Women Workers in the Era of Globalisation

A Comparative analysis of the responses of AIDWA and SEWA to Structural Adjustment Programme

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of requirements for the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

POULOMI PAL

Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067
India

2005

Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, India

Tel. : 011-26704413
Fax : 011-26717603
Gram : JAYENU

Date: 27 July, 2005

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**Women Workers in the Era of Globalisation: A Comparative Analysis of the Responses of SEWA and AIDWA to Structural Adjustment Programme**" submitted by **Poulomi Pal** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is her original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other university.

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

Prof. Sudha Pai
(Chairperson)

Prof. Zoya Hasan
(Supervisor)

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the CPS faculty, especially my supervisor Prof. Zoya Hasan, who gave me the time to think, reflect and evolve my arguments at length, without getting impatient. Her inputs have helped me enormously to develop the ideas expressed in this research. I would like to extend my acknowledgments to the Chairperson, Sudha Pai, Shefali Jha and Mary John, who encouraged me to do the USS course. Besides being an extremely enriching experience, the course allowed me to do extensive fieldwork in SEWA, Ahmedabad.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Nivedita Menon for helping me to conceptualise the central argument of this research and for getting me started. The work could not have been completed without the help of Indu Agnihotri and Indrani Majumdar from CWDS. Numerous discussions with them went a long way towards sorting out problems that cropped up during the course of writing. I would like to thank them especially for having the patience and for taking out the time to bear with my bombardment of questions. I am grateful to Meena ji and Mishra ji from the CWDS library, Pramila ji and Rija from AIDWA, Mirai ben and Namrata ben from SEWA for helping me get the much needed source materials, without which the research could not have been undertaken.

Many people have seen me through the ups and downs of this work. Ravi, Geetu, and Shipru have pampered me when I needed it the most. My punching bags- Mathilde, Will, Trish, Bhuvana, Luande and my much needed long-distance supports- Anurag, Satya, Chotku and Meenu, thank you all. A special thanks goes out to Ponni, Kallu, Harish, Bhaskru, Nilu, Nupur, Byasam and Bindu for cheering me up and to Rampiyari, Shashibhushan and Boris for being there, when needed the most. The timely encouragement and concern of Bhochka, Rachna and Mahesh was highly appreciated. Ena deserves a special note of thanks for doing the proof checking at very short notice.

I would like to convey my regards to Maashi, Dada, and Kavita for providing me with the comforts of home away from home. I am indebted to Puloma for her insightful comments, which transformed the nature of my work. I am thankful to Ma and Babonshona for their belief in me and for never giving up on me. Lastly, I would like to mention Uditi, for being there through thick and thin and for pulling me out of numerous episodes of breakdowns. Her involvement in this work has been indispensable.

List of Abbreviations

AIDWA-All India Democratic Women's Association

SEWA-Self Employed Women's Association

IMF-International Monetary Fund

ILO-International Labour Organisation

SAP- Structural Adjustment Programme

IRDP-Integrated Rural Development Programme

DWCRA-Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas

ICDS-Integrated Child Development Services

NGO-Non Governmental Organisation

PDS-Public Distribution System

BPL-Below Poverty Line

APL-Above Poverty Line

FCI-Food Corporation of India

WTO-World Trade Organisation

CSWI-Committee on Status of Women in India

RBI-Reserve Bank of India

ER-Economic Reform

NER-New Economic Reform

TLA- Textile Labour Association

UNIFEM-United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNCTAD-United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

GPO-Grassroots Producers Groups

CPI (M)-Communist Party of India (Marxist)

GTN-Global Trading Network

SRGY-Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana

NTFP- Non-Timber Forest Produce

JFM- Joint Forest Management

BJP-Bharatiya Janta Party

STFC- SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre

NPP-National Perspective Plan

JRY-Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

Introduction

The structural adjustment programme, introduced in the 1990s, falls within the broader ambit of liberalisation debates and is the most crucial form that globalisation takes in the Indian context. The policies of structural adjustment were initiated by the government of India in 1991, which resulted in the opening up of the economy to foreign investment and restricted the welfarist role of the state through a reduction of its expenditure on subsidies. This directly affected the poverty alleviation programmes, the employment generation schemes and overall food availability for many people below the poverty line. Due to the closure of numerous small-scale industries after the introduction of these policies, millions of people lost their jobs. Greater mechanisation of the production process was another reason for loss of jobs. The exit policies introduced in the labour market post 1991 made it very easy to hire and fire labourers without giving prior notice. The nature of work began to be characterised as casual, part-time and some times un-waged. To put it in a nutshell, the policies of structural adjustment had adverse impact on the economy, polity and society. Within this broader picture, women were hit much harder. Since their position in society in general and the labour market in particular had already been vulnerable, in the wake of the policies of structural adjustment, they were doubly marginalised. The central focus of this research is to critically analyse the stand taken by All India Democratic Women's Association or AIDWA and Self Employed Women's Association or SEWA regarding the impact of structural adjustment programme on women workers.

In this research an attempt has been made to move beyond the conventional formulations regarding how changing economic policies bring in modifications in the role of the state and the way it exercises power. This study seeks to critically understand the impact of specific

governmental policies on women workers. The focus is on responses of the women's movement to these changes. This is examined through the way this problem is articulated by two women's organisations, AIDWA and SEWA. Since both the organisations work with the grass roots, ground level realities and negotiations become central to conceptualising macro changes brought in by SAP. The analysis is distinguished by its focus on these two organisations, which have been intrinsic parts of the women's movement in India. Thus, this research also endeavours to conceptualise the gendered aspects of the policies of globalisation, especially the structural adjustment programme. In this context, broader questions are raised regarding the gender politics of the Indian State. The possibility of broader linkages between the emancipatory potential or ideals of the women's movement and its opposition to globalisation have also been investigated.

The methodology adopted to undertake the research is based on critically evaluating the publications of AIDWA and SEWA, relevant to this issue. The primary resource base has been their respective constitutions, pamphlets, booklets, reports and conference reports. The issues of Women's Equality and the organisational documents of AIDWA have been vital in understanding AIDWA's stand. Similarly, in the case study of SEWA, their annual reports, conference documents, organisational documents and relevant publications on the impact of globalisation have been extensively used. Also an attempt has been made to incorporate some of the papers presented at conferences organised by Indian Association of Women's Studies which have often dealt with the issue of women workers in the era of globalisation. Specific articles by prominent AIDWA and SEWA members in conferences or published in journals are also looked at. "Towards Equality" (1974) and "Shramshakti Report" (1988) have been used to study the impact of globalisation on women workers. Apart from this, the research has primarily been based on secondary literature available on AIDWA and SEWA in books,

articles, journals and papers presented at conferences on globalisation in print and on the web. The period of study has been roughly from 1991 till date.

This research has been presented in three main chapters followed by a conclusion. It begins with a discussion on the impact of Structural Adjustment Policies on women workers in the first chapter. The premise for usage of terms like structural adjustment policies, new economic reforms, liberalisation and broadly globalisation to mean changing role of the state in response to certain changes in economic policy, is laid out. The case studies of AIDWA and SEWA are located within the context of processes of change being manifested in the realm of the women's movement, running parallel to the changing role of the state in India. This chapter also probes into comprehensive details of the impact of structural adjustment, especially in the context of the feminisation and mechanisation debate, in order to understand the intensity of consequences for women workers. In other words, the foundations for the detailed case studies on AIDWA and SEWA, which are taken up in the next two chapters are laid down here.

The second chapter attempts to understand SEWA's evaluation of the impact of globalisation on women workers and their strategies in dealing with it. The underlying emphasis in this chapter is to critique SEWA's policy of dealing with the problem by making piecemeal changes geared towards reducing risks for its members in the unorganised sector. It also attempts to globalise the rural market by itself, playing the role of the intermediary. The specific origins of SEWA, which plays an important role in SEWA's conceptualisation of globalisation; the organisational structure of SEWA that demonstrates how SEWA is a special case of trade unions and lastly the connection of these two aspects of SEWA with its interpretation of the neo-liberal policies are explored.

The third chapter focuses on the assessment of globalisation and its impact on women workers by AIDWA. Unlike SEWA, here a well-articulated stand against globalisation (perpetuated in the form of Structural Adjustment Programme) influenced by AIDWA's Marxist lineage is evident. An understanding of both AIDWA's ideology and gender politics is crucial to comprehend its position vis-à-vis globalisation. AIDWA's reconciliation of these two strands is reflected in its understanding of globalisation and its impact on women workers. Detailed discussions of AIDWA's understanding of the extent of the impact of globalisation based on empirical details[1] builds upon this broad argument. This includes the study of AIDWA's critique of certain governmental measures, which substantiates their stand on the negative fallouts of globalisation. Their active agitation for land rights and effective public distribution system, have been selected for detailed discussion largely because they have come to prominence in the wake of the policies of globalisation.

The conclusion ties up the discussion through a comparative analysis of the stands taken by AIDWA and SEWA. Their diverse stands in many ways represent the diversity of perspectives of varied groups, which comprise the autonomous women's movement today. There has also been an attempt to conceptualise the politics of both the organisations vis-à-vis certain issues, such as funding which are directly linked to the stand they take on globalisation and its impact on women workers. It also compares the various strategies, which are employed by the respective organisations to counter the forces of globalisation. To conclude, there has been an attempt to point out a crucial absence common to both AIDWA and SEWA i.e. the conceptualisation of the category of women workers in terms of their position of exploitation in society and the labour market. The conceptual understanding of the impact of globalisation on women workers is bound to be incomplete, unless this lacuna is addressed.

[1] These empirical details are derived from either survey done by AIDWA or studies done by other independent researchers. AIDWA merely uses some of these data to deduce its conclusion

Chapter One

Double Burden on Women Workers: Identifying Agents of Marginalisation

In 1991, the government of India introduced policies of Structural Adjustment promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund primarily to tide over a severe Balance of Payment crisis. These policies intensely impacted upon the organised and the unorganised sector of the Indian economy. The impact was felt in terms of deterioration in working conditions, fluctuations in wages, and growing casualisation of work in terms of irregular, casual and non-permanent employment. Workers in general and women workers in particular were severely affected. Historically, women have been discriminated against in society based on their class, caste, and gender. It is rather obvious that this discrimination is bound to be perpetuated in the labour market too. Women workers therefore constitute a category that was especially vulnerable to the risks, which were ushered in post 1991. The following chapter would investigate the impact of structural adjustment policies on women workers. Beginning with the conceptual understanding of structural adjustment programme it moves on to illustrate how far the terms Liberalisation, stabilisation, new economic reforms structural adjustment programme, and broadly globalisation can be used interchangeably to denote the changing role of the market forces after 1991. There is also an attempt here, to understand the inter-relationship between the above stated terms, so as to avoid ambiguity and confusion in the attempt to understand the real implications of the phenomenon of globalisation.

The changes in market forces post Liberalisation have had a direct fallout on the role of the state. A synoptic overview of the changing role of the state as expressed through corresponding changes in government policies is important as a background towards comprehending the plight of labour in general and women workers in particular. Later in the

chapter, theories of feminisation and mechanisation are used extensively to focus on the gendered aspect of the impact on labour, in the post globalisation period.

AIDWA and SEWA both form an intrinsic part of the women's movement in India. They both organise women workers based on their articulation of dissent against these contemporaneous economic changes and their social fallouts. Thus, the gendered aspect of the impact of globalisation is what they primarily deal with. Although their opinion on the nature and degree of impact of SAP on women's lives is significantly different, they nevertheless represent the diversity and tolerance of difference within the women's movement. In the last part of the chapter, the foundations are laid for the detailed case studies on AIDWA and SEWA, which are taken up in the next two chapters are laid down.

Globalisation in the Indian Context: SAP and the Role of the State

The typical components of an orthodox stabilisation and structural adjustment programme are macro-economic policies of fiscal austerity, monetary contraction and devaluation that are followed by a set of policies at the sectoral and micro-economic levels. The latter include privatising public–sector enterprises, deregulating financial markets, deregulating agricultural prices, removing trade barriers, and deregulating the labour markets.[2] Policies of stabilisation focus on reducing public expenditure instead of increasing direct taxation. However, it may be underlined that in India many of these policies had already been initiated by the government in the eighties as a part of the package of conditionalities linked to the earlier lot of IMF loans. In fact, the balance of payment crisis was substantially a result of lifting of trade restrictions in the early eighties leading to the dissipation of foreign exchange mainly on the massive import of

[2] Madhura Swaminathan, 'The Impact of Policies of Orthodox Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment on Women: some evidences from India', from the *workshop on the Human Development Report 1995: The Structural context for empowering women in India*, organised by FES and UNDP, Dec 12 and 13, Neemrana, 1995.

luxury goods. Thus, policies prescribed as solutions for the crisis were largely a cause of the crisis in the first place. India's debt rose from Rs 163,311 crores in 1991 to Rs 282.904 crores in 1993, bringing the debt per Indian to over RS 3000.[3]

Four significant episodes of Liberalisation and debates surrounding each of them can be traced in the political economy of independent India. The advent of Liberalisation was not something specifically linked with the introduction of the structural adjustment programme in 1991. A common definition of Liberalisation is used in all these debates. Commonly, the term Liberalisation, when used in the context of economic policy connotes the reduction of government regulation of economic activity and shrinking space for state intervention that would allow the unfettered operation of market forces to determine economic processes.[4] In other words, the structural adjustment programme of 1991 denotes only a part of the whole Liberalisation process and debates surrounding it.

The first debate relates to the controversy surrounding the control of food rations started during the 1940's war years, which were extended into the early years of Independence. The debate centred on arguments about whether liberal markets or government controls could better ensure domestic food security. The second debate covers the period 1955-56 and a few years thereafter, when the combination of agricultural failures and external crises led to urgent reliance on emergency external financing, as well as the related rupee devaluation and trade Liberalisation. The third episode is from the early 80s, when the government's decision to take a medium–term loan from the IMF also involved commitments to liberalise economic policy in specified ways. Finally we come to the last episode, which is still underway, having begun in

[3]Madhura Swaminathan and Brinda Karat, 'Impact of New Economic Policies of Structural Adjustment on Women', *Women's Equality*, Quarterly bulletin of AIDWA, Vol. VIII no. 1, 1995.
[4]Jayati Ghosh, 'Liberalisation Debates', Terry Byres (ed.), *The Indian Economy: Major Debates since Independence* OUP, New Delhi, 1998, pg. 295.

mid 1991 in the form of a package of ' new economic reforms'. This phase is understood as both a response to the balance of payments and fiscal crises of the economy as well as the implementation of terms, determined by the broader international forces of 'globalisation'.[5] In this context, the 'package of new economic reforms' is synonymous to policies of structural adjustment. Thus structural adjustment policies and new economic reforms are often used interchangeably. However, these terms merely denote some aspects of Liberalisation and globalisation, which are much broader and more complex processes.

The immediate context of the introduction of structural adjustment policies in India was the outbreak of Gulf War and the consequent disruption of oil supplies. International oil prices shot up, causing a big hike in India's oil import bill. This conflict also affected the remittances sent in by large number of migrant Indian workers in Kuwait and Iraq, which were important elements of total invisible inflows. Also domestic political instability, culminating in the fall of the V.P. Singh government, added to the economic insecurity and eventually led to the downgrading of India's international credit rating by the two most important credit rating agencies. The external reserves of the RBI fell to a level equivalent to less than two months' imports and the country hovered on the brink of default. However, unlike previous crises, this collapse in the balance of payments and in the financial prospects of the government did not reflect any major setbacks in the real economy.

Agricultural and industrial output remained normal, and inflation was not abnormally high for the period.[6] Therefore some theorists argue that the balance of payment crisis was one of the many reasons, but not a compelling explanation for the process of Liberalisation that was initiated in the 90s in the form of structural adjustment programmes. India had indeed

[5] Ibid., pg. 298-99.
[6] Ibid., pg. 323.

witnessed many bouts of severe balance of payment crisis before the 90s. Thus, it can be said with some degree of justification that the balance of payment crisis does not prove to be the only reason behind Liberalisation.

When the new government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao came to power in the middle of 1991, its first two economic policy initiatives were to approach the IMF for an immediate stand-by loan, and a two-stage devaluation of the rupee by about 20 per cent. Subsequently, a wide–ranging programme of 'economic reforms' was set in motion, in which the immediate aim of stabilisation was conjoined with a broader structural adjustment package based on the strategy of Liberalisation.[7]

There is substantive difference in meaning between stabilisation, structural adjustment, liberalisation and new economic reforms according to Jayati Ghosh. Essentially stabilisation refers to short-term attempts to 'stabilise' or steady the economy in the face of sudden shocks or existing macro-economic imbalances, especially in the balance of payments. Structural adjustment refers to medium-term or long-term changes in the productive structure, in accordance with overall social goals. The way the term is currently used usually denotes the desire to make the economy more internationally competitive. But this is not the only possible aim of structural adjustment: it could as well be directed towards a more efficient and equitable provision of basic needs for the entire population, or an attempt to improve labour productivity without involving slack in the form of unemployment. These aims are not always mutually compatible. It could easily be the case that the striving for enhanced external competitiveness actually reduces the economy's ability to provide basic needs and to improve aggregate productivity. This seems to have happened in the case of India.

[7] Ibid., pg. 324

The concentration on international competitiveness alone, is part of an overall approach, which puts primacy on the unfettered functioning of markets as the best means for achieving growth and 'efficiency'. This, in a nutshell, is the essence of the liberalisation measures of 1991. The latter are typically described in India today as elements of the new economic reform package, irrespective of whether they actually do involve a move towards the improvement of the standard of living of the mass of people.[8] Thus in India, structural adjustment policies have been largely synonymous with new economic reforms.[9]This identity, is however, merely specific to the post 1991 Indian context and does not derive from any essential feature of structural adjustment policies in general. From the previous discussion we can conclusively infer that the policies of structural adjustment, economic reforms and new economic reforms are merely the forms that liberalisation and globalisation takes. It narrows down the scope of study if we deal with structural adjustment, which seems to be only a part of the broad aims and objectives of the process of globalisation. A focus on SAP has the advantage of bringing out the causal links between certain changes in the market forces and overall changes in the role of the state. Henceforth, 'liberalisation' will be used specifically to mean the liberal economic reforms initiated in 1990s, largely in the form of SAP.

The main elements of the current economic strategy, which attempts to combine stabilisation and structural adjustment under an umbrella of liberalisation and greater reliance

---

[8] Jayati Ghosh, 'Gender Concerns in Macro-Economic Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1994,April 30.

