

**THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF
WOMEN IN INDIA : A STUDY OF
THE SEVENTIES**

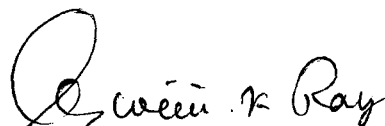
Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY


NIVEDITA MENON

**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
1986**

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled 'THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: A STUDY OF THE SEVENTIES' submitted by NIVEDITA MENON for the degree of Master of Philosophy has not previously been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


DR ASHWINI RAY
CHAIRMAN


DR ZOYA HASAN
SUPERVISOR

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CLASS AND GENDER IN SOCIAL ANALYSIS	16
II : WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS: AIWC, NFIW	63
III : WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS: AITUC, INTUC, CITU.	101
IV : SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR: SEWA AND WWF	145
CONCLUSION	186
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this dissertation owes a great deal to a number of people. I would like to thank

- My supervisor, Dr Zoya Hasan, for her patience, guidance and sense of humour; for ruthlessly ordering me to rewrite innumerable times and for the cups of tea with which she soothed my nerves while doing so.
- My friends Anita Banerji, Arunima and Indrani Chatterjee for ideas, discussions, laughter and support.
- Dr K. Saradmoni for her friendship and encouragement.
- My family for providing the emotional infrastructure.
- Gopi, for his caring and strength.

Lidelikey

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to look at political participation in India since the 1970s with a conscious focus on gender. The use of the word 'gender' is deliberate, signifying the socially and culturally acquired dimensions of the biological sex division. Political participation is seen as the struggle to transform oppressive power relations in society, in different ways and at different levels. Three kinds of organizations that seek to do this are studied - women's organizations, trade unions, and organizations of women in the informal sector.

Before embarking on a project with the word 'women' in its title, it is customary in Indian social sciences today to begin with a justification. But if one were studying, for instance, the 'working class' or 'the peasantry', one could ignore completely the specific experience of women within these categories since the man is supposed to be the representative subject. No explanation would be expected then, about why one is studying men. It is precisely because of this 'invisibility' of women in social history that it becomes neces-

sary to focus specifically on their situation, their work, their consciousness and their resistance. Only such a conscious focus can uncover the mechanisms operating in the oppression of women across cultures and time. At the same time, it is not sufficient to note that historically women have indeed participated fully in social production and been part of all kinds of resistance against exploitation, though even such limited notice is valuable in recovering women in history. We must go further, and ask how the forms of such participation have constructed and maintained unequal gender relations in society and whether common resistance against exploitation has brought gender issues into focus, even implicitly.

The recognition of gender as crucial to an understanding of the specificity of women's oppression does not entail seeing it as a sufficient explanatory category for all structures of oppression. However the manner in which class structure and the structure of gender relations are mediated by each other in the construction of levels of exploitation and consciousness has not been clearly understood. An analysis of oppression using class as the determining category is able to comprehend relations of appropriation and exploitation between capital and labour, but such an analysis cannot address the specificity and universality of the relations of exploi-

tation between men and women of all classes. A feminist refocusing of Marxism would require an exploration of the relations between the mode of production and the organization of sexuality, domestic production and the household.

The attempts to relocate within explanations of oppression, gender as a socially constructed category cannot simply be grafted on to existing views of the world and of knowledge. A sensitivity to gender must transform what we know as social science, with its positivist assumptions of objective and value-free knowledge. Only in recent years has there grown the recognition that knowledge is socially constructed, created by human beings. That knowledge is not objective truth about phenomena which exist independently of the knowers, but rather that it is created by people who select from among several explanations, all of them partial. Thus, while all human beings generate explanations which organize the objects and events of their world, only some of these explanations are legitimated. Further, those who have the power to validate their own models of the world also validate their own power in the process.¹

1 Even within the natural sciences, considered to be synonymous with objectivity, there has always been a conflict in practice and theory between hierar-

Pure states of subjectivity and objectivity as dimensions of human experience cannot be assumed to exist. Knowledge is constituted by the knower, and it would be intellectually honest to recognize and acknowledge this, making clear the parameters within which one is functioning, which will determine what the 'facts' are that one will observe. A feminist understanding of society would involve, in opposition to the idea of objective, value-free research, what one writer has called 'passionate scholarship' - the recognition that the knower and known are of one universe, that they are not separable. She points out that this understanding animates advanced experimental and theore-

Cont'd.. f.n. 1

and non-hierarchical

chical/perceptions. Evelyn Fox Keller in 'Feminism and Science' (in Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Barbara C. Gelpi (ed.), Feminist Theory A Critique of Ideology, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982) cites as example the organismic and particulate views of cellular organisation. The latter is a hierarchical view which sees either nucleus or cell, genome or cytoplasm, as having primacy, and this view has always won out. In this context she discusses the work of scientist Barbara McClintock, who rejects the linear hierarchy described by the central dogma of molecular biology, in which the DNA encodes and transmits all instructions for the unfolding of a living cell. Her research reveals rather, a view of the DNA in delicate interaction with the cellular environment, that is, an organismic view. Keller points out that such a view of science, unrestrained by the impulse to dominate, has always existed, but has been selected against because of the operation of a hierarchy-oriented, 'masculinist' ideology.

tical work in contemporary physics too, as it has for thousands of years the thought and experience of the mystics, eastern and western.²

A hierarchical notion of knowledge, overlaid with conceptions of power and control, is associated with a 'masculinist' world view not only by feminists. Ashis Nandy, for instance, characterises British colonialism in India as using 'a homology between sexual and political dominance'.³ In the process a cultural consensus was produced in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity. Thus, he argues, in the dominant culture of the colony, the 'final differentiae of manliness' became aggression, achievement, control, competition and power, while many of these characteristics had traditionally been associated with femininity in India.

The 'masculine' notion of knowledge as mastery over nature, as having to struggle against the otherness of nature, is present also in Marxist conceptions. Feminists however, question whether a truly liberatory

2 Barbara du Bois, 'Passionate Scholarship: Notes on Values, Knowing and Method in Feminist Social Science' in Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein (ed.), Theories of Women's Studies, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.

3 Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983.

society could depend on the mastery of anything - one's 'base' instincts or appetites as Plato held, another person or a class of persons, or 'nature'.⁴ This criticism of Marxism has been made by Foucault⁵ and by the Frankfurt School as well.

4 Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, Longman, New York, 1983, p. 154.

5 Foucault's work in fact, seems to present very promising openings for an analysis of oppression which could take into account gender as well as class, race, caste or other forms of oppression. Foucault presents an alternative conception of history and historical analysis - genealogical analysis. Whereas traditional history inserts events into grand explanatory systems and linear processes, celebrates great movements and individuals and seeks a point of origin to historical processes, genealogical analysis considers events in their singularity and focuses on a whole range of phenomena which has been denied a history. Genealogy disturbs our secure and holistic conception of history and replaces it with an awareness of the complexity, contingency and fragility of historical events. Historical events are not seen as culminations of historical processes but as episodic manifestations in a series of subjugations. Above all, genealogical analysis stands in a relationship of opposition to the scientific hierarchy of knowledge, its status being that of an anti-science. Foucault sees Marxism's scientificity as synonymous with the exercise of a form of domination, rather than with the construction of the preconditions for emancipation. At the centre of this contrast between genealogy and scientific discourse is a conception of power and knowledge relations - that knowledge is not objective but a product of power relations, that knowledge is political because the conditions for its existence include power relations. In Foucault's conception of power, although power is seen as having an objective, it is not the product of intentionality

This section intended to explore the possibilities and implications of using 'gender' in an emancipatory way in the transformation of social analysis. The next section of this introductory chapter will outline the scope and methodology of this particular study.

Scope of the Study and Methodology

This study is a preliminary exploration of forms of political participation by women. Two particular women's organizations and trade unions, and two organizations of women in the unorganized sector are studied. Though such a framework excludes hundreds of struggles by women in different spheres, their exclusion is not because they are perceived as marginal to such a study, but because it becomes necessary to begin with the exploration of areas where adequate information is available.

The women's organizations and trade unions are studied on the basis of reports on their activities which they publish annually, monthly or weekly. The two organizations of women in the informal sector publish occasional

Cont'd.. f.n. 5

on the part of the subject. At the same time, the very existence of power relations presupposes forms of resistance. There is thus not one locus of refusal but a multiplicity of resistances. For a lucid exposition of Foucault's ideas on knowledge and power, see Barry Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.

pamphlets, some of which have been used. Available secondary material relevant to this study has also been consulted.

Analysis of all these three types of organizations, therefore, is based mainly on their self-perception as revealed by those in a position to express what are seen as the organizations' views. It is possible that local branches and units function more or less independently and do not subscribe to perceptions of women and social reality as manifested in official reports. It must also be remembered that only such activities can be recorded in the reports as are reported by local units. There may be struggles and activities which remain unrecorded and which are therefore invisible to a study of this kind.

While the limitations of such a study must be made clear, some valid generalizations can still be made. The perceptions of leaders largely determine the official policy of an organization as well as what it is associated with by those it seeks to represent. The official policy also decides an organization's effectivity vis-a-vis the state. Hence this study, while recognizing its limited framework, can make legitimate generalizations within that framework. In an area which is so

little explored, the sketching in of even the broad outlines would be a fruitful exercise.

The study begins with a theoretical exercise, an attempt to understand the manner in which class and gender mesh together in a complex web of interrelations. Such an understanding is essential before an empirical study can be undertaken.

The period being studied

It is generally held that women's participation in politics began with their mass mobilisation during the nationalist movement, particularly during the civil disobedience movement when middle class women emerged from the seclusion of their homes in large numbers. It would perhaps be truer to state that it is only for the nationalist movement that recorded evidence exists, for even earlier, as evident from folklore and folk songs, it is possible to get a glimpse of the active role women played in peasant struggles and in cultural movements against the hierarchic authoritarian structure of the caste system.⁶

6 For instance there are songs of such women in the Vadakkan Pattu of Kerala, ballads of c. 15th Century A.D.

See also the accounts of the Santhal hools of the

Of women's participation in the nationalist movement some writers assert that women had been mobilised only as a matter of political expediency, not as a result of the recognition of the need for women's emancipation (Gail Omvedt, 1975; Gail Pearson, 1975).⁷ It is also believed that the symbols used to mobilise women, by Gandhi for example, precluded the possibility of a genuine women's movement emerging. The Hindu ideals of Sati and Damayanti symbolised women suffering yet devoted to their dharma, that is to their families and to the nation, and attracted women from the upper middle classes who were concerned with the family first and socio-political issues afterwards.⁸

Cont'd.. f.n. 6

19th century in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, pp. 130-31, Oxford University Press, 1983.

- 7 Gail Omvedt, "Caste, Class and Women's Liberation in India", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. VII, January-March, 1975.

Gail Pearson, Women in Public Life in Bombay City with special reference to the civil disobedience movement, Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1975.

- 8 Maria Mies, "Indian Women and Leadership" in Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, op.cit.

Whatever be the reasons behind the mobilisation of women, the fact remains that the nationalist movement which brought together widely differing ideologies under the banner of nationalism, also marked the emergence of women, both in the public consciousness and in their own, as creatures with political interests. Both the Gandhi-led salt Satyagraha of 1930 and the Communist-led Tebhagha movement of 1946-47 are noted for the large participation of women, their militancy and fortitude. While the peasant women who participated in the latter, in the course of struggle grew aware of the exploitative man-women relationship as well as of their general oppression as a class, the elitist perceptions of the Congress did not allow these basic issues to emerge in the former movement.⁹

Women were prominent among the revolutionary terrorists, and Renu Chakravarti (1980) has recorded the heroic role played by peasant and working-class women in the various mass movements which strengthened the position of the Congress vis-a-vis the British government. Yet another study of women in the workers' movement in

9 Women's Participation in Political Life in India, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 1983 (Unpublished).

the coir industry in Kerala¹⁰ attests to the powerful presence of women in various anti-imperialist struggles.

In the post-independence period the upsurge of militancy among women in the 70s must be seen in the context of the growing volume of popular unrest. After independence development planning followed a pattern which was pushing the country towards an economic and political crisis. By the 70s the economic situation was worsening. The industrialisation embarked upon in the private sector, catering to an essentially middle class consumer market, had reached its limit. The coalition of classes which had come to power after independence, consisting of the bourgeoisie, the landed elite and the urban professional - bureaucratic middle-classes, had tried to bring about a non-radical transformation to capitalism in the agricultural sector. However, land reforms remained largely unimplemented, and the government followed contrasting economic and socio-political policies avowedly to achieve growth with social justice. On the one hand the growth strategy required policies

10 Meera Velayudhan, 'Women Workers in the struggles of coir workers in Kerala (1938-1980)' Paper presented at the Second National Conference on Women's Studies, Trivandrum, 1984.

based on incentives to private investment that increased disparities still further. On the other, additional resources were required for subsidised loans and other schemes dictated by the equity consideration. A diversion of development resources to this end would siphon off scarce funds to depress still further rates of growth, and would not make a significant difference to the inequalities of income and consumption. Growing unemployment, soaring prices, shortages of foodgrains and essential commodities imposed severe hardships on the poorer sections of the population. Spontaneous uprisings aimed at forcing the resignation of corrupt, repressive and "anti-peoples" ministries in Gujarat and Bihar reflected not only disillusionment with particular state governments but with the process of party politics and the parliamentary system.

In response the regime became correspondingly more repressive. This led to a steep decline in the legitimacy of the government, which was forced by largely spontaneous movements against it, into the Emergency. The suspension of democracy was presented to the electorate as the price for economic performance, but by the end of 1976 the legitimacy of the Emergency was destroyed, particularly by the increasingly open use of repression against

the lower orders of Indian society who were supposed to be its main beneficiaries.¹¹

It was in this situation of growing government repression fuelling popular struggles that women increasingly participated actively in politics. This period saw the mass participation of women in struggles on issues such as agricultural workers' wages, price rise, repression during the 1974 railway strike, equal wages, the food movement in Gujarat, and the JP movement in Bihar. There was a growth of women's organizations in urban areas as well as of grass-root level organizations of poor women fighting for their right to an independent livelihood and basic resources like credit, training and technology. Moreover, since some of these women's organizations have political affiliations, there has grown a debate within political parties, particularly of the left, about the specificity of women's oppression.¹²

11 Francine Frankel, India's Political Economy 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution, Oxford University Press, 1978. See also Sudipta Kaviraj, "Economic Development and the Political System", paper presented at the Vienna Colloquium on Contemporary India, 1982; Pranab Bardhan, 'Authoritarianism and Democracy, First Anniversary of new regime', Economic and Political Weekly, March 18, 1978.

12 Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit.

The following chapters will first establish the theoretical framework for the study, and then trace the operation of gender issues in Indian politics in the turbulent seventies. As discussed earlier, this will involve an examination of women's organizations, trade unions and organizations of self-employed women - an attempt to contribute to the project of bringing women and gender back into social history.

CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK : CLASS AND GENDER
IN SOCIAL ANALYSIS

This chapter attempts to provide a theoretical framework for the empirical enquiry into the significance of gender issues for political participation in the 70s. Throughout the study gender and class have been used as categories of analysis while examining the various ways in which people have struggled to transform oppressive relations of power. As has been discussed in the Introduction, social analysis must break out of positivist assumptions of objectivity. The categories that are used and the theoretical framework one is bound by determine the manner in which one looks at issues, struggles, ideas. It follows then, that the categories which underlie a study must be explicitly discussed before one starts the study itself.

Accordingly the first part of this chapter is a review of literature on class and gender - the various ways in which these two modes of existence have been seen to condition oppression. This exercise leads to a point at which it seems possible to transcend both the ahistorical radical feminist perception of the oppression of women

as well as the determination-in-the-last-instance- by - the economy/relative - autonomy - of - the superstructure deadlock characteristic of Marxist feminist analyses. The understanding displayed here of the manner in which gender and class mediate each other colours the analysis of the three types of organizations studied, the criticisms made of them, and the judgement of the issues they raise.

The literature that is reviewed is almost entirely western. The question might be raised therefore, of its relevance to a study on Indian politics. It hardly requires to be stated that the material conditions prevailing in the West are, for various historical reasons, quite different from those in India. The consciousness of gender oppression is far greater in Western societies; the proportion of women in the workforce and in trade unions is also greater. Nor is there the complexity obtaining in India by the operation of both feudal and capitalist forces of oppression. Nevertheless the literature that has been reviewed attempts to arrive at certain universal conceptualisations which would aid one in viewing different kinds of societies.

The next part of this chapter takes a fresh look at the concept of political participation. This new

understanding is necessitated by the foregoing discussion on gender and class. The conventional division between the 'private' world of women and the 'public' world of men has certain implications for political theory. Since most activities of women are located within the 'private' realm they remain outside the scope of enquiry. Even when women venture into the 'public' sphere of work and work-based politics they are held to be under the influence of the 'private' if they raise issues of home and family. Demands for creches, for example, by women workers must be seen to be as political as production-based demands because child-bearing and household responsibilities are major obstacles to women's participation in trade union and other activities.

It is beyond the scope of this study to go into how private the 'women's sphere', the family, really is. Yet it is crucial to an understanding of women's subordinate position in society to unravel how the ideology of the family helps to maintain not just unequal relations of power between the sexes, but also oppressive power relations among people of both sexes in society. This question will be partially tackled in the following chapters. It must be noted that this view of the importance of the family in maintaining power relationships in

the 'public' sphere is not only a feminist one. For instance, Tocqueville's vision of democracy attributed a pivotal role to the family as a haven of cooperation that nurtures the habits of altruism. Central to this theme is the notion of separate spheres for the sexes, the private for the woman and the public for the man in a 'different but equal' regime. A thoroughgoing equality of the sexes would, he believed, undermine the family's function of moral formation. In other words, both the family and the sexual regime that supports it are linked to the preservation of freedom in democratic societies.¹ Evidently any complete understanding of what politics is must include what has so far been considered private.

This section also reviews existing literature on the political participation of women in India. The review is brief because such literature is scarce and because most of it is concerned with electoral politics alone.

I

Engels: The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

Any discussion of gender within Marxism must begin

1 F.L. Morton, 'Sexual Equality and the Family in Tocqueville's "Democracy in America"', Canadian Journal of Political Science, June 1984, XVII:2.

with Engels' historical materialist treatment of women's present subordinate position.² Using the work of anthropologist Lewis Morgan, Engels established the historicity of the family in relation to material conditions of production. He locates women's oppression at the level of participation in production, establishes its origin in the appearance of private ownership of wealth and states that an end to this oppression will come about with the abolition of private property. Neither women nor the oppressed classes can be free until then. It is private property as an organizing principle of society, Engels claims, which transforms women's work organization, creating families as economic units, and undermining an egalitarian social order.

There are a number of problems with this analysis. To begin with, Engels did not draw a clear relationship between the subjugation of women and class exploitation. Exploitation has a precise meaning for Engels, it is the extraction of surplus labour by one class of another. Yet he says, "The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the

2 Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977.

first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male".³ Thus, as Ann Lane points out,⁴ the problem of relating the oppression of women to class exploitation when women are distributed throughout the class structure, is not even confronted - it is not clear whether Engels is indeed saying that women are a class by themselves or if he is using the term 'class' rhetorically.

Furthermore, modern anthropological research has shown that Engels has made a number of ethnographic errors, which led him to believe that in pre-class societies women were not oppressed. He assumed, for instance, that in societies practising matrilinear inheritance women had social authority, so that when men acquired wealth in the form of herds and wanted to ensure this wealth passed on to their children it was 'mother-right' that they overthrew. However, as Schneider and Gough have pointed out, women do not necessarily have power in matrilinear societies.⁵ Very often as with the Nair

3 Ibid., p. 66.

4 Ann J. Lane, 'Women in Society: A Critique of Frederick Engels' in Liberating Women's History, ed., Berenice A Carroll. University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1976.

5 David Schneider and Kathleen Gough (ed.), Matrilinear Kinship, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961.



community of Kerala, it only means that authority rests with the woman's brothers rather than with her husband. There is no anthropological evidence of the existence of any truly matriarchal societies.⁶ Engels believed it was only with the production of surplus wealth which men appropriated, that women lost their equal status, and that men were able to appropriate such wealth because they had always been the collectors and producers of subsistence - 'Gaining a livelihood had always been the business of the man; he produced and owned the means therefore'.⁷ However, for hunting-gathering societies it has been found that the precarious returns from hunting are less responsible for subsistence than the food-gathering activities of women,⁸ and for horticultural societies it is often the women's horticultural activities which are the basis of subsistence.⁹ Thus if surplus

6 Paula Webster, 'Matriarchy: A Vision of Power' in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), Toward An Anthropology of Women, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1975.

7 Engels, op.cit., p. 158.

8 Lee and DeVore, 'Problems in the Study of Hunters and Gatherers' in Lee and DeVore (ed.), Man The Hunter, Aldine, Chicago, 1969. Cited by Karen Sacks, 'Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of production and Private Property' in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), op.cit.

9 Judith Brown, 'Iroquois Women: An Ethnohistoric Note' in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), op.cit.

wealth naturally fell into the hands of the men, it seems to suggest that men were already the more powerful sex.

Engels was wrong also in believing that the domestication of animals preceded cultivation of the soil and that the herds belonged to the men - 'The herds were the new means of gaining a livelihood, and their original domestication and subsequent tending was his work'.¹⁰ As a result of recent research, a more commonly accepted theory is that cultivation and pastoralism developed in the same cultural milieu and it was the women who worked at agricultural production and controlled domesticated animals.¹¹ In this situation if, when wealth was produced it was wrested from the women, then Engels' assertion that women and men were equally powerful in pre-class societies is questionable. Following from this, so is his belief that with the destruction of class divisions the oppression of women would automatically end.

Karen Sacks¹² uses ethnographic data to recons-

10 Engels, op.cit., p. 158.

11 Lattimore, Inner Asian Frontiers of China, Capital Publishers, New York, 1957. Cited in Karen Sacks, op.cit. These ethnographic errors are documented also in Ann J. Lane, op.cit.

12 Karen Sacks, op.cit., pp. 220-28.

tract the position of women in four African societies and shows that women are not the complete equals of men in most non-class societies lacking private property. There are also many societies she notes, with and without classes, where women do own and inherit property. A wife's ownership of property can give her a substantial amount of domestic power vis-a-vis her husband, but as class societies sharply separate the domestic and public spheres of life, in such societies this domestic power is not translatable into social power. Moreover in class societies, the economic and political autonomy of a household is restricted. Thus, in the necessary dealings with the public sphere women are at a disadvantage and this is likely to act against even domestic equality. In class societies therefore, it would appear according to Sacks' research that the subordinate position of women derives not from domestic property relations but from the denial of adult social status to women by excluding them from public labour or denigrating their performance of such labour.

Apart from Engels' lack of access to modern ethnographic data, his analysis is limited because he conceived of a spontaneous sexual division of labour. Rosalind Delmar notes his remark about the American Indian organi-

zations that 'the division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature; it existed only between the two sexes'.¹³ However, as she points out, anthropological findings have established that the sexual division of labour is not a clear outgrowth of nature as Engels assumes, but is socially and culturally conditioned. As a result of Engels' uncritical acceptance of the sexual division of labour as natural - that is, women in the house, men outside - his vision of a future society does not envisage that domestic labour will cease to be performed exclusively by women, only that it will be publicly and collectively performed. He says, for example, 'The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree'.¹⁴ The acquiring by women of the social adulthood of which Sacks speaks, then, would seem to be tied up with a radical questioning of the basis of the sexual division of labour. This division of

13 Engels, op.cit., p. 155. Cited by Delmar, 'Looking again at Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' in The Rights and Wrongs of Women, ed. Anne Oakley and Juliet Mitchell, Penguin, 1976.

14 Engels, ibid. Emphasis mine.

labour has implications for the world of employment as well, and cannot be assumed to be a natural given.

Ann Lane points to yet another limitation of Engels' analysis. The very concept that he used, of 'social production' leaves the woman at home involved in non-activity from which she must escape if she is to become 'productive'. This difficulty, Engels had in tackling the problem of 'unproductive' domestic labour is reflected in Marxist theory's inability to grasp the degree of autonomy the sphere of reproduction of labour power has from that of production.

Despite these weaknesses, however, Engels' work is a sustained effort to demonstrate that the existence of sex conflict was bound up with particular historical phases in the development of the family. His perspective therefore makes an analysis of the family central to an understanding of the oppression of women.

The Limitations of Radical Feminist Analyses

The concept of patriarchy is central to most analyses of the situation of women by feminists, both radical and Marxist. It has been conceived of in widely differing terms, and therefore the context in which the concept is used is very important in understanding how women's oppression is being viewed.

