WOMEN, LAND RIGHTS AND GLOBALISATION:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND MEXICO

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Women, Land Rights and Globalisation: A Comparative Study of India and Mexico" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Dedicated
to

The countless struggles

waged against patriarchies

by peasant women

across the world

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, LAND RIGHTS AND GLOBALISATION

The discipline of International Relations (IR), has only recently, in the past few decades, made place for a feminist analysis. Feminism as an approach, and IR are contemporaries, each developing through the war-torn twentieth century and motivated by some of the same international events such as the Industrial Revolution, colonialism and the two World Wars, although work in IR has often over looked women's contributions.[1] While in some respects estranged from the mainstream in IR, feminist scholars and others who study gender have launched an important critique of the core issues of the discipline, for instance on war, peace, territoriality and sovereignty. It is in the context of a greater degree of self-reflexivity within the discipline of IR, that the feminist intervention has taken place. It also takes as its object of inquiry the problems of exclusion. The main objective of a feminist 'lens' then, is exploring the problems of bias and distortion which arise when theory or knowledge about the world is constructed, only by particular social groups, who occupy dominant positions in society, and exploring, how these same biases and value judgments delimit the scope of what is considered to be 'legitimate' inquiry in the field of study (Krause 2001; Sylvester 1994).

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[1] Such as the 1919 International Congress of Women, this ran parallel to the conference at Versailles. See Grant, R. (1992) "The Quagmire of Gender and International Security." In V. Spike Peterson, (ed.) *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner. p 86

The invisibility or marginalisation of gender issues in the study of IR, may also be seen as a consequence of methodological individualism which begins with a high level of abstraction (Steins 1998:53). In much of IR theory, the state has been deemed to be the key 'actor'. However, this conception of 'state as actor' has been built upon the supposedly unproblematic figure of 'sovereign man', an abstraction which is underpinned by a conception of the warrior, Prince or modern day practitioner of *Realpolitik* (Ashley 1998). Thus IR theory has drawn upon particularly white, western, male identified roles as the basis for political identity. Drawing upon a number of works in feminist political theory, some feminist critiques have gone further, suggesting that the model of the 'state' employed in much of IR theory has been built upon a model of 'abstract masculinity', characterised by a need for a singular identity, for separation and a denial of relatedness (Hirchmann 1998:166).

The study of the global political economy has become a dynamic and expanding area within the study of international relations in recent years. From an initial narrow focus on the relationship between state power and decision-making in the context of the constraints imposed by the economic environment, global political economy has expanded to include activities of multinational corporations, the influence on state policy of military industrial complexes, the role of international organisations in the global economy and the problems of debt and development.

In part, the conceptual shift from international to global political economy is the response to globalisation.[2] Global 'restructuring', the increasing influence on transnational corporations, the complex global division of labour, the intimate relationship between debt, development and environmental degradation, are all integral parts of the ongoing process of interconnectedness that is characteristic of globalisation. While the 'nature' of globalisation has been disputed, its impact is undoubtedly uneven, 'it can nevertheless be usefully understood as a reordering of time and distance in our lives' (Giddens 1990:45).

Critical approaches to globalisation recognize that global processes shape and transform economic activity and that a number of 'actors', both governmental and non-governmental, are agents of economic, social and political change. Important literature has emerged to counter these weaknesses. Accessible and sophisticated treatments of political economy in the context of globalisation(s) have emerged (Cox 1987; Strange 1994; Murphy and Tooze 1991; Gill 1993). Also available are more broadly focused texts that include international politics, political theory and socio-cultural developments in the context of globalisation.[3] Theories that have arisen in response to globalisation, recognize that global processes shape and transform economic activity and that a number of 'actors', both governmental and non-governmental, act as agents of economic, political and social change. Since this

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[2] Here, I refer to a definition of the term by Richard Falk, a phenomenon '...proceeding in an ideological atmosphere in which neo-liberal thinking and priorities go virtually unchallenged, especially in the leading market economies; the collapse of the social 'other' has encouraged capitalism to pursue its market logic with a relentlessness that has not been evident since the Industrial Revolution...' in *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* Cambridge Polity Press, (1999), pp 129

[3] Please refer to Berry (1989), Rosenau (1989), Robertson (1992), Walker (1993). Sassen (1991) has written about global cities, Dunn (1990) considers the economic limits to modern politics, Scholte (1993) addresses social change, Baldwin (1992) and Ruggie (1993) rethink state territoriality, Kofman and Youngs (1996) examine the politics of spatiality and sovereignty is reconsidered in numerous works by Barker and Cronin (1994), Richard Ashley, David Campbell and Cynthia Weber.

change cannot be viewed entirely as an 'internal affair', it is necessary to explore its global dimensions while recognizing the specificity of some areas (Scholte 1993:6).

Critical approaches to IR and international political economy have attacked the dominance of realism within the discipline on grounds that it serves to legitimize and perpetuate unequal social, economic and power relations. They have stressed the need to develop a counter hegemonic set of concepts and concerns to deal with the problems of economic and social inequalities. However, the gender dimension of inequality and the forms of resistance which arise in response to the experience of gender inequality has been largely neglected (Whitworth 1993).

As the dominant paradigm in international relations, realist preoccupation with power politics has had the predictable effect of marginalizing economics and the paradoxical effect of neglecting theories of the state (Halliday 1987; Peterson:1992). The neglect of history and presumption of territoriality have impoverished IR theory, rendering it particularly inadequate in the context of globalisation. Ignoring history has exacerbated the tendency towards static and reductionist understanding, prevailing theories deal poorly with change and simply deny fundamental transformations. On the other hand, the elevation of politics over economics has precluded sophisticated and critical analyses of market dynamics (Peterson 1996:20).

FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The fundamental achievement of a feminist critique has been to problematise gender in IR and to begin the process of deconstructing all texts which place the male subject at the centre of analysis. Deconstruction can prove a useful tool for feminism allowing the hidden gender bias of a work to be revealed and exposing the partial and perverse understanding of human relations which result. It can also reveal how positivist epistemologies have systematically excluded the possibility that women can be 'knowers' (Krause 2001). Moreover, the feminist critique of international relations discourse does rather imply that there are other ways of 'being' and other ways of 'knowing' the world which could themselves give rise to a rather different kind of non-realist IR theory.

The view that gender relations are essentially either a 'private' or a cultural matter is frequently echoed in non-feminist approaches to IR where it is assumed that not only can relations between states be understood without reference to gender, but also that gender relations are essentially 'private'. When the 'international' is viewed through the prism of inter-state relations, the degree to which social relations are being globalised is rendered invisible. Such an approach ignores both, the way in which gendered processes have shaped international relations historically as well as the 'degree of power involved in constructing and maintaining such relations' (Krause 1996:231).

However, attempts to develop a specifically feminist IR theory have proved to be problematic. In the process of deconstructing the text, the category of 'woman' has been

used as the 'other'; that which subverts concepts and reveals hidden assumptions, rather than as lived experience. As Grimshaw (1986:135) has argued, one might recognise that men construct their identity around conceptions of abstract masculinity, but a critique cannot be carried out in the name of a 'real' or 'authentic' self. To do so, is merely to reassert the dichotomy. The notion of a 'women's perspective' is problematic since no such person exists except within a set of gendered relations. Furthermore, feminist theorists have also identified the need to develop approaches which recognise that the relationship between women and men is always historically situated (Rowbotham and Linkogle 2003).

To attempt a feminist reconstruction of international theory is then to face up to the challenges of developing a theory which is historical, committed to shaping and guiding an emancipatory politics, but which does not attribute the 'universal' to one particular group. The challenge which emerges when gender is taken seriously, then, is the need to establish that women's lives and experiences constitute knowledge of the world while resisting the claim that there is a homogeneous 'women's experience' which can serve as the grounds for such knowledge claims. In part, recent debates in feminist theory must themselves be seen in the context of feminist attempts to grapple with the problem of the international/global.[4] Recent debates have been largely concerned with rethinking approaches to both theory and practice which are both historical and which can also allow the articulation of difference, while retaining a feminist politics. The way forward is,

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[4] For a critique of eurocentrism, and western developmentalist discourses of modernity, especially through the lenses of the racial, sexual and class-based assumptions of western feminist scholarship, and third world feminism as a distinctive approach, see Mohanty, C.T. (2003), *Feminism Without Borders : Decolonising Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham and London: Duke University Press

perhaps, to develop an approach which rather than attempting to engage the 'marginalised' and 'excluded' in a dialogue in an effort to discover 'transcendental' values, or bring together the various critical approaches within a single perspective, involves a rather more open ended 'conversation' between those who see themselves as committed to a common goal of developing strategies to challenge various forms of inequality and exclusion. The grounds for challenging inequalities and exclusion would not so much be grounded in a meta-narrative of emancipation and equality, but in recognition of the historical dimension of political struggle and social change.

The challenge to international theory, which emerges from attempts to take seriously all forms of social exclusion, is the requirement to rethink not only what it now means to have solidarity with other human beings but to acknowledge the necessity of rethinking a conception of citizenship, rights and justice from a number of perspectives (Walker 1992). A difficult task undoubtedly, but as we enter the age of globalisation, a task that is all the more necessary and one to which feminist perspectives can and must contribute.

THE GLOBALISATION OF A FEMINIST POLITICS

It is often suggested that feminism is a Western ideology which is 'alien' and of no relevance to women in the non-western world (Chatterjee 1995:119). However feminism is no more 'foreign' than socialism or nationalism. The rise and growth of feminist movements has been shown to be related to the rise of nationalist movements in the Third

world and with the resistance to imperialism (Jayawardena 1986). There remain broad divisions between women in the North and the South, between rural and urban women and between women of different social classes, castes and races. However global processes can, and do create conditions for transnational political alliances which in turn affect both social and economic change. The 'growth of global capital transforms social orders and gives rise to many and varied social movements' (Falk 1999:129).

Globalisation, has similarly changed the terms of feminist politics. The 'feminisation of poverty', increasing concentration of women in export production zones and the use of ideas about gender to legitimize low wages have all profoundly affected women and encouraged women to organize around gender interests (Bhattacharya. 2004). While 'feminists from a non-western perspective have recognized the urgent need to form strategic alliances across class, race and national boundaries, they also insist that gender relations are embedded in wider power relations' (Mohanty 1988:73).

At the same time, the contribution of western feminists towards shaping debates in the international fora cannot be undermined. In the past few decades, the United Nations have played a vital role in challenging traditional and cultural beliefs, often reinforced in law, which have assigned women a lower status. The issue of violence against women and to recognize women's rights as human rights has also found its way onto the global agenda. The UN declared the 'International Decade of the Women' from 1975-85 and this led to several international conferences being organized around women's issues providing opportunities for various 'feminisms' to deliberate. Also, research and data collection on

the status of women was undertaken on a global scale which led to a series of UN directives to governmental heads to prepare reports on sex-ratio, health care available to women, levels of education, political participation etc. This is turn sparked off debates within states on the status of women and their development. However, women's indirect relationship to the state and lack of direct political participation indicates that their interests are neither adequately addressed by theory, practice nor through monitoring.[5]

Clearly, the problems and interests of women have to be viewed in local, national, regional and global contexts. Broad disparities between the 'North' and 'South', between rural and urban, rich and poor are highly significant in understanding the limits of a 'global sisterhood' and the relationship between gender inequalities and other forms of inequality based on class or race or ethnic group. Nevertheless, feminist analysis challenges the common-sense view that gender subordination can only be seen in the context of particular cultural practices by demonstrating the degree to which gender relations are constantly amended by global and local processes. Gender, therefore, has to be understood in terms of both local and specific practices and global power relations. An analysis of women's movements then, is a step in the right direction.

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[5] According to Ashworth, women's relationship to the state is mediated by husbands, fathers and brothers who at the same time acquire authority over women either via the state or traditional political communities. 'While gender relations often appear to be locked in the private realm, they are frequently upheld by the modern state through taxation, social security, immigration and nationality laws all of which retain elements of the husband master legacy and where identity and rights are based on property ownership – a traditional source of European law exported through colonialism – the ramifications for women have been enormous.' in Ashworth, G. (1993) *Changing the Discourse : A Guide to Women and Human Rights*, London, Change Publications. A shift was also witnessed in the methods of monitoring after the UN decade for Women. Gender indexes gained importance and the effect of policies on men and women separately, were studied.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The origins of the interest in women's movements can be traced back to a few decades ago with feminist historians working to recover a hidden history of female activism. They were concerned with not just establishing women as participants or bystanders but to suggest that women's political involvement was of a distinctive character and significance. The analysis of women's movements, both historically and culturally, has demonstrated the range and diversity of forms of solidarity that women have engaged in and has alerted us to the factors, both structural and symbolic, which are significant in particular cases.

A comparative analysis of women's movements shows considerable variations between regions in their timing, character, influence and effectiveness. This suggests that the appearance of women's movements and of different forms of organization and resistance has been contingent on five main factors : prevailing cultural configurations, family forms, political formations, the forms and degree of female solidarity, and the character of civil society in the regional and national context (Molyneux 2001:xvii). One implication of this historical and comparative work is that women's movements are essentially modern phenomena. Although there have been forms of female collective action in pre-modern societies, these have tended to be either small scale or spasmodic eruptions of social protest. The mass, relatively sustained entry of women into the fields of politics, the emergence of women's movements and of particularistic conceptions of women's interests and citizenship rights are developments which were associated both with the spread of Enlightenment ideas, and with the multiple processes of socioeconomic modernization and

forms of political activity - imperialism, colonialism, democracy etc., that accompanied them.

While women's movements in this sense, first emerged in the political and social conditions of eighteenth century Europe, it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that women in many other regions of the world began to organize against inequalities based on sex and to demand legal reforms aimed at removing patriarchal rights within the family and society at large (Jayawardena 1986). Modernising nationalisms, liberal and socialist thought played their part in early claims on the polity, and self-proclaimed feminist movements sometimes achieved substantial legislative reforms. They have also sometimes resulted from the influence of colonial powers on subject states and from dominant powers over defeated states. Finally, the issue of women's rights has been internationally recognized as a result of the United Nations influence in the international arena.

However, the definition of women's movements as autonomous and expressive of women's gender interests does not usually encompass what Shiela Rowbotham has called the phenomenon of 'women in movement', that is, women acting together in pursuit of common ends, be they 'feminist' or not. Yet it is important to acknowledge that these other forms of female mobilization, excluded from consideration as 'women's movement', nonetheless constitute a large proportion, possibly the greater part, of female solidarity in much of the modern world. Women have been an active, if not acknowledged, force in most of the political upheavals associated with modernity, as members of political parties,

trade unions, reform and revolutionary organizations and nationalist movements. These are significant for what they can tell us about the terms and character of women's incorporation into political life.

Whatever form female mobilization has taken, the twentieth century has been marked by the growing absorption of women into the public realm, not only into education and employment, but also into the particularly resilient realm of politics. A steady progression can be witnessed in women's political involvement in the diverse range of political experiences, while the numbers of women involved in liberal political processes as voters, candidates, members of political parties, continues to rise. Yet women's entry into positions of power within formal, institutional politics has been fraught with difficulty and this is despite women's extensive incorporation into the public sphere as the century has progressed. With some exceptions,[6] the upper echelons of political power have remained a remarkable resilient bastion of male exclusivity. This is true even for countries where other formal structures and legislation have been put in place to support women's participation.

Challenges have also emerged to women's movements not just from the state but from the international market as well. Yet, the most disorienting aspect of emerging social order has to do with the challenging the 'dissimulative discourse and practice of the state'(John 2002:182). The 'social mobilisation' of women is a catch-phrase frequently deployed by government agencies and documents. From 'welfare to development to empowerment' is

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[6] Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher have been politically powerful figures in history but their responses to political situations have been typified by male responses. Infact, as women, their responses have been more 'male' than their male counterparts. Please see Atul Kohli (1989) "Centralisation and Powerlessness: India's Democracy in a Comparative Perspective" in Hasan (ed.) (2000) *Politics and the State in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications

yet another contemporary slogan meant to demonstrate the state's steady advance meant in addressing women's issues. At the same time we observe a big cut in public expenditure, reduction in agricultural subsidies, privatisation of education which adversely impacts women in the modern nation-state - in line with the policies of liberalisation-privatisation-globalisation, which restricts these slogans to be merely rhetorical in nature or to be used as electoral promises to capture state power.

Successful campaigns have also been led against the patriarchal state in developing countries, with concerted efforts towards legal and legislative reforms affected for equal status of women, prohibition of child marriage and polygamy, raising the legally recognized marriageable age for women and other such efforts. However, the impact of these reforms has been varied, benefiting middle class women much more than rural women whose oppression is multifaceted and cannot be dealt with legalistic measures unaccompanied by social reform, resulting in the severe limitation of its positive effects. Women's movements in the third world tend to suffer from an urban bias in representation of issues and mobilization techniques. While this assertion is not to undermine the multiplicity of succeeding women's movements in rural India, our imagination of the women's question, at a national level, is centered around women groups in the urban metropolis, which are closer to the higher echelons of power and represent a distinct 'modern' class. Issues of health care, education, minimum wages and land rights remain unresolved as states reduce social spending to meet the demands of a neo-liberal economy.

WOMEN AND PROPERTY

Land has been, and continues to be the most significant form of property in the rural third world. It is a critical determinant of economic well-being, social status and political power. However, there is substantial evidence that economic resources in the hands of male household members often do not benefit female members in equal degree (Harriss 1990). Hence, independent access to such economic resources can be of crucial importance to alter unequal gender relations in society and further a feminist politics.

To a certain extent, gender-progressive legislation has been brought about to legally grant equal status, few women in practice inherit landed property, and even fewer control it.[7] A number of factors can be identified which constrain women in exercising their legal claims. These include patrilocal post-maritial residence and village exogamy, strong opposition from male kin, the social construction of gender needs and roles, low levels of female education, and male bias and dominance in administrative, judicial and other public decision making bodies at all levels. (Agarwal 1994:xvi). The interactive effects of economic factors, cultural norms and gender ideologies and practice in this regard, have received little attention from economists, political scientists and other social scientists, each operating from their separate disciplinary domain. The constraints point towards the fact that women's struggle for effective land rights might not be easy. However, the framework of contestation and bargaining between actors with differential access to economic and political power illuminates the process by which the hierarchical character

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[7] Hindu Inheritance Act 1956 which gives limited rights to widows, wives and daughters where no rights existed, Amendment to the above Act in 2005 which includes inherited land to include agricultural land which was not the case before.

of gender relations is maintained, and can be changed. In this context, the process of acquiring land rights is likely to be as important in empowering women, as the end result. It is precisely the formidable nature of the obstacles to overcome that gives the struggle for land rights a strategic importance and transformative potential which perhaps no other gender-related issue singularly possesses (Agarwal 1994:12).