[9] In this context, it is important to remember that there is a crucial difference between economic reforms and new economic reforms. If by reforms is meant the deregulation of the economy and gradual or sudden dismantling of governmental controls, then the process had started, from the late 1970s. However, the deregulation was started in 1985, when a new industrial policy and a so-called long-term fiscal policy were announced, and major changes in regulatory and foreign trade policies were announced. To distinguish this set of policies from the policies set into motion in June –July 1991, and from the old regulatory framework which had been in operation between the 1940s and the 1970s, we shall call the changes introduced in 1985, the economic reforms (ER) and these introduced from 1991, new economic reforms (NER). These introduced in 1991 affected all major sectors of the economy and involved changes in the use of all the major instruments of economic policy. See, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Economic Reforms and Employment in India', *JCASS symposium Series 6*, 1998, pg. 39-40.

on the market mechanism, are as follows.[10] First, is the reduction in government fiscal deficit (which represents the excess of total expenditure over current income), in a context of simultaneous lowering of direct tax rates. This typically involves large declines in public capital formation and in expenditure on social infrastructure and poverty alleviation schemes by the state. Second, is the increasing control over domestic credit expansion achieved through restricting some measures of broad money supply. The third feature is the devaluation of the currency followed by an exchange rate regime that allows the rupee to float at rates determined by the market. Fourth, comes the liberalisation of external trade characterised by a move from quota controls on imports to tariffs. This is followed by the gradual reduction of tariff barriers as well as removal of restrictions on specific exports, particularly agricultural goods. The fifth feature is the easing out of conditions for foreign capital inflow. This is especially directed towards attracting foreign investments and portfolio investments by foreign agents in Indian securities. The sixth feature is domestic deregulation and freeing of controls, including those on prices of essential commodities and the restrictions on their movements. Overt and covert cuts in subsidies on exports, fertilisers and food, are promoted both as a part of budgetary cuts and in order to bring domestic prices in line with 'international' prices. Last, but not the least is the wide-ranging reforms of various sectors unleashed by the forces of globalisation. 'Reform' of the public sector enterprises usually implies a rise in output prices, reduction of state subsidies and possible closure of loss–making enterprises and moves towards disinvestment and gradual privatisation. This is accompanied by attempts to liberalise domestic financial markets with a view to strengthening capital markets vis-à-vis banking intermediaries, and allowing for various types of financial innovations. 'Reform' in the labour market essentially

[10] Jayati Ghosh, 'Macro-Economic Trends and Female Employment; India in the Asian context', Paper presented at *seminar on Gender and Employment in India; Trends, Patterns and Policy Implications*, organised by the Indian Society of Labour Economics and Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi, December 18-20, 1996,pg. 3.

involves the introduction of an exit policy to make retrenchment and closure easier and doing away with protective legislation for workers, which is seen to make the labour market 'rigid' and 'inflexible'.[11]

Although most of these policies are important to note to get a holistic picture, for the purposes of this research, it is imperative to focus on the policies that impact directly on labour. The analysis in this research would primarily deal with three important components of the structural adjustment policies vis-à-vis the changes brought in by the Indian government after the 1990's liberalisation. These are the reforms in the labour market; the privatisation of the public sector in general and specifically the state-led closure of small scale industries or industries not making profits; and lastly, cuts in subsidies or government expenditure on health, education, social security and poverty alleviation programmes.

Before we discuss certain governmental measures implemented post liberalisation, we need to build a theoretical framework within which the changes can be situated and studied. In the last ten years, one of the key tenets of structural adjustment programme under the broad umbrella of globalisation has been the opening up of the national economy to international competition through more openness in trade and capital inflows. The other, and related key notion has been the rolling back of the state in major areas of economic and social activity.[12]

David Held has identified some distinct schools of thought, which look at the debates around globalisation and the response of the nation state. The advocates of a Neo-liberal world order stress on the emergence of a single global market based on the principle of global competition as the harbinger of human progress. Economic globalisation they believe is leading to the denationalisation of economies through the establishment of transnational

[11] Ibid., pg. WS-2.

[12] Rajni Kothari, 'Globalisation and Revival of Tradition, Dual Attack on Model of democratic Nation building', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 25, 1995.

networks of production, trade and finance. In this 'borderless' economy, national governments are becoming little more than transmission belts for global market forces. Economic power and political power are becoming effectively denationalised and diffused. As a result, nation-states are increasingly becoming "a transitional mode of organisation for managing economic affairs".[13] On the other hand, Statists or Protectionists argue that the politics of national communities is associated with hostility to or outright rejection of global links and institutions. What is prominent here is the protection of a distinctive culture, tradition, language or religion, which binds people together and offers a valued common ethos and sense of common faith.[14]

In the Indian context, the initiation of structural adjustment policies has led to a re-examination of state intervention in competitive markets and development. The perception that state institutions were ineffective as providers of public goods and services was implicit in the acceptance of the market as an alternative delivery mechanism, where the role of the state merely became to facilitate and regulate the market.[15] The most striking change has taken place in the sphere of economic policy, as India moved from state led capitalism to a market-driven one. The state's relationship to the national economy was decisively reshaped from the early 1990s by the neo-liberal agenda adopted in response to a combination of internal and external pressures, particularly the external debt crisis in 1991.[16]

After deregulation and the initial production gains, poor infrastructure and weak purchasing power present major obstacles to further economic expansion. Thus, economic liberalisation is no panacea. Contrary to standard representations of the process, the government and the bureaucracy are still critical in economic operations. But unlike the past,

---

[13] David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalisation/anti-Globalisation*, Polity, 2002, pg. 7.
[14] Ibid., pg. 111.
[15] Amit Bhaduri and Deepak Nayyar, *The Intelligent person's guide to liberalisation*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1996.
[16] Ibid.

the state does not always act as buffer between domestic and foreign capital in order to protect the former. Like the earlier regimes, liberalisation primarily serves the interests of the upper and the middle classes. [17]

The official economic policies are not grounded on any major institutional change such as land reforms or the redistribution of other resources, such as assets or income, which is an important precondition for sustained growth. The absence of such change, given the prevailing inequalities in income and wealth distribution, and the unequal access to social and political power, has meant that a relatively small proportion of the population has largely appropriated the gains from such growth.[18]

The sheer inability of the state to control economic growth or to direct it towards socially desired lines has had several negative implications for the overall development process. Since the economic structure was that of a mixed economy, with private sector investment and production decisions determined by the unequal distribution of purchasing power, government allocations were often out of line with flows generated by private agents. This made it difficult to implement the planning process according to intentions, and also increasingly irrelevant as private sector allocations actually determined the course of the economy. The incapacity of the government to tax the rich, not only meant that direct taxes as a proportion of total national income decreased continuously from the early 1960s, but also led to the emergence of a significant parallel or 'black' economy.[19] From the mid-1970s onwards, state expenditures also became increasingly oriented towards subsidies to favoured groups and towards providing largely middle class employment in government and public sector. Also the

---

[17] Prabhat Patnaik, 'The State in India's Economic Development', in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Politics and the State in India*, Sage publications, New Delhi, 2000.
[18] Vijay Joshi, *India's Economic Reforms: 1991-2001*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
[19] Jayati Ghosh, op.cit, pg.330,

proclivity to private enrichment at social expense permeated the ranks of bureaucratic functionaries making corruption a systematic feature, which added to inefficiencies. [20] Liberalisation measures have failed to stimulate an upswing in economic growth; in fact, according to available data, after registering an increase between 1991 and 1996, industrial growth slowed down between 1996 and 1998. Foreign direct investment has not risen significantly. Delicensing of the regulatory regime has conferred greater autonomy to business, but it has not reduced corruption and rent seeking. If anything, deregulation of bureaucratic controls led to a liberalisation of corruption.[21] Therefore it can be argued that the state in some ways failed to bring about overall economic growth, due to non implementation of land reforms and no proper channels to determine the goals of the planning process. Also there had been a growing nexus between the bureaucracy and the economic and political elites. Overall, it failed to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

The Impact of SAP on the Poor

The process of structural adjustment is linked inevitably with an increase in poverty and inequality.[22] Available data suggests that income-poverty and inequality worsened in India between 1991 and 1994. The incidence of income-poverty among female-headed households was above average for all households in both rural and urban India during the 90s.[23] This was linked to a steep reduction, in central government outlays on programmes for "poverty alleviation". The overall rate of growth of employment is likely to have fallen sharply after the introduction of policies of structural adjustment due to the industrial recession that it

[20] Ibid., pg. 331
[21] Bob Currie, 'Governance, Democracy and Economic Adjustment in India: Conceptual and Empirical Problems', *Third World Quarterly*, 1996,pg. 787-808.
[22] N. Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues*, Boston: South End Press, 1993.
[23] S.D Tendulkar, K.Sundaram and L.R.Jain, *Poverty in India, 1970-71 to 1988-89*, ILO-ARTEP, New Delhi, 1993.

generated.[24] The state–sponsored credit for small-scale self-employed has also been cut in the nineties.

Employment generation and the incidence of poverty are the two critical concerns voiced by the opponents of the recent reforms. The 1980s were characterised by a relatively slow expansion of employment, but also by rising real wages and a fairly substantial drop in both the incidence and the severity of poverty, particularly in rural India. It has been argued by Sen and Ghosh that this can be partially related to the rapid increase in various subsidies and transfers from government to households, the large increase in revenue expenditure on agriculture by central and state governments and a substantial increase in rural development expenditure.[25] However, since 1991, governments' economic strategy has amounted to a total turnaround. It has led to further reductions in the employment generation capacity of the organised sector, while adversely affecting rural non-agricultural employment.

This can be explained in terms of a direct fallout of the following policies- actual declines in government spending on rural development in the central budgets, cuts in the fertiliser subsidy; reduced central government transfers to state governments which have thereby been forced to cut back on their own spending, diminished real expenditures on rural employment and anti-poverty schemes and overall decline in public infrastructure and energy investments. Although these policy measures affect the entire country, the rural areas are invariably the worse hit. Reduced spending on social expenditure such as on education, health and sanitation and rise in prices combine to take a heavy toll on the poor. Financial liberalisation measures have especially hit the rural sector very hard by effectively reducing the availability of rural

[24] R. Islam, *'Perspectives on Employment Generation in India'*, ILO, New Delhi, 1994.
[25] A.Sen and J.ghosh, *Trends in Rural Employment and the Poverty Employment Linkage*, ILO ARTEP Working Papers, Delhi: International Labour Organisation, 1993.

credit. As a result there has been an absolute decline in rural non-agricultural employment since 1991.

Structural adjustment programmes in other words has necessarily entailed costly food for the working people. A rise in rural poverty is an inevitable consequence of this phenomenon. The introduction of this package shows that the real mobility witnessed is that of finance rather than that of capital-in-production. What comes through clearly from the Indian experience with structural adjustment programme is the dominant role of the process of globalisation of finance. [26]

There have been three major criticisms of the orthodox policies of structural adjustment implemented by the Indian government in 1991. It has been argued that these policies undermine national sovereignty with respect to economic policy-making.

The policies of structural adjustment will not generate sustained economic growth. The new policies impose an unjust and harsh burden on the poorest sections of society. Changes associated with India's current economic policy have caused acute crises in communities that live on the margins of subsistence.[27]

During structural adjustment there is inevitably depression in growth rates, at least in phases. There is simultaneously a pressure to 'rationalise' the labour market by reducing protection for workers through creating 'exit policies'. There is also a reduction in the quality of employment. In sum, the orthodoxy of structural adjustment just cannot be pro-poor and no amount of putting on the cosmetics of the 'human face' and spreading 'safety nets' can prevent distress to the poor. Then it is up to the poor to respond as they can to this orthodoxy

[26] Prabhat Patnaik and C.P Chandrashekhar, 'Indian Economy under Structural Adjustment', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 25, 1995.
[27] Madhura Swaminathan, op.cit.

and kow-towing to false prophets.[28] It is this aspect, which is investigated in this research with special emphasis on women who are the most marginalised within this category of the poor.

Globalisation, which is often referred to as the removal of borders to free trade and the closer integration of national economies, can be a misnomer. It has been argued that it has the potential to enrich everyone in the world, particularly the poor. But the way globalisation has been managed has foiled this possibility. Specially, the international trade agreements that have played such a large role in removing barriers for the free play of the market and the policies that have been imposed on developing countries in the process of globalisation need to be radically rethought.[29]

The Debate over Feminisation and Mechanisation of Labour and its Gendered Implications

The policies of structural adjustment programmes ushered in changes in the labour market, which had many gender specific impacts. The reduction in government spending on social sectors has a direct impact on women in general and women workers in particular. As a result of increased mechanisation ushered in by the policies of liberalisation, traditional industries such as coir, cashew, tobacco, handicrafts, handloom and khadi where women are employed in large numbers, are in a crisis. The result invariably is a decline in women's employment.[30] Policies of liberalisation are typically associated with an absolute and relative decline in formal sector employment with unavoidable negative consequences for informal sector employment. More and more people are forced to survive by means of part-time self-employment, odd jobs,

[28] N. Arvind Das, The Political Economy of the Economic "Reforms", JCAS *Symposium Series 6*, 1998, pg. 139-140.
[29] Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalisation and its Discontents*, Penguin books, Great Britain, 2002.
[30] D.Narayana, 'Financial Sector Reforms: Is There a strategy for Agricultural Credit', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 16, 1993.

self-employment, odd jobs, casual wage labour and other temporary jobs in the informal sector. In the post 1991 period, it is likely that the share of the unorganised sector in total employment has increased distinctively. The proportion of women workers who are employed in the informal sector is higher than the proportion of all men workers employed in this sector. To this extent there is a distinct gender aspect to the problem of "informalisation".[31]

Programmes of orthodox structural adjustment are an onslaught on the poor and working people. When poor households suffer, women among them suffer too. In addition, women within households bear a disproportionate share of the new burden. Further, certain policies of structural adjustment have a direct impact on women.

It is important that the women's movement understands and monitors the ways in which current economic policies affect the conditions of life and work of women in order to further the struggle for women's equality and well being.

The deterioration of the position of women workers is partly caused by the policies of structural adjustment as concretised in the form of the lack of employment guarantee, fluctuation in incomes and declining living conditions. Some argue that quantitatively women's employment has increased in certain sectors post 1991. We need to study not only the quantitative and qualitative increase or decrease in employment rate, but also changes in other factors, which determine the nature of women's work. In this context, it is important to reflect upon the feminisation and the mechanisation and tie it up with other issues, the impact of which on the nature of women's work post liberalisation has often been calculated by unconventional mechanisms.

---

[31] P.Visaria and J.Unni, *Self-Employed Women Population and Human Resource Development*, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad, 1992.

It is a fact that more women have been entering the labour force after 1991. But qualitative improvements or better conditions have not necessarily accompanied the quantitative increase in employment. Indeed, it is usually the case that employers prefer to take in women for additional employment generation precisely because they are willing to accept lower wages, inferior working conditions and less security of contract than men for similar work. Structural adjustment, economic reform, the transition from centrally planned to market economies and globalisation have tended to exacerbate women's vulnerability, and increased their overall economic marginalisation even as the employment of women in productive activities has visibly increased.[32]

In March 2000, reviewing their experience of the impact of structural adjustment policies and globalisation on women's social and economic status, around eighty women's organisations and groups identified loss of women's jobs, "through mechanisation, cuts in government initiated employment" and reduction of local employment provided by domestic enterprises as the dominant phenomenon.[33] They argued that "SAP has had a differential impact and increased stratification among working women" with only "a minority of urban educated women" having benefited from better employment opportunities.[34]

In the late eighties, the concept of 'feminisation' of labour emerged to somewhat loosely capture the characteristic features of changes taking place in what is called the labour market, as national statutory regulations gave way increasingly to market regulation and globalisation. Particularly in the context of some developing countries emerging as export manufacturing hubs with increasing proportion of women workers in export oriented garment and electronics

[32] Ibid., pg. 8
[33] Brinda Karat, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.
[34] *Womenspeak, United Voices against Globalisation, Poverty and Violence* in India, March, New Delhi, 2000.

industries, feminisation of labour became a central concept around which much of the gender oriented discourses on the impact of globalisation proceeded.[35]

The concept of feminisation of labour includes two specific connotations. The first, of course, is the sharp rise in the share of women in paid employment, either as a result of women taking over jobs earlier done by men or due to relatively faster expansion of sectors (particularly in manufacturing) where female workers predominate. Secondly, the phrase is also indicative of the general growth of precariousness in forms of employment. This was considered to be a characteristic of 'flexibilisation' policies, i.e., the trend of employers (large and small) to respond to market uncertainties and increased pressure on costs by reducing their core workforce, and relying increasingly on irregular forms of employment in order to avoid paying wages to workers during economic downturns. The attributes of 'flexible' labour leaned towards a casual nature of the work contract, lower rates of remuneration, lack of security provided, low access to skill etc.; all "characteristics associated with women's historical pattern of labour force participation." [36]

Guy Standing uses the term 'feminisation' to refer to two processes: a rise in female labour force participation in the face of a fall in male participation rates and the feminisation of certain jobs that were traditionally performed by men, i.e. the substitution of men by women. Applying this thesis to India, Sudha and L.K. Deshpande state that this tendency towards feminisation of the workforce has been observed in official data at national level as well as in the city of Bombay. Employers in Bombay responded to liberalisation by employing women or by retrenching fewer women than men. They argue that feminisation in urban labour markets over the 80s increased employment opportunities for women.[37] Elaborating on the direction of female employment in

[35] See 1999 Survey Of *Women in Development, Globalisation, Women and Work*, United Nations, 2000.
[36] Guy Standing, 'Global Feminisation Through Flexible Labour: A Theme Revisited', World Development, Vol. 27, No 3, 1999,pg. 583.
[37] Sudha Deshpande and L.K Deshpande, 'New Economic Policy and Female Employment', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct 10,vol. XXVII, no 41, Bombay, 1992.

manufacturing, they note that "to reduce cost, employers replaced dearer male labour by cheaper female labour. Very often these women did work that was an extension of housework. Even when employed in the formal sector they were likely to work as casual, contract or piece-rate workers or work in ancillary units that were often small home-based enterprises."[38]

It is important to probe the nature of jobs being done by women or that, which were taken over by women from men. It is possible that this could be the result of a process, quite different from the kind of 'feminisation' that has been described by Elson.[39] Conversely, feminisation could have been due to the disappearance of the types of jobs traditionally dominated by men and the expansion of those traditionally done by women. Qualifying the feminisation thesis, Nirmala Banerjee points out further that far from the breakdown in the sexual division of labour, "all that has happened was that either woman-type occupations had expanded or some occupations had become more identified with women."[40]

On the other hand, numerous micro level studies have shown decline in the employment of women. Renana Jhabvala and Mira Savara have documented the decline of female employment in the textile mill sector in Ahmedabad and Bombay over the past few decades due to automation. Other case studies in the city of Bombay show how many large-scale industries that used to employ women in large numbers have replaced their women workers by either men or machines or both.[41]

Feminisation of the labour force has been used to refer to one or all of the following: increase in the female participation rate relative to men, the substitution of men by women who take over

---

[38]Nandita Shah, Sujata Gothoskar, Nandita Gandhi, Amrita Chhachhi, 'Structural adjustment, Feminisation of Labour- Force and Organisational Strategies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 30, 1994.

[39] Diane Elson, 'Appraising Recent Development in the World Market for Nimble Fingers', in Amrita Chhachhi and Renee Pittin (ed.) *Confronting State, Capital and Patriarchy*, Macmillan, London, 1996.

[40] Nirmala Banerjee, 'Trends in Women's Employment', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 29, 1989.