Early radical feminists used the term to indicate an overarching category of male dominance. Kate Millet¹⁵ argued that the situation between the sexes throughout history has been a case of what Max Weber defined as herrschaft, a relationship of dominance and subordination. She uses Weber's conception of domination as exercised in two forms, control through social authority and control through economic force. In patriarchy as in other forms of dominance she avers, control over economic goods is as much a consequence of domination as one of its most important instruments, and the political power which men wield over women amounts to the fundamental political division in society. Weber had used the term patriarchy to describe a particular form of household organization in which the father dominated other members of an extended kinship network and controlled the economic production of the household. Millet extends the definition in this manner - 'if one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the population which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be two-fold. Male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger!'¹⁶

15 Kate Millet, Sexual Politics, Ballantine Books, New York, 1970.

16 Millet, op.cit., p. 34.

By this definition, she says, our society like all other civilizations in history is a patriarchy. One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy according to her argument, has been to set one woman against another; but in fact, women transcend class stratifications because 'economic dependency renders her affiliations with any class a tangential, vicarious and temporary matter'.¹⁷

Similarly Shulamith Firestone¹⁸ gives analytic independence and primacy to male domination over the mode of production. Economic class divisions in this view, are conditioned by and dependent on the primary class division between men and women. Thus, Firestone argues that to understand women's oppression we must explore their primary relation with men rather than their economic class relation with regard to capital.

Ti-Grace Atkinson too, defines women as a political class.¹⁹ She distinguishes between the biological class of females characterised by its specific sexual capacity of reproduction, and the political class of women

17 Op.cit., p. 52.

18 Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectics of Sex, Paladin, London, 1972.

19 Ti-Grace Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, Links Books, New York, 1974.

characterised by a seemingly necessary and inevitable function that is reproduction. Accordingly she argues that in opposition to the political class of women stands that of men, who because they have been able to manipulate and control women's reproductive capacity, are the effective agents of their reproduction. Thus the relative class positions of the two sexes is defined in terms of their differing relationships to reproduction, not production.

Another model focusses on the domestic mode of production. Christine Delphy²⁰ argues that domestic work, which all women perform, is the material foundation for a system of patriarchy which is the main oppression of women. She acknowledges the existence of an industrial mode of production and its related forms of capitalist exploitation, but focuses on the significance of the domestic mode of production in which the man and woman are respectively owner and labourer in a relationship similar to that between capitalist and worker.

The use of the term 'patriarchy' in the manner outlined above is problematic in that male dominance is seen as universal and trans-historical. As Michele

20 Christine Delphy, The Main Enemy, Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, London, 1977.

Barrett has pointed out,²¹ this dominance is said to be grounded in male control over female fertility, without any attempt to trace how and why men acquired this control. Such an emphasis on procreative biology in the construction of male domination tends to erode the very distinction between 'sex' as a biological category and 'gender' as a social one, which was established by feminist research.

While it is true that the use of 'patriarchy' as a transhistorical explanation of male domination is faulty and inadequate, I do not agree with Barrett and Gayle Rubin that it can only be used in this manner. It is possible to define patriarchy so that it takes into account the complex mediation of gender and class within specific historical contexts. Barrett argues that 'to use the concept is frequently to invoke a generality of male domination without being able to specify historical limits, changes or differences'.²² Similarly Rubin suggests that 'patriarchy' should be used only to describe societies where one man wields absolute power through a socially defined institution of fatherhood, as

21 Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today, Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis, Verso, London, 1980.

22 Op.cit., p. 14.

with the nomadic tribes of Abraham's era, for example. She feels the use of 'patriarchy' obscures dimensions of the historical forms of women's oppression and sees it as analogous to using 'capitalism' to refer to all modes of production. 'Patriarchy' fails to maintain a distinction between 'the human capacity and necessity to create a sexual world and the empirically oppressive ways in which sexual worlds have been organized'. She suggests therefore the use of 'sex/gender system' as a neutral term which refers to the domain, and which indicates that oppression is not inevitable in that domain.²³ However, a neutral term such as that Rubin suggests fails to point precisely to the oppressive aspect of the manner in which 'sexual worlds' have been organized, historically. It would be useful therefore, to adopt a definition of patriarchy such as that given by Ruth Bleier.²⁴

'... the historic system of male dominance, a system committed to the maintenance and reinforcement of male hegemony in all aspects of life... its institutions direct and protect the distribution of power and privilege

23 Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in Rayna R. Reiter ed., op.cit., pp. 167-68.

24 Ruth Bleier, Science and Gender. A Critique of Biology and its theories on women, Pergamon Press, New York, 1984, p. 162.

to those who are male, apportioned however, according to social and economic class and race. Patriarchy takes different forms and develops specific supporting institutions and ideologies during different historical periods and political economies'.

Such a definition is able to break out of its ahistorical usage by the early radical feminists. The value of this early work however, must not be overlooked - it focused attention on the specificity of the oppression of women across classes, cultures and time. Where it failed was in seeing this oppression as undimensional and unaffected by any other factor.

The Limitations of Marxist Feminist Analyses

Marxist feminists have attempted to historicize patriarchy as a concept by the argument that in capitalism, patriarchal relations assume a form dictated by capitalist relations of production. That is, capitalism supports existing patriarchal relations - the system of reproduction of labour power (the family) which through domestic labour in the household operates at the lowest possible cost and provides a cheap and flexible reserve army of married women workers to lower the price of wages in general. However, such an argument superficially recognizes the relationship between patriarchy and capita-

lism; in effect it simply restates that the labour/capital contradiction is central in society, and that gender relations are appropriately tailored.

A very influential analysis has been that of Juliet Mitchell,²⁵ who uses the Althusserian notion of overdetermination to express the complexity of women's situation. She rejects the idea that 'women's condition can be deduced derivatively from the economy (Engels) or equated symbolically with society (early Marx)'.²⁶ Rather she sees it as a structure which is a unity of different elements, and these elements are combined in different ways at different times. The key structures of women's situation she lists as Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and the Socialization of children. This complex totality, she says, means that no contradiction in society is ever simple - 'Because the unity of women's condition at any time is in this way the product of several structures moving at different paces, it is always "overdetermined"'.²⁷

This is one of the most sophisticated Marxist femi-

25 Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate, Penguin, 1971.

26 Ibid., p. 100.

27 Ibid.

nist analyses of women's oppression. However, in the end Mitchell is affected by the same structural determinism which Althusser's work, for each independent sector is 'ultimately determined by the economic factor'.

The work of Mary McIntosh, although it notes that the family household system has its own history and roots in precapitalist society, still avers that the state plays its part in the oppression of women through its support for a specific form of household, that is, the family household dependent largely on a male wage and female domestic servicing. As Barrett has pointed out,²⁸ this particular form of household and its accompanying ideology is not the only possible form for an efficient reproduction of labour power in capitalist relations of production - 'It is the product of historical struggles between men and women, both within the working class and the bourgeoisie'.

McIntosh further reduces the complexity of the various levels of oppression by stating that 'capitalist society is one in which men as men dominate women. Yet it is not this but class domination that is fundamental to society'.²⁹ This raises more questions than it ans-

28 Ibid., p. 249.

29 Mary McIntosh, 'The State and the Oppression of Women', in Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Volpe (eds.),

wers - is it only in capitalist society that 'men as men' dominate women, don't men dominate not only 'as men' but also as the ruling economic class, and if class domination is 'fundamental to society' how does it explain why 'men as men' dominate at all. This complexity is best illustrated by the distinction that can be made between the significance of the issues of landlord-rape and wife-beating for the Left. The former issue fits in unproblematically with a Marxist view of class oppression determining the form of gender oppression, but wife-beating within the working class calls into question this determination, and tends therefore to be sidelined as disruptive to working class unity. A recent study of the Warli revolt of 1945-47 has interviewed several women activists and most of them have stated that matters such as oppression within the family, or the Communist men's attitude toward their women were not taken up regularly in the party.³⁰

Cont'd... f.n. 29

Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, p. 259.

30 Indra Munshi Saldanha, 'Tribal Women in the Warli Revolt 1945-47: Class and Gender in the Left Perspective', Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Women Studies, April 26, 1986.

A strong tendency in Marxist-feminist analyses is to see the oppression of women as located entirely at the superstructural level. Juliet Mitchell, for instance, differentiates between the 'economic' mode of capitalism and the 'ideological' mode of patriarchy.³¹ Another study by Lise Vogel sets women's oppression into two spheres, the economic and the political. That is, (i) as in all class societies women and men are differently located with respect to important material aspects of social reproduction' and (ii) 'women like many other groups in capitalist society, lack full democratic rights'.³² Vogel's analysis would appear to suggest therefore, that class struggle will fight the first aspect of women's oppression and a broad-based women's movement the second. This oversimplifies the complexity of women's oppression which constitutes ideology as well as the material structure of oppression within which their domestic labour is set. The oppression of women is not set solely in the ideological or political realm, as Vogel would seem to suggest, but is bound up in a complex manner with the material conditions of existence, with the mode of produc-

31 Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, Penguin, 1974.

32 Lise Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory, Pluto Press, London, 1983, p. 166.

tion and of reproduction. The kind of division of labour she envisages, with a class struggle combating class oppression and a women's movement fighting gender oppression (which Vogel identifies as lack of democratic rights) would be impossible in practice because the two kinds of oppression are not so neatly separable. Nor is the oppression of women reducible to the denial of 'democratic rights'.

Another attempt to link patriarchy with mode of production has been that of Zillah Eisenstein. However, she simply states that both 'the capitalist class system' and the 'patriarchal structure of male supremacy' create inequalities.³³ What precisely the relationship is between the two is not tackled at all. In an earlier work she had referred to patriarchy in terms of its functions for capital alone - 'capitalism uses patriarchy and patriarchy is defined by the needs of capital'.³⁴

33 Zillah Eisenstein, 'Reform and/or Revolution: Towards a Unified Women's Movement' in Women and Revolution: A Discussion on the Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Feminism, ed. Lydia Sargent, Pluto Press, London, 1981.

34 Zillah Eisenstein, 'Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy' in Eisenstein ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1979.

An extreme example of such an argument tending to reductionism is the work of Tony Cliff.³⁵ He begins by defining both feminism and Marxism in completely self-sufficient and ~~un~~^{uni}dimensional terms - 'Feminism sees the basic division in the world as that between men and women' and 'for Marxism however, the fundamental antagonism in society is that between classes, not sexes'. Naturally, after this, he finds there can be no compromise between these views, that 'women's oppression can only be understood in the context of the wider relations of class exploitation'. He goes on to assess the contemporary women's liberation movements in the USA and Britain, and sees them as 'focussed consistently on areas where men and women are at odds' that is, rape, battered women and wages for housework, while ignoring the areas where women are strongest - the unions and the workplaces - and where they are more likely to win the support of men in issues like equal pay, strikes and so on.³⁶ As has been documented later in this study, it is questionable how far women have the support of their male co-workers in trade unions and in the issues Cliff lists. The concentration of feminists on rape and so on is due to the complete

35 Tony Cliff, Class Struggle and Women's Liberation, Bookmarks, London, 1984.

36 Op.cit., pp. 7-13.

sidelining of these issues by mainstream political struggles, even those led by the left. Furthermore, it is evident from other reports that women have organized innumerable struggles through trade unions and in the workplace and these areas are far from ignored in feminist theory or practice.³⁷

A less reductionist analysis, but tending to a simplistic determinism nevertheless, is that of Olivia Adamson et al who see women's oppression as both functional for, and created by, capitalist relations of production. They conclude therefore, that a politically autonomous women's movement can only reflect petty-bourgeois reformism. Their argument rests on unpaid domestic labour and insecure low-paid wage labour as the twin mechanisms whereby capitalism exploits not only women but the entire working class. Thus, the interests of women are identical with those of the working class.³⁸

There have been some attempts to develop the con-

37 To mention only a few, Siltanen and Stanworth (eds), Women and the Public Sphere, Hutchinson, London, 1984; Gamarnikow et al (ed.), The Public and the Private, Heinemann, London, 1983; Rowbotham, Women's Consciousness, Man's World, Penguin, 1973.

38 Clivia Adamson, Carol Brown, Judith Harrison, Judy Price, 'Women's Oppression under Capitalism', Revolutionary Communist, No. 5, 1976, cited by Barrett, op.cit., pp. 22-3.

cept of 'class' in such a manner as to incorporate the facets of gender and race as well. For instance, the notion of 'class-fraction' has been put forward by Phizacklea and Miles. In their view the dominant mode of production within a social formation constitutes the basis for identifying its primary classes. The concept of class-fraction is used to identify the basis of stratification within classes. Class fraction is defined as 'an objective position within a class boundary which is in turn determined by both economic and politico-ideological relations'.³⁹ The argument therefore appears to be that the socio-economic determinants of class, structure not only class itself but also the fractions within it. Migrant labour constitutes a class-fraction because it has a specific economic position within the working class and a particular place within ideological relations whereby they are negatively evaluated. Similarly women constitute a class-fraction because of their dual role in production as both wage and domestic workers.

However, such a formulation assumes the subordination of women and blacks is similar in kind, and that the mechanisms of their oppression are also alike. Moreover,

39 Cited in Brittan and Maynard, Sexism, Racism and Oppression, Basil Blackwell, London, 1984, pp. 45-6.

the form of relations between the fractions is problematic. If a black working-class woman is part of two class-fractions, what are the implications of this for her relationship with black men and white women, both middle and working class and with white working class men?

Further, although Phizacklea and Miles claim ideology is effective at both economic and political levels, their formulation does not escape economic reductionism because their categorization is in their terms constructed under certain conditions of production which will, in the final analysis, be determinant.

Another analysis which uses 'class' is that of Paul Gilroy, who argues that class should not be regarded as a continuous historical subject which once formed, continues its development in a linear way. Rather, it exhibits many contradictions and divisions of which gender and race are the most obvious. He also stresses that gender and race should not be seen as parallel forms of oppression. Eventually however, he sees race and gender as 'the modality in which class relations are experienced'. Struggles against these oppressions are class struggles in and through race or gender. Thus the argument assumes a familiar reductionist form.⁴⁰

40 Paul Gilroy, The Empire Strikes Back, Hutchinson, London, 1982.

Jean Gardiner's position is that instead of constituting unambiguous members of the working class, women in fact have a dual relationship to it.⁴¹ That is, women's oppression rests on their dual position with respect to domestic and wage labour. Gardiner therefore advocates an extension of the definition of working class to include not only those who sell their labour power for a wage, but also those who are dependent on someone else's sale of labour power. This argument suggests there are two possible class positions for women - in one they have a dual relationship to the class system because of their wage work and domestic roles. In the other, where they perform only domestic tasks, their class-connections are indirect and received through their husbands. The implication here is that there is one objective male class system, to which women are attached in a more or less external manner. Class is still being defined by the 'normal' male relation to work and the wage, and women's position is seen as an aberration from the male norm. Also, this fails to account for the oppression of women of the working class by working class men.

41 Jean Gardiner, 'Women in the Labour Process and Class Structure' in Alan Hunt ed., Class and Class Structure, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977.

In short, with Marxist feminist analysis some important questions remain unanswered - the subordination of women in pre-capitalist and even pre-class societies and in socialist societies; the hierarchical power relations between men and women within the same class in contemporary capitalism. The assumption is that the working class is a homogeneous group into which women can be unproblematically fitted. However, the interests of male and female workers have often been in conflict over issues such as equal pay, protective legislation and the marginalisation of women from skilled work.⁴² Such conflicts cannot be explained by the interests of capital.

Above all, as Barrett notes, none of these analyses adequately explains why it should be women who have been assigned the role that is proving so useful for the maintenance of capitalist relations. She argues that, as in the case of low-paid black and immigrant workers, an understanding of the mechanisms of exploitation does not explain why it should be this particular category that is exploited in this manner. Such an explanation, she concludes, would require an analysis of the extent to which the interests of women workers were subsumed under

⁴² See Chapter 3 below.

and defeated by those of the organized male working class, particularly in the crucial struggles over wages in the 19th century.⁴³

Barrett too, although she argues lucidly and powerfully against reductionism, finds herself in a sticky spot when she tries to make the link between women's oppression and the mode of production. She emphasizes the importance of ideology in the construction and reproduction of women's oppression, but disagrees with the view that this oppression is located solely at the ideological level.⁴⁴ As she has argued elsewhere, it is not possible to counterpose ideology on the one hand to women's economic situation on the other, because the two are analytically related. Many of the categories which are called economic are in fact, she points out, constituted historically in ideological terms; for example the wage form in capitalism. Thus, the limitations of women's participation in wage labour are related to ideology, especially familial ideology; wage bargaining rests mostly on definitions of skill, which incorporate ideological assumptions, for example,

43 Michele Barrett, op.cit., p. 27.

44 Ibid., pp. 251-54.

the view that women's wages are secondary because of the ascription to all women of the destiny of wife and mother.⁴⁵

She finds it easy to dismiss the idealist version of the view that the oppression of women is located at the level of ideology, namely, that ideology is absolutely autonomous of the mode of production. However, a materialist version, that ideology is grounded in material relations, gender ideology being grounded in economic relations between men and women, and that these exist independently of capitalism, can be countered by her only with the argument that this poses a different set of material determinants from those specified by Marxism. She seems to consider it essential that the labour/capital contradiction should not be displaced from its centrality in the analysis of capitalist society. At the same time, she rejects as untenable the possibility that the ideology of gender is necessarily determined by the materialist relations of capitalist production.

Thus Barrett is caught in a paralysing double-bind - it would appear that she must either be reductionist in favour of the mode of production or risk diluting the

⁴⁵ Michele Barrett, 'Rethinking Women's Oppression: A reply to Brenner and Ramas' New Left Review, No. 146, July-August, 1984.

Marxist component of her analysis. She does not resolve this dilemma either way, but merely restates her situation in several ways.⁴⁶

This situation is best explained in the words of Stedman Jones - 'The absence, on the theoretical plane, of any mechanism to connect the determination in the last instance by the economy and the relative autonomy of superstructures, was reproduced on the political plane in an inability to produce a systematic theory of revolutionary politics'.⁴⁷ Commenting on this Barry Smart concludes that these two propositions are in fact irreconcilable and therefore either analyses of politics and power will continue to be more or less sophisticated forms of economism, or politics and power will be theorized autonomously of the economy.

Nancy Hartsock: Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism

At this point it would be fruitful to consider the

46 Michele Barrett, Womens Oppression Today, op.cit.

47 Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the end of Classical German Philosophy', New Left Review No. 79, 1973. Quoted by Barry Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983, p.30.

analysis of Nancy Hartsock in the book named above.⁴⁸ Her formulation of the situation of women is materialist, and takes as its starting point two of Marx's important arguments about epistemology and ontology. The first is that conscious human activity or practice has both an ontological and an epistemological status. That is, each mode of producing subsistence, each form of the division of mental from manual labour can be expected to have consequences for human understanding.

Hartsock asserts that society is not structured simply by a ruling class dependent on the division of mental from manual labour, but also by a ruling gender, defined by and dependent on the sexual division of labour. Control over the means of mental production belongs to the ruling gender as well as to the ruling class. Thus, the categories in which experience is presented according to Hartsock, are both capitalist and masculine. She argues, therefore, that to the extent that Marxism is grounded in men's activity in production and ignores women's activity in reproduction, Marxian categories themselves require critique.

The second argument Hartsock adopts from Marx is that the ruling ideas, because they are the ideas of the ruling class, give an incorrect account of reality. Marx

48 Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, Longman, New York, 1983.

argues that the social relations of capitalism generate two epistemological systems, the one rooted in the activity of exchange, at the level of appearances, and the other in the activity of production, at the level of real social relations. Hartsock carries this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion - 'if the institutionalized structure of human activity generates an ontology and an epistemology and if the activity of women differs systematically from that of men we must ask whether epistemology is structured by gender as well as by class'.⁴⁹

In other words, Hartsock argues that the domination of one gender by another can only be made visible at a still deeper level, an epistemological level defined by reproduction. Her use of the category of reproduction must be differentiated from analyses which use a 'mode' or a 'sphere' of reproduction which indicate a different but parallel realm of existence. Rather, her argument is that at the level of reproduction we can develop a comprehensive account of the totality of social relations as well as understand why it is that neither the level of exchange nor the level of production provides an adequate and complete epistemological ground for the theorization of power.

49 Op.cit., p. 9.

Hartsock's criticism of Marxism develops from the 'gender-blind' categories in which Marx rendered his account of class domination. She is of the opinion that for Marx the value of labour power depends only on labour power incorporated into commodities, no attention is paid to the value of labour power consumed directly or incorporated into use values. Yet both at the time Marx wrote and today, much of women's labour takes the form of use values consumed in the home. As a result of this omission Marx also sees no need to give analytic attention to issues such as sex segregation of the labour market, the limitation of women workers to only a few job categories or the income differential between women and men in similar jobs, although evidence for these phenomena was clear, Hartsock feels, in Capital itself. She also points out that much of Marx's discussion of the labour of women both groups it together with the labour of children and centers the discussion not on women's labour but on the moral effects of their employment - the great mortality of children as being due to the employment of mothers, for instance. In the Critique of the Gotha Programme Marx seems to question whether communism should abolish the sexual division of labour because some branches of industry are especially unhealthy for the female

body or morally objectionable to the female sex. This gender-blindness operates also in Marxist theory as it developed later. Hartsock cites Poulantzas as an instance, who in his Classes in Contemporary Capitalism totally ignores those without paid employment and by implication suggests they have no class position.⁵⁰

Hartsock goes on to state however, that the strength of the Marxian critique of society in terms of class domination lies in its indication of the need for a theory that can 'put individual and intentional action in the context of structural constraints',⁵¹ and which can explain how what seem on the surface voluntary interactions between equal participants are in reality deeply and structurally unequal.

Her conception of an understanding of oppression at the level of reproduction is briefly as follows. Because the sexual division of labour means that much of the work involved in reproducing labour power is done by women, and because much of the male workers' contact with nature outside the family is mediated by women, 'the vision of reality which grows from the female experience is deeper and more thoroughgoing than that available to

50 Op.cit., pp. 146-50.

51 Op.cit., p. 150.

the worker'.⁵²

Women's activity as institutionalized has a double aspect - their contribution to subsistence and their contribution to child rearing. Whether or not all women do both, women as a sex are responsible for producing both goods and human beings. Although the nature of women's contribution to subsistence varies immensely over time and space, Hartsock's primary focus is on capitalism, with a secondary focus on the class societies that preceded it. In capitalism women contribute both production for wages and production of goods in the home; that is, they, like men, sell their labour power and produce both commodities and surplus value, and they also produce use values in the home. Unlike men however, women's lives are institutionally defined by their production of use values in the home. Marx for example, Hartsock points out, repeats as if it were his own, the question of a Belgian factory inspector - if a mother works for wages, 'how will the household's internal economy be cared for; who will look after the children; who will get ready the meals, do the washing and mending?'⁵³

52 Op.cit., p. 234.

53 Karl Marx, Capital, International Publishers, New York, 1967, in Hartsock, op.cit., p. 235.

Hartsock then traces the outlines and consequences of women's dual contribution to subsistence in capitalism. Like that of the male worker (a) women's labour is contact with material necessity, (b) their contribution to subsistence involves them in a world in which the relation to nature and to concrete human requirement is central and (c) repetition of work for wages and in household production involves a unification of mind and body for the purpose of transforming natural substances into socially defined goods.

Women's contribution to subsistence however, represents only a part of their labour. Women also produce and reproduce human beings. This aspect of women's production exposes the inadequacies of the concept of production as a description of women's activity. Another human being is not produced in the way an object is produced. Women's experience in reproduction represents for Hartsock a unity with nature that goes beyond the proletarian experience of interchange with nature and women's experience in bearing and rearing children involves a unity of mind and body more profound than is possible in the workers' instrumental activity.

Using the work of Nancy Chodorow and Jane Flax, Hartsock develops on a materialist psychology based on the objects - relation school of psycho-analytic theory. According to this view, the process of differentiation from a

woman (the mother), for boys and girls, reinforces boundary confusion in women's egos and boundary reinforcement ~~boundary confusion~~ in men's. This early experience forms an important ground for the feminine sense of self as connected to the world and the masculine sense of self as separate and distinct. As a result girls enter adulthood with a 'more complex layering of affective ties and a rich ongoing inner set of object relations. Boys, with a simpler oedipal situation and a clear and early resolution have repressed ties to one another. As a result women define and experience themselves relationally and men do not'.⁵⁴

In this manner, Hartsock believes she points to the way in which masculine, but not feminine experience and activity replicates itself in both the hierarchical and dualist institutions of class society, in the frameworks of thought these societies have generated and in the cultural construction of sexuality. From this follows an entirely different conception of power, not as domination but as a capacity of the community as a whole. Hartsock suggests that women's experience of connection and relation have consequences for understandings of power and may hold resources for a more liberatory understanding.

