother died soon after the birth of the second baby. At that time Santha was five years old. The father remarried and settled down at Kommady (Alleppey). A woman called Lakshmi took Santha to her house as she had only three sons, and sent her to school. Santha's father, Balan, used to visit her occasionally.

One day, when Santha was studying in the 3rd standard, her father came to school and took her to Kommady. After a few days he took her to Dr. C. C. Alexander's residence and she served that family for about six years. Dr. Alexander used to pay Rs. 5/- every month to Balan for the services of Santha. There she fell in love with Babu, an employee of the Water Transport Corporation at Alleppey and eloped with him. Santha's life there was happy. In due course Babu acquired some ornaments for Santha from Bhima Jewellery with the savings they had. One day Santha's father came there and told Santha that he was in dire need of money. Santha felt pity for him and gave away the ornaments. When Babu returned in the evening he got angry and threw her out. At that time Santha was pregnant. She came to Palluruthy and joined the Beggar Relief Settlement. On the 2nd of October, 1972, the Settlement authorities transferred her to the Rescue Home.

Santha says that her father is an idle person and depends on others for his livelihood. Her brother is now working in a family at Madras and she used to get money from him. She says that she never went after anybody except Babu. She hopes and prays that one day Babu will return and take her and the child back to their home.

References

1. *Kadha Prasongam:* This is a form of mono-acting, explaining the meaning of some story from mythology, which is written in the form of poetry in Malayalam. Each stanza is sung and then explained by acting it.
2. *Kandaka-Sheni:* 'Shani Dassa' is supposed to be a period of misery in one's life according to astrology and Kandaka-Sheni is the worst form of it.

Chellamma—A Portrait

Mina Swaminathan

Mrs. Mina Swaminathan (b. 1933), a Homi Bhabha fellow, is the Secretary of the Indian Association for Pre-school education. She has published books on the use of drama as an educational tool in schools.

Chellamma—A Portrait

(This is a portrait of an imaginary woman—based on the lives of several such women known to the author. There is no one Chellamma, but enough such people to make this account true. Chellamma, an elderly South Indian woman belonging to the semi-rural upper middle class, has a many-faceted personality, and a many-sided life. Belonging to an orthodox community, without formal education, and leading a sheltered life within the four walls of her home, she is, nevertheless, not merely a housewife, but performs a multiplicity of roles in her daily life. A member of a diminishing social group that may be extinct in a decade or two, she is important to know, not only as an illustration of a way of life, but also because of her influence on two or more generations of younger women. Her life demonstrates in microcosm the adaptation of traditional India to the modern world.)

Chellamma stands at the front door of her house. It is dusk, and the chores for the day are over. Soon it will be time to light the lamps for the evening hour of prayer and music. It is hard to guess her age from her appearance. Sturdily built, with jet black hair, and an erect carriage, her once fine teeth ruined by the red stains of betel chewing, she is far from beautiful, but has a dignified presence, the look of one accustomed to command. Her sari is simple, but diamonds flash around her face and gold around her person. She is a woman, not so much to be looked at, as reckoned with.

Born into a Brahmin land-owning family of Tanjore District, Chellamma was named Brihanayaki, after the goddess of Tanjore, but always referred to by her pet name 'Chellamma', the favoured one. She was married at the age of nine, also into a land-owning

family. The wedding was a splendid one, talked about in the district for years. Her husband was a college student at the time. Chellamma lived on in her parents' home until three years later, when a formal announcement was made to her in-laws that the bride had 'come of age'. With due ceremony, Chellamma was escorted to her new home in the little town of Thirupuram, where the bride of twelve was initiated into her new life and duties. So began her long training for her final position as mistress of the household and along with her husband, head of a joint family. Burdened as she soon was with child-bearing and child-rearing, Chellamma was for the first few years mostly confined to minor duties, which she shared with several other women of the household, while her mother-in-law undertook the managerial tasks needed to make the wheels of the great household economy go round. This also gave Chellamma time to learn many traditional skills and rituals, and pursue traditional recreations and pastimes which lent colour to the daily routine.

Chellamma's day begins early. She is up before sunrise to see to the milking of the cows, and to carry the fresh milk straight to the prayer room. The observance of religious ritual is one of the chief duties in a Brahmin household. Attending to her father-in-law, while he performed his daily ritual, taking part in the solemn celebrations of all the sixteen major 'samskaras' that mark the changing phases of life in a Hindu household, Chellamma acquired much of the lore that she has today. Chellamma has had little formal education—she was just able to read and write Tamil when she was married. Later, she acquired a smattering of Sanskrit. She has read the Ramayana and some other classics. But her understanding comes not so much from books as from an oral tradition. Music and poetry, myth and legend, story and song, inextricably mixed in the practice of ritual, and constantly repeated, have given Chellamma a deep understanding, not only of ritual and practice but of their underlying meaning too. More deeply than the literature, it is the language which she has mastered. For she expresses her understanding of the meaning of life with the sharp wit and double-edge nuances typical of the rich colloquial speech of her people.

From dawn to noon, Chellamma is busy within her house and garden. At the time of her marriage, the family had recently moved from the village to live in a town house, a typical narrow 'street' house, which soon proved to be too constricting. A few years later, they had moved into a new house on the outskirts of the town, where they have lived ever since. Within the spacious compound there is room for a variety of fruit-bearing and useful trees, for a kitchen garden and cattle sheds. The house is semi-modern—it has been rebuilt several times with many innovations. The front portion, the verandahs and airy central hall are furnished in modern style to receive visitors. Beyond, the traditional pattern reasserts itself—'koodam' open to the skies, surrounded by pillared corridors and smaller rooms leading to the kitchen, store-rooms and semi-open spaces used for various activities.

The house is fully electrified and supplied with running water, and the well in the courtyard is now equipped with an electrically run pump. Upstairs, there are bedrooms with attached bathrooms, and western style lavatories. In the front garden, a host of small sheds linked by a narrow verandah house the offices and stores of the ever-growing business in coconut and rice. Next to the garage is a shed housing the gaily painted single-bullock cart, still occasionally used. At the back are the vegetable and fruit gardens and cattle-sheds.

This, then, is Chellamma's domain, where she spends most of her days, with occasional trips to the orchards in the village or the town market. The cattle and kitchen garden take up a fair share of her time. She not only buys and sells cattle, but also enters into contracts for the purchase of meal and disposal of dung, supervises the daily care of the cattle by two cowherds, issues their daily rations, sees to the construction and maintenance of the cowsheds, and attends to the sick animals or calving cows, watching over both cleanliness and profit, shrewdly calculating the gains and losses from the transactions.