Land defines social status and political power in the village, community, nation and inter-national linkages. It structures relationships both within and outside the household. Yet, for most women, effective rights in land remain elusive, even though legal claims have come to be recognized. Then, to argue that women's economic needs require a specific focus, distinct from men, is to challenge a long standing assumption in economic theory and development policy, namely, that the household is a unit of congruent interests, among whose members the benefits of available resources are shared equitably, irrespective of gender.[8] This assumption is reinforced time and again and as recently as with the passage of the 'universal' National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on August 25, 2005 to guarantee 100 days of work to *each household*. This claim of universality is based on the removal of the APL-BPL criterion which extends the act to cover all households but not guarantee individual entitlements. Hence, to argue for independent and effective rights of women over land – the most critical form of property in agrarian relations – is to challenge the very foundations of the patriarchal state. [9]

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[8] This explanation of the household has been drawn from Bina Agarwal's (1994) *A Field of One's Own : Gender And Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. The Government of India defines household as 'the members of a family related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption and normally residing together and sharing meals or holding a common ration card.'
[9] Independent land rights are defined here as rights that are formally untied to male ownership or control, in other words, excluding joint titles with men. By effective rights, it is meant not just rights in law but also their effective realization in practice.

The neglect of women's land related concerns by both governmental and non-governmental institutions mirrors a parallel gap within academic scholarship, where the relationship between women and property has remained virtually unattended and little theorized. A vast body of economic development and political science literature documents a strong interdependence between the rural household's possession of agricultural land and its relative economic, social and political position. Characteristically, these studies focus on the household as the unit of analysis, neglecting the intra-household gender dimension.

There is a substantial body of primarily descriptive sociological and anthropological literature on the South, especially relating to kinship and marriage.[10] But even in the best of ethnographies upto the 1970s, the analysis is typically ungendered. Women appear principally as objects of study and exchange, not as subjects; they are occasionally seen but not heard; their presence is registered but seldom their perspective; and gender relations are depicted as essentially unproblematic. Usually, implicit in these descriptions is the assumption that the underlying basis of women's social subordination (typically defined as women's roles) is the cultural values of the community to which they belong. In this emphasis on the ideological, the possible material basis for this subordination or the dialectical link between the material context and gender ideology, is seldom recognized.[11] And, culture is often characterised as 'given' rather than in the process of constant reformulation, or as an area of contestation.

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[10] See, for example, Reddy, N.S. (1956) 'Rites and Customs Associated with Marriage in a North Indian Village', *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. 9 No.2, Dec 1955 - Feb 1956, pp 77-91 Several articles of the Eastern Anthropologist before the 1970s, present an in depth analysis of kinship and marriage relations in village communities but ignore the gendered nature of man-woman relationships.
[11] Two notable exceptions are U. Sharma (1980) and Kishwar (1987).

From the 1970s onwards, work has emerged which incorporates gender analysis in diverse ways. This includes some gender sensitive ethnographies which bridge important gaps (mainly on women's work and roles) and a spectrum of other studies which can be loosely characterized as 'women and development' literature. This literature examines gender biases in economic development, often giving primacy to women's economic position as a significant indicator of gender inequality and sometimes also as a causal factor underlying non-economic dimensions of that inequality (Boserup 1970). But the measure of women's economic status is still typically employment and labour force participation, not rights to property.

The relationship between gender, property and land can be explored from several angles. Gender relations and women's property status within the household is a good starting point. The question is not only about who owns the property but also who controls it, and *in relation not only to private property but also to communal property*. The distinctions between law and practice and between ownership and control are especially critical in the context of gender, for most women in the South there are significant barriers to realizing their legal claims in landed property, as well as to exercising control over any land they do get.

This formulation departs significantly from standard Marxist analysis, particularly from Engels' still influential, though much criticized, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where intra-family gender relations are seen as structured primarily by two overlapping economic factors: the property status of the households to which the

women belong, and women's participation in wage-labour. Engels argued that in capitalist societies, gender relations would be hierarchical among the property owning families of the bourgeoisie where women did not go out to work and were economically dependent on the men. While he was one of the first to acknowledge the class difference between men and women in the same household, he posited gender relations to be egalitarian in propertyless proletarian families where women were in the labour force. The ultimate restoration of women to their rightful status, in his view, required the total abolition of private property, the socialization of housework and childcare, and the full participation of women in the labour force (Engels 1884).

The solution which Marx and Engels propound for women's specific form of oppression is to bring them out of the archaic isolation of domesticity and into *productive* employment. Engels argued: 'the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry' (Engels 1884:137) In his analysis therefore, the presumed equality of gender relations in a working class family rested on both husband and wife being propertyless and in the labour force, and the inequality in the bourgeoisie family rested on men being propertied and women being both propertyless and outside the labour force.

Many feminist critics have pointed out the inadequacy of this response in terms of women's 'double-shift' and the undervaluing of *reproductive* labour, particularly in Marx.[12] Engels at least recognized the practical difficulty for the wife: if she carries out her

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[12] Critiques of different aspects of this analysis abound: see especially Barrett (1980, 1985), Mackinnon (1989) and Molyneux (1981)

duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from social production and unable to earn, and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out her family duties. (Engels 1884:143). However, Engels failed to realize the real reason that paid work is not necessarily liberating is not simply overwork and fatigue, it is that paid employment does not give the wife ownership of her own labour. The original property inequality in one's labour remains untouched by participation in 'productive' work, whether in a market or socialist economy (Dickenson 1997:120).

Engel's emphasis on women's entry into the labour force condition for their emancipation has been enormously influential in shaping the thinking of left-wing political parties and non-party groups, including left-wing women's groups in the South.[13] As noted, they too gave centrality to women's employment, but necessary accompaniments emphasized by Engels, namely the abolition of private property in male hands and the socialization of housework and childcare, have largely been neglected, as has the question of women's property rights.

Yet, neither deriving women's class from the property status of men nor deriving it from their own propertyless status appears adequate, although both positions reflect a dimension of reality. Women of large landed households do gain from their husband's class positions

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[13] Also see Molyneux (1981) who describes how socialist countries (including those who were socialist until recently), the influence of Engel's analysis led to a similar preoccupation with women's entry into employment as the major means of eliminating gender oppression. Although at the time of Molyneux's writing, the types of jobs held by women were largely at the lower end of the job hierarchy; progress towards the socialization of housework was extremely limited; and the ideological basis of gender oppression (neglected by Engels) had persisted, in greater or lesser degree.

in terms of their overall living standards, their lower work burdens, the social status and influence they can command in relation to other women in the community. Hence, property mediates relationships not only between men and women but also between women. At the same time, there are significant commonalities between women which cut across derived class privilege, such as vulnerability to domestic violence, all women's responsibility for housework and childcare (even if all women are obliged to perform such labour themselves-the more affluent ones can hire helpers), gender inequalities in legal` rights; and the risks of maritial breakdown due to which even women of rich peasant households can be left destitute and forced to seek wage work, reflecting their propertyless state and economic vulnerability as women (Omvedt 1978:398). In other words, there is an ambiguous character to women's class position.

This complexity impinges with critical force on the possibilities of collective action among women, again in a double edged way. Class differences among women, derived from men, can be and often are divisive in terms of relative economic privilege or deprivation, the associated ability (or lack of ability) to dominate women's groups, perceptions about which aspects of gender relations need challenging, willingness to engage in collective struggles and so on. At the same time, the noted commonalities between women's situations and the character of their class privilege make class distinctions between them less sharp and divisive than those among men and could provide the basis for collective action on several counts.[14]

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[14] There are other aspects of a person's identity other than class which also can be divisive or adhesive, such as caste, ethnicity and religion.

SIGNIFICANCE (

Till now, the discussion has revolved around property in general, but not all forms of property are equally significant in all contexts, nor are they equally coveted. In the agrarian economies of the South, arable land has been popularly understood as the most valued form of property, for its economic as its political and symbolic importance. It is a productive, wealth-creating and life sustaining asset. Traditionally, it has been the basis of political power and social status. For many, it provides a sense of identity and rootedness within the village; and often in people's minds land has a durability and permanence which no other asset possesses. Although other forms of property such as cash, jewellery, cattle and even domestic goods could in principle be converted into land, in practice, rural markets are often constrained, and land is not readily available for sale.[15] In any case , ancestral land usually has a symbolic meaning which purchased land does not and in land disputes, people are usually willing to spend more to retain a disputed ancestral plot than its market value would justify.

In other words, both the form that property takes and its origin are important in defining its significance and the associated possibility of conflict over it. Hence, for instance, in terms of the possible relationship between a woman's property rights and the control that her kin might seek to exercise over her sexual and maritial choices, one would expect families to

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[15] Shankar (1990) found that in Uttar Pradesh (northwestern India), over a period of 30 years, an annual average of 0.14 percent of owned agricultural land was sold. The sellers typically owned less than 2.5 acres of land. Rural land sales on any significant scale in South Asia have usually tended to be under distress circumstances. From the mid nineteenth century, large scale land transfers were largely in the nature of distress sales by severely indebted peasants to money lenders in the Punjab and Bombay presidency (Barrier 1966, Charleston 1985) or by starving peasants during the Bengal famine (Mahalanobis et al. 1946). Theoretical reasons have been proposed as to why in such circumstances, land accumulates with persons with already large land holdings.

be much more concerned about keeping landed property intact and under control rather than control over movable property as given in dowry.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND THE ISSUE OF LAND RIGHTS

There exist accounts not just of major campaigns of the women's movement but also a number of specific struggles.[16] A study of these accounts highlights some similarities across the third world. For example, the articulation of women's interests in organized land rights movements emerge in the 1970s and 80s. Most feminist researchers have pointed that the rise and consolidation of women's movements in the third world has coincided with the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-85. Successive international conferences took up the issue of women's property and land rights and committed nation-states to taking specific steps towards gender equality. This period also witnessed the beginning of the debt crisis, the proliferation of structural adjustment programmes and the rise to prominence of neoliberal economic models and political regimes. In the backdrop of these unfavourable economic conditions, a number of significant gains were achieved by the women's movement.

Mexico was the first country to establish legal equality in agrarian legislation, since 1971 both men and women could become ejiditarios and enjoy equal rights within ejido decision making procedures. Yet following traditional practice, each household in the ejido was customarily represented by the male household head. Thus while the state had granted all

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[16] See, for example, Basu (1993), Sharma (1989), Sen, Ilina (1990), Ray (1999)

adult women with equal rights to participate in decision-making, the ability to practice this right was limited. As a result of the Chiapas uprising in Mexico, the government has signed the 1996 San Andres Accords with the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) which gives autonomy to the indigenous communities in their internal forms of living and social, economic, political and cultural organization. Women now have a greater role in decision making and land ownership in the Chiapas region (Deere and Leon 2001).

In India too, a study of the organized movement for land rights to women would indicate the emergence of this question within larger social movements for land rights. Land was reclaimed earlier as well, with the Bhoodan movement and state initiated land reforms but women's rights were not important to the then prevailing discourse. But movements like the Bodh Gaya movement which emerged in the backdrop of the JP movement, displayed almost equal participation of women along with a reformulation of demands and techniques to effort change. However, unlike Mexico, the land for women movement in India has not successfully continued or spread to other parts of the country. One reason could be the large indigenous population present across Mexico unlike in India, where they are concentrated in some regions. Also, a shift in conceptions of land over which rights must be established, has taken place from arable to forest/tribal land. Movements centered on demands for land rights are mostly in indigenous/tribal regions and rights over land is now a basic demand in indigenous movements across the spectrum.

In the discipline of IR, it is necessary to develop approaches which recognize the importance of specificity and difference and also the degree to which global processes

transform gender relations and create conditions for feminist alliances. A study of the women's movement with regard to the struggle for land rights to women, would provide an opportunity to understand global influences in conjunction with local specificities, to examine the influence exerted by the ideas of Enlightenment, the experience of colonialism and more recently, the impact of neo-liberal globalisation on the assertion of women rights and the restructuring of patriarchal relations within the family, community, nation and inter-national affairs.

A comparative study between the struggles carried out in India and Mexico would draw out similarities and contradictions useful for broader conceptualizations of the women's question at a global scale. Also, as leading symbols of Third world assertion and as lucrative sites for transnational alliances against hegemonic constructions, the Indian and Mexican experience would prove to be of great value. A juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, culture and ideology, would expose possibilities which would perhaps enable a clearer understanding of the women's question at a global level. Moreover, the attempt would be to broaden our perspectives on women's movements, composed not only of high-profile leaders, activists of political parties, autonomous groups, non-governmental organizations, self help groups etc which gives it a character that cuts across caste, class, race, regional and ethnic divisions but to examine contributions of women in movements and how they impact the articulation of demands and methods of mobilization and protest.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND LAND RIGHTS IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

The women's movement in India, is an 'old' social movement that has played a substantial

role in contemporary struggles, ebbing, flowing and reinventing itself in myriad ways. [1]

Indeed, when compared to other social movements, the extent, depth of its influence on

contemporary institutions, ideologies and practices, may well be unique (Kumar 1999:xi).

With over half a century since independence from British colonial rule to the formation of

the Indian state, women's movements in the region have exerted considerable influence on

the colonial government as well as the more recent Indian state. Successful campaigns

have been led against the colonial and later the patriarchal state with legislative reforms

affected for equal status of women accompanied by legislation for the prohibition of child

marriage, sati, polygamy, to name a few.

The key to the vibrancy of the women's movements in India is that it has raised a range of

issues and has evolved from being composed of more or less a high profile leadership

during the nationalist struggle by activists from political parties or otherwise, but has

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[1] MSA Rao (1993) defines movements as 'a sustained effort made through collective mobilisation, to bring about change based on a pre-determnined or emerging ideology.' To this, Katzenstein, Kothari and Mehta (2001) add, 'social movements include activism that may prioritise a protest agenda or may emphasise, as does much of the NGO sector, development work informed by a deep commitment to grassroots social change.'

grown to include people from across classes, castes, genders and religions. To my mind, the movement has not been restricted merely to addressing gender-specific interests, but women have participated in struggles for worker's rights, land reform, minimum wages and others, in very large numbers. Though their presence has positively affected the impact of these struggles, gender-specific concerns of women in these struggles have not always been addressed.

HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT BEFORE 1947

There exist accounts not just of major campaigns of the women's movement but also of a number of specific struggles.[2] The history of the women's movement in India can be traced back to several decades before Independence from British rule in 1947. The crusade for the emancipation of Indian women became the first tenet of the social reform movement in British-ruled India (Hemisath 1964:14). The ideology that emerged to redefine gender relations combined new foreign ideas, indigenous concepts and the response of Indian men and women to the colonial domination.[3] Rammohan Roy took up the cause of women who were 'forced upon the pyre', Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar wrote of the customs which had hampered the evolution of women's faculties and promoted education for women and D.D.

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[2] See, for example, Basu (1993) *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* Oxford, Oxford University Press and Sen, Ilina (1990) ed. *A Space Within the Struggle*, New Delhi, Kali for Women.

[3] See Forbes, G. (1996) *Women in Modern India, New Cambridge History of India*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, pg 14 Also see, Sarkar, S. (1994) 'The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Women and Culture*, Bombay, Research Centre for Women's Studies

Karve spoke of caste widows. According to the reformers, these customs were not in harmony with nature and were followed without recourse to common sense (Forbes 1996:17).

These early social reform efforts led by male social reformers, with the exception of Pandita Ramabai (who was one of the most scathing critics of Hindu patriarchy and casteism at the time), focused on socially oppressive issues such as, sati, widow remarriage, child marriage and the education of girls. The campaign against sati by Rammohan Roy resulting in the subsequent passing of the law prohibiting sati in 1829 was the first intervention by colonial rulers in 'personal law'. Vidyasagar's campaign for widow remarriage resulted in the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, 1856.[4] These early reform movements were sporadic and legalistic, reflecting western influences on the social reformers. Since the colonial state was reluctant to intervene in these matters because of a policy of neutrality, these reform efforts were directed towards the State for remedying the situation along with attempts to change the social mindset towards oppressive customs and practices (Azad 2003:200).

These initial reformist efforts soon spread to other parts of India and other communities. Geraldine Forbes writes;

> 'In Bengal, Vidyasagar championed female education and led the campaign
> to legalize widow remarriage, the Brahmo Samaj, led by Keshub Chandra

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[4] Hindu women were legally empowered to remarry only after the death of their husbands via this Act. However, the Act of 1856 stipulated that the Hindu woman who remarried forfeited all claims to the property of her dead husband. Thus, women from several communities or castes that allowed widow remarriage prior to the Act and that had enjoined no forfeiture, were actually disabled by this 'progressive' Act. For further reference, please see Sen 'Towards a Feminist Politics' (2002) and Caroll, L. (1989) 'Law, Custom and Statutory Social Reform : The Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act of 1956, in J. Krishnamurthy (ed). *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and the State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi pp 1-26

Sen campaigned for women's education, abandonment of purdah and viewed the oppression of women as a major political issue. By the end of the century, Swami Vivekananda…..was arguing that women could become a regenerative force. In North India, Swami Dayananda Saraswati… encouraged female education and condemned customs he regarded as degrading to women: marriages between partners of unequal ages, dowry and polygamy. Among muslims, Khwaja Altaf Hussain Hali and Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah introduced education for girls.' (Forbes 1996:19-20)

Not everybody agreed with the reformists or subscribed to the view that gender relations need to be changed. Many Indians glorified the treatment of women in the Indian tradition or compared their condition in India with that of European women and argued that in both countries women suffered hardship (Forbes 1996:14; Raychaudhari 1988:336). Nevertheless, this reformist activity led to the formation of several social reform organizations in Andhra, Gujarat and Maharashtra. With the passing of the Native Marriage Act of 1872, prohibiting polygamy, allowing divorce and setting an age limit of 14 for marriage, the Brahmo Samaj broke away from Hinduism itself. Successful in their limited goals, the upper caste, newly educated elite who led this social reform movement were unwilling to make any changes in the family structure or the class-caste hierarchy, to make any dents in the 'monolith of patriarchy'(Azad 2000:198).