[41] Gothoskar and Banaji, 'Making the Workplace a Better Place for Women', *Manushi*, no 24, Sept-Oct, New Delhi, 1984.

jobs traditionally handled by men, or the increase in women's involvement in 'invisible' work, i.e., family labour and home working. The changing character of industrial work on the basis of new technology and managerial strategies whereby work is decentralised, low paid, irregular, with part time or temporary labour contracts, (i.e. increasingly like 'women's work' but which is not necessarily done by women), could also come under the ambit of 'feminisation'.[42]

A major problem with the concept of 'feminisation through flexible labour practices' is that it does not take into account the issue of sexual division in the labour market. Since the inception of industry, there has been a very clear division of labour based on gender. The earliest women workers in textiles, jute, mining and later in chemicals engineering and electronics have mainly done packing and assembly line jobs, while men have been involved in the rest of the production process – operating, supervision, maintenance, etc. In other words, the sexual division of labour was predominant in the labour market much before the debates about the nature of work done by women came up in the context of feminisation. Taking the argument further one could also establish the stand that the sexual division of labour became overtly visible in the era of structural adjustment programme when the nature of women's work was being discussed.

Nirmala Banerjee observes that most employers deliberately promote a gender wise division in labour and an image of meekness and submission amongst women workers.[43] According to her, there is no competition between men and women workers because women are only given jobs, which men do not want. This is possible as the labour market treats men as 'superior workers'. Women did amateur work for electrical industry, but as soon as the wage rates went up, the work was taken out of their hands. Such reversals have also been noticed in large-scale

---

[42] Ibid.

[43] Nirmala Banerjee (ed.) *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

industries like pharmaceutical and toiletries where women dominated tasks like packing and assembly has been taken over by men.

The electronics industry has always been seen as a woman oriented one. But as Diane Elson points out, from the late 70s, due to the technical changes in wafer fabrication, assembly and testing, the proportion of women employees has declined in countries like Ireland. She goes on to say that the "...gender division of labour, which tends to confine women to relatively subordinate and inferior positions in the organisation of monetised production, is not overridden by 'flexibility'. Rather it structures the form that 'flexibility' takes".[44] Therefore women are facing the brunt of gender discrimination along with discriminatory employment policies that come with flexibility and mechanisation.

Technological change and advancement are popularly regarded as progressive, positive and inevitable. The significant threat of resultant unemployment is often downplayed. It is true that transition to wage labour has granted economic independence and autonomy to women in developing economies. Yet further mechanisation and technical innovation is also going to make them increasingly vulnerable to deskilling and job loss, especially so in financial and service sectors.[45]

Surveys of the impact of technological change on rural women has revealed that technological change, particularly in the rural areas, have for the most part led to concentration of women in domestic and non-market roles and in labour-intensive activities. It has also been observed that technological innovations introduced in women's activities result in the men taking over women's jobs. This happens simply because the corresponding skills development, training, knowledge and working capital necessary for accessing the new opportunities created

---

[44] Diane Elson, (ed.), *Male Bias in the Development Process*, London: Macmillan, 1991.

[45] Jan Sinclair Jones, Women and Technology- Problems of Technological Unemployment or Deskilling, *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 20-27, 1996.

excluded women, often owing to institutionalised gender biases. It has been noted that rural factory market imperfection which contributed to class-based inequalities could well deny the women access to technology and resources leaving them in occupations marked by low incomes and low productivity, thereby creating and accentuating gender-based inequalities.[46]

In general, empirical evidence in India does not support the feminisation of labour thesis in terms of any sharp rise in share of women in employment in manufacturing or services. In agriculture, a rise in women's share in employment during the early nineties has tapered off in the later half. In fact, debates around the concept have drawn attention to several inequalities and forms of exploitation faced by women workers. At the same time the sweeping universalistic position on feminisation of labour, has not gone theoretically uncontested by women scholars at an international level.[47] This is to draw attention to theoreticians like Diane Elson, who have questioned the very basis of the feminisation theory. What comes out very clearly from the discussion is the special nature of work that women do and how this needs to be critically analysed in the context of structural adjustment programme.

The unemployment rates for urban females had already increased in 1990-91, which was a year of economic crisis. Conditions worsened further in 1991-92. The deterioration in employment status and in participation rates after a full year of the operation of new economic reforms was largely connected to a further increase in the casualisation of labour, especially in the urban areas. The proportion of casual labour among urban males, which had been 132 per thousand in 1977-78, had increased to 146 per thousand in 1987-88 and jumped to 193 in 1992. Among urban females, the proportion was 256 per thousand in 1977-78, 254 in 1987-88 and

---

[46] Iftikhar Ahmed, 'Technology and Feminisation of Work', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 30, 1994.

[47] Indrani Mazumdar, *Emergent Contradictions: Globalisation and Women Workers in India*, May, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 2004.

287 in 1992.[48] While amongst males, the casualisation was mainly at the cost of regular employment, among the females it was mainly at the cost of self-employment.[49]

The situation of poor women, children and the average member of the scheduled castes or scheduled tribes is likely to be worsened rather than bettered with the kind of reform measures that have been introduced since 1991. Questions of social and economic reforms, of social empowerment and freeing the market, social deepening and financial deepening are intimately connected in the poor countries of the world, and India is no exception. [50]

Situating SEWA and AIDWA: The Foundational Background

Following Held's formulation of the overarching debate on globalisation and its impact on the legitimate role of the state, it can be said that the radical school identifies the agents of change in existing social movements, such as the environmental movement, the women's movement and the various anti-globalisation movements. There are echoes here of Rousseau's 'democratic vision' and New Left ideal of community politics and participatory democracy. But the radical model also draws on Marxist critiques of liberal democracy, as is evident in the language of equality, solidarity, emancipation and the transformation of the existing power relations. The achievements of 'real democracy' are conceived as inseparable from the achievements of social and economic equality, the establishment of the necessary conditions for self- development, and the creation of strong political communities.[51]

The radical school of thought gives immense importance to the articulation of dissent by various social movements in the context of globalisation. SEWA and AIDWA are intrinsic parts

[48] NSSO statement, 1994.
[49] Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Economic Reforms and Employment in India', *JCAS Symposium Series 6*, 1998, pg. 24-25
[50] Ibid., Pg. 59.
[51] See argument by Callinicos, in, David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalisation/anti-Globalisation*, Polity, 2002.

of the women's movement in India. Both deal with the impact of globalisation on women workers, albeit in different ways, which falls within the purview of the radical school of thought.

It is in this context that the two case studies are placed. Both are primarily women's organisations but are very different in terms of perceptions, ideologies and influences. AIDWA has a very radical stand on the issue of structural adjustment programme and its impact on the women workers whereas SEWA professes a pragmatic view of the issue. Although both have crucial connections with the women's movement, their respective positions are distinct. It is this experience of diversity that characterises the dialogue between the different strands within the contemporary women's movement. However, what strengthens the movement from within is the ability to form broad alliances on specific issues with varied ideological stands.

SEWA works within the parameters of the informal economy, in a large number of sectors from agriculture to forestry, manufacturing to trade and services, and in many different locales; from dense urban areas to dry and desert like rural areas. It has in a way provided for social security for its members who are poor working women in the unorganised and the informal sector. SEWA is one of the pioneering organisations, which has successfully taken up the cause of women working in the informal sector. This is one of the reasons why SEWA proves to be an interesting case study. The main thrust of SEWA's argument has often been that women belonging to the informal sector are the most marginalised section within the category of women workers. They suffer from a double burden- the dismal conditions of work characteristic of the informal sector are further magnified by the influences of globalisation.

The tendency of displacement of women workers in the informal sector by machines has been accentuated under globalisation. Advancing mechanisation, removal of earlier protections for small-scale industry, alterations in the market for informal sector products because of penetration by large industry have all contributed to this process. Evidence has been piling up of

mechanisation displacing women in the construction industry. [52] In the petty producer segment of the informal sector, such as handloom workers, liberalisation has meant driving more and more of them out of the market. The bidi industry, where 80 percent of the workers are women working from home, is facing stagnation and the number of workdays has declined. In all, it appears that even in harshly exploitative informal sector employment, women workers are facing increasing marginalisation with the advent of globalisation.

One of the defining principles of the informal sector is that, it is increasingly becoming synonymous with the kaleidoscope of unregulated, poorly skilled and low-paid workers.[53] Its existence and characteristics were really defined in contrast and with reference to the formal sector, that is supposedly characterised by regular and written contracts and therefore, is subject to state regulation.

Even before the birth of the concept of the informal sector, the unorganised sector and its workers had been a recognised category in India.[54] The concept of the informal sector held great appeal for those interested in bringing the issues of invisible women workers onto the agenda of national policy.[55] In a sense, the concept played a role in highlighting the fact that vast contingents of the working people in developing countries such as India, had remained

---

. [52] See Renana Jhabvala, Globalisation, Liberalisation and Women in the Informal Economy, in Veena Jha (ed.) *Trade, Globalisation and Gender –Evidence from South Asia*, UNIFEM, New Delhi, 2003

[53] Jan Breman, 'A Question of Poverty', in *The Laboring Poor in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2003.

[54] 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 organisation and nature of problems of their sectors of employment-the organised and unorganised sectors. The organised sector is characterised by capital-intensive technology relatively higher wages, large-scale operations and corporate or governmental organisations. The unorganised sector has labour intensive technology, small –scale operations using traditional methods and lower wages. In the organised sector wages are usually protected by labour legislation and trade union activity: in the unorganised 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.

[55] Several new central laws specifically targeting sections of the unorganised workers were brought into existence, including The Bidi and Cigar Workers (condition of employment) Act, 1966, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, The Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979, along with Welfare Cess and Fund Acts covering workers in the Bidi industry, Cine industry, and in the Iron ore, Manganese ore , Chrome

deprived of the benefits of bare minimum employment security and labour rights. For women, it acquired even greater significance with the growing realisation that decline in women's employment in the formal sector simultaneously witnessed a disproportionately large majority of women workers concentrating in the more backbreaking forms of labour and work that characterised the informal sector.

The task force of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, which compiled Shramshakti found that, "the labour force in the unorganised sector is characterised by a high incidence of casual labour, mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or doing their own account work at very uneconomic returns. There is a total lack of job security and social security benefits. The areas of exploitation are high resulting in long hours, unsatisfactory working conditions and occupational health hazards."[56] SEWA is situated within this broad understanding of the informal sector.

The case study of AIDWA is interesting because they work with women workers in the rural and urban areas and because over the years, they have been functional in developing a substantive critique of the policies of globalisation from a Marxist feminist perspective. Their stand is distinctive from other women's groups, as they are also a part of the organised left in the country. They have also developed a strong critique of globalisation policies, especially the structural adjustment programme by claiming that these policies strengthen patriarchy.

It is important to study the category of women workers as it enables one to have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of globalisation on them. AIDWA as an organisation, attempts at defining the category of women workers by analysing the discrimination they face at multiple levels.

---

ore , Lime stone , Dolomite and Mica mines , for women ,this period saw the enactment of the Equal Remuneration act ,1976 .

[56] National Commission of Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, *Shramshakti*, New Delhi, 1988.

Women workers are primarily discriminated based on the predominant norm of gender-based division of labour, which is a characteristic feature of the labour market. AIDWA also articulates women's position in the realm of society and polity in terms of the general gender based discrimination they face. AIDWA has been one of the pioneering organisations to critique the patriarchal policies implemented by the state in India.

They analyse these patriarchal policies by determining the consequences it has on women workers. Again, the concept of a woman worker cannot be studied outside the context of patriarchy. Just like the social construction of a woman; there is also a social construction of the woman worker and in both these processes patriarchy plays an important role. Again, patriarchy itself is essentially a historically developed ideological force. It gives gender relations their specific character in each situation. One instrument of patriarchal domination is the denial of property rights to women. The state in India gives tacit support to patriarchal forces by not enforcing its own laws and programmes, which might challenge the prevalence of patriarchal property relations on behalf of women. This partly may be because the state still leaves the function of providing social security and succour mainly to families. Patriarchal attitudes of politicians and decision-makers also play an important role in keeping the structures of patriarchy intact. Fighting for the denial of property rights to women has been in the agenda of AIDWA in almost all its struggles.

Historically analysing women's work force participation, Nirmala Banerjee points out that in the period just preceding the policy changes, the immediate prospect before the majority of women was no less depressing. There had been no respite from the continuing discrimination against them in the labour market. So merely reversing the reform policy may ease some of the immediate pressures on poor women but it cannot change the basic parameters of the situation. Women workers were in a precarious position in the economy as either men or machines

constantly replaced them. It is now established that women workers were already in a disadvantageous position and that their conditions of work left much to be desired. The crux of the debate then becomes whether globalisation has further deteriorated their condition of work or not.

Jayati Ghosh has argued that there is an overarching set of controls, which characterises the work of the women worker. There is a range of controls varying from control over self, over one's own labour power, labour, type of work contract, means of production, raw materials, output, proceeds of the output, income, skills, etc. In other words women workers have practically no control over their own conditions of work, starting from the process of doing the work till the proceeds of the work are received. There might be structural constraints, which are specifically linked to the problems related to the unorganised sector, such as the casual nature of work, insecurity in terms of employment and income associated with flexible labour. But even within this sector, the women workers, just by virtue of being women, constitute a section that is doubly exploited. SEWA in its struggles and interventions do not address this aspect of double burden faced by women workers. They theorise women's exploitation vis-à-vis the informal sector without evolving an overall critique of women's position in society. In the era of globalisation, it is important to base any gendered critique of these policies on the pre-existing position of women in society and the labour market. This is mandatory to evolve a holistic understanding of women workers and their changing conditions of work post liberalisation.

Chapter Two

'Humanising' Globalisation: A Case Study of SEWA

This chapter attempts to critically evaluate SEWA's understanding of the impact of globalisation on women workers in the informal sector. One argument, which runs through SEWA's literature, emphasises the vulnerabilities of women workers to unwarranted risks typical, to the informal sector. However this can't be averted due to the nature of the work. Nonetheless in the wake of forces of globalisation, this tends to be aggravated. SEWA is prone to arguing that globalisation is not the only reason for the deterioration of the condition of work for women workers in this sector. On the contrary, according to SEWA, sometimes there might be no causal relationship between the forces of globalisation and the conditions of work being unbearable for women in general and in the informal sector in particular. In this chapter, there has been an attempt to look at SEWA's stand and connect it with the role it plays in reducing risks for its members in the informal sector after the introduction of policies of New Economic Reform. The role played by SEWA is characterised by its emphasis on reaching the markets to the doorstep of the poor women. This can be achieved in terms of providing skill training, enhance capacity building, provide raw materials and credit facilities for the women on the one hand, and network with national and international markets on the other hand to sell the finished product. They also attempt to bring changes at the policy level to even out some of the measures taken by the government after the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme. The conclusion illustrates how this position taken by SEWA is only to reiterate the fact that globalisation has a human face. It either deals with the problem by making piecemeal changes to reduce risks for its members in the informal sector

or worst still, by attempting to globalise the rural market where SEWA itself plays the role of the intermediary.

Keeping this broad argument in mind, the chapter is divided into three strands of thought. The first deals with SEWA's historical underpinning, which plays an important role in its conceptualisation of globalisation. The second section attempts to give a comprehensive overview of the organisational structure of SEWA. This is important to examine as it explicitly demonstrates in what way SEWA is a special case of trade union. It is different from other trade unions because it does not have a reductionist attitude of exclusively dealing with the economic conditions of work alone. Instead, it fights for the social as well as the economic security of its members. This argument is broadly based on the assumption that traditional trade unions mostly fight for economic security for its members. Moreover, a typical trade union operates in a formal structure, which looks at the dynamics between the employer and the employee. SEWA operates in the informal sector, which is characterised by the absence of an employer-employee structure. The lack of a negotiating partner with respect to SEWA's operations makes it a unique case study in this respect. This understanding can be attained by critically looking at the decentralised structure of its organisation. The last strand of thought links all this to SEWA's interpretation of the neo-liberal policies.

The Beginnings

The emergence of SEWA can be traced back to the insecurities[57] of casual and

[57] Insecurity was meant in terms of work and wages. Mostly all the women were scattered and unorganised with extremely low wages .All of them had acute problem of working capital, market place, raw material, transport, and storage. The middlemen would exploit them. They had no protection of any labour laws despite working for 18 hours a day. They mostly had unhygienic living conditions; faced occupational health hazards, also the percentage of female and infant mortality was high. They had no access to markets, banks, governmental bodies or courts. They were invisible in the eyes of the planners. Faced severe harassment from the police. Above all,

'self-employed'[58] women workers in the Textile Mill City of Ahmedabad. In 1917 Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (TLA) was formed under Mahatma Gandhi's patronage. At that time, some women workers had approached the TLA to get the benefits of organised unions. Ela Bhatt pioneered the beginning of SEWA as a union for informal sector women workers, which would, nevertheless, operate under the patronage of the TLA. SEWA was registered in 1972 as a trade union that aimed at organising poor women in the informal economy for full employment and self-reliance at the household level. The TLA was a conventional trade union (in terms of employer-employee set-up) that had a women's wing. It did not really protect and support the interests of the women workers who were engaged in casual work on a piece–rate basis. In 1981 the TLA expelled SEWA members and Ela Bhatt from its ranks after differences of approach emerged between them. Following their expulsion, the SEWA members took the opportunity to change their rules of membership so as to exclude men. From that time onwards, SEWA has been an all women's organisation. However, it is not clear from their literature whether this decision to exclude men was the result of the immediate context of the conflict with the TLA, or a deliberate and well thought out policy. SEWA now operates in a number of other Indian states under an umbrella federation called SEWA Bharat,

---

they were non-skilled and therefore had no income security. They had intense needs for fair credit, maternity protection, fair wages for whatever work they were engaged in.

[58] See 1991 SEWA Annual Report , according to this document :
Self employed is a broad term covering all the workers who are not in a formal employer- employee relationship. Both traditional and modern occupation come under SEWA's definition of self employed, from the bartering of goods to capitalistic piece-rate work.
The self employed women come from three broad categories:
The home-based worker producer
Women quilt makers, Bidi workers, incense stick makers, carpenters, block printers, bamboo workers, black smiths, junk smiths, spinners, weavers, food processors, handicrafts workers and artisans in the urban and the rural areas, potters, cobblers and weavers constitute this group.
The petty vendors
Women selling vegetables, eggs, fruits, fish, eatables, garments, milk and consumer goods produces in their slums constitute this group.
The manual labourers and providers of services
Women working as agriculture labourers, construction workers, cattle-holders, brick plant workers, head loaders and cart pullers, fuel wood pickers the forest and mountain labourers, waste pickers, fisherwomen, cotton-pod openers etc. constitute this group.

though it has primarily grown out of the SEWA Gujarat experience. The organisation strives to attain "the second freedom" (the first one being the political freedom asserted by the national freedom struggle), which means the attainment of social and financial security for thousands of women workers in the unorganised sector.[59]

SEWA is both an organisation and a movement and has spread to six states of India. Its annual membership fee of Rs 5 has facilitated a steady growth in membership over the years. At the beginning of 2003 its all-India membership was 7,04,166 and the Gujarat membership was 4,69,306.[60] SEWA believes in the joint action of trade union and co-operatives, federations and self help associations in rural and urban areas.