54 Ibid., p. 239.

Hartsock's use of Chodorow and Flax to develop a materialist psychology is marked by the ahistorical assumptions characteristic of psychoanalysis in general. Barrett in her Marxist and feminist critique of psychoanalysis quotes Timpanaro in this context - 'on the one hand, it externalizes situations which are historically specific. For example, it abstracts what truth there is in the notion of "hatred of the father" from an authoritarian structure of the family, which remains transient even if it is slow to pass away, and transforms it into a sort of eternal destiny of mankind.... Yet in another sense it remains suspended in a limbo between the "biological" and the "social", rejecting contact with one no less than with the other'.⁵⁵

Barrett concludes therefore, that while many psychoanalytic insights may be useful in that they do relate to some common features of psychosexual development in capitalism, wider theoretical problems for Marxism and feminism remain unsolved.

Nevertheless, Hartsock's analysis is a very important contribution to feminist materialism. She is

55 Sebastian Timpanaro, The Freudian Slip, London, 1976. Barrett, op.cit., pp. 58-60.

able to use the emancipatory content of Marxian class analysis while developing on it to reveal the reality of gender oppression operating simultaneously. Her conceptualisation of this oppression as made visible at the level of reproduction while class oppression is revealed at the level of production makes it possible to analyse both class and gender oppression without reducing the complexity of either, or expressing one in terms of the other. Her analysis of the origins of the sexual division of labour is weaker, because it relies more heavily on an ahistorical scheme based on psychoanalysis, but she does not suggest that the totality of human relations can be expressed by psychoanalysis. Her work remains a very useful attempt to redeem Marxism from gender-blindness, in the process transforming Marxism itself as a tool of analysis.

II

Political Participation: A New Look at the Concept

The term political participation is generally taken to mean electoral participation either by voting or by contesting elections.⁵⁶ While these are certainly

56 V.M. Sisirkar, "Overview" in Vina Mazumdar (ed.), Symbols of Power, Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1979.

important ways of participating in the political process, it is questionable how far the replacement of one political party by another marks any genuine change and how far the electorate believes that it does. In the face of disturbing demographic trends which reflect persistent high female mortality, declining economic participation of women and the slow progress of female literacy,⁵⁷ the study of women's participation in elections and of their voting patterns is an inadequate indicator of levels of political awareness.

Further, in such studies political characteristics are attributed to women as if they were a homogeneous social group. There is a tendency to speculate about the reasons for the greater or smaller mobilisation of women at various elections as if all women - rural, urban, middle-class and working class - would have voted for the same reasons.⁵⁸ While it is necessary to study

57 Towards Equality, Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974.

58 Pravin Seth, Political Participation of Women 1951-1979, ICSSR Programme of Women's studies.

Rekha Chowdhury, Women and Politics in India, M. Phil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (Unpublished), 1973.

S.D. Muni, "Women in the Electoral Process", in Vina Mazumdar (ed.), op.cit.

Nandini Upreti and D.B. Mathur, "Women Voters and the Midterm Poll 1971" in Vina Mazumdar (ed.),

how the specificity of women's situation in the economy and in society affects their political participation, gender cannot be treated as the crucial explanatory variable.

The underlying assumption of many studies is based on stereotypes of women as conservative and politically immature, making political choices on the basis of extra-political judgements. The greater mobilisation of women in the 1971 General Elections for instance, is attributed by one writer to the 'abala' (weaker sex) image of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.⁵⁹ This observation is not backed by any evidence, and a purely personal impression is presented as a sociological fact.

Similarly after the 1984 Lok Sabha elections in which women voted in larger numbers than ever before, a popular view aired in the national press was that the female vote went to the Congress(I) as a sentimental tribute to the memory of Indira Gandhi and an expression

Cont'd... f.n. 58

op.cit.

Susheela Jain, "Political Awareness and Political Commitment", Paper presented at the Second National Conference on Women's Studies, (SNCWS), Trivandrum, 1984.

59 Pravin Seth, op.cit.

of support to her son. But at least one reporter, after speaking to women from different castes and economic groups in UP, MP, Jammu & Kashmir and Delhi, concluded that the female voter saw a vote for the Congress(I) as a vote for Rajiv Gandhi, who to them, represented the forces of change. As with the male voter, for women too, change meant better wages and employment opportunities.⁶⁰

Two recent articles by activists on women's struggles in the 70s⁶¹ are rich in information about the ferment among broad sections of women - agricultural workers, poor peasants, working class and middle class women, students. However they merely record data about demonstrations, strikes, processions and so on, and leave unexplored the questions this study attempts to raise: how far do these struggles form a women's movement, explicitly operating at the level of gender, and if they are aimed at power relations oppressing both men and women, does the oppression of women within the group come into question at all.

60 Shahnaz Anklesaria, "Women as Agents of Social Change", The Statesman, New Delhi, February 4, 1985.

61 Meera Velayudhan, 'The Crisis and Women's Struggles in India (1970-1977)', Social Scientist, 145, June, 1985. Vibhuti Patel, 'Women's Liberation in India', New Left Review, 153, September/October, 1985.

Limiting the study of political participation then to formal participation through voting and contesting elections obscures the dynamics of participation at various levels. Most issues raised by women would be ignored in political terms since they would appear to be part of the 'private' sphere of women rather than of the 'public' sphere of politics.

An unpublished study on the participation of women in political life in India, prepared by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, is noteworthy for the understanding it displays of political participation. It studies the evolution of the 'women's question' in India from the pre-Independence period to the 70s. This involves 'relating political participation to various stages in the growth of a) the debate on women's roles in the social and political process of change, b) the response of political organizations to the issues articulated by the women's movement and c) the growth and evolution of the ideology of the women's movement in the context of the pattern of development and increasing participation of women in the political process.'⁶² The study is a very important one, the first one to see political participation in wider terms

62 Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit.

than electoral participation and in the light of this understanding, to scan Indian history and politics with a conscious focus on gender. However, its analytic insight is considerably weakened by its equation of the political participation of women with the women's movement. There is no awareness that the political participation of women involves struggles at two levels. Only one part of this participation constitutes a women's movement, and within every struggle the women's movement should be sought out - has common struggle for a more equitable social order exposed gender oppression among the oppressed themselves? And within struggles operating explicitly at the level of gender is there also an understanding of structures of power oppressing both men and women? Rather than articulate these questions the study counterposes 'political action' to 'women's rights issues' - 'women who begin activism on women's rights issues begin to realize at some stage that they cannot bring about needed changes without political action.... On the other hand, women who begin their activism under the general banner of a political movement, begin to develop some consciousness regarding women's issues...'⁶³ The implication is that 'women's issues' by themselves are not political, and must be attached to mainstream

political movements to be of any significance. After this, the concluding sentence of the study '... the women's issue... is basically a political one'⁶⁴ does not follow from its own reasoning, and is meaningless in its context. In other words, while we agree with the conclusion it does not seem to be logically connected to the assumptions that precede it.

The UNESCO seminar on the participation of women in political life (Lisbon, 1983) delineated the political sphere as including spheres in social relations where power relations are generated, institutionalised and used to control and move people's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs in a specified direction - to control and regulate distribution of resources. Some of these spheres are the government and its agencies, educational and cultural agencies, the work-place, economic and religious institutions and the family.

Political participation therefore is the involvement in any organised, deliberate activity that seeks to influence or alter the character and functioning of any of those spheres and institutions in which power relations are used to control and regulate the production and distribution of resources. In this sense, of

64 Ibid.

course, it is not necessary to differentiate between the political participation of women and men. But when such participation is directed against power relations which ensure that women alone are oppressed, it must be viewed as qualitatively different from the participation of men. There are no power relations which, while oppressing men, do not equally oppress women. The reverse, however, does not hold - there are relations of power which oppress women only, as a group, cutting across class, caste and race divisions. (The family best embodies such relations.) The political participation of women would involve the endeavours to transform both these kinds of power relations.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS: AIWC, NFIW

This chapter studies the two largest women's organizations in the 70s and tries to draw, from a study of their activities and perceptions, some general conclusions about women's participation in political life. Neither the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) nor the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) have direct political affiliations, but the AIWC has close links with the Congress and the NFIW with the Communist Party of India. Their perceptions of Indian social reality are therefore, radically different. The question to be considered then is - What are the implications this has for the kind of policies followed and the issues raised by the AIWC and the NFIW? This question is crucial to the possibility of a unified women's movement cutting across class lines.

It is argued here that one must use the term 'women's movement' with care in India. Such a term masks the differential participation of women in political life, given their different socio-economic posi-

tions and class interests. This does not mean that such differential participation is mutually antagonistic, but it does mean that to see all kinds of participation by women in terms of a 'Women's Movement' is to obscure the differences in the political interests of women as a non-homogeneous group. Furthermore, a women's movement can be said to exist only where gender oppression specifically, is called into question. A women's movement, in other words, would struggle to transform those relations of power which oppress all women. Hence the deliberate preference for the term 'the political participation of women' to 'women's movement'. Such a term includes all struggles by women to transform oppressive relations of power, as we have seen in the last chapter. Thus the political participation of women would include not only a women's movement but also struggles to fight against power relations which oppress both men and women. In the latter kind of struggle the aspect that must be considered is whether gender issues are confronted as well.

The following study of AIWC and NFIW leads to an understanding that a unified women's movement cutting across class lines is possible in struggles opposing power relations which oppress only women. Where the

attempt is to transform relations of power oppressing both men and women, women are motivated by interests and loyalties which may differ from those of women of the powerful groups.

The AIWC and NFIW will be considered in terms of their perceptions of the Indian situation and their general activities in the 70s. Specifically, this chapter will look at these organizations with reference to two important movements of the period, the anti-price rise movement and the 'Total Revolution' movement in Bihar. The NFIW participated actively in the former, and the AIWC mainly confined itself to the Central Steering Committee while denouncing all 'agitational' politics. Neither organization participated in or supported the latter movement, but they did not participate for different and mainly political reasons.

The AIWC: Perception of Indian Social Reality and of the Situation of Women

The AIWC was formed in 1927 at Pune, its formation was inspired by Margaret Cousins, who felt that education alone could save Indian women from their backwardness.

The organization does not have any particular theoretical understanding of the oppression of women. Their

understanding springs from the general belief that "the State, if it is to secure to all citizens, men and women, equality must come forward to provide adequate means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work and public assistance in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement.....",¹ and a recognition of "the inherent rights of every human being to work and to have the essentials of life."² However, there is hardly any insight into the compulsions operating on the State which constrain it from "providing adequate means of livelihood." Nor is there ~~specific~~ any understanding of the stratification of women along caste and class lines. While protesting against the proposal to combine the incomes of husband and wife for tax purposes, it is stated that "the creation of an egalitarian society is of course an important objective of our government.... But it cannot be done by sacrificing the interests of women who constitute fifty per cent of our population."³ However, not all of that fifty per cent would have incomes which fall within the tax bracket. The AIWC thus tends to see the rights

1 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 41st Session 1973.

2 Ibid., 38th Session 1970, Aims and Objectives.

3 Ibid., Presidential Address, 40th Session 1972.

of women as the rights of middle-class women alone. Even this understanding is partial, as they seem to consider that 'equality' has now been achieved and the government need only be urged to fill in some lacunae. This attitude is evident from a statement like the following, "From British period onwards, women and scheduled castes have been bracketed together as the two most oppressed sections of our society.... It is however a matter of great concern to us that our co-travellers of old have not won for themselves that position of social equality which we have succeeded in doing so wonderfully well..."⁴ To refer to women and scheduled castes as if they are two entirely different groups, one of which has won equality while the other has not, shows an extremely inadequate understanding of the social and economic context of women's oppression.

This middle-class urban viewpoint can be seen in the patronising attitude ~~reflected~~ in statements like "Rural Women.... have hardly made themselves felt in activities that are directly related to their welfare and upliftment... How could we inspire them and make them share in these activities?"⁵ Thus rural women are

4 Ibid., Presidential Address 1970.

5 Souvenir issued at 43rd session, 1975.

viewed as passive beneficiaries of development which urban women will bring them. The understanding that 'they have hardly made themselves felt' in activities clearly shows the ignorance of the immense contributions of women to the rural economy.

The structural inequalities in the economy as a whole remain uncomprehended by the AIWC. As a result, the scarcity of food, for example, is seen not as a problem related to distribution and to the lack of purchasing power on the part of the lower classes, but as a function of production.⁶ It becomes possible then, to see the irresponsibility of trade unions as the cause for food shortages. "Ask any of the student and labour union leaders how much we are losing every year by way of strikes and hartals".⁷

More progressive views remain restricted to papers presented at seminars. For example, "Production is important, but not more important than the welfare and progress of men and women."⁸ Other papers on education and unemp-

6 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 49th Session, 1980.

7 Ibid., Presidential Address, 40th Session, 1972.

8 Impact of Industrialization on Women, Paper read at Regional Seminar of the International Alliance of Women, 1970. Report in AIWC Report of 38th Session, 1970.

loyment have raised the questions of the decentralisation of industries to rural areas, the need for child-care facilities for working women and so on. The Presidential addresses also occasionally go beyond a superficial view of women's situation, "... when the employer employs a man he is actually employing two people for one wage. He is employing the man and his wife who is looking after him and reproducing his energy..."⁹ Sometimes radical views are expressed... "Women's bodies must not be used as instruments of the political or economic programme of any nation or ideological group. It is the exclusive right of women to control their own reproductive destinies...."¹⁰

However, as we shall see, such views are not translated into action.

The AIWC as a Political Organization

Beginning as an organization for social work, the AIWC sessions began to reflect the growing perceptions of its members that "in consideration of the widespread awakening of interest amongst the women of India in all questions affecting their welfare, this conference is of

9 Report of AIWC, 43rd Session, 1975.

10 Ibid., 42nd Session, 1974.

the opinion that while continuing its policy it should widen its scope to include these questions."¹¹ Its policy so far had been concerned solely with the right kind of educational scheme to secure the development of a truly national and natural womanhood. The understanding that questions of politics could not be ignored was hotly debated in following sessions. By the 13th Session (1938-39) politics was accepted and the debate revolved around the definition of politics. While refraining from "party politics" Indian women were exhorted to understand, "why and how far the form of government affects their lives."¹² From the 18th Session (1943) Indian independence is openly demanded.¹³ The organization had indeed come a long way from its initial understanding of politics as a hindrance to social change.

After independence, the formation of a Congress government resulted in^a recasting of AIWC's policy. There was a gradual shift from agitational politics to developmental strategies. This shift was not abrupt. Through

11 Maitreyee Chaudhuri, 'Defining Politics: The All India Women's Conference (1927-47)', Paper presented at SNCWS, 1984, p. 5.

12 Defining Politics, op.cit., p. 7.

13 Defining Politics, op.cit., p. 8.

the 50s the AIWC actively lobbied and pressurised the government to reform social laws concerning women. Along with other women's organizations the AIWC applied pressure on the government to enact the Special Marriage Act 1954, the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955, the Interstate Succession Act 1956 and the Dowry Act 1961. From the mid-50s however the AIWC began focusing its attention primarily on social welfare.¹⁴ By the 70s, when there was such tremendous political activity by women, the AIWC retreated to a position where once again 'social work' was posited against political activity as being more constructive, 'the time has come when this organization should recover its old spirit of dedicated vigorous activity in social welfare work'.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, the coming into power of a Congress government certainly necessitated a realignment of AIWC's policies. However it would be facile to stress the close links between the Congress and the AIWC in an attempt to explain the AIWC's involvement in politics during the nationalist movement as well as its withdrawal from active politics after the

14 Centre for Women's Development Studies, Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit.

15 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 39th Session, 1970.

40s. This shift in policy should not be viewed as a fundamental change in direction from 'political' to 'apolitical' but rather, as a continuation of the same political line. That is, both the decision to enter active politics as well as the decision to withdraw were political decisions.

AIWC's decision to enter active politics must be understood in the context of the nationalist movement of the 30s and 40s when the organization assumed an agitational stance. In the 30s potentially radical lower-class protests were being contained by the advance and consolidation of the Congress organization, which involved the gradual establishment of the hegemony of bourgeois and dominant peasant groups over the national movement. The overall importance of bourgeois groups in national politics in this period proved decisive in Civil Disobedience, constitutional discussions and ministry making.¹⁶ It is within this historical context that we must view the AIWC's political stance at the time. Both the AIWC's involvement in politics at that stage as well as its withdrawal from active politics after the 40s must be seen as political decisions, the impact of which at both times

16 Sumit Sarkar, Modern India 1885-1947, Macmillan India Ltd., 1983, pp. 254-61.

was to strengthen the hands of the bourgeois landlord coalition. It is important to note here that we are referring to the participation only of the AIWC in the national movement, and not to the participation of women as a whole. The two are by no means the same.

But the organization itself viewed its change in policy quite differently. This is clear from the Presidential addresses and the annual reports of the Secretary-General, which see politics as a detrimental to any constructive social work. In an interview a veteran Congress activist who has also been a member of AIWC, Phulrenu Guha, attributed the new "deputationist approach" to the "moral degeneration" of the post-Independence period.¹⁷

Thus, these decisions of the AIWC (to take part in agitational politics and then to withdraw) have been characterised as political not because they were intentionally so. These decisions had a political impact in that the dominant fraction of the ruling class benefited by them in both cases.

By 1970, the only form of political activity which the organization accepted as falling within its ambit is

17 Dr Phulrenu Guha in interview on 6th May 1983 in Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit., p. 32.

the education of the voter so that she could meaningfully exercise her vote.¹⁸ It does consider economic emancipation of women as part of its work,¹⁹ and this could have meant radical political activity. However, the term 'economic emancipation' refers only to the various self-employment schemes which the AIWC conducts in various areas. There is no understanding of the system within which such schemes perforce operate, making economic emancipation far from being a reality. Further, the reference to participation in politics means only participation in elections and lobbying in the public interest, but "we stop dead when it is likely to go anywhere into the political area."²⁰ Earlier, at the 1972 Session, the Presidential address had noted that "by and large the line dividing the two (social welfare and politics) is becoming thinner..... Many of the Central Ministers, MPs, MLAs..... were our workers at some time or the other This is as it should be"

In an article in the souvenir brought out for the 43rd Session in 1975, the President Lakshmi Raghuramaiah

18 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 39th Session, 1970.

19 Ibid., Presidential Address, 48th Session, 1977.

20 Ibid., 49th Session, 1978.

saw participation in public life as restricted to educated women. Once again it is evident that she is equating public life with electoral participation. This itself is suspect, because thousands of illiterate women turn out to vote, although women who contest elections are normally educated. However, if we see public life as composing more than electoral participation, her statement is false, for countless working-class women were part of popular movements and active in trade unions.²¹

In the post-Independence period then, it would appear the AIWC lapsed into its earlier stance of non-involvement in political questions. Even on women's issues the militancy shown during the passage of the Hindu Law Bill was no longer evident.

During the 70s the AIWC was involved in a set of activities which, while worthwhile in themselves, were located in the existing social and economic structure and therefore made no attempts to challenge it. However, as we have seen, keeping out of all kinds of move-

21 Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit.; Gail Omvedt, We Will Smash this Prison, Orient Longman Ltd., 1980; Amrita Basu, "Two Faces of Protest" in The Extended Family ed., Gail Minault, Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1981.

ments attempting to deal with the growing poverty and government repression was motivated by political considerations. Not surprisingly the AIWC consumed its energies in running working women's hostels, balwadis, cooperatives, small savings schemes, serving centres, schools for the blind and mentally retarded, adult education centres, free legal aid and self-employment schemes.

It gave evidence before the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Termination of Pregnancy Bill and also before the Estimate Committee on the role of voluntary organizations and family planning.²² It undertook surveys of fisherwomen and women petty traders for the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India,²³ and represented successfully against the proposal to convert Lady Hardinge Medical College into a co-educational institution.²⁴ Alongwith other women's organizations, the AIWC held a symposium, "Indian Women in the 80s: Development Imperative", to ensure that women's needs were adequately represented in the Sixth Plan. The

22 Report of AIWC, Secretary-General's Report, 39th Session, 1970.

23 Ibid., Secretary-General's Report, 1973-74.

24 Ibid.

recommendations of this symposium were published as a document and as a result of these efforts a section on women was included in the Sixth Plan.

One major attempt at transcending the politics of representations and resolutions during the 70s was the effort to hold public meetings to protest against the proposal of Charan Singh, Chief Minister of UP, to stop recruitment of women officers in the IAS and the IFS, and again holding of meetings to protest against the proposal to assess income tax on joint incomes of husband and wife.²⁵ While both were valid and relevant issues, their universality as women's issues was strictly limited.

More radical demands were restricted to resolutions — implementation of equal wages for equal work, speedy implementation of land reforms,²⁶ an end to the sale of Adivasi girls in Orissa,²⁷ barring export of essential food items.²⁸ At the 42nd session in 1974, a resolution was passed "to rededicate ourselves and declare that we

25 Ibid., Secretary-General's Report, 39th Session, 1970.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 40th Session, 1972.

28 Ibid., 49th Session, 1980.

shall not spare ourselves to obtain social justice for all, by peaceful, non-violent means..."

At the same time, some resolutions display an insular middle-class attitude and concern for the interests of these classes. Consider for example the demand that "In view of the inconveniences caused to members attending their meetings, the Railway Ministry is requested to renew their former concession for upper classes"²⁹ or the suggestion to form squads which would go out and "show students how to concentrate on studies and not spoil their careers and those of others by forcing the closure of educational institutions."³⁰ On occasions the AIWC demonstrated its class bias quite candidly by asserting that "all strikes in essential services and in those enterprises concerned with national production should be barred for 5 years."³¹

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India characterised the AIWC as 'mainly a deliberative body using resolutions as its main method of pressurising the government'.³² We have seen that this withdrawal of AIWC from agitational politics is not a

29 Ibid., 40th Session, 1972.

30 Ibid., 48th Session, 1979.

31 Ibid., 41st Session, 1973.

32 Towards Equality, Report of the CSWI, op.cit., Ch.VII.

retreat to an apolitical stance. Rather, the effect of its withdrawal has been political, in that it has strengthened the hands of the dominant class coalition.

The NFIW: Perception of Indian Social Reality and the Situation of Women

The women within the AIWC who had Communist leanings increasingly felt constrained by the scope and functioning of the organization. During the nationalist movement the communist sympathisers wanted the AIWC to transform itself from an elite organization into a mass-based organization of the toiling women of town and country as these women were largely outside the ambit of membership.³³ Eventually the increasing restriction of AIWC's activities in the post-independence period to issues of social reform encouraged the communists to break away to form the NFIW in 1954.

Although the constitution of the NFIW describes it as a 'non-political' body, it is known to have close links with the Communist Party of India.³⁴ It is also political in its activity in that it seeks to transform

33 Renu Chakravarti, Communists in the Indian Women's Movement, People's Publishing House, 1980.

34 Centre for Women's Development Studies, op.cit., p. 33.

oppressive relations of power. The federation aims at raising the awareness of women to fight for social transformation, and places the oppression of women within the framework of society and class struggle. The organization's emphasis is on helping to release women from their present restricted position in society, but believes this would be possible only if all oppressed people are free. (Even though primarily an organization meant to remove the special disabilities that women suffer from, we believe they can be truly free only in a planned socialist society. Therefore while we are a women's organization, the NFIW believes in supporting people everywhere in their struggles for national liberation, against foreign aggression and for world peace.³⁵ It is noted that after independence "there were forces which tried to reduce the role of women's organizations to charitable work combined with, on and off, passing resolutions demanding better status for women",³⁶ but the NFIW has been "consistently working for organizing women to struggle for equal rights and responsibilities in all spheres of life."³⁷

Believing that the oppression of women is set with-

35 Report of NFIW, 8th Congress 1973, Presidential Address.

36 Ibid., 10th Congress, 1980.

37 Ibid.

in a generally exploitative structure, NFIW is concerned with the general political situation in the country. It decried the growing authoritarianism and suppression of democratic rights as for example the passing of the National Security Act which it saw as 'aimed at curbing the democratic rights of the people, and suppressing popular struggles'.³⁸ Similarly, it drew attention to the "dangerous situation" in the North-East Region which "has been kept totally undeveloped in the last three decades".³⁹

The NFIW had a structural understanding of the economic and political crisis in India in the 70s. It sharply criticised the economic policy of the government, which for all its lip service to socialism encouraged big industry, constantly widening the disparity between the rich and the poor. In accordance with the general framework, rising prices were seen as due to the capitalist development in the country as a result of which inflation had been rising.⁴⁰ "It is government's trade and industrial policy of favouritism to big industrial houses... lack of curbs on unproductive spending... on luxury goods,

38 Ibid., Work Report, 10th Congress, 1980.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

uncontrolled deficit financing... that are responsible for unabated... rise in prices...".⁴¹ A powerful mass movement must therefore be built on this issue to provide at least some relief to women. The task was seen as that of having a prolonged campaign with "intensive propaganda giving facts and figures about the reasons for the price rise", and "building agitations on specific demands in localities".⁴² The Eighth Congress of the Federation drew up a charter of demands which included government takeover of wholesale trade in foodgrains and essential commodities, introduction of statutory rationing and nationalisation of sugar, oil and textile industries.