These reformers were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only 'limited and controlled emancipation' of their womenfolk (Sarkar 1994:106; Forbes 1996:27). They were encouraged to represent a 'tradition' constructed from selective appropriations of varying and contradictory Hindu texts representing idealized Brahminic norms. This was possible because of the legal and institutional innovations of the colonial state empowered elite men to speak on behalf of 'Hindus' in

their widest definition. As a result, lower caste peasants, labourers and artisans were co-opted as participants who upheld a putative Hindu ideal of womanhood and a ritual and legal Brahminisation of marriage that was sacrament in nature and irrevocable (Nair 1996).

This process led to the recasting of patriarchy in the image of high caste and upper class norms which meant that large masses of women were left out, not only from the benefits of modernity but also deprived of their traditional rights and freedoms. In contrast, the anti-caste movements spearheaded by Jotirao Phule and E. Periyar, challenged the whole structure of caste Hinduism including women's oppression in the family and society. Both leaders, founded their organizations around progressive marriage ceremonies like the *Satyasodhak* marriages advocated by Phule, defied caste and provided women equality as did the self-respect marriages advocated by Periyar (Azad 2000: 201).

THE BEGINNING OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

By the 1880s, individual reformers and reform organizations began to identify themselves with the Indian nation. The ethical ideals, still influenced by the West, were now used to transform society on a national basis (Azad 2000: 202). Women were told 'the house is on fire' and they should come out of the burning house and help put out the fire. From liberal homes and conservative families, urban centres and rural districts-single, married, young, old-came forward and joined the struggle against colonial rule.

According to Nandini Azad (2003:204), women's participation in the national movement can be viewed from a two-fold perspective : (a) for the first time, women were mobilized *en masse* out of the 'family' and participated in demonstrations such as all-night dharnas of 1930 during the salt satyagraha; (b) while it broke the myth of segregation by bringing women in the public-political domain, the basic understanding of the women's question for national leaders was within the existing patriarchal systems. As Partha Chatterjee notes, the reason why the issue of female emancipation seems to disappear from the public agenda of nationalist agitation in the late nineteenth century is not because it was overtaken by the more emotive issues concerning political power. Rather, the reason lies in the refusal of nationalism to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. It was after independence, when the nation had acquired political sovereignty, that it became legitimate to embody the idea of reform in legislative enactments about marriage rules, property rights, suffrage, equal pay, equality of opportunity, and so on (Chatterjee 1993:132).

However, one significant development due to women's participation in the national struggle was that women began to define their own interests, to propose solutions and take action through forming their own associations. Earlier, a few organizations had been established by men who belonged to the reform movements. While these organizations did valuable work of educating women and providing them with the first experience of public work, they were restrictive in many ways. Male reformers regarded the household as the primary focus and fundamental arena of activity for women and these associations dealt with women's problems as defined by male leaders (Azad 2003: 197).

Hence, during the early spurts of nationalist agitation, the Women's India Association (WIA) was launched in 1917, to be followed by the National Council of Indian Women (NCIW) in 1925. The WIA defined itself as including and representing women of all races, cultures and religions. It opened branches in different parts of southern India and remained connected to the Madras Theosophical Society. They raised the issue of female franchise but the WIA remained highly limited in class and caste composition and failed to spread outside the Madras presidency.

The NCIW was even more elitist. It was set up as a national branch of the International Council of Women and was influenced by Lady Tata and other women from wealthy industrialist families. Many of these women saw the Council's purpose to be charitable, modeled on British middle class women's associations. Both organizations claimed to represent 'Indian women' though they were far removed from the masses they sought to benefit. Nevertheless, they had sectional committees on labour, legislation and the press. Their main target was the government: they turned to it for solutions and advised it on what they saw as 'problems'. They concentrated on 'petition politics' because such activity suited their 'station' and purpose best. Their contacts, through family, marriage and social interaction, gave them far more credibility than was warranted by either their numbers or their experience (Forbes 1996:44).

The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed in 1926 and was quite successful in its aim of 'national' representation of women both in spread and operation and also in its

alliance with the Indian National Congress (INC). In ten years, AIWC included subcommittees on labour, rural reconstruction, industry, textbooks, opium and child marriage legislation. They also led the successful campaign for the enactment of the Child Marriage Bill 1927. From the 1920s onwards, the INC began to forge linkages with peasants, workers and women's organizations in order to demonstrate that it had mass support. Women's political participation was socially legitimized and this completely altered equations within the women's movement. Some women were already engaged in a variety of political activities. From 1889, every meeting of the INC included some women, a few of whom were delegates and many observers. Their participation was often 'token' and symbolic, but the women were educated and politically knowledgeable and were seeking new political roles (Sen 2002:475).

In 1917, Annie Besant became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress. Under her influence, the INC 'expressed the opinion that the same tests be applied to women as to men in regard to franchise and the eligibility to all elective bodies concerned with local government and education (Besant 1935:70). In December 1917, she along with Margaret Cousins, Sarojini Naidu and 8 other Indian women met Mr. Montague to demand votes for Indian women. Sarojini Naidu played an instrumental role in the passage of a resolution supporting women's franchise at the Special Congress session in Bombay 1918 and went to England as a member of the Home Rule League deputation to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee, where she put forward the case for women's suffrage. In 1925, she became the first Indian woman to become President of the INC.

Gandhi, through his emphasis on *satyagraha* and passive resistance, created a special space for women in nationalist politics. He fully appreciated the value of women picketeers and continually sought to draw more women into the nationalist movement. Women's participation legitimized the Indian National Congress and Gandhian politics. It bolstered claims of Indian 'unity' against foreign rule. It also undermined the 'civilizing mission' of the British and the government's claim to be a 'protector of women'. In Gandhi's first article on women in *Young India*, he wrote : women should take their proper place besides men, but not with a 'votes for women' campaign which would only detract from the fight for freedom. Women, he argued should use their energy 'helping their men against the common foe' (Gandhi 1920:26). Women demonstrators and nationalist leaders claimed the participation of all women of India, but upper and middle class Hindus dominated the movement since Gandhi invoked all-Hindu sacred legends, icons like Sita, Savitri, to appeal to women across classes and castes. Gandhi's political idioms were successful since they drew on traditional gender ideology, which served not only to women but also reassured the men (Forbes 1996: 73).

By the 1940s, there was a sense of seeing independence on the horizon, and the women's movement was absorbed into the struggle for independence in such a manner that questions about women's emancipation were felt to have been resolved. Within the Congress-led nationalist framework, it was felt that inequalities would be righted with independence. The nationalist feminist woman activist was seen both as a symbol and a bulwark of women's emancipation, the fact, that the image of a woman activist which had been constructed in this period itself limited and restricted women, was not questioned

(Kumar 1999:94). Partha Chatterjee explains by raising a paradoxical question, on one hand, since British rule, middle class employment has been an area of bitter competition between cultural groups distinguished by caste, religion and language but gender has never been an issue of public contention. On the other hand, the new constitution of independent India gave women the vote without any major debate on the question and without there ever having been a large scale movement for women's suffrage, like in the West, at any period of nationalist politics in India (Chatterjee 1993:131).

By the middle of the decade, the hegemony of the all-India women's organizations had eroded. For two decades they had spoken for all Indian women but their ideology was too Hindu, too middle class and too urban to appeal to or adequately represent all Indian women. With the backdrop of the outbreak of communalism resulting in the Partition, mass mobilization in the Quit India Movement 1942, famine and war, there arose more radical movements for socio-economic justice. Women were a significant part of all major events of this time and their involvement helped to shatter the essentialist constructions of 'Indian woman' from which both, the nationalist and the women's movement drew. Women's organizations' attempts to attract lower-class rural and urban women failed due to the lack of any programmes with mass appeal (Sen 2002:479).

However, there was significant participation by peasant and working-class women in both class-based action and nationalist groups under the leadership of a variety of left, primarily communist groups, as in the Tebhaga movement in North Bengal, the Telengana

movement in Andhra Pradesh and the cotton textile worker's movements in Western India (Custers 1987; Cooper 1988).

Women who joined the revolutionary movement were few and exceptional but they often transgressed stereotypical gender roles. While their political achievements were valorized, contemporary society did not regard them as 'respectable' or representative. Pritilata Waddedar, the most celebrated woman martyr of the freedom movement, left an impassioned question that could not be within the dominant gender ideology of nationalism : 'if sisters can stand side by side in a satyagraha movement, why are they not so entitled in a revolutionary movement ?' (quoted in Mandal 1991:4). This radicalism was seen again in the 1940s among the early communist women. These women went on to question social restrictions on women's mobility, the values of segregation and the discriminatory sexual morality imposed on women. But like the revolutionaries, they were a small group outside the 'mainstream' and only marginal groups were able to accommodate any radical gender questions (Munshi 1997).

The Left, had women's organizations of its own as well, like the *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* (MAS) formed in the wake of the Bengal famine in 1943. It did significant relief work in times of distress but, according to Chakravarty, could not coalesce into any significant mass mobilization of women on issues of gender. Agitations by the left on 'women's issues' remained limited to urban elite women while poor women were mobilized for 'class' or 'nationalist' causes (Chakravarty 1980:134). On the other hand, Bina Agarwal and Ilina Sen feel that MAS was instrumental in the struggles of the

Tebhaga movement that emerged due to the unrest precipitated by the famine. The Tebhaga movement emerged in 1946–47 in undivided Bengal, in the footsteps of the great Bengal famine of 1943. Sharecroppers in the region had no occupancy rights and faced a constant threat of eviction. The landlords took half the produce while bearing no part of the production costs, levied illegal taxes, and sexually abused the women. The movement, spearheaded by the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), under the leadership of the Communist Party of India, demanded a reduction of land rents and an end to other forms of exploitation. The women's self-defense league played a critical mobilizing role among women (Agarwal 1994:87).

Despite women's participation, unequal gender relations persisted both within and outside the movement. Whatever gains women made were ad-hoc. Their objections to domestic violence led to the boycott of some of the male activists responsible, but the issue was not seen as integral to the larger political struggle to change economic and social relations that the movement was addressing. In particular, women's rights in land were not discussed. Women also played little role in decision making and during the most intense periods of the agitation women emerged from their domestic roles, they were forced to return to housework and largely unchanged gender relations within the family when the struggle ended. It was not until several decades later, during the Bodhgaya movement, that oppression within the family and women's rights in land emerged as significant concerns within a peasant movement in India.

HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT 1947 ONWARDS

VIS-À-VIS LAND

The immediate aftermath of Partition and Independence saw a steadily increasing sense of betrayal on the part of workers and peasants, communists and socialists. Left leaning women were the least satisfied with the new constitutional guarantees and the promisies of prosperity. Under the leadership of some CPI women, the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) was formed in 1954 and was meant to be a radical alternative to existing women's organizations, and one that would reach beyond a mere middle class membership. The delays of the Congress in the fulfillment of its promises of speedy and effective land redistribution infused the Kisan Sabhas with a new spirit of opposition at a time when the impact of the Chinese Revolution was being felt by Indian communists and there were sharecroppers' rallies, strikes and demonstrations, led by the Kisan Sabhas, criticizing government measures as insufficient and demanding land reform. Most of these agitations were suppressed by the government through the arrest of peasant leaders, but this was not possible in the case of one of the earliest and most militant sharecroppers' movements, the 1948-50 Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of India, around two thousand, five hundred villages were declared 'liberated', sharecroppers' debts were cancelled, rent payments suspended and land redistributed. In September 1948, Indian troops took over the state and the CPI was outlawed and the movement forced underground where it took to guerilla tactics.

Though thousands of women had been active in the strikes and rallies, the attitude towards women remained one of benevolent paternalism, and when the movement went underground, women were not allowed to join the guerillas but expected to perform ancillary tasks such as providing shelter or acting as messengers. Exceptional women did manage to push themselves into the guerilla movement but later confessed the loneliness they experienced, for while they were treated as having shed their 'womanliness', they were never accepted at par with men (Stree Shakti Sangathana 1987). Meanwhile, struggles within the CPI led to a shift in policy, with emphasis being placed on working class agitations rather than peasant insurrections. As a result, in 1951, the Telanagana movement was called off.

In the wake of the Telangana movement, Vinobha Bhave, a nationalist leader influenced by Gandhian ideals, started a movement to persuade landlords to donate their lands for redistribution to the landless. Know as *bhoodan*, the movement did not take off in a big way but experienced limited success in Bihar. In a movement that culminated in the early seventies, land was finally redistributed but some was uncultivable, some were snatched back by landlords after they had been made cultivable, and some were lands over whose ownership legal battles were being waged when they were given (Kumar 1999:97).

In the northern hill areas of Uttarakhand, the *sarvodaya* movement made attempts to organize people against the degradation of forests and the increasing consumption of alcohol. Started in the early seventies, the *Chipko* movement followed, where women took it upon themselves to lead the struggle against deforestation by hugging the trees and not

allowing forest officials and contractors to cut them. Since independence, women have actively participated in struggles for rights over land and resources. While some gender related concerns like wife-beating and alcoholism were raised, these issues were not completely resolved. While this period saw a marked absence of specific women's movements, it provided an opportunity for feminists to develop strategies and tactics for women's emancipation in the following years.

A turning point came in the 1970s, several conjunctural events, both within and outside India gave a radical turn to the women's movement. The emergence of 'New Feminism' in the developed countries led to the International Year and then the Decade of Women in 1971 with a focus on development. On being urged by the United Nations, the Government of India appointed a Committee on the Status of Women in India. This report came out in 1974 and confirmed that fact that the condition of Indian women, especially poor women had worsened in a variety of ways. Gender disparities had widened in employment, health, education and political participation.

Around the same time, the Indian left fractured and gave rise to a body of 'new' leftist thought. A series of locally organised and popular intense struggles broke out. The first of these was the Shahada movement in Dhulia district in Maharashtra, which was initiated by *Bhil* (indigenous tribe) landless labourers under the Shramik Sangathana. Women and men actively participated in economic and political struggles around land rights, wages, employment and elections. Vigorous campaigns against domestic violence, alcoholism and rape were also taken up. The 1972-73 drought and consequent famine led to the rapid

growth of the movement, which had then taken up struggles against land alienation through occupying and cultivating fallow lands, much of which had been reserved by the government as 'forest land' (Mies 1976:77). Meanwhile, in Gujarat, the first attempt at a women's trade union was made in Ahmedabad by Gandhian socialists attached to the Textile Labour Association (TLA). Formed in 1972 by Ela Bhatt, who worked in the women's wing fo the TLA, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was an organisation of women who worked in different trades in the informal sector but shared a common experience of very poor working conditions, extrememly low earnings and harassment by authorities and lack of recognition of their work as socially useful labour. The aims of SEWA was to improve these conditions of work through training, technical aids and collective bargaining, as well as to 'introduce the members to the values honesty, dignity and simplicity reflecting the Gandhian ideals to which TLA and SEWA leaders subscribe' (Jain 1989:14).

Conditions of drought and famine in Maharashtra, led to a rise in prices which affected urban areas. In 1973, Mrinal Gore of the Socialist Party and Ahilya Ranganekar of CPI-M, together with many others formed the United Women's Anti Women's Anti Price Rise Front to mobilize women of the city against inflation just as women of the rural poor had been mobilized in the famine agitations (Omvedt 1990:22). The movement grew rapidly, becoming a mass movement for consumer protection, demanding that both prices and distribution of essential commodities be fixed by the government. Thousands of housewives joined and protested with *thalis* and rolling pins. Soon, the movement spread to Gujarat, becoming known as the Nav Nirman movement of 1974. It became a massive

middle class movement with thousands of women joining the ranks of protestors and demonstrators. This movement too, faced police repression and it took them three months to crush it, killing around 100 people in 1974 (Patel 1985:18). Nav Nirman activists were influenced by Jaiprakash Narayan's call for 'Total Revolution', fighting to reform as well as limit state power, arguing that the State rule of law had become corrupt and decayed, and the time for *lokniti* (people's rule of law) had come.

In the same year as the Nav Nirman movement was developed and was crushed, the first women's group of the contemporary women's movement was formed in Hyderabad, the Progressive Organisation of Women (POW). Comprising women from the Maoist movement, the group was an exemplar of the process of rethinking within the movement after its savage repression. According to them, the sexual division of labour and the culture that rationalizes it are the two primary structures of women's oppression. The former rendering them economically dependent on the men and, the latter providing justificatory theories arguing that biological differences between men and women were such that women were 'naturally' inferior (Omvedt 1980:39). Influenced by the POW, Maoist women in Pune formed the Purogami Stree Sangathan and in Bombay, formed the Stree Mukti Sangathana. March 8th, International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time in India in 1974 by these groups.

Hence, the influence of feminist ideas was beginning to grow. Though the feminist campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s were dominated by new city-based groups, similar developments of feminist consciousness had also taken place in certain rural

movements. The Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh was renewed after the 'Emergency' of 1975, and the area was declared a 'disturbed' zone by the government. In Karimnagar district, where women had been especially active in the landless labourers' movement, a new wave of agitation began with a campaign against the kidnapping of a woman called Devamma, and the murder of her husband by a local landlord. The Stree Shakti Sangathan, formed in the late 1970s in Hyderabad, by women from the erstwhile POW, pushed the demand for independent women's organizations which came from the 'women themselves' who raised the issues of wife-beating and rape by landlords through Mahila Sangams. Their goal was to build a women's liberation movement linked to the revolutionary struggles of the toiling masses and their role in that process should be to present before the masses, a political line which linked women's liberation to the fight for revolution (Omvedt 1984).

THE BODH GAYA MOVEMENT

The Bodhgaya movement, initiated in 1978 in the Gaya district of Bihar, was a struggle by landless laborers and sharecroppers to gain rights in land which they had cultivated for decades. The land, some 9,575 acres spread over 138 villages, was held by a *Math* (a monastery-cum-temple complex), much of it in violation of land ceiling laws. *Math* officials exploited the peasants and also sexually abused the women. The struggle emerged under the leadership of the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, a Gandhian-socialist youth organization founded in 1975 by Jayaprakash Narayan and committed to improving the lot

of the disadvantaged. Vahini membership was restricted to those under thirty, and included women in every tier of the organization. The movement lasted several years. Its primary slogan was *Jo zameen ko boye jote, voh zameen ka malik hai* (those who sow and plough the land are the owners of the land).