Two movements contributed to its emergence.[61] The first of these was the Trade Union Movement. However, as is evident from the earlier discussion, SEWA, in its structure, organisation and functioning, has grown beyond its trade union roots. Traditional trade unions are concerned primarily with the organised sector – i.e. with white collar workers incorporated within enterprises or with factory workers in registered factories. These employ the twin strategies of recourse to law and pressurising through withholding labour as the primary means of getting benefits for their members. Apart from dealing directly with employers, the trade

---

[59] The term unorganised sector has been widely used in India. It has not yet been defined precisely, but it is usually used to describe a type of work that is small, unregistered uncertain and unprotected. The unorganised sector is thus largely understood as being opposite of the organised sector, which is characterised by large firms, protection of labour laws and organised trade unions. The main defining characteristic of the unorganised sector is the precarious nature of the work. Employment is not permanent and workers are not covered by adequate social security. The unorganised sector comprises of two basic components i.e. self –employment in informal enterprises and paid employment in informal jobs. Another defining criterion for the unorganised sector is the lack of workers' organisations. They are rarely organised into trade unions or into associations. The workers in this sector therefore have little bargaining power and collective bargaining is rarely employed. The contribution of this sector to the economy is often grossly undercounted and underrated. According to the National Accounts Statistics, the unorganised sector contributes over 60.5 % to the NDP.SEWA works with women workers in the informal sector which broadly comes under the wider ambit of the unorganised sector. The term unorganised sector is used interchangeably with the informal sector. This is due to the commonality, the two terms share on the basis of their relationship and similar nature of work patterns, which has been elaborated above.

[60] SEWA Annual Report 2003, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad.

[61] Ponna Wignaraja, *Women, Poverty and Resources*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989, pg.74.

unions also use their numbers and their closeness to political parties to put pressure on employers, and even on the government from time to time. Unfortunately neither of these strategies is available to workers in the unorganised sectors. Thus, it is not surprising that the new SEWA union with its focus on women in the unorganised sector went beyond conventional trade unionism. Its main aim was to organise poor illiterate women in the rural and the urban sectors to empower them with the capacity to bargaining. SEWA attempts to ensure socio-economic security for self-employed women and to avert unwarranted risks, associated with the unorganised sector. Since there is no employer-employee relationship in the unorganised sector, its strategy has been to negotiate with the government directly so as to change the policies specifically implemented or to be attained in this sector. One important aspect that derives directly from SEWA's association with the TLA is the Gandhian influence on its ideology. The role played by this ideology in SEWA's overall philosophical grounding is taken up later in the chapter.

The other movement, which contributed to SEWA's growth, was the Women's movement in India. As the Women's movement gathered momentum, it became apparent that the struggle of poor women went beyond gender conflicts and purely economic issues to an inter-related set of problems including the social, cultural and political aspects which had to be addressed if the poor women were to benefit. It also became clear that poor women needed a more comprehensive basis for organisation.[62] It is interesting to note that SEWA as an organisation has never addressed the nature of what we call 'woman's work'[63] to produce an overarching critique of patriarchal structures which characterise most of the work women do, be it in the organised or in the unorganised sector. There has also not been any attempt to link

[62] Ibid.
[63] Discussed at length in the fourth chapter

up the gender division of labour operating both within and outside the family, with the social and sexual exploitation of women in general. Most importantly, there has been an over-emphasis on women workers and their rights without going into the politics of the position of women in society. In their understanding of woman's role and status in society and economy, SEWA seems to fall back upon Gandhian formulations.

SEWA adheres to what can be called a feminine philosophy, since it believes in non-violence, instead of retaliating with violent means for arbitration and reconciliation. Overall, it strives for a quiet, fiercely determined resistance to exploitation. SEWA draws a great deal of inspiration from Gandhi's work, and believes that he was instrumental in getting Indian society to recognise women's importance in the world of work and social change.[64] However, in this context, it is not very clear whether the attempt is to essentialise or to romanticise their so-called 'feminine philosophy'.

A discussion on Gandhian principles and ideas regarding the place and role of women in Indian society is necessary to understand the way in which SEWA uses, or has adopted the Gandhian ideology. Gandhi gave the Indian woman confidence in herself. He made them realise that they have a significant and dominant role to play in the family, that both she and her husband are equal and that within the family they both have similar rights. In a path-breaking intervention, he made not only the involvement of women in politics possible, but also made her realise that the national movement could not succeed without her active involvement in the struggle. Gandhi ultimately empowered women in the family and within marriage.[65]

---

[64] As expressed by Kalima Rose who has worked extensively with SEWA, for more details see, Kalima Rose, Where *Women are Leaders: The SEWA Movement in India*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pg. 31.

[65] This interpretation of Gandhi's take on women has been argued by Sujata Patel, for further details, see Sujata Patel 'Construction and Reconstruction of Women in Gandhi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 20, 1988.

This reconstruction of women and femininity did not get into a structural analysis of the origins and nature of the exploitation of women in society and within the family. In fact, Gandhi's views were essentialist in nature. He reaffirmed women's position as mothers and wives in the household. Gandhi believed in the doctrine of 'the separate spheres' whose roots lay in biology. The differences between sexes were explained in term of 'natural difference' that legitimised different social and cultural role for men and women in society and provided the basis of moral prescription regarding the behaviour of women and the interactions between sexes. In Gandhi, women's weakness was turned into strength. Gandhi links his understanding of women's weakness and its transformation into strength as part of the same strategy that was embodied in the conceptions of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*.[66] The "non-violent movement", he asserted, "is to enable the weakest human beings to vindicate their dignity".[67] The woman, in Gandhi's view, remained weakness personified. The difference was that while "she may be weak in body... she can be strong in soul".[68]Gandhi projected the spinning wheel as the weapon for the strong in soul.

SEWA's ideology draws heavily from Gandhian philosophy and traditions of truth, non-violence, communal harmony, removal of untouchability and propagation of khadi and village based industry.[69] There is no attempt to question the Gandhian notion of biological determinism and essentialism that is instrumental in articulating the dual role of women inside and outside the household. Here, the role outside household is strictly in terms of women's involvement in national movement and nation building. When it comes to women's role within the sphere of the household, it is limited to household chores, which reiterates

[66] CWMG, 1922, VOL23, pp. 33-37.
[67] Ibid., pg. 127
[68] Ibid., pg. 128
69 Kalima Rose, op.cit, pg.32.

stereotypes of gendered division of labour. SEWA in organising women workers has attempted to use the Gandhian philosophy of femininity in terms of turning the very weakness of women into their major strength.

There is an intrinsic link between SEWA's non-addressal of issues regarding the politics of gender and the stand they take on globalisation. A common feature in both these contexts is SEWA's disinclination towards questioning pre-existing structures, be it the forces of globalisation or the position of women in society. However, when we deal specifically with its stand on globalisation, a fundamental contradiction emerges between SEWA's overall approach and its Gandhian roots. In sharp contrast to Gandhi's advocacy of a self-sustained village economy and his critique of machines being an undesirable feature, specific to western civilisation, SEWA propagates the integration of the global to the local. This aspect will be dealt in depth later in this chapter. What seems to be the most positive take on Gandhian philosophy, is its politics of organising women in large numbers by articulating their vulnerable position in society vis-à-vis their work.

Moving Beyond Trade Unionism:

SEWA is a trade union that operates on the principle of decentralisation, which allows it to reach and organise the women workers at the grass roots more effectively. This principle of decentralisation is evident in the structure of the organisation and also the different activities it is involved in. SEWA believes in decentralised local management through barefoot managers and *Aagewans*, literally meaning local leaders. It has a democratically elected leadership-cum-management structure with four tiers represented by the executive committee, the council of representatives, the trade-cum-area committee of leaders and finally the members.[70] In terms of organisational structure, SEWA functions as an umbrella organisation,

[70] Ibid., pg.130.

which brings together various smaller, local associations of women. It mobilises women workers through four types of associations - the union, the co-operatives, the federations and the supportive services.[71] Given its emphasis on employment and income, most of the organisations that comprise SEWA are trade based.[72] It has been instrumental in organising its members into co-operatives based on issues of livelihoods.[73] The SEWA Bank, the SEWA's Rural Development Programme, the SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre, SEWA Academy and Social Security Measures provided by it, form the skeleton of supportive measures that SEWA undertakes within its broad organisational structure. The goals of SEWA's activities are to achieve full employment and self-reliance for all its members. It organises women to enter the mainstream of the economy through the twin strategies of struggle and development.[74] SEWA also supports its members' efforts towards empowerment and autonomy.

SEWA also poses as a unique example of trade unions in the Indian context, as it negotiates policy changes not only with the state but also establishes broad alliances with national and international agencies. Traditionally trade unions have the factory owners or at the most the state as their negotiating partners. SEWA transcends the boundaries of these traditional trade unions by working in close quarters with the *panchayats* through *gram sabhas*, taluk, district and municipal level government, with the state, the national government and with international

---

[71] Renana Jhabvala, 'Self- Employed Women's Association: A Case Study of Interventions in The Labour Market', Paper presented at a *seminar on Gender and Employment in India; Trends, Patterns and Policy Implications*, organised by the Indian Society of Labour Economics and Institute of Economic Growth, , December 18-20, Delhi, 1996, pg. 11.

[72] The members of these Trade organisations are the beneficiaries. Some of the organisations are registered under the co-operative act, and some are DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) groups or producers' groups registered with the Ministry of Rural Development. All these trade organisations are smaller primary groups that are village level or mohalla based and all of them function as independent, autonomous bodies.

[73] Some of the co-operatives started through SEWA's initiative are the Milk producers co-operative, the Artisans co-operatives, the Land based co-operatives, the Stone quarrying co-operatives, the Cleaners co-operatives, the Salt producers' co-operatives, the Housing co-operatives, the Bank co-operatives and the Vendors co-operatives. Some of the DWCRA groups started by SEWA are as follows – artisan based DWCRA groups, land based DWCRA groups (fodder farms), Small forest produces gatherers groups, Nursery raising groups Cattle feed and consumer items

[74] 'The Self –Employed Women's Association', *Working with Women in Poverty*, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN publications, 1993, pg.34

agencies.[75] The stark differences between SEWA and other trade unions are evident from SEWA's stand on globalisation and structural adjustment programmes, which seem to contradict the views of traditional trade unions which denounce these policies by critiquing them outrightly.

The next part of the chapter would deal with SEWA's stand on globalisation and its impact on women workers. This analysis can be carried out at two levels. At the first level, inferences derived from sector-wise study of women workers will be discussed in order to substantiate SEWA's stand with adequate data. The second level would be to understand what role SEWA plays in humanising the dehumanising effects of globalisation on women workers in its capacity of being an intermediary of sorts.

Globalisation's Impact on Women Workers: SEWA's Piecemeal Interventions

SEWA has taken a pragmatic stand on the issue of globalisation by trying to understand how it affects poor women in their day-to-day life and also how it might affect them in the future. SEWA supports trade liberalisation in some cases and opposes it in others, depending on whether the effects are beneficial or damaging to the poor.[76] To quote Ela Bhatt, "Our objective in studying the changes in women's lives is to adopt a pro-active stance on programmes and policies concerning liberalisation and globalisation in order to better the lives of women in the informal economy. It is a pro-active, pro-poor position. SEWA is not for or against it (globalisation). When the poor benefit we support globalisation, and when they do not, we try to build their strength to reap the benefits. But the poor self-employed worker is no

[75] Mirai Chatterjee, 'Where Women are the Leaders Some Experiences of the Self Employed Women's Association', Anuradha Maharishi (ed.), *A Common Cause NGO's and Civil Society*, NFI, 2002, pg134.

[76] Yukitsugu Yanoma and Marzia Fontana, democracy and civil society, 2020 Focus 8, *Shaping Globalisation for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security*, 2001, also see , www.ifpri.org

different from the factory worker: Both are affected by national and international change. To achieve security we need to enhance our women's participation in global trade".[77]

SEWA does not enter the debate at the macro level; rather it observes changes at the ground level and tries to link it with macro changes and policies. SEWA carries out a four-stage analysis towards this end. The first step is to try and discover what changes are actually taking place in people's lives. Second, is to find out whether these changes are due to local factors or something of a more macro nature at the state, national or international level. At the third level, the causes of the changes are investigated. The fourth and last step is to investigate possible linkages between particular changes and the liberalisation policies or the phenomenon of globalisation. The reason for this four-stage analysis is that SEWA does not believe that globalisation is the one and only factor, or the predominant factor that influences the conditions of work for their members in the unorganised sector.

"Today, the unorganised sector is taken far more seriously than it was two decades ago. It has been a long journey for these workers from the margins towards the centre, which has happened not because of any changes in the conditions of the workers but far more due to the changes in perception that have come about with the historical shifts due to globalisation."[78] This is the view expressed by Renana Jhabvala, who is one of the spokespersons for SEWA. From the quote, one can clearly observe how the changes after globalisation have been legitimised in a way. There seems to be an attempt to argue that the changes effected by the process of globalisation have been instrumental in giving greater prominence and centrality to the issue of conditions of work in the unorganised sector, especially in the context of women

[77] Ela Bhatt, 'Reality for Poor Self Employed Women, *Global issues local insights: Round table on Listening to the Voices of the poor Self Employed Women*, March 16, New Delhi, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 2002.

[78] Renana Jhabvala, 'Globalisation, Liberalisation and Women in the Informal Economy', in Veena Jha (ed.) *Trade, Globalisation and Gender Evidence from South Asia*, UNIFEM in collaboration with UNCTAD, New Delhi, 2004

workers. But the irony that this greater prominence has come at the cost of overall worsening of conditions is partly glossed over

SEWA seeks to protect its members from adverse changes, which have come in the economy after globalisation by equipping them with the adequate training for greater skill and technological competence. SEWA's programme includes educating them, helping them market their goods, helping them gain greater access to the markets, courts, governmental bodies and also helping them in harnessing resources and managing finances. Above all, SEWA seeks to provide them with alternative employment opportunities and social security measures. They believe that after the policies of globalisation have come into being some sectors have been beneficiaries in terms of employment and income. Globalisation has also helped them in a way to reach out to the international bodies for support and legitimacy. With their emphasis on women's economic agency, processes of decentralisation and the reduction of the role of the state, it is perhaps not surprising that SEWA has been picked up as a model by international agencies such as the World Bank. SEWA is being projected as an ideal model not just for the third world countries, but even for first world nations who are seeking to dismantle their welfare systems in favour of neo-liberal policy orientations.[79]

Saying that the SEWA model favours neo-liberal policies in the wake of reduced role of the welfare state does not adequately define SEWA's stand on the issue. SEWA might legitimise the forces of globalisation to some extent; nonetheless it is aware of some of the fallouts of liberalisation policies and their adverse impact on certain key sectors where their members work in large numbers. For instance, in the construction and the garment sector, the employment loss or reduction in wage rate is often associated with mechanisation which is characteristic of the forces of globalisation. To make these links clearer, following are some

[79] This is discussed at length by Mary E. John, for further details see, Mary E. John, 'Feminism, Poverty and globalisation: an Indian view', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 3, Number 3, 2002, pg.361.

examples of the findings from a sector wise study commissioned by UNIFEM and SEWA in 2003 to show impact of globalisation on women workers. There has also been an attempt to incorporate other studies, which lay emphasis on the impact. Here, an attempt is made for the first time to actually link the deteriorating conditions of women workers to forces of globalisation, therefore it is pertinent to probe into the results of the following sector wise studies. SEWA firstly articulates the changes brought about by globalisation and secondly evolves coping up strategies.

In the Agricultural sector, for instance, the UNIFEM and SEWA study noted critical fallouts due to globalisation. Among the major problems faced by women labourers in the agricultural sector as a result of the processes of globalisation, was the growing lack of employment due to mechanisation in agriculture. As a result, machines were largely replacing manual labourers in the field. Changes in the cropping pattern, shortage of water for irrigation, problem of procurement of raw materials including seeds, fertilisers and pesticides accompanied by the lack of information about modern technologies and agricultural systems were some of the other interrelated problems. Apart from these, shortages of fodder had resulted in the large-scale migration of cattle and a decrease in the population of livestock. There were also structural constraints like fluctuations in the market rates of agricultural produce and high transportation costs and the non-availability of modern tools and equipment. Absence of alternative employment opportunities also affected the livelihood of farmers when they had no harvesting work. Most farmers, especially women, lacked access to knowledge and information on capital and technology.[80] This is one of the sectors that have been adversely affected by globalisation policies specifically in terms of the process of mechanisation.

[80]Renana Jhabvala, op.cit, pg. 45.

This study also revealed falling rates of income for rag pickers. Two reasons were given for this. The closure of the textile mills had led to an increase in the number of women and children picking waste off the streets. Greater competition meant that each person was able to collect less. Secondly, the price of waste paper had come down. Traders sited some large consignments of waste paper being imported as a reason for this decline. Thus, the falling rates of income for rag pickers was directly related to trade liberalisation[81]

In the clothing and textile sector, SEWA members found it difficult to procure raw materials because of high transportation, octroi and other costs involved. Besides, these workers were unable to work on new fabrics like velvet or to incorporate new designs and embroidery patterns on these fabrics as that would require the use of automatic, advanced equipment, which was financially out of their reach. Home-based workers had no access to social security and do not even get a minimum wage. They work mainly on the basis of piece rate.

This was the situation before the ILO Convention.[82] Today home-based workers work on time rate. But neither of these two systems has benefited them, since few attempts have been made for skill up-gradation among unorganised textile workers. They find it virtually impossible to compete in the globalised market. The study revealed that since most of the SEWA members working in the textiles and clothing sector were home-based and rural

[81] Ibid., pg. 49.

[82] According to the ILO convention on home based workers adopted on June 20,1996
The term "home-work" means work carried out by a person, in his or her home or in other premises of his or her own choice, other than the work place of the employer. The work is usually done for remuneration. This results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, unless this person has the necessary degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions.
Persons with employee status do not become home-workers within the meaning of this convention simply by occasionally performing their work as employees at home, rather than in their usual work places. The term "employer" means a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary, whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislatures, lets out work to home-workers to pursue his or her business activity.

workers who were adversely affected by the rapid changes in technology.[83] They thus need to be imparted adequate training and skills in order to enable them to keep abreast with these changes and to be able to access suitable markets for their products. In the garment industry also, advancement in technology, in line with globalisation has had a severe impact on small players. The traditional garment workers' wages have been adversely affected due to new design, patterns and fashions.

To cope with the new technology and better production processes, SEWA has initiated a joint venture with National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) that works towards improving quality control, standardisation, fabric sourcing and product development aspects of the home based producer. The joint venture unit with a full-fledged fabric-testing laboratory has in-house facility for product development, layering, machine cutting, stitching and finishing. The warehouse has a system supported inventory control and latest packaging and dispatching facilities.

SEWA's efforts on behalf of its members in the garment industry have been directed towards increasing their access to employment opportunities, to capital, to skills and to markets. The existing employment exchanges only cater to formal sector jobs. SEWA has set up its own employment centre where SEWA members register themselves, their qualifications and skills and the kind of work they are willing to do. The centre keeps in touch with potential employers through direct visits and through other forums such as the Chamber of Commerce. It attempts to place workers as well as to negotiate a good wage and working conditions for the members.[84]

---

[83] Ibid.