She supervises the gardener who tends the vegetable plot, which not only provides for most of the daily needs but a small

surplus which she trades off. The savings on this and some other minor transactions go into her private hoard. She does not keep any written accounts, but has a pretty good idea of the state of her household accounts at any time and is well-acquainted with the prices of most of the goods and services she handles. She employs or contracts with a score of people, who deal in garden products. Sometimes it is the old woman who weaves strips of thatch from dried coconut leaves, at other times the man who harvests ripe coconuts from the trees, working by the hour. There are skilled craftsmen, vendors and casual workers. There are people who buy (or sell) the unripe mangoes from the mango grove, the ripe fruit at other times, banana leaves, citrus leaves, flowers, dung, thatch and a host of other things. There is a season for every activity, a demand for every product.

During the morning she also keeps an eye on the front part of the house—where there is a constant coming and going, a loading and unloading. Chellamma's husband, starting in a small way, now runs one of the largest businesses in the district, dealing in coconut and coconut products—oil, husk and fibre, and in whole-sale rice. Recently, a new venture has been launched—the manufacture and sale of 'appalam'. It is a cottage industry, sub-contracted out to women working in their own homes, but centrally collected, packaged and distributed. The project has met with great success. Sometimes some of the women come in with their product, and Chellamma inspects and receives it. She supervises the foremen, takes charge of the cash and is always on the look-out for petty pilferage. Few can escape her watchful eye.

From the garden to the kitchen it is only a step, and Chellamma also directs the activities there. The planning and preparation of the day's meals, she leaves to others, and reserves her attention for other things—the parboiling of rice, the pounding and cleaning of pulses and other provisions to be stored, the preparation of various kinds of dried foods, pickles and preserves for the year, the treating of coconut to fill great jars of home-crushed oil, the preparation of medicinal oils, powders, pastes and

perfumes, sweets for festivals and spices and condiments, a whole range of items from milk products to cosmetics. Chellamma is very particular about such things, and sets high standards of work. She not only directs but takes a hand in each process, demonstrating to the other women how best it is to be done, occasionally explaining the theory in a few words. She trains by both example and precept.

Towards the end of the morning, Chellamma drops into one of the inner rooms to see to the treatment of her third daughter, who has recently given birth to her second child. Chellamma herself has had ten children (eight surviving) and contrary to the usual custom had all her confinements in her own home, instead of returning to her parents. From her mother-in-law, she learnd the various arts and skills associated with child-birth in a Brahmin home—the precautions for pregnant women, the skills of midwifery, the elaborate diets, medicines and massages for the newly-confined mother, recipes for body, hair and skin care and the care of the infant. All this has stood her in good stead, for she has seen her own daughters through several confinements each.

Today she is an acknowledged local expert in herbal remedies and cures, and also in traditional cosmetics. Ask her a question about almost anything from colic in infants, skin care for adolescents or aching joints in the old—and she has a quick answer to it, which works nine times out of ten, though Chellamma could not tell you the reason why. Chellamma attributes all her knowledge, of course, to her elders—that and a lifetime of observation. Teenagers and her grand-children often draw her out on this and are amazed by her store of knowledge.

It is nearly twelve, time for the main meal. Chellamma listens for the sound of the car which announces her husband's arrival. After serving him, she eats, and after lunch allows herself the luxury of relaxing for a while. Lying where the breeze can find her, she sleeps a little, reads, fondles the grand-children, tells her rosary. Sometimes she joins in a game, sometimes she reminisces, sometimes just listens to the chatter of the others. It is a moment of peace and quiet in her busy day, a moment of recuperation.

The afternoon is the time for the formal social calls and exchanges among women. Now-a-days, Chellamma rarely pays a visit, but there is a call almost every day, usually with some special purpose, such as an invitation to a marriage or family ceremonial. News and gossip are exchanged, discreet enquiries about possible marriages are made. Once the formal purpose is stated, the conversation becomes oblique, proceeding through nuances of tone and expression, silences and signals. So are family affairs discussed and informally settled. And all the time, amidst the chatter, the women continue with the main business of the afternoon—dressing and decorating themselves and the children, preparing for outings, perhaps to the temple, perhaps for another social occasion.

Chellamma's social background is wide, her skill in human relations great and her judgement sound. She is intimate with very few—two or three close friends of her childhood, women of her own age. Except with such friends, she is reserved and watchful. But her social contacts are not restricted to women of her own class and caste. She is an employer and has well-defined business relationships with her employees. With remarkable shrewdness, she has adapted herself to the change from a feudal to a cash relationship with labourers, tradesmen and craftsmen. She rarely gets the worst of a bargain, and has worked out her new obligations and rights. In the course of her travels, for pilgrimages and attendance at social events, she has learnt to deal with all sorts of people. For a ceremonial occasion, negotiations with priests, cooks, astrologers, jewellers, musicians and suppliers of all kinds can safely be left to her.

She is a storehouse of information. Her advice on money matters and marriages is much sought after. Through her contacts she knows all the news of the district. No source is too un-important for her, and she can gauge the political tone of the countryside from a casual remark. Though rigidly bound by the conventions of her caste, her humanity in her relationships comes through in many ways. With people of different caste or status, she does not consider herself a different kind of person, merely more fortunate, and that too thanks to her karma, and not to any special attribute of hers.

Chellamma's pre-occupations are with order and the prosperity of her own family, first, and then with the rest of the world. With everyone, she is the same, watchful, tactful, a caustic comment rarely far from her lips, but softened by her smile, cautious in speech, quick to seek the advantage for her family, but helpful to others within those limits. Her meaning may not be read by those who look with haste. In human relations, she has a certainty of touch born of long years of observations, an alert mind and sure judgment. No secluded housewife, she.

The afternoon progresses and it is time for music. Untrained though she is, Chellamma has a fine voice, and a large collection of songs, particularly those suited for various ceremonials. Her children and grand-children have received regular training in classical music. Chellamma loves to listen to them, and to attend an occasional concert, or a discourse or devotional music evening at the temple. She is a great story-teller, and on evenings at home regales youngsters with wonderful tales from mythology and legend. During these sessions, through verse and song and story, repeated by the children, she keeps alive the great religious tradition for the younger folks.

Chellamma gives thanks to God (to the goddess, that is) for having looked with favour on her family so far. It is a big one and has changed much since she was married. Two branches still live together. Some of the older members of the family, and some distant relations remain, but her husband's sisters return only for visits, and the entire family now gathers only on ceremonial occasions. Her three older daughters are well placed in life, having married government employees. Chellamma's children are quite different from her. The girls have all received schooling, and her youngest daughter is a graduate. They lack Chellamma's opportunities for a rich and varied life, but have security—typical modern urban housewives in three-roomed flats. Once a year they visit their parents for a vacation, and return after a month's stay, heavier in both body and luggage. Besides, she usually has one of the daughters staying with her for a confinement.