Women played a crucial role in the movement. In 1980, for instance, the activists decided to seize the land and cultivate it independently of the *Math*. About 3,000 acres were captured and ploughed. Despite police attacks, sowing was completed. At harvest time, the attacks were renewed. Since women usually harvested the crops, it was they who faced the brunt. As the repression intensified, women's involvement increased. Women also participated in the movement's nonviolent protests, despite threats of beatings and rape by the *Math*'s hired ruffians. Over time, women began participating in equal numbers with the men and also courting arrest with accompanying children. In addition, women organized *shivirs* (camps) to discuss their concerns within the struggle. They focused on women's exploitation, their exclusive responsibility for housework, discrimination against girl children, men's verbal and physical violence against them, and (most importantly) women's need for independent land rights. Resolutions were passed, including one against wife beating and another demanding land in women's own names. In the course of the struggle, women activists of the Chaatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, Bihar felt that, 'the Vahini men activists were mainly interested in women's participation in large numbers in action programmes, but were less interested in their developing an independent identity' (Manimala 1983:137). They questioned such an attitude and pointed out the lack of women in leadership of the movement.

Finally in 1981, the government identified 1,000 acres of the *Math*'s land for redistribution to the agitating farmers. The Vahini drew up a list, giving priority to landless labourers, the disabled, widows, and small peasants. Women other than widows did not figure in the list, and they protested their exclusion: "We were in the forefront of the fight, carrying our children in our wombs and in our arms. We went to jail and faced the lathis [sticks]; we also did all the housework. But when the land was distributed, we were pushed back, we didn't even come to know by what rules the land was distributed" (Manimala 1983:140). After a prolonged debate on why women should have independent land rights, in 1982, it was decided that women too would receive land in their own names in future distribution. In two villages the villagers unanimously approved lists for giving land only to women and widowers.

The District Officer in charge of registering the titles was also strongly opposed to the idea of individual land rights for women, arguing that there was no precedent for giving land to persons other than heads of households, who were typically men. The villagers, however, refused to take any land unless it was given to women. Almost three years passed before women were finally allocated land. Eventually, all the Math's illegal holdings were distributed and women received land in various ways: individual titles, joint titles with husbands, as widows, destitute and disabled persons, and (without precedent) in some cases as unmarried adult daughters. Although such women were few since most girls there were married before they were eighteen, the idea that unmarried daughters were eligible was an important step forward. Each person received about one acre.

Initially, women encountered opposition at three levels: from husbands, from the Vahini activists, and from government officials. Women's ability to overcome these layers of opposition depended on several factors: men's recognition over time that women's contributions were crucial to the movement's success; the growing solidarity among women and their articulation of their gender-specific interests as distinct from those of the men of their class and community; the support of some pro middle-class female Vahini activists with a feminist perspective; and the process of debate in which women persuasively countered opposition.

For instance, when the women protested against their exclusion from the Vahini's initial list of land recipients, the men argued: "What difference does it make in whose name the land is registered?" The women responded: "If it doesn't make a difference, then put it down in the woman's name. Why argue about it?" To the suggestion that women's demand would weaken class unity, the women replied: "Equality can only strengthen, not weaken an organization, but if it does weaken our unity, that will mean that our real commitment is not to equality or justice but to the transfer of power, both economic and social, from the hands of one set of men to the hands of another set of men." When the men asked: "How can you cultivate the land on your own? Who will plough it for you?" they replied: "Well, who will harvest your crop in that case? We are ready to cultivate the land with hoes instead of ploughs, but we want it in our names" (Manimala 1983:145).

The significance of the Bodhgaya struggle from women's perspective lies not just in its being South Asia's first land struggle where *women's* land interests received explicit attention. It also lies in *the process* by which this was achieved. For the first time, women from dalit families were able to have land in their own name. It is noteworthy that a largely illiterate peasant community discussed at length issues such as women's independent rights in economic resources, domestic violence, female education, and postmarital residence, and on several counts resolved them in women's favor. The debate, although arduous, brought significant rewards. The question of gender equality began to be seen by many not as divisive but as integral to the movement's success. As a result, women's participation in decision making also increased, wife-beating and verbal abuse against women was deemed shameful, and male villagers began to take care of cooking and childcare in the women's *shivirs*, while the women participated in discussions.

The women of Bodhgaya were also indirectly helped by a growing women's movement and a spreading feminist consciousness in the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when issues concerning women's rights were being raised in various forums. In contrast, women in the Tebhaga movement of the 1940s had not demanded independent land rights. At that time, there was an absence of cohesiveness among women on gender questions; a lack of spokespersons among them who could articulate a feminist perspective; and the absence of a widespread women's movement in the country. For the Bodhgaya women, the situation was favorable on all these counts. They were thus able to articulate their interests overtly. However, the Bodhgaya experience still awaits replication.

The question that now arises is: what lessons were learnt from Bodhgaya ? Have there been any attempts to replicate the success of the Bodhgaya movement elsewhere in India? Has the issue of independent land rights for women been taken up within large struggles for land rights? Despite inspiring success in Bodhgaya, a sustained or widespread focus on the question of women and land has not been taken up. Several factors constrained this: first, there was and still is, an ambiguity among groups and individuals who have otherwise been strong advocates of redistributive land reform, namely Marxist political parties and left-wing non-party organizations, most of whom tend to view class issues as primary and gender concerns as divisive and distracting. At the same time, most gender-progressive groups, including women's organizations, not only had quite divergent concerns and approaches, but they focused on issues other than land. Among urban groups, violence against women was the main unifying issue, and women's economic situation has taken a secondary place (Agarwal 2003:186).

Moreover, barring some notable exceptions, those concerned with women's economic position, including rural based groups, have been preoccupied with wage employment, non-land related income-generating schemes, and micro-credit for small enterprises, as *the* means of improving women's economic welfare.[5] Little attention has been paid to questions of land and property access, and an inadequate account of the stage of India's agrarian transition has been taken, wherein agriculture was still the main source of livelihood, but in much greater degree for women than men (Agarwal 2003:187). Hence,

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[5] Among individuals, notable exceptions include Chetna Gala and Manimala (active in the Bodhgaya movement); Gail Omvedt (who, along with Gala, played a lead role in the Shetkari Sangathan's Mahila Agadi); Madhu Kishwar, who filed a petition in India's Supreme Court challenging the denial of land rights to Ho tribal women in Bihar (Kishwar 1987) and P.V. Satheesh and Rukmani Rao of the DDS, who began promoting land acquisition and collective farming by women.

working on land without rights in it meant a high vulnerability to poverty. This broader picture, which warranted prioritizing land access for women, even while other employment avenues and micro-credit schemes were worth pursuing as supplementary measures, was somehow missed. Also, while inheritance laws were made more gender equal in a few states, most amendments did not touch agricultural land and, until the recent amendment to the Hindu Succession Act 1956 in 2005 which finally gives rights to women over agricultural land as well.

However, some small efforts have been initiated. The Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment in November 1997 to set up a three-member Committee for Gender Equality in Land Devolution in Tenurial Laws,[6] to reform the rules governing the inheritance of agricultural land. Since agriculture is a State subject, changes in tenurial laws are undertaken by State legislators. The Committee's Report recommended full gender equality in the devolution rules and outlined in detail the changes needed (Agarwal, Sivaramayya and Sarkar, 1998). Most state governments have yet to respond to the recommendations, but one state, Uttar Pradesh (UP), has gone some way toward reform by seeking to amend the UP Land Reform Act of 1950, by bringing the widow on a par with sons in the inheritance of agricultural land. In another state – Madhya Pradesh – the Government's *Policy on Women* drafted sought to bring in the land question as a central issue, and recommended that land distributed by the Government would, in future, be in women's names, with preference given to groups of poor rural women. Also, unmarried adult daughters, who until then had been ignored in land distributed under resettlement

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[6] The Committee was constituted under the chairpersonship of Dr. Bina Agarwal, the other two members being law professors Lotika Sarkar and the late B. Sivaramayya.

schemes, would be placed on a par with adult sons. Some of these recommendations have since been implemented, although mainly in terms of giving women joint titles with husbands (Agarwal 2003:188).

An examination of movements for land rights, in the current context, one witnesses a shift from demanding rights over agricultural land to a reconceptualisation of land rights to include forested areas inhabited by indigenous peoples in India. Mass movements for land rights are now taking place in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala, to name a few. An example is, the Nari Mukti Sangh (NMS). The NMS emerged after the tribal peasants in Jharkhand started getting organised under revolutionary leadership against the feudal oppression of Rajput landlords and the harassment of officials and contractors of the forest department. It first started in the district of Giridih, a district in which the majority of the peasantry belongs to the Santhal tribe. It is a women's organisation in which almost all the activists and leaders are drawn from the adivasis, for instance, from the Santhals and the Mundas. [7]

Within the re-emerging debate on the land question, it appears imperative that the issue of women's access to land is given critical attention. A growing body of evidence indicates that this is likely to have positive effects on women and their family's welfare, agricultural productivity, poverty reduction and empowerment. And while all channels for women's economic empowerment, including non-farm employment and various self-employment

[7] (2003)'Movement of Jharkhand's Adivasi Women', *People's March* Volume 4, No. 10, October (This article is based on an interview with com. Susheela, the founder member, president and one of the leading comrades, who developed the NMS to its present strength. Because of the severe police repression on her, she is leading the movement from the underground).

enterprises need pursuing, these latter channels alone cannot realistically help more than a small percentage of women, especially in countries such as India, where 85 per cent of rural women workers are still dependent on agriculture (and hence on land) as their main source of livelihood.

Women can obtain land through the State, the family and the market. While it is important to make public land distribution more gender equal, access through the family and the market deserve particular attention, given that most arable land in India is privatized. Moreover, a study of land rights movements opens a window of opportunity to re-examine the context of previous struggles and enable us to draw from rich experiences in order to adopt successful strategies to address gender concerns.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA : SOME TURNING POINTS

After Independence, the Congress made certain attempts to ratify their promises to women, declaring the equality of men and women in the Constitution and setting up various administrative bodies for the creation of opportunities for women. Yet, these attempts were at best partial and to many, years after independence seemed a severe setback for feminists, consider for example, the case of Hindu Code Bill controversy.[8] According to Radha Kumar, in post independence India, feminists were more fragmented than ever before, for they no longer saw a common enemy. Political divisions became more important than they

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[8] See Azad Nandini, (2003)'Gender and Family : State Intervention in India' in Margrit Rernau, Imtiaz Ahmad, Helmut Reifeld (ed) *Family and Gender: Changing Values in Germany and India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp 205-208.

had been earlier, especially since feminists had neither openly sought nor identified the enemy in general terms, due partly to the exigencies of colonialism and partly to the complexities of culture in which gender relations were not as clearly distinguished as in the West (Kumar 1999:100). Many women activists from the pre-independence era had joined the Congress government as the Congress stood for an improvement in women's conditions. However, disillusionment was setting in gradually.

In the following decades, women participated in peasant movements, trade union strikes, protests and others, in large numbers. The turning point came in the 1970s with the declaration of the International Decade for Women as a result of feminist movements in the developed countries. On the behest of the United Nations, the Government of India appointed a committee on the status of women in India. The Committee's Report (1974) confirmed that the conditions of Indian women, especially the poor had worsened in a variety of ways, even by conventional indices of well-being.[9] Gender disparities had widened in women's food grain consumption, employment, health, education and political participation. These findings resulted in widespread disenchantment by the Indian state and led to a 'new wave' of the women's movement in India.

The first national level campaigns of the contemporary women's movement in Indian were against dowry and rape. Protests against dowry were first organized by the Progressive Organisation of Women (POW) in 1975 (Stree Shakti Sangathana 1984:201). After emergency was lifted in 1977, the new movement against dowry started in Delhi and was

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[9] Government of India (1974), *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India,* Ministry of Education and Social Welfare

aimed at violence inflicted upon women for dowry, especially against murder and abetment to suicide. Though the Mahila Dakshata Samiti was the first organisation to take up the issue of dowry, it was Stri Sangharsh whose campaign made dowry murder a household term. Several protest demonstrations were organized, feminists linked death-by-fire with dowry harassment.[10] Over all, the agitation on dowry related crimes led feminists to varying conclusions. On the one hand, they discovered that it was possible to get massive public support for campaigns against certain kinds of crimes against women, such as dowry related murder. On the other hand, they found out how difficult it was to work with the law against such crimes. This later experience was repeated in regard to the campaign against rape.

Beginning just a few months after the campaign against dowry, the agitation against rape started with agitations against police rape (Kumar 1995:352). When new feminist groups formed in the late 1970s, they were already familiar with the categories of police rape and landlord rape, for both, especially the former had been addressed by the Maoist movement. In 1979, several women's demonstrations on the issue were organized in several parts of the country but remained isolated from each other until 1980, when an open letter by four senior lawyers against a judgment in a case of police rape (known as the Mathura rape case), sparked off an intensive campaign by feminist groups. The campaign against rape marked a new stage in the development of feminism in India. The networks that had begun to form in 1978-9 were now expanded and used to coordinate action. On March 8, feminist groups across the country held demonstrations demanding the re-trial of the Mathura case,

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[10] For a detailed account on the campaign against dowry, please refer to the chapter 7 on dowry in Radha Kumar's (1993) *The History of Doing : Women's Movements in India. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, New Delhi, Kali for Women

implementation of relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, and changes in the rape law.[11]

The experience of the campaigns against rape and dowry deaths led many feminists to question their methods and tactics on a wider scale than before. The discovery that there was no connection at all between the enactment of new laws and their implementation had left many feeling bitter about the manner in which the Government had side-tracked their demands. This gave rise to further questions about the efficacy of basing campaigns around demands for changes in the law.

On the one hand, this strengthened decisions to take up individual cases and follow them through the intricacies of the courts which led to the setting up of several women centres, mostly in cities, to provide legal aid, counseling, health care and employment. On the other hand, some feminists began to move away from their earlier methods of agitation such as public campaigns, demonstrations, etc. feeling that they had limited meaning unless they were accompanied by attempts to develop their own structures to aid and support victims of sexual harassment. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah point out that one of the outcomes of the anti-rape and anti-dowry campaigns was 'the realization that violence in different forms may exist for a long time before we realize its existence' (Gandhi and Shah 1992:61).

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[11] For a detailed discussion on the agitation against rape, please see Chapter 8 in Radha Kumar's (1993) *The History of Doing : Women's Movements in India. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, New Delhi, Kali for Women

Since a large majority of women in India are landless, the women's movement in India has engaged with the legal-institutional framework of the Constitution and the justice system in India to affect necessary changes for gender equality. As noted above, issues of women's inheritance rights, land ownership and matrilineal inheritance were raised even during the pre-independence period, particularly in the context of changes in personal laws, and have been under dispute ever since.

The succession laws in most communities in India work to the disadvantage of women. Christian laws vary according to domicile for all movable property and by location of property in the case of immovable property. The Indian Succession Act, 1925 (ISA) till date, governs a majority of Christians whereby a widow gets one-third of her husband's property while the sons and daughters get equal shares. If there are no lineal descendents but there are other kindred who are eligible to inherit, the widow gets half of the property.

The Hindu joint family system excludes women from being co-parceners in the joint family property. Only sons could become co-parceners. An exception, since 1976, is that the joint family system has been abolished in Kerala, due to which unmarried daughters can become co-parceners. Subsequently, Andhra Pradesh in 1986, Tamil Nadu in 1989, and Karnataka and Maharashtra in 1994 ammended the Hindu Succession Act to make unmarried daughters co-parceners, giving them equal claims to those of the sons in the joint family property including a right to a share by survivorship. All Indians can opt out of

their personal laws of succession if they have a civil marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA). They are then governed by the ISA 1925. But an enactment in 1976 changed the rules for two Hindus (or Buddhists, Sikhs or Jains) marrying under the SMA. Now, the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and not the ISA governs their succession rights (Azad 2003: 203).

Under Muslim law, succession is governed by the personal law of each sect. Unlike the traditional Hindu law, Muslim law recognized women's inheritance rights at a time when they enjoyed few, if any legal rights. The process of codifying Muslim Personal law was initiated in the 1930s at the behest of the members of the community (Azad 2003: 204). Two legislations, i.e. the Shariyat Act 1937 and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939, were passed. The purpose of these acts was to apply Muslim Personal Law to muslim men and women who were governed by customary laws. In the eyes of those initiating the laws, the move was a progressive one as it gave Muslim women rights denied to them under customary law and at a time when women in other communities had no similar rights. The Shariyat Act brought all Indian Muslims under Shariyat laws in matters relating to inheritance, divorce, marriage and guardianship. The 1939 Act also extended the right of divorce that had been restricted until then to Hanifi Muslims, to all Muslim women in India (Singh 1993:181). However, inheritance law assumes that women do not need as much property as men. It reflects the underlying assumption of women's economic dependency; on a male relative, and thus will not be in need of the same amount of property as men in the community.

The law continues to be shaper by the patrilineal and patrilocal nature of the ideologically dominant family, and its assumptions of women's economic dependency. The assumption that property should descend primarily through the male line has not been completely displaced. Nor has the assumption that married daughters become the economic responsibility of their husband's families. Despite reforms to these laws, the rules of inheritance continue, at some level, to assume and inscribe women's economic dependency on some male member of the family – unmarried daughter on her father, wife on her husband and widow on her adult son(s).

Most inheritance laws do not apply to agricultural property, which constitutes 75% of the land in India. The tenurial laws governing agricultural property show a strong preference for agnatic succession and agnatic males. However there are signs of improvement with a recent amendment in the Hindu Inheritance Act in 2005, which includes agricultural property as part of inheritance share which was earlier available only to the son.[12] Even the land reform enactments relating to fixation of land ceilings have worked to the disadvantage of women. In virtually all the states, the parental household can hold additional land on account of each adult son to a specific limit. In some states, each adult son counts as a separate unit and is entitled to hold a specified amount of land in his own right. Moreover, usually when a husband counts as a unit, the wife does not count as an independent unit even though she may have property in her own right (Agarwal 1995).