[84] Jeemol Unni, *Urban Informal Sector: Size and Income Generation Process in Gujarat*, Gujarat Institute for Development Research, Ahmedabad, 1999.

Globalisation was not the only reason, which led to the deterioration in the condition of women workers in the informal sector. A significant number of SEWA members are embroidery workers, mainly in the rural areas. In the last ten years they have been hit by repeated disasters such as drought and cyclone and at these times, embroidery is the only livelihood, they can sustain. The objectives of STFC (SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre) is to link artisan rural micro-enterprises with the national, international, global and virtual marketplace, thereby offering access to both domestic and external trade opportunities and increase sustainable employment opportunities for the disaster-affected poor artisans. In order to achieve its goals, STFC uses the latest management tools and information technology to realise the true potential of the products produced by the artisans and to connect them with the targeted market arenas and segments globally.[85]

The case of construction workers is a good example of relating international and national policies directly with changes on the ground level. SEWA found that their construction worker members, who got twenty days of work a month just a few years ago, were now not getting work for even a week in a month. There was a clear decline in employment. On the other hand under the prevailing WTO regime, the essential requirement of tendering has facilitated the entry of many multinational corporations onto the Indian construction scene in a big way. Major foreign companies that have already arrived are Bechel (USA), Hyundai (Japan), Mitsui (Japan), Obayshi (Japan), Savdesa (Sweden), and Traffel House (UK). Entry of these companies is beginning to have far reaching implications for the domestic construction industry and labour, owing to their technology-smart latest machinery and construction methods. In the post liberalisation period, the Indian construction industry is undergoing

[85] Renana Jhabvala and Ravi Kanbur, 'Globalisation and Economic Reforms as seen from the Ground: SEWA's Experience in India', Paper Presented to *The Indian Economy Conference*, Cornell University, April 19-20, December 2002, pg.9.

many structural changes that are radically transforming the business as well as the construction labour market. This change is already visible in large projects, where women workers have been totally eliminated and the proportion of workers to machines is very low. There has been a decline in the number of unskilled women construction workers, ever since mechanisation led to the replacement of unskilled workers with machines. Instead of receiving the mandatory wage of Rs 100 per day, construction workers were getting no more than Rs 60 per day.[86]

To deal with these broad trends seen in the construction industry, SEWA approached a prominent cement company and a local builder to help the women better skills. In collaboration with the Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust and Construction Industry Development Council,[87] SEWA built the Karmika School for Construction Workers. The school envisions enhancing the skill and competency levels of the workers through up-gradation of their knowledge and skills. But training is not enough. What is also needed is to influence the councils involved in formulating policy and regulations that affect the daily lives of poor women. As a result of broad-based pressure the government of India has passed the Construction Workers Protection and Welfare Act (1996). However, the Government of Gujarat is yet to implement this Act. The main demand of SEWA in Gujarat was that the government of Gujarat implements the Construction Workers Act. Thus construction workers now do have some voice through SEWA. However, the major decisions to deal with globalisation are made not in Ahmedabad, but in New Delhi. SEWA has now become a member of the Construction Industry Development Council, and through this and various other channels, is making the need of the workers felt at the level of government policy.[88]

---

[86] SEWA, *Labouring Brick by Brick: Study of Construction Workers*, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 1999.
[87] The CIDC is an apex body promoted by the Planning Commission of India for the development of construction industry
[88] Renana Jhabvala and Ravi Kanbur, op.cit, pg. 9.

It is estimated in the study commissioned by UNIFEM and SEWA that there are 4.5 million *bidi* workers in India, of whom 80% are women. Globalisation has also affected this industry. First, the international anti- tobacco campaign is threatening to reduce the work in the industry even as *bidis* are finding a new international market. According to SEWA, the main challenge here is to implement the existing legislature for protection and welfare of bidi workers while simultaneously beginning the search for new avenues of local employment, in which the women can be trained.

The impact of globalisation on the forestry sector seems to have been felt firstly through the environment movement and secondly, through the opening out of international markets. There is strong evidence that increasing consciousness about the environment has led to growth of tree-cover in the last decade. Also there has been an increase of imports of timber and pulp, leading to further conservation of forest resources, while at the same time exports of minor forest produce has increased. Unfortunately, there seems to be little impact of liberalisation on the management of forests, in terms of increase or decrease of employment. However, statistics do reveal that there is a greater scope for women in some areas with the advent of globalisation, especially in the areas of minor forest produce, nursery, fodder, tree planting and conservation. This would result in increasing the participation of women in this area.

Overall, SEWA would argue that the impact of the reforms on the forest based communities and particularly women has been positive, although the import of pulp has adversely affected some farmers who had undertaken block plantation of eucalyptus and other such species.[89] International participation and influence on forest management has been positive to the extent that greater stakeholder participation and community-based

[89] Reema Nanavati, *Feminise Our Forests*, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 1996.

management are now widely accepted within the forest bureaucracy. With the institutionalisation of Joint Forest Management, a great conceptual breakthrough has been made in sharing ownership with local communities. However, JFM covers only a minuscule proportion of the country's forest and even here, the literature suggests that women's interests may have been adversely affected in the initial stages.[90]

The study by SEWA members on gum collectors in the forests showed a sudden decline in income and it was possible to link this to import of gum from Sudan. But, this seems to be only one of the reasons. In SEWA's view, the continuing state control and monopoly of the Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) trade, across different states in the country is by far, the greatest factor adversely affecting the livelihood of gum collectors, especially women. Gum collection by SEWA members is a leading example of this phenomenon. Almost all of the important NTFP's are nationalised and can be sold only to government agencies. Most State Forest Development Corporations are defunct agencies, confronted with mounting liabilities. Huge and redundant manpower and capital enhance operating costs and huge make-ups are needed to break-even. Very often subcontractors are deployed and the collectors' margins further squeezed. The extensive literature on the subject almost unanimously points towards decontrolling the trade and reducing the government's role in it.[91] In response, SEWA organised the gum collecting women into groups, which got licenses from the forest department to collect gum. Due to the forest laws, the groups were not allowed to sell the gum in the market but had to sell it at reduced price. SEWA began a dialogue with the government, asking for special permission to sell gum directly in the market. This permission was reluctantly

[90] Manjul Bajaj, 'Public Policy and the Sustainable use of Forest resources: A study of the Indian experience of state intervention in the Forestry sector', *Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc degree in Environmental Management*, Wye College, University of London, 1994.

[91] Manjul Bajaj, 'The impact of globalisation on the Forest sector in India with special reference to Women's Employment', *Paper commissioned by the study group on Women Workers and Child Labour, National Commission on Labour*, Government of India, 2001.

granted for a year, during which the earnings of the women went up considerably. However the permission has not been renewed. Meanwhile, SEWA is exploring ways of processing the gum in the villages. At the same time, SEWA is working with the Agriculture University to upgrade the quality of the trees and make them more productive.[92]

From the above study of various sectors and the varied strategies employed by SEWA, the following deduction can be made. There is a clear emphasis on the broad linkages between increasing vulnerabilities and insecurities of unskilled women workers in the unorganised sector and the forces of globalisation. The imperative of the SEWA movement is to enhance the skills of women workers in the unorganised sector, to cope up with these policy changes in the national and global level.

In most of the sectors which were studied above, the impact of globalisation on women workers has not been promising, though there has been an effort by SEWA to procure the maximum possible advantage from the situation at hand. This was evident from their capacity building programmes, especially in the construction and the garment sector, where it is instrumental in training women in order to make them adequately qualified to enter their respective trades, post liberalisation. One distinctive characterisation of SEWA's perspective on globalisation is that, it does not question the very basis of these policy measures. Their literature re-iterates that the insecurities associated with women's work in the informal sector did not increase or change drastically after 1991. They argue that the conditions, these women had to deal with were the same, if not worse, prior to the onslaught of the policies of globalisation and liberalisation. Therefore, the best possible solution for the women workers is to take a stand whereby they can benefit most from the current situation. Though in some

[92] *SEWA; The Gum Collectors: Struggling to Survive in the Dry Areas of Banaskantha*, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 2000.

sectors, the link between worsening conditions of work in terms of decrease in wages and employment and the forces of globalisation is obvious, yet SEWA has not come up with any substantive critique of the overall impact of liberalisation or of the structural changes ushered in by globalisation.

SEWA's role has primarily been to provide enabling conditions for its members to cope with the risks and vulnerabilities associated with globalisation. The strategies adopted by SEWA are operationalised in two levels. In the first instance, it acts as a pressure group to lobby with the government to change certain policies, specific to the unorganised sector. Secondly, it acts as an intermediary to market the goods produced by its members.

SEWA's role in interpreting governmental policies in the wake of Globalisation:

SEWA, in the first level of analysis, interprets the governmental policies, which specifically deal with alleviation of poverty and those which directly deal with the mass of women working in the unorganised sector. It primarily acts as a catalyst to increase the pace of the formulation and implementation of certain policies. It has also been successful in lobbying to the government for changing or providing viable alternatives to certain policies.

Poverty alleviation has been one of the main responsibilities of the government of India, especially since the beginning of the Fifth Five Year Plan. About 10 percent of the central annual budget is allocated directly towards schemes for poverty alleviation. These schemes include Food Security through Public Distribution System, Work Security through various schemes (such as IRDP, JRY, etc.), Social Security and Public Health through a public health system and child care through ICDS etc. In addition, there are Credit Schemes through National Housing Bank and Insurance schemes through the National Insurance Companies. Each state also has its own poverty alleviation programmes. However, the efficiency of these

schemes and the agencies are always in question. There are leakages in funds, which lead to delays and shortage of funds. Benefits also go to the better off groups and even to the public servants themselves. As a result of all this, the delivery and implementation of these schemes has been poor, in spite of the best intentions of the State and no dearth of available funds.

According to SEWA, in these circumstances, one is left with two extreme choices. One can support presently existing poverty alleviation programmes and oppose Structural Adjustment Programmes in the name of social justice. Conversely, one can free the economy from the clutches of bureaucracy and support Structural Adjustment Programme in the name of Liberalisation.[93] Both these arguments are equally destructive for the poor. It is pointless to support poverty alleviation programmes that have proved to be inefficient and ineffective. On the other hand, it is far worse to support a programme that will take all targeted support away from the poor.

SEWA concludes that the supporters and opponents of Structural Adjustment Programmes have created a false dichotomy regarding globalisation. Instead of focusing on alternative methods of poverty alleviation, the focus is on the ability or inability of the government to run these programmes. SEWA believes that these poverty alleviation schemes should be decentralised and handed over to local organisations. SEWA has been successfully running some of these schemes in collaboration with the government, local women's groups, federations and co-operatives.

This can be a very skewed and cryptic understanding of the issue. Poverty alleviation programmes consist of one of the issues on which the supporters and opponents of the structural adjustment programme differ. The reasons stated for opposition to policies of

[93] Renana Jhabvala, *Structural Adjustment Programme: Issues and Strategies for Action for People's Sector Women Workers in India*, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 1999, pg. 4-6.

structural adjustment are often very narrowly defined in terms of appropriation of funds by government officials and the bureaucracy. There can be many other problems, which affect the successful implementation of these measures. There should be an emphasis on alternative methods of poverty alleviation but this process should not delegitimise the role of the government in alleviating poverty. The unstated problem here, which is of importance to the opponents of structural adjustment programme and its impact on poverty alleviation programmes, is based on reduction in government subsidies, which have been curtailed post liberalisation. An attempt should be made to critically question the basis of these policies, instead of looking for other viable alternatives. The alternative implemented by SEWA, is no doubt, successful in the short run but in the long run, increasing reduction of subsidies is bound to pose problems of sustainability.

One of the major tasks under the Structural Adjustment Programme is the removal of government restrictions, especially on the expansion of the economy. There is an attempt by SEWA to look into several sectors where these restrictions have caused unjustified problems, which are then tackled successfully to reach a favourable solution. Many women artisans earn their livelihood by making baskets, brooms, etc. out of bamboo and cane. But due to the restrictions on the use of forest products, even the forest dwellers are unable to freely use these raw materials. They need licences not only to buy cane and bamboo but also to transport the finished product from their homes to the markets. Similarly the forest dwellers, who earn their livelihood from collection of *tendu* leaves, cannot freely sell the leaves in the open market or even use them to make *bidis* in their homes. They need licenses to hold stocks of even one bag of these leaves. There has been an attempt to remove governmental restrictions in this sector without qualifying the monitoring mechanisms, which would keep the system of licensing in place.

Reaching the Markets: SEWA's Role as an Intermediary

Besides acting as a pressure group, SEWA functions as an intermediary between their members and the market. It has over the years managed to make strategic links with the market. This, in one sense, guarantees economic security to most of its women members. However, one needs to look at the politics behind this. SEWA appropriates the forces of globalisation to such an extent that it not only links the local to the global, but it also brings the global to the local. This integration of sorts underpins SEWA's take on the issue on another plane.

Reema Nanavati, an eminent spokesperson for SEWA, makes this point about integration clearer. "There should be efforts both to make the markets meet the poor and also for the poor to meet the markets. For poor people to reach the markets they need skills, collective activity and social security measures such as health care, childcare and shelter. To open markets to poor people there should be a review of the policy constraints. Secondly technical and marketing support is needed, such as the Trade Facilitation Centre of SEWA has begun to provide."[94]

It can be said that SEWA, in many ways, legitimises the process of liberalisation as the cure for the problem of economic security for lakhs of women. Renana Jhabvala has argued that "Although the poor crave liberalisation, there are very few sectors where liberalisation has been extended to them. Unlike the formal sector, our members, who are the workers in the grip of the informal sector, remain in the grip of tight controls with little access to the market. They are still the victims of what used to be called the 'license-permit raj'. If liberalisation can be extended to them too, it would definitely create a reduction in poverty."[95] This statement is contradictory to the claims made by SEWA in the previous part of the paper. Looking at the

---

[94]Reema Nanavati, Globalisation and the Poor, *Global issues local insights: Round table on Listening to the Voices of the poor Self Employed Women*, March 16, SEWA publications, New Delhi, 2002.

[95] Renana Jhabvala, *Liberalising for the poor*, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 1995.

harsh realities of the impact on certain sectors, which SEWA as an organisation has reiterated in its studies, it is important to state what exactly is meant by liberalisation here. Liberalisation is defined very narrowly here. SEWA merely looks at the increase in access to global markets. Moreover, the argument put forward is specific to the garment industry.

SEWA claims that while there has been much research done on the differential impact of globalisation on rich and poor countries, and on women and men, little thought has been given to developing strategies by which the most marginalised groups can take advantage of growing international markets and thus share the benefits of globalisation rather than be further marginalised by the process.[96] This is the area where SEWA seeks to intervene.

The strategies adopted by SEWA for bridging the gap between the poor women and the market, have been concretised broadly at two levels. First, it deals with the issuance of licenses to women so that they can sell their products directly in the open market. SEWA's experience with gum collectors shows how it successfully executed this strategy. After lobbying for three years, the government granted license to sell in the open market. SEWA's second strategy of reaching the markets to the poor, aims at eliminating the middlemen and contractors. This is achieved by linking the growers directly with the vendors. Both rural and urban members of SEWA have to rely for marketing and purchase on the middlemen or the private traders. The most appropriate example is the vegetable growers and vendors, who, for the longest time, were completely under the control of the private traders. The price of the vegetable was determined by the traders and not the growers. On top of this, the government levied cess on them. With the help of the Agriculture Produce Market Committee SEWA organised

---

[96] Reema Nanavati, *Making the Poor Women Reach Markets: SEWA's journey proceedings of Bank –Fund meetings in Prague*, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 2000.
Also see, www.thehawkeye.com/columns/.

vegetable growers and vendors and hired a shop in the main market, to do away with the private traders.

There have been many more strategies, which have been adopted by SEWA over the years, but one thing seems to be clear from the two interventions stated above: The politics of numbers is what constitutes its strength through the working of its union, co-operative and federation. The enormity of the numbers is one of the determining factors, which leads them to believe that they are a mass based movement of sorts. The process of globalisation is rapidly changing the structure of markets. SEWA's experience has found that individual women workers and producers are too weak both socially and economically to enter markets on their own. However when they organise into groups they are able to pool their capital, skills and resources and begin to enter the markets. The Trade Facilitation centre and the SEWA Gram Mahila Haat are apex marketing organisations, which provide marketing facilities and services to federations and producer groups to enter and survive in the market. The Trade Facilitation Centre has the so-called Global Markets Programme, which seeks to sensitise policy makers and women themselves of the negative and positive impact of globalisation and also increase the capacity of women workers in the informal sector to gain direct access to global markets.

SEWA's core strength to mobilise and organise artisans into "Collective Enterprises" has by far been the most effective way of overcoming market failures by strengthening bargaining power, attaining economies of scale and acquiring competitiveness for micro enterprises and self-employed workers in the informal sector. STFC is constantly engaged in the capacity building of the artisans through strategic alliances with specialised technical and training institutions and also building the in-house training facilities. It provides comprehensive market intelligence that includes market surveys for specific product categories, access to buyers' databases, information on tariff structures and non-tariff barriers. Further it has a detailed

marketing strategy comprising of retail and institutional sales both in the national and global markets. STFC facilitates linkages with various institutional investors and state and central government schemes to enable access to subsidised credit and ensure proper flow of funds. It works on creation of working capital corpus funds, which provide the resources to scale up. Further, linkages with financial institutions and banks are established to enable access to credit and a range of financial advisory services, which are vital to engineering efficient, and profitable business models.[97]

In addition to this, STFC has established marketing links with number of national and international institutions to extend its marketing network. STFC has explored new export markets and is currently exporting the products of its member artisans to USA, UK, Belgium, France, Spain, Germany and South Africa. In order to meet the economic challenges of globalisation, creating collective is an imperative. STFC has initiated the Global Trading Network (GTN) which is a partnership of grassroots producer's organisations, Country Governments and International Development Institutions. It is a unique model that includes Grassroots Producers Groups (GPO) across three continents: Asia, Latin America and Africa. The GTN is a Section 25 Company registered in India, where the majority shareholders are the GPOs. Profits earned will be reinvested into the organisation, for ensuring better support to existing GPOs and increasing the GTN membership base. Its objective is to link poor producers with national and global markets, thereby offering access to both domestic and external trade opportunities, which in turn increase sustainable employment opportunities. The GTN will improve poor women's access to formal markets so that they benefit from trade

[97] See, www.sewatfc.org/women_fighting_poverty.htm,
Also, 'Women Fighting Poverty With Trade', SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre, SEWA Publications, Ahmedabad.

and investment flows. GTN will act as a gateway to global networking and integrate trade in favour of the poor.[98]

This strategy of tapping the market in the post liberalisation era by SEWA in many ways have been criticised by theorists from the women's movement and the trade union movement at large.[99] Also the position they take vis-à-vis utilising the benefits of globalisation by reaching the global markets in another sense dilutes the stand, they take on liberalisation and its denigrating impacts on certain sectors, which has been discussed earlier on. It also posses as a contradictory stand which acknowledges the negative impact of globalisation; at the same time do not take a critical stand on it because they have a stake in the whole process at large.