Chellamma is closer to her daughters than to her sons. Her eldest son, a graduate, and the father of two children, will carry on the family business. He and his wife occupy two rooms upstairs, but they are restless, and Chellamma and her husband have already planned to set them up independently to manage a branch of the business at Tanjore. Two sons are away at college, the youngest is still at school. Her third son has a scholarship to continue his studies in America, and Chellamma fears he may decide to stay there. Her younger sons will all fly the nest, she knows. She will be pleasant to their wives, whom she will choose, and visit occasionally, but she will stay where she belongs. She has a pattern to grow old into, so she has no anxiety on that score.

The hour before dinner Chellamma relaxes on the front verandah with her husband. They hold no abstract discussions, but the conversations, practical and pragmatic, cover a range of topics, usually concerning the family. No detail of the family concern is unknown to Chellamma. Her husband respects her opinion and her shrewdness, and often asks for her advice. Decisions about many matters affecting the family, marriages, studies, business and religion are taken in this quiet evening hour. Her own little private board, however, Chellamma keeps a secret, even from her husband. He knows about it, of course, for from time to time one of her daughters sports a new nose-ring or a new vessel in the kitchen. These are Chellamma's private investments, but he would never dream of asking her directly about it. Such is the code of conduct which regulates even the most intimate of relationships in Chellamma's world.

This, then, is Chellamma's life as it is today, and this is the story of how it came to be what it is. Chellamma and her family are resilient. Traditional in her own upbringing, she has adapted herself in many ways to the slow social revolution of our times. Things are not what they were, she often says, nostalgically, but not in complaint. The house has been rebuilt several times, their habits and style of living have altered in so many ways, the younger generation are educated, values are different, ceremonies are shorter, the traditional arts and decorations have given place

to garish modern things. The transistor and the weekly magazine dominate daily life, and the home is full of new gadgets. Business has changed too, from agriculture to wholesale trade, and now to new innovations in processing. Her children lead lives beyond her comprehension and their future will be unimaginable to her. She is uneasily aware that the younger generations have grasped only the shell of her philosophy and its observances, and missed the core, but she rarely puts this feeling into words.

Contrary to the popular image of the Indian woman, Chellamma plays many roles besides that of wife and mother, or simple housewife. She has an economic role as processor and distributor of primary products; she is the head of a small enterprise; ruler of a little community of human beings. In herself she combines the role of manager, teacher, doctor, nurse, judge, broker, administrator, builder, craftswoman and several others. Above all, she has trained the young and carried forward a cultural tradition. Socially, too, her life is far from simple. She lives in a vast network of relationships, which she manages by her understanding of a set of unwritten rules. The unwary and the unintelligent have no place in this complex world, where success goes to those who have learnt to apply the rules with grace, not hesitating to be ruthless at times.

But if this is Chellamma's life, and her world, what is she herself like? What are her hopes and dreams, her values and her aims? Chellamma can be induced to say very little about herself. Her favourite deity is the goddess, and well she understands the power of woman, but she believes that that power must be exercised with discretion. She has been trained to be self-effacing, and she both practises and preaches it. In her vocabulary, the highest word of praise that can be spoken of a woman is the Tamil word 'adakkam', usually translated as 'modesty' but more literally rendered as 'restraint'. And her values? They are power exercised with restraint, in the interest of all and for the sake of harmony, order and proportion; life lived with discipline, not indulgence; all things enjoyed in moderation; steadfastness in both

joy and sorrow, success and failure; orderly progression through the stages of life as laid down by the scriptures and traditions; above all, family before self and before community. It is all there, unspoken—the upholding of Dharma, or Divine order, the philosophy of 'nishkam karma' or detachment, mutuality of obligation, devotion leading to self-realisation.

She is not given to philosophising, and if pressed, would rather illustrate with anecdote and incident than abstract argument. But she runs her life according to a few basic concepts and principles, derived from the religion which is central to her life. She comes from a family and a community of scholars, so she understands the basis of what she believes and practises. But it is foreign to her nature to discuss it except when compelled to do so. She would rather go on living it, and if an argument is carried uncomfortably far, will remind you of a task waiting to be done.

So Chellamma stands at her front door. It is dusk and time to light the lamps. It is the evening of her life too, and it is time for her to withdraw, to light the inner lamps and begin to prepare spiritually for the close. She is not afraid, though she is often puzzled. She is prepared for whatever comes, as she has always been. She turns swiftly when it is time, and goes indoors to see to the lamps.

Between School and Marriage—A Delhi Sample

Renana Jhabvala
and
Pratima Sinha

Miss Renana Jhabvala (b. 1952), graduated from Delih University, is presently studying Mathematics at Harvard.

Miss Pratima Sinha (b. 1952), a Science (Physics) graduate of Delhi University, who passed with distinction in 1972, is currently doing her M.Sc. in the same University.

There are more girls going to University now than before. Does education change the outlook of the girls? Will educated girls be different from their mothers? In order to get answers to these questions we ran a survey by means of questionnaires and personal interviews with girls from different backgrounds and studying in different courses of Delhi University. We asked questions concerning the girl's background, her reasons for coming to college, her future plans and her attitude towards the older generations.

On the basis of our survey we found that we could divide the girls into these categories—'hep' and 'not-so-hep', 'simple' and 'not-so-simple', and lastly, those we have called 'the exceptions'.

Hep and Not-so-Hep

Stepping into the campus you could not miss the well-dressed, smart and sophisticated girls. These are the 'hep' girls. They are from well-to-do families and come to University to gain social poise. They take up what are known as 'light' subjects, such as English, Psychology and Political Science. They make fluent conversation and can discuss anything from Communism and Kissinger's Russian policy to Women in modern India and the scientific theories of horoscopes and rebirths. They read only English and American books, but indiscriminately—taking in Thomas Hardy and Harold Robbins with equal enthusiasm.

It is a status symbol to have as many 'dates' as possible, to fag and to pot. These girls frequent discotheques and take active

part in extra-curricular activities, including debates, dramatics and, especially, organising fetes in aid of worthy causes. They tend to put off tasks which involve some effort as "too much work, *Yar*!" or "Oh! you science types must be working so-o-o-hard."

Rita is a hep girl studying English in one of the better known girls' colleges. Her father is in the Indian Foreign Service and so Rita lives in the Girls' Hostel. Rita enjoys herself very much; she believes in 'Youth having its fling' and has experimented with drugs and sex. She used to go out with many different boys but is now 'going steady' with a boy of her own social class.

