INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

for

WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

An Indian Perspective

FINAL MANUSCRIPT

By

Devaki Jain

"Tharanga"
10th Cross, Rajmahal Vilas Extension

Bangalore-560 080
April 1991

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INTRODUCTION

India offers a useful laboratory for studying institutional arrangements for supporting women's advancement.

As a country it has kept in step with almost all the suggestions made by the U.N. and other frontline agencies for support to women. However, it also has widespread and growing non-governmental mechanisms for women's articulation.

As India maintains a Parliamentary democracy, with liberal traditions such as freedom of association, political plurality (namely a multi party system), as well as freedom of the press, so women's movement is also a heterogeneous pluralistic presence in the national scene - reflecting the diverse political and economic perspectives.

The inter-play between the 'State', namely the government and its limbs namely Parliament, the Judiciary, and the Executive and the "public" namely the press, the women's wings of political parties and the many types of women's formations has yielded a rich harvest of experience.

The Indian landscape offers all the variety of experience to draw the existential - further because of the variety both ethnic, religious, ideological and

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economic. It is possible also to offer a variety of 'models' - thus a microcosm of the South - if not the world.

It is hoped that this study of the Indian experience in the area of promotion of women's advancement, by recording the milestones, describing the structures, processes and circumstances under which they operated, will provide insights for future strategies.

Starting with a discussion on concepts and definitions and their genesis, the paper analyses the emergence of instruments pre decade and post decade, describes the Indian debates and assesses the national machinery in the context of the Indian political and economic framework.

The study is in 8 sections. Section one discusses the concept. Sections 2, 3 and 4, describes the Indian Landscape in terms of pre- and post decade efforts for structuring women's advancement, as well as the antonomous women's movement, and the contribution of women's studies, section 5, discusses change ᴎ or its abssence - in Indian women's lives and tries to account for it. Section 6, gives a glimpse of the Indian debate on structures. Section 7 Reviews the whole subject and section 8 proposes an appropriate mechanism for the South countries.

1. Concepts, Definitions and their genesis

The title of this paper is deliberate. It would have been normal or conventional to refer to the subject as National Machinery. This is a term that is being used both within the UN system, within countries and in most of the papers and literature relating to mechanisms for supporting the advancement of women. However, it is this paper's argument that by denoting or describing the intention of supporting women's struggle for advancement with institutional mechanisms such as a national machinery, the objectives have been thwarted. We might even go further to say that the term `national machinery' is misleading.

National machinery as a concept, has not only been defined, but has been differentiated and distinguished from focal point in a paper prepared by the Secretariat of the Centre for Women's Advancement located in Vienna. In this paper, the Secretariat says

Two different concepts need to be distinguished - a national machinery and a national focal point. National machinery is a complex organised system of bodies often under different authorities but recognised by the government as the institution responsible for issues relating to women.

In the literature on national machineries, there are further characteristics which have been assumed because of the concept. For example, it is assumed that this is a _central structure_. National level would mean that there would be a central office or a central headquarters. In that sense, it is a centrist concept. This concept of a central mechanism is further emphasised by the argument that it is necessary to have a centralised or a central structure which in turn would interact with other central structures like the sectoral ministries. This central structure would mediate in policy, again on the assumption that ultimately policy is determined again in a central point. The role then of this central structure is to participate in such centre-based activities and to ensure that women's questions are drawn to the attention of all these other central and therefore powerful structures.

Thus we see some debate on the second issue, namely the _location_ of such a central structure. There has been an analysis in the literature, a debate on whether it is more effective when it is brought right into the

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This definition is extracted from a paper entitled "National machinery for monitoring and improving the status of women - a holistic approach", prepared by the branch for The Advancement of Women, Centre for Development and Humanitarian Affairs, 9 September 1987 (prepared for seminar on similar subject, Vienna, 28 September to 2 October 1987).

President's or the Prime Minister's office, "the highest authority in the land" rather than being in a Ministry which tends to be the practise, usually Ministry of Welfare or Human Resource Development. Another suggestion is that it should be located in the central planning body like the Planning Commission in India.

Thus the debate on location also moves along the same track (a hidden assumption being that ultimately power lies at a central point). The closer it is to a central concept of power the more effective it will be.

The third characteristic of the conceptualisation has been the postulate that there will be a women's Bureau. Thus we see in many countries the development of a women's Bureau as part of the achievements of the Decade 1975-85. The UN system has directed the development of a Bureau of women's affairs within governments as a goal and its achievement is one of the positive milestones of progress in countries during and after the women's decade 1975-85.

An attempt will be made to trace the roots of this concept and to debate whether conceptually it has been a facilitator or otherwise, because the overall goal is of providing support or institutional support for women's advancement.

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The second area of definition and concept which would be discussed in this section is on what could be called the criteria by which we judge `advancement' or improvement in the position of women. Since the thrust of this paper is to look at changes in women's positions and trace backwards what has been the factors responsible for this change and how far these factors have been the outcome of the institutional support mechanisms including the national machineries, the index of change that will be used is most important.

There are obviously many types of indicators of change that are conventionally referred to. This paper would presume the indicators to be economic participation, literacy rates, health characteristics, political participation and so forth. That is the quantifiable change in the straightforward economical, political and social fields.

Deepening of such a set of indicators would be to separate them across certain social categories like class, caste, minorities. Another layer would be the move from private to the public domain such as shift from home based work and self employment, from unpaid family work to wage work, work in factories, work in what are called modern sectors. Similarly, in social groupings, from the area of seclusion to be able to come

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into public activities like public forums So there could be a discussion on change from "traditional domain", to what could be called the modern domain. Even on this, there could be some debate whether such a movement or transfer should be given positive values.

A third layer or dimension of looking at change, it could be argued, will be to see the change in `visibility´ or how far has there been a recognition of women and the women´s issues. In this case, the change cannot be measured in terms of actual changes in what could be called the women´s lives, but the change could be measured in social perception or perception of policy makers or data collectors on women´s role and capabilities.

It is important to list various approaches to recognising improvement. The reason this is being elaborated at this stage is because all of these three will form a part of the approach that will be used in this paper.

We return then to the first issue, namely the assumption or the premise that underlies the review of the literature or all the debates so far that we have had access to.

The concept of a national machinery it seems, emerged out of the culture of the UN system. Most large

bureacracies would tend to believe that in order to bring attention to any subject, it is necessary to have a bureaucracy. A secretariat, cell, or Bureau which looks after the section, which collects the information, which disseminates it, which safeguards the sector. Thus it is quite natural that when women become a subject of international interest leading to a UN decade, a mechanism has to be developed within the UN to handle the decade. The first step within the UN itself would be to have a Cell or a Bureau. In turn these Bureaus would find it easier to work with counterparts. Their counterparts would be other women's Bureaus located in the heart of national governments. In that sense, the national governments would imitate the model that is embedded in the international system. Thus as long as the Bureau in the UN cannot find a single place through which it can pass on the various mandates, issues, declarations that are the output of the international system, they would feel, in a sense, at sea. They would like to send them to a home in the national governments. Thus the UN system could not rest till it found its counterparts. This would be one of the reasons why the Bureau or the national machinery became such a significant part of the official women's movement all over the world.

What is the alternative? Some of the alternatives are certainly worse than having a Bureau. For example,

if there is a ministry for welfare and the political system of that country was insensitive to women's emancipation, but argued that the whole ministry has the arrangement for women, then the women's Bureau in the international organisation, whether it is in New York or Vienna, would find that its outpourings would get lost in an "uninterested" receptacle. To that extent it is much better to have a receptacle.

This tendency to ask for field organisations, branches all over the world to provide a platform or assistance still persists in the international organisation. Recently the UN Voluntary Fund, now commonly known as UNIFEM, have developed a similar arrangement. The UNIFEM feels that it must have an UNIFEM officer in every regional UNDP office. These officers in turn feel that they must have UNIFEM field officers even within the country. Thus today UNIFEM has regional officers plus national program officers. In a sense, this was contrary to what UNIFEM was conceptualised to be. UNIFEM was to be different from the UNDP. The UN system has a special Bureau for women's affairs which was working through the governments. The UN Voluntary Fund (UNIFEM) was supposed to provide an alternative instrument to the women's organisations, which were not necessarily the government's bureaus, to have access to funds as well as an international framework. UNIFEM was going to provide a catalytic role

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to facilitate non governmental organisations to not only do a task which they were doing ot which they wanted to do, but bring it to the visibility of the official system.

Thus it was supposed to uncover, teach, catalyse mainstream small projects and entirely work with the non governmental organisations. Today however, while this part, that is, funding non governmental organisations continues, it has not innovated and developed a system of functioning within the countries and in the field which is innovative. It still uses its own branch system to function. The example of UNIFEM is again to show that there is a compulsive tendency, a tendency which is perhaps necessitated by the controlling, regulatory, information - communication methods, which are already established, which in fact, require a central office, to regulate, conduct, retrieve and report.

The UNIFEM concept has evolved in a similar way and has become imitative of the usual trend of funding. It has not been a response to the kind of needs that women have, when they are trying to bring visibility, recognition and transformation.

It is important to see this beginning of the structure of national machinery, if we intend to make an appraisal of its performance.

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The Indian Landscape:

2(a)   Pre and Post decade structures

As has been stated earlier, India has been one of the most dynamic, energetic countries in following through various mandates and processes of the international women's decade and its aftermath. As a result of the Resolution of the General Assembly, India set up a Committee called the Committee on the Status of Women in India, to do a complete review and bring up a report on the status of women in India. Thus, as 1975 dawned, India already had a report called `Towards equality' on its table and could bring it to the World Conference in Mexico. Again, in anticipation of the international women's year, namely 1975, India had commissioned a book through its Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which was released as the first event of the decade in 1975. This book, called "Indian Women", was a collection of essays by distinguished scholars dealing with every aspect of the evolution of women in the Indian historical context.

Following the report of the CSWI as well as the various recommendations of the international organisations, India initiated many steps which could be called the various elements of a full fledged national machinery. The description of the Indian national machinery, its inception, its establishment, its

evolution etc. are given in Section 2 (b).

But what is more interesting is to look at the structures and processes that existed within, before the evolution of the more conventional national machinery, whose appearance, as was stated above, was the exact result of the UN initiative.

First, there was a Committee of Women who wrote a book called "National Committee on Planning" - 1946 (pre-independence) and made specific suggestions on the kind of areas that should be looked at, if India was planning for its women or planning what was not at that time called integrating women into development.

At the dawn of Indian independence the Indian government set up a National Board called the Central Social Welfare Board (1953). This Board was an initiative of the various women's organisations and its first Chairperson was an eminent woman leader, Durgabai Deshmukh. The Board wanted to be a network of the various women's groups that were scattered all over the country, engaged in what could be called providing services specifically to women. Simultaneously, the new government set up two more "economic reconstruction" boards, the All Indian Handicrafts Board (AIHB) and the Khadi & Village Industry Commission. These structures were "empowering" instruments not bureaucracies. For example the first chairperson of the AIHB was a famous

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woman revolutionary Kamladevi Chattopadyay. The Board was composed of craftspeople, designers and constructive workers. The chief executive was also a social and political worker. The government functionaries provided a secretariat to the Board, assisted at the grassroots - setting up exhibitions, design centres, skill transfer from master craftsmen and so on. It was a network.

The CSWB worked hand in hand with these economic boards often with common Board members, offering grants to social institutions and so on.

Many women's organisations became part of the AIHB & KVIC structures - a form of mainstreaming. There were other large national structures such as the All India Society for Women's Education, the Family Planning Association of India, which was largely a women's organisation. These were membership organisations with all India dispersal. This approach and this network has over the last few decades, been marginalised for many reasons.