Conclusion

The effects of globalisation and Economic Reforms on poor women are highly differentiated and nuanced, argues Jhabvala, so a blanket analysis or stance is not justified. Some features of the economic reform process, such as reducing the role of the state in Forestry, and some consequences of markets for poor women's product, are beneficial to poor women. But other features are not. Despite the benefits of globalisation and economic reform, the three troubling features broadly are relative decline in unskilled wages, increased risk and vulnerability, and a declining bargaining power of unskilled labour. This indeed is seen in SEWA's ground level experience.[100]

Though, there is an acknowledgement of the dehumanising aspect of the policies of liberalisation by SEWA, it does not make any attempt to question the very basis of the politics

[98] Reema Nanavati and Mona Dave, 'Self-Employed Women's Association ', SEWA Publications, Ahmedabad, Also see mail@sewatfc.org, discussed at Trade and Poverty Forum, December 5, New Delhi, 2004.
[99] This point will be discussed at length in the 4th chapter.
[100] Renana Jhabvala and Ravi Kanbur, op.cit.

behind such measures. The stating or non-stating of the problem is somehow hidden behind what SEWA does to tap the benefits from these measures in a way. SEWA's strategies aim at maximising the benefits and minimising the costs. This requires active management of the process of globalisation and economic reform with the best outcome for the poor in mind. According to them a hand off policy is not an option. Enlisting the experiences of the poor and to their representatives should develop strategies for management. Managing and mitigating the negative consequences of liberalisation will require direct interventions to enhance the skills of the poor, and to develop insurance tolls to manage the risks they face.[101]

These interventions by SEWA need to conglomerate with appropriate government action in favour of the poor. The unskilled poor women need organisation to counteract the growing economic power of capital and skilled labour as a result of their greater national and global mobility. Organisation is also necessary for representation of the interests of poor women in local, national and global policy making councils. Public policy can help by developing an enabling legal and regulatory environment, in which membership based organisations of the poor can represent their interests.[102] Thus the overemphasis on building organisational networking leads us to believe that SEWA shies away from critiquing these policy measures because they have a stake in the structure at large. In a sense they argue for a globalised world with a human face.

---

101 see, http://www.sewaresearch.org/global.htm
102 Ibid., pg. 16-17

Chapter Three

Patriarchy, Structural Adjustment Programmes and Dissent: AIDWA's Critique of Globalisation

This chapter attempts to critically evaluate AIDWA's stand on the impact of globalisation on women workers. Unlike SEWA, it has developed a well-articulated stand against globalisation, perpetuated in the form of structural adjustment programme and neo-liberal policies or economic reforms. This anti-globalisation stand is influenced by its Marxist lineage. AIDWA is often referred to as the women's wing of the CPI (M). As an organisation it links up the question of women's oppression with that of class oppression. It is a mass based organisation rooted in the organised left and the women's movement at large. Here, an attempt is made to understand AIDWA's position vis-à-vis the issue, keeping both its ideology and gender politics in mind. AIDWA's reconciliation of these two strands is reflected in its understanding of globalisation and its impact on women workers.

Building upon this broad argument, in the later section, we move on to discuss in detail AIDWA's understanding of the extent of the impact of globalisation based on some empirical details,[103] such as changes vis-à-vis wage rates, employment rates and condition of work among women working in various sectors - rural, urban, organised, unorganised, agriculture and services, after liberalisation. This is followed by a study of AIDWA's critique of certain governmental measures, which substantiates the argument about globalisation and its fallout. The conclusion focuses on struggles for land rights and effective public distribution system, two of the many issues in which AIDWA has been active in mobilising women workers. These have

[103] These empirical details are derived from either survey done by AIDWA or studies done by other independent researchers. AIDWA merely uses some of these data to deduce its conclusion

been selected for detailed discussion largely because these struggles have come into prominence in the wake of the policies of globalisation.

The Organisational Structure and Political Lineage of AIDWA

AIDWA was founded in 1981, as an all India organisation. However, several State units of the organisation had come into existence much earlier, in the wake of the freedom struggle. Many of these older state units have a commendable record of anti-imperialist and pro-working people's activism, dating back to pre-independence days. AIDWA has an organisational presence in 21 states in the country with a membership of over eight million women according to the conference report of 2004.[104]

AIDWA is organised on a federal basis, with its head quarters in New Delhi.[105] Its organisational strength lies in thousands of grass root units elected from the village and the district neighbourhood levels, going up to the state and finally the Central Executive Committees at the national level. The principle of decentralisation is actually practised in the three-tier structure of AIDWA. Unit committees can be formed as soon as there are more than 50 members. Any member of AIDWA is eligible to be an elected member of these committees. Any woman above the age of 16, who subscribes to the AIDWA constitution and programme, is eligible for membership of the organisation. Every year the membership is renewed. The unit committees, district committees and state committees elect members for the central executive committee. AIDWA does not accept funds from any foreign funding agency or any

[104] Introducing AIDWA document.

[105] Patricia Loveridge, 'Approaches to Change: The All India Democratic Women's Association and a Marxist Approach to the Woman Question in India', in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 1994, 1:2. Also see conference document of AIDWA in Madras, where the organisation's Constitution, Programme and Statement of Aims and Objectives were formulated

funds from the Government. Its activities are run and financed by membership fees, individual donations and through fund collection drives.[106]

AIDWA is often dismissed as the women's wing of the CPI (M). AIDWA itself claims to be an independent mass based organisation, which is merely affiliated to the party. The usage of the term 'merely' is to connote that non-party members are also part of AIDWA. What role the party actually plays in the day-to-day functioning of AIDWA as an organisation is not a part of this research. The organisation has to be studied independently, irrespective of its affiliations to the party. This is not to undermine the philosophies, political influences and attributes, which are intrinsically linked to this particular association of AIDWA. As most of their work is ideologically influenced by the party ideology, therefore an attempt has been made to study what characterises women's mass based organisations affiliated to CPI (M) in particular.

It is clearly mentioned in the document on mass organisations,[107] that mass organisations cannot take up the role of the party in terms of its functioning. However, on the other hand, they may be influential in getting more and more people associated with the party ideology, which is in no way different from that of its own. Some mass organisations affiliated to political parties are known to act as electoral vote banks at the time of elections. This is, however, not an essential characteristic but is entirely subject to the discretion of the particular organisation. In other words, conceptually mass organisations are not meant to be electoral vote banks of political parties. According to Lenin, the mass organisations plays an important role in transforming 'masses' into a group of 'exploited' who can now fight for their rights.[108]

---

[106] Ibid.

[107] *Central Committee Document on Mass Organisations*. Communist Party of India (Marxist), Progressive printers, New Delhi, 1981.

[108] Collected Works, Vol. 32, pages 468-477

AIDWA's stand has been in consonance with the document on mass based organisation. It takes up the question of capitalist-created inequality, wages, unemployment, discrimination in jobs etc. However, it believes that both women from toiling sections and women from other sections are still living under feudal restrictions, with inferior status in their families.[109] There has been a conscious effort to link up the struggles against class, caste, gender, and patriarchy within and outside the private realm of the family by AIDWA.

AIDWA is part of the seven sisters in the organised women's movement in India.[110] It believes that the emancipation of women in India requires fundamental systematic change. Women's issues concern an integral part of a larger socio-political and economic system and cannot be addressed in isolation or only within a male- female relationship framework. It has over the years developed a critique of the state in India, which according to them represents the narrow interests of powerful elites of the capitalist and landlord classes and has a stake in strengthening patriarchy as an ideology, intrinsic to its interests.

AIDWA claims its overall aims are to achieve democracy, equality and women's emancipation. In policy and in practice, it upholds secular values against all forms of fundamentalism. Its main focus is among the poorer sections of working class women who constitute the majority of India's female population.[111] Specific to this regard, one issue, which affects the lives of the millions of women according to AIDWA, is globalisation.

AIDWA believes that globalisation is not gender-neutral. It has been estimated that women and children make up 70% of the worlds poor. Two-thirds of all those deprived of literacy are

---

[109] Ibid.

[110] We have dealt with this aspect in particular, in the first chapter. The other organisations, which comprise the seven sisters, are All India Women's Conference affiliated to the Congress, Mahila Dakshata Samiti with the Janata Party, The National Federation of Indian Women with the Communist Party of India, others are Joint Women's Programme, Centre for Women's Development Studies and the Young Women's Christian Association.

[111] Introducing AIDWA Document

women and two-thirds of children who do not go to school are girls. Women and children provide 66% of hours worked but receive only 10% of the revenue and own only 1% of property. Poor women, all over the capitalist world have been hardest hit with loss of jobs, wages and reduced social benefits because of structural adjustment policies. Economic independence, the right to work with equal wages, a minimum income (with respect to self-employed women workers), are all crucial components of the advancement of women. The provision of social security services including accessible education, health facilities, old-age security and so on, are equally important. But globalisation policies adversely affect both aspects, thus increasing women's subordination. Analysing these components, AIDWA concludes that imperialism driven globalisation strengthens patriarchy.[112]

Marxism, Patriarchy and AIDWA's Understanding of Women's Work

To get a better grasp on AIDWA's ideological moorings, it is important to link up the theory of women's oppression from a Marxist perspective to the theory of patriarchy. It could be argued that the thrust of AIDWA's understanding of women's oppression is derived from a theory of patriarchy. Once this can be asserted we could get back to the discussion on the question of how globalisation strengthens patriarchy which leads to the perpetuation of women's subordinated position in society.

Historically, according to Marxist theory, it was class society that gave birth to patriarchal

[112] *All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 1998-2001*, March, New Delhi, 2002, pg. 16.

ideology and the subordination of women.[113] This theory broadly holds that the abolition of private property and the establishment of a socialist society are essential requirements for women's emancipation from her unequal status.

With the theory of alienation, Marx critically diagnosed the nature of capitalism. By capitalism, Marx and Engels referred to the entire process of commodity production. In examining the exploitation inherent in this process, Marx developed his theory of power. Power or powerlessness is derived from a person's class position. Hence, oppression is a result of capitalist organisation and based in a lack of power and control. Through productive labour, capitalist society exploits the worker who creates surplus value,[114] for the bourgeoisie. Class society, divided into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is characteristic of capitalism. The class structure, which manifests itself in social, political and cultural forms, is economic at its base. The proletariat's exploitation, in which value is extracted from their productive labour, forms the core of their oppression. Marxist theory perceived the exploitation of men and women as deriving from the same source and assumed that their oppression is similar in structural terms. Women are considered to be yet another victim, no different from the oppression of the proletariat in general. Therefore, there is hardly any difference between class-based oppression and gender-based oppression.

---

[113] In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels drew links between the development of class society and the changing forms of the family and the oppression of women. The crux of his theory is the understanding of the sexual division of labour the first division of labour between man and woman for the procreation of the human race. Along with the centrality accorded to women's reproductive role and the line of descent being decided through the woman, historical evidence of the woman's central role in the nurturing of the family, in food gathering and at a later stage in the practice of agriculture, indicates women's control over the means of production at that stage of human development. The "historic defeat of the female sex", as Engels described the overthrow of mother right, was the result of the development of class society and of private property through a period lasting several million years. "The first class antagonism which appears in history" Engels wrote, "coincides with the development of antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male"

[114] The surplus labour, which is inherent in profit, is derived from the difference between the actual and necessary labour time of the worker.

Marxist theory was more of an all-encompassing theory of class exploitation and gender was a small subset or component. In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels discuss the division of labour in early pre-capitalist society in familial terms.[115] Engels spoke of the conflict between man and woman as class conflict. Within the family, the man represents the bourgeoisie and the wife represents the proletariat.[116] However, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are positions of power deriving from a relation to the economic means of production, not to the sexual act of reproduction. The analysis, sketched by Marx and Engels in the German Ideology and then further developed by Engels in, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, reveals their belief that the family at least, historically reflects the division of labour in society. What weakens and finally limits the insights is that for Marx and Engels, this division of labour deriving from the sex act is coincidental, and identical with the birth of private property. Thus, division of labour and private property are reduced to identical expressions.

The reciprocal relationship, between family and society, production and reproduction defines the life of women. The study of women's oppression then, must deal with both sexual and economic material conditions, if we are to understand oppression, rather than merely understand economic exploitation. The historical materialist method should incorporate women's relations to the sexual division of labour in society as producer and reproducer. For a comprehensive understanding of the sexual division of labour within the family, it is important to study the concept of patriarchy, which legitimises women's oppression, within and outside the family in more than one ways.

---

[115] Friedrich Engels, 'The early development of the family', a free press pamphlet, The selection is also the fist two chapters of *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, International Publishers, New York, 1942, pg. 65.

[116] Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

For radical feminists, patriarchy is the male hierarchical ordering of the society. The patriarchal system, preserved through the sexual division of labour within marriage in the family is rather implicit. Manifested through male force and control, the roots of patriarchy are located in women's reproductive selves. Woman's position in this power hierarchy is defined in terms of the patriarchal organisation of society, not in terms of the economic class structure. Patriarchy is rooted in biology rather than in economics or history. According to Firestone, "the sexual imbalance of power is biologically based." Men and women are anatomically different and hence not equally privileged. The domination of one group by another is embedded in this biological male/female distinction.[117] Gerda Lerner argues that patriarchy "is the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general".[118]

Another way, of defining patriarchy, is in terms of it, being a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, exploit and oppress women.[119] It is important to stress the characterisation of patriarchy as an overarching structure. On one hand it helps us to reject biological determinism as the basis of difference in the power and status of men and women, on the other hand it helps us comprehend that power exercised by men over women is not an individual phenomenon but is part of a structure. It also helps us question the stand taken by radical feminists. This ideological stand, which is different from that of the positions taken by radical feminists, is closely associated with AIDWA's stand.

The patriarchal structures are perpetuated in society through men's control over property and patrilineal succession. Another way in which this argument can be interpreted is to look at how patriarchal forces play a substantial role in enhancing and maintaining the gender and

---

[117] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Bantam Books, New York, 1970, pg. 9.
[118] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986.
[119] Sylvia Walby, *Theorising Patriarchy*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990.

sexual division of labour within and outside the family. In this context the issue of women's work needs to be critically studied. The nature of work that women do is in many ways defined in terms of patriarchal structures. When we study the Marxist theory of women's oppression the question of women's work within the debate of gender division of labour, comes through, as an important component for discussion.

According to AIDWA, women's subordination is not only intrinsic to capitalist systems but also an essential requirement for its existence. This subordination is expressed and maintained not only through the unjust terms of social division of labour between men and women, but also in terms of women's unpaid work.[120] A question that remains unaddressed in this context, is whether this claim is specific to capitalism or whether it holds true for other systems of production. Maria Rosa Dalla Costa and Selma James theorise that the work women do in the home "frees" the male worker to work longer hours for capital and so increases the rate of surplus value.[121] This is in the context of domestic work, which does not get recognition in terms of pay but enhances the production of capital and increases the gender gap where women are left to do a certain kind of work.[122]

The most obvious defect in Marxist functionalism, is that it never really explains why it is women who do "women's work". In other words even if unwaged household labour is profitable to capital, there is no explanation of why it is women who perform this labour. However, Marxism provides a clear acknowledgement of the social necessity of the work

---

[120] Brinda Karat, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.

[121] Selma James and Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, Bristol Falling Wall Press, 1973.

[122] For a detailed analysis of the domestic labour debate see, Maxine Molyneux, 'Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate', in *New Left Review*, no 116, 1979. Also see, S. Himmelweit and S Mohan, 'Domestic Labour and Capital', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 1, 1977. For further details refer to, 'The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no 83, 1974. Also see, Jean Gardiner, 'Women's Domestic Labour' and Margaret Coulson, Branka Magas and Hilary Wainwright, ' The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism –a Critique', *New Left Review*, no 89,1975.

women do. Therefore critically looking at Marxist theory of women's oppression one could state that they acknowledge the importance of women's work and theorise subordination of women being intrinsically linked to the nature of capitalist production. Though they do not argue further why women tend to do work which are comparatively discriminatory in terms of gender. There are missing linkages between the analysis of women's subordination and the role patriarchy plays in perpetuating it, which limit Marxist understanding of women's work.[123]

AIDWA derives its gender politics from Marxist understanding of women's oppression. This is perhaps the reason why it falls short of certain critical insights necessary for a holistic articulation of women's subordination. It does make an effort to link up the concept of broad patriarchal structures that influence women's position in society. Though it claims to raise issues of gender division of labour in society, it fails to deal with the issue of sexual division of labour critically. In other words, there is no attempt to question the theory of biological determinism in relation to understanding why women alone do certain 'women specific tasks'.

AIDWA's analysis of women's oppression is pitched at two levels. The first issue is the growing marginalisation of women in the economic and productive sphere that is related to the kind of discrimination faced by women in the work place. These discriminatory practices would include poor working conditions, low salaries and restrictions on promotional opportunities. The second strand would be the oppression women experience at the societal level, particularly violence against women resulting from communal and caste-related conflict. Overall women are oppressed on the basis of their gender, as members of an exploited class and as citizens.

---

[123] The failure to look closely at reproduction, especially at procreation, deprives Marxism of the conceptual resources necessary for understanding women's oppression. Division of labour by sex in procreation is unquestioned in Marxist theory. For further explanation refer to, Alison. Jaggar, 'Traditional Marxism and Human Nature', *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Rowman and Littlefield, 1983.

The Impact of Imperialist Globalisation on Women Workers: AIDWA's Analysis

In the following section there has been an attempt to look at AIDWA's stand on the policies of globalisation. It looks at the problem from the point of view of the women workers and tries to articulate the problem pitched from their level. The broad argument being made in this section is how the policies of globalisation aggravate the already existing oppression faced by women workers. Its stand is clearly against such policies as they directly strengthen the overarching patriarchal structures that influence women's lives as workers, citizens, and last but not the least, as women.

According to AIDWA, globalisation is imperialism by another name and its main aim is to capture world markets to make super profits. Country after country has been forced to accept the policies of structural adjustment with negative consequences for the people in the developed as well as in the developing worlds. The international regime of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF is functioning, as a supra-government, dictating terms to developing and poor countries. This, in AIDWA's view, has deeply eroded national sovereignty of the debtor countries and the democratic rights of their people, as decisions having wide reaching implications on their lives are not decided within their own countries but in distant capitals where the leaders of funding agencies hold court.[124] Imperialist globalisation, which in today's world has become synonymous with US imperialism, remains the greatest hindrance to democracy, independence and justice. Struggle for women's emancipation is intrinsically linked with issues of national sovereignty and the protection of the inalienable rights of people to decide their own course of development. There are a growing number of women's organisations that link their movements to anti-imperialism struggles.[125] AIDWA belongs to

[124] *All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 1998-2001,* op.cit, pg. 11.
[125] *All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004,* March, AIDWA Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pg. 31.

this stratum of movements that fight against the forces of globalisation, through its affiliation to the organised left and the women's movement.