The not-so-hep girl goes to college to acquire some kind of feminine accomplishments which will help her to be a good housewife, a good mother and an asset to her husband. She also tends to come from a wealthy family.

Rajni is a typical example of the not-so-hep girl. She is the daughter of a rich businessman and is well-dressed and pretty. She has just finished a three-year course in interior decoration and is now happily engaged to a boy chosen by her parents who will soon join her father's business. Her parents are giving Rajni a large dowry which they have been collecting ever since she can remember.

Rajni found her course "useful and interesting". She enjoyed herself in college with her friends. She had no boy-friends but went out a lot with her girl-friends and family in parties, pictures and picnics. She admires her teachers because, she says, they come from good families and don't *have* to teach; and because they are smart and well-dressed. Rajni is looking forward to getting married since this will give her the opportunity to travel, to see a lot of new places and, especially, to go abroad.

Simple and Not-so-Simple

These girls constitute the majority of University students. Unlike those in the previous category, they come to college not

to acquire social poise but to pass the time between school and marriage. This is a relatively new phenomenon, because now-a-days girls are being married at a later age. A few of these girls even take up jobs, usually as receptionists or clerks in between graduation and marriage. Some others go on to post-graduate studies after which they may take up jobs such as lecturerships; they may even continue working after marriage—if their in-laws have no objections. Most of these girls put in genuine effort, diligently taking notes and frequenting the library. They rarely take part in extra-curricular activities. Their interests outside studies are sometimes singing and dancing, often Hindi films.

Some of these girls affect complete indifference towards boys, never talk to or of them and condemn as 'fast' those who do. They refer to themselves as 'simple'.

The 'not-so-simple' girls focus their attention on their male counterparts. They talk a lot about them, nudge each other when a boy comes near but give way to giggles when he confronts them. Since they have no experience of their own, they tend to follow the pattern of romance as depicted in Hindi films, copying the gestures and actions of the screen heroines.

Veena is a 'simple' girl doing a B.Sc. course. She gets up at 5 a.m., helps her mother prepare food for the rest of the family and then does her studies. She comes to college and faithfully attends all her classes. She does not enter the co-ed cafe. Her interests and conversations are confined to her studies and her household duties.

Asha is in the B. A. (Pass) class. She would like to imitate the hep girls but her mother made her give back the pair of bell-bottom trousers she bought for herself. Asha admires a boy in her class but gives way to giggles if he ever talks to her.

The Exceptions

Most of the girls who go to University will never have to work

for a living; usually a B. A. or B.Sc. course does not require much hard work so that a student doing these courses never really has to exert herself. There are a few exceptions, however, who do work hard because they want to be self-sufficient. Hard work is also required of the few girls who go into professional fields such as medicine, architecture and engineering. People do not believe that girls can make good architects or engineers and hence the small number of girls in these courses. Sometimes a family with a liberal member in it will allow the girl to take up one of these professional courses. In these cases it is often found that the girl tends to break away from older traditions and occasionally even marries outside the caste.

Medicine, which is recognised as a subject that a girl can respectably take, attracts a large number of the brighter girls. Although some lose interest as the course goes on, most of them finally take up jobs as practitioners, in hospitals or in administration.

Amita's father is a physicist, which is probably the reason she is so interested in physics. Her father was not very happy about his daughter doing physics, although he had no such qualms about his son. But Amita was adamant. And having finished her B.Sc. she now insists on specialising in Solid State Physics. Marriage or no marriage, Amita is going to insist on making a career in research.

Gurdeep has just completed her Bachelor of Technology degree and plans to get a job as soon as possible so that she does not have to be dependent on her parents. She has been studying in the Indian Institute of Technology and has found the discrimination between girls and boys very frustrating. She has, without much success, been protesting against unequal treatment —such as not being allowed to stay out late from the hostel, or not being allowed to take part in the inter-university sports (some of the cities where the sports are held are not supposed to be safe for girls). Gurdeep's parents want her to get married and have chosen a boy for her, but Gurdeep has refused. She is

determined not to have her marriage arranged and, in fact, says that she will not get married if it means leaving her job.

In conclusion we would say that most girls drift along with the tide. They are satisfied with their roles as future mothers and housewives. College to them is just a means of spending the time till they get married. Those girls to whom college means more than a period of waiting are definitely the exceptions.

However, perhaps the years spent at the University do have some effect on the girls. There is some indication that it makes them more tolerant and ready to recognise new values; it also makes them less satisfied with the traditional values of their mothers. Although most of them settle into the life planned out for them by their parents, this does not mean that they are wholly uncritical in their acceptance. They appear to be aware of certain drawbacks in their parents' attitudes and way of life. 'Orthodox' and 'narrow-minded' are words often used to describe them. Of course, these critical attitudes may just be the natural reaction of the young against the old—'interfering' is another word often used—and may fade away as time passes. But they do indicate a questioning of traditional ways which may be a sign that this generation of educated girls will not be completely unresponsive to change. "I cannot blame them for being as they are," one girl said of the older generation of women, "but I, for one, will not be the same when I am a mother." Time will tell.

In the Performing Arts

Kapila Vatsyayan

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It would be impossible to make any broad generalisation regarding the role of Indian Women in the fine arts, more particularly the performing arts of music and dance. The staggering multiplicity of forms which have survived at different levels of Indian society is matched only by the complexity of the socio-cultural fabric of India. Taking only dance and music, what was the situation in the near and distant past and what is the situation now?

In 1934 Balasaraswati danced in Banaras, the heart of Hindu orthodoxy. Balasaraswati came from a family of *Devadasis*. The *Devadasi* tradition had been banned in 1927. Her recital was, however, seen by the middle class and gentle society of the great Brahminical tradition and, surprisingly, it was widely acclaimed. About the same time, Smt. Rukmini Devi, coming from a highly sophisticated Brahmin family tradition, had married a foreigner and had taken to the art of the *Devadasis*. She gave a performance in Madras before an invited audience of the intellectual elite who had not been attending public performances of dance. She, too, was widely acclaimed. Both were compared to celestial dancers; their sociological status seemed to be of no consequence at least for the duration of the recital.

A related fact refers to Smt. Kamaladevi. In 1920 she tried to take part in a dramatic performance before an invited audience. She was not allowed to do so, was locked up in the house and the hero of the play was abducted. Let us move to another level of Indian society: the professional singers known as the *Bais*.

Amongst these were Kesarbai, Siddheshwari Devi, Hirabai Barodekar and others. In the thirties they also began to perform at concert platforms and were readily accepted.