First, it has been argued that the network of agencies that the Central Social Welfare Board was fostering and supporting, were dealing with welfare and not development. It has been argued that the concept of social welfare, of women being instruments of providing charitable services, services which deal with women's

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gender specific problems like maternity, child health, leisure activities, `clubs' are not as pugnacious as what is called development which hinges largely around women's productive role. The various "schemes" which were funded by the Social Welfare Board were specifically dealing with women who were victims of social customs. It dealt with widows, orphans. It dealt with bringing women into educational fold after they dropped out of school. It dealt with raising awareness for women on community activity and a small part of the Board's activity was helping to organise very poor women to be able to take up what today is called `income generating activity', and what in the old days was called `socio economic programmes'.

The network had some of the ideal characteristics such as that all the individual organisations were left free, they could go to the Board for grants, but the route was through state level Boards, who would scrutinise the proposals. The state level Boards were composed of women from the women's organisations which are usually dispersed in the districts of the state. There was no government official at all functioning on the Board. At the central level also, the Board was composed of what could be called eminent social workers and public figures, hardly any political women or women from the party or legislature. The budgetary sanction for the Board's operation came from the Government, but

the Board remained autonomous. Every year a conference was held at the national level where the chairpersons of the state level boards and the central board members met to discuss issues and future programmes. Both at the central level and at the state level, there was a small secretariat, composed of what could be called 'government functionaries', appointed by the Board but paid for by the Government. Thus Government and the 'voluntary sector' had found a way of partnership, where the decision making and power rested with the voluntary sector and the Government provided technical support.

When a small voluntary agency applied for a Dairy project, the state level board secretariat had to find a technical department which would clear the proposal. Thus the Dairy Department, the Small Scale Industries Department, the Village Industry Department would be obliged to scrutinise and guide projects which came under their sections. For reasons which could be called encroachment, the Board's work increasingly got marginalised, as the decade moved forward.

It is interesting and ironical to observe that at the end of 15 years, i.e. 1990, there is an increasing recognition that to facilitate the forward march of women, especially from the poorest sections of the society, the package called "welfare" is a critical input. Thus in the Seventh and Eighth Plans in India,

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there was greater emphasis on convergence of social inputs. There is far greater emphasis in the need to provide basic amenities like water, nutrition, such as a component of food, child care centres, health facilities, literacy etc along with or if not, even before work. Most poor women are working but they are dying and being ground into illness and death due to lack of proper support.

These new programmes are being developed to raise the awareness of women as well as to organise them while this old structure is being quietly eroded.

It could be argued that the over enthusiasm to make women's productive roles the focus of the "new movement" as well as the domination of the international concepts such as setting up Bureaus and giving a major role to government, could be responsible for the erosion of these "indigeneous" pre-1975 structures. It can also be said that with the advent of Government, the centre stage of the autonomous women and their structure began to take a backstage. The many all India structures of women's got marginalised by the advent of the concept of machinery and the concept of the international system of management of women's programmes.

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Indian Landscape

National machinery in India -

2(b) Post decade arrangements:

To set the context for a review of the process that
led to the formation of the Women's Bureau, it is
crucial to analyse briefly the history of the
development process as related to women. This analysis
leads back to the period of the freedom struggle in
which the constitutional struggle for women's equality
was first articulated. In the decade of the 1920's,
leading freedom fighters such as Sarojini Naidu,
Margaret Cousins, Muthulakshmi Reddy voiced the need for
WOmen's Constitutional Rights. In 1929, Dr.
Muthulakshmi Reddy opted for election to the legislative
council as an independent candidate and emerged
victorious. The Indian National Congress was not ready
to voice the demand of special interest groups such as
women. Given the tenor of the nationalist movement i.e.
against colonialism, any special interest was regarded
as divisive. During this period, organisations such as
the All India Women's Conference articulated the
educational/training aspect as critical inputs for women
to gain access to constitutional rights/ positions of
power. In Bombay, Iravati Karve and Vidyasagar in
Calcutta advocated the need to train women for
employment. In 1932, the Lucknow session of the Indian
National Congress for the first time tabled the

fundamental rights resolution stressing the equality of women.

The framing of the Indian Constitution particularly the Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Rights for women reflected this long process of women's struggle for constitutional guarantees. Enshrined in the Indian Constitution are numerous laws that guarantee women freedom of speech, protection of life and personal liberty, equality before law i.e non-discriminination of sex, equality of opportunity relating to employment/or holding of office, equal pay for equal work/ equal livelihood for men and women, adult franchise and so on.

Three major development periods can be identified in India's planning process i.e. (a) the period of community development (1950's) (b) the period of intensive agricultural development and emphasis on growth strategies (1960's) (c) the period of growth and social justice (1970's). The impact of the first period was felt when the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established in 1953. THe CSWB was an 'amalgam' agency to promote the social welfare of public such as the welfare of the family, women, children and the handicapped. Further, cases of employment, old age, sickness, disablement were also under its purview. The CSWB was reflective of the idealogy of the community

development approach i.e. an alliance of comprehensive self-help and welfare measures. Welfare measures were perceived as basic to converting under-utilized manpower into capital and goods.

Further Mahila Mandals, or women's forums, were set up to be instruments to bring women into the institutional framework of Rural Development.

There is great variation in the substance and performance of these "women's clubs". Some were registered, federated; some informal, most of them became mere pawns in the hands of the administration and were also not sufficiently representing of working classes.

This period was followed by India's strategy of intensive agricultural development (1960's) and finally, the disillusionment in growth strategies leading to the debate of growth vs social justice in the seventies. This decade envisioned for the first time programmatic thinking on equity for women and is considered a major landmark in India's planning idealogy. particularly, as it related to women as a separate interest and marginalised group. This era motivated by concepts of social justice was a rethinking that emerged due to political situations.

Specialized agencies were set up with 'the last first approach' of targetting towards discriminated

clientele i.e marginal farmers, DPAP, tribal areas program, minimum needs program and so on. This special concern led to the appointment of a Select Committee on the Status of Women in India (SCWI) to make a comprehensive review of the situation and status of women. The major areas of concern provided as a framework of reference, were the early age of marriage for girls high rates of female mortality and illiteracy, low rates of female participation in the labour force, internal migration and its impact on employment status. The critical outcome of the CSWI report was the recommendations in 1976 for the establishment of a Women's Welfare Development Bureau. In 1976 the Women's Welfare Development Bureau was set up in the Department of Social Welfare (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare). The same year witnessed the drawing up of a National Plan of Action for women that would serve as a guideline not only at the national level but at the state levels.

The Plan identified areas of health, family planning and nutrition, education, employment, legal provisions and social welfare for formulating and implementing action programmes for women and called for planned intervention for improving the conditions of women in "India".

The Women's Welfare and Development Bureau was charged with this nodal responsibility of (a)

coordination and collaborating with their multifarious
programmes in other central government ministries (b)
initiating policies, programmes and measures (c) collect
data and serve as a clearing house (d) monitor programs
for women's welfare (e) coordinating the implementation
of programmes at the State Government level (f)
Servicing or for the national committee, the Steering
Committee, Inter-departmental coordination committee of
the National Machinery (g) following-up on the
recommendations of the CSWI by formulating proposals and
providing guidelines (h) workingout financial and
physical targets (i) liasoning with multilateral/UN
agencies in the field of women's welfare.

Apart from its original terms of reference, the
Women's Bureau currently has been charged with action on
several new areas of work such as the following:

i)   The forward looking strategies upto the year 2000
     AD adopted at the World Conference held in Nairobi
     in July, 1985 at the end of UN Decade for Women;
     the document lays down strategies for the
     advancement of women in broad sectoral areas such
     as legal and constitutional status, their
     participation in politics and decision making,
     employment, health, education etc. by locating the
     obstacles to achievements and outlining strategies
     in each of these sectors;

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ii) the recommendations of the ministerial level meeting of the SAARC countries on women in development held in Shillong on May 6-8, 1986 followed by the setting up of a Technical Committee on Women, which envisages a continuous series of activities.

iii) assisting the `Department of Culture in setting up exhibitions, etc relating to women in "The Festival of India" to be celebrated in future in different parts of the world;

iv) follow up action on the new "Education Policy" adopted by the Department of Education in so far as it is applicable to women;

v) building of awareness campaign among the people about the status of women, the various legislators benefitting women and the programmes being implemented for their benefit through mass communication media, Radio, TV;

vi) launching of new schemes for women such as a new national training and employment programme as envisaged in the Twenty Point Programme 1986, Women's Development Corporations, as indicated in the Seventh Plan;

vii) monitoring the beneficiary created schemes for Women in the other Departments/Ministries; and

viii) reorganising and restructuring the CSWB in line with the recommendations of the Ranade Committee Report.

Structure & Staffing - Size of organisation, position, reporting lines, legistimising devices, structural supports, linkages with other Ministries/Departments
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The WWD Bureau presently comprises the following staff:

Name of the Post	Number of Posts
Joint Secretary	One
Director	One
Under Secretary	One
Desk Officer	Three
Section Officer	One

From 1986, the Bureau has been functioning with a separate Programming, Monitoring and Evaluation Cell comprising of the following staff:

Name of the Post	Number of Posts
Joint Director	One
Research Officer	One
Senior Instructor	One
Statistical Assistant	One

The Bureau functions under a Joint Secretary in the Department of Women and Child Development of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The Joint Secretary in charge of the Bureau is designated as the Bureau Head, who reports to the Secretary in the Department of Women and Child Development and through the Secretary to the Minister of State for Women and

Child Development (i.e. wherever the Minister is required to be informed of the development or implementation of policy decisions.)

To intensify efforts and measures needed for ensuring participation of women in national development, periodical coordination meetings are organised by the Bureau. These are with the representatives of Women's Voluntary Organisations, Ministries/ Departments concerned, Central Social Welfare Board etc. i.e to review the progress of women's welfare programmes and to discuss various issues related to the exploitation of women and atrocities committed against them. For instance a coordination meeting was held in 1985 to discuss the need for a special component plan for women by setting physical targets, embarking of funds, collection of statistics etc. Similarly, a national level meeting was held with voluntary organisations and social workers on the 1st July, 1985 under the Chairmanship of the then Minister of State for Social and Women's Welfare to discuss the role of voluntary organisations in the field of social welfare with special reference to the welfare of women and children. A meeting of Women Members of Parliament was organised by the Bureau on the 13th August, 1985 under the Chairmanship of the aforesaid Minister to discuss further amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act and to make it more effective and stringent.

Women as a target were originally the clientele of the social welfare ministry. With a combination of programs for reduction of physical weakness, isolation and vulnerability such as old age/widow pension, working women's hostels, prostitution, vocational education, women as a target were clubbed with the handicapped and the SC/STs.

In January,1985, for the first time 'Women' were emphasized as a special component of a newly formed department i.e.the Department of Social & Women's Welfare. Women still were linked with minorities, disadvantaged and handicapped clientele. In September, 1985 the pressure of the Nairobi closing decade conference (July, 1985) and the awareness generated by it, led to the creation of a separate Department of Women and Child. Particular emphasis was on the 'Women's Bureau' and its role as a coordination, planning unit and an advocate of Women's Programs and consciousness.