AIDWA agrees with the arguments put forward in the 2004 ILO Report on global unemployment, which estimated that the global unemployment rate for women at 6.4 percent is higher than that of men at 6.21 per cent. This is mainly because women have smaller likelihood of being in regular wage and salaried employment than men. In the agricultural sector and services there are more women, but they are likely to earn less than men for the same type of work even in traditionally female-dominated occupations. [126]Two broad trends can be deduced: in the first place, women are discriminated in terms of gender and secondly, there has been greater availability of 'women's work', characterised by irregular wages, unsure employment and casual work. Neo–liberal policies have impacted negatively on the lives of the vast majority of rural women including women of landed households. The worst hit have been poor landless women, agricultural women workers, part time women workers from poor peasant households, casual rural women workers in non-agricultural work and small artisans, who taken together form the vast majority of the rural female population. In addition, a large section of these women belong to the oppressed castes i.e., mainly Dalit and tribal women.[127] Dalit women who form the largest section of the rural female work force also face the added burden of exploitation based on caste.

AIDWA reported that in urban India, in the 945 employment exchanges, the number of women registered in 2003 was at a high of 1.7 crores, of which 70 percent were educated up to the 10th standard and above. This is an indication of the extent of joblessness even among the urban middle classes, since poor women do not register at all. A total of 4.4 crore people were

[126] This aspect will be dealt in details in the next chapter

[127] Madhura Swaminathan and Brinda Karat, 'Impact of New Economic Policies of Structural Adjustment on Women', *Women's Equality*, Quarterly bulletin of AIDWA, Vol. VIII no. 1, 1995.

registered of which only 1.55 lakh got work, but it is not known how many of these were women.[128] The level of female work participation rate in urban India is extremely low, between 13 and 15 percent. According to the economic surveys in the 1990s, there was an overall decline in the number of women employed in the organised sector. Although the statistical decline in the last year is marginal at 0.2 percent, given the increasing number of women looking for jobs, the trend of decline is ominous. There are at present 4.95 million women in the organised sector, which is around 18 percent out of the total of 27.2 million workers. The extra unemployment created by structural adjustment is estimated to range between 4 to 10 million persons during the period 1992-1994. Opportunities for employment in the organised sector in general, and more specifically for women, have decreased, as a result of SAP.[129]

A major area of urban women's employment is in the service sector. Teaching and Nursing are two professions that continue to be dominated by women as 51 per cent of teachers and 57 percent of all nurses are women. However privatisation of these services has led to a sharp deterioration in the service conditions. Primary school teachers under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are employed at the panchayat level for between Rs 1000-2000 a month. There is a huge proliferation of private clinics and hospitals and women work as private nurses through nursing agencies. Their salaries and working conditions are poor with no security or job guarantee.[130]

Factory work for women has come down with the increasing closures of small scale or traditional industries where women found some employment. In fact of all women workers in

---

[128] *All India Democratic Women's Association Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004*, op.cit.
[129] Ibid.,pg. 22
[130] Ibid.,pg.81.

manufacturing, 93 percent or around 1.3 million women are in unorganised manufacturing, which includes family labour as well as hired labour in small units. They are adversely affected by these policies of globalisation.

There is an increase of contractualisation of work and under-employment in the informal sector, where there is no protective legislation. Often, women are not even recognised as workers. An increasing number of women are employed as domestic maids. They constitute 86 percent of housekeeping workers and 30 percent of sweepers. A substantial number of domestic workers are migrant workers. In Karnataka, 60,000 women are employed as cooks and helpers in the mid-day meal programme with a monthly payment of Rs 600 and Rs 300 respectively. Many of them are poor Dalit women. They have faced severe humiliation, social boycotts and even removal from work because of continuing practices of untouchability. Almost 87 percent of all bidi workers are women. They are also facing a big crisis due to the government policy of raising the tax on bidis to make it at par with mini cigarettes produced by large tobacco companies. There are no alternative avenues of employment for several lakhs of women bidi workers whose jobs are threatened, post-liberalisation. Another area is that of home-based work where women are framed out work from companies and paid very low piece rates. Even though the government of India has signed the ILO convention towards legislation for home- based work, a lot has to be done for policies to be implemented in this area. It is very clear from the above analysis, how AIDWA interprets the impact of globalisation. It first lays down the premise of women facing discrimination based on their caste and class identities. Then, it illustrates how they are also adversely affected by the changing nature of work, especially in the unorganised sector. It then goes on to enumerate how the policies of globalisation intensify the oppression of women in general and women workers in particular.

Another reason for women's underemployment or unemployment is the massive loss of jobs due to industrial sickness and closure of more than 6 lakh factories. Although there is no gender dis-aggregated data on the number of women affected, a cursory look at some of the industries involved show that these include industries in which women did find some employment, such as small garment factories and food processing units.

AIDWA has done significant work amongst families of retrenched textile workers in both Delhi and Kanpur. It would be no exaggeration to say that in a substantial number of these families it is the women who take over the economic burden of unemployment. They are forced to take up any kind of jobs in order to ensure the survival of the family. It was believed that liberalisation would lead to more jobs for women. It is true that there has been an increase in women's employment in some sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, computer factories, gem cutting and in some sectors of garments; but for the vast majority of sectors of employment this supposition does not hold true. An important point has been raised by AIDWA regarding the sectors where employment has been created for women. AIDWA points out that even within these sectors, there has been no attempt to qualify the nature of the work done by women.[131]

A micro-study conducted in the electronic sector by Chacchi in 1999 pointed out that women form around 40 percent of workers in this industry, and the figures are projected to grow further.[132] The same study conducted in 24 manufacturing units in and around Delhi showed that 37 percent of the women employed are involved in assembly work, while 23 percent are doing soldering, and 27 per cent are doing both. The data revealed a wide ranging differential in wage, with only 16 percent of men and women getting the same wages. The

[131] Brinda Karat, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.
[132] Ibid.,pg.75.

majority of women get wages less than that drawn by men for similar or even identical work. In many units, minimum wages are not paid. Much of the new employment is in the export oriented zones. This employment, linked as it is to demands in the global markets, is very insecure. The 2004 Conference Report of AIDWA observed that in Tiruppur, the biggest hosiery centre in the entire region, thousands of young women lost their jobs in the preceding year due to lack of orders[133].

Overall, the employment growth rate has come down in the nineties compared to the eighties as a result of structural adjustment programmes. Data from the National Sample Surveys show that the proportion of casual workers in the total female work force has risen, from 41 per cent in 1990-91 to 45.3 per cent in 1993-94. The proportion of regular workers fell from 4.5 per cent to 3.4 per cent over the same period.[134] The greatest impact of SAP, is the proletarianisation of the female work force – huge numbers of women searching for work on any terms and at any price. The usage of the term proletarianisation coded by AIDWA would denote the extent of exploitation experienced by women workers in the period after liberalisation.[135]

A crucial issue for women is the decreasing days of work available in agriculture and the consequent growing demand for non-agricultural work to ensure a minimum income. Women in particular are the worst affected because the opportunities for non- agricultural work for women are extremely limited. The increase in women's work is, essentially, only as "marginal" workers. The workers are getting work for less than six months a year. In the last ten years the increase in the number of women "main" workers, i.e., those who have work for more than six years has been just 3 million and the corresponding figure for men has been 5 million. At the

[133] ibid.,pg 76
[134] ibid.,pg.77
[135] Ibid. , Pg.78.

same time, the number of women marginal workers has increased to 27 million, which exceeded the increase in case of male marginal workers by 1 million.[136] The other aspect is that of changing patterns of hiring labour, with most women being employed either on a contract basis that deprives them both of the guarantee of a regular income and the benefits normally accruing to permanent workers. The intensified economic exploitation of the work force, the suspension of labour laws in many countries and increasing unemployment have been hallmarks of liberalisation policies across the world and have led to increasing poverty. According to AIDWA, India is no exception.[137]

The implications of the structural adjustment programmes have been typically negative, in terms of reduced real incomes and standard of living for most women, along with a greater burden of unpaid work. In fact, one very common gender specific result of such policies is the increase in the unpaid labour done by women. The reduction of government subsidies to energy sources and to basic amenities such as sanitation, water supply, public health and education services has not only reduced the household incomes of wage earners, but has also put a special burden on women who generally bear the responsibility for providing these amenities to the family.[138]

There is no doubt that poverty as measured by incomes has worsened in India after 1991. The official income-poverty line fixed at less than Rs. 10 a day, identifies persons unable to meet even the minimum nutritional requirements for survival. By this criterion, the proportion of poor households declined from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s to 34.1% in 1989-90. By 1992, the poverty ratio had risen to 40.9 percent. The incidence of poverty has thereafter

---

[137] Ibid.,pg.74.

[138] *Women Speak ,United Voices Against Globalisation, Poverty and Violence in India*, 2000, Published by Six Women's Organisation and printed at Progressive Printers, New Delhi.

declined to 36.5% in 1993-94, but remains higher than in 1989. In rural areas, for example, the absolute number of poor persons increased from 229 million in 1987-88 to 244 million in 1993-94.[139]

AIDWA's Critique of Government Policies Ushered in by SAP

In a period, when poverty, inequality and unemployment were increasing, there was a steep reduction in real terms in central government outlays on programmes for "poverty alleviation". In the first year of SAP the percentage reduction in expenditure on programmes of poverty alleviation was higher than the percentage reduction in overall development expenditure. The expenditure on Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and Integrated Rural Development Project was drastically cut in the 90s. The number of days employment generated in the first scheme declined from the already insufficient 864 million person days in 1989-90 to 778.3 million person days in 1992-93. The number of families assisted annually in the second scheme, the IRDP,(Integrated Rural Development Programme) declined from the already low figures of 3.35 million in 1989-90 to 2 million in 1992-93. There has been a steep reduction in expenditure on DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) and ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), the two major national programmes for women and children. Under SAP the Central Government outlays on education have been reduced in real terms. Earlier, the government had talked about the necessity for low cost housing and certain schemes to provide cheap housing such as Indira Awas Yojana had been implemented. The expenditure on these programmes has also been cut under SAP.[140]

---

[139] Madhura Swaminathan 'The New Economic Policies and Rural Women', *Women's Equality*, 1998,July –September

[140] *Women in the New Economic order*, AIDWA publication series, New Delhi, January 1999.

The government has actually cut down on the workdays, generated through its public works programmes and food for work schemes in the last decade. In some states such as Rajasthan, there was an increase in workdays in government programmes, but only for a short period as a measure of drought relief. According to AIDWA, under the BJP rule, all such schemes were clubbed together in April 2002 under the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY). The number of workdays created had come down in the first three years of the BJP rule, from an inadequate 8601.4-lakh workdays in 1997-1998 to 5229.7 lakh workdays in 2002. In addition, labour saving machines are used in many government projects, thus further cutting down the number of workdays. The minimum one-third workdays for women in all government work schemes, proposed by the planning commission, a decade ago and accepted by the government, is yet to be implemented. Evaluations done by the Rural Development Ministry, which runs most of the work schemes, show that on the whole women have got only between 12 to 17 per cent of the workdays created. There has been no attempt by the government to create other forms of sustainable employment in the rural areas.[141] When critiquing governmental policies in the wake of globalisation, AIDWA seems to link up its political bias against BJP in particular to substantiate its stand. Nevertheless the argument holds as it is based on empirical data and not the rhetoric of political opposition.

In the decade of the 1980s, as a part of poverty alleviation programmes, the central government schemes had included recruitment of lakhs of women as anganwadi[142] workers, as village health workers, and so on. There have been sustained protests organised by AIDWA on the conditions of work and the levels of exploitation faced by this section of working women. The government is severely cutting back on all these programmes. Many anganwadi centres

[141] Ibid.,pg.57.
[142] The term is loosely used to describe the women working in child care centres run by the Government

have been closed or handed over to NGOs and hundreds of women have lost even the meagre wages, they were earning. There has been no fresh employment in any of the government schemes. As a result of government cutbacks in funds, anganwadi workers are doing more work for low wages. They do not have dearness allowance facilities, so their real wages have come down as a result of inflation. About 1.2 million anganwadi workers earn a mere pittance, termed as honorarium, ranging from Rs 260 to Rs 650 a month in most states. However the workload has drastically increased and often these women are subject to 10-hour working days. This includes every type of government survey under different ministries, health programmes including mother and childcare, immunisation etc. Thus for this section of women, current economic policies have led to an increased workload with less pay.[143] There has been an attempt to qualify the nature of work, women do in the wake of these globalisation policies, which constitutes the thrust of AIDWA's argument against it.

One issue that is constantly neglected by policy makers and the government is investment on public health for rural women. The criminal neglect of public health system in India has been greatly exacerbated by SAP. Even earlier, the government of India had equated health with family planning specifically for women. With the present global or rather western obsession with population control of third world countries as the means of saving the world resources, there is all the more reason for the government to target women in coercive population control programmes. These play havoc with women's health. At present, the outlay on family planning is more than the total outlay on health. Liberalisation has led to the use of Indians as guinea pigs for clinic trials conducted by pharmaceutical companies. This will have a far-reaching negative impact on women's health. Harmful contraceptives and drugs like RU-486, net-en, Depo-Provera is available in the Indian market in the name of choice. Even more

[143] Hemlata, 'Anganwadi employees movement marches ahead', *Women's Equality*, 2004, Nos. 1& 2,

langerous is the practice of many government hospitals of encouraging women to use these lrugs and contraceptives.[144] This is an interesting connection that AIDWA makes on the issue)f women's health and how in the view of the patriarchal state it is always important to control he reproductive potential of women, thus furthering their oppression in the wake of lobalisation. However it can be argued that globalisation is only one way in which these xperiments are receiving a new lease of life. The Indian State has always had a reductionist tand on women's health, where it has been consistently reduced to women's reproductory ıealth. There has been an overall neglect of women's health in general.

The government's inadequacies to provide alternative work has forced a much greater nigration of men and women looking for work in rural areas. On the one hand, male nigration has greatly intensified leading to an increase in female-headed families. More women re today responsible for the welfare and survival of their families than ever before.[145] ılthough the non-creation of alternative employment in rural areas can be one of the reasons or migration, it certainly is not the only reason.

AIDWA's conference reports from all over India has revealed the nature and extent of the nigration crisis.[146] In the village of Khanne and Motamarri in Andhra Pradesh, groups of /omen leave the village at around 8 in the morning. Unable to find work in and around their illage, they walk 3-4 km to the station to get a train to the neighbouring district. Here, after an qually long trek, they find coolie work at Rs 30 a day. They pay a bribe to the ticket conductor f Rs 5 each way, which is cheaper than buying a ticket. They get home by 10 or 10.30 at night. 'hus they have a fourteen-hour day, excluding domestic work, with a trek of at least 12 to 15 km

[4] *All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 1998-2001*, 2002,op.cit.
[5] *All India Democratic Women's Association Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004*, 2005,op.cit.
[6] *Women in the New Economic Order*, AIDWA publications series, New Delhi, January 1999.

a day, apart from the hard train ride. For all this, they end up earning only twenty rupees daily.[147] The incidence of sexual harassment is highest among migrant workers and also women who travel to villages looking for work. In this context, AIDWA's experience at a meeting of migrant women workers from the town of Tirupati who live on the streets near a city bus stop, is revealing. Ninety out of every hundred women present reported some form and degree of sexual harassment. However, the issue of sexual harassment is not something specific to rural migrant women only. Women from all age groups, religious backgrounds, caste and class identities face it. Therefore a more important point to note, specific to these migrant workers, is the nature of work the women do compared to the meagre wages they receive.

AIDWA's Interventions: The Struggles for Land Rights and Food Security

Struggle for access to land and the struggle for equitable public distribution system has been two major struggles organised by AIDWA in the wake of the policies of globalisation. Since AIDWA works with a mass base of women especially from the rural areas, these two issues seem to be appropriate for in-depth discussion.[148] To understand the issues in detail it is important to link it to the governmental policies, which compound the problem, especially in the post liberalisation era.

The interconnected issues of land reforms, distribution of land to landless families, ensuring equal rights to women through joint title deeds of land distributed and the need for

---

[147] Ibid. , Pg.20.

[148] See Swaminathan, Padmini, *'The State And The Subordination Of Women'*, Presented at the Third National Conference Of The Indian Association For Women's Studies at Punjab University, 1986, also see, *Women in the New Economic Order*, AIDWA publications series, New Delhi, January, 1999. There is also mention of the two specific struggles in the following, *Women's Equality*, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, April-June 1998. *Women's Equality*, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, Vol.-VIII no I, New Delhi, 1995. *Women's Equality*, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, July-September, 2003.

special attention in distributing land to single women and female-headed landless households, have been a part of the core demands of women's movement for several decades. AIDWA women have played a crucial role in the land struggles in different states. With the advent of liberalisation policies, successive governments at the centre and several state governments have encouraged the corporatisation of land. Amendment of land ceiling acts in states like Maharashtra and Karnataka, and passing of this act in other states, is mostly designed to encourage the leasing out of land to multinational corporations or facilitate the buying of land by them. The numbers of landless rural households has increased from 35 per cent in the eighties, to 41 per cent in 2000, and the trend continues. This upward trend in Landlessness is caused largely by distress sales. Women peasants have no direct part in these distress sales as the land is rarely in their names. However, the indebtedness that is usually the reason for the sale, lies heavily on their shoulders, leading to a much increased work burden and increased insecurities. Land ceiling legislation is the least implemented law in India. There is virtually no distribution of land. Although women's groups are working towards the joint titles to land for men and women, it seems to be countered at every step, by neo-liberal policies, which primarily increase inequalities in land ownership.[149]

Landlessness and the denial of access to common land have had disturbing fallouts. The lack of toilet facilities and the cramped home sites force women into open public places for most of their bodily functions. Landlords prevent them from using their private land. In a series of conventions of agricultural women workers organised by AIDWA during the last few years, women have spoken bitterly of the problems they face just to find a place to relieve themselves. Physical prevention, public humiliation by landlords and significantly aggressive

[149] Brinda Karat, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.

opposition by women of landlords' families against poor women using their land, were common experiences for the women.

Animal husbandry forms a substantial part of women's work and efforts at income generation. A large number of women are involved in the dairy industry. Denial of access to common land directly impacts on this activity, increasing inputs costs, and is an important reason for non- viability.

The forest policies of the post liberalisation era are equally devastating in their impact on tribals. 1 crore tribal families are threatened with eviction through a government order of May 2002, which orders all habitations of tribals in forest areas to be removed in the name of environmental protection. In many states, evictions have started. Tribals are also prevented from using even minor forest produce. These policies shift the onus of proof of innocence onto the accused and make bail provisions extremely stringent. Tribal women in particular are the worst victims because they are more vulnerable to the harassment of forest guards.[150] AIDWA through its struggles, demands implementation of land reforms and distribution of land to the landless. It attempts to stop commercialisation of common land and to ensure access to land for landless and poor women.