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[12]For details of the specific amendment please refer to Bina Agarwal's article, The Amendment of Hindu Inheritance Act 2005' in *The Hindu*, 16th October, 2005

So, what does this mean for a feminist politics ? According to Kapur and Crossman (1996), precisely because the regulating and defining force of law is directed towards the creating and naturalizing of specific governable identities, the law cannot be a 'subversive site'. Nivedita Menon argues that at best we may be able to use existing legal provisions creatively in such a way that we might negotiate some spaces outside and around prescribed identities. The term 'subversion' is too strong for such a limited exercise (Menon 1999:286). However, Kapur and Crossman (1996) hold that law reform despite its limitations, must continue to be an important part of the women's movement's engagement with law.

Gandhi and Shah (1992:268) argue that the law is not enough, the struggle to transform the patriarchal nature of existing laws can only be a part of the wider struggle. Legal campaigns are at most a broad strategy to create public awareness and secure some short term legal redress. Similarly, Haksar (1994:153) feels that law reform cannot be divorced from the more fundamental struggle to transform social values. On the other hand, some feel that the constant recourse to law creates a series of new legislations which often mean the increase of state control, while implementation remains unsatisfactory (Kishwar and Vanita 1980,1986; Agnes 1992). Omvedt hold that lobbying for legal reform by urban based groups wastes energy without achieving much. Such a strategy, in her opinion offers little challenge to the social systemic basis of the increasing atrocities against women (Omvedt 1986:39).

However, in the last few decades, challenges have emerged to the women's movement in India, not just from the state, but from the international market as well. Yet, the 'most disorienting aspect of the emerging social order has to do with the challenging the dissimulative discourse and practice of the state' while social mobilisation of women is a catch-phrase frequently deployed by government agencies and spokespersons can be found in numerous documents (John 2002:182). From 'welfare to development to empowerment' is yet another contemporary slogan meant to demonstrate the state's steady advancement in addressing women's issues over the last half century. But this can be seen as mere rhetoric advocating the retreat of the state from its role in equal economic development.

In the present context then, it would be vital to study the range of responses being currently adopted towards the new policies, within the women's movement today. Even when allowance is made for the fact that these positions often focus on different dimensions of neo-liberalisation and globalisation, their range is truly remarkable, while they may be all feminist and committed to social justice. Though there have been extensive debates within the movement over Uniform Civil code and reservations for women, similar debates have not taken place over the immensely critical nature of the new conjuncture.

Several diverse opinions have emerged within the women's movement today, on the issue of globalisation. Vandana Shiva, whose opposition to multinational capital arises from a fundamentally different world-view, one based on the desire to preserve indigenous local

knowledges and pre-modern relationship to nature that she imputes to third world women farmers (Shiva 1998). As a result of the coming together of such incommensurable frameworks, oppositional rhetorics are being deployed. Kishwar (2001), seems to be basing her dissent to the current economic regime from her opposition to any state-centric, or what she identifies as western-inspired worldview, whether of development or women's empowerment. From a different perspective, Rohini Hensman views the greater integration of the world economy as a necessary stage for the evolution of global capitalism. She goes further to assert that this demands for a corresponding international level of intervention and struggle, whether through the promotion of co-ordinated class actions by globally disenfranchised workers or by taking advantage of the international standards such as highly controversial WTO directive to link trade with labour standards in developing countries like India (Hensman 2000).

Gail Omvedt and Chetna Gala (1993) have argued that globalisation and the new economic order may actually help those very groups whom the development era effectively marginalized. Her analysis is based on the expectation that globalised markets will, on the one hand reign in Indian bourgeoisie, its unviable monopolies and inefficient upper caste state bureaucracy, and on the other hand, will give the small farmer a better global price for produce that was previously underpriced due to state intervention. This argument begs as many cases as it raises, the most important of which would be the following : are these hitherto marginalized groups – peasants, Dalits, backward castes and women – socially positioned to take advantage of globalisation, and on what basis can we expect the dominant urban classes and castes to lose out in the current realignments taking place.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT & LAND RIGHTS IN MEXICO

Tomorrow...

If there is to be one, it will be made with the women, and above all, by them...

-From the Mountains of the Mexican Southeast

SUBCOMMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS (2005)

INTRODUCTION

The women's movement in Mexico owes its identity and history to the cultural, political, social and economic context of the country. [1] The lives of Mexican women can be best understood within a context of the history that is the product of mainly two cultures: indigenous and Spanish. The process of achieving independence and forging a modern nation has taken place in the face of persistent problems of racism and highly skewed distribution of income generated from the export of Mexico's vast natural resource base, ranging from petroleum to cacao, and various other raw materials that have fed the

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[1] In Mexico, the term *'women's movement'* refers not only to the feminist movement but also to all women's organisations that share the perspective that gender is an issue of social and political concern. However, "feminist movement" and women's movement in many instances are used interchangeably, but they are not one and the same. In the case of Mexico, as Marta Lamas points out, they are distinct concepts. Several movements organized by peasant women and women of the popular sector, among others, have successfully drawn attention to women's political activism without espousing feminist ideals. Lamas uses the term *"movimiento amplio de mujeres"* to emphasise the concept of broadness when referring to the confluence of several movements, especially those led by women of the popular sector, workers, peasants and feminists. (Lamas 1994: 162-163)

industrial machines of continental Europe and the United States. Having to confront powerful obstacles, the women's movement has developed particular strengths, building bridges among very different kinds of women's groups and forming coalitions and alliances that have become central to its evolution. An important feature of the movement has been its attention to issues that are broadly significant to Mexican society in addition to gender-specific concerns, for instance, over half of the Mexican population lives in abject poverty and this has been an issue of concern and focused on by the women's movement.

Another key element of the Mexican context is the strong tradition of male dominance. There are many theories on the origins of Mexican men's aggressive/defensive masculinity, which may be traced to the violent history of the Spanish conquest (Nash 1995). The *conquistadors* came to conquer rather than settle and did not initially bring their wives or families. They saw indigenous women as part of the spoils of war, it is often said that the origin of Mexico's mestizo race was the rape of indigenous women by the Spanish conquistadors. Mexican masculinity may also be a more complex product of the conquest as a whole, combining the attributes of the conquistadors with those of the conquered indigenous groups, which also had a male dominated society, as demonstrated in the Aztecs' gift to Hernan Cortes of twenty-five indigenous slave girls and has left deep scars on Mexico's social fabric that persist to the present. (Nash 1995:23) This tradition of male dominance in Mexico has been reinforced by the powerful influence of the Catholic Church which can be traced from its active role during the Spanish conquest which imposed Catholicism on the indigenous Mexicans, even as it enslaved them.

One of the most pervasive legacies of the conquest on Mexican society is deep-seated racism. Mexico's indigenous groups continue to be discriminated against and marginalized in many ways. They constitute the poorest of the country's poor, it's most disenfranchised, and they suffer the highest rates of illiteracy, infant mortality, poverty and disease. Indigenous women are especially marginalized; with even lesser access to education, they also suffer from malnutrition and high rates of mortality in childbirth and it has been more difficult for them, as compared to other Mexican women, to receive appropriate compensation for their labour. The women's movement in Mexico has made sustained attempts to confront these issues as they are inextricably linked to the condition of women in Mexican society.

HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN MEXICO (1910-1970)

Mexican women have fought for their rights and have participated in public life for over a century. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), large numbers of peasant women accompanied the rebellious armies to provide food for their husbands, brothers and fathers, and some entered the struggle as soldier and generals. As *soldaderas* and *adelitas*,[2] women occupied an important place in the history of the Revolution. As Ramos Escandon (1994:200) points out, 'their combat-related activities represented a profound change in their usual confined roles. In the heart of the armed struggle, women served as couriers,

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[2] *"Soldaderas"* is a term that encompasses both women soldiers and camp followers. The typical story is that a young woman followed her man ("su Juan") when he joined the armed struggle, becoming a caretaker of his daily needs. *Adelita* is the principle character in one of the most unforgettable ballads of the Revolution: 'the woman who the sergeant idolized since, in addition to being courageous, she was pretty and even the colonel respected her. Old photographs of the Revolution in which women appear with rifles and bandoliers illustrate the role they played as soldiers and developed a strong spirit of collective action among themselves.

arms runners, spies, nurses, and in other roles that would have been unthinkable in peace time'. But after the Revolution ended, women were virtually forbidden to continue their activities in public life.

During the revolutionary period, women's participation in political activities began to take shape. Many women worked in opposition to Porfirio Diaz's campaign for re-election and supported Francisco I. Madero, who was an attractive political candidate since he favoured women's suffrage and made it a part of his platform. Women supported Madero's campaign by organizing women's political clubs, such as the *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc* and *Amigas del Pueblo*. These clubs had a profound effect on the women's suffrage organizations that would form six years later (Cano 1991:271).

At the turn of the 19th century, the women's movement had been most active in the south of the country. The first feminist organizations to focus exclusively on equal suffrage emerged in Merida. Although Mexico city had always been the hub of cultural, political and economic activity, Merida, a booming port on the Yucatan peninsula, had direct contact with Europe and the United States (which were also witnessing the strong presence of suffrage movements). Merida also had a strong tradition of political activism. The relative openness towards women was rooted in a strong socialist tradition in the state. In 1916, with the help and support of socialist governor Salvador Alvarado, Merida women leaders organized the first Mexican feminist congresses in the city. The congresses, held in January and November, 1916, had two main goals: to act as a forum where women of diverse backgrounds could meet to discuss the various issues that affected women's

position in society; and more importantly, to prepare a specific agenda to present at the Constitutional Convention in early 1917 (Miller 1991:76, Pablos 1999:94).

Nearly seven hundred women (mostly teachers) attended the first conference in 1916, and considered issues 'ranging from the function of schools, the importance of secular education, and the need for sex education, to the political participation of women' (Escandon 1994:201). The women were able to come to a general consensus on a majority of issues discussed, with the exception of the suffrage question. Although suffrage had become the overriding goal for feminists, it was still a controversial issue. There were splits among the conservative, moderate and liberal factions at the conference about what type of suffrage to advocate at the Constitutional Convention (Miller 1991:77). Conservative women asserted that suffrage should not be granted until women were sufficiently 'educated' to handle the responsibility; moderate women advocated partial suffrage; and radical women, full suffrage. When participants reconvened at the second conference in November, the delegates were finally able to compromise on the issue. The conference platform, which was presented to the Constitutional Convention, advocated suffrage for women at the municipal level (Miller 1991:79). Yet, the women's efforts to persuade the convention failed. Instead of granting equal suffrage to women, the Convention opted to make it clear that women were excluded from participating in public life.

Even though progressive laws were passed regarding workers and land reform, the Constitutional Convention of 1917 enacted overtly sexist laws relating to the status of

women. The official argument sustained that women were not prepared to participate in the political sphere and therefore it was necessary to train them through a gradual incorporation into this activity (Silva 1989:272). In the view of the *constituyentes* (those attending the Constitutional Convention), the argument for denying the women the right to vote was indisputable: The fact that some exceptional women have the necessary attributes to exercise their political rights satisfactorily does not support the conclusion that there rights should be conceded to women as a group (Leon 1995:13). Another argument against granting suffrage to women was the fear that they would vote conservative, specifically, that they were so feeble minded that they would vote as their priests instructed them (Rodriguez 2000:266).

Gabriela Cano (1998:115) feels that the feminist congresses 'could be understood as efforts of the constitutional Revolution to weaken the alliance between women and the ecclesiastical power, and to integrate women within a project of economic modernization.' According to her, these congresses were neither spontaneous encounters, nor did they have political independence. According to Salvador Alvarado (1915), the political mobilization of women was an adequate tool and the most efficient procedure to achieve these goals, that is, to emancipate and educate women, is to have the presence of women, with their energy and initiatives, in order to fight for their rights, to claim the education they need and to demand their incorporation into state affairs...' (Cano 1998:116). Despite the political control to which these Congresses were subjected, a great variety of views on the role of women in society were expressed openly but the differences among the delegates were so great in the First Congress that it became a public scandal.

The Yucatan constitutionalists, as well as the other factions at war in the Mexican Revolution, inherited liberal views about the Indians. Thus, revolutionary policies concerning the Indian population were assimilationist in nature. The objective was to eliminate specific components of Indian culture and social organisation, which were considered backward and an obstacle to progress. Women were not recognized as subjects by the Yucatan constitutionalists, they were considered useful political instruments. However, influenced by socialist ideologies they were egalitarian in their image of men and women's contributions to society. This perspective also understood feminism as a phenomenon with a specific profile which distinguished it from various other forms of feminism that existed elsewhere, for instance, suffragism in United States or bourgeois feminism(Cano 1998:117).

An association between egalitarian claims and nationalist traits characterizes this conception of feminism. 'We demand women's rights and activities similar to those of men, in education, life and democracy, and in accordance to the Mexican social revolution." (El Primer Congreso Feminista 1915:16). Cano asserts, this position generated a representation of the 'Mexican woman' that was defined by the right to build the 'Mexican Fatherland' on unequivocal bases of equality. Such an image influenced the constitutionalist policies towards women, on both local and national levels, but gender equality was not its main purpose (Cano 1998:117).

The sexist overtones of the Constitution of 1917 and the exclusion of women from political activity provided the starting point for the women's movement in Mexico. Women's

organizations began to form as a reaction to the lack of recognition they received for their efforts during the war. Both the Revolution and the importance that the new Mexican state placed on revolutionary rhetoric helped set in motion the first cohesive women's organizations in the country that advocated suffrage as the main issue.

The suffrage movement gathered momentum in the 1920s and 30s but it reached its peak during the administration of President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), when women almost succeeded in passing new amendments to the Constitution that would allow them to participate politically. From, 1940 to 1952, women found a way to work within the system and to press their demands for change from within. They were given the right to vote in the municipal elections of 1947, and finally in October 1953, women were granted the right to vote in national elections and participate in public life. However, President Ruiz Cortines's pro-woman stance was, like much else in Mexican polity, a gift from above. The intent clearly was to co-opt women into the government and party structures. As Silva (1989:277) remarks, 'since the 1930s, the movement suffered a process of deactivation, moving from independent to institutional and from collective struggle to an individual one'.

While the 1940s and 1950s was the era of the suffragist movement, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed several women becoming politically involved in groups inspired by socialist ideology and the history of the Mexican Revolution. While these groups were not feminist, they gave women experience in organising to struggle for their rights.

According to Marta Lamas (1994), beginning in the 1970s, Mexican feminists established a public identity by placing power and politics in the context of daily life. Feminist activism addressed a range of issues, from interpersonal relations to relations found within economic and political structures. The new feminism of the 1970s attracted middle-class women who had a college education and an awareness of feminist discussions taking place in the United States and Europe. Politically, these women broadly identified with the Mexican left. This new feminism however, did not address the oppression of women bearing the burden of housework and the responsibilities of parenthood. This difference was largely attributable to Mexico's prevailing cultural tradition and skewed social and economic structure but at the time, Mexican feminists organised to resist the strong *machista* cultural tradition. Encouraged by the counter-cultural movement of those years, they focused on identifying and analysing women's condition through discussing their personal lives. The main form of organisation was consciousness-raising groups, which tended to emphasise the link between the personal and the political, especially in the area of sexuality. The central demands that emerged were for the legalisation of abortion, stricter penalties for violence against women, and support for rape victims. These small groups proved to be fundamentally important for empowering women and for spreading their ideas among other sectors in society.

Women in government positions at the time in the ruling political party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), were important

allies in bringing about these reforms, which were a significant step forward. There were few women in government in the early 1970s, and they tended to be relatives of important male politicians. On paper, the reforms were profound, they included a constitutional amendment guaranteeing equality of the sexes, a law giving peasant women the right to own land, and labour laws prohibiting discrimination against women. However, given Mexico's weak judicial system, few of these laws were effectively implemented and till several years later, a substantial gap existed between legislation and practice.

During the mid-1970s, the first draft of a proposed law for voluntary maternity was presented (1976), the first women's studies course was offered (1976), the first feminist publications appeared (1976), a centre was created to offer help to rape victims (1977), and a huge number of demonstrations, assemblies and public declarations were organised, bringing the feminist movement to greater visibility. Significantly, feminist groups also began forming outside the capital. Given the high level of centralisation in Mexico, these groups underscored the extent of feminist organising throughout the country and the impact and relevance of feminist thinking in Mexican society (Lamas, Martinez, Tarres & Tunon 1995:332).

The National Front of Women's Rights and Liberation (FNALIDM), formed in 1979, was the first organisation to unite feminist groups with labour unions, gay organisations and left political parties. This effort represented the first attempt to broaden the political base of support for feminist concerns. Although this organisation was important in building bridges between feminist groups and other social movements and political organisations,

its continuation also entailed some costs. As a result of the movement's growing political significance, the feminist groups that had initiated the National Front ceded control of the organisation to women from political parties with different agendas. Differences in members' political positions and sexual orientation compounded the difficulties of connecting productively with political parties, resulting in the virtual disintegration of the FNALIDM by the early 1980s.

The 1970s also saw an increased activism among women who, while not necessarily assuming a feminist perspective, organised around issues important to women's lives. These included women from the leftist and antifascist tradition who had organised at the end of World War II to create the National Women's Union. There were women in the government working on legal reforms and mothers of the disappeared demanding that the government be more responsible for the fate of their children. Women involved in liberation-theology inspired Christian-based communities, along with women in left political groups, organised the rural and urban poor, and women industrial workers and worker's wives became involved through labour unions. Peasant women organised around landownership and income-generating projects, and poor urban women fought for housing and urban services. Women in opposition parties tried to get their parties to incorporate a feminist perspective. Lesbians participated in feminist organisations and worked for their own rights as well as collaborated with gay men working for homosexual rights.

Through the diversity among emerging women's organisations demonstrated the broad range of women's concerns and activism in Mexico, Lamas feels that this did not

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constitute a collective will that could be translated into a political force. Each of these social and political initiatives followed parallel paths without meeting in a broader movement and without developing a clear feminist perspective capable of providing a shared framework for the activities of women in 1970s (Lamas, Martinez, Tarres & Tunon 1995:333).