The Programme of the Women's Bureau and
the Central Social Welfare Board
(funded through the Bureau) 1985 +

The programs of the Women's Bureau are listed below:

WOMENS'S BUREAU

(i)   Hostels for Working Woman

(ii)   Setting up of employment and income generating
        production units with the assistance of Norweigian
        Agency for International Development. (Norad)

(iii)   Women's Training Centres/Institutions for the
        rehabilitation of Women in Distress

(iv)   Short Stay Homes for Women & Girls

(v)   Women's Development Corporations

(vi)   The scheme of Support to Training and Employment
        Programmes for Women. (STEP)

        The Bureau has also been releasing funds to the
        Central Social Welfare Board for the
        implementation of the major schemes for the
        benefit of women as listed below:-

(i)   Socio-economic programme with the objective of
        providing opportunities for work and wage to needy
        women such as economically backward, destitutes,
        widows, deserted and disabled.

(ii)   Condensed courses of education for adult women and
        vocational training programmes.

(iii)   Training of Rural Women in Public Cooperation

(iv)   Family Counselling Centres

(v)   Program of Creches for children of working &
        Ailing Mothers/Supplementary Nutrition
        Program/Integrated Pre-School Project: Urban
        Neighbourhood.

(vi)   and other schemes
        The programs of the Women's Bureau listed above can

be classified as (a) service oriented i.e. welfare

programs (b) employment oriented and or integrating

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women into mainstream economic activities. Under the welfare programs can be discussed Working Women's Hostels, Homes for Women in distress, short stay homes, complaint cell, monitoring cell and so forth. Under the employment oriented programs, two types of programs can be clearly discerned (a) employment generation for women as perceived in isolation as a goal (b) a + cognizance of backward/forward linkages and changes in production relations.

Details on "Schemes" of Women's Bureau

Working Women's Hostels: The Women's Bureau runs 380 working women's hostels as of March, 1986. The working women's hostels were in 1985 initiated as a support service in urban area. Since 1985, they are more rural and semi-urban based. At each working women's hostel, day care centres have been attached recently as a new program activity (towards a more service based and integrated approach)

Homes for Women in distress address the issue of dowry harassed victims, deserted, penniless women. The approach, however, has been to address vulnerability rather than utilise a direct strategy such as employment. The home, however, serves a limited purpose as an alternative residence for women that need boarding and lodging during times of crisis.

Short Stay homes are mainly boarding and feeding centres for women in crisis. Since a decade, no evaluation was done to assess the quality of the homes. a current evaluation notes that it is the responsibility of the short stay homes to send women "back into society as decent citizens. Linked with this attitude of perpetuating countervailing social idealogy is the sustainence of activities such as tailoring/embroidery and other marginal economic activities. Preventive, rehabilitative and curative services such as these are more harmful in their marginalization and reinforcing of women's discriminative social roles (be it the oppressed wife, dowry victim or abandoned wife).

The scheme of Women's Development Corporation is a new scheme in the Seventh Five Year Plan. The outlay for the plan is Rs. 50.00 Lakhs. The Women's Corporations are currently in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These are set-up by the State Governments. The objective of setting up of the Women's Development Corporations has been "to assist the State Governments in promoting women's employment by providing technical and financial assistance".

The Five Women's Corporations have performed variedly and no comparable parameters can be utilized. The Tamil Nadu and Punjab Corporations have recorded higher

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profits than the other three Corporations. The Andhra Pradesh Corporation has a Women's Finance Corporation while the Tamil Nadu Corporation has an electronic assembly unit, printing press plus a new scheme for agricultural and technological extension in one district of Tamil Nadu.

Three issues are not clear from the guidelines and implementation of the Women's Development Corporations:

a) the target group intended to be reached by the Corporations.

b) size and nature of undertaking i.e. micro enterprise, industrial units and so on.

c) operational role i.e. coordination or implementing agency.

While the majority of the female labour force in India belong to the low income, low skill sector i.e. the urban/rural unorganised sector, currently, Corporations are operating as industrial units providing employment to a different clientele. Alongwith its nature as an industrial unit, employer/employee relations, negotiations and problems have begun in the Punjab Corporation. The beneficiary group, therefore, are alienated by the lack of access to labour processes, management or even decision making in the Corporations.

The Norad employment schemes (non-traditional areas
of employment) covers 2Ø units around the country.
Initiated in 1982, its initial goal was to sensitize
public sector companies to `make work place´ for women.
An evaluation of the Norad schemes in 1985 noted that
women were mainly mostly semi-skilled and some units
provided little skill training. The educational and
organizational aspect was marginal in the activities of
the units. The relationship of management and worker
were structured in the traditional vertical fashion.

Now the scheme is being diverted to smaller firms
and organisations to whom capital equipment and cash
would make a difference. Further trainees are
encouraged to initiate production units such as
electronics and radio assembly. From sensitizing public
sector units to employ women, this scheme is now trying
to provide women access to means of production. Women´s
organisations are now running units such as radio and
electronic assembly under this scheme.

The WWD/Bureau also functions as a complaint cell
wherein complaints regarding "Dowry Demands", "Non-
transfer of dowry" to the bride on divorce or death",
"dowry deaths" etc., are being dealt with. As a nodal
point it has also become necessary for the WWD Bureau
for taking up various types of grievances such as non-
implementation of some social legislations enacted for

providing categories of complaints, such as non-compliance of policy decisions, guidelines or instructions relating to posting of husband and wife at the same station by Government, Public Sector Undertakings etc., retrenchment from service of ad-hoc female employees or provisions relating to maternity leave, bigamy committed by permanent employees violating the provisions of the conduct rules, cruelty towards wife, desertion of wife, unfair treatment or harassment of women employees etc.

The Bureau has had to prevail on the concerned Ministry/ Department to finalise policy decisions arising from the above mentioned issues i.e guidelines regarding posting of married couples, clarification regarding maternity leave irrespective of the marital status of the women concerned were issued when the matter was taken up by this Department.

The Monitoring Cell of the Women's Bureau set up in 1985 has 27 programs in 8 - 10 departments to monitor. The emphasis has been on reviewing targets and in a limited way assessing the quality of services (motivation, training and self esteem). The monitoring cell has no technological inputs to facilitate its activities through computers, terminals or quality based studies. 80% of the posts have not been filled up in the Cell.

The second type of projects relate to a) employment generation as a single goal b) utilize employment generation with backward and forward linkages. They also visualise an overhaul of production relations as a major goal. Under the first category are the five women's development corporations.

Since 1986, some efforts are being made to "mainstream" women. The most dynamic of the programs of the Women's Bureau in terms of idealogy/ approaches is the Support to Employment Programs (STEP) initiated in 1986. The Program is to integrate women in the eight mainstream employment sectors namely agriulture, Dairy, sericulture, fisheries, Khadi and Village Industries, Handicrafts and Handlooms. The idea is to take the need and context of each state (Sectorwise) and create large scale employment programs for Women such as Dairy in Bihar State, Sericulture in Tamil Nadu State, Fisheries in Karnataka State and so forth. Organisation of women has been visualised as critical to the success of this program. Involvement of non-governmental agencies for organisation of women and utilization of sectoral agencies (such as the National Dairy Development Board) for skill training and overall co-ordination by State Dairy Federations has given the Bihar Women's Dairying Project an integrated and sensitive approach to implementation. All other projects in the eight primary

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sectors will utilize varying agencies such as the Bihar Project as well as employ forward/backward linkages in planning and implementation. STEP has policy implications for Women's Projects in developing countries particularly the implementing of learning process approach programs in large bureaucracies.

In 1991, two more such "programmes" to be part of the women's Bureau's allocation of resources are being attempted. One a 50 Backward District Programme where the goal will be to achieve female literacy and another to do an area plan which integrates women and children into development.

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) draws its funds through the Bureau. In its list of schemes, some changes in approach and a clear policy change similar to the Women's Bureau can be senses. Particularly, the awareness generation camps are now focussed on building local leadership among women. However, follow up is rather limited. The health/education employment component have been linked to these camps. The other scheme that shows considerable promise are the restructured condensed courses. They now focus clearly on field level functionaries i.e training creche, nutrition, non-formal education and anganwadi* workers. The approach is clearly to service and Cooperate rural based organisations. The scheme of training of creche

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workers, also has added a critical input i.e. health practices. This scheme of training workers can be perceived as moving more closer to the multipurpose worker at the grassroots.

At the Women's Bureau, all the major schemes follow the project approach, except the Norad schemes for employment or STEP. None of the former have viably contributed to mainstream economic activity for women or considered integration of women in the major sectors crucial. The heavy emphasis is on blueprints and targets tied down to specific activities i.e. 'the planner is the most significant variable in projects'. The flexibility of the process or changes at the local level cannot be dealt with in the blueprint approach to planning or development. The processual or learning process approach is participatory and the planning/action initiatives where the implemention is. Upward flows of information about problems are encouraged i.e. a responsiveness to the demands from below (clients) rather than an order from above.

Section 3

Women's Movement

The women's role in the national liberation struggle gave birth to several women's organisations which articulated the debate on women's question and its essential outcome was constitutional equality and the legislative amendments in Hindu laws in the 50's. The women's question and the implication of the principle of gender equality adopted in the Fundamental Rights Resolution of 1931, represents one of the most important of these unresolved debates.

The issues that women's groups have taken are wide ranging such as health, law, access to land and other productive resources, environmental degradation, media, rape, violence, dowry deaths, sati, wife beating, alcoholism, trafficking, police atrocities, prostitution, devdasi, women prisoners, communal and caste conflicts and gang rape of tribal and dalit women. Wide ranging issues provide space for participation to different groups of women. Agitations since 70's on issues such as dowry/rape/crime and violence against women, have also shown the vital role played by information generation, sharing and dissemination by the women's movement and the media and the need for joint action. Acts of violence against women (Mathura rape case, Sudha Goel dowry murder case, Deorala Sati incidence) have drawn so much attention and emerged as

rallying points for women's groups, rather than day to day oppression of millions of women in their homes and work places. A sustained campaign against the 'sexist media' and finding new and alternative ways to create messages, communicate and mobilise is an important aspect of issue based agitation, street plays, skits, poster campaigns, songs and mobile exhibition, newsletters, women's studies journals etc.

Several factors have contributed to the widening of debate on women's issues in India. The reassessment of the challenges of growth, development and equity issues from women's perspective has generated interesting debates on dimensions and causes of gender inequality. Growth of women's studies, women and development debate, reconstruction and reinterpretation of 'her own history' her identity, her subjectivity, have all influenced the dialectics of the women's movement and its agenda for action. The connections between knowledge and practice are always problematic particularly within a complex and diverse society, however, the construction of social reality of women as an oppressed group, provides a point of departure.

The debate on development crisis and crisis in key social institutions, and a critique of growth models and their national and international dimensions, and analysis of new inequalities generated by the pattern of

development and new forms of exploitation emanating from world economic systems, have given a new direction to women's movement. The 'women in development' literature which began exploring and explaining the realities of women's lives and inter-connections between macro-processes of development and women's disadvantaged situation, found many areas of common interest, i.e. impact of technological changes on women's work and income, women and migration, female headed household, women in the informal sector and in home-based production, impact of industrialisation strategies (particularly in export oriented industries) on women, women and environmental degradation etc.

The official ideology of a 'soft state' committed to women's equality and development, occasionally get expressed in various policy statements, however, the social reality of the majority of women presents a sharp contrast to stated policy objectives.

The concern for issues of marginalised groups of tribals, landless and poor rural and urban women, women in the informal sector and mobilising them around survival issues such as fuel, fodder, water, forest dwellers rights, minimum wages, working conditions, sexual exploitation by rural rich, bondedness, indebtedness etc. separates the contemporary movement from the earlier movement by taking women's issues into

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new areas of concern. In the process, the relationship between educated, articulate middle class women acting as 'catalysts' and mobilisers in rural and urban areas, is also changing.