On other levels of Indian society the following can be observed. In the vast majority of rural villages a variety of theatrical forms continue to be prevalent. These forms include a class of traditional theatre in which only men take part. This type of theatre has had a long history, perhaps of about 300 to 500 years; it continues to follow the same conventions as it did 40 years ago. In this connection, one may mention the *Terukoothu* of Tamil Nadu, the *Ottantullal* of Kerala, also *Kathakali*, the *Ankia Nat* of Assam, the *Mayurbhanj* dances of Orissa, the *Purulia* dances of West Bengal, the *Seraikella Chhau* of Bihar, the *Kuchipudi Bhamakalapam* of Andhra, the *Bhagavatmala* of Tamil Nadu, the *Bhavai* of Gujarat, the *Nautanki Ramlila/ Raslila* of U.P., and the *Jatra* of Bengal. The actors are not confined to a particular social stratum; in terms of caste or economic level they range from princes to rickshaw-pullers. Nonetheless, all these forms are purely and uniformly men-oriented. All parts are taken by men and no change seems to have taken place during these years in spite of socio-economic change. What is true of these dance-drama forms of a rural and semi-urbanised society is also true of the more sophisticated stylised forms, such as *Kathakali* or *Koodiyattam*. There are other levels: those of the purely agricultural societies where men and women take part in the functions of everyday life on the field and are also full participants in the arts. This is true of the communities particular to Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. There is the level of tribal society where also we can discern a pattern of participation. In some only men dance and sing, in others both, in yet others only women.

Can any deduction be made as to the stage of social development of the particular society, judging from the mere fact that men or women, or men and women, take part in performances, music and dance recitals, etc.? These unconnected facts at different levels of society clearly point to two things. One

is that the role of women in the arts is not the only indicator of the position of women in that society. For example, the socio-economic stage of development of those who presented the traditional dance-drama forms was generally higher than the purely tribal and village societies and yet it was in the traditional dance forms that women did not take part. Second, many moments of historical time persist and these phenomena are multi-layered and not uni-dimensional, evolutionary or linear in character. Further, this set of facts has to be counterpoised with another set of realities known to the Indian tradition. These belong to the collective psyche of the people at all levels of society, irrespective of caste and class, and have lingered in their consciousness through centuries. The proverbial continuity of tradition belongs to this order of reality rather than to the physical state of society at a given moment of time. Let us identify some facets of this tradition in relation to women and the arts. From the earliest times, it would appear that there is an amazing pre-occupation with the concept of the celestial dancer, who epitomised beauty, grace, and well-being. She could be either a goddess or a professional dancer or musician. On the level of ordinary mundane life both *Sastras* and the oral tradition stressed the indispensability of music and dance with all rites from birth to death. The artistic tradition considered the aesthetic experience and art creations as the highest discipline, termed as a *Sadhana*, a *Yajna*, a *Yoga*, capable of evoking a state of release second only to the supreme state of bliss called the *Brahmananda*. Aesthetics had taken over a well-chiselled terminology of Indian philosophy and discussions in the dimension of the spirit.

Alongwith these traditions which may be called the traditions of idealisation or deification of both women and the arts, there were the negative attitudes to both women and the arts. A Saraswati, a Durga, a Kali, and an Usha were the embodiment of learning, power, energy—in a word, all that stood for the whole concept of *Prakritis*. When this dynamic principle was inverted or reversed then the Kali became a Chamundi and the Urvashi and Menaka gave rise to the Rambhas and the Tilottamas, and a host of other professional entertainers who could

tempt, entice and be used for variety of shady purposes. Apparently, the two attitudes are in direct contradiction. However, this seeming ambivalence to both women and the arts were two facets of the same attitude: an attitude which recognised their unique power and latent dynamism. Both could be the vehicle of the greatest ascension of the spirit and both could be the vehicle of the utmost degeneration, prostitution and indiscipline.

We must recognise that in the tradition, therefore, there lay the seeds of two attitudes that manifested themselves in the twentieth century: one looked upon the practice of these arts by all, and especially by the unmarried girl in the home, as essential for developing personality, necessary accomplishment; the other recognised the negative potential of women and the arts as the most deadly effective instruments of degeneration.

The second approach was represented by Kautilya and Manu and the writers of Devi Bhagavata. It is significant that not only is a low place given to these arts in these texts but the mere fact that they are recognised as essential in society reveals the preoccupation of these writers, even if their case is only stated negatively. It would appear that the middle class society of the early twentieth century was only waiting to see the brighter side of the mirror, having been acquainted with the dark side of the tradition which had considered the arts of music and dance as low, cheap, and vulgar in civilised society.

The transition from the temple to the stage, from the Brahaminical household to the concert in an elite society, would not have been easy, had it not been for the fact that within the periphery of the home these arts had continued to be practised by women and that the people had continued to subscribe to the first aspect of the tradition: it was an essential part of the education of the girl, the Kumari, and, in spite of Manu and other puritans, it had never been given up, it had only been sheltered. Thus, when a Rukmini Devi and a Balasaraswati came on the stage, it was as if the dust had been removed from the mirror and all were ready to respond to the original luminosity of image.

This ready acceptance of a major phenomenon of social change without revolts, agitations, intellectual formulations and freedom movements, was in no small measure due to the content of the traditional arts, particularly music and dance. They were distant in time, but in sharing and responding to the content of these arts, the Indian was really facing the totality of this tradition which was timeless and symbolic of all that was refined and pure. The myths and legends, the gods and the goddesses that these arts presented had little or nothing to do with everyday actuality. The form in which this content was embodied, abstracted and depersonalised had no element of subjectivity. And yet the forms were highly sensuous, emanating a celestial radiance without being earthy or fleshy.

But this was only one side: the sensuous form was also a double-edged sword. It was capable of transcending subjectivity through a well-conceived pattern of symbolism and multiple meaning but it was also one where the mathematical formulae were also capable of being poorly rendered, making these very formulae not just wooden, but cheap and vulgar.

In the field of theatre, dance-drama, or all forms of *Desinataka*, the situation was different. Here, although the themes and myths were common, a different dimension was being explored; here, it was not a highly charged ecstatic feeling but "emotion" in the raw. The actor was not a narrator, he was a character: social taboos and theatrical conventions both played a part. It was perhaps this relationship to present-day actuality and the content and form of drama which accounts for the kind of opposition which women met in the field of theatre, in contrast to the comparatively warm welcome accorded to the solo musician or the dancer.

It is significant that although education has reached the villages and traditional culture has come to the educated class, the tradition of these arts is carried on by those for whom the written word is of little consequence. The oral tradition is one other factor in the mobility, the flexibility, the continual inter-action

of different levels of society and different forms of the arts. Insularity was broken amongst the sub-divisions of the social structure, and between the strictly professional and the amateur and the pandit and the practitioner, through the efficacy of the oral tradition. This oral tradition also accounts for the particular place of women in transmitting these arts in the home situation and in community congregation.