This could not be achieved until the 1980s, when changes in the country's social, political and economic conditions, combined with the greater maturity of the women's movement, made it possible to seek a broader alliance among women. The intense feminist activity of the previous decade spilled into the first years of the following decade. The Coalition of Feminist Women and the broader based FNALIDM sponsored for the second time, a proposal for a law on voluntary maternity (1980-81) with the support of an opposition party. The Catholic Church and the Right launched a fierce campaign against the proposed law. Left parties, which had only recently been legalised, were a weak presence in the legislature and unable to effectively support the proposal. Given these weaknesses and the governing party's unwillingness to address the proposal, the proposed law was finally shelved, never having been formally discussed in the legislature.

This experience had varied consequences as formal feminist organisations withered away and women's influence expanded. Violence instigated by conservatives intimidated the left opposition leaders who had sponsored the voluntary maternity law. As a result, most political leaders distanced themselves from the abortion issue. Both the National Front and the Coalition dissolved. Women political activists returned to their parties, where they tried

to incorporate specific women's issues, such as increased penalties for rape and support for battered women, into party strategies and platforms; such issues generated less public opposition than abortion rights. Women from diverse organisations of the poor concentrated on integrating a gender perspective into their many social and economic demands. Thus, paradoxically the fragmentation that followed the dissolution of the FNALIDM actually generated increased popular support for the women's movement as feminist activists relinquished organisational initiatives to women from low-income groups. This development helps explain the apparent contradictions of the diminished public visibility of the feminist movement coupled with its broader influence at the beginning of the 1980s.

In the absence of a cohesive national women's movement, women activists turned to localised activities. They looked towards new political projects and their own survival; some formed support groups, while others set up NGOs in order to work for poor women. A number of women got involved in government projects for women and worked on designing new public policies. Several women activists worked as academics, offering courses on women's studies, establishing research programs, and teaching in universities. In the media, women worked on creating forums for feminist ideas in print, on radio and on television.

A number of Mexico City activists migrated to cities outside the capital, where they joined local feminist groups. Linkages were developed between feminists and women from groups associated with the Catholic Church's progressive wing and with left organisations

working with the poor. This helped open newer channels of communication with poor women and incorporate gender concerns into the demands of people's movements: the need for public services, housing, basic consumer goods, fair salaries and access to credit.

A new phenomenon known as 'popular feminism' developed during the 1980s (Lamas, Martinez, Tarres & Tunon 1995:335). Between 1980 and 1987, there were ten national conferences of women workers, peasant women, and poor urban women, each attended by approximately five hundred women. In addition, there were innumerable local and regional meetings of low-income women's groups. These events, sponsored by feminist support groups, NGOs, and feminist sectors of urban poor movements, included discussions on class and gender issues and established specific mechanisms for exchanging experiences. Popular feminism took the feminist demands of the 1970s and combined them with the demands of low-income women. This attempt by middle class women and women from poorer sectors to "walk together" was a new phenomenon characterising the 1980s. The formation of these partnerships was an enormous achievement. The experience of a multi-class movement had been previously unknown in Mexico due to its entrenched social and economic stratification and deep-seated cultural and racial prejudices. The desire to understand and communicate the very different experiences of being women predominated, although the areas of mistrust were not easy to overcome.

This interaction was not without difficulties, political relations between middle-class feminists and low income women sometimes suffered from problems of communication and differing priorities. In addition to the difficult processes of identifying a common

agenda, there were disputes about funding, control of decision-making, and the different value placed on the theoretical concepts of the middle-class feminists versus the experiential knowledge of the low-income women.

Interestingly, this type of conflict among different strands of women's movement did not emerge in rural areas, perhaps because relations between feminists and peasant women were newer or because the urgency of addressing rural problems outweighed these conflicts. Peasants' long-standing relationships with outside development agents may also have given them the experience with negotiating such conflicts. Peasant women also questioned the decision-making process of peasant organisations, which had traditionally excluded women and ignored their interests. Since the 1970s, political party activists had tried to mobilise peasant women, but these efforts remained low profile. They were effective in addressing immediate needs while also encouraging self-esteem and individual development. Groups composed entirely of peasant women established income generating activities and social services such as cooperatives, health centers and mills for grinding corn. This independent organisation of women occurred mainly in the poorest and most remote areas. In contrast, in areas where agriculture was oriented towards large-scale production, peasant women's concerns tended to be subordinated by the peasant organisations' power structures.

Women in the women's movement were spurred to organise among low-income groups by the economic crisis that affected Mexico in the 1980s. Resulting from a combination of Mexico's difficulties in meeting payments on its foreign debt, a rise in the interest rates

charged by US banks, and a drop in the price of petroleum, one of Mexico's most important exports, the economic crisis had brought on a recession, sharp inflation, and a concomitant decline in real wages. The impact on Mexico's poor was exacerbated by sharp cuts in government spending on social services, including health and education. The economic crisis of the 1980s also had major implications for the rural economy and Mexicans living in rural areas. A reduction in urban buying power and a drop in international agricultural prices reduced the profits that could be made from certain crops and seasonal daily wage jobs (on which many peasants relied to supplement their low income) became scarcer. Rural women's activity outside the home was also reduced. When seasonal employment had been plentiful, women shared the work with the men. However, when the demand for labour was filled by men, women were no longer hired.

In response to these changing conditions, women's groups began to develop their own discourse, which combined feminism and the perspective of the poor. Although the expanding women's movement still did not adequately address persistent discrimination against Mexico's indigenous peoples, its discourse and actions increasingly reflected attempts to respond to issues rooted in both class and gender. This new political consciousness evolved simultaneously in different areas of the country, fed mostly by women's efforts to advance their values, aspirations and practices. These explorations were shaped by the individual character of each region, different discussions took place among industrial workers of central Mexico, women from the *maquiladora* export assembly plants in the north, and women from the agricultural cooperatives in the southeast. The most

important aspect of this interaction was that women all over the country were raising issues of women's concern.

In 1987, there was massive popular mobilisation and public debate about democracy in anticipation of the national elections to be held in 1988. The effects of the economic crisis had increased public demand for change and provided strong incentives to organise. For many Mexicans this was the first time it seemed possible to bring about a change in government and to elect a presidential candidate from a party other than the ruling PRI. The potential for change aroused great interest among organised women. The key question for the women's movement was how to incorporate specific women's issues into the electoral agenda. Two new women's organisations emerged. The Benita Galeana Coordinating Committee and Women Fighting for Democracy involved several women's organisations and NGOs along with prominent women from the country's cultural and political spheres and aimed to bring together women from outside political parties as well. Both groups subsequently worked to promote the candidacy of women in political parties as well as joining in the efforts to overcome the problem of fraud in Mexican elections.

In the 1990s, the political and economic climate of the country has been shaped by the programs of economic adjustment and the austerity in public finances implemented by the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Salinas, the PRI candidate, was determined the winner of the 1988 elections in spite of many people voting for the opposition in response to the economic crisis. The climate of general disapproval deriving from charges of electoral fraud produced such widespread discontent that the new

administration was forced to take immediate measures to assert its legitimacy. The National Solidarity Program was launched to provide highly focused economic assistance and brought much needed services of agricultural credit and production projects to rural areas. This also created new challenges to the power base of women's groups. In its role as the intermediary, the program came into competition with local social organisations, NGOs and political groups. In the past, such organisations had served as intermediaries in negotiating with the government on behalf of the poor. While the majority of organised women's groups have taken advantage of some of the resources made available by the program, they have also had to fight to preserve their organisational autonomy and the integrity of their programs.

Widespread efforts under way in recent years to modernise the country have greatly affected peasant women and women workers (Jelin 1996). Many women workers moved from traditional unionised jobs in the garment industry, food processing and electronics to newer sectors and services such as banking and communications. Employment in Mexico has been redefined by the arrival of foreign companies and the adoption of new production processes in Mexico. Women workers' demands have moved beyond the traditional protectionist view of female employment, which focused on securing maternity leave and prohibiting employers from requiring women to work at night or carry heavy loads. New labour demands are in the area of women's access to job training, placement in non-traditional positions, participating in unions' negotiations with employers, and a voice at all decision-making levels.

Following the Mexican Revolution, the Land Reform Act (Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917) allowed for restitution of communal lands of indigenous communities lost during the liberal period and opened up national land for *ejidos*(collectively owned and individually cultivated plots allotted to cultivators who established residence in colonies). However, land reform had a mixed effect. Some indigenous communities acted on it late, twenty years after land reform was enacted in the central plateau of Mexico while other communities never got state support to challenge large landowners. The few communities that did manage to get titles to *ejido* land, were outnumbered by those that lacked good cultivable lands within municipal boundaries or fought unsuccessfully to win their claims, gaining only a fraction of eligible land (Nash 1995:34).

Mexico was the first country to establish legal equality in agrarian legislation, since 1971 both men and women could become *ejiditarios* and enjoy equal rights within *ejido* decision making procedures. However, it was not until 1975 that the government passed legislation giving women access to farming credit programs, too late for many women farmers to make their land productive. Moreover, following traditional practice, each household in the *ejido* was customarily represented by the male household head. Thus, while the state had granted all adult women with equal rights to participate in decision-making, the ability to practice this right was limited by local and traditional practice to female household heads only. Nevertheless, usufruct rights on the ejido were considered to be the family patrimony, entitling each member of the household to access to land and other resources.

The land distribution program soon ended, and in 1992 these communal lands were opened to market forces.

The 1992 reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was also considered a setback for collective land rights. Under the Mexican agrarian reform, the ejidos had been ceded as collective property by the Mexican state to communities in perpetuity. The basic principles governing ejido and indigenous community land were that land could not be used as a collateral, could not leave the family (although the status of the ejido was inheritable), could not be sold to a non-ejido member, and could not be rented to outsiders. In most ejidos constituted under the Lazaro Cardenas administration (1934-40), the first period of massive land distribution, lands were worked collectively and resembled production cooperatives. The ejidos also received considerable state support to collective production was deemphasised, and most land in the ejido sector came to be farmed under individual family usufruct with only grazing land and forests used collectively (Thiesenhusen 1995:40).

Under the counter-reform that began in 1992, on a simple majority vote of ejido members, individuals holding usufruct rights may acquire title to this land and subsequently rent or sell it. But land may be sold to non-ejido members only if the ejido as a whole (by majority vote) decides to change to being full private property (*dominio pleno*). As of January 1999, more than 18,000 (66 percent) had completed the PROCEDE program, the first step towards full privatisation of ejido land rights (Robles 2000:19).

In the counter-reform, all major decisions regarding the future of the ejido(such as whether to divide into parcels or dissolve the ejido) are to be made by recognized members. This requirement means that spouses of ejido members are excluded from decision making, which in effect excludes most women(less than a fifth of total ejido membership) from participating directly in determining the future of their communities. Moreover, on a vote of ejido members, individuals holding usufruct rights may acquire a title to the family parcel and dispose of it as they see fit, either renting it or selling it. If an ejidatario decides to sell his parcel, his spouse and children have what it is called "right of the first buyer" (*derecho de tanto*). But they have only thirty days to make arrangements to purchase the land. Given the low wages and income of rural women, few would be able to exercise this right, should their husbands decide to sell the family plot (Esparza 1996:38).

The salient point is that in the Mexican counter-reform, what was a family resource has given way to a process of individualisation of land rights that has largely excluded women. This outcome reflects that fact that traditional norms and practices granted household representation to only one gender (Deere and Leon 2001:55).

Women were only minimally represented in peasant organisations, where their position has been diluted as these groups focus on defending threatened community rights and family ownership of property, which tends to undermine the property rights for women. To replace day-labour jobs lost in the 1980s economic crisis, a growing number of peasant women are becoming migrant farm labourers or industrial workers, others are defending their rights as peasants by organising their own production projects.

THE INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE EZLN IN THE CHIAPAS

> *"Mi nombre es Esther, pero eso no importa ahora. Soy Zapatista, pero es*
> *- tampoco importa en este momento. Soy indigena y soy mujer y eso es lo*
> *unico que importa ahora"* (My name is Esther, but that doesn't matter now.
> I am Zapatista, but that doesn't matter now either. I am Indian, and I am a
> woman, and now that is all that matters).
>
> -Commandanta Esther(2001)[3]

In the 1970s, there emerged in Mexico, an important indigenous movement that began to question the official discourse on the existence of a homogenous mestiza nation. Together with demands for land, cultural and political demands were made which would later evolve into a struggle for autonomy for the indigenous peoples. In the case of the Chiapas, the Indigenous Congress (Congreso Indigena) of 1974, in which Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol and Tojolobal people took part, is considered a turning point in the movement's history. Though most studies of this period make no mention of the participation of women, some have gathered accounts of participants that women took charge of the logistics of many of the marches, sit-downs and meetings documented by these studies. This role of 'helper' continued to exclude them from decision making and active participation in their organisations, but it did allow them to meet together and to share experiences with other indigenous women from different regions of the state.

Two decades later, as a result of the Chiapas uprising in Mexico, the government has signed the 1996 San Andres Accords with the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) which gives autonomy to the indigenous communities in their internal forms of

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[3] Loaeza, *Reforma/AM*, 31st March 2001, translated in Marcos, S. Selected Writings (2005) *Chiapas: Resistance and Rebellion* Vitiyal Pathippagam Press, Coimbatore, pg 76.

living and social, economic, political and cultural organization. Women were to have a greater role in decision making and land ownership in the Chiapas region (Deere and Leon 2001:57). During this time, there were important changes in the domestic economy, and new spaces emerged for collective reflection – a process in which indigenous women participated.

Women's active participation in peasant movements in the 1970s was accompanied by some changes in the household economy. These resulted in larger number of women being involved in the informal commerce of agriculture and handicraft products on local markets. It is not possible to understand the wider political movements without first understanding the local dynamics encountered by indigenous communities in Mexico at the time. The 'oil boom' of the 1970s, together with the scarcity of cultivable lands, caused many men to migrate from the states of Chiapas, Oaxaco, Tabasco and Veracruz, to migrate to the oil fields, leaving their wives in charge of the family economy. The monetization of the indigenous economy has been seen as a factor which takes power away from women within the family, as their domestic work becomes increasingly dispensible for the production of the workforce (Collier 1994:174). However, for many women, the reverse was true, since while their position within the domestic unit was restructured, their involvement with informal commerce led to increased contact with other indigenous and mestizo women, and initiated forms of organisation through co-operatives which later became spaces for collective reflection (Nash 1993).

The Catholic Church, through adherents linked to the Theology of Liberation, also played a very important part in the promotion of these spaces of reflection. Although Liberation Theology which guides pastoral work of the diocese of San Cristobal las Casas, does not promote reflection on gender issues, the analysis in its courses and workshops on social inequality and racism of the mestizo society led indigenous women to question the gender inequalities they experienced in their own communities (Hernandez Castillo 2002:392). At the end of the 1980s, there were some groups who supported this line of questioning. They pointed out the need to open a Women's Area within the diocese of San Cristobal which resulted in the founding of the Diocesan Coordinator of Women (CODIMUJ), one of the principal organizational spaces of Chiapan indigenous women (Hernandez Castillo 1998:89). These women, with their reflections on gender and their organizational experience, played an important role in the wider women's movement.

At the same time, feminist NGOs began to work in rural areas, combining their support for women's productive projects with reflection on gender issues promoting a gender consciousness among indigenous women. Pioneers in this field were the members of the Center for Investigation and Action for Women (Centro de Investigacion y Accion papa la Mujer, CIAM) and the Women's Group of San Cristobal (Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristobal las Casas AC), both founded in 1989. They began working on the issue of violence against women, while supporting indigenous women's organizational processes in Chiapas's Los Altos region, They also worked with women refugees from Guatemala. Discourses centering on women's 'dignity' promoted by the Catholic Church began to be substituted by a discourse centering on women's rights and by newer perspectives on

gender. Indigenous women appropriated and resignified these ideas in dialogue with feminists.

Migration, organizational experience, religious groups, feminist NGOs, and even official programmes of development have all influenced the ways in which indigenous men and women restructured their relations within the domestic unit and reworked their strategies of struggle. But it was with the public appearance of the EZLN, that indigenous women began to raise their voices in public spaces, not only in support of demands of their male companions, or to represent the interests of their communities, but also to demand respect for their specific rights as women.

The political debate over the rights of the indigenous peoples to cultural difference, self-determination and autonomy gathered new strength after January 1, 1994, when Mayan peasants in the south-east of Mexico rose up against a national project they considered centralist and exclusive. This indigenous movement, known as the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN: Zapatista National Liberation Army), violently rejected the neo-liberal policies promoted by the government of the President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94). On the same days that the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, the inidigenous peoples of the Chiapas called the world's attention to the failings of the new economic model. The reality on the ground in Chiapas was sharply at odds with the official version, promoted by Salinas, that poverty and marginality had been eradicated and that Mexico had become a 'first world' country.

Together with mestizo peasants, members of the Tzotzil, Tzetzal, Chol and Tojolabal ethnic groups declared war on the 'illegal dictatorshipof Carlos Salinas de Gortari and his official party [PRI]'.[4] The political discourse of the Zapatistas identified the negative effects of neo-liberal policies on the lives of thousands of indigenous peoples in Mexico, as the immediate cause for the uprising. At the same time, they linked their struggle to the 500-year-old resistance movement of the indigenous peoples against colonial and post-colonial racism and economic oppression. In later statements, as the specific demands as indigenous peoples became clearer, the Zapatistas began to appropriate and reinterpret the meaning of 'indigenous autonomy' (Hernandez Castillo 2002:329). Their demands for autonomy within the framework of a multicultural nation-state made evident the urgent need to recast the official centralized and culturally homogenizing project.

The EZLN took up the demands of other groups in Mexican society, and became the first guerilla movement in Latin America to advocate, prioritize and integrate gender demands with their own political agenda. However, when they demanded both the right of indigenous peoples to form governments in accordance with their own normative systems, and the rights of indigenous women to hold local posts of authority, inherit land and have control over their own bodies, they entered troublesome terrain. In many cases, such rights to women were contradictory to the traditional practices of indigenous communities and so making demands for indigenous self-government as well as the recognition of indigenous women's rights were seen as mutually exclusive. A new movement of indigenous women,

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[4] Despertador Guerrillero (1994) quoted in Hernandez Castillo, R.A. (2002) 'National Law and Indigenous Customary Law: The Struggle for Justice of Indigenous Women in the Chiapas, Mexico' in Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi eds. *Gender, Justice, Development and Rights* London: Oxford University Press

which emerged under the influence of the Zapatista uprising has taken up the challenge of reconciling these two demands. On one hand, they have called upon the Mexican state to recognize indigenous people's rights to self-government within the framework of a reformed nation-state; on the other, they are struggling within their own communities and organisations for a critical rethinking of their prevailing normative systems. This new women's movement emerged from a long process of organisation and reflection, involving both Zapatista and non-Zapatista women.