The concept of 'grass root organisations' of rural and urban poor women as participatory and mobilising mechanisms has emerged from the critiques of development models and the blindness to gender dimension in development policies and programmes. Women's research and action groups have brought to focus the administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks, leakages in the benefits reaching to poor, corruption, delays etc. and the need for vigilant and strong organisation of producers and beneficiaries. Grassroots organisation earlier seen as 'delivery mechanisms' are now seen as 'participatory and mobilising mechanism' to increase women's visibility and bargaining power.

The crisis of rural and urban poverty has generated several responses from voluntary action groups and provides an interesting experience about the roles and perceptions of such groups in mobilising the poor women and questions relating to form, content and methodology of grassroots organisations. Do such organisations whose critical role is being recognised now both by bureaucracy and the social action groups, besides increasing women's visibility to development planners and administrators, also 'empower' them? Do they equip

women in better understanding their oppression and in trying to combat pressures from the family community and the exploitative power structure? It is also argued that while women share many of the problems of the poor in general there are many issues which are female specific and to deal with such issues, women need to organise separately.

There are two distinct viewpoints about middle class 'catalysts' mobilising the rural and urban poor. Some women's organisations believe that mobilising women for economic development is critical as it is likely to help them challenge the forces of oppression. They also believe that search for more effective strategies and instruments for women's development, has opened up a line of communication between the government, researchers and activists. The process of interactions has helped to improve the conceptualisation of women's needs, problems, roles and potentialities within the Government, although it is highly uneven and there is still lack of clear understanding, lethargy and misinformation at the conceptual and implementation level. Insufficient understanding of the complex relationship between the achievement of policy objectives and women's active participation has hampered formulation of effective policies and programmes. The strategy of involving voluntary agencies in the implementation of anti-poverty and Minimum Needs

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Programme definitely assumes that such programmes should build on people's initiative and participation. Government's recognition and development assistance to grassroot groups creates a dilemma for such organisations as they are faced by a contradiction between their interests and state policies.

Some advocates of `participatory development' have a negative view of the role of bureaucracy. There are social action groups which believe that "grassroot participatory organisations" are not something which the Government can promote. They mobilise women for self-initiated collective action. Some of them combine mobilisation with development action and see such action as `empowering strategy' by enabling women to sustain such struggles, while others support women's mobilisation for struggle but do not support the idea of women forming a separate forum to articulate their problems as women, and believe that women's issues need to be raised within all social and democratic movements. There is no doubt that there is a difference between grassroot organisations, promoted by the Government, or by some old fashioned women's organisations who want to `do something' for the deprived women, and grassroot organisations promoted by committed catalysts.

The role of such `catalysts' has also come in for considerable scrutiny and criticism. The question of

perspectives, leadership and their relationship with local organisations and leaders, funds (from both national and international agencies), issues of credibility and accountability, have been intensely debated. It is argued that in order to play the catalyst's role, such organisations need to be independent of government and yet influence policy matters. NGOs receiving foreign funds face another dilemma, as such organisations are vulnerable to adverse propaganda. To be effective, catalysts need to have credibility and thrust of the people. While several of these issues related to 'grassroot experiments' remain unresolved, the growth of such pressure groups has definitely contributed to the debate on mobilisation strategies and the role of such organisations as a counter-force. There are, however, some dissenting voices.

Recently the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in Informal Sector constituted by the Government of India, submitted its report with a focus on unprotected women labour in poverty sector. In the preface the Chairperson of the Commission, Ms. Ela Bhatt writes, "I learnt that these women are better fighters against poverty than their men, have more calculative, stable, forward looking strategies to deal with their own environment, yet the women remain poorer ... Awareness has spread, though slowly .... The new

opportunities are gradually catching their attention. In
every group that we met, there were one or two bright,
articulate, defiant young women ready to act as
catalysts for better future ..... If left to women's
groups and to poor women's own efforts, it is unlikely
that such organisations will come up that soon and in
large numbers to make a significant dent on the
situation of these women. That is why the Commission has
recommended to the Government to actively help initiate
and maintain a network of grassroot level organisations.
It is ironic that one is asking the state to support a
machinery to promote action for change in state
policies, but we have done it with great hope on the
strength of the Foreword of our Seventh Plan stating
that development is basically about people,....

For many of these questions facing the women's
movement, we have to find our own answers. Today we see
ideologically disparate organisational forms, visible and
invisible movements confronting the concept of laissez
faire state and the manifestation of its various
policies. Desai says that "at the end of the Decade a
new scenario is visible in the Indian women's movement.
There has been a sea change in structuring of women's
groups, in mobilising of women and in focussing on
issues that concern women". Can we call it a women's
movement? While agreeing that one of the major problem
in the Indian women's movement is of widening the base,

she thinks that we would be ignoring the reality to say
that there is no women's movement or that it is an
'urban elitist thunder clap' or women's groups are
'merely instruments of bigger political power brokers'.

4. Women's Studies Movement

The Women Studies Movement in India has set the basic tone of women's studies into being something of a continuous crusade in the cause of women. It has also obtained from the state in India a formal commitment of support to the cause of women. While the state has certainly not launched on any major movement to restructure the Indian Society and while its support to the cause has also sometimes been subverted by other political compulsions, it has at least been fairly generous with research funds for women's studies. Official data collecting agencies too have made considerable efforts to sensitise their enquiries and tabulation programmes to women's concerns. Thanks to such efforts, India today has perhaps one of the most reliable and comprehensive data base in this field among all developing countries.

The women's movement is essentially a political movement which potentially involves all women regardless of their caste, class or other alignments.

This politicisation in women's consciousness of what was long regarded as personal has given women's studies an extra dimension which is not often shared by other academic disciplines. Therefore most researchers start as activists in women's movements or become drawn to it in the course of their work. Most people, at

least most women engaged in this field have a sense of direct personal involvement in the process they are studying. Therefore sooner or later most researchers get involved in the women's movement. Activists too often feel an urge to understand the background of the discrimination against women. As a result they too try to systemise the information they collect and analyse it with a view to bring out the basic patterns underlying their observations. For both groups, there is therefore a heightened sense of participation in the lives of the subjects they are studying. This involvement no doubt reduces the objectivity of their analysis, and to that extent vitiates their efforts. At the same time, this kind of participatory observation has often made observation by these people more acute, more perceptive; their hypotheses also can become more imaginative and and bold. In the initial stage of a new discipline such as women's studies at this juncture, these qualities can be particularly useful for highlighting its potential promise and therefore attracting new scholars.

What are the achievements of women's studies in India? One must first and foremost point to the impressive corpus of research generated over the past few years. A large section of this research has been devoted to finding and collating factual information about various aspects of the relative situation of

women. This preoccupation with facts was partly because results of the long standing gender-based discrimination in India were so palpably obvious and readily measurable and yet had been so totally neglected by mainstream academics. To bring these facts into academic discourse was perhaps a fairly heady game. The initial framework given to research by the Committee on Status of Women in India had also been fact oriented. Therefore arguing from macrolevel trends has been one of the main methodologies of Indian women's studies.

A further reason for the preoccupation with factfinding in these initial stage could be the world-wide interest at the juncture in the issue of women and development. Following Esther Boserup's pioneering work in this field, the issue had become the main focus of the 1975 UN conference at Mexico for initiating the international decade for women. Following the resolution adopted by the conference, the government of India, several UN agencies as well as other aid giving groups had allocated considerable funds towards research for investigating several crucial aspects of the existing situation of women and for designing specific projects to alleviate it.

In trying to analyse this data on a systematic discipline-wise basis, researchers in women's studies have come to pose some serious challenges to standard

concepts and models used by several academic disciplines. A major example of such a challenge relates to the concepts of work and workers as defined in Economics. While investigations at practical level indicated that an average women bears an enormous load of work and contributes significantly to her household's real resources, official estimates of work participation rates, i.e. percentage of economically active women in India were surprisingly low. Specially in some parts of India, official records indicated that not more than three to six percent of women were in the labour force. This apparent contradiction could not be resolved until two basic points were accepted: one, that at least in a developing country, the concepts of work and workers, if defined strictly in terms of their market orientation, are not adequate for covering the entire gamut of productive activities in the economy and specially, those of women within the households. Secondly, however, objectively conducted, standard official enquiries regarding work cannot but reflect the gender based biases prevailing in our society because the concept of work is itself not value neutral. It is subject to various interpretations according to the ideologies prevailing within households regarding the image of women.

Similarly, standard formulations regarding labour market behaviour and class formation have had to be

modified to accommodate the significant influence of gender as a relevant factor. Not only is it a very important criterion segmenting both the supply of and demand for labour, but it is also a valid consideration for determining a person's access to productive assets, as such poverty and other vulnerabilities of assetless working people have been found to affect women to a relatively greater degree than men. This is due not only to class contradictions and uneven distribution of economic power within the economy but also to the intra-household ideologies about the status and appropriate roles of women.

In fact studies regarding the essential nature of households and families have become an increasingly important section of their field in India. Here too, standard notions have been found to belie the reality. Households are often portrayed as socialistic units where each member is nurtured to an equal degree and provided with his or her requirements to the best of the household's ability. Members too are all assumed to contribute voluntarily their best for the household's well being. Reality however is quite different from these myths. Relations between different members within a household are far from being benignly complementary as is usually assumed. They are in fact dominated by gender and age-based hierarchies. Decisions regarding deployment of household resources reflect the uneven

weightages given to the welfare of different members by authorities within families. These systems of weightages moreover are found to systematically discriminate against specific groups like girl children and young wives. These findings have given a strong impetus to women's movements to agitate for state and welfare agencies dismantling their family oriented programmes in favour of others directed to particularly vulnerable specific groups of persons even at the cost of undermining the authority and solidarity of households.

Another thrust of women's studies has been in the rewriting and reinterpreting of social and political history with a fresh focus. Writings in Indian history have so far been mainly related to happenings in the public domain. And since women were by tradition excluded from that sphere, historical accounts by and large did not recognise the existence of this half of human society. The few women who found a place in historical legends or accounts were those who had broken the moulds and entered public life. Here too, records and judgements were strictly from the male point of view. In order to rectify these ommissions, researchers in women's studies have been freshly examining standard sources of historical material. These sources of course are far from adequate since our traditions had given little space for women in social perceptions.

Therefore historians have ventured further and further into exploring non-standard sources of information like oral reports, newspaper records, autobiographies, traditional songs and sayings, rituals and myths, women's portrayal in various art forms etc. Apart from setting historical records straight regarding women's roles in past societies, this work has contributed exciting findings regarding the evolution of ideologies in India and the uses they have been put to in social movements, formations etc.

Cultural studies and literacy analysis are the new areas in women's studies where tempo of work has been going up steadily. These scholars have drawn on several new developments in various disciplines starting from Philosophy and Hermaneutics and including Political Theory, Sociology, Literary critisism, Social Linguistics etc. Their work broadly fits in with a few theoretical frames recently developed in social sciences of which discourse theory and subaltern studies are some of the more prominent examples. An exciting mixture of concepts and methodologies borrowed from several disciplines combined with use of various non-traditional source materials have created in them a rich potential for analysis of social structures, artefacts and hierarchies. Special emphasis is also being given to the study of language as a source material. A related area of particular importance in India is of

Comparative Literature and Language Studies, because they provide a methodology for exploring the variations in interpretations between regions within India of what appear to be ideologies shared by all ; one example of this kind of problem could be the ideology of motherhood which, though common to most parts of India still has several different connotations prevalent in different regions.