The oppression of women was, as we have seen, placed in the context of the economic crisis. Increasing incidents of rape, molestation and dowry murders are seen as concomitants of the nature of economic development in the country, 'rape and molestation are being used today as a class and caste weapon'.⁴³ A strong women's movement must be built up, organizing women to fight for equal pay for equal work, better job opportunities, access to educational and vocational training and conditions in which

41 Ibid. Commission on Land Reform and Rising Prices, 8th Congress, 1973.

42 Ibid., 10th Congress, 1980.

43 Ibid. Commission on Social Oppression, 10th Congress, 1980.

they can marry according to their own choice, without the humiliating custom of dowry.⁴⁴ Working women bear a double load of oppression, and NFIW is particularly sensitive to this aspect. Lower wages for similar work is one of the most common ways in which women are discriminated against, and a resolution passed at the Ninth Congress in 1976 welcomed the passage of the Equal Remuneration Act, but noted that it covered only women in the organized sector, and demanded that all loopholes in the Act should be plugged.

Every Congress has normally set up Commissions on Social Oppression, Land Reforms, Rising Prices and Employment of Women which have organized statistics and other facts about women's situation in these areas.

The NFIW as a Political Organization

While the NFIW recognizes the importance of social welfare activities evident in its efforts to organize nursery schools, handicraft centres and health centres, the organization feels it much more imperative to organize women to make them intervene in political issues.⁴⁵

44 Ibid., 10th Congress, 1980.

45 Interview with Vimla Farooqui, Secretary, NFIW, 30th May, 1983, in Women's Participation in Political Life in India, op.cit., p. 34.

Its membership reflects its mainly working-class base of women who have been struggling against exploitation and inequities. The delegates to the Tenth Congress in 1980, for example, included biri workers from Bombay who had at that time participated in a seventy-five day strike, teachers from Delhi and Bihar who had actively taken part in movements for better conditions of work and women who had fought for and won several local demands, like more water taps, health and maternity facilities, better drainage, and improvement in fair price shops. Thus, politics for the NFIW is constituted by struggle against exploitation and oppression.

The political activities of the NFIW fall into three broad streams - actions in solidarity with workers and other toiling sections, actions for a life of dignity and self-respect, and efforts for better conditions of living. We will look at some of the actions taken in order to draw a general picture of what constitutes political activity for the NFIW.⁴⁶

In pursuit of its goal of solidarity with the working class active work was done among the striking workers of the cashew factories in Kerala (90 per cent of the employees of which are women), the Bata shoe factories and the Birla owned cotton mills of West Bengal, the

⁴⁶ Based on information in reports of 8th, 9th and 10th Congress of NFIW.

Dhariwal mill in Punjab and among workers in other parts of the country both by NFIW's actual participation in the strikes and by expressing solidarity and organizing relief for the workers' families.

On the demand of reducing municipal taxation on working women, the NFIW carried out a successful programme of squatting in front of the Municipal Building in Asansol, West Bengal. NFIW members are also closely associated with the biri workers at Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Because of their consistent agitation in Maharashtra along with other women's organizations, women employees won some important concessions from the State Government regarding transport from mofussil areas and other protective measures. Organizations of tribal and Harijan women have been built in Dhulia and Katkari (Maharashtra) to fight the oppression against women on grounds of sex and caste. Work is also done among peasant and tribal women in other parts of the country, educating them about their rights and launching campaigns against higher taxation, indebtedness and non-implementation of land reforms. Self-employment schemes were started for these women in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

The NFIW is as concerned that women should live in dignity and self-respect as it is with their economic independence. It has taken up innumerable individual

cases of women who have been victims of social oppression, molestation and police tyranny. The Tenth Congress noted that there had been a growth and strengthening of cooperation among women's organizations on the issues of rape and molestation. The cases of Rameeza, Mathura and Maya Tyagi focused national attention on the issue of rape and police harassment of women and constant lobbying by the women's organizations forced the Supreme Court to review the Mathura case. A Bill was introduced in Parliament to amend the law on rape. NFIW has also undertaken many programmes to improve the living conditions of women. It does active work in slums to stop demolition of huts, reduce rent, and provide basic amenities. Such activities are carried on all over India.

Quite clearly then, NFIW is political in a way in which AIWC is not. This will become clearer still when we look at the two major movements of the 70s, the anti-price rise movement and the 'Total Revolution' movement in Bihar led by Jai Prakash Narayan.

The Anti-Price rise Movement

Throughout the 70s there were sporadic protests against the rising prices of essential commodities. The

movement found its most organized expression in Bombay between 1972 and 1974. It is significant that while all sections of society were hit by the price rise, the protest movement against it was spearheaded by women so that it became essentially a women's movement. Since the sexual division of labour ensures that women, both of the middle class and of the working class, are responsible for making ends meet in running their homes, they were most directly affected by essential commodities going out of their reach. It was women therefore, who were immediately responsive to any kind of protest action. They organized militant and imaginative campaigns such as the kachra tula, i.e. the weighing of the Minister for Food and Civil Supplies against chaff collected from grain available through fair price shops, and the famous Belan March to the Secretariat in Bombay in which women banged belans on empty thalis.

An All India Anti Price Rise Women's Committee was formed, consisting of members of women's organizations and women's fronts of political parties. Both AIWC and NFIW were a part of this united front. The AIWC viewed the problem of rising prices as essentially a function of low productivity. Higher levels of production required eschewing militancy. Consequently the organization

advocated a remedy of 'no strikes, no bandhs until we have enough and the slogan for the year is produce more and reduce price.'⁴⁷ The price rise was to be fought by increasing production in all national spheres and by destroying the 'three enemies' - 'any aptitude for strikes, any aptitude to destroy property and adulteration of food, medicines and essential articles'.⁴⁸

A resolution passed at the 41st session in 1973 approved of the following steps to combat rising prices and scarcity of essential consumer goods - the organization of an effective consumer movement to resist and fight rise in prices, adulteration and scarcity of essential commodities, the seeking of women's representation on vigilance committees, and the establishment of women's consumer cooperatives to provide essential commodities at reasonable prices. However, these objectives were realized only through measures which worked on the assumption that "anti-social" elements were responsible for the crisis. There was no understanding of the structural reasons for continued inflation and, therefore, no attempt was made to tackle these issues at a deeper level.

47 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 41st Session, 1973.

48 Ibid.

The Andhra branches of the AIWC collected levy rice for the government and ran fair price shops. The branches at Ernakulam, Madras and Amritsar organized cooperative stores on a no-profit no-loss basis "in spite of harassment by dealers and shopkeepers". Fair price shops were run in Kanpur and Simla, and complaint cells established in every Municipal Market in Calcutta, run jointly by the AIWC and the West Bengal Women's Coordinating Council.⁴⁹

By contrast NFIW, had a much clearer theoretical understanding of the price rise, and they saw the task primarily as one of educating the people about the reasons for the price rise on the one hand, and of building agitations on specific demands in localities, on the other.⁵⁰ In pursuance of these aims it conducted several campaigns against rising prices between 1971 and 1979. In July 1971 NFIW organized an All-India signature campaign on a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding price controls and in cooperation with the Agricultural Workers' Union and the Kisan Sabha, the organization picketed government offices to protest against the price rise. In September 1972 a protest week was observed

49 Ibid., Secretary-General's Report 1973-74.

50 Report of NFIW, 10th Congress, 1980.

against rising prices. All over the country agricultural labour women, factory and office workers, slum dwellers and middle class housewives held demonstrations and meetings and presented memoranda to the Chief Ministers, Collectors and District Magistrates. A similar campaign was launched in March 1973. Subsequently considerable action was undertaken to compel erring traders to dehoard foodgrains and sell them at reasonable prices.

By 1974 the NFIW had come to realise the situation could not be changed by organizing consumers' resistance nor just by women taking over ration shops. Instead the organization felt it was necessary to launch an organized struggle against hoarders, black-marketeers and big industrialists.⁵¹ The first phase of the campaign was to explain to women the causes which led to the artificially created scarcity of essential commodities. Meetings were held all over India for the purpose.

In Patna after a long agitation four bread shops were opened to provide bread at a controlled rates, and banks were gheraoed to press the demand that loans to speculators in food grains be stopped. In Delhi a godown where vanaspati was hoarded was raided and shopkeepers selling rationed food in the black market were gheraoed till their licenses were revoked.

51 Ibid., 9th Congress, 1974.

Throughout 1976 and 1977 and intermittently until 1979, women continued their protest throughout the country. Such consistent agitations and protest had some effect - there was better distribution of kerosene and extra rations of sugar for the festive season for example. In 1979 the Andhra Pradesh government issued orders for the suspension of export of vegetables to Gulf countries.

But the NFIW itself does not see these campaigns as anything more than an effort to provide "some relief" to women,⁵² as it is fully aware that inflation is a consequence of the path and nature capitalist development followed in India. In the face of the direction that development is taking however, the NFIW feels a strong and organized women's movement is essential to counter the growing marginalisation of women.⁵³

The 'Total Revolution' Movement in Bihar

The JP movement in Bihar has been discussed as an example of the differential levels of participation of women in politics though neither NFIW nor AIWC participated in or supported it. However it is interesting to

52 Ibid., 10th Congress, 1980.

53 Ibid.

compare their attitudes because both organizations had different perspectives which arose out of varying political considerations. Further-more the movement cannot be ignored because it attracted large numbers of women who took an active and enthusiastic part at every stage, and they did so for eminently political reasons.⁵⁴ In view of these contrasting positions it is not surprising that there was no single 'women's' perspective on the JP movement.

The movement began in Bihar in 1973 with the imposition of professional tax by the government which affected not only the middle class in the towns but the working class as well. So the opposition parties and trade unions formed an organization to struggle against the imposition of the tax. The organization which spearheaded the opposition was dominated by the Left parties. By March 1974, however this movement which had developed into a struggle against price rise and other economic difficulties passed into the hands of students. In consequence political demands eclipsed the economic demands. The urban middle class joined hands with the students but

54 Niroj Sinha, "Women's Participation and Political Development in India; a Case Study of the Total Revolution Movement", paper presented at SNCWS, 1984.

the working class kept aloof, as issues like corruption and dissolution of the Assembly came to the forefront. The landless and the poor peasants were largely indifferent to the movement. The entire agitation after March 1974 was planned and executed essentially by non-Communist and Right parties.⁵⁵

The AIWC did not participate in the movement and in fact, there is no direct reference to the movement at all in the Presidential addresses, reports of the Secretary-General or the resolutions passed in that period. However, the organization's condemnation of the movement for causing a breakdown of law and order can be noticed from the approval of the Emergency as a restoration of real democracy whose 'vitals were being eaten away'.⁵⁶ This was further reflected in the Secretary-General's report for 1974-75 which noted that 'as soon as the Emergency came we had our responsibilities to keep the people in strict discipline and order'. Thus the AIWC clearly stayed away from the movement because it was a challenge to the government's authority. As discussed

55 Ghansham Shah, "Revolution, Reforms or Protest? A Study of the Bihar Movement", Economic and Political Weekly, April 9, 16, 23, 1977.

56 Report of AIWC, Presidential Address, 44th Session, 1976.

earlier, the AIWC had political reasons for withdrawing from agitational politics, and these reasons related to the need to ^{ensure the} political stability of the dominant coalition of the ruling class.

NFIW's opposition to the JP movement was derived from the CPI's stand which characterised the movement as one of right reaction. Its attitude was basically determined by the CPI's overall support to the Congress Government which it saw as a representative of the interests of the national bourgeoisie against the monopoly bourgeoisie. The latter, in concert with the representatives of reactionary forces, was precipitating a situation conducive for the Fascists to take over. Besides, the CPI found no reason to support the movement which was antagonistic to Communist ideology.

In view of its close affinity to the CPI, the NFIW also denounced the Total Revolution movement as an attempt "to subvert democracy and destroy democratic institutions."⁵⁷ The forces supporting the movement, they said, are those which had always resisted measures for the emancipation of women. The Bombay branch of the NFIW walked out of the Anti-Price Rise Committee when some elements tried to link it with the JP movement, and in

57 Report of NFIW, 9th Congress, 1976.

Bihar it worked actively to expose the "anti-democratic" agitation.

The NFIW then, opposed the Total Revolution movement because it saw it as reactionary and tending to fascism. The AIWC's opposition on the other hand, arose out of its rejection of all agitational politics after independence. Both therefore, were politically motivated.

An important question which arises here but which is too complex to be discussed as a part of this chapter is that of the relationship between the CPI and the NFIW (indeed, between any Left party and a women's organization linked to it).⁵⁸ How far has NFIW's adherence to the CPI party line constrained its functioning as an organization primarily intended to promote the interests of women? There has been considerable dissatisfaction among women activists within Left parties on the coexistence of a patriarchal ideology along with a revolutionary one.⁵⁹ Moreover, the NFIW's support of the Emergency which saw draconian measures directed against the lower classes was due its unquestioned acceptance of the CPI line. There was of course, a qualitative difference in

58 I am not here concerned with women within non-Left parties and with women's organizations linked to them because these are not necessarily committed to an egalitarian society and so are therefore, not always involved in a contradictory position if they continue to see women in a subordinate role.

59 Chhaya Datar, "Women's Movement and the Left Parties: Critique of the Conceptual Framework", paper presented at SNCWS, 1984.

NFIW's support of the Emergency and that of AIWC. NFIW laid greater stress on the implementation of the Twenty Point Programme which it saw as a 'fight against feudalism and backwardness in the countryside'⁶⁰ than on the aspect of maintenance of discipline as AIWC did. Even so, its support of the Emergency was quite out of keeping with its avowed aim of helping the oppressed struggle for a better life.

Another women's organization of the Left is the All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). Some of its regional units have been active in struggles since the 1930s in association with the undivided Communist Party of India, but it came into existence as a national organization only in 1981. The AIDWA therefore, is outside the time period of this study, but a brief examination of its ideology is necessary to complete the picture of women's organizations in India because with a membership of about 15 lakhs, it is the largest women's organization today. The mass base of the AIDWA is mainly among agricultural workers, peasantry and the working class, but it also includes professional women and women from the service sector.

The AIDWA, being closely associated with the CPI (M), has sharp differences with the perceptions of the

60 Report of NFIW, 9th Congress 1976, Presidential Address.

AIWC as well as NFIW on Indian social reality and on the situation of women. The NFIW, it is argued, has become a conglomeration of tendencies, diffusing any sharp understanding of women's situation or of the general class structure of Indian society. The AIDWA's understanding of women's oppression is at three levels (a) as citizens, (b) as members of a certain class; and (c) as members of an oppressed sex. All these are equally important, and the AIDWA feels this kind of a structural understanding is necessary for a women's organization to function effectively. The 'urban middle-class perception' is seen to be limited, with its stress on personal liberty. Rape, for instance, is viewed less as a man-woman issue than as an instrument of class rule, through landlord rape. Similarly, dowry cannot be fought without attacking caste structures and the consumerist culture.⁶¹ The Janwadi Mahila Samiti (JMS), in its campaign therefore stresses the social roots of the dowry problem and the role of the government in not being firm on anti-dowry legislation, while at the same time, trying to fight it at an immediate level as well.

The JMS in Delhi started functioning from July 1980, mainly with women from the Students' Federation of India

61 Interview with Indu Agnihotri, President, Janwadi Mahila Samiti, January 30, 1986.

and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. The first programme of JMS was a demonstration against the police molestation of Maya Tyagi. Since then there have been many campaigns on issues of vital importance to its mainly working class membership, demands for basic civic amenities, water supply and regular transport to the resettlement colonies. The JMS was also extremely active in opposing the bill on Muslim Women (Protection of Rights On Divorce).⁶²

An important forum of JMS activity is its legal cell, which gives advice on cases of dowry and desertion. Women came for help with cases already in court as well as for advice on whether to go to court at all. There are no trained counsellors, but JMS activists learn through experience.

The AIDWA then, has quite a different understanding of the oppression of women from that of the AIWC, and criticizes the lack of focus in the perception and functioning of the NFIW. However, the tensions inherent in theoretically accommodating 'gender' within 'class' do tend to the subsuming of the former within the latter in the AIDWA's ideology - as with the dismissing as 'middle class' of any concern with personal liberty and the viewing of rape wholly as a class weapon. This tension, it

62 For a discussion of this Bill, see Conclusion.

should be noticed, is evident also in NFIW's characterisation of women's oppression.

Of course, this opinion of AIDWA is derived from very scanty material and cannot be considered as more than a personal impression until more rigorous data - collection can be done. It would be interesting to examine whether in actual practice the AIDWA transcends its theoretical tendency to see social reality primarily in terms of class conflict, so that gender oppression within the working class and in socialist societies remains invisible.

To sum up, while there is a strong presence of women in politics in India, not all of their participation adds up to a women's movement. In struggles which oppose power relations oppressing all women, as for instance in the anti price rise movement, a unified initiative expressing a women's perspective is evident. Here a women's movement can be seen to exist. Though AIWC and NFIW differed on matters of detail, they were agreed that rising prices must be combated by a common front of women. Another instance of such a struggle is that against the Muslim Women Bill.

However, within struggles to transform structures of power which oppress both men and women, the political action of women is determined more by their situation

within that structure than by their situation as women. The JP movement is an example of such a struggle, in which some women participated, and AIWC and NFIW did not, but all the three sets of responses were influenced by varying political reasons.

It is also to be noted that neither organization questions the oppressive nature of the family or the inevitability of the sexual division of labour. These issues have been of no significance in Indian politics.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS: AITUC, INTUC, CITU

The number of women in trade unions forms a small percentage of the total number of working women in India. Yet it is important to study their struggles, their participation in trade union activity, and the extent to which trade unions in turn are sensitive to political issues arising out of gender. The crucial role that trade unions play in struggles to transform unequal relations of power should place them in a position which makes them specially responsive to the double load of oppression borne by women workers in a capitalist society. This chapter considers whether trade unions are in fact responsive to this aspect. Three trade unions are studied, the All India Trade Union Conference (AITUC), the Indian National Trade Union Conference (INTUC) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). These are the three largest unions in India, AITUC with a membership of 18 lakhs affiliated to the CPI, INTUC with a membership of 33 lakhs, to the Congress(I) and CITU with a membership of 15 lakhs to the CPI(M).¹

1 Figures compiled by the Ministry of Labour, quoted in Indian Worker, January 8, 1979, Vol. XXVII, No. 14.

These trade unions have been studied on the basis of their weekly journals, INTUC's Indian Worker, AITUC's Trade Union Records, CITU's Working Class and Voice of the Working Woman, and some pamphlets produced by these unions on specific issues. Thus, as has been stressed in the Introduction, the data base of this study is limited. At the same time, it is sufficient to draw certain legitimate generalizations of a preliminary nature. Also, the focus on trade union membership, particularly of three specific unions, will necessarily exclude the struggles of women workers who are not trade union members. Hence it would be well to be constantly aware of the limited field this chapter encompasses.

The first section of this chapter draws a picture of the falling levels of the employment of women since 1921, and examines the factors responsible for this. In particular, the role of protective legislation in inhibiting women's employment is studied - the patriarchal assumptions on which it is based, and the contrary pulls of the needs of capital and male privilege which it embodies.

Next, the gender-blindness of labour history in the West is focused upon. Where women's workplace struggles have been considered worthy of notice they are belittled in comparison to men's struggles as being short-

sighted and emotional. This is equally true of studies of trade unions in India, discussed in the next section.

The chapter then goes on to study the perceptions of class struggle and patriarchy of AITUC, INTUC and CITU. Finally, the issue of equal pay for equal work is studied, as a reliable indicator of the position of women within the trade union movement. This is done with particular reference to the views of AITUC, INTUC and CITU.

Women and Employment in India

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) classified women workers into two broad categories according to the degree of organization and nature of problems of their sectors of employment - the organized and unorganized sectors. The organized sector is characterised by capital intensive technology, relatively higher wages, large scale operations and corporate or governmental organization. The unorganised sector has labour-intensive technology, small-scale operations using traditional methods, and lower wages. In the organized sector wages are usually protected by labour legislation and trade union activity; in the unorganized sector there is easier entry, but less job security and lower earnings. The former includes the entire public sector of services

and industry as well as that part of the private sector which is regulated. The latter includes agriculture as well as various industries and services.

The census of 1981 showed that of the 63.6 million women employed (that is, 19.8 per cent of the total female population and 26 per cent of the total work force), 94 per cent is employed in the unorganized sector. Only 6 per cent of the female work force is in the organized sector, where women form 12.2 per cent of the total work force, and 7.5 per cent of the membership of unions submitting returns.²

These figures are given in the table below:

Number of women employed (63.6 million) as

<u>Percentage of total female population</u>	<u>Percentage of total work force</u>
19.8	26

Percentage of 63.6 million women employed in organized sector - 6

In organized sector,

Percentage of total work force - 12.2

Percentage of membership of unions submitting returns - 7.5

There has been a consistent decline in the total employ-

2 Figures from Indian Labour Year Book, 1984. Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government of India.

ment of women since 1921, both in percentage of workers to total female population and in their percentage to the total labour force. Between 1972-73 and 1977-78, women lost 4.8 million jobs, while the employment of men went up by 7.4 million.³

The reasons for the falling work participation rate of women are mechanisation, which pushes out women who generally lack alternative qualifications and training, the decline in handicrafts, increasing pressure of population on agriculture and migration from the rural sector.⁴ The Labour Bureau in the Ministry of Labour has reached a similar conclusion. It has found that rationalization, automation and modernization have adversely affected women's employment in organized industries like jute, silk, mica, food processing.⁵

3 See Towards Equality, Report of the CSWI, 1974, Chapter V, "Roles, rights and opportunities for economic participation" and H. Pais, "Employment of Women in India: Recent Trends", National Labour Institute Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 3, 1984.

4 Towards Equality, op.cit.

5 Neerja Chowdhury, 'First Victims of Mechanisation' The Statesman, November 25, 1985.

It should be noted that even within the generally falling levels of employment for all workers, the closing of avenues for women workers has been greater because of these factors. There are in addition, policies followed by employers which actively militate against the employment of women. As recently as 1983 for example, the Kerala government was directed by the High Court to remove the discriminatory statute denying women jobs in Class IV government service. Evidently, the unconstitutional statute came to light only when two affected women moved court.⁶ Another such instance is the voluntary retirement scheme of Bharatiya Coking Coal, by which a male or female worker can choose to retire and nominate a male dependent in his or her place.⁷ While only elderly males generally give up their jobs, women are pressurised to give their jobs to male relatives by being transferred indiscriminately and being put on night duty in contravention of the Mines Act.

The next section studies the role of protective

6 Vimal Balasubramanyan, 'Biology and Gender Bias', EPW, May 18, 1985, Vol. XX, No. 20.

7 Manoshi Mitra, 'Women and Class Struggle, Tribal Women's Struggles in Chotanagpur', paper presented at the National Seminar on A Decade of Women's Movement in India, SNTD Women's University, Bombay, 1985.

legislation like the Mines Act mentioned above, in affecting women's employment.

Protective Legislation

The provisions relating to women in two of the major acts of this kind are (a) The Factories Act of 1948 which prohibits the employment of women in certain parts of the factory which are deemed hazardous and in operations which expose persons to injury, poisoning or disease; (b) The Mines Act of 1952 by which women may not be employed underground or at night.