But all this was in the past or in the pre-independence period: Rukmini Devi, Balasaraswati, Menaka, foreigners like Ragini and Simkie, musicians like M. S. Subulakshmi, M. L. Vasantakumari, Gangubai Hangal, and others, all coming from varied backgrounds, have played their part. The art style, the particular *gharana* or *sampradaya*, was the sole criterion for sub-divisions or structuring.

And what of the last twenty-five years, where, while we have gained independence on one level, we have become uprooted and alienated on another. A continuity of tradition was sustained by women in Indian society on many levels. Music and dance alone amongst the arts continued to be traditional without being static. In other fields—theatre, literature, painting—the continuity had been broken and the process was of reconstruction. And what did we do for these arts, and for women to learn them in the spirit of dedication and seriousness?

Soon after independence, schools and colleges multiplied. So did institutions of music, dance, painting and sculpture. There was a shift in emphasis. Professionalism now did not consist in sitting at the feet of a teacher for fifteen years and then emerging as a full-fledged performer. It was a matter of quick institutionalised training and subsequent performance. The teachers, mainly men, were and are associated in large measure with these dance and music academies. Some of the older teachers had been nurtured by an elitist society or a court culture, such as Sri Achchan Maharaj, Hafiz Ali, Allauddin Khan; others had taught and practised dancing in the isolation of a village, such as Bharatam Narayanaswami or Meenakshisundaram Pillai. But there

were and are others who are now teaching dance and music to young women who come from ordinary middle-class backgrounds, who are not consumed with a fervour or passion of nationalism, but who wish to study the arts for either a professional purpose or for the general purpose of a rounded education. A teacher, grown up under a *Sampradaya* tradition found it hard to teach a pupil whom he could not take on as *Shishya* in the chastest sense and whom he had to teach merely to earn a living or become a stage actor. The motivation of the women who took to these arts was also not always very clear. While all of them wanted it as an accomplishment, some were not certain whether this was to be a career or a profession like any other. From this varied middle class background come most of the dancers who are on the professional stage today. This includes Smt. Indrani Rahman, Yamini Krishnamurti, and many others. In fact, this generation is meeting with hardly any opposition compared to the preceding generation. Shanta Rao was not easily accepted as a pupil when she decided to plunge into dancing, coming as she did from an affluent background, others who followed her did not face as much difficulty. Amongst the musicians also, the same phenomenon can be observed and many more women have taken to the profession. Their socio-economic backgrounds have varied, most of them have come from the middle-class, many of them from the lower middle-class.

But a last phenomenon can also be noted. The stage is no longer a temple of the arts, where the artists and the audience are sharing a rich cultural experience. This tradition is lost to entertainment in an urban milieu. The artist entertains and the audience gets its money's worth. The popularity of the arts has attracted women from many cultural backgrounds. Paradoxically, the profession has led some of them to go back to become 'professional' in the nineteenth century connotation of that term. The future remains to be seen. Will Indian women sustain the tradition? Will music and dance carry forward the continuity?

Women in Politics

Imtiaz Ahmed

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What is the position of Indian women in the field of politics? It does not take much reflection to realise that this snappy question is not one question but a host of questions.

There are, for instance, comparative questions: Are there differences in the access of men and women to authority and political power? Do men enjoy greater influence in the elaboration and application of political decision than women? Are there basic differences in the political status of women in the different states within India, in cities of different sizes, in different castes, classes and communities? Specifically, what about urban versus rural women?

There are also general questions on the degree and patterns of political involvement and behaviour among women: How far do women exercise their recognised political rights and prerogatives? Do all women exercise them equally? Or, are there differences amongst them as to their interest and involvement in political affairs? What is the part that women play at each level of political participation? What role, for example, do they play in elections, campaign activities, electioneering and in direct political action? What is their role at higher levels, that is, in legislatures and executive positions?

What is the influence of demographic and social factors on their political involvement and behaviour? For example, are there differences in their political involvement and behaviour by age, education and social status? Or, do these differences arise from

their psychological and personality make-up? How far do urbanisation, intellectual atmosphere of the family and role beliefs directly influence their political participation and behaviour?

In what ways do attitudes of men affect the degree of political involvement and participation among women? Are men willing to accept women on equal terms? Or, do they feel that women should be admitted to political offices only in exceptional circumstances and then only within strictly defined limits? What are the policies of the different political parties with respect to the involvement of women in political affairs? What factors enter in their selection for elective and executive positions?

Other general questions focus on what women do in politics: What influence does their participation in public life have on the political policies of the political parties and the bias of their propaganda? Do women concentrate on specialised matters, such as health, education, motherhood, family welfare and housing, etc., that is, on all matters which are considered to be of special interest to women? Or, do they have more broad-based interests in politics? And is any short or long-term shift taking place in their political concerns?

All these and many other questions must be asked and they lead to an immensely complex analysis. So we must also ask: Are there any systematic patterns of variability? If so, of what factors are they a function—the structure of relationships between the sexes, the governmental policies towards involving women in public affairs, of what?

Little solid information is available, however, to help answer these questions. However, if an attempt is made it would consist largely of commonsense generalisations, based on case studies of relatively few single women among the 100 million in the country. It is, therefore, dangerous to generalise. What passes for commonsense is frequently nonsense. Anyone, who is foolish enough to agree to discuss the question "What is the position of

Indian women in the field of politics?" must, therefore, focus on a few elements—and hope for the best.

This is precisely what I propose to do here. I shall first present a few cases that bear on a few of the questions that I have mentioned. The cases were collected through personal interviews with women representing a cross-section of society and from the biographical sketches of individual women politicians in the Who's Who, or their autobiographical writings and biographical works about them. The selection of these cases is purely arbitrary; they were selected not so much to be representative as to illustrate some of the factors that could help us to evaluate the position of Indian women in the field of politics. I shall present these cases and then make some tentative propositions which are suggested by them.

Let me present now some of the case material from which I shall draw certain propositions:

Case 1: This is a housewife. She was born and raised in a small Punjabi village in Amritsar district. When she was barely fifteen, her parents had married her to a man she had never seen before. After seven years of her marriage, she came to the city to live with her husband. He works as a stenographer in a private firm. She has voted twice in elections. On three other occasions she did not exercise her franchise: once she did not find anyone who would take care of the children, the second time her husband did not ask her to vote, and the third time she did not know that the elections were being held. She does not know what elections are about, though she has heard that they are held to run the government of the country. She always follows the lead of her husband. Each time she had to vote, she asked her husband where to vote and voted according to his political preference. Politics, she believes, is too complicated an activity for her and she would like to leave it to her husband.