For women's studies in India, these kind of approaches can be particularly useful in analaysing and demystifying the true nature of our gender relations. The process of women's subordination in India is loaded with insidious myths about women cast in such glorious images as Shakti the Goddess of power personified, Laxmi the Goddess of wealth or Annapoorna the Goddess giving food.

These images are constantly reinterpreted from the standpoint of diverse ideologies all designed to obfuscate the long-standing traditions of men dominating over women. Fed on the beautiful myths from childhood onwards, and pursued by their constant reinforcement through the mass media, most women in India find it very difficult to cut through layers of obscurantism and face up to the vulnerability for themselves that is built into this gender based power structure. It is only through systematic efforts to deconstruct each myth

and popularising of that understanding that we can hope to build up a strong defence against this insidious process.

Indian women's studies are now poised to enter a new stage, a stage where generating adequate theoretical frameworks is going to be the need of the day. These studies now have a fairly large and reliable data base. There is an increasing perception among the people involved of the complexities of the issues and variables involved. There have also been numerous experiments to devise some methodological tools suitable for the field. Since most phenomena being studied are related to multiple variables of diverse characteristics, there have been many experiments with interdisciplinary studies. No doubt the field has grown too fast for most researchers to fully master the concepts, tools and models of the several disciplines they draw on : these experiments therefore have sometimes left a lot to be desired. Nevertheless, examples of such successful interaction between disciplines are not hard to find.

Notwithstanding these achievements, women's studies are still hovering at the periphery of the academic world.

5. Section

Measuring Change

In Chapter 1, we have talked of several layers of phenomena which have to be unfolded in order to record change. First, the quantifiable changes such as literacy, health, work participation, political participation and so on. Second, the measuring of such quantified and quantifiable changes in terms of classes and in India, castes and minorities. The third layer would be to see whether there has been a shift from the private to the public domain. For example, in work from home based work to wage work. A fourth would be to see whether in social activities there has been a shift from seclusion to public forum, what could be called from the traditional domain to the modern domain. Another layer of fifth dimension of looking at change would be to see whether there has been an increase in visibility, whether there has been an increase in the recognition that there is a women's question. Such a change could not be measured in quantities but could be measured in social attitudes. In this section we would try to get a glimpse of the situation as far as these five types of indices are concerned.

In an exercise that was undertaken by the ISST, which was called the Indian Women's Experience of Development in the last 15 years (for ICSSR) the authors (principally Nirmala Banerjee but also Devaki Jain,

Mukul Mukherjee and Sudhir Bhattacharjee) find that merely an increase or a strong presence of economic roles does not necessarily strengthen what could be called social status. Not that it is not important by itself, but it is not sufficient. Another proposition which comes through, is that more than power, autonomy is the most sensitive and most empowering attribute. This is corroborated in a paper written by Gita Sen, trying to explain the changes in fertility. It is not education alone, nor economic participation nor stages of development nor even health, but autonomy that has given the real push to reduction in fertility rates in India. Third, that in spite of public investment, inspite of certain modern indicators moving in the positive direction, certain pockets of Indian society with certain cultural modes remain static. In other words, at the disaggregated level, there is no real shift in what could be called the indicators of improvement.

Has the position of Indian women improved over time? Is it true that, even within a similar class, women improved over time? Is it true that, even within a similar class, women of some parts of India are better off than those of others? Has development been good for women or bad? Although these and similar issues have been discussed infinitum by all concerned across coffee tables, in political fora and in official committees, they rarely get unambiguous answers. Rather, the more knowledgeable the person dealing with the subject the more the hedging and qualifying that goes into the answer. This is surely not for want of investigation or information. Indeed, in India, women's studies of the last two decades, women and development has been a favourite topic ; moreover, in most such studies, there was a welcome tendency not to regard women's issues as static but to take account of changes that had taken place in them over time, through social and economic upheavals.

Women's status or position is made of many diverse dimensions – their health, their educational achievements, the role they play in social, political and economic activities, their legal rights etc. So far, it has been customary to examine each such dimension separately as for example was done in the report of the Committee on the Status of women in India in 1974. This exercise was once more repeated in 1985

both by respective government departments and also by several groups of individual researchers. But a comparison between the results of those two sets of exercises only helped to highlight the inherent difficulties in judging this issue. On some aspects, there was a distinct improvement in women's achievements over the decade. In others, the change was not always positive or not as marked. Again, even when women had made some gains in a particular dimension, these gains were not always comparable with the gains made by men. Therefore, inspite of all this research, no conclusive answer could be given to the simple question as to whether or not at the end of the women's decade, Indian women were better off than they were at its beginning.

Also, although the publicity given to the women's decade in India was quite remarkable, few would claim that it was matched by purposive actions on the part of either the government or the society. Therefore, we are infact concerned not just with what happened in this brief period of one decade but with what has been happening to Indian women over the entire period of development for which we have some systematic data. And, even a cursory examination of this data indicates that even over this entire period of the 20th century these kind of interdimensional contradictions and problems of aggregation were very marked. A few examples would perhaps make this point clear.

Firstly, on several aspects, women's position has moved in a direction tangential to the general trends that came about through development. For example, after 1921, general standards of health began to improve in the country and expectation of life at age zero (eg:) started going up: it went up from 19.4 between 1911 to 1921 to 26.9 between 1921-1931 and then to 41.9 between 1951-1961 (figures are for male population). Women's e: was also rising over this period but in every decade it fell increasingly below that of men (GOI 1985 Table 2.1 p.87). Similarly, between 1921 to 1961 the all India employment of men increased both in absolute terms and also as percentage of total male employment. But for women, this figure fell continuously in absolute numbers between 1911 to 1961 (J.N.Sinha 1972, ch. I).

Secondly for women as a group, different indicators of relative well being have been moving in different directions. For instance, between 1931 and 1971, disparity between men's and women's literacy and educational performance had been slowly going down (Sopher 1980, ch.no) but over the same period, the relative position of the girl child within the family does not seem to have improved very much (this is discussed later in some detail). In another respect, while women's civil and political rights have improved considerably, incidence of malpractices such as dowry and violence in marriage have certainly continued unabated.

The third set of inconsistencies becomes evident when one looks at regional differences in women's position. One finds that areas of similar rates of economic growth do not show similar rates of improvement in women's conditions. For example, in the last two decades, while economic growth rates of Haryana were comparable with those of Punjab and Maharashtra, life expectancy of women in the former region was significantly below those of the other two regions (GOI 1985 Table 2.3, p.89). Another example would be from a recent study of Rajasthan and Bihar which showed that inspite of a higher level of achievement on most aspects including female literacy, Rajasthan continued to have significantly higher rates of total fertility than Bihar (Srinivasan & Kanitkar 1984).

What happened to women of different parts of India could not thus be explained only in terms of the level of economic development. In the pattern of distribution of the costs and benefits of development, gender had played an important but varying role in each region.

Multiplicity of variables affecting women's position is not the only reason why analysis of the issue of women and development has not been very fruitful. The approach from which this analysis is initiated is also vitiated by questionable assumption regarding the relation between the two processes viz

women's subordination and economic development. One group of analysts consider women's subordination as a cultural phenomenon determined wholly by past traditions. Economic development is then regarded as an extraneous variable which changes some parameters of the economy and society and hence also women's conditions. But because no allowance is made for a possible interaction between the two processes themselves, there is no explanation about why women of some societies respond more positively to economic stimuli or why some kinds of development policies are more effective in reducing women's subordination.

On the other hand another group of analysts assumes that women's subordination is entirely a function of economic development and each particular stage of the latter can be linked with particular forms of women's subordination. In this kind of analysis by Marxist feminists, attempts are made to link todays subordination. In this kind of analysis by Marxist feminists, attempts are made to link today's subordination of third world women with the experience of women of developed world in earlier periods and stages of development (Mies 1986 et al 1988). Others take note of the distortions introduced in the classical pattern of impact on women of capitalist development countries by the first world through multinationals (Deere 1976). This analysis errs on the side of

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overgeneralisation and makes no allowance for cultural specificities and burdens of traditions that affect the way in which women can be utilized by capitalist forces. After all if there is any truth in the much touted image of "nimble fingers" of the South East Asian women, then one must acknowledge the fact that the fast economic growth of countries like South Korea and Thailand on the basis of export industries sponsored by multinationals at least partly depended on the availability there of a large pool of women who were docile but hard working and who enjoyed full societal sanctions for participating in production work outside their houses. On the other hand though labour was probably even cheaper in South Asia, absence of similar traditions of women working for wages outside agriculture must have inhibited setting up of similar foot-loose export industries there.

Actually for understanding what happens to women's position in development it is essential to realise that the process of women's subordination is also a political one like that of economic development. In each society, the two processes take place within the same social arena and interact with the same traditional socio-cultural and economic institutions. As such neither can remain independent of the other. The extent to which development can affect women either positively or negatively itself depends on the initial position of women-their capabilities to respond to and to avail of

new challanges and opportunities; The ease with which older traditions controlling women's social and economic responses can be altered also has a bearing on the pace and character of development. On the other hand, nature of development and the speed with which it takes place can also make significant inroads on traditional controls over women. Therefore neither socio-cultural traditions nor forces of economic change can claim primacy over the other as explanant of women's position in a given society. Nor can one subscribe to the viewpoint which regards women as "Sarvamsaha Dharitri" (the all suffering earth) passively absorbing the impact of development.

Some indicators (1) Sex Ratio

The figures shows that in the time period the first 80 years of the 20th century, ther was infact a continuously increasing deficit in the relative number of women in the India population. Experts (Visaria 1961: Mitra 1980) agree that this deficit is not related to biological differences in male and female birth rates or any systematic under-ennumeration of women, but that it reflects serious differences in male and female mortality patterns. Since being alive is a precondition of well being, this higher proclivity towards death of women has to be considered a primary indication of their relative well-being.

A significant part of this deficit is not merely an incidental result of the many relative disadvantages that are generally the lot of poor women during early periods of development. Admittedly Indian women are subject to relatively higher morbidity and mortality rates due to a deliberate and vicious discrimination against the very vulnerable group of female infants and young girls. Also, average age at marriage of women, their fertility rates, maternal nutrition levels, or access to contraception are all themselves fairly closely related to the social position of women in a given society, and therefore these factors too cannot be dismissed merely as indicators of economic backwardness.

For India, as is argued in the next few paragraphs, regional differences in the sex ratio exhibit a very marked pattern which has remained steady over a long period. This in itself strongly suggests the possibility that the less than even sex ratios of India and its subregions are an important indicator of institutional factors.

An examination of the details of relative levels of age-group wise sex ratios and changes in them between regions and over time appears to suggest that economic development is in certain circumstances capable of removing some of the handicaps and problems faced by

women. These circumstances however are not neutral to the prevailing socio-economic traditions. Therefore, sex ratio as an indicator of women's position appears to be sensitive to both cultural and economic forces and to the on-going interaction between these two in each society.

The number of women as compared to the number of men in the Indian population or its sex ratio is remarkably low and contrasts sharply with that of many developed and developing countries. In 1981 it stood at 935 women per 1000 men. Comparable figures for other countries are: 1058 for the USA (1981), 1034 for Japan (1980), 1053 for U.K (1980). Or to cite examples from developing countries closely comparable with India in many other respects: sex ratio stood at 1008 in Thailand (1980), 991 in Malaysia (1979), 1011 in Indonesia (1981), 1016 in Burma (1983), 1066 in Ethiopia (1984). (U.N.1985).