Such provisions to protect the life and health of female workers are certainly necessary, but surely they are necessary for all workers. Any demand for the relaxation of these provisions so as to expand women's employment would in effect be a demand for the right to be equally exploited with men in sharing their unprotected conditions of work. This is why in Britain, in the face of the Tory Government's proposal to repeal such legislation, it has been suggested instead that the labour movement should fight for its extension ~~to~~ the hours and conditions of work of male workers too.⁸

8 Michele Barrett, Womens' Oppression Today, Verso, London, 1980, p. 171.

It has also been argued that the economic obligations on employers of maternity benefits, maintenance of creches and other special facilities for female workers are largely responsible for the decline in women's employment. In fact, the Labour Bureau in 1977 established that the monetary burden for such provisions was negligible compared to employers' other expenses, i.e. 0.02 to 1.8 per cent of the total wage bill. This has been corroborated by other studies.⁹

The focus of the chapter therefore, is on another aspect of protective legislation, that is, its use as a deliberate strategy to reduce competition for male workers. It is argued that women's precarious position in economic production, their dependence on men, and the restriction of the domestic role in the family to women can be explained at least partly by protective legislation.¹⁰ For instance, a Commission appointed in 1884 to investigate the operation of the 1881 Factory Act recommended that the number of working hours for women be restricted to eleven. This was to enable the female worker to go home and perform her household duties

9 Neerja Chowdhury, op.cit.

10 See Jane Lewis, 'The Debate on Sex and Class', New Left Review No. 149, January/February 1985.

which would 'promote the general health of the whole body of workers'. Similarly, prohibiting night work was decided upon because otherwise 'her home will be neglected.... The children will be either left at home uncared for or brought to the mill which may affect their helath'.¹¹ Thus it is assumed that housework is the women's natural and primary domain.

In the history of the labour movement in Britain it has been found that male workers resisted the wholesale entrance of women and children into the labour force and sought to restore the disrupted family life. Men therefore reserved union protection for men and argued for protective legislation for women and children.¹² As Sally Alexander puts it, 'The history of production under capitalism from a feminist perspective, is not simply the class struggle between the producer and the owners of the means of production. It is also the deve-

11 Shahnaz Anklasaria, 'Why Life is one long struggle', The Statesman, July 16, 1985.

12 Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more progressive Union' in Lydia Sargent (ed.), Women and Revolution: a Discussion on the Unhappy Marriage between Marxism and Feminism, Pluto Press, London, 1981.

Sarah Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement, Davis - Poynter, London, 1980.

lopment of a particular form of the sexual division of labour in relation to that struggle'.¹³

The conclusion seems inescapable that such protective legislation was responsible for much of the diminution of women's share in employment involving as it did the assumption that the relegation of women to domesticity and child care was natural and desirable. At the same time, the state has not been averse to lifting protective legislation in its own interests. In mines, the gradual reduction of women working underground began in 1929, in response to a depression in the coal industry from 1909 to 1920. A total ban was imposed in 1939 but this ban was lifted for a short period during the Second World War when increased production was necessary.¹⁴

Socialist countries too, are aware of the manner in which protective legislation restricts employment for a large section of the work force. In the Yugoslav textile industry, the introduction of new technology requires machines to run twenty four hours but since women are restricted from working at night they are being

13 Sally Alexander, 'Women's Work in 19th Century London, A Study of the Years 1820-50', in Anne Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (ed.), The Rights and Wrongs of Women, Penguin, 1976.

14 Manoshi Mitra, op.cit.

thrown out of employment. So attempts are being made to decrease the hazards and inconveniences of women working at night - meals, day-care centres for children to allow women to sleep during the day, and other measures to fight sexual harassment and so on.¹⁵ But it will be noted that even in Yugoslavia the sexual division of labour appears to be taken as unchangeable and natural.

It is interesting to note that the ILO is considering ensuring protective legislation for 'workers with family obligations' rather than for women.

The INTUC opposes such legislation as unduly restrictive. This is in keeping with the Congress government's move to withdraw the ban on women workers going underground and working on the third shift in mines. The AITUC and CITU are against the removal of restrictions as they understand such a withdrawal to be in the interests of profit, and not intended to increase the volume of employment for women.¹⁶ However, the complexities of

15 . Vida Tomscic, Member of the Yugoslav Council of Federation and President of the Republic of Slovenia, at a discussion in New Delhi organised by the Research Group on Women's Studies, Delhi University, November 8, 1985.

16 Maitrayee Chaudhuri, 'Participation of Women in the Indian Trade Union Movement', (unpublished), M.Phil. dissertation, JNU, 1981.

this issue have never been part of any debate in the trade union movement in India. The withdrawal of protective legislation for women altogether would not only free employers from the responsibility of ensuring hazard-free work environments but also keep wages low for everyone. These two effects could be combated by organizing female workers and demanding extension of protective legislation to all workers. However, patriarchal social relations divide the working class, allowing one part (men) to be bought off at the expense of the other (women). The existence of protective legislation for women alone ensures a larger share of the job market for men. It also minimises the danger of the undermining of male authority in the home through women earning wages separately from men. Thus, protective legislation reflects in miniature all the tensions within the intermeshing of class and gender oppression at the work-place.

Women Workers and Labour History

As noted earlier, 19.8 per cent of the female population of India has paid employment, and an even smaller number of them are members of trade unions. In 1981, the percentage of women members to the total membership of

registered unions submitting returns was as low as 7.5 per cent. The figures for specific unions are not available but a sample survey of 580 CITU unions taken in 1979 showed that 18 per cent of the membership and less than 1 per cent of the office bearers and executive committee members were female.¹⁷

Before we go into the reasons for the low rate of participation in trade unions, it would be useful to consider the characterization of women workers in Marxist tradition and labour history. Michele Barrett has pointed out that for Marx the typical wage-labourer was male. Not only did Marx refer to women and children as "that mighty substitute for labour and labourers" in his discussion of the introduction of machinery, but he also stated that the value of labour power is determined not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the adult labourer but also "his" family.¹⁸ This notion of women's dependence on a male wage persists even in the face of evidence that most women workers support their families, and that many households both in India and the West, are female-headed. Such a view has led to the point where in Britain, trade unions support a family wage system in

17 Fight Unitedly for the cause of Indian Working Women, CITU, 1979.

18 Capital, Vol. I, London, 1980, p. 395, Quoted by Barrett, op.cit., p. 125.

which a male breadwinner earns a wage adequate to support a wife and family.¹⁹ As a result women have remained invisible in labour history. As Sarah Boston notes in the context of Britain, not only has the history of the trade union movement been one of struggle between workers and employers (ultimately the state) in which women have shared, but in addition it has been one of struggle by women for recognition by male trade unionists, of women's fight for the right to be equal members within the unions.²⁰

Generally, women's workplace struggles are considered to be more short-sighted in their aims than those of men, to reflect a more rudimentary understanding of the realities of class struggle, and to be concerned with issues seen as extra-political, that is, the betterment of the lives of their children and fulfilling domestic obligations rather than with a broader commitment to the betterment of workers as a whole. To begin with, it is questionable to what extent all male workers are motivated by this broader commitment. More fundamentally, if women are indeed concerned with the lives of their children and with fulfilling domestic obligations, it is

19 Barrett, op.cit., p. 135.

20 Sarah Boston, op.cit.

difficult to accept that this concern is in contradiction to a broader commitment to all workers. This is where one recognizes the significance of Nancy Hartsock's analysis,²¹ which uncovers the reality of social relations operating at a deeper level than that of production, that is, at the level of reproduction. If women are systematically responsible for a particular set of activities which are crucial for the functioning of society, then it follows that the consciousness arising from these activities is of equal relevance to society. Motivations arising from this cannot be dismissed as extra-political.

Another factor is the differential location of men and women in wage work. It is likely to be women's inferior class and market positions which form the basis for their lower rates of union membership and activism than the factors operating simply because they are women. That is, a different understanding of women's attitudes to trade union activity might be possible if the context of work rather than the gender composition of the workforce were to be stressed upon as the factor determining the frequency and type of militant action.²² In other

21 Discussed in Chapter I, 'Theoretical Framework'.

22 Purcell and Brown in Siltanen and Stanworth (ed.), Women and the Public Sphere, Hutchinson and Co. London, 1984.

words, if men were employed in the inferior and lower-paid categories of jobs in which women are segregated, it is possible their levels of trade union activism would be equally low. It has also been found in some case studies in Britain that where the segregation of women into less-skilled, lower-paid jobs ensures that the interests of male and female workers diverge, male workers often use union power to preserve the differentials that favour men rather than to erode such occupational divisions.²³

Michele Barrett has outlined the strategies a labour movement could use, a consideration of which would be enlightening in this context. The first would be to use the strength of groups whose skills and essential functions enable them to bargain for higher wages and better conditions of work. The bargaining power of these groups would also help to pull up less well-placed groups and to raise the standard of living of the working class as a whole. However this strategy depends on differentials and exclusionary practices and tends to reinforce the vulnerable position of women workers. The British labour movement has followed this strategy, and it is also endorsed by Marx who in his discussion of the dilution of skill which accompanies the substitution of

female and child labour for male, argues that organized male workers could successfully resist these tendencies.

The second strategy which Barrett sees as more likely to benefit labour in the long run, is to attempt to establish a minimum wage for all workers, irrespective of skill and sectional bargaining power, and thereby reduce the likelihood of undercutting and substitution of cheap labour. This strategy, since it does not protect sectional interests however, has naturally been less popular.²⁴

Women Workers and Trade Unions in India

It is not uncommon to find, in books entitled 'Trade Unions and Politics in India' or 'Trade Union Movement in India', no reference to women workers at all.²⁵ Ramaswamy's book is still more explicit, it is called 'The Worker and His Union'.²⁶ Where women are acknowledged at all, their low rates of participation in trade union activity are attributed to 'apathy'. This

24 Barrett, op.cit., p. 170.

25 Harold Crouch, Manaktala, Bombay, 1966, and Sohail Jawaid, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1982 respectively.

26 Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1977.

apathy has been explained by Mathur and Mathur, as due to women being more uneducated and illiterate than men, owing to the bonds of religion and social traditions and to the pressure of domestic responsibilities.²⁷ Since these reasons are very commonly put forward to explain why women are less active in trade unions than men, it is worthwhile exploring the ideological presuppositions which underlie them. To begin with, illiteracy as a factor inhibiting trade union membership is a contentious one. If its negative effects were strong, there ought to have been maximum unionization and militancy among white collar workers. Such is not however, the case. Hence, to attribute the lower participation of women to illiteracy is to leave unquestioned the patriarchal attitudes and structures which inhibit their participation and keep them illiterate in the first place. As to the bonds of religion and social traditions, it is true that women because of their role in the family and in the socialization of children do internalize such traditions to a greater degree than men. However, men are not free of such traditions either, and if their inhibitions can be broken down by a strong trade union movement, so can those of women.

27 Trade Union Movement in India, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1962, p. 71.

That women workers are still bound by such traditions (if they are) only points to the lesser degree to which the trade union movement has mobilized them. A study of women employed in mines, carried out by the Labour Bureau of the Indian government in 1979 found that 55 per cent of the women were ignorant about legislative provisions meant for their welfare.²⁸ This, in spite of the fact that women in the sample formed 13 per cent of the membership of trade unions, when their percentage to the total number of women sampled was 16 per cent. This shows a relatively high degree of trade union membership, but evidently the unions had not educated their women members about their rights. Disinterest on the part of trade unions then, is as responsible for the low membership of women as 'apathy' on the part of women. One study has shown that while in Ahmedabad women are the most loyal members of the Textile Labour Association, the TLA colluded with the Ahmedabad Mill Owners' Association to retrench female workers in the 1920s.²⁹ This claim is also made by an activist Vibhuti Patel - that

28 Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines, Labour Bureau, Government of India, 1979.

29 Renana Jhabvala, Closing Doors, Setu Publishers, Ahmedabad, 1985. Cited by Neerja Chowdhury, 'First Victims of Mechanisation', op.cit.

in the textile industry trade unions have connived with employers to freeze the level of female employment or to replace women with men at times of rationalization and mechanisation.³⁰

Domestic responsibilities certainly inhibit women's participation in union activity, but the effort should be directed at questioning this sexual division of labour. There has however, been no attempt at such a questioning either by the trade union movement or by studies of this movement.

Such studies fail to derive a correct picture also because they survey women workers alone. For instance, Nilima Acharya's study of the Jamshedpur branch of Life Insurance Employees showed that women union members took part only to the extent of attending meetings in times of crisis or joining processions for a charter of demands.³¹ However, she has provided no information about the degree of participation of male members - it is quite probable that a majority of men too were only active to this degree.

30 Vibhuti Patel, 'Women's Liberation in India', New Left Review, 153, September/October 1985.

31 "Women Workers in Organized and Unorganized Sectors in India", Indian Worker, March 9, 1981, Vol. XXIX, No. 23.

Mathur and Mathur also go into the reasons why employment of women for wages outside the home "is not desirable and is not conducive to national and family prosperity."³² That is, "the effects of lack of maternal care on the development of a child's personality The increasing number of still-born children, abortions, miscarriages.... in western countries...." Of course, this book was written twenty years ago, but this kind of attribution of the domestic sphere as natural to women is by no means an extinct attitude. A special article on women and the Indian labour movement in INTUC's journal Indian Worker during International Women's Year notes that the Indian trade union movement is being run by and large through gate meetings and by presenting cases in industrial courts and tribunals. However, "it is difficult for women workers to address gate meetings where workers of one shift are going to the factory and those from the others coming out. It is also difficult for them to prove their worth before the Labour Courts and tribunals because of the time and strain that preparation of a case entails".³³ Since it is not specified why exactly these activities

32 Op.cit., p. 72.

33 J.C. Dikshit, Indian Worker, Anniversary Number, May 5, 1975.



are "difficult" for women, one must assume the author is referring to some natural delicacy in women and to their having to shoulder the entire responsibility of household work. This last is, of course, assumed to be inescapably part of the duties of women. The real reason for the fewer numbers of women leaders within trade unions seems to be in the one sentence the author does not elaborate upon - "It is also true that no trade union organization has seriously and in an organized manner taken up the job of preparing a cadre of women leaders..."

Vimal Ranadive definitely sees the lack of conscious and persistent efforts of trade unions to organize women around equal wages, maternity benefits and retrenchment as the main reason for their low membership. She notes that in many instances the leadership of trade unions has gone to the extent of discouraging women from coming forward to be on executive committees and the like.³⁴ She suggests therefore that a committee of women trade unionists be formed in each industry under the guidance of their respective unions. Another study notes that not one trade union is known to have prosecuted a factory owner for ignoring the health problems his fac-

³⁴ Ranadive, op.cit., pp. 65-6.

tory causes to his female employees.³⁵

The AITUC, INTUC and CITU - Perception of Class
Struggle and Patriarchy

The founding of the first trade union in India is attributed to Anasuyaben Sarabhai. On her return from England she formed an organization of textile mill workers in Ahmedabad in 1917. She remained President of this organization until her death.³⁶ The municipal street sweepers of Pune, the largest group of employed women in that city were also among the first workers in India to organize themselves. They formed a union in 1930, although their attempts to organize had begun in the 19th century.³⁷ Gail Omvedt noted that the sweepers gave hundred per cent participation in strikes, turning out for sit-ins, fasts or demonstrations. In fact, she found the union to be practically the only political force in the lives of these women; they know little about contemporary political leaders and had been hardly affected by the national movement.

35 Shahnaz Anklesaria, 'Factories Ignore Workers' Health', The Statesman, July 2, 1984.

36 J.C. Dikshit, 'Women and the Indian Labour Movement', op.cit.

37 Gail Omvedt, We will smash this Prison, Orient Longman, 1979.

The AITUC was formed in 1920 as a united platform of the Indian proletariat to conduct its struggle against imperialist domination and the rule of capital. Many of the founders of this central organization of the working class and many of those who led it later were leaders of the national movement, over which the bourgeoisie had established hegemony. At the end of the Second World War, in 1945, the Communists who were in effective control of the AITUC, revised its constitution. The revised constitution declared the establishment of a socialist state and the nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange as the primary aims of the organization. The trade union was described as an organ of class struggle, the class-war thesis was emphasized and the inevitability of proletarian revolution stressed. Echoing the stand of the CPI the AITUC attacked the first Five Year Plan, but supported the second in 1957. This was in line with the CPI's new policy of conditional cooperation with the Nehru Government. Finally in 1958, the declaration at Amritsar stated that the AITUC would, in the future, adhere to constitutional means.

During the growing mass upsurge of the early 40s the Congress was increasingly uneasy about the clear stand the AITUC was taking on the class struggle. In 1946

the Congress Ministry of Bombay passed the Industrial Relations Act which was strongly anti-working class and designed to limit their struggles through the machinery of arbitration. This Act was condemned by the AITUC at its annual session in Calcutta. In 1947 the INTUC was formed as a separate labour organization to bring about "peaceful change" through "democratic methods".³⁸

Two different traditions were represented in the INTUC. The strongest single union at the inaugural meeting was the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad, which had adopted a distinct philosophy of industrial relations based on the teachings and practice of Mahatma Gandhi. The second tradition was that of those unionists who were previously in AITUC. This group was more influenced by western socialist ideas and it emphasised the right to strike and the need to fight for workers' rights. The INTUC endorses the Congress programme for a "socialist pattern of society" and in practice toes the line of the ruling party.

) The CITU was formed after the split in the Communist

38 Resolution passed at Conference convened by Congress Majdoor Sevak Sangh in 1947, moved by S.C. Banerjee, thrice president of AITUC. Cited in Sukomal Sen, 'Working Class of India, History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1970, K.P. Bagchi and Co., Calcutta, 1979, p. 409.

Party, in 1970 when a large number of members of the AITUC who were frustrated with the "class collaboratio-
nist policy" of the dominant leadership met in Goa to
form a separate organization. Jyoti Basu in his welcome
address declared that the AITUC had "been transformed
into an instrument of surrender to the bourgeoisie."³⁹ The
objects of the CITU according to the draft constitution
were to establish a socialist state in India, to socia-
lise and nationalise the means of production, distribution
and exchange, and to ameliorate the conditions of the
working class. The state is viewed as the executive
committee of the bourgeoisie. The aim of the CITU is the
establishment of people's democracy and the developing of
a mass revolutionary movement through the combining of
parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles.

The INTUC sees its role in terms of social service,
that is, adult education classes, cooperative credit
societies, support to the policy of prohibition and so on.
Its main plans are compulsory adjudication, abjuring of
strike action for collective bargaining, support of
nationalisation and reliance on government machinery. The
AITUC and CITU, while they realize the need for remedial
measures, emphasize the structural inequalities of the

39 Cited in Sukomal Sen, op.cit., pp. 455-56.

system. In practice, however, the AITUC too, tends to follow the reformist line. For instance, the report of the Commission on Unorganized Workers at the 32nd session of the AITUC (1983) notes, "In fact, the Commission felt that a guaranteed minimum wage will expand the internal market and keep our consumer industry active and growing". This statement reflects AITUC's understanding of the class struggle - that minimum wages should be demanded not because labour is the source of value and because workers have a right to a minimum standard of living, but because it will benefit the consumer industry.

None of these unions considers with any seriousness the hold of patriarchal ideology over the working class or over the trade union leadership itself. In their weekly journals, workers are always referred to as workmen and in the masculine pronoun. There is occasional mention in these journals, of women workers who have played heroic roles in strikes. However, since such reports are few, they tend rather to reinforce the impression that women rarely participate in union activities so that when they do, it rates a special mention. There are instances such as the fight of some women workers of Ritz Continental Hotel, Calcutta, who had been retrenched in 1976,⁴⁰ a demonstration by working and middle class

women at Vishakapatnam before the Collector's office demanding restoration of the cut in rice quota and reduction in its price in January 1975,⁴¹ and the arrest of some women belonging to the families of the workers of a textile mill in Indore who had been agitating for the opening of the mill.⁴² Apart from isolated instances like this, however, where women alone have agitated, it would appear from reading the journals of the trade unions that the general workforce is composed entirely of men. The last instance does not even refer to women workers, but to the families of workmen. In fact, there tends to be a general emphasis on such women outside the workforce as forming a reserve force of trade unions. The railway strike of 1974, the movement for democratic rights in Durgapur and the strike of South Eastern Railway workers in 1970, and many other struggles of workers have witnessed the active involvement of women of the striking workers' families in organizing pickets, taking part in demonstrations, facing police attacks and so on.

However, it is precisely because these women are playing their roles within the established familial structure that trade unions find it easier to recognize their

41 Trade Union Record, January 9, 1975, Vol. XXXII, No. 1.

42 Indian Worker, June 6, 1977, Vol. XXV, No. 36.

participation. Without in any way reducing the importance of the part these women play in workers' struggles it is necessary to recognize that they are not stepping out of the limits of their positions as dependent daughters and wives of workers. The importance of distinguishing between the role of women outside the workforce and of women as workers becomes clear when we consider the kind of conclusions that can be drawn from over-emphasizing the significance of the former. It becomes possible to argue that for family reasons women can be relied on as a reserve force of trade unions and that participation through the family unit as wives, sisters and mothers of workers is an important structural basis of understanding women's role in trade unions.⁴³ To view the participation of women in trade union activity primarily in terms of a reserve force functioning in the family structure obscures the oppressive forces operating within that structure. It also prevents an examination of how far women workers are restricted from functioning on an equal footing with their male counterparts within trade unions.

INTUC's perception of women is along the paternalistic traditional lines of Gandhism. The education of women is seen as necessary so that families are better looked after and high efficiency maintained among workers.

⁴³ See for example, Maitrayee Chaudhari, op.cit.

Women are seen as excelling in certain spheres such as nursing, mid-wifery, teaching in elementary schools and the fine arts, and the vice president of INTUC in a speech to the Rajya Sabha suggested that in International Women's Year certain specific occupations should be reserved for women. These occupations were teaching, nursing and social service. Other articles in Indian Worker reflect the understanding that homework is a woman's responsibility and so solutions are sought in terms of lightening her load through labour-saving devices and reduction in working hours so that women can attend to their homes. The gentleness of women is expected to help the trade union movement become tolerant, patient and non-violent.⁴⁴

Since the understanding of women of AITUC and CITU is set within the framework of the class structure, their perception is less paternalistic than that of the INTUC. A resolution passed by AITUC at its 32nd session in 1983 noted, "Feudal and semifeudal attitudes to women are

44 A representative selection of articles from Indian Worker would be Dewan Subhash Chander, 'Modern Education and Gandhiji', Gandhi Jayanti Number, 1977; S.W. Dhabe, 'Women's Emancipation', September 30, 1974, Vol. XXIII; V. Srinivasan, 'The Emancipation of Working Women', February 21, 1977, Vol. XXV, No. 21; D.P. Ghiya, 'Work among Women', 'Gandhi Jayanti Number 1970; G. Ramanujam, 'Women's Healing Touch', February 16, 1981, Vol. XXVIII, No. 31.

widespread which also results in a lack of seriousness in the matter of taking up the special problems of women workers or in involving them in trade union activities." Earlier at the 31st session the AITUC, while calling on women workers to come forward and join the trade also called upon the unions to help women shoulder more responsibilities in their respective unions.

CITU has a journal called Voice of the Working Woman which takes up various issues which affect women workers and in 1979 held a national convention of working women. The report of this convention noted that even in industries and occupations in which women were a sizeable group, they were not represented in the leading bodies of the union. This was attributed not to any natural disinclination on their part, but to social attitudes which restricted the role of women.⁴⁵ Particularly after the declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year, all three unions have been holding conventions on working women in different parts of the country and passing resolutions on different aspects of women's employment. A specimen resolution from each union is given below -

- (a) AITUC in 1980 at its 31st session demanded the setting up of special machinery to implement the

⁴⁵ Fight Unitedly for the Cause of Indian Working Women, op.cit., p. 33.

Equal Remuneration Act, ensuring the security of employment of women in industries where they are already employed, eradication of discriminatory practices in regard to employment of women, on-the-job training to working women to improve their skills and protection from harassment particularly at their places of work.

- (b) The Working Committee of the INTUC submitted a memorandum on various issues concerning labour and the national economy to the Union Finance Minister in 1980. This memorandum had a note on women workers, pointing to the falling rate of women's employment in industries and demanding more employment opportunities for women, facilities for pre-employment training in selected industries and services, and creches, day-care institutions and working women's hostels.

The INTUC has a Women's Wing, whose activities from 1971 to 1984 according to the reports of the sessions, have been mainly the organization of seminars, conferences and educational and training programmes, and participation in the Indian Committee for the "celebration" of International Women's Year.

- (c) The CITU at its working committee meeting in Decem-

ber 1975 adopted a resolution criticizing the Ordinance on Equal Pay for Equal Work as inadequate in terms of implementation and ^{demanding} the protection of women workers from the threat of retrenchment following its introduction.