Case 2: This is a woman aged twenty-four. She is a graduate and works as a school-teacher. Her parents had wanted her to

get married after graduation. She wanted to take up a job and work for some time before getting married. She had put up a real fight against her relatives to take up a job after the completion of her studies. She hopes to get married soon to a colleague in the school, but she would like to keep her job.

She has never voted in an election. Last time, the electoral roll did not contain her name, but she knows what elections are about. She would see to it that her name is entered in the electoral roll when elections are held next time, and she would like to vote for the Swatantra Party. "The Swatantra Party," she admits, "may or may not do very much, but I would like to give it a chance anyway."

Case 3: This is also a housewife. She comes from a family of Congressmen. Her father was an active Congress worker and had participated in the nationalist movement. Her husband favours the Jan Sangh. She has never voted in any of the elections. "I would," she says, "like to vote for the Congress and my husband would not like this. I, therefore, abstain from voting altogether."

Case 4: This is a member of the city corporation. She had started out as a school-teacher. Around ten years ago, she decided to establish her own school and approached some Congress politicians to help her secure grants for the purpose. Three years later, she was asked to go on the Mandal Committee of the Congress to assist in mobilising female votes. She had no direct interest in politics but she conceded to their request. "I thought," she says, "this way I could at least pay back a part of the debt that I owed them." Last year, she was virtually handpicked to run for a seat in the corporation.

Case 5: This is a village pradhan. She is a widow, aged around sixty-four, and belongs to the land-owning caste of her village. When she was elected to the pradhanship, the news of her election had been broadcast widely. The Community Development Department had even awarded a prize to her village for electing a woman as the pradhan. She does not, however, know what the

duties of a pradhan are or how her election to the post came about. She thinks that the government appoints the pradhan.

Her son's reason for putting his aged mother up as a candidate for the pradhanship was tactical. On two previous occasions, he had himself held the position. Ideally, he would have liked to run for a third term in office, but his supporters felt that the position should change hands. So he asked her to stand. She now occupies the formal position of the pradhan, but he takes all the important decisions.

Case 6: This is a widow, whose husband was a member of the Lok Sabha. She had been a devoted wife to him and had never herself taken any personal interest in politics beyond allowing her name to be included in the list of patrons of a few social and cultural organisations. After her husband passed away, the party decided to nominate her to the Parliament. She held the seat for two terms.

She never participated in any of the debates of the House. She did as the party bosses asked her to do, which was not very much. She would like her eldest son to enter politics once he is eligible for election. Politics, she says, is in his blood and he would be able to do much more than she could.

Case 7: This is the wife of a Chief Minister. Her husband was formerly a member of the Lok Sabha and had held a ministerial appointment in the central Cabinet. Last year, the Prime Minister asked him to take up the Chief Ministership of his state and he had to resign his seat in Parliament. His wife was then given the Congress ticket to run for election from the constituency vacated by him. She has held the seat in Parliament for two years now, but she has never participated in any of the discussions. She also does not attend the sessions very regularly. She has had no previous political experience.

Case 8: This is a woman Chief Minister. She is the third woman to become Chief Minister of an Indian state. Her father

was the Chief Minister before her. She succeeded him after his death.

She was a favourite child of her father. Even as a little girl she was all the time with him. He would buy her books about lives of great men and leaders of the country. Her idol was Subhas Chandra Bose. She was impressed by his courage and patriotism. Her wish as a child was to be somebody and help the downtrodden.

She is married to a Chartered Accountant. He wanted to settle in a metropolitan centre, but she preferred to stay on in her home state. She, of course, had the final say.

She has wide experience in social work and was Minister of State for Health during her father's Chief Ministership. She came into politics in a roundabout way. She wanted to be just there without getting involved in party factions. Her first experience was during the opinion poll when the question of merger of her home state with a neighbouring state was being voted upon. She saw some people jockeying for power and trying to break the party. She took part in the election and won. "My father," she says, "never suggested that I should get the party ticket. My name was put up by the party people."

Her main aim in politics is to complete the work her father had begun.

Case 9: This too is a Chief Minister. Born into a family of intellectuals, she was influenced by her uncle. He implanted a deep root of revolutionary ideas and spirit in her mind. She studied about the revolution in the U.S.S.R. and heard with rapt attention about the great ideals and deeds of Marx, Engels and Stalin.

As soon as she entered college, she became a full-fledged member of the CPI and started participating in student politics. She led a black flag demonstration against Jayaprakash Narayan, who

opposed the CPI's efforts to launch a general railway strike, for which she was convicted. She was also detained under the Preventive Detention Act for her activities in the revolutionary programme of her party to overthrow the Government. She was released on parole but again addressed a public meeting sponsored by the CPI and took a leading part in a massive demonstration protesting against the rise in college fees. She was arrested but released on an undertaking given by her father.

Towards the middle of 1950, she dissociated herself from the CPI and married a co-worker in the party who was also a jail-mate of hers. She devoted herself to literary and social work. All her political activities had, however, been watched by the then Chief Minister of her state. He inducted her into the Congress Party and put her in charge of the women's wing. She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1962, where, as member of the Consultative Committee of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, she had ample experience. She also formed part of the set-up where practically every decision of the Party and the Government was discussed. The deliberations of this group had an important bearing on the decisions of the Government. Mrs. Gandhi herself was leader of this group. Upon becoming the Prime Minister, she picked her up as a Deputy Minister.

Her entry in the Union Ministry was a great surprise even to her. In fact, she did not know that her name had been included in the list till the news was broadcast by All India Radio the following morning.

Case 10: This is an unsuccessful party worker. She has been active in the women's wing of the Congress Party for well over fifteen years now. Last time, when the Prime Minister wrote to the state branches of the women's wing of her party to send the names of women candidates who could be nominated for Lok Sabha elections, she applied for a Congress ticket from her home constituency. The party bosses did not favour her candidature and turned her application down. She is evidently sore over the rejection. "Politics," she says, "though interesting, is an unsavoury

game. Every group from each district—and there are so many districts in this state—wants to push its own candidates. In this tug of war, I as a woman naturally stood nowhere."

Case 11: This is the Rajmata of a famous royal house in Madhya Pradesh. She was herself a commoner, that is, did not belong to the royal family. She finds that this makes it easy for her to participate at the grass-roots level in politics.

She had always been interested in politics but had never actually taken any active part in public life. "So long as my husband, the former Maharaja, was alive," she says, "there was not much that I could do. He was very keen that I should keep firmly behind the scene, that I accept my role as wife and mother in seriousness." She entered active politics after the death of her husband.