This ratio, moreover, had been falling throughout the 20th century. Officially it has been claimed that the figure for 1981 was an improvement over the earlier trend, which fell steadily from 1971 in 1901 to reach an all time low of 931 in 1971. However, some experts have argued that the very sharp fall between 941 in 1961 to 931 in 1971 was due to a serious undercount of females in the latter year (Visaria 1981, Dyson 1984). In that

case, if we ignore the 1971 figure, the 1981 results still fit in with the seculiar trend of decline. Similarly the fall in sex ratio between 1981 and 1991, is attributed to UNDP enumeration. Table 1 gives the all India and statewise sex ratios for each decade since 1921.

(ii) Work Force Participation Rates (WFPR)

In the entire elaboration of the hypothesis of work giving women worth, one finds little or no curiosity about what actually constitutes women's work and whether or not it could at all give a woman any worth. However, it has been shown by several studies that in India, though the line dividing men's jobs from women's has shifted very dramatically between regions over time, neverthless it has always been discriminating. In each situation examined, women were allotted poorer tools, and their work was therefore less productive of value. When tasks were allotted to women, they soon became socially less valuable and came to be paid at relatively, poorer rates. Also their tasks were generally repititive laborious and physically exhausting (ICSSR 1983, Banerjee 1985a, 1985b, 1989). In addition, it is generally acknowledged that, being a part of the work force did not and still does not absolve Indian women from the burden of housework which in many cases not only includes standard tasks of cooking, cleaning and childcare but also a lot of preparatory work and assistance in the family's economic enterprise. This extended concept of housework claims a significant part of most women's working hours. Therefore it would not be surprising if Indian women abstained from the

generally poorly rewarded economic work assigned to them unless it becomes absolutely imperative. They would prefer to withdraw from the labour market whenever possible.

Moreover, apart from the consideration that in India as elsewhere, women's domestic work is crucial for the reproduction of the family labour, it is also a very common tendency in India to equate a family's sense of well-being with the amount of time devoted by its women to domestic chores. Therefore, it seems logical to assume that families would withdraw women from the labour market and replace them by other labour whenever the latter is available cheaply and readily.

Traditions of sexual division of labour in all India societies have been shown to be the biased and discriminatory against women. Most studies in the field have shown that tasks allotted to women are relatively more laborious, repetitive and physically exhausting as well less productive because their tools and techniques remain primitive. When a particular tasks gets allotted to women it becomes socially less valuable (Banerjee forthcoming). Its returns relative to those of men in comparable work go down. Furthermore, in the case of women, work is not considered as status promoting since it is traditionally identified with women of lower social orders. Factually, too, it is the women of relatively lower social status who account for

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the overwhelming bulk of Indian women workers. The scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women have significantly higher WFPRs in all regions of India than women of other social groups. The traditions of women's work and sexual division of labour in India are therefore not of the sort that can enhance the idealogical status of women through work even though it may do so in real life.

This tendency to consider women's work as detrimental to family status exists to a greater or smaller degree in all parts of India and particularly in Punjab and Bengal societies.

It is found that even when women had worked all their lives and so also had their mothers, they did not favour teaching their daughters any skills for the job market. Their ideal or dream was to get the girls married so that they did not have to do any productive work. Similarly, in their study of the garment industry of Delhi, Rao and Hussain (ICSSR 1983) found several unmarried girls working who were desperately anxious that their society should not find this out since that would reduce their chances of making a `good' marriage. Some of them were working to meet future dowry demands in their own marriages; but they felt that if the fact that they were working got known this dowry demand would go up further.

When amniocentesis first caught the attention of Bombay people, one advertisement is supposed to have claimed "why not spend Rs.500/- now and save Rs. 50,000/- in future?" Indeed a frequent reason given for bias against a daughter is said to be that she is likely to create financial problems for the family at the time of her marriage on account of the dowry demands and high costs of marriage imposed on the former by the groom's family. Again, the incidence of dowry and other expenses to the brides family varies widely between different communities within any region and also between regions.

Some argue that "lower female participation in agriculture and other economic activities - in the 'north' than in the 'south' lowers the economic value of the women (and hence raises the compensating need for dowry) in the former regions than in the latter. (Bardhan 1988, p.479).

In the case of dowry, this kind of explanation is of even less relevance. Dowry in fact is usually much more prevalent in upper caste/upper class sections of a society. And, since throughout India, there is a strong observed negative relation between the family income/status and women's participation in economic activities, one can assume that for explaining the

greater incidence of dowry in some societies rather than others the issue of whether or not there is a tradition of women's work in that society is of not much relevance.

Development and Dowry Demands:

The spread of dowry to additional communities has been noted by many people though as yet there is little systematic information about it. The point was brought home dramatically by a report in a popular magazine – INDIA TO-DAY- on a section of Kallar community of south Tamil Nadu. In this community women have always worked as agricultural labourers along with men. But suddenly in the last few years, the customary brideprice has come to be replaced by sleep demands for dowry by the grooms. This traumatic change has resulted in many families killing their newborn daughters. One mother confessed to have killed four daughters in the last ten years. The report is being investigated by some college teachers of the neighbouring town; their preliminary findings have confirmed these reports though no details of them.

Culture determines social attitudes which in turn impedes the operation of legislative and other pressures to improve the status of women. In this paper and in other literature, if the question is asked as to what

have been the real changes as a result of the activation of the women's question, and how far can they be attributed to the machinery or the women's Bureau, the answer would be that where there has been change, it has been part of an overall flow of change.

For example, if there has been positive movements in literacy and health in the state of Kerala, it is not because of the women's decade, but because Kerala had a political ideology, namely socialism, backed up by a history even before the advent of Independent India, where the social base had been made strong by monarchs and social reformers. The economic organisation also was built in towards minimum social security because of fragmented peasant holdings which usually was self sufficient in the basic need of nutrition.

If a decline in socio-economic status is noticed, again it is not for the presence or absence of a women's bureau but because there has been a general trend. For example whether land use patterns and cropping patterns have pushed cultivators into the status of landless agricultural labourers, the push has been for both men and women, but stronger towards women because there were fewer of them as cultivators in any case. The Census of 1991, inspite of the doubt cast on sex ratio trend did show that there is a decline if not a lack of improvement, in the status or the regard that is given to the girl child even today in India and in South Asia.

This is in spite of the decade and the enormous awareness campaign put forward by organisations like UNICEF. There is a hard heartedness in these societies which has not yet been melted.

The latest 1991 census has revealed that the female-male ratio has declined from 933 per thousand in 1981 to 929 per 1000 in 1991. The ratio has declined steadily in every census save one this century. Does this indicate a further decline, assault in women?

The statistical handbook released at the time of the census results gives data from 1975-1984. In this period female mortality dropped from 16.3 per thousand to 12.8 per cent thousand. Even if we look at female children below the age of 9, mortality dropped from 62.9 per thousand to 47.6 per thousand. In sum, women and small girls are not being killed in ever larger numbers through neglect. On the contrary they are surviving at a better rate than ever before.

Between 1975 and 1984, male mortality declined by 3.1 per thousand but female mortality dropped faster by 3.5 per thousand. The trend is even more dramatic in data for children under the age of 9. For this age group, male mortality fell by 13.7 per thousand but female mortality dropped by 15.3 per thousand. While more females die than males, the gap between them has narrowed.

If indeed women are faring better than men in terms
of mortality, if indeed dowry deaths and amniocentesis
have had no impact, why has the all-India female ratio
fallen? The question has been addressed by some
academics, and they offer a number of possible
explanations.

First, there are errors in data gathering. The
data say that the female ratio rose from 930 per 1000 in
1971 to 933 per 1000 in 1981 and then declined to 929
per 1000 in 1991. But given the inaccuracies inherent
in collecting data, it would be more sensible to say
that the female ratio has remained at around 930 per
1000 from 1971 to 1991, and that the variations up and
down should be neglected since they fall within the
range of statistical error. This is the position taken
by Prof. Pravin Visaria.

A second possible explanation is that there is a
systematic undercounting of females in every census
which is increasing with time. Prof. Mahendra Premi
theorises that many census enumerators do a perfunctory
than ever. Some enumerators may simply fill in their
forms from their recollection of a locality instead of
making a house-to-house inquiry. They are more likely
to recall the names of all males than all females, given
the high visibility of males (especially male children)

in our society. This will result in an apparent fall in the female ratio even if it does not exist.

Another explanation proferred by Prof. Premi is that the male-female ratio at birth may have gone up for unexplained reasons. Demographers in India have assumed 105 males per 100 females at birth from independence onwards, and there are no hard data on trends. However, some data collected in 1965-67 suggest a rural ratio of 107.5 males per 100 females at birth, a distinct rise. Prof. Premi says that an increase of 6 percent in the ratio of birth will translate into an increase of 6 percent over a period of thirty years. If indeed there has been a slight increase in the male birth ratio, this could be part of the explanation for the falling female ratio. But we need to know why more males are being born (the 1965-67 data predate amniocentesis). Much more data needs to gathered and research done to solve the puzzle. It could be suggested that new born female infants are being killed, even <u>before</u> reporting and since more infants survive <u>generally</u> more males "appear" in statistics now.

The number of females per thousand males in 1985 was around 950 in Nepal, 940 in Bhutan, 940 in Bangladesh and 910 in Pakistan. In other words there is nothing peculiarly Indian or Hindu about a low female ratio. It is a cultural problem afflicting the

whole sub continent with its mosaic of religions. There is no problem of dowry in Pakistan, yet females remain unwanted. The same is true of China, which has a female ratio of around 940 per thousand. Looking further afield in the third world, we find that it is around 930 in Papua New Guinea, 940 in Turkey, and just 840 in Saudi Arabia (this last figure is probably depressed by the presence of male immigrant workers). Christian areas seem to have the highest female ratio, which is highest of all in Botswana (at 1,100 females per 1000 males).

Let us now come to layer no. 2, namely class, caste and minorities. Most people would suggest that there has definitely been an improvement in the position of the middle class women in India. They are emerging as strong participants in media, in business, in the fields of public policy. But the same cannot be said of the masses. There has been a decline in the intake of nutrition, or to put it the other way, an increase in hunger and death (AK Sen). In terms of minorities and scheduled castes, it can be stated that there has not been any improvement at all. Attempts to mainstream women amongst these castes and minorities have backfired because of the politics associated with the hegemony of these groups.

In the third layer on visibility, certainly India has moved a great deal forward. There is a widespread understanding and awareness of women's productive roles. No programmes or policy statements could be issued without reference to the importance of women. Political campaigns are also tuned to evoke the sympathy of women and so forth. However, it would be nobody's argument that this has been the result of the government machinery. This is directly the outcome of an articulate women's movement embedded in a democratic framework.

Has there has been a shift from the private to the public, from the secluded to the social forums? The data in a formal political participation shows a decline. Yet the data in terms of those states in India which have had elections to local bodies namely village level councils and district level councils, where there has been a 30% reservation for women such as in the state of Karnataka, there has been a burst of women in public life. In Karnataka, there are 12,000 women elected to bodies which are in charge of 100 villages (the Mandal). Again, this has not been the result of either national machinery or women's advocacy, but as part of an approach which believes in people centred development and recognition that women as well as the subordinate castes need to have a quota in order to redress the historical imbalances.

Thus whichever set of indices are taken, whichever layer is uncovered, the attribute does not necessarily lead to specific women's machineries but either to an overall policy or to the women's movement.

It is for this reason that the Indian Women's Movement has been somewhat resistant in easy acceptance of what looked like an extremely professional document The National Perspective Plan on women (NPP). An important illustration is the method by which women's movement across all parties would not allow this document to become the official policy statement. They resisted it, because it did not take account of the consultative method and the opinions and participation of a large body called the women's movement. Similarly, there was active resistance to the attempt to make the National Commission on Women a totally official structure with tentacles into research and grassroot organisation. This resistance, both indicates the historical development of the Indian women's movement and also the wisdom that no bureaucracy can deliver a subordinate group from its shackles.