While resolutions have been passed and convocations and seminars held, there is no evidence of a single strike or agitation which was called on the issue of equal wages or the non-provision of maternity benefits and child care facilities or the retrenchment of women workers in the wake of the Equal Remuneration Act. Nor is there any discussion at all about the exploitative sexual division of labour in the home - women's 'household responsibilities' are often cited as a reason for low trade union participation but never questioned.

The issue of equal pay for equal work is one which best reflects the position of women within the trade union movement and is worth considering in some detail.

The Issue of Equal Remuneration for Equal Work

'Minimum wage-fixing machinery' published by the ILO summarised the views on minimum wages held in different parts of the world and there was general agreement that the living wage should enable the male earner to

provide for himself and his family.⁴⁶ This view of the wage as paid to a male labourer to compensate him for his labour and to enable him to look after his wife and children was also taken at the 15th Session of the Indian Labour Conference held in 1957. This session determined certain norms for calculating a need-based minimum wage after a tripartite conference between employers, government and labour. These norms included taking into account minimum food requirements on the basis of a recommended intake of calories, clothing, house rent, fuel and miscellaneous requirements. However, the "standard working-class family" was to be taken to comprise "three consumption units for one earner, the earnings of women, children and adolescents being disregarded".⁴⁷ Later these norms were not formally ratified by the government, but they continue to be upheld by trade unions as the standards which ought to prevail. In 1983, the Commission on Unorganised Workers at the 32nd Session of the AITUC, for example, endorsed the same criteria for the determination of the minimum wages. This propagation of the myth of women supported by their husbands always militates against

46 Report of the Committee on fair wages 1947-1949, ILO.

47 Cited in Sukomal Sen, op.cit., pp. 441-42.

their getting equal wages for equal work. Thus the All India Industrial Tribunal stated that ".... the female worker generally belongs to a family group, with at least one male earner as its head...." and so the Tribunal felt it was quite fair if the female workers' wage was fixed at about 75 per cent of that of the male worker "since the special amenities enjoyed by women like maternity benefits, provision of creches etc. make up for the deficiency."⁴⁸

To begin with the male-headed nuclear family is certainly not the norm among the working classes in India. As many as 97.2 million households are headed by women in India.⁴⁹ This pattern has also been corroborated by another study among working class families in Bombay. It is not the nuclear family with one wage-earner that is the 'average' family unit but the extended family with two or more wage-earners.⁵⁰ So the need to work is urgent for a vast number of women.

The historical development of the idea of the 'natu-

48 Cited in Vimal Ranadive, op.cit., p. 3.

49 Shahnaz Anklesaria, 'Why Life is One Long Struggle', op.cit.

50 'Working Class women and working class families in Bombay: Report of a Survey', Economic and Political Weekly, July 22, 1978.

ral' family being nuclear and male headed has been traced in an unpublished study.⁵¹ By Indian custom sons were required to look after their parents, widowed sisters and distant and needy relatives. The definition of a 'natural' family as nuclear, which was adopted by the family budget surveys of the 1920s and 30s, was therefore alien to the Indian understanding. This definition followed the articulation by the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj of a reformulated version of motherhood, downplaying women's role as workers, although at the time women comprised 22 per cent of the workforce. In one-third of the 'natural' families women were earning along with their men for survival. In spite of this, a family wage began to be seen as the man's wage which would suffice for the family. Thus, the whole concept of the nuclear family with the woman as mother and dependent reflected an ideological trend rather than reality. But this ideology is what motivates policies which cater to a starkly different reality.

Moreover, maternity benefits and creches can hardly be viewed as "special amenities" for women. Biologically women do give birth but it is the operating of a particular gender ideology which makes them solely responsible for the care and upbringing of children. As anthropolo-

51 Radha Kumar's study on women workers of Bombay, Cited by Neerja Chowdhury, op.cit.

gists like Margaret Mead have established, other role patterns for the sexes have been known to exist in other cultures.

Another major argument which operates against equal wages for women is that their output and efficiency are lower than those of men. The Committee on the Status of Women in India found that wage discrimination was in fact due to the restrictive confinement of women to limited types of work. Certain jobs are traditionally classified as women's work and then lower wage rates are fixed for them. In plantations, for example, women pluckers were paid less than men because the management claimed there was a difference in the minimum output. However, the Committee found the majority of women were qualifying for incentive schemes by producing higher outputs than the fixed minimum. Evidently, the difference in wages was not justified. Thus the feminisation of the production process reinforces discrimination in wages. Where men are employed for the same job they are usually placed in a higher category.⁵² Joan Mencher and K. Saradamoni have shown in their study of the rice growing districts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal how lower wages are paid for transplanting than for ploughing and harvesting.

52 Towards Equality, op.cit., Chapter V, "Roles, Rights and Opportunities for Economic Participation".

The former is an arduous and skilled task but because it has been traditionally a women's job it is lower paid.⁵³ This is quite understandable if one considers Barrett's argument that differences in pay for men and women are not only due to gender ideology which devalues women's work but also demonstrate Marx's point that wages depend on costs of reproduction rather than the value of goods reproduced.⁵⁴ Thus, because it is cheaper to reproduce the labour of women and children (partly because women are known to deprive themselves to feed their families) they are paid less.

India ratified the ILO Convention on Equal Pay in 1958 but the Equal Remuneration Ordinance was promulgated only in 1975. This was ratified later by Parliament and the Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1976. The provisions of this Act were (i) men and women workers doing the same work or work of a similar nature must be equally paid. "Same work or work of a similar nature" was defined as "work in respect of which the skill, effort and responsibility required are the same when performed under similar working conditions by a man or woman...".

(ii) There was to be no discrimination against women at

53 "Muddy Feet, Dirty Hands", EPW, Vol. XVII, No. 52, Review of Agriculture, December 1982.

54 Barrett, op.cit., p. 166.

the time of recruitment.

(iii) Employers defaulting were to be punished by a fine of upto Rs. 5000/- but there was no provision for imprisonment.

However, there was no automatic introduction of equal pay for equal work; the industries concerned would be notified by the government within a period of three years. This would give employers ample time to reorganise their work force in such a manner that jobs classified on the basis of sex could be reclassified in terms of higher and lower categories. Also, the term "same work or work of a similar nature" is capable of providing loopholes because women's employment is generally restricted to a few spheres where men do not work. Hence the demand in the USA for equal pay for "comparable" work, that is, comparable in terms of its value for the employer as well as in terms of the skill required to perform it. The Act moreover, did not ban retrenchment of women workers and thus large numbers of women did in fact, lose their jobs in the wake of the Act.

All three trade unions being studied have responded very favourably to the Act in terms of passing resolutions and drawing the attention of the government to lapses in complying with the Act. The General Secretary

of the Indian National Rural Labour Federation who was also Vice President of INTUC wrote to the Chief Ministers of five states in 1975 drawing their attention to the discriminatory provisions in the wages fixed by them for female workers in rural areas. If the disparity was not removed the INRLF would be 'constrained to launch an agitation' the General Secretary cautioned.⁵⁵ However, there is no information in subsequent issues of Indian Worker about the response of the concerned Chief Ministers and whether the disparity was indeed rectified. At any rate, no agitation was launched on the issue.

The President of the Tamil Nadu INTUC in a statement to the Press decried the action of plantation owners, reducing men's wages to those of women in the wake of the Act.⁵⁶ INTUC therefore appealed to the Tamil Nadu Government to see that the spirit of the Act was not violated.

The AITUC, at its 30th Session in 1976 welcomed the Act but drew attention to the distortions in its implementation. "In the tea plantations.... in the name of implementing the Act the managements have been depriving the women workers of their real wages or increasing their workload. Similar instances have been noted in the cons-

55 Indian Worker, May 19, 1975, Vol. XXIII, No. 32.

56 Ibid., November 15, 1976, Vol. XXV, No. 7.

truction industry, where.... the employers have even resorted to retrenchment of women workers.. to evade implementation of the Act... The Government has also not implemented the requirements of setting up the implementation machinery and advisory committees enjoined by the Act..." The AITUC demanded that these aspects be looked into and rectified.

In December 1975 the CITU working committee demanded further amendments to the ordinance-(a) a ban on retrenchment of women workers with effect from the date of its promulgation and immediate implementation of the ordinance without the grace period of three years, (b) Heavier punishments for lapses in complying with its provisions, (c) Withdrawal of the power of the government to declare unequal wages in certain occupations due to a factor other than sex, and (d) the implementation of the Ordinance to be supervised by Committees consisting of elected trade union representatives not those nominated by government.⁵⁷ In 1976, the CITU unions in plantations of Karnataka refused to sign an agreement with the management which replaced the words 'men' and 'women' by 'Grade-I' and 'Grade-II'. By this agreement Grade-I wages would be paid to men and Grade-II to women. A

memorandum protesting at this manoeuvre was sent to the Karnataka Government and the Union Labour Minister by the Karnataka Provincial Plantation Workers' Union.

These are only a few major examples of resolutions and memoranda, but the fact remains that there have been very few cases of complaints filed under the Equal Remuneration Act.⁵⁸ This is due to various factors - the greater vulnerability of women workers which makes them more cautious, and the lack of publicity given to the Act among women workers. Trade Unions have evidently not considered the issue of equal pay important enough to take up seriously. A report in the Financial Express at the time of the Ordinance said "In the present state of stabilised relationship between unions and managements in plantations the unions are able to perceive and privately admit, that but for some marginal exceptions, the nature of male, female and child employment in plantations is essentially based on occupational work logic and not sex discrimination, but are unwilling to take a public posture of this fact for fear they may appear as pro-

58 "Evolution of Changes in the Law relating to Women during the decade 1975-84" Indira Jaising, on behalf of the Lawyers Collective: Paper presented at the National Seminar on A Decade on Women's Movement in India, SNDT Women's University, Bombay, January, 1985.

management".⁵⁹

This report was unsubstantiated by interviews or names of specific unions, but its credibility bears up to scrutiny when one considers the actual actions taken by the trade unions to enforce the Act. As has been noted earlier, there has not been a single agitation or strike on the issue, although the Act continues to be more infringed than adhered to.

The picture that emerges is one in which trade unions would appear to be as embedded in patriarchal ideology as other organizations. I would like to make the point here that there is a qualitative difference in the perception of INTUC as opposed to that of AITUC and CITU. It is not my intention to obscure the differences in the views represented by them on the oppression of women. AITUC and CITU, viewing society in terms of class struggle, are able to understand prevailing attitudes on women as remnants of feudal ideology, whereas INTUC is able to do little more than state pious intentions while continuing to view women in the framework of 'traditional' Indian wife and mother.

Moreover, it is of vital importance to see that there are powerful movements within trade unions of the

59 'Equal Remuneration Ordinance', 1st February, 1976.

Left to pressurise the leadership to take up the specific nature of female workers' oppression. There are women's caucuses within CITU, and AITUC which have made special efforts in the last two to three years to recruit women, and have drawn up a charter of demands of women employees.⁶⁰ CITU's journal on women workers, Voice of the Working Woman, was started in 1980. In the issues spanning the last five years has been recorded a tremendous volume of struggle by women all over the country - peasants fighting against harassment by landlords, factory workers demanding better working conditions, middle class professional women striking for higher salaries and better conditions of living, air hostesses against discriminatory terms of employment. In the same period, CITU's official journal Working Class reflects none of this powerful political activity, so that in effect Working Class is the journal of CITU's male members and Voice of the female. The very founding of the journal however, points to the burgeoning consciousness within trade unions of the left that class and gender oppression feed on each other and must be fought simultaneously.

60 Vibhuti Patel, op.cit.

CHAPTER IV

SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR: SEWA AND WWF

Of India's estimated female labour force of 63.6 million, 60.4 per cent of the rural female work force and 44 per cent of the urban female work force are self-employed and the majority of self-employed women are in the informal sector.¹ The 6th Five Year Plan had estimated that wage-employment in the organized sector has limited scope and can absorb only 12 per cent of the estimated increase in the labour force over the plan period. The rest must find employment in the informal sector.²

This chapter studies two organizations of women in the informal sector, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Working Women's Forum (WWF), based in Ahmedabad and Madras respectively. These organizations seek to tackle the problems unique to self-employed women. The

1 Pushpa Sundar, 'Women's Employment and Organization Modes', Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Management, November, 1983.

2 Sixth Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, GOI, Chapter 27.

purpose here is to examine to what extent they are able to combat the power structures weighted against them at work as well as the gender oppression in the lives of their members.

After outlining the characteristics of women's employment in the informal sector, particularly those peculiar to the self-employed, SEWA and WWF are studied in terms of their origins, their grass-roots, non-hierarchical mode of organization and their activities. Finally, an assessment is made of their effectivity as political organizations.

Women's employment in the informal sector is based on three types of activities (i) home-based production which is either an extension of household activities like dairying, poultry keeping, food processing (Papads, idlis, masala making) or use of traditional craft skills for market production such as sari work, lace making, embroidery, (ii) retail trading and services such as flower and vegetable selling, old garment selling, laundering, catering of meals and (iii) home-based production using non-traditional and acquired skills as part of the ancillarisation of big industry. Here a part of the production process is put out by big production units to women who work at home in beedi-rolling, matchstick making, ceramics for example.

In this last kind of home-based production women do not make production decisions. They are paid a piece rate and have no control over the price of the product or the profit margin. They cannot be considered self-employed, unlike women engaged in the first two kinds of production where the women or their families own and control the productive assets, make the production decisions including pricing and the profit margin and generally handle all the stages of the production and distribution process themselves. Self-employment must then refer only to control over the production and distribution process as well as engagement in production.³

Therefore, only women engaged in home-based production and in trading and retail services qualify to be categorised as 'self-employed.' The major problems faced by self-employed women are: (a) shortage of capital, hence rented means of production, (b) shortage of raw materials leading to limited income, (c) inadequacy of place of work, (d) lack of suitable market place, and (e) indebtedness.

The difficulties associated with organizing such workers are unique - (a) the lack of specific employer-employee relations among the self-employed makes it

3 Pushpa Sundar, op.cit.

difficult to identify a particular person or organization to struggle against; (b) it is not easy to organize workers not concentrated at one work site; (c) protective legislation does not apply to the informal sector and so unions have little leverage; (d) traditionally unions have steered clear of self-employed workers also because their problems are more akin to those of employers than employees - shortage of raw materials, access to markets, exploitation by middle men.

Ela Bhatt has pointed out that trade unions have a negative attitude towards home-based workers.⁴ The unions feel that the growth of home-based workers undermines the union movement in the organized sectors and have often put forward proposals to ban home-based work. The issues which Bhatt stresses as crucial to tackling the problems of home-based workers are: (a) their invisibility in official and unofficial records. Research should highlight their social and economic conditions, (b) their inaccessibility to protection of law. Labour laws should be extended to all piece-rate workers by a Home-Based Workers Protection Bill, (c) impact on them of policy decisions and

4 Ela Bhatt, 'The Invisibility of Home-Based Work: The case of piece-rate workers in India', Paper presented at the Asian Regional Conference on Women and the Household, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi, January, 1985.

technological changes which often destroy the employment of thousands of workers. For example, a new type of shell-less cottonpod planted in Gujarat which put home-based cotton pod shellers out of work, or the decision of Public Sector Cement companies to use new jute bags instead of re sewn old ones, which affected the employment of bag stitchers; (d) their distance from the labour movement. Stronger unions should take these workers as their members especially where the employer, directly or indirectly is a big company with a strong union.⁵

As we have seen earlier, the informal sector includes self-employment as well as putting out by big industries. In this chapter we are concerned only with the organizations of the self-employed because in the latter case workers are poorly organized. Trade unions have been set up only in some factory units and even these are not very effective. A common reaction to organization of workers has been to move the place of work and thus undermine trade union organization.⁶

Self-employed women however, engaged both in home-based production and in retail trading and services, have been organized into associations to provide cheap credit

5 *ibid.*

6 Isa Baud, 'Industrial Subcontracting - Effects of Putting Out System in India', Paper presented at Asian Regional Conference on Women and the Household, New Delhi, 1985.

and marketing facilities and to combat the exploitation of middle-men, traders and authorities. Two of the most well-known among such organizations are SEWA founded by Ela Bhatt in Ahmedabad in 1972 and WWF founded by Jaya Arunachalam in Madras in 1978.

Origins

SEWA was organized in 1972 after the women's wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA hereafter) in Ahmedabad undertook a detailed survey of unorganized self-employed women. According to the 1970 census, at least 45 per cent of Ahmedabad's labour force is comprised of unorganized workers. The survey revealed that 97 per cent of these women (engaged in the six occupations of garment-making, hand cart pulling, used garment dealing, vegetable vending, junk smithy and milk producing) lived in slums, 91 per cent were illiterate, 60 per cent in debt to money lenders, 78 per cent were married with an average of four children, and 70 per cent took their children to the work-site.⁷ These women were organized into SEWA which was permitted to register with the state of Gujarat as a trade union largely due to the backing

7 Kamla Bhasin, Breaking Barriers: A South Asian Experience of Training for Preparatory Development, Report of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development Programme for Regional Change Agents, FAO publication, Bangkok, 1979.

of the powerful TLA. However, the strains of working through a traditional male-dominated organization like the TLA reached a peak during the anti-reservation riots in Ahmedabad in 1981, when Ela Bhatt made a public statement in favour of Scheduled Castes. This was in violation of the TLA's policy of non-partisanship. Ms. Bhatt was dismissed as an employee of TLA and SEWA was ordered to move out of TLA premises. SEWA was also disaffiliated from TLA's central union, the National Labour Organization. Three and a half lakh rupees of TLA deposits were withdrawn from SEWA's cooperative bank.

The split between TLA and SEWA arose out of fundamental differences in their perception of women and of the self-employed. Ela Bhatt's statement during the riots was only the immediate cause. To begin with, TLA's conception of SEWA was limited. It did not feel a trade union should enter the areas of credit and training as SEWA did, because such work necessitates a more democratic organizational structure. TLA has a strict hierarchical organization and developmental activities such as credit would have meant a shift in the relationships between TLA leaders and SEWA organizers and members. Furthermore, SEWA organizers felt increasingly constrained by the feudal, patriarchal environment in TLA. The

behaviour expected of them by TLA leaders was reinforced by social norms. When they attempted to assert themselves they were accused of indiscipline, humiliated and threatened with dismissal. TLA's approach to solving workers' problems is to avoid confrontation, and it prides itself on the very few strikes it has had to organized over the years. SEWA however, developed a style of going out to working women in a more organized way and dealing with problems in a manner that often involves confrontation. Ela Bhatt has also pointed out that the TLA leadership holds basically patriarchal views on women and is blind to the problems of women workers.⁸ Between 1950 and 1970, notes Bhatt, which was one of TLA's strongest periods, the number of women workers in mills fell from 20 per cent to 3 per cent, but TLA was blind to this major development. Moreover, apart from Anasuyaben Sarabhai, the founder of TLA, and Ela Bhatt herself, there has never been a woman in a post higher than that of a clerk. Finally, TLA's disinterest in self-employed women could also be due to pressures from industrialists who have used the unorganized sector to depress wages in industry.

8 Personal correspondence to Jennefer Sebstad, 1981, cited in Struggle and Development among self-employed Women. A Report of SEWA, Ahmedabad. Prepared for USAID, Bureau for Science and Technology, Office of the Urban Development, March 1982, p. 234.

Despite the acrimonious split the two organizations have expressed a desire to coexist in peace. Since then SEWA has forged ahead in expanding its activities particularly in organizing producer cooperatives and rural projects. After being disaffiliated from the National Labour Organization, SEWA has stood on its own as a single union. It hopes in the future there will be many similar unions of poor self-employed workers and at some point it may become appropriate for them to join together in a central body of their own.

The Working Women's Forum in Madras arose out of the frustration of several women members of the Congress Party and the Communist Party of India.⁹ While mobilising poor women for political rallies these activists noted how little government policies and programmes benefitted members of the lower socio-economic strata. Feeling increasingly constrained within their parties, Jaya Arunachalam and her colleagues came together in an attempt to build a responsive women's organization with leadership coming from the poor themselves. As a beginning they conducted a survey among women in slum communities to ascertain what their areas of priority should be. Three areas of problems were identified - the business,

9 Hilde Jeffers, Organizing Women Petty Traders and Producers: A Case Study of WWF, Madras, Report Submitted for Master of City Planning Degree, University of California, USA, November 1981.

the work-place and the home. The greatest constraint was the supply of credit to reinvest in business. Most of the women were heavily in debt to money lenders who charged exorbitant rates of interest. At work the women experienced many indignities - being harassed in the wholesale market, jostled away from prime selling spots and with no access to water or toilet facilities. At home the women suffered from the tensions of common-law marriages, bigamy, desertion, dowry pressures and the responsibilities of household and child care.

The Forum, chartered as a society in 1978, essentially began as a self-help credit association. As it expanded its activities from self-employed vendors in Madras city to agricultural labour and home-based workers the class character of the oppression of women took on sharper focus. The Forum therefore realized that to be effective it would have to transform from a grass-roots development organization to a trade union. In 1981, the WWF was registered under the Trade Union Act as the National Union of Working Women.

Thus, both SEWA and WWF came into being with the realization that the special problems of self-employed women could not be tackled through orthodox, hierarchical organizations. The need was for genuinely democratic

associations responsive to the needs of specific trades, in which the initiative lay with the members themselves.

Organization

SEWA has a membership of 22,739¹⁰ and WWF a membership of 8,000.¹¹ From the organizational patterns of SEWA and WWF it is clear they are grass root organizations which, although led at the highest level by middle class women, are run by the poor self-employed women whose interests they promote. Both try to promote leadership skills among their members so that they are not organizations for self-employed women as a client group, but of and by them.

One major weakness of both organizations is that they are not self-sufficient, as they receive finances both from government and international agencies. The ideology of such agencies does not conceive of a transformation of power relations. They seek rather, at best, to ameliorate existing conditions. The dependence of SEWA and WWF on these agencies is bound to constrain their functioning in vital ways. It could even be argued that the reluctance on the part of SEWA and WWF to recognize

10 Annual Activities Report of SEWA, Ahmedabad, 1984.

11 Working Women's Forum at a Glance, WWF Publication, undated.

class conflict is influenced by their sources of funding. At the same time, they have limited alternative resources. Unlike traditional trade unions whose dues-paying members are regularly employed in industries, the meagre and uncertain incomes of the members of SEWA and WWF do not permit financial independence. It has been suggested therefore, that industrial workers' unions could support unions of poor self-employed workers.¹²

Ideology

Both SEWA and WWF are motivated by Gandhian principles and attempt to use Gandhian instruments for social change, of which self-reliance and non-violence are the main pillars. The concept of conflict is rejected and there is a belief in sorting things out through moving community opinion to take care of its vulnerable sections.

Both organizations view women as economic agents whose work and income are as vital to society as their work in the home. SEWA sees them as "agents, not beneficiaries, of development"¹³ and does not fight merely for better wages but "for enabling the women workers to develop their own selves as decent human beings, capable of thinking, acting and reacting".¹⁴ WWF, while recog-

12 Jennefer Sebstad, op.cit.

13 SEWA's Aage Chalo Project Report, 1982-83.

14 Ela Bhatt in Tusher Bhatt, 'Good Samaritans'

nizing that in all classes of Indian society women are "secondary entities", also believes that "the fight is not between man and woman but a fight to safeguard human dignity and human rights".¹⁵

In addition the WWF takes strong anti-caste positions. SEWA too is anti-caste, but WWF apart from encouraging integration among castes and religious communities in the loan groups and among organisers, also arranges mass inter-caste marriages. WWF has also arranged demonstrations against the dowry system and commented on pending reform bills dealing with rape and divorce.

SEWA and WWF both steer clear of political parties but are active political organizations in that they are engaged in empowering their members in their struggle to gain control over their means of production.

The Activities of SEWA

"Being self-employed and not covered by protective legislation SEWA members do not have a specific employer to fight against. They struggle against contractors, middlemen, government rules, regulations and policies

Cont'd... f.n. 14

Sunday, 2-8 December, 1984.

15 Working Women's Forum at a Glance, WWF Publication, undated.

and often certain social values including western-educated, urban, middle-class and male attitudes...."¹⁶

The three immediate goals of SEWA are (i) to make the work of self-employed women visible and their voices heard; (ii) to increase their rate of income and earnings; (iii) to increase their control of income in the family.¹⁷ To achieve these goals, SEWA undertakes two main types of action - struggle and developmental activities.