In Selva (eastern lowlands), the Highlands, and the Sierra of the Chiapas, women's lives were transformed in previous decades by liberation theology, indigenous and campesino organisations, development projects and health workshops. These women have begun to question their historical exclusion from political spaces and to advance a platform advocating the construction of democracy from within the private family space. In response, both to the autonomist/Zapatista and the government discourses, these organized indigenous women have pointed out that, while gender inequalities exist within state law, they also exist within the so-called indigenous law. They have confronted the essentialist perspectives of some sectors of the indigenous movement, which glorify certain cultural traditions, arguing instead in favour of change. As one document from the organized indigenous women's movement states: 'We want to find paths through which we may view tradition with new eyes, in such a way that it will not violate our rights and will restore

dignity to indigenous women. We want to change those traditions that diminish our dignity.'[5]

Such viewpoints were expressed at the negotiating table between the government and the EZLN, set up twelve days after the Zapatista uprising. Partly as a result of the pressure applied by the indigenous women's movement, the San Andres Accords, signed both by the Zapatista commanders and by representatives of the government committed the government to respect indigenous autonomy in the following terms : 'indigenous peoples have the right to free self-determination, and as the means of their expression, autonomy from the Mexican government to......apply their own normative systems in the regulation and resolution of internal conflicts, honouring individual rights, human rights and specifically, the dignity and integrity of women.'[6]

In Mexico, where privatisation of communal land is most advanced, indigenous women have been most vocal in demanding land rights explicitly for women. As expressed in the 1994 NGO Preparatory Meeting for Beijing, the changes made in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution opened the way for the privatisation of the ejido. This modification "affects us indigenous women because we cannot decide on the fate of our lands; it allows that land be sold, when previously it was inalienable and could not be mortgaged or rented.

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[5] Quoted in Hernandez Castillo, R.A. (2002) 'National Law and Indigenous Customary Law: The Struggle for Justice of Indigenous Women in the Chiapas, Mexico' in Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi eds. *Gender, Justice, Development and Rights* London: Oxford University Press

[6] Quoted in Hernandez Castillo, R.A. (2002) 'National Law and Indigenous Customary Law: The Struggle for Justice of Indigenous Women in the Chiapas, Mexico' in Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi eds. *Gender, Justice, Development and Rights* London: Oxford University Press

Now they can take away our lands....Parallel to the struggle for land must be the struggle

for women's rights..."[7]

In meetings in the Chiapas, indigenous women have been very specific about their

demands for land rights: "women have the right to property of land and to inherit it"; "in

granting land titles, women should be co-owners"; and "if a man abandons his family, the

parcel should automatically pass to the woman." Of all the indigenous movements, the

EZLN has been the first to recognize in position papers that "land should be redistributed

in an egalitarian form to men and women" and "women must be included in tenancy and

inheritance of land" (Rojas 1995:103, 209, 251).

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[7] CEIMME (1995) statement made by the EZLN during negotiations with the Mexican government in 1994, quoted and translated in Hernandez Castillo, R.A. (2002) 'National Law and Indigenous Customary Law: The Struggle for Justice of Indigenous Women in the Chiapas, Mexico' in Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi eds. *Gender, Justice, Development and Rights* London: Oxford University Press

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN MOVEMENTS AND LAND RIGHTS

IN INDIA AND MEXICO : A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

> Science and expert discourses such as development create powerful truths,
> ways of creating and intervening in the world including ourselves.....
> ....[I]nstead of searching for grand alternative models or strategies [of
> development], what is needed is the investigation of alternative
> representations and practices in concrete local settings, particularly as they
> exist in contexts of hybridization, collective action, and political
> mobilisation.
>
> - Arthuro Escobar(1995:356)
> *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*

In this chapter, I shall examine the two local settings that have been laid out in the previous chapters and attempt a comparison of similarities and differences between women's movements in India and Mexico, more specifically on the issue of land rights since, it is necessary to develop approaches which recognize the importance of specificity and difference and also the degree to which global processes transform gender relations and create conditions for feminist alliances.

A study of women's movement with regard to the struggle for land rights to women, provides an opportunity to understand global influences in conjunction with local specificities, to examine the influence exerted by the ideas of Enlightenment, the

experience of colonialism and more recently, the impact of neo-liberal globalisation on the assertion of women rights and the restructuring of patriarchal relations within the family, community, nation and inter-national affairs. A comparative study between the struggles carried out in India and Mexico would enable us to draw out similarities and contradictions useful for broader conceptualizations of the women's question at a global scale. A juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, culture and ideology, exposes possibilities which would enable a clearer understanding of the women's question at a global level. Moreover, the attempt is to broaden our perspectives on women's movements, composed not only of high-profile leaders, activists of political parties, autonomous groups, non-governmental organizations, self help groups etc which gives it a character that cuts across caste, class, race, regional and ethnic divisions but to examine contributions of women in movements and how they impact the articulation of demands and methods of mobilization and protest.

Before I embark on the comparison, it is important to outline the global and regional dynamics along with locational factors that influence our analysis of the issues that have been laid out. The popular conception of the 'international' with the nation-state as its basic unit, dilutes several equally significant categories like gender, race and caste since the 'domestic' is strictly separated from the 'international' and prevents an understanding of the ways in which they are mutually constituted. To a large extent, underlying the conception of the international is a notion of universal patriarchy operating in a transhistorical way to subordinate all women. The only plausible methodological strategy here, then is to make visible and intelligible (to the West) the organizational practices and writings of Third World women through a discrete case-study approach. (Alexander &

Mohanty 2000:xix). 'International' moreover, has come to be collapsed into the culture and values of capitalism.

According to Alexander and Mohanty (2000:13), missing from these definitions of the 'international' are at least three elements: '1) a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world, 2) an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between people (especially the North and the South), and 3) a consideration of the term 'international' in relation to an analysis of economic, political and ideological processes which foreground the operations of race and capitalism' (for instance, those which would therefore require taking critical anti-racist, anti-casteist and anti-capitalist positions that would make feminist solidarity work possible).

Then, to talk about feminist praxis in global contexts would involve a shifting the unit of analysis from local, regional and national cultures to relations and processes across cultures. Grounding analyses in particular, local feminist praxis is necessary, but we also need to understand the local in relation to larger, cross-national processes. This would also require a corresponding shift in the conception of political organising and mobilisation across borders. The ideas and practices of democracy, justice and equality would have to apply across cultural and national borders to build solidarity across the global South.

THE GLOBALISATION OF CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY

Women's disadvantage in society is not just an aberration within society requiring a simple remedy of 'integration' or 'equal access', because non elite men are also 'victims' of inequalities inherent in the capitalist world system (Bandarage,1984). Feminists have argued that the situation of third world women cannot be studied unless we examine the issues of capitalist production, changing class relations and international political economy. (Beneria and Sen,1981; Stolcke,1981; Mies,1986).

To explain the worsening position of women in societies undergoing capitalist penetration, advocates took two main routes: the 'female marginalization thesis' approach and one drawing from dependency approach. The changing roles of men and women resulting from the transition to modern capitalist forms of production (see Engels, 1972 for more detail; also Papanek,1979; Etienne and Leacock,1980; Molyneux,1981; Jacquette,1982) laid the foundations for the 'female marginalization thesis'. This theory holds that the nature of capitalist development has restricted women's access to economic opportunities, because women's unpaid labour in the domestic sphere and their exclusion from the labour force are necessary for the survival of capitalism. It is argued that by separating women from production, women provide the labour for the reproduction of the labour force (thereby lower wages are given), and act as a 'reserve army of labour' to be temporarily deployed during periods of increased labour demand, for example during seasonal shortages during ploughing season (see Beneria and Sen, 1981).

Despite the analytical weaknesses inherent in the production/reproduction dichotomy and the difficulties experienced in testing the marginalization thesis (see Scott 1986), it was an influential thesis in the eighties. Since women were viewed as exploited unpaid workers trapped in the domestic domain, there was an underlying assumption that only by incorporating women into productive employment can their independence and well-being be promoted. Thus, like with liberal theorists, wage employment was equated with women's increased autonomy. Moreover, the marginalization thesis, with its emphasis on women's isolation in the domestic domain, failed to recognize that many women were already involved in the waged labour force for household survival and for many, this source of employment was the source of their disadvantage.

Beneria and Sen (1981:150) remarked that capitalism:

> '...generates and intensifies inequalities, making use of existing gender hierarchies to place women in subordinate positions at each different level of interaction between class and gender. This is not to deny the possibility that capitalist development might break down certain social rigidities oppressive to women. But these liberating tendencies are accompanied by new forms of subordination.'

Many feminists have also drawn several of their theoretical constructs from dependency theory to further exemplify the oppression of women in developing countries (Youssef, 1976; Schmink, 1977; Leel and Deere, 1980). Dependency theory emphasizes the historical forces that led to a capitalist core of nations that own most of the world's capital and which have incorporated developing nations into the world economic system as a source of cheap labour and raw materials for industrialized nations. (see Frank, 1974; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; and Manzo, 1991). With incorporation, subsistence agriculture was replaced by export cash cropping; urban migration increased as people moved to work

in the new industries; and male and female work roles were transformed (Jaquette, 1982; Nash and Safa, 1985). Furthermore, the exploitation of female labour intensified as 'traditional' societies were incorporated into capitalist production.

ROLE OF THE UN INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF WOMEN 1975-1985

In the past few decades, the United Nations have played a vital role in challenging traditional and cultural beliefs, often reinforced in law, which have assigned women a lower status. The issue of violence against women and to recognize women's rights as human rights has also found its way onto the global agenda. The UN declared the 'International Decade of Women' from 1975-85 and this led to several international conferences being organized around women's issues providing opportunities for various 'feminisms' to deliberate. Also, research and data collection on the status of women was undertaken on a global scale which led to a series of UN directives to governmental heads to prepare reports on sex-ratio, health care available to women, levels of education, political participation etc. This is turn sparked off debates within states on the status of women and their development. Despite the fact that they often led to confrontations, even crucial contradictions and divisions, the debates organized on several matters engaged official delegates and NGO representatives, mostly women from various countries, to discuss many issues such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, democracy and sexuality.

The United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year in 1975 marked the beginning of cross-class linkages between middle-class and poor women in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. This continued to be an important feature of the movement in the 1980s, when middle-class feminists and poor women joined forces to create a 'popular feminism' that addressed both class and gender inequality. At the same time that women's organisations were developing around the country, a variety of other organisations including peasant, academic, media and professional groups, were initating similar kinds of activities. Though not highly visible, the women's movement gained strength during this period by permeating increasingly diverse segments of society. In the 1990s, the movement had consolidated its efforts around the extension of democracy and political participation. Mexico's rapidly changing economy has significantly impacted women's social and economic status, providing new challenges and opportunity to the country's women's movement.

RELEVANCE OF A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AND MEXICO

India and Mexico make an interesting comparative study. As leading symbols of Third world assertion and as lucrative sites for transnational alliances against hegemonic structures, the Indian and Mexican experience is of great value. While both countries are heralded as exemplars of democracy within their respective regions, they have also played a pivotal role in rallying support for Global South solidarity in international forums.

As elsewhere in Latin America, though, recent years have seen the flourishing of citizenship demands in Mexico and the entry into the political life of the country a number of actors who were largely excluded from the political process, including women (Rodriguez, 1998:3). Mexican women were active participants in the citizenship movement that emerged in recent years to undermine the semi-authoritarian political system. Democratization resulted from a number of factors, including intra-elite ruptures opened up by the rapid economic changes the country experienced in the 1980s. 'It is unlikely that democratization would have proceeded quickly, however, without the active participation of mobilized citizens, especially women. The democratic opening thus appears propitious in many respects for women's citizenship demands. Nevertheless, as the Chilean case, like others in Latin America, demonstrates, democratization can be accompanied by a backward movement both in terms of the level of public organization and contestation, as well as specifically in attentiveness to gender concerns among the new state elites' (Blacklock and MacDonald 2000:232).

In Mexico, the revolutionary heritage created the conditions for the long survival of corporatism and a top-down inclusionary political system. The incorporation of peasant, worker, and 'popular sector' organizations into the governing party Partido Revoluticionario Institutcional (PRI), and the cooptation of many other organizations, precluded the development of the strong division between state and civil society that existed in many Latin American countries. Women were even denied formal political citizenship status and the right to vote until 1953. This was despite a strong and unified women's suffrage movement that had emerged in the 1930s. When it was finally granted,

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women's suffrage came to the fore as a 'gift from above' rather than as a result of active contestation by women's organisations, since the early women's movement was largely demobilized after the failure of an earlier attempt by a wide and active women's movement to win the vote in the late 1930s (Rodríguez 2003, 98-101). The few women's organizations that did exist in this period were tied to the PRI; the result was primacy of the party identification over the promotion of women's interests. Widespread clientelism undercut demands around citizenship by presenting political participation and state social programmes as pay-offs for support of the dominant party, rather than as a response to inalienable human rights (Craske, 1998: 124).

In India, the political economy of colonial rule had a specific impact on women because of new developments like lower wages and loss of usufructory rights to community property and resources through forest laws and the introduction of private property in land. In addition, the subordination of women was specifically significant in maintaining the British Empire, as the position of women in Indian society was one of the major factors that legitimized British rule (see Chatterjee 1993). The British government selectively intervened in changing the position of women – on some issues it liberalized the law, on others it increased constraints. Thus, by maintaining women's subordination, the British could infer that India was not fit for independence, by liberalizing it could at the same time demonstrate the superiority of Western culture (Kasturi and Majumdar 1994). The issue of votes for women was first raised in 1917, and rejected by the British on grounds of conservatism of Indian culture and because it would be premature when most Indian men were not educated enough to use the vote 'responsibly' (Menon 1999:8). The British could

not have directly enfranchised Indian women in 1919 when British women got the right to vote only in 1938. Even when it became clear that all major political organisations supported this demand, universal adult suffrage was granted to all in 1947 after independence.

It becomes clear that in the earlier period, in India and Mexico, political and civil society remained terrains occupied by men, while women were largely relegated to the private sphere, although some ambitious, well-connected women were able to make their way into the political elite. Greater political participation of women has been observed since the 1970s in both cases as well as in other parts of Asia and Latin America.

The feminist movement in Mexico emerged as part of the Mexican left and was composed primarily of middle-class, highly-educated women. As part of their largely Marxist orientation, feminists repeatedly attempted to build links with working women, with little success. In India too, the women's movement comprised of middle-class women and was based mostly in urban centres. While some feminists and left women's organisations did work in rural areas with peasant women, their efforts at organising rural women has met with limited success. The problems in building a cross-class, united women's movement continues to plague feminism till date. These problems existed partly because of the inherent problems middle-class women face in communicating with working class women, and also because of the continued strength of traditional gender ideologies among poor, peasant, and working-class women. According to Lamas, '[W]orking-class women's vision of the world corresponded with the dominant ideology. Women workers considered

the double day and sexual harassment as 'private' problems, which bore no relation to their work situation" (Lamas 1994:187).

An important precursor of the contemporary Mexican women's movement was the Committee in Defense of Prisoners, the Persecuted, the Disappeared, and Political Exiles, organized by Rosario Ibarra de Piedra and other mothers of the approximately 500 Mexicans who disappeared during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the mothers' movement for human rights was not as prominent as in Chile and other Latin American countries, reflecting the absence of the extreme forms of repression in those countries which led to the politicization of women's roles as mothers. In the 1970s and 1980s, a wide range of popular movements arose, such as independent unions and urban popular movements, whose demands were phrased in terms of social rights. These movements had a largely female face, with heavy female participation, although they were usually led by men. As Nikki Craske (1999:210) argues, in the 1980s, even though popular sector women of the *colonias populares* were in fact raising citizenship demands – demands for genuine representation and state accountability as well as social citizenship rights, "These citizenship demands generally do not include proposals for structural changes necessary to advance the position of women in Mexican society. Citizenship is still largely based on the ideally gender "neutral" but substantively masculine model, and demands are kept within the narrow remit of elections" (Craske 1999:234).

However, the 'sectarian and non-inclusionary nature' of the Mexican women's movement failed to dislodge or even substantially challenge this male model of citizenship. While

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contacts between middle-class and popular sector women continued during the 1980s, and popular sector women increasingly adopted feminist slogans, conflicts continued, which were expressed both at a series of national feminist encounters, and at the Latin American feminist encounters. 'Any cooperation between the two groupings has occurred on a short-term basis', and the movement as a whole remains 'atomized' (Blacklock and MacDonald 2000).

In India, a number of autonomous women's organisations emerged in urban centres during the 1970s. Feminist campaigns that followed were dominated by nation-wide mobilisation on issues of dowry, rape and violence against women. Several women participated in the anti-Emergency protests and demonstrations but the issue of ensuring citizenship and political rights to Indian women has not been raised in the same way as the Mexican women's movement and political parties. This is perhaps due to the fact that periods of transition from authoritarian rule to democratic government offers 'new opportunities and sets different constraints. Social movements are at an advantage since 'transitions are political openings, in the broadest sense, there is a general willingness to rethink the rules of the game. This gives social movements an extraordinary opportunity to raise new issues and to influence popular expectations (Jacquette 1989:13).

The 1990s witnessed a scenario of globalizing free trade, with the Brettonwoods institutions emphasizing that economic success can only be achieved by a process of liberalization to attract finance capital flows. India became a partner in this process when it took up the structural adjustment programme promoted by the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) to get aid approval during the balance-of-payments crisis in 1991. These adjustment policies have had an adverse impact on the marginalized sections of society especially women (see Bhattacharya:2004).

With liberalization and the 'retreat of the state', the women's movement, like other democratic movements, finds itself in the position of turning increasingly to the state to protect and guarantee employment rights while the 'free market' is valorized. Thus, social movements find themselves pressing for restoration of state control while continuing to characterize the state as representing propertied and socially/culturally dominant interests.