Table - 1
Variations in GSR 1921-1981 (adjusted for Internal Migration)

States	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
Jammu &Kashmir	870	865	869	873	878	882	n.a.
Punjab*	821	830	850	858	864	863	879
Rajasthan	896	907	906	921	900	899	911
Uttar Pradesh	908	904	907	910	909	862	872
Andhra Pradesh	993	987	980	986	981	975	974
Kerala	1011	1022	1027	1028	1022	1019	1035
Karnataka	969	965	960	966	959	961	963
Tamil Nadu	1029	1037	1012	1007	992	975	975
Gujarat	944	945	947	952	940	936	945
Madhya Pradesh	974	973	970	967	953	943	941
Maharashtra	950	947	949	941	936	955	959
Assam	908	886	886	877	876	901	n.a.
Bihar	1016	994	996	990	994	928	925
Orissa	1086	1067	1053	1022	1001	983	978
West Bengal	905	890	852	865	878	931	946
India	955	950	945	946	941	931	935

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Reg. Gen. of India, New Delhi.

These figures are adjusted for the several changes of borders of different states and of India that took place during this period.

* Included Haryana and Himachal Pradesh upto 1971. For 1981 inclusive of Haryana only.

Table - 2

No. of Females per 100 Males in Population 0-4 Years

Zone/State		Population of Age 0-4 C.S.R.		
		1961	1971	1981
1		2	3	4
NORTH ZONE	Punjab	929	917	915
	Haryana	–	921	924
	Rajasthan	972	956	983
	Uttar Pradesh	971	950	953
	Himachal Pradesh	987	984	N. A.
	Jammu & Kashmir	974	967	N. A.
SOUTH ZONE	Andhra Pradesh	1009	1002	992
	Karnataka	973	984	973
	Kerala	975	981	969
	Tamil Nadu	995	983	972
WEST ZONE	Gujarat	971	960	966
	Madhya Pradesh	941	992	985
	Maharashtra	983	975	953
EAST ZONE	Assam	1035	1009	N. A.
	Bihar	1016	985	1010
	Orissa	1048	1031	1018
	West Bengal	1024	1019	1002
	I N D I A	990	980	972

TABLE - 3

Work Force Participation Rates (WPPR) of Women Selected Years

States	1911	1931	1961	1981 Rural only Main + Marginal
North Zone				
Punjab (includes Haryana)	11.9	12.7	14.2	10.2
Rajasthan	45.5.	38.3	35.9	21.1
Uttar Pradesh	33.3	29.8	35.9	9.6
South Zone				
Andhra Pradesh	41.58	30.30	41.33	38.8
Kerala	28.01	22.81	19.75	17.0
Madras (T.N.)	36.48	30.12	31.29	27.4
Mysore	26.14	25.32	32.02	25.4
West Zone				
Bombay (includes Gujarat)	36.74	29.72	34.61	27.2
Madhya Pradesh	47.85	37.46	44.0	30.4
East Zone				
Bihar	34.71	26.09	27.13	13.4
Orissa	30.43	30.04	26.58	14.7
West Bengal	18.79	13.19	9.44	8.9

Source: J.N.Sinha 1972 statement 8 pp. 24-25, Nirmala Banerjee 1988 statement 1 p.2.

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6. The Indian debate on structures

India provides an interesting example of the debates on "structure". As the national machinery evolved and as India was responding to the various impulses given both by the UN and its specialised agencies, there was a debate on what kind of establishment would best yield results. The Bureau was established and at the same time, an attempt was made to establish Bureaus or Directorates of women and child welfare in all the states.

The National Committee on women was formed, but unfortunately met only once in 10 years. This Committee was supposed to be representative of all regions and issues and the Bureau was supposed to serve as a secretariat for that Committee.

With the recognition that women were an important element in the productive process, just as in the case of commodities like cocoa, coffee and handloom, an idea emerged that there should be a women's development corporation which would be a public sector body with finances to fund economic projects. Once again, an attempt was made to set this up in all the states with finances, with a Board of Management and a civil servant as Chairman and Managing Director. This prototype was adopted from the Forest Development Corporation and other such "commercial" organisations. While these

structures were being set up, there were several kinds of debates.

First, at the level of the states, which is the regional government in India, the question was raised in what way the corporations would be different from the state level welfare advisory board which in turn would be different from the Directorates of Women and Child Welfare?. The state level social welfare advisory board were trying to identify viable economic products for women and taking it to technical service sectors. The Women's Development Corporations were also trying to find groups of women to strengthen in their economic role. The Directorate of Women and Child Welfare also wanted to show its ability in advancing women's economic roles. All of them were fishing in the same muddy pond of poor women, with limited micro tenses.

A fourth layer was added by the Rural Development Programme, which had a mandate to identify poor rural households and provide them with credit – the universally known IRDP. There used to be some concern that many hands were trying to reach the same "handicapped" person, and as a result, either the same voluntary agencies were providing information to all the four limbs of Government or all the four limbs of the Government were pushing each other at the ground level. Thus, at conference after conference, the issue was, which is the domain of operation for each of these

bodies or were they one too many? There have been phases where one or the other was in the vanguard, but as it stands today, none of these three structures, either the social welfare advisory board, or the corporation, or the Directorate, has any specific achievement to show in the field of the advancement of poor women. Either in tangible changes in their lives or in innovative approaches or in the field of advocacy related to recognition of visibility.

The second area of debate was on which method would be more effective. A cell in the different sectoral ministries or a very large board with sufficient technical help, representing the various subjects.

On that debate there was a further dimension, which was whether to have advisory boards attached to the cells or a body of all the cells in the various ministries, that is called Inter Ministerial Coordinating Committee or whether they should have the advantage of having advisory committees and the cell would serve as secretariat. The difference of opinion was between those who felt that within the civil service or bureaucracy, the hierarchies were so deep, that the status of the official who operated the cell would determine how far her interests or concerns and her suggestions would travel up the ladder to hierarchy and bureaucratic power. Those who were skeptical about the

power of a functionary within the system suggested that if there was an advisory committee composed of women of some eminence and status in what is called public life, their advise and their access would be to the higher echelons of administrative powers, sometimes even reaching into the political layers which supercede executive layer. Thus it was argued that if an MP was a member of the advisory committee and she found that the cell was not being taken note of by the higher layers in the administrative hierarchy, she would have the clout and the access to go either to the higher authority, the minister, or the chief executive, the secretary to the ministry, whereas the young junior civil servant who will be in charge of the cell could not manage that access.

There are others who felt that within the system, coordination and the fact that the administrative system had a certain amount of homogeneity and knowhow to listen and react to their own officials would be far better than having these advisory committees. Thus as usual it became a debate between a strong executive working within itself and those who had doubts about the power of the executive to enter the field like women.

It is important to notice that these debates in India are a reflection of the character of the Indian polity. The presence of articulate women's groups, on a

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lively debate in newspapers which are in turn a democratic phenomena, associated with the freedom of the press which permits and allows opportunity for hearing these differences.

As a result of these continuous debates on strategies, curiously, India's attempts at developing various systems of national machinery has not emerged in any clear focus. Assessments of the machinery, are usually negative. For example, in a paper written for the Commonwealth Secretariat, on integrating women in development and national machineries, an official of the ministry has stated at the end of the paper that the women's Bureau in India has not been a success.

Similarly, attempts at assembling committees and structures within ministries in order to use government's clout to put forward programmes, have been turned on and off without any specific reason, except perhaps that it was never taken very seriously. For example, the ministry of labour had an advisory committee on the Equal Renumeration Act, which was composed of trade unionists, women activists and women from the development research centres. This advisory committee not only met frequently to make suggestions to the labour ministry including its welfare funds, but it also set up sub groups and task forces, to specifically look at the statistics of women in the unorganised

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labour and also to look at recommendations for the plan in terms of women's employment. This committee has withered away. This committee was replaced by a committee for women workers, which took up the task of funding women workers' projects - a kind of substitute or alterego for the earlier programme of the social welfare board. This committee also ceased to function after a few sittings. The Standing Committee on women's education was dissolved into a national programme to raise the consciousness of women towards education, which has built itself more on dispersed groups and participatory and non governmental mode.

Inspite of this experience, these debates and doubts, this resistance to state structures, even today, that is in 1991, the Indian debate on national machinery continues to hum around the same concept of a central point. The long term demand of various national committees such as the Committee of the Status of Women in India, as well as Shram Shakti, the Commission on self employed women was to have a National Commission on Women. The idea, was that a National Commission on Women would be an autonomous body which would continuously play the role of a watchdog, disseminating information, scrutinising policy and providing the basic promotional mechanisms. The government which came into power in 1989 November had made a political pledge that it would set up this Commission as one of the responses

to the demands of women. As a result, there was a draft Bill on the National Commission, placed before the Parliament. The women's movement debated every consideration of the National Commission on Women, basically the difference of opinion arising between how much of it should imitate an establishment, a bureaucracy and how much it should imitate an autonomous women's organisation. Grave reservations were expressed by many experienced women leaders that such a Commission would do no more than providing lip service to the cause of women.

Such women quoted the examples of other National Commissions meant for neglected or oppressed classes such as the Scheduled Castes, and showed that though the reports provided by that Commission were informative, critical of government and often severe indictments of the functioning of the state and society, the condition of those classes had not changed. Neither had they received more attention nor greater security. It was feared that the National Commission on Women would have the same fate and that since the government would have felt a sense of gratification for having set it up, there would be no more need for the government to "look at women".

The misgivings about the role that the commission would play and how far it would fall short of the ideals

and the idealism with which such a commission has been recommended have been increasing over the last year and a recent incident has nailed the doubts. The present government (May 1991) which will have to be dissolved, as there will be general elections in India at the end of May, has already proposed a panel of names to be in the National Commission. The panel of names have been chosen to suit the government's need to give patronage. Thus the case of those who conceived of the national commission that it be a body representing the interest of women and the experience accumulated in the development research on women would be pushed aside, in order to make it one more political platform for the party, rather than for the cause of women.

The possibility of this distortion had occurred to those women who were debating the concept who feared that that once it was established, many of the codes of conduct and the dreams with which it had been conceived would be pushed aside by the political system. And indeed this is what is likely to happen.

The third perspective on the same experience can be provided by looking at categories of interest which are similar to the women's movement. For example, it is conventional to compare the cooperative movement, the environmental movement and the movement of Dalits, that is the subordinate castes in India, with the women's

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movement. These are all movements which are basically demanding a redressing of an old order which has given second class citizenry to certain social groups. They also are movements which go across in some sense the horizon of what is moral and at the same time, attract people's participation. They contain the elements of people centred development.

Environment and the cooperative movement it has been observed by many analysts, have fallen by the wayside. None of the official organs have any convergence of interest with the movement today. The cooperative movement has become a government movement for cooperatives and the SC/ST commission which was set up to safeguard the interest has become a separate government structure, whereas the movement is distanced and has a different voice.

It can be asked why it is that the women's movement has not yet reached that kind of "exalted" position - a hard structure without social support? It could be suggested that the women's movement has not become a heavy structure because it concerns women and the male dominated system has not bothered to take interest or to bring it into the main stream as it has done with the caste or the cooperative movement. It is suggested that the reasons for it not emerging as a large scale structure lie in the phenomena of female subordination

and the lack of interest in women as an important or a power oriented issue.