She is a prominent member of the Jan Sangh. "The people of this country, particularly the women," she points out, "are extremely attached to the customs of their religion and culture. They are the upholders of the tradition. There is a need in India for a party which emerges from the national inclinations—religious and cultural—of the people." She feels that her own party represents the nearest response to such a need.

She holds the seat in Parliament from her home constituency. She finds the Parliament as it is today quite un-interesting. She attributes this to the 'roadroller' majority of the ruling party and the prominent position of the Prime Minister. "Indira Gandhi," she says, "in her role as Prime Minister has maturity, wisdom, and judgment. Her ability to steer a clear course for herself in the political life of the country is a remarkable phenomenon." She believes, however, that this situation cannot last long. Soon the present allocation of power would be eroded and the opposition would come into its own. Parliament should be very interesting then.

Case 12: This is an eminently successful woman politician. Belonging to a family which had had a long tradition of involvement in the nationalist movement, she was drawn into the

vortex of active politics at an early age. She participated in the national movement, courted arrest, and mobilised children and women for the achievement of national independence. She says that she would not have been engaged in political work as her husband, himself a well-known lawyer and politician, had asked her to keep away from political activities. Her continued involvement led to tensions between them. She drifted along a different course and, though the emotional bond with her husband remained quite strong, she devoted herself increasingly to political work.

After independence, she was appointed a member of the Congress Working Committee and placed incharge of the Women's Department. A couple of years later, she was elected to the Presidentship of the Party. As she was staying with her father, she often accompanied him on his international tours. This provided her with opportunities to participate in international forums and make contacts with top leaders in other countries. She obviously acquired skills that she could capitalise upon later, if an opportunity for participation at leadership level presented itself.

Around ten years ago, she was elected to the leadership of the Congress Parliamentary Party. She evidently had no strong credentials for the post. She was still quite young and had not yet proved herself worthy by a long enough test in office. She was, nevertheless, supported by party bosses over other claimants to the position. Presumably, the factor that weighed strongly in her favour was that she lacked an independent power base of her own. This led the party bosses to anticipate that she would be amenable to their control.

Once installed in office, she took her party bosses by surprise. She quickly gained confidence and acquired the skill and technique of wielding power without their support. This led to a split within her party, but it gave her absolute control over the affairs of the party. She has since proved her mettle in dealing with her opponents who show signs of becoming an embarassment to her.

From these very elliptical summaries of twelve concrete cases, I wish to draw some tentative propositions about the political status and role of women in India.

First, it seems apparent that women differ considerably among themselves as to their political involvement and patterns of political participation. Some women vote like their husbands or join the ranks of those who with complete responsibility ignore politics entirely. Because of the nature of sex roles and authority structure in the family, they find it almost natural to follow the male 'authority figure' when they go to the polls. Others participate in politics on their own but concede to male pressures. Still others realise the significance and value of their political prerogatives and use them quite independently.

Secondly, the structural position of a woman discourages both political participation and political independence. A high degree of political participation, political scientists have concluded, depends at least in part, on the presence of group pressures emphasising the importance of the ballot, and the absence of cross pressures discouraging political independence. In the case of women, each variable works against their participation in public life. A woman finds little encouragement to participate in politics. Unless she has a supportive husband or father, it is just as easy for her not to go to the polls. Moreover, the whole ideal of women's place contradicts the idea of female political independence which only the most committed can transcend.

Third, when women participate in politics, they respond to public affairs as individuals rather than as members of a special interest with a distinctive set of interests. This has special significance for those who argue that women should form a front of their own, independent of other political parties, and express their disinterested opinion and fight for issues of vital concern to them. It would suggest that the idea that women should organise along sex lines, nominate women, urge special legislation and vote en masse, represents little more than a 'hallucination'. Women differ in emotions, ideals, and prejudices just as much as men do.

Fourth, there are several alternate courses through which a woman gets to higher forms of political participation. She can get to it via the widow succession, or as a stand-in candidate or through a complex network of social and patronage links. Whatever the avenue of her entry into politics, she has to depend on the favours of male party officials for her political promotion.

Fifth, most women in top legislative positions either accommodate or depend on male leaders for whatever influence they might exert. Lacking a strong power base of their own, it is often hard for them to build their own independent spheres of influence. Moreover, the fact that most women remain in office for brief periods, would entail that there would be little opportunity for them to build influence. It is only in exceptional circumstances, such as those exemplified by the last case above, that a woman has an opportunity to build her own sphere of political influence.

Sixth, male political leaders like to appoint those women to political posts who they think share their point of view about political matters or who would be amenable to their political influence.

Seventh, when elected to party or legislative positions, they find it difficult to concentrate on issues that are of special concern to women. While they may continue an interest in health, education and welfare, their pattern of participation is quite varied. This fact supports recent findings that the political behaviour of men and women is quite similar at higher levels.

Eighth, there often is a keen competition for available elective and executive positions and success in this competition depends on a large variety of pulls and pressures. A woman as woman stands little chance of success in this tug of war. She must mobilise other pulls and pressures if she wants to succeed.

These propositions suggest that women are, by and large, characterised by a passive political orientation. What accounts

for this passive political orientation among Indian women? While a definite answer to this question must await further research, it seems clear that the sources of passive and dependent political orientation among women are rooted within the social structure itself. In tradition and practice, the Indian social structure provides an elaborate and segregated network of roles for each sex, with little interaction or exchange between them. This division of labour, in most cases, has led to division of authority as well.

Moreover, the idea that the two sexes should fulfil different roles and responsibilities is buttressed by institutions such as the family, and transmitted from generation to generation through the socialisation process. Males continue to be raised in a way that encourages a participatory life-style, females in a way that contributes to withdrawal, and attitudes and behaviour reinforce each other. Naturally, with few models of 'independent' women to emulate, only a small percentage of women are willing to risk failure in the female world of marriage and motherhood in order to prove their worth in the male world of politics.

These, then, are some of the speculations and hypotheses about the political status of women in India. What this discussion emphasises above all is the need for more intensive research. Meanwhile, it seems quite clear that the real obstacle to equality in the political sphere lies in the division of spheres between men and women; and the legal provisions have not substantially altered this. Women enjoy the right to vote and to be elected to decision-making positions, but these legal provisions have meant little. Nor would they mean much as long as the structure of relationships between the sexes continues to reinforce the idea that the man should be dominant in action toward the world outside the family and the woman should accept his leadership passively. Only a substantial upheaval that undermines the structural basis for traditional views of male and female roles would modify the existing assymetry in the political status of men and women.