Similarly in Mexico, new ways of doing politics and framing citizenship demands have also been influenced by the process of economic restructuring adopted first by the PRI regime and continued by the current PAN regime. As in India, the Mexican government and dominant classes have adopted a clear "restructuring discourse" in support of their project of neo-liberal restructuring and trade liberalization. This discourse is largely centred on the privatization of functions previously performed by the state. Economic restructuring has also led to increased numbers of women entering the paid workforce either in the *maquiladoras* or in the informal sector. While women were increasingly entering the public sphere of the labour market, their employment was usually in precarious, poorly remunerated sectors whether in South Asia or Latin America. Especially in the *maquilas*, unions were either absent or company-controlled while in India, SEWA is the only successful example of bargaining by women in the unorganized sector.

At this point, Mexican feminists turned to new institutional forms in the 1980s, shifting away from the earlier small consciousness-raising groups toward work in NGOs. In the Indian case, however, Mexican feminist Marta Lamas notes that in this period, feminist groups were still plagued by what she calls *"mujerismo"* ("womanism," a form of identity politics) and hyper-radicalism (2001, 100-103). Mexican feminists retained their autonomy from the state and from other political forces and their non-hierarchical forms of organization, but they did so at the expense of their political marginalization.

In the 1990s, however, a rapid shift occurred in opposition politics that led to a new turn toward the citizenship discourse, both generally in the popular movement and specifically among women's organizations. After the PRI declaration of victory in the highly controversial 1988 elections, many activists re-evaluated their previous rejection of electoral struggle and civic action and came together with democratic reformers to challenge the political system from below in a non-partisan way. For example, a group called *Alianza Cívica* emerged that brought together hundreds of small NGOs in a joint campaign to clean up the electoral system and implement citizen observation of elections. Large numbers of women participated in these exercises, both within mixed organizations of men and women and within women-only groups like *Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia*. About half of the participants in *Alianza Cívica* are women, although they tend not to occupy leadership positions and although the organization does not focus specifically on gender issues or women's political participation (Pérez 2001). As well, feminist organizations began to add demands around political citizenship to traditional demands for reproductive rights and freedom from violence. In the 1990s, according to

Lamas, the majority of feminists began 'positioning themselves as politically republican and democratic subjects, rather than as victims or oppressed women' (Lamas 2003, 134).

Despite the rise of a citizenship discourse, it is important to emphasize the distinct nature of the transition to democracy in Mexico in order to appreciate women's limited role in the new democratic system. While the women's groups and citizen's organizations discussed above did play a role in the transition, their roles were circumscribed. Mexican democratization was more a result of the decomposition of the previous order than the result of a massive opposition between state and civil society (Bizberg, 2003: 159).

No strong organized opposition with roots in labour or peasant movements emerged to challenge the dominant regime, and once elections did occur, it was a pro-Church party of the centre-right, the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN), that was able to take advantage of the democratic opening. While President Vicente Fox is relatively independent from the more socially conservative elements of his party, this is not a propitious political opportunity structure for dramatic improvements in the position of women. The 2000 elections were the first to reduce the number of women in the Mexican Congress, and despite his promises, Fox did not increase the number of female cabinet members over the level under the previous PRI administration (Rodríguez, 2003: 249). Confrontations between feminists and the PAN emerged early in his presidency, when, not a month after Fox's election, the PAN governor in Fox's home state of Guanajuato moved to restrict further women's abortion rights by banning abortions even in the case of rape. This proposed legislation was eventually reversed after considerable public protest. In this case,

women's movements' autonomy from the new regime clearly contributed to their outspoken and successful opposition to this move and their ability to speak out forcefully on abortion rights.

Even more significantly, the left-wing PRD government in Mexico City, headed by feminist Rosario Robles, moved to expand abortion rights in cases of foetal impairment or when the health of the mother is threatened (Lamas, 2003: 132). There are widespread concerns about a right-wing backlash against feminist demands, and pro-choice groups are increasing in visibility and political astuteness, benefiting from support from a larger number of PAN senators and deputies in Congress (Stevenson, 2001: 5-6). While the PAN does contain significant numbers of women militants who have fought for democracy and for women's participation in politics, *panista* women leaders tend to promote views about the moral superiority of women because of their spiritual and moral capacities, and believe that public life should be open to women because of their distinctive capacity to enrich it (Rodriguez 2003:119) The economic policies of the Fox administration also give rise to concerns about the prospects for women's citizenship demands in the context of democratization. In contrast, the version of neo-liberalism that has been adopted in Mexico under both the previous PRI and the current PAN regimes is discursively and practically more radical, and poverty and inequality have increased despite impressive economic growth rates. Mexican feminists are legitimately concerned about the capacity of programs of support to small and medium-sized enterprises to make more than an extremely limited contribution to the reduction of poverty among women.

Mexico was the first country to establish legal equality in agrarian legislation, since 1971 both men and women could become *ejiditarios* and enjoy equal rights within *ejido* decision making procedures. Yet, following traditional practice, each household in the *ejido* was customarily represented by the male household head. Thus, while the state had granted all adult women with equal rights to participate in decision-making, the ability to practice this right was limited. As a result of the Chiapas uprising in Mexico, the government has signed the 1996 San Andres Accords with the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) which gives autonomy to the indigenous communities in their internal forms of living and social, economic, political and cultural organization. Women now have a greater role in decision making and land ownership in the Chiapas region (Deere and Leon 2001:55).

In India too, a study of the organized movement for land rights to women indicates the emergence of this question within larger social movements for land rights. Land was reclaimed earlier as well, with the Bhoodan movement and state initiated land reforms but women's rights were not important to the then prevailing discourse. But movements like the Bodh Gaya movement which emerged in the backdrop of the Jayprakash Narayan movement, displayed almost equal participation of women along with a reformulation of demands and techniques to effort change. However, unlike Mexico, the land for women movement in India has not successfully continued or spread to other parts of the country. One reason could be the large indigenous population present across Mexico who have

organized to raise such demands unlike in India, where indigenous people are widely dispersed communities, concentrated in some regions and less organised. Also, a shift in conceptions of land over which rights must be established is taking place, from arable to forest/tribal land. Movements centered on demands for land rights are mostly in indigenous/tribal regions and rights over land is now a basic demand in indigenous movements across the spectrum The issue of land rights for indigenous women is however, not prominent yet. .

In Mexico, the paradox of being indigenous in a country that has built its nationalism out of a 'proud Indian past' but relegates its indigenous citizens to the bottom of the heap in the present has provided an ideological opening for women from different locations to question their marginality within indigenous organisations, communities and families, as well as in 'the Mexican nation'. A diverse group of indigenous women have engaged in forums on autonomy and questioned the unexamined notion of 'tradition' in what have been largely male discussions of indigenous autonomy. They have questioned the invented tradition of 'Indian communities' and the assumption of democracy within these communities. 'Grassroots political organising that interfaces regularly with the state in Mexico requires a homogenous identity, a 'strategic essentialism'[1], a constituency that is visible and capable of being counted' (Lynn 2005:74).

The Bodh Gaya movement which was initiated by the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, was not a women's organisation but during the struggle, evolved a position of demanding land

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[1] Strategic essentialism, or the need to project "sameness" to outsiders in a concept created and first used by Gayatri Spivak. For further reading, please see Spivak (1989, 1990, 1993).

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rights for women. At the time, according to Indian law, women did not have inheritance rights over agricultural land which they do now since the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 (Agarwal 2005:1). However, the struggle did not lead to the enactment of a new law guaranteeing independent land rights to women. Moreover, the movement was localized to cover approximately 50 villages in Gaya district, Bihar and did not spread to neighbouring regions. Important peasant struggles for land rights have taken place in Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar but they have been distant from each other and were not linked through a shared network to formulate better strategies collectively. Even with the enactment of the Amendment law (which does not include non-Hindu women), the implementation of legal rights for women across different sections is a distant dream in the Indian context.

The 1996 accords signed by the EZLN and the Mexican government on indigenous rights and the 2001 Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture are framed in terms of 'indigenous' peoples and deal marginally with 'indigenous women'. Many nongovernmental organisations and other organisations supporting the National Indigenous Congress and the Zapatista movement also had programmes targeting indigenous women. Hence, it seems that bargaining with the state and holding it accountable requires the frequent deployment of essentialist identities and categories. However, as Stephen Lynn puts it,

> '.....the fact that political recognition of women and other marginalized sectors of nations such as indigenous peoples requires political action on the basis of essentialised identity categories, points to atleast an initial strategy based on affirmative action rather than on abstract notions of universal citizenship. The difference between politics and cultural analysis is that while we can deconstruct essentialist categories and show contingency, temporality, and incompleteness of identity formation, essentialist

categories are alive and well in the political arenas of Latin America. While universal citizenship may be appealing in a post structural world where all hierarchies or power and oppression have been deconstructed, in the real world such hierarchies persist.' (Lynn 2005:75)

Other issues highlighted in preparatory meetings, including women's right to land, unequal divisions of labour in households, domestic violence and rape were, however, absent in the 1996 accords and legislative proposals. The accords omitted all the demands concerning the democratization of the home and sexual violence and addressed women only at the level of the community, stating that they should participate in all legislative processes and be involved in choosing local leaders. The Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture approved by the Mexican Senate and Congress in April 2001 similarly omitted most of the demands made by women in the preparatory meetings, only focusing on women's right to political participation in their communities. Nevertheless, the demands of indigenous women have been inserted permanently into national politics in Mexico and an ongoing dialogue between indigenous women from different regions of Mexico has been established.

Indigenous women's unity against some of the men who wished to silence them, no doubt, helped to facilitate this process. The women's internal dialogue around a wide range of issues speaks to their multiple identities as primarily rural, indigenous and female. This process did not create a homogenous identity out of many, but provided a discursive field within which women participated from different positions. This effort can be an important learning for women's movements across the developing world, especially in India since the

indigenous question had gained prominence and has emerged as a core area for social mobilisation.

For many women who participated in the process leading up to the signing of the 1996 accords, coming together with other people from throughout Mexico- in this case, other indigenous women – has created networks that have lives of their own. Ultimately, these networks may prove to be more important that the accords themselves or the 2001 law. Women in the national movement for indigenous autonomy have begun to carve out a space and political vision that links home, community, and nation to a new framework for being indigenous in Mexico – autonomous in economic, cultural and political decision-making, but part of the Mexican nation. This vision and the political culture it represents has the potential to open up new political spaces not only for indigenous women, but for other women in Mexico and the rest of the world as well. In order to do so in Mexico, indigenous women from different regions of the country, with distinct regional histories and ethnic relations and different languages, had to essentialise themselves as 'women' within the national indigenous Congress and in relation to the state. At the same time, they had to recognize and mediate their differences.

Moreover, the proportional number of women in leadership positions in the EZLN is much higher than those in the Bodh Gaya struggle and also when compared to other movements for land rights in the developing world. Women commandants in the EZLN have led siege operations and been negotiators for the indigenous movement of the Chiapas.(Marcos 2005). The fact that the EZLN-led indigenous movement is an armed movement must

surely impact the nature of political mobilisation and support in the Chiapas. On the other hand, the Bodh Gaya struggle was a peaceful movement that did not resort to violence as a political strategy. This brings us to the fact that the nature and form of struggle adopted lies within a broader socio-political framework. While the EZLN struggles to democratize Mexican society which is also the backyard of US-led capitalism, the Bodh Gaya movement emerged as a response to a call for 'Total Revolution' against state oppression and eradication of social injustice in the post-Emergency era in Indian politics. This impact however, on mobilisation of women especially in armed movements, needs to be researched in much greater detail to draw any further conclusions.

The Bodh Gaya struggle started in the late 1970s and lasted for less than half a decade. The EZLN-led indigenous movement started around the same period but has sustained itself till date and has grown in terms of mass support. This indicates that changes in strategies and objectives depending upon circumstances, is an integral part of successful mobilisation against injustice which has led to the successful continuation of support to the EZLN as well as the end of the Bodh Gaya movement during a time when the issue of land rights to women could have been used to build feminist alliances across the country. Hence, factors such as conceptualization of pertinent issues, the nature of 'democratic' politics, the process of economic restructuring, and the types of alliance possibilities that exist, are key in determining the effectiveness of such a discourse.

The challenge to international theory, which emerges from attempts to take seriously all forms of social exclusion, is the requirement to rethink not only what it now means to have

solidarity with other human beings but to acknowledge the necessity of rethinking a conception of citizenship, rights and justice from a number of perspectives (Walker 1992). The rise and growth of feminist movements has been shown to be related to the rise of nationalist movements in the Third world and with resistance to imperialism (Jayawardena 1986). There remain broad divisions between women in the North and the South, between rural and urban women and between women of different social classes, castes and races. However global processes can, and do create conditions for transnational political alliances which in turn affect both social and economic change. The growth of global capital transforms social orders and gives rise to many and varied social movements (Falk 1999:129). Our efforts should be concentrate on learning from varied experiences across the world and taking inspiration from new and creative means of mobilisation and organising to resist fresh onslaughts on the position of women and build solidarity for a gender-equal world society.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has outlined the importance of comparatively studying women's movements using the conceptual framework of land rights for women. The main purpose was to understand the differences in movements' conceptions of land rights, the strategies they pursue to promote women's land rights, and the state's openness to such demands. I argued that factors such as conceptualization of relevant issues, nature of democratic transition, the process of economic restructuring, and the types of alliance possibilities that exist are key in determining the effectiveness of such a discourse.

The grounds for challenging inequalities and exclusion should not so much be grounded in a meta-narrative of emancipation and equality, but in recognition of the historical dimension of political struggle and social change. Shiela Rowbotham has called the phenomenon of 'women in movement', that is, women acting together in pursuit of common ends, be they 'feminist' or not, as missing in the popular but limited definition of women's movements as autonomous and expressive of women's gender interests. It is indeed important to acknowledge that these other forms of female mobilization, excluded from consideration as 'women's movement', nonetheless constitute a large proportion, possibly the greater part, of female solidarity in much of the modern world. Women have been an active, if not acknowledged, force in most of the political upheavals associated with modernity, and we must make efforts to reconceptualise prevalent notions of women's participation to include organising on 'other' social issues. These are significant

for what they can tell us about the terms and character of women's incorporation into political life.

The comparison of the Indian and Mexican cases shows how the political opportunities and local specifications affect women's movements differently in each case. The more repressive PRI government in Mexico produced a comparatively unified women's movement with socio-economic rights forming a key part of the agenda. The less repressive Indian state succeeded in co-opting and dissipating social movements, and hindered the early development of a discourse around land rights for women. Cross-class linkages among women's organizations were weaker in Mexico, although recent initiatives taken by women in indigenous movements seek to overcome this historic problem. Such an initiative, to build cross-class linkages among women's organisations in India would prove beneficial in raising issues that will strike at the roots of patriarchal structures that exist in our society.

It also emerges that as feminists, we must look into the question of women and law, especially in the global south, since remnants of colonial structures in our legal formations continue to adversely impact the situation of women and the lack of effective implementation is indicative of the patriarchal nature of the state. For example, according to CYSV activist, Karuji, almost 44 percent of the land that had been redistributed is no longer in the possession of the villagers in Bodh Gaya as of 2001. Hence, it is imperative to learn from past mistakes, rectify them and create new techniques of mobilisation to give strength to the movement.

Commonalities across movements in the developing world can be noticed, decolonisation has not rid us of our Enlightenment- conditioned mindsets as we rarely question but continue to uphold colonial notions of modernity, justice and equality. The politics of language play out as well in such cases. We, ex-colonial subjects, think, speak and write in colonial languages. While the globalisation of the English language has created channels for communication, learning and solidarity-building from across the world, it has left out crucial narratives which could assist in creating greater awareness about other movements, sharpening the critique of different patriarchies and fostering stronger transnational feminist alliances.

In sum, the analysis presented here indicates that while globalisation presents opportunities for women's movements to promote their goals through the creation of new spaces in institutionalized settings, there are both advantages and potential disadvantages embedded within these opportunities. While Mexican women have made significant gains, the loss of strategic cross-class linkages among women has had serious consequences for the movement's agenda. As Mexican feminists re-evaluate their historic rejection of institutional politics in the context of the more recent democratic transition, we too, in India, can learn important lessons from the experiences of women's movements in countries like Mexico where the struggle for democratization has profoundly altered the terrain on which such struggles are played out.

The question of land is central to the status of women in third world societies since the marginalised continue to be dependent on natural resources for their survival. However, to organise on this issue, we will have to first raise issues of 'strategic interest' to create the foundation for a sustained feminist struggle. Compared to the divergent responses to globalisation, there seems to be growing consensus on the re-significance of the local as the site of protest and change. Different conceptions of the local abound, most now subscribe to the need for greater political decentralization and local autonomy. If the participation of women in political processes brings new opportunities and dangers, the rise of a politics based on caste, indigeneity and minority status also poses radical questions to the women's movement in India broadly, and their rights over land, more specifically.

To attempt a feminist reconstruction of international theory is then to face up to the challenges of developing a theory which is historical, committed to shaping and guiding an emancipatory politics, but which does not attribute the 'universal' to one particular group. The way forward is, perhaps, to develop an approach which rather than attempting to engage the 'marginalised' and 'excluded' in a dialogue in an effort to discover 'transcendental' values, or bring together the various critical approaches within a single perspective, involves a rather more open ended 'conversation' between those who see themselves as committed to a common goal of developing strategies to challenge various forms of inequality and exclusion.

Some questions remain. Given the diversity of experiences, how do we unlearn our inheritied ways of conceptualizing our underdevelopment ? How could we further use concepts of third world feminism to understand the context for women's issues in India and other parts of the developing world ? How do we create possibilities and spaces, for an open debate within and between women's movements, based on urban/rural locations, class positions, forms, issues chosen for activism and forms of resistance ? And finally, are women better off being propertied after being property for centuries ?

There are reasons to be optimistic. An intense process of networking is going on between different groups and small entities, with their culturally defined, communal structures nearly all over the world. These movements represent a kind of 'strategic reserve' for the majority of the people who have been marginalised excluded from the process of economic globalisation. Globalisation has improved cross-cultural communications through technological advances and created a set of global parameters for exchange of thoughts and perceptions. At the same time, this process has resulted in sharpening the contradiction between the ruling elite and the marginalized and thus, greater mobilisation on issues of common concern. Whether transnational alliances can be effectively built and result in state transformation and the emancipation of the oppressed sections, is yet to be seen. In the interim, struggles continue.

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