While on the one hand using one set of indicators, it could be argued that because a clear national machinery has not emerged in India, it is a failure. On the other hand, it could be equally well argued that it is a blessing in disguise, as it has protected the processes and the position of women from becoming a symbolic fortress.

Yet donors and the UN system want a national commission. It is a simpler link to pour in the funds. It does not require detailed work.

7. Review and Analysis

When Indian development is analysed at the macro level and the question is often asked, as to why Indian development has not been able to deal with poverty and inequality and that even after 40 years, both poverty and inequality have deepened. Across all ideologies, the response that emerges is that the method or the process through which the transformation was sought, was not adequate. That for a dispersed heterogeneous community like India, institutional framework required to design and implement employment development had to be at a much more micro level, responding locally to both the genius, the problems as well as resource and solutions. With this analysis, India proposes to go in for a decentralised system of development management. This is called the Panchayati Raj. Within this decentralised system, a local development management, women have been given a reservation of 30% of the seats. It is at this level that women can wield an influence in the allocation of resources, in dealing with local issues of discrimination including violence. It is no safeguard for women to have a Bureau in New Delhi when there is a case of rape in a village in Maharashtra, as had happened in the Mathura case. It is local politics and local political effort that will resolve the issues. Most of the issues and most of the experiences and the reasons for gender subordination are what could be called political.

The proposed National Commission could be designed more in the form of "stars" or satellites in the universe with the core secretariat performing the role of a networking information exchanging and facilitating "station".

The mechanism of signalling should be well considered and evolved. So the links with Panchayati Raj system of development(decentralised local elected bodies) should be well hammered out as also the connection with development and law.

More than having members of a commission there could be spearhead teams which would be travelling in zones and regions to provide local strength and political clout.

Further there could be 10 committees of experts who are people drawn from existing persons in the women's movements whether from professional institutions or activists, according to special areas of expertise and experience.

These groups would form scrutiny committees or vigilance squads to whom the commission would send documents, policy statements for comment and alternatives.

At the central level there could be a secretary general or a general coordinator with an information

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officer and only focal point type personnel. The general coordinator should be drawn from the women's movement and not from the civil service.

Thus, if one was proposing a national machinery for women, it would be a network of the women's representatives on local bodies. It would be an idea to consider associating women who are members of the local elected bodies, in horizontal district level and then state level and then perhaps at the national level, so that their working can strengthen their work and the token services that is provided to these networks could increase their capability in doing advocacy at the local level. Thus the conclusion is that it is necessary to turn the concept of national machinery upside down. It is necessary to consider local bodies and the machineries that they have to redress grievances and then build it up to an apex, rather than have a bueracracy at the centre, which will be able to nurture the cause of women at the grassroot level.

The demand for a National Commission for Women is the result of a general feeling that we as women need a body that is fully concerned with women, which ensures not only that information is given but interests are safeguarded, which would provide for a redressal of grievances and initiate the creation of arrangements to ensure justice and equal opportunity.

There is no shortage of issues that the National
Commission could deal with. However, the effectiveness
of its functioning will depend greatly on the manner in
which it is structured. The main thrust of this note is
to argue for the central importance that organisational
structure will have for the Commission, and the need to
reflect upon this aspect.

In one sense the formation of a central body might
appear to contradict the moves being made for democratic
decentralisation in the country today. The Panchayati
Raj and other local institutions like the Nyaya
Panchayats which are being worked upon reflect the
fairly widespread feeling that centralized structures
need to be dismantled and local processes strengthened.
There is much experience and information suggesting that
real change is brought about by making arrangements that
give an opportunity for people to articulate their
opinion as well as have that opinion translated into
action. The success of many local NGO's can also be seen
as the consequences of autonomy.

At the same time, it is apparent that there is a
link between macro policies and local or micro level
happenings. If the Commission is to fulfil its
objectives it will need therefore to find a way of being
in touch with what is happening all over the country,
but to intervene only where macro policy can be seen to

be the source of the problems. Very many local issues will be best resolved locally. The mechanisms of signalling will have to be well considered and evolved. The links with Panchayati Raj institutions need to be hammered out. It is proposed that there would be a significant proportion of women on the Panchayats. Thus it would seem that some policies, e.g. the provision of institutional child care centres, which could also be made into a national policy, might be left to these representatives.

Today there is also a widespread appreciation of the work done by local NGO's. Very often government programmes try to interact with NGO's as a result of their contributions to development activities. However, the problems in trying to have overlapping spheres of government and NGO work are immense. Two different cadres with different "ideologies" are being asked to do the same thing for different salaries, benefits, levels of security etc. It seems preferable that there should be non-encroachment on NGO spheres. For similar reasons the way in which the National Commission hopes to interact with NGOs needs to be reflected upon.

Some safeguards have to be built into the structure to avoid the creation of an inward hardcore establishment. The Central Social Welfare Board which was designed to be a totally informal consultative body with non-officials all over India and then mobilised

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into State Boards, and with a funding pattern which is to have deep and broad extensions has not found it possible to maintain the character that was visualized. The centrifugal process that centralizes power seems to be almost a biological characteristic of institutions. This process is only strengthened when there is a limited availability of professionals : if the Commission draws from the given market it would also be drawing into itself the skills of dispersed institutions which are in fact working for the same outcome. There is the additional consideration that this individual expertise would lose the supportive skills of the home institution.

The challenge before the Commission is to evolve a method by which existing skills can be utilized without losing the local base and credibility that they have at present.

It might be possible to have a small core secretariat for the National Commission which would perform the role of networking, information exchanging, and facilitating station, with access to committees of experts who are people drawn from existing persons in the women's movement whether from professional institutions or activists, according to the special areas of expertise and experience needed. The Commission

could then benefit from their experience and knowledge without stunting local initiative. If a large number of issues are locally resolved, on matters where national policy decisions are concerned, the appropriate committee could scrutinize documents and policy statements for comment and alternatives. The central body then needs to consist only of a few people : a general co-ordinator with an information officer and focal point type personnel. The general coordinator should be drawn from the women's movement because a prior sensitivity to the kinds of issues that will be raised is essential.

It is necessary to devise a structure that would remain outward looking and responsive, and which would also respect the rights of women to determine local solutions as far as possible.

Section 8

An appropriate mechanism for South Countries

The discussion on structures, namely the review leads to the pointer, that the most effective national machinery for a country like India might be not so much of a centrifugal structure, but a dispersed structure, heavily drawn from the women's movement, including the women elected on local bodies, with the state providing what could be called secretarial services, including a facility for networking, as well as a a clearing house of information.

This type of approach of providing institutional support to women in their quest for advancement, for redressing the social and economic structures which have traditionally been discriminatary, would perhaps be more appropriate for the developing countries than the kind of women's Bureaus which have become the mode during the decade and after.

The reason this is being stated is that the nature of the economy and society, including the nature of the state in most of the developing countries are similar. The major production and trade takes place in the "informal" structure, the self employed, the small scale industries, the home based. Production with often marketing routes and structures are both homogeneous as well as heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion,

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levels of education, urbanisation. Governments are in some sense yet to settle down.

Most of the governments are searching for a form of political system which provides the libertarian characteristics which all societies would aspire for, but at the same time, the regulatory mechanism to prevent inequity as well as poverty. The various experiments with types of democracy and types of regimes in the continents ranging from Latin America to the Pacific could be considered to be a search for a government which fulfils the various tasks which normally is expected of the state. However, it has been an unsettling time for the newly liberated countries. Even India which started off with one of the most solid structures, drawn from the British Parliamentary system, with what was called the `iron frame`, namely the Indian Civil Services, is now cracking. The Indian debate on politics now hinges around a question whether the particular parliamentary system of democracy is in fact appropriate in expressing the aspirations and getting back the fulfilment to the population.

Tanzania, Nepal and Pakistan tried various other styles of democracy - village democracy, basic democracy and so forth, but most of them have ended with one party systems or military regimes. At the same time authoritarian states have not been able to either fulfil people's aspirations or even hold the people from

protest. The most colourful recent example of this is Bangla Desh, which recently came out of a period of military dictatorship to multi party democracy.

In these circumstances, to expect the machinery for women to be not only launched in what could be called a nebulous State, but even more, to assume that this will provide a kind of vehicle to resolve issues which would impinge around neighbourhoods and work arrangements which are usually local, seems to be an implant which is not taking to the body.

Thus it could be argued that for the rest of the developing countries also, the machinery could be built from the grassroot organisation towards a federated voice whenever necessary, but providing a signalling system across micro or small scale organisations. The inappropriateness of the existing structure seems much more obvious when the root of the concept is traced to international systems which do not have the uncertainty and short history of evolution that the Southern countries are suffering from. Further, most of the concepts and structures as well as the functioning of the international systems have emerged from the North which, relative to the South, has had a longer history of durability not only in the political systems, but a more organised economic structure with citizens in

greater communication with a reasonable base of social security.

The environmental conditions for making what we would like to call a networking instrument or a instrumentality for women which supports their struggles for redressing historical discrimination cannot be developed in isolation. It would require that the basic approach to social and economic change would also have to be pledged to people centred development. The South Commission in its recent report "The Challenge to the South" has this to say on a vision for the South.

(Pg. 13 - 14) "Development is a process of self-reliant growth, achieved through the participation of the people acting in their own interests as they see them, and under their own control. Its first objective must be to end basic needs of all the people, any surplus, being fairly shared. This implies that basic goods and services such as food and shelter, basic education and health facilities, and clean water must be accessible to all. In addition, development presupposes a democratic structure of government, together with its supporting individual freedoms of speech, organisation, and publication, as well as a system of justice which protects all the people from actions inconsistent with just laws that are known and publicly accepted".

(Pg. 81) "A people-oriented development strategy will have to take much greater note of the role of women; a nation cannot genuinely develop so long as half its population is marginalized and suffers discrimination. Women, who invariably bears a disproportionate share of poverty, also had to bear the major burden of adjustment to the crisis of the 1980s. Yet, in almost all the countries of the South, they play a vital role in productive activities and in maintaining their families and households. Thus, on the grounds of both equity and growth, development programmes must give due prominence to the specific concerns of women and ensure that ample resources are marshalled to satisfy their needs and aspirations".

(Pg. 121) "A measure of decentralization in economic management is needed to promote self-reliant and people centred development. In the past a paternalistic approach to planning has inhibited participation at the grass-roots level, in both the design and the execution of development programmes. As the State, rather than society as a whole, is seen as the main agent of development, the result has been widespread apathy. Participation by the people can help to ensure that development activities, and the technologies, services, and inputs involved, are appropriate to the resources, skills, or environmental

situation in the areas and communities they are meant to benefit. Without popular involvement, the absorption of new processes or the use of new facilities is likely to take longer, even where these are appropriate.

It is also evident from past experience that a `top down` approach to planning and modernization can meet with resistance if it neglects to take account of local and traditional knowledge. Most countries possess time-tested reserves of indigenous knowledge and practices whose continued application, where necessary with adaptation, can enrich development and secure wider popular mobilisation in support of development efforts. Through devolution and decentralization, development planning should build upon the reserves of knowledge and experience at the grassroots level".

Without such an approach, the poorer countries of the world will not be able to either move forward economically nor contain their societies from complete breakdown. Thus if the countries of the South come together to pledge an approach which starts from the people, the institutional arrangements for women to participate would have the kind of environment within which they would flourish. And a structure as described in Chapter 7 would be appropriate.

It can also perhaps be argued that even if the overall economy does not accept people centred

development, women as a force, by setting up systems which challenge top down approach and which are developed out of the local strength of women, could show the way. They could be the lever to building up a more democratic and more efficient system of governance for the developing countries.

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