The leaders, organizers and members have struggled for fixed wages for headloaders, secure selling spaces for hawkers, defence against police harassment and higher piece rates.¹⁸ The Union has a Complaints Cell where self-employed women can register problems related to their work or family life. These complaints are taken up by SEWA's organizers and group leaders. The mode of struggle has been that of strikes and demonstrations as well as legal battles. In 1982, SEWA filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court on behalf of the vegetable vendors of ^{Manek}~~Manik~~ Chowk, Ahmedabad, as a result of which

16 Annual Activities Report of SEWA, 1984.

17 Ibid.

18 Items in Voice of the Working Woman, No. 3, May 1981, No. 5, September 1984.

the Court directed that licenses be given to the vendors. A writ petition was also filed in the Gujarat High Court about the inactivity of the Cloth Market Unprotected Labour Board.

As part of its developmental activities SEWA tries to deal with problems related to the structural constraints within the trades - limited access to supplies of raw materials, markets, credit, skills; lack of laws and policies to protect poor self-employed workers. These activities are:

(a) Credit Programme: For want of capital for trade, the women had been forced to depend on money-lenders for credit. The traders from whom the women purchased their inputs like left-over rags and vegetables, exploited them because of their weak bargaining power. They were also exploited by those from whom they rented out their means of livelihood, for example, carts in the case of cart-pullers. SEWA decided to make credit available to these women from the nationalised banks. Since they had no security to offer and no one to stand guarantee for them, SEWA played the intermediary and got loans worth Rs. 3 million advanced to 8,000 members between 1972 and 1976.¹⁹

19 Kamla Bhasin, op.cit.

However, the bank staff had problems with these illiterate slum women who did not know their full names, had no proper address at which they could be contacted, and who mixed up the names and branches of the banks. Moreover, the working hours of the banks coincided with theirs, which meant they could not do their own business if they had work at the bank. To get over these problems a women's cooperative bank was set up in 1974, the Mahila Sewa Sahakari Bank. Now about 11,000 women have their savings accounts in this bank, which processes the loan applications of SEWA members and submits them to the nationalised banks for loan advancement. It also collects repayment instalments from members and so relieves the nationalised banks of a lot of work. The SEWA bank is paid a service charge of Rs. 10/- per application by the nationalised banks which advance loans to SEWA members in lieu of the deposits kept with them by the SEWA bank, therefore no collateral is required for SEWA members to get a loan.

In order to get a loan a woman has to be a member of SEWA and a shareholder, which she can become by buying a share of Rs. 10. Loans to SEWA members range from Rs. 250 to Rs. 1000/-. An analysis of 2000 of the 6406 borrowers showed that 44 per cent paid their instalments

on time. 43 per cent had not paid 3 to 6 instalments and 13 per cent had defaulted for more than 6 instalments. The reasons for this high rate of default range from low income, not enough savings and unexpected expenditure on illness and social occasions to an irresponsible attitude on the part of some members towards repayment.²⁰

The SEWA bank has rejected the narrow interpretation of a bank's functions as a loan-giving or deposit-creating agency and thus has formulated schemes which establish members' access to those services which ensure their borrowing yields greater productivity. For example, it provides raw materials at fair price. The Bank's Recovery Section does the follow-up work to check how the loan money has been spent, to help members purchase raw materials to collect repayments and to strengthen the organization through personal contact with the members.

SEWA's experience has shown that banking can play a central role in organizing the self-employed. The bank helps organizers learn more about the specific trade-related needs of the members and thus provides the information to launch many new economic projects.

(b) Social Security Programmes: The Mahila Sewa Trust was established in 1975 to extend minimum security to its members, who contributed a day's earnings to pro-

vide the seed capital. Funds are mostly self-generating, although the trust also receives contributions from organizations of labour and philanthropic institutions. SEWA trust is presided over by a Board of Trustees, mostly SEWA members and group leaders. The three schemes provided by the trust are Maternity Benefit, Widowhood and Death Benefit.

(c) Supportive Services: Twenty SEWA supported anganwadis function in various parts of Ahmedabad for the children of working mothers. Apart from providing recreational, educational and health facilities for children, the anganwadis act as an important contact-point with the community. The anganwadi teacher is kept informed of important problems in the community such as wife-beating, alcoholism, the problem of slum demolition and insufficient water supply. Teachers intervened and played an active role in several instances. In addition, through regular monthly meetings with mothers, teachers were able to raise and discuss various women's issues apart from their health education work.²¹

SEWA also provides legal aid in demanding minimum wages, cases related to property, compensation for accident, tenancy and some marital cases.

(d) The Economic Wing deals with problems regard-

21 Sebstad, op.cit.

ing raw materials and markets, has initiated several supply and marketing projects on a cooperative basis and non-profit marketing centres. Cooperative production units purchase raw materials in bulk and are linked directly to markets, thus avoiding middlemen.

The struggle for higher wages and incomes soon led to the realization that only an integrated set of services would help the trade groups to become self-sustaining and in control of their struggle. The Economic Wing therefore has several training programmes in income generation for different trade groups and artisans with a view to making them self-reliant in terms of skill, management, marketing and leadership. These training programmes are held in collaboration with the All India Handicrafts Board, Weavers' Service Centre and National Institute of Design among others. Equipped with training, women and girls have entered both traditional occupations as well as those hitherto monopolised by men - patchwork, block-printing, cane and bamboo, woollen shawl weaving. SEWA has arranged training in cattle care for milk producers, maintenance of machines for garment workers and spinners and handling of improved tools for junk-smiths.

(e) The Rural Wing Promotes non-farm employment activities for women agricultural labourers. The Wing has a membership of about 5500 in 15 villages. It started

in 1978 with a tiny creche and tailoring class in the village of Zamp in Dholka Taluka of Ahmedabad district. In the beginning the organization of rural workers was conducted in a "typical union style"²² demanding minimum wages for agricultural labourers. However, it was soon realized that the root cause of exploitation is the lack of bargaining power of the workers due to the high rate of unemployment. Agriculture in the area where SEWA works is predominantly dependent on women's labour because men go to urban areas for work. The Rural Wing tries to develop employment opportunities for women through three activities - those involving manual labour, craftsmaking and dairying. Production centres have been started in the villages as a follow-up of vocational training to ensure steady, year-round employment. The main activities of the Rural Wing are unionizing rural women labourers; grass-root leadership development through training and support for rural organizers, income-generation activities and vocational training; support services like creches, banking, legal aid, marketing and linking services.

(f) The Research Wing: Research plays an important part in SEWA's work. The organizers have conducted socio-economic surveys of most of the trade groups among

the members. Those who conduct the survey typically become the organizers for that trade group. Study prior to action is a regular step for SEWA in organizing new trade groups.

To achieve the three goals mentioned at the beginning of this section SEWA has followed three kinds of strategies outlined below. To ensure greater visibility for the self-employed, SEWA lobbies law-makers, public officials and government authorities for laws, policies and programmes which protect and support self-employed women. The Union also builds a bridge between its members and the community by bringing different groups of women together and linking them to outside institutions.

In order to raise the incomes of members, training programmes, employment schemes, and supply, production and marketing cooperatives are run by SEWA. The women's cooperative bank and supports such as creches and maternity benefit schemes also indirectly augment incomes of members.

SEWA members achieve greater control of income and property through the SEWA bank which provides members a safe and convenient place to deposit their earnings. SEWA also links women to outside government agencies concerned with protecting their rights and property.

Nine SEWAs apart from the one in Ahmedabad have come into a federation called the SEWA Bharat. Each of these is autonomous working closely with one another. There are SEWAs in Delhi, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Mithila, Singbhum, Munger, Bhagalpur. SEWA Ahmedabad provides infrastructural and other services to SEWA Bharat.

The Activities of WWF

The goals of WWF²³ are - to federate existing organizations striving for working women and to establish branches of WWF in all districts and villages of Tamil Nadu.

- to assist in improving the conditions of working women through cooperation and secure for them more time and leisure for creative work, cultural activities and recreation.

- to help self-employed women expand their business through arranging loans from nationalized banks and to improve their professional and social status by giving them training and establishing day-care centres for their children.

- to solve civic and other problems of members by acting as liaison agent between members and civic autho-

23 Stated in Opinions, undated WWF Literature.

rities, government and other national and international organizations.

- to mobilise all working women to fight for their rights by acting as a pressure group.

The activities of the Forum can be grouped under three broad streams - Credit Programme, Family Planning and Health Programme and Social Conscientisation activities.

(a) Credit Programme: The Forum has two channels of credit for women workers in the informal sector, through nationalised banks and its own cooperative credit societies. Urban and rural areas in three states are covered.

The objective of credit intervention is to relieve women of the clutches of money-lenders and middle men by providing them working capital at low rates of interest. Thus women obtain a certain control over resources and their contribution to household income is enhanced. As we have seen earlier the credit system centres on the neighbourhood loan group.

Loans for groups are negotiated with the nationalised banks under the Differential Rate of Interest Scheme, whereby loans carrying 4 per cent interest rate are given to the weaker sections of society. The Forum also

has its cooperative credit societies in all centres except Bangalore. The idea of a women's cooperative bank was proposed because of problems with nationalised banks faced by WWF members, similar to the experience of SEWA. The aim was to increase loan amounts, end delivery lags, lend for consumption purposes and fund other WWF projects. After additional bank training and setting up of the proper infrastructure and funding, the Women's Cooperative Credit and Social Service Society opened. There are 2500 shareholders, holding shares worth Rs. 20 each.²⁴

One of the first proposed funding projects for the new credit society is a cooperative production unit. The aim is to provide secure, higher skill employment for women where profits can be used to provide work benefits or be reinvested to create more jobs. A garment tailoring unit that would utilize the skills of the tailoring trainees is viewed as a likely first step.

(b) Family Planning and Health Programme: The main objective of the Forum is to empower women both in their productive and reproductive roles. In the latter women must be given the knowledge about and accessibility to methods of birth control, personal hygiene and health care institutions. They must also have the confidence

24 Helzi Noponen, 'Organizing Women Petty Traders', Paper presented at Asian Regional Conference on Women and the Household, New Delhi, 1985.

and ability to take decisions about their own lives and bodies.

With this objective in view the Forum tries to use the State-sponsored Family Planning Programme and transform it into a women-centred grass roots health care project. The Forum recruited health trainees from among the women themselves, who were given training by experts. These trainees meet every household in their area once a week, and advise them on matters of health, contraception, nutrition, immunization of children etc. They also accompany the women of their areas to hospital and provide post-operation care. The method is personal, based on building confidence and trust, unlike the mechanical attitude of the state health machinery. Under this programme, 6000 slum dwellers are covered by 60 trainees.

(c) Social Conscientization Activities: The Forum conducts inter-caste marriages and group activities like role-plays, group singing and dancing and communal eating.

Inter-caste marriages are an important part of Forum activities, because normally such unions among poor working class couples are not legally established. With societal pressure or for other reasons men may desert such common-law wives. Through inter-caste marriage the Forum registers such unions under the Marriage Act.

The task of raising consciousness is greatly aided by the Research and Training Wing. The methodology adopted by the Forum emphasizes democratization of research at the grass root level with the ultimate objective of enabling women to acquire skills. The women are thus the subjects of research, not the objects.

Through the joint action of several loan groups in one neighbourhood additional support services are set up, such as Balwadis, evening coaching classes for older children and job-training for income-generation. A proposed wholesale marketing scheme in produce is to link a rural development scheme involving marginal and landless farmers in the Madras Beltway area to the urban-based WWF. In this manner it is sought to eliminate the middle-man and ensure that rural producer and urban vendor share equitably in the exchange of produce.

The Forum mobilises exclusively women as opposed to the family unit. The entire loan programme, child care, health and education activities are operated and controlled by the women themselves. The Forum stresses equal education of daughters and tries to provide jobs for them when they finish school.

SEWA and WWF as Political Organizations

Both organizations are explicitly Gandhian in their ideology. Neither uses the category of class to under-

stand social reality, nor acknowledges any conflict as generic between the classes. Nevertheless in their practice they face and tackle precisely those issues which arise out of the exploitative production process. The self-employed members of SEWA and WWF, while not being part of the capitalist production process itself, are essential if peripheral components of this process and subject to all its forces of exploitation. SEWA and WWF, by strengthening their bargaining power vis-a-vis their immediate oppressors (middle-men, money-lenders) and the government, are in fact coming up against class conflict and the State in their struggles. During the anti-reservation agitation in Ahmedabad for instance, SEWA was concerned with restoring the means and tools of livelihood of its poorest members, regardless of their caste or community, and this is the understanding they try to share with their members.²⁵ Apart from encouraging and assisting members to take advantage of existing resources and pressurising existing institutions to become more responsive to the self-employed, these organizations also attempt to build alternative institutions such as banks and cooperatives.

25 Annu Joseph et. al., 'Impact of Ahmedabad Disturbances on Women', Economic and Political Weekly, October 12, 1985.

Further, both organizations can be called "women-intensive". While both display an awareness that ultimately men and women are involved in a common struggle for social change, they also recognize that within existing social norms women would invariably be unequal participants in an organization in which men are also members. In 1981 SEWA did open membership to a group of male headloaders, but it has generated much debate about the advantages of a union specifically for women. Prevailing myths about the secondary nature of women's earnings and their primary role as house-keepers are likely to ensure that the problems of women workers remain peripheral within organizations of both men and women. This is the impression that emerged from the study of three trade unions done in the last chapter. It is of course, also possible to argue that the problems of the self-employed, and of workers in general, can best be tackled if men and women unite. However, an analysis of SEWA and WWF leads to the conclusion that despite the structural weaknesses they suffer from as a result of their limited self-defined parameters, they have been remarkably effective in meeting the particular needs of their members. Some of these weaknesses have already been discussed (for example, their financial dependence on agencies whose commitment

to radical change is doubtful). Some others are dealt with later in this section.

An assessment of SEWA's impact with reference to its three goals of increasing the visibility of the self-employed, their incomes and their control over property and assets, reveals a fair degree of success. Many of the Union activities involve mobilising large numbers of women for meetings, demonstrations and strikes. This has served to increase the women's visibility within the community, in their families and among themselves. Surveys conducted by SEWA of various trade groups have been used to inform government policy-makers, planners and the public on the needs of the self-employed. The media too, have been widely used to highlight the working conditions and problems of SEWA's members. SEWA's lobbying efforts have resulted in (i) The Planning Commission including a chapter on the self-employed in the Sixth Five Year Plan; (ii) The ILO changing its definition of worker to include the self-employed and (iii) governmental programmes and resources being channeled to self-employed women, some of which are an unorganized Labour Board charged with overseeing the payment of wages and benefits in Ahmedabad's cloth market; maternity benefit schemes on the lines of SEWA's scheme by state and national level labour ministries; training programmes for women by the National Dairy

Development Board.²⁶

Since self-employed women are concentrated in the lowest level jobs in the occupational hierarchy and are often paid less than men doing the same job, the earnings of SEWA members are lower than those of workers in the informal sector as a whole.²⁷ The lack of systematic data prevents any concrete conclusions about increase in incomes but the Sebstad study, quoted earlier, found that at the least many of the programmes have served to regularize and stabilize employment. And for several groups there were indications that overall earnings have increased. The programmes of the Economic Wing (i.e. skills, training programmes, production and service cooperatives, and projects facilitating access to raw materials and markets) have been most successful in these areas.

A study of SEWA bank borrowers showed that women used their loans productively and many had increased incomes.

The Rural Wing also helped to increase and regularize earnings. A major activity of this Wing was to create off-season employment for women agricultural labourers through skills-training, programmes and organized income generating projects (Khadi spinning and

26 Jennefer Sebstad, op.cit.

27 Op.cit., p. 205.

weaving, sewing, carpentry). Women's milk cooperatives have also been organized by SEWA in more than 15 villages in conjunction with the National Dairy Development Board.

SEWA's social security programmes compensate women for a loss of income they would otherwise incur during maternity or due to widowhood.

The SEWA bank has provided a safe place for the members to deposit their earnings and capital. This enables them to maintain direct control and ownership of these resources. Further, loans from the SEWA bank have allowed many women to purchase their own tools and equipment for use in their trades, and to break out of the clutches of money lenders.

SEWA works in the midst of many constraints. In rural areas, for example, they must face pressures from powerful local elites and vested interests. It is difficult to get women to travel outside their villages for training, and the practical difficulties of organizing and managing a milk cooperative had to be surmounted at every step - corrupt office bearers in the villages, opposition from private diaries.²⁸ Considerable hostility from men

28 SEWA goes rural, published by SEWA Ahmedabad, February, 1981.

has to be tackled. Anila Dholakia, director of the Aage Chalo Project, recorded that during a training programme for organizers, at the first phase of village level conference to discuss the local problems of the women, some men shook a tree over the meeting disturbing a beehive. Another instance was that of a man bringing a female buffalo into the meeting, telling the animal to express her feelings and not to be shy though she was illiterate. Apart from this kind of trivialization of women's efforts to organize, there is also strong resistance to women entering traditionally male occupations. Men of traditional weavers' families for example, objected to women learning a male skill like weaving, although they admitted the women did a lot of work for the processing of the raw wool, spinning, reeling, starching and other processes involved in the finished product. This was overcome, Ms. Dholakia notes, after endless discussions.²⁹

SEWA's organized struggles to defend the rights of sellers to sell, producers to produce and labourers to work has prevented loss of income for many groups. However, one of the most difficult areas of struggle for the union is that of strikes for higher piece rates and

29 Anila Dholakia, SEWA's Aage Chalo Project: Project Report 1982-83, SEWA, Ahmedabad.

better working conditions. Some of these strikes have been successful but most have failed due to the absence of minimum wage laws to enforce agreements with merchants and traders.

The attempts to develop leadership from among the membership remains a challenge. Sebstad notes that there are many constraints operating on the women - they are socialized to take an inferior role, SEWA cuts into their time for their work and families, they face pressure from their husbands about going out. Younger women with the status of daughter-in-law find it difficult to participate. The women who typically emerge as the most active leaders are therefore the mothers-in-law themselves, older women with relatively more freedom to move in outside circles. They are also from relatively better off families who can afford the loss of income from being involved in SEWA.³⁰

A major weakness of SEWA according to another study appears to be that the members of SEWA in effect function as individuals, not groups.³¹ They seemed to have no say in selecting the group leader or controlling her. Since there is no group responsibility or group pressure, of

30 Sebstad, op.cit.

31 Kamla Bhasin, op.cit.

the sort there is in WWF, repayment of loans is not satisfactory. As a result, rather than members taking up responsibilities as groups, SEWA appears to be serving them.

This study also felt that some SEWA members had an attitude of disbursing charity rather than that of creating a movement to demand a fair deal and justice. This impression is further strengthened by a remark in Sebstad's study, that almost all the organizers talked about changes in the personal habits of the members since they started participating in SEWA. "Now... they have improved their language, are neater and cleaner in appearance, are more patient... Many have given up their bad habits..."³² This kind of attitude certainly is patronising. It cannot, however, be gainsaid that the flow of income through the women's hands has raised their status and decision-making power within their families, and that they now have the confidence to control the environment and to take the initiative in matters concerning their lives and their work.³³

32 Sebstad, op.cit., p. 210.

33 Devaki Jain, Women's Quest for Power, 'Street Vendors of Ahmedabad', Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1980; SEWA Goes Rural, op.cit.; Jennefer Sebstad, op.cit.

The WWF's credit programme has had a positive impact on its members' economic condition. Newly created jobs were estimated in 1981 as 2800. Expansion of previous employment through loan investment occurred for 70 per cent of the sample and reflected almost a doubling of daily earnings. This increase in income which typically amounted to Rs. 120 extra per month was spent on basic items such as food and clothing.³⁴

Using credit as a point of entry the WWF mobilises self-employed women in the urban and rural sectors so that credit intervention is transformed from an end in itself to a means of forming a collective. These collectives take up not just economic issues but other problems affecting their lives and work and eventually the women become conscious participants in collective action.

Apart from economic gains, it is clear that the women are in control of their own resources. They receive the loan on the guarantee of other women, their neighbours who trust in their ability to earn and repay as opposed to co-signing by husbands or sons. The loan group meetings are expressly closed to male community leaders or husbands. The women are encouraged to handle the details of their business, utilize the loan correctly,

34 Helzi Noponen, op.cit.

take responsibility for repayment and retain control over earnings. As a result of their improved business performance, and access to prestiged institutions and officials, women gain in status in the community.³⁵

A majority of the organizers come from working-class households with prior occupational experience in the informal sector. A little over quarter of the organizers have themselves not been engaged in any occupations but personal crises in their lives - death of husband or father, desertion, alcoholism of male supporter - enabled them to comprehend the class-based oppression of the other working women also.³⁶ In an earlier chapter³⁷ it was argued that in struggles to transform structures of power that oppress women alone, a unified initiative expressing a women's perspective is evident. The observation about WWF organizers noted above seems to strengthen such an argument. The breakdown of the apparent security provided by a family would appear to bring women together at a deeper level of understanding

35 Jeffers, op.cit.; U. Kalpagam, Working Women's Forum: A Concept and an Experiment in Mobilization in the Third World, paper presented at the International Symposium "Anthropological Perspectives on Women's Collective Action", Spain, November, 1985.

36 U. Kalpagam, op.cit.

37 Chapter 2, Women's Organizations: AIWC, NFIW, ~~(and)~~ ~~(IDWA)~~.

of both gender and class oppression.

With credit intervention, as through the dairy loan for example, the bargaining power of agricultural labourers has been strengthened. They do not need to go for agricultural work at such low wages as before. Apart from this there is the greater degree of understanding the women display about their own powerlessness and about power relationships in the system. They have a stronger grasp of the role of politicians, the bureaucracy, the landlords and the money-lenders in their own precarious situation.³⁸

WWF too, like SEWA, functions within several constraints. The most important of these is the structure of the market in Madras and the prevalent norms of female behaviour especially regarding interactions with men. In the central wholesale market a few wholesalers, all male, wield considerable power over supply especially when credit is involved. The women are also open to sexual harassment and abuse and lose respect if they assert themselves. They cannot hire young boys as helpers and peddlers because it would cause scandals and young women cannot be employed for the purpose because

38 U. Kalpagam, op.cit.

of social taboos.³⁹ The younger members of WWF therefore are reluctant to take up the trades of their mothers. Consequently a training programme in tailoring and craft was begun.

Because of these constraints on expanding business, a WWF loan programme tends to become a consumption loan after the first loan.⁴⁰ Without the possibility of building a stall and securing a larger cut of the market the business woman may already be operating at the maximum trade level given her resources. Thus, the credit programme while providing significant improvement in the condition of women petty traders, has not been able to assist them in moving from pavement peddling to stalls.

There have not then, been any structural changes. The difficult and precarious position of women petty traders discourages younger women within WWF from following these trades. Their being trained instead, in tailoring and crafts reflects an aspiration towards middle-class standards and higher-status work. Rather than

39 Johanna Lessinger, 'Caught between work and modesty: The dilemma of women traders in South India', Paper presented at Women and the Household Conference, 1985.

40 Jeffers, op.cit.

transforming the conditions of work of women petty traders so that more women can enter this field, the WWF seems to have improved the financial situation of these women to the limited extent that their daughters can choose not to enter this occupation. Not all petty traders are WWF members and it would seem that they and their daughters will have to continue to struggle with the same conditions of work.

This criticism can be made of SEWA's impact as well. While its work has focussed largely on upgrading work for women already in the labour force, there has been limited emphasis on expanding employment opportunities for more women workers. The occupational structure for women has not been altered significantly and SEWA members, as WWF members, continue to be in the lowest level occupations. The lack of minimum wage laws ensure that wage rates remain low for most of the occupational groups within both organizations.

In rural areas both SEWA and WWF have strengthened the bargaining position of agricultural labour through employment schemes. However, they continue to receive wages far below the legally stipulated minimum wages, although these are higher than the wages they received earlier. Their relationship of subordination to the land-

lords too has not changed, for they cannot give up agricultural work altogether.

These kind of limitations are perhaps inevitable with organizations which attempt to work within the existing system. Given their limited self-defined parameters, both SEWA and WWF have achieved greater visibility for the self-employed and their contribution to development, and equipped these women to gain greater control over their means of production and their personal lives. At the same time, it must be noted that there has been limited change in the perceptions of SEWA and WWF members about gender oppression, and the sexual division of labour within the household and the workplace remains unchanged for the most part.

However, in the context of other projects which boast of women's participation but which in fact reinforce class and male superiority, the achievements of SEWA and WWF are greatly encouraging. An example of such a project is the Khadgodra village Diary Cooperative in Anand, Gujarat. One report on this project found that the cooperative was supposed to be run exclusively by women as a result of the efforts of the woman sarpanch of the village. However, there was not a single woman member on the board. The chairperson of the cooperative

was evidently a figurehead, and her husband exercised real control. Women seemed to be retained as a front-line only because the cooperative is legally registered as one run by women.⁴¹ Most development programmes too, are blind to women's work and the crucial role it plays in the economy. When one considers therefore, that organizations like SEWA and WWF have made great rents in this veil of invisibility, have given self-employed women a large measure of independence and self-confidence, and constantly battle against class and gender oppression, it becomes difficult to lay stress on their limitations.

41 Shahnaz Anklesaria, 'Village Politics Wrecks Anand Women's Scheme', The Statesman, September 5, 1985.

CONCLUSION

What has emerged from this study is a picture of women participating powerfully in struggles to transform oppressive conditions of life. Part of these struggles form a women's movement, explicitly operating at the level of gender. Other struggles are aimed at power relations oppressing both men and women. In such struggles on the one hand, the oppressive power relations operating against women within the group are viewed as peripheral if visible at all; on the other, women tend to perceive their interests as closer to those of their men than of women of the powerful groups.

Where women unite across class on issues which touch their lives as women, other factors such as caste or religion are used by male vested interests to divisive effect. The recent movement against the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights On Divorce) Bill is significant no less for its complex relationship to the tense communal situation in India as for the manner in which women of all groups and classes have rallied against it. Briefly, the Bill allows maintenance to a divorced woman from her husband only during the three month Iddat period; thereafter responsibility for her devolves upon her natural family, and if her family is destitute, upon the

Wakf Boards. While a detailed discussion of the Bill and its implications is beyond the scope of this dissertation, what is important is that as an attempt to strengthen the exploitative nature of the family in the 'private' sphere, it has been powerfully resisted by women in the 'public' sphere. This further illustrates the argument of this study that a women's movement in India must face specifically those power relations which oppress women alone, across class and group (religion, caste) lines. This is not to give secondary importance to struggles against power structures which are exploitative of both men and women. Rather, a women's movement must simultaneously and constantly expose the gender oppression at the subcutaneous level of every struggle.

This study argues that while gender cannot be treated as a sufficient explanatory category for all forms of oppression, yet an insensitivity to gender leads to partial and distorted analyses of society. Moreover an understanding of gender is bound to transform our notion of the possibility of an objective value-free social science. We can no longer conceive of knowledge as something that exists independently of the knower, waiting to be discovered. A sensitivity to gender leads us to the understanding that knowledge is generated by our-

selves. The theoretical framework we build up to order the events of our world determines the 'reality' that we choose to accept. Since the entire study hinges on the way class and gender as modes of existence condition oppression, an attempt has been made to grasp the complex nature of the intermeshing of the two. A tentative point of departure arrived at is derived from the work of Nancy Hartsock.¹ That is, if conscious human activity has consequences for human understanding and if the level of activity of exchange as Marx argued, is the level of appearances, the totality of social relations can be comprehended not at the level of men's activity in production but at the deeper one of women's activity in reproduction. Thus, while class oppression is revealed at the level of production, the entire reality of social relations, including gender oppression, is revealed at the level of reproduction.

Following from this discussion is the necessity to understand afresh the concept of political participation. Its conventional focus, electoral politics, omits entirely from its orbit the 'private' world of women. Thus the struggles of women which stem from their activity at the level of reproduction are not conceived of as political at all. The family and the sexual division

1 Nancy Hartsock, op.cit.

of labour on which it is based are accepted as natural and outside the realm of politics. Hence it becomes necessary to redefine political participation to include all activities which seek to transform the spheres and institutions in which power relations are used to control and regulate the production and distribution of resources. It is possible to differentiate between such power relations as those which oppress both men and women and those which oppress women alone, across class or caste boundaries. The political participation of women would include struggles to transform both these kinds of power relations. The questions that are constantly confronted in this study are: how far do these struggles form a women's movement explicitly operating at the level of gender, and if they are aimed at power relations oppressing both men and women, does the oppression of women within the group come into question at all.

A review of the existing literature on the political participation of women in India in the light of the foregoing discussion reveals its inadequacies and the unjustified assumptions on the 'nature' of women on which much of it is based.

The rest of the study examines the political participation of Indian women in the 70s through an examination of two women's organizations (AIWC and NFIW), three

trade unions (AITUC, INTUC and CITU) and two organizations of women in the informal sector (SEWA and WWF).

The tremendous upsurge in the political participation of women in the period under study must be linked to the growing economic crisis of the 70s. The direction of developmental strategies after Independence was leading to growing disparities in incomes and wealth and increasing hardship for the poor. It is within this context of an increasing volume of popular struggles against the government and against exploitative forces that we must view the growing militancy of women.

AIWC and NFIW were the two largest women's organizations of the 70s (since then AIDWA has become the largest) and their perceptions of social reality and of women are radically different. AIWC has no theoretical understanding of the oppression of women and tends to see it as a social reform issue which the government can deal with through legislation, dissemination of education and so on. The few radical stands it has taken are restricted to resolutions. Moreover, it can be seen that both its involvement in the nationalist movement as well as its withdrawal from active politics after Independence were political decisions, whose effect at both times was to strengthen the dominant coalition of the ruling class.

By contrast, NFIW is political in a way in which AIWC is not. It places the oppression of women in the context of society and class struggle, and its political actions as a consequence are radical where AIWC is status quoist. At the same time NFIW shows no awareness of gender oppression within the working class or in socialist societies.

The organizations' reactions to the anti price rise movement and the 'Total Revolution' movement in Bihar, two of the most important movements of the 70s, were characteristic of their perceptions. NFIW participated actively in the former and AIWC confined itself to the Central Steering Committee while denouncing all agitational politics. Both were in agreement however, that rising prices must be combated by a united front of women. Since the sexual division of labour ensures that the responsibilities of running a household devolve upon women, the anti price rise movement became in effect a women's movement.

The JP movement on the other hand, although it attracted large numbers of women who participated actively, was condemned by both AIWC and NFIW. Neither participated in it, but for reasons arising out of contrasting political considerations. AIWC denounced it because

it threatened the stability of the ruling party, precipitating what it saw as a 'law and order' situation. NFIW's response was drawn from the CPI line, which was to support the Congress Party against fascist forces. Moreover the JP movement was explicitly anti-communist.

The study of AIWC and NFIW in terms of these two movements leads to the conclusion that it is only in struggles against relations of power oppressing all women that a unified women's perspective is evident. The anti price rise movement, although it did not question the exploitative sexual division of labour, was nevertheless directed against an area of experience shared by all women. It functioned therefore, as a women's movement.

However, in struggles aiming to transform relations of power which oppress both men and women, the response of women is determined more by their situation within the oppressed group than by their situation as women. As an urban middle-class movement, the 'Total Revolution' movement evoked opposing and antagonistic reactions in different sections of women. It is precisely because women have political interests that a single women's perspective is impossible in a movement like the JP movement.

Another aspect of struggles to transform power relations oppressing both men and women is that the gender oppression within such struggles remains largely invisible. This aspect is explored through a study of trade unions, which try to fight exploitative production relations. The trade unions that are studied are AITUC, INTUC and CITU. The context of the study is set by two issues which best reflect the position of women in the trade union movement, protective legislation and equal pay for equal work.

Protective legislation is a major factor inhibiting women's employment, involving as it does the assumption that women's restriction to household work and child-care is natural and desirable. Ideally, protective legislation should be extended to all workers, for it is not only women who must be protected from hazardous work. However its function at present is less to protect women than to exclude women from employment, ensuring more jobs for men. At the same time, removing protective restrictions would only benefit the capitalists, for they would be freed of their responsibility to their workers and at the same time, wages would fall for everyone. These effects could be combated by organizing women, but patriarchal social relations divide

the working class. Thus protective legislation is an issue which reflects all the tensions of the intermeshing of class and gender oppression at the work place. INTUC is for the removal of protective restrictions, but this is in the interests of greater profits rather than of women's employment. AITUC and CITU support protective legislation but show no awareness of the complexities of the issue.

All three unions welcomed the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. However in the period under study there is no evidence of any agitation or strike over the issue of equal pay for women although the Act continues to be more infringed than adhered to.

None of these unions considers with any seriousness the hold of patriarchal ideology over the working class or over the leadership itself. The distinction between INTUC and the two leftist unions is not minimised - INTUC views women in the paternalistic Gandhian tradition while AITUC and CITU understand the oppression of women within the framework of class conflict and class struggle. In practice however, there are scarcely any women at executive levels, and the issues of non-provision of maternity benefits or child-care facilities, equal wages and the retrenchment of women

in the wake of the Equal Remuneration Act have not formed the core of struggles. Nor is there any discussion at all about the exploitative sexual direction of labour.

At the same time it must be noted that there is a growing and vocal awareness of women within AITUC and CITU of their marginalisation, resulting in much soul searching by the leadership and the founding in 1981 of CITU's journal to record the struggles of women workers.

The final part of the study examines SEWA and WWF, both 'women-intensive' organizations. Although neither explicitly acknowledges class struggle, in practice both confront precisely those issues which arise out of the exploitative production process. They assist members to take advantage of available resources and pressure existing institutions to become more responsive to the self-employed. At the same time, they build alternative institutions such as banks and cooperatives. While both organizations are aware that ultimately men and women are involved in a common struggle against oppression and exploitation, they also recognize that within existing social norms women would be unequal participants if men also were members.

The criticism can be made that there has been limited change in the perceptions of SEWA and WWF mem-

bers about their oppression as women and that the sexual division of labour in the household and the workplace remains largely unchanged. However, given their limited self-defined parameters, both SEWA and WWF have equipped their members to gain greater control over their means of production and their personal lives.

This study has attempted to look at political participation in the 70s with a conscious focus on gender. A crucial assumption of this exercise has been that a distinction must be made between power relations which oppress men and women of certain classes and groups, and those which oppress only women, regardless of other factors. The recognition that there are such power relations which hinge on gender alone would transform the manner in which we view society and oppression as a whole. One writer has tried to put into specifics what she means by 'the oppression of women' in the following manner - women are oppressed if (a) they work for others' benefit, if the products of their labour are not theirs to use and distribute; (b) they don't have control over their lives, decision-making ability, freedom of choice; (c) they are believed to be culturally inferior to men; (d) they are vulnerable to physical attack by men; and (e) there are valued cultural

activities from which they are excluded.²

It should not be difficult to see that while all or some of these conditions operate upon both men and women of oppressed classes and groups, every condition further weighs upon women within the oppressed groups, to the advantage of their men. They weigh also upon women within the powerful groups vis-a-vis men of their own groups and in some cases, of the oppressed groups. All women for instance, are generally believed to be culturally inferior to all men and women of every class are vulnerable to physical attack by men. This complexity is masked by the emotional appeal of a statement like the following: 'There is a difference between a society in which sexism is expressed in the form of female infanticide and a society in which sexism takes the form of unequal representation on the Central Committee. And the difference is worth dying for'.³ On deeper analysis however, one must disagree with the qualitative difference being made between one form of sexism and the other, for it is suggesting that the

2 Penelope Brown, 'Universals and Particulars in the Oppression of Women', in The Cambridge Women Studies Group, Women in Society: Interdisciplinary Essays, Virago Press, London, 1981.

3 Barbara Ehrenreich, 'What is Socialist Feminism',

fight against one must come before the fight against the other. It must be argued rather, that if the cultural, ideological and economic relations which permitted female infanticide were indeed destroyed, there would automatically also be equal representation on the Central Committee. Consider China, where female infanticide continues and where the institution of the female domestic servant is being reintroduced rather than attack the sexual division of labour which places the entire burden of house work on women.⁴ Or Russia and Eastern Europe, where women engineers and truck drivers go home to cook and clean while men go home to rest. A women's movement to be truly effective must simultaneously fight the power relations oppressing women while women participate in general struggles against oppressive relations as a whole.

Cont'd... f.n. 3

Win, June 3, 1976. Cited in Catherine A. Mackinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory in N.O. Keohane, M.Z. Rosaldo and B.C. Gelpi (ed.), Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982.

4 Elizabeth J. Croll, 'Domestic Service in China', Economic and Political Weekly, February 8, 1986.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

All India Women's Conference (AIWC) Annual Reports
1970-1980.

AIWC journal Roshni 1970-1980.

National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) Triennial Reports 1973, 1976, 1980, 1984.

Interview with President of Janwadi Mahila Samiti,
January 30, 1986.

All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Trade
Union Records 1970-1980.

Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC),
Indian Worker 1970-1980.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Working Class
1970-1980 and Voice of the Working Women
1981-84.

Reports of the Sessions of AITUC, INTUC, CITU, 1970-
1980.

CITU, Report of the National Convention on Working
Women, 1979.

Working Women's Forum (WWF) Publications (Undated).

- Working Women's Forum at a Glance,
- Women Entrepreneurs of Madras City - Experiment
in Credit Systems, (Research and Documenta-
tion Section, WWF).
- WWF - A Case - Study of Self-help movement acce-
lating Social transformation among the
slum women of Madras.
- From destitution to leadership, a study of WWF,
Tamil Nadu.
- WWF experts in grass-roots health care.
- WWF at a glance.

- Opinions.

Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Publications.

- Annual Activities Report of SEWA, Ahmedabad, 1984.
- Aage Chalo Project Report 1982-83.
- SEWA goes rural 1981.

Books:

- Agnew, Vijay, Elite Women in Indian Politics, Vikas, Delhi, 1979.
- Atkinson, Ti-Grace, Amazon Odyssey, Links Books, New York, 1974.
- Barrett, Michele, Women's Oppression Today Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis, Verso, London, 1980.
- Bleier, Ruth, Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and its Theories on Women, Pengamon Press, New York, 1984.
- Boston, Sarah, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement, Davis - Paynter, London, 1980.
- Bowles, Gloria and Klein, Renate Duelli, (ed.), Theories of Women's Studies, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.
- Brittan, Arthur and Maynard, Mary, Sexism Racism and Oppression, Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- Carrol, Berenice A. (ed.), Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1976.
- Centre for Women's Development Studies, Women's Participation in Political Life in India, New Delhi, 1983 (Unpublished).
- Chakravarty, Renu, Communists in the Indian Women's Movement, People's Publishing House, 1980.

- Chattopadhyay, Kamaladevi, Indian Women's Battle for Freedom, Abhinav, Delhi, 1983.
- Cliff, Tony, Class Struggle and Women's Liberation 1640 to the Present Day, Bookmarks, London, 1984.
- Crouch, Harold, Trade Unions and Politics in India, Manaktala, Bombay, 1966.
- Delphy, Christine, The Main Enemy, Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, London, 1977.
- Engels, Frederick, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977.
- Firestone, Shulamith, The Dialectics of Sex, Paladin, London, 1972.
- Frankel, Francine, India's Political Economy 1947-77, Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Gamarnikow, Eva, Morgan, David, Purvis, June and Taylorson, Daphne (eds.), The Public and the Private, Heinemann, London, 1983.
- Hartsock, Nancy C.M., Money, Sex and Power. Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, Longman, New York, 1983.
- Jaggar, Alison M., Feminist Politics and Human Nature, Rowman and Allanheld, New Jersey, 1983.
- Jain, Devaki, Women's Quest for Power, Vikas Publications, New Delhi, 1980.
- Jawaid, Sohail, Trade Union Movement in India, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 1982.
- Keohane, Nannerl O, Rosaldo, Michelle Z, and Gelpi, Barbara C. (eds.), Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982.
- Kuhn, Annette and Wolpe, Anne-Marie, Feminism and Materialism Women and Modes of Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

- Leghorn, Liza and Parker, Katherine, Women's Worth Sexual Economics and the World of Women, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1981.
- Mathur, A.S. and Mathur, J.S., Trade Union Movement in India, Chaitanya Publishers, Allahabad, 1962.
- Mazumdar, Veena (ed.), Symbols of Power, Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1979.
- Millet, Kate, Sexual Politics, Ballantine Books, New York, 1969.
- Mitchell, Juliet, Woman's Estate, Penguin Books, 1971.
- Nandy, Ashis, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under colonialism, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983.
- Oakley, Anne and Mitchel, Juliet, The Rights and Wrongs of Women, Penguin Books, 1976.
- Omvedt, Gail, We will Smash This Prison! Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1980.
- Ranadive, Vimal, Women Workers of India, National Book Agency, 1976.
- Reiter, Rayna R., Toward an Anthropology of Women, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1975.
- Rowbotham, Shiela, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World, Penguin Books, 1973.
- _____, Women, Resistance and Revolution, Penguin Books, 1972.
- Sanday, Peggy Reeves, Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.
- Sargent, Lydia (ed.), Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, Pluto Press, London, 1981.
- Schneider, David and Gough, Kathleen (eds.), Matri-linear Kinship, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961.

- Sengupta, Padmini, Women Workers of India, Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1960.
- Sarkar, Sumit, Modern India 1885-1947, Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 1983.
- Sen, Sukomal, Working Class of India, History of Emergence and Movement, 1830-1970, K.P. Bagchi and Co., Calcutta, 1979.
- Sharma, Ursula, Women, Work and Property in North-West India, Tavistock, London, 1980.
- Siltanen, Janet and Stanworth, Michelle (ed.), Women in the Public Sphere, Hutchinson and Co., London, 1984.
- Smart, Barry, Foucault, Marxism and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.
- Spender, Dale (ed.), Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on the Academic Disciplines, Pergamon Press Ltd., New York, 1981.
- Stanley, Liz and Wise, Sue, Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983.
- Vogel, Lise, Marxism and the Oppression of Women Toward a Unitary Theory, Pluto Press, London, 1983.

Articles:

- Andre, Judith, 'Power, Oppression and Gender', Social Theory and Practice, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring, 1985.
- Anklesaria, Shahraz, 'Factories Ignore Workers' Health', The Statesman, July 2, 1984.
- _____, 'Women, As Agents of Social Change', The Statesman, February 4, 1985.
- _____, 'Why Life is one Long Struggle', The Statesman, July 16, 1985.

- Balasubramaniam, Vimal, 'Biology and Gender Bias', Economic and Political Weekly, May 18, 1985.
- Bardhan, Kalpana, 'Women's Work, Welfare and Status: Forces of Tradition and Change in India', Economic and Political Weekly, December 14, 1985.
- Bardhan, Pranab, 'Authoritarianism and Democracy: First Anniversary of New Regime', Economic and Political Weekly, March 18, 1978.
- Barrett, Michele, 'Rethinking Women's Oppression: A reply to Bremer and Ramas', New Left Review, No. 146, July-August, 1984.
- Basu, Amrita, 'Two faces of Protest: Alternative forms of Women's Mobilization in West Bengal and Maharashtra' in Gail Minault (ed.), The Extended Family, Chanakya, New Delhi, 1981.
- Bhatt, Tushar, 'Good Samaritans', Sunday, 2-8 December, 1984.
- Brown, Penelope, 'Universals and Particulars in the Position of Women', in Women in Society, The Cambridge Women's Studies Group, Virago Press, London, 1981.
- Chowdhury, Neerja, 'First Victims of Mechanisation', The Statesman, November 25, 1985.
- _____, 'Muslim Women Bill: Trail of Errors', The Statesman, April 28, 1986.
- Croll, Elizabeth J., 'Domestic Service in China', Economic and Political Weekly, February 8, 1986.
- Gardiner, Jean, 'Women in the Labour Process and Class Structure' in Alan Hunt (ed.), Class and Class Structure, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977.
- Lewis, Jane, 'The Debate on Sex and Class', New Left Review, No. 149, January-February, 1985.

- Mencher, Joan and Saradamoni K., 'Muddy feet, Dirty Hands, Rice Production and Female Agricultural Labour', Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, December, 1982.
- Mies, Maria, 'Indian Women and Leadership', Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, January-March, 1975.
- Morton, F.L., 'Sexual Equality and the Family in Tocqueville's "Democracy in America"', Canadian Journal of Political Science, June, 1984, XVII: 2.
- Omvedt, Gail, 'Caste, Class and Women's Liberation in India', Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. VII, January-March, 1975.
- Pais, H., 'Employment of Women in India: Recent Trends', National Labour Institute Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 3, 1984.
- Patel, Vibhuti, 'Women's Liberation in India', New Left Review, 153, September-October, 1985.
- Reddy, Jaganmohan P., 'Bill of Contention', The Statesman, April 22, 1986.
- Saldanha, Indra Munshi, 'Tribal Women in the Warli Revolt 1945-47: Class and Gender in the Left Perspective', Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Women Studies, April 26, 1986.
- Seth, Pravin, Political Participation of Women 1951-1979, ICSSR Programme of Women's Studies.
- Shah, Ghansham, 'Revolution, Reform or Protest? A Study of the Bihar Movement', Economic and Political Weekly, April 9, 16, 23, 1977.
- Sundar, Pushpa, 'Women's Employment and Organization Modes', Economic and Political Weekly, November, 1983.
- Velayudhan, Meera, 'The Crisis and Women's Struggles

in India, 1970-77', Social Scientist, 145, June, 1985.

- 'CPI - Defender of Women's Rights', New Age, 23 (4) 26 January, 1975.
- 'For Women - Not enough jobs, lower wages', New Age, 23 (11) 16, March, 1975.
- 'West Bengal Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti', People's Democracy 11 (15) 13 April, 1975.
- 'Agricultural Worker Women, Inspiring Convention', People's Democracy 11 (12) 23 March, 1975.
- 'Equal Pay for Women', Southern Economist 14 (12), 15 October, 1975.
- 'Working Women's Conference adopts 13-Point demands', New Age 27(37), 16 September, 1979.
- 'Equal Remuneration Ordinance', Financial Express, February 1, 1976.

Papers Presented at Conferences:

- Kalpagam, U., 'Working Women's Forum: A Concept and an Experiment in Mobilisation in the Third World', Paper presented at the International Symposium on Anthropological Perspectives on Women's Collective Action, Spain, 1985.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta, 'Economic Development and the Political System', Paper presented at the Vienna Colloquium on Contemporary India, 1982.
- Second National Conference on Women's Studies, Organized by the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Trivandrum, 1984.
- Chaudhari, Maitrayee, 'Defining Politics: The All India Women's Conference (1927-47)'
- Datar, Chhaya, 'Women's Movement and the Left Parties: Critique of Conceptual Framework'.

- Jain, Susheela, 'Political Awareness and Political Commitment'.
- Sinha, Niroj, 'Women's Participation and Political Development in India: A Case Study of the Total Revolution Movement'.
- Velayudhan, Meera, 'Women Workers in the Struggles of Coir Workers in Kerala (1938-1980)'.
- Asian Regional Conference on Women and the Household, Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi, 1985.
- Baid, Isa, 'Industrial Sub-contracting - Effects of Putting Out System in India'.
- Bhatt, Ela, 'The Invisibility of Home-Based Work: The Case of Piece-rate Workers in India'.
- Jumani, Usha, 'The Future of House-based Production'.
- Lessinger, Johanna, 'Caught Between Work and Modesty: The dilemma of Women Traders in South India'.
- Noponen, Helvi, 'Organizing Women Petty Traders and Home-Based Producers: A Case Study of Working Women's Forum, India'.
- Seminar on A Decade of Women's Movement in India, SNDT University, Bombay, 1985.
- Jaising, Indira, 'Evaluation of Changes in the Law relating to women during the decade 1975-1984'.
- Mitra, Manoshi, 'Women and Class Struggle: Tribal Women's Struggle in Chota Nagpur'.

Reports:

- Bhasin, Kamla, Breaking Barriers, A South Asian Experience of Training for Participatory Development, Report of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development, Regional Change Agents Programme, 1978.

Sebstad, Jennefer, Struggle and Development among Self Employed Women: A Report on SEWA, Ahmedabad, India, Report prepared for the USAID Bureau for Science and Technology, 1982.

Report of the Committee on Fair Wages 1947-1949, ILO.

Towards Equality: Report on the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974.

Working Class Women and Working Class Families in Bombay: Report of a Survey, Economic and Political Weekly, July 22, 1978.

Socio Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Mines, Labour Bureau, Government of India, 1979.

Report of the UNESCO Seminar on Participation of Women in Political Life, 1983.

Indian Labour Year Book 1984, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government of India.

Unpublished Dissertations/Theses:

Chaudhari, Maitrayee, Participation of Women in the Indian Trade Union Movement, M. Phil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1981.

Chowdhary, Rekha, Women and Politics in India, M.Phil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1973.

Jeffers, Hilde, Organizing Women Petty Traders and Producers: A Case Study of Working Women's Forum, Madras, Dissertation for Master of City Planning degree, University of California, USA, 1981.

Pearson, Gail Olivia, Women in Public Life in Bombay City with Special reference to the Civil Disobedience Movement, Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1975.