The second important issue on which AIDWA has played a significant role by organising dissent, is the Public Distribution System practised by the government of India. The government's Antodaya[151] scheme provides only one crore people a monthly ration of just 10 Kgs of food grains priced at Rs 3 and 10 Kgs of wheat at Rs 2. With six crore tones of food grains stacked in government godowns, the most rational course of action would obviously be a huge expansion of the Antodaya system, both in terms of food grain quotas as well as in terms

[150] 'Rural India –reverse land reform and anti-tribal forest policy', AIDWA 7TH National Conference Report –Section 1, *AIDWA perspectives on international and national issues and women's status 2001-2004.*

[151] This scheme is meant for the poorest of the poor within the Below the Poverty Line category.

of numbers to be covered. At the same time, the food grains could be used in a massive food-for-work programme. However, according to AIDWA, the central government's food-for-work schemes are inadequate and pose as another instrument for exploitation. The payment is partly in food grains and partly in cash but the proportions differ from state to state. The food component consists of terrible quality food grains, literally unfit for animals, leave alone human consumption. In this context, the important recommendation of the Abhijit Sen Committee set up by the Food Ministry, to universalise the PDS (Public Distribution System) becomes significant. It has been repeatedly quoted in AIDWA's campaigns.

On a public interest litigation petition, moved by the Right to Food Campaign in the Supreme Court, the apex court last November in 2004 issued a set of guidelines in its interim orders. There are many positive aspects of the orders such as, directives to the state governments to ensure work to all people in famine/ draught affected areas; directions to governments to ensure work during the agricultural off-season to at least two adults per family; all destitute persons over the age of 65 to get Rs 75 per month; every pregnant BPL (Below Poverty Line) member to get Rs 500 for the first two births, 8 to 10 weeks before delivery, etc. However, for the orders to be implemented by the state governments, most of whom are in deep financial crisis, a reversal in the present cuts being made by the central government in funds for the states and in the erosion of the financial powers of the states by the central government, would be required. For the Supreme Court orders to be implemented, the necessary financial arrangements have to be provided for. Another problem is posed by the court, accepting the present system of targeting, whereas the Sen Committee has rightly pointed out that it is the targeting system that has to be given up to make room for a universal right to food guarantee.

In the prevailing patriarchal cultural framework where women are usually the last to eat in a family, they have been particularly affected by shrinking access for the poor to affordable food grains. In the last three years, the government has been holding an unprecedented amount of "excess stocks" around two-thirds, more than the official norm for buffer stocks. AIDWA severely criticises the government for hoarding, instead of distributing the food grains rotting in the godowns.

A central issue of the current PDS is that of 'targeting' based on the identification of BPL and APL (above poverty line) families. An additional third tier called Antodaya, of about one crore households within the six-and-a–half-crore BPL households, was created in December 2000, in accordance with the World Bank's prescription of separating the 'moderately poor' from the 'very poor'. While all ration cardholders can now get 35 Kgs of food grains, there is differential pricing for the three categories. While Antodaya households are eligible for rice and wheat at Rs 3 and Rs 2 per kg, the BPL households have to pay more than double that price for wheat and at least two thirds more for rice. The prices of grains for the APL category are the same as, or marginally less than, the market price .For all intents and purposes, therefore, the PDS has been scrapped for the vast majority of the people.[152]

National Health Survey in its latest sample, claims that the percentage of poor in the total population has come down from 36 percent in 1993-1994 to 26 percent in 1999-2000. The BPL has become a convenient political excuse to derecognise the poor and deny them basic entitlements. Official poverty measurement in India has to be radically altered if the real masses of the poor are to be identified.

At AIDWA's call, women demonstrated at central government offices, at FCI (Food Corporation OF India) godowns and outside state assemblies. They raised the demand for

[152]Brinda Karat, op.cit.

universal public distribution system, cuts in prices of rationed food grains and an expansion of the Antodaya system with special emphasis on widows, single women and disabled people, which would enable them to get good quality food grains calculated at Antodaya prices.[153]

Ten thousand women marched through the streets of Bankura in West Bengal and held a sit-in at office of the District Magistrate. In Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh women broke into the FCI godown demanding distribution of the food grain rotting in the godown. In Kerala, in all 13 districts, women demonstrated at FCI godowns asking for their demands to be considered. In Maharashtra, women demonstrated and conducted rasta roko's[154] in at least ten districts including a morcha[155] of 3000 women in Nasik and a rasta roko in Thalaseri in Thane district with 1000 women, blocking the national highway. In Jaipur, women clashed with the police who attempted to block them from reaching the Rajasthan vidhan sabha. In the end, they succeeded in reaching and protesting at the vidhan sabha. In both Bhuvaneshwar and Lucknow, large rallies were held outside the respective vidhan sabhas. Other states, like Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Bihar, also saw many demonstrations and mass mobilisations on similar demands.[156]

Strategies for Change

The opposition to SAP from the women's movement in India is multidimensional and encompasses women's response as citizens, as workers, as producers, as consumers, as wives, as mothers and as human beings struggling to live a life of dignity. The most inspiring example of growing resistance was the World March for women held in 2000. From March 8th,

[153] Brinda Karat, 'fighting for a basic human right: a life free from hunger', *Women's Equality*, 2003, July-September.
[154] Literally meaning blocking the roads as an expression of protest.
[155] Literally meaning rally.
[156] *Women's Equality*, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, July-September, 2003.

International Women's Day, to October 17th 2000, Anti-poverty Day, millions of women throughout the world participated in campaigns and agitation against poverty and violence generated and intensified by neo-liberal economic policies. AIDWA was a part of this historical platform.[157] Participation in these kinds of forums to establish ties with other anti-globalisation movements is an important aspect of the strategy, adopted by AIDWA to resist the policies of globalisation. Infact, such alliances and formulation of broader critiques are vital to the worldwide movement against such policies. At the same time, it is important for the protests to reach the respective governments, which actually implement these economic policies.

The huge struggles against imperialist globalisation, reflect the common experiences of working people all over the world. Women and women's organisations have been part of these protests. At the same time, there is a growing trend among certain sections of women's organisations, reflected in discussions at international meetings, to 'adjust' and work within the framework of globalisation policies. AIDWA is very critical of this kind of stand. It argues that while defensive strategies may be necessary at certain junctures, the present advocates of 'adjustments' fail to understand that neo-liberal policies are not static. AIDWA believes that they keep changing and expanding, finding new methods to maximise profits in order to serve the interests of imperialism and the ruling classes of different countries. Total opposition to every step of neo-liberalisation that harms the interest of democracy, national sovereignty, justice and equality, has to be central to any movement that seeks to advance the goals of women's emancipation and social change.[158]

---

[157] Other forms of protest and participation in forums against liberalisation will be discussed in details in the next chapter.

[158] *All India Democratic Women's Association Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004*, op.cit.

Just as legislation is seen as a precondition for social change, in AIDWA's view, raising public awareness and influencing government policy is also understood as tactics for short-term gains in the struggle for women's equality. What is stressed however, is the need for broader change in the socio-economic sphere and a programme to bring about such change. The other level of AIDWA's approach then, is the promotion of long-term and radical social, political and economic change. Raising public awareness regarding the nature of women's oppression and the exploitation of the working class is one aspect of this strategy. What characterises both strategies is the emphasis placed on mass mobilisation and the need for change from below.

AIDWA's programme is an integrated approach in which the issues, concerning women are linked to the larger political, economic and social problems, affecting Indian society. Because the oppression of women is viewed here not as the simple product of a male-dominated society, but as the inevitable outcome of an in-egalitarian system in which the masses, male and female alike, are exploited, the approach taken is necessarily integrated and one that is contingent on cross-gender solidarity.

There is an overarching emphasis on building a common struggle for women's emancipation through broad-based linkages with other movements, which may or may not be women centric. True to its federal structure, AIDWA builds its movements and mobilises women from the grassroots. This does not in any way undermine the perspective of AIDWA towards macro issues. In other words, AIDWA's stand on globalisation and women's oppression comes from comprehending these as macro structures. This raises critical questions regarding AIDWA's stand on micro level issues.

In most of the AIDWA publications it is evident that a lot of emphasis is given to macro structures. What is noticeable here is that while much attention has been paid to the larger

structures responsible for women's subordination, there is no discussion concerning oppression as it is perpetuated at the micro level. As such, a number of questions remain unanswered. How exactly is power exercised among individuals? Are oppressive relationships at the interpersonal level a direct product of the larger structure? What is the relationship between the operation of power at the macro and the micro levels? Will class struggle, involving the removal of the concerned government and other large structural changes, be enough to change power dynamics at the micro level and that of gender? AIDWA's analysis of the oppression of women and the strategies of their emancipation will necessarily remain incomplete, unless it can reconcile its understanding of macro-issues with its micro-level experiences to evolve a holistic theoretical framework.

Chapter Four

Towards Evolving a Feminist Critique of Globalisation: A Comparative Analysis of SEWA and AIDWA

Here an attempt has been made to tie up all the arguments in a systematic manner to give an overview of some of the commonalities and differences between AIDWA and SEWA vis-à-vis their stand on the impact of structural adjustment programme on women workers. It is very difficult to compare AIDWA, a mass based organisation which has its membership in almost every state, to SEWA, an organisation which is smaller in terms of numbers, (i.e. membership) but definitely not in terms of its reach. The comparisons are not in terms of the number or reach of the two organisations. Instead, it is an attempt to compare their perceptions, ideologies and political stand on one particular issue. Though in the last two chapters there is an elaborate description of their respective stands on the impact of the policies of structural adjustment, here the focus has been narrowed down to a few fundamental differences between the two organisations which lead them to have divergent views on this issue. At the same time, broad commonalities shared by AIDWA and SEWA cannot be overlooked. Therefore, it is important to deduce the commonalities first and then to derive the differences.

Both AIDWA and SEWA are located within the women's movement in India, although they come from varied ideological positions. Both the organisations primarily work with women workers and problems associated with them. Government policies aiming at women's empowerment tend to be goal oriented, functioning on certain predetermined, often overtly patriarchal stereotypes. Women's issues are often reduced to an overt focus on reproductive health and family planning, which in turn is geared to serving the state's specific interests of

population control. Neither SEWA, nor AIDWA have such narrow and reductionist understanding of women's issues.

The Indian State's broad conceptualisation of development, and specifically women's empowerment from the late 60s till date, has always been in contention with the predominant ideological premises of the women's movement. Sudipta Kaviraj has spoken of the crisis of legitimacy suffered by the Congress, from the end of the 1960s.[159] The criticism faced by the Nehru model of politics and planned development for being an empty rhetoric of poverty alleviation led to fundamental revisions in policy. Even, at this juncture, the coding of the Indian nation as socialist, guided by aims of national self-determination, continued to shape political discourse to such a degree that these were also formative for a number of oppositional struggles. It was thus possible to question the state and expose the hollowness of its claims while at the same time demand certain accountability based on the rights of citizenship. However critical the institution of patriarchy was to become in the self-understanding of the women's movement, especially among autonomous groups, the Indian State has continued to be the movement's most constitutive site of contestations.[160]

The five-year plan documents in independent India have no mention of women as workers. On the other hand, the first five-year plan reiterated 'women's legitimate role in the family'. The second plan did mention women workers but with a patriarchal undertone. The state took a protective attitude towards women to safeguard them from industrial hazards. In the third plan, there was no mention of women as workers in the chapters on employment, personal requirements, training programmes and labour policy. The solitary mention, found was about

[159] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'A Critique of the Passive Revolution', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, Vol. 23, no 27, November 1988.

[160] Mary E John, 'Gender and Development in India, 1970s-1990s, some reflections on the Constitutive Role of Contexts', Economic *and Political Weekly*, November 23, 1996.

giving women training for family planning and midwifery.[161] During the critical years of the 1970s, the new emphasis on development by feminists gave fresh shape and a new lease of life to the 'producer' in India's imagined economy. The kind of supplementary place that had been allotted to women in the community development programmes financed by the Ford Foundation in the 1950s and the 60s which involved training women in skills of 'family management' and 'home economics' came in for vehement criticism. The feminists of the movement focused on working women and the problem of the invisibility of women's work. The Committee on Status of Women in India heralded the process of bringing the question of women workers in the forefront for the first time.[162] Directly linked to an understanding of the government's development policies was the politics behind the formulation of National Perspective Plan. In their critique of the NPP, some women's organisations, part of the broader movement, pointed out that the proposed plan recommendation to bring women into the mainstream of development ignored the reality of women's marginalisation being the result of such mainstream development.[163]

A clear picture of the state's perspective of women's role in the economy, emerges from this discussion. The women's movement has been instrumental in questioning this stereotypical stand reflected in the policies implemented by the state. One has come a long way from merely critiquing the role of women in society, in terms of being a good mother and a competent

---

[161] Nirmala Buch, 'State Welfare Policy and Women, 1950-1975', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 125, 1998.

[162] The CSWI's initial analysis was based more on inferences, the cries of thousands of poor women across the country voiced before the committee and demographic evidence of secular trends of decline in women's value in the economy and society as a whole. The complexities of the relationship between macro-economic changes and women's status issues at different levels of society had been neglected by social analysts till then. The committee appealed to the social science community to study this relationship on a continuous basis, GOI, 1974.

[163] Indu Agnihotri, and Vina Mazumdar, 'changing terms of political discourse: Women's movement in India, 1970s-1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22, 1995.

housewife to an increasing attempt to articulate the position of women as workers. Keeping this broad historical context in mind one can identify some basic commonalities between AIDWA and SEWA. Both these organisations organise women based on their specific needs and demands which emanate from them being workers primarily.

Although both AIDWA and SEWA are women's organisations, dealing specifically with problems related to women workers, they hold different worldviews. AIDWA believes in transformative politics in which they strive for changes in the structure of the economy and society, which would bring in appropriate changes in economy, politics and society. So in a sense though they specifically look at women workers and their problems, AIDWA believes in contextualising the category of women workers within a hierarchy of power structures in society, economy and politics where power is permeated through gender, class and caste hierarchies. In other words, women's oppression in society is reflected in the discrimination they face in the economy. As the power structure is all pervasive so is the discrimination. Since AIDWA is the women's wing of CPI (M) it also has a fairly strong influence of the organised left. AIDWA therefore takes a political stand on globalisation based on its understanding of both gender politics and its left ideology. SEWA on the other hand, believes in fighting for the cause of women workers in the informal sector. They are predominantly a Gandhian organisation with a massive mass base. They lobby at the national and international level for the visibility of the problems and get policies implemented for the benefit of this section of women workers. Although self-reliance and development are two broad objectives, which SEWA pursues in their struggles and strategies, they seem to have no critical understanding on the issue of 'women's work' or women workers. This comes from SEWA not situating women workers in a framework of already existing power structures of domination. They also do not attempt to define, question or redefine women's work.

This difference in perception can also come from their diverse histories. The genesis of the two organisations can be traced to two disparate phases within the women's movement. The women's movement in India is conceived to be issue-based and heterogeneous.[164] It can also be studied in three distinct time periods or 'waves'.[165]

The first wave can be said to have begun with the mass mobilisation of women during the Indian Independence Movement. After Independence, for over a decade, there was a lull in political activity by women. The period from the late 60s was the second wave, with a resurgence of political activity. In Maharashtra, the United Women's Anti Price-Rise Front, formed in 1973 by Socialists and Communists, rapidly became a mass women's movement for consumer protection. The movement spread and linked up with the students' agitation against corruption in Gujarat, and it became a massive middle class movement, which soon shifted its focus to an overall critique of the Indian State. Brutal police repression and the declaration of the Emergency in 1975 crushed the struggle. The women's movement has always successfully incorporated different issues which weave together a holistic understanding of discrimination faced by women in the socio-economic and political sphere at both the macro and micro level.

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad and Working Women's Forum in Madras were formed in this period, organising women in the informal sector. The Bodh Gaya movement in 1978 is another landmark, which confronted a local 'muth'[166] owning most of the village land. During the struggle, women were very active and militant, and tried to combine the issue of land rights with women's right to resources.

---

[164] As one historian of the women's movement, Radha Kumar sees it: the contemporary women's movement encompasses and links up a range of issues– work environment, ecology, civil rights, and health. It is also a network, which encompasses party-based, professional and independent groups. It is within this range of heterogeneous membership that we can situate AIDWA and SEWA

[165] Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, The *Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's movement in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1992.

[166] A religious complex (usually Buddhist or Hindu) consisting of shrines ,centre of religious learning and residence for monks

The third wave, which can be said to have emerged in the late 70s, had a specific feminist focus. There was the growth of the 'autonomous' women's groups in towns and cities, without party affiliations or formal hierarchical structures, although individual members often had party connections. However, feminists within autonomous groups pointed out that left parties and trade unions were as patriarchal as other bodies and so it was necessary to stay independent while allying on a broad platform. These new city-based groups dominated feminist campaigns during this period. There were nation-wide campaigns on dowry and rape, and women's resource centres were set up in several cities.

Taking this notion of 'waves', into the late 80s and further, we may note the emergence of a new feature, which transformed the landscape of the women's movement. This was the large-scale availability of funding, both from the government and international sources. Hereafter, most 'autonomous' groups became funded non-governmental organisations. Many theorists argue, whether the forces of globalisation have actually enhanced the functioning of some of these groups which, instead of questioning the premises of these policies got co-opted by them. Since the 80s, there has been a large-scale co-option of feminist rhetoric by the state and 'empowerment of women' is a slogan commonly used in government documents. However, it is increasingly being recognised that this kind of government programme aims at empowering women only to the extent that it would serve the purpose of education for population control through, for example, drives against child marriage. [167]

.This growing statism and ngo-isation of the women's movement has been noted within the movement itself, often leading to acrimonious debates. In the 90s, another feature of significance was the formation of a common platform, which emerged at the national level with

[167] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing, An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990,* Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993.

the women's wings of national level political parties as its members.[168] It comprised of the All India Democratic Women's Association, All India Women's Conference, National Federation of Indian Women, Mahila Dakshata Samiti and three national level women's organisations, i.e. the YWCA, the Joint Women's Programme and the Centre for Women's Development Studies. This collaborative effort has gone a long way in bringing issues like the recent Bill on reservations for women in Parliament to the forefront.

AIDWA officially formed a part of the organised women's movement after the movement established feminist stands on varied issues. SEWA on the other hand, formed a part of the movement in the 1970s when the thrust of the movement was to build alliances between different movements fighting against different power structures. This is a crucial difference between the two organisations. Their different historical backgrounds contribute to the divergence in their political stands on various issues, though they both belong to the women's movement at large.

Specific to the problem of structural adjustment programmes and their impact on women workers, the contrast between AIDWA and SEWA lies in the terms of conceptualisation of the problem. AIDWA's stand tends to be highly politicised and therefore prone to being rhetorical. There is also a tendency to reduce all social problems to their real or imaginary economic bases. For example, even issues such as prostitution and trafficking are understood primarily as economic problems or conversely, are understood as results of globalisation. On the other hand, SEWA's stand reflects a non-partisan, depoliticised and opportunistic viewpoint.

AIDWA takes a strong anti imperialist anti globalisation stand, which it supports, by empirical data on conditions of work, especially for women workers in the agricultural and rural areas. The conditions have substantially deteriorated, once these policy measures were

[168] Nivedita Menon (ed.), *Gender and politics in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999.

implemented post 1991. SEWA, on the other hand, takes a more pragmatic stand on this issue. According to SEWA publications, the conditions of work for women workers were already dismal in the informal sector. This was symptomatic of the informal sector and not caused by any specific external agency.[169] The policies of globalisation might have augmented the already existing problems but there is no causal link established by SEWA, between the deteriorating conditions of work for women workers and the implementation of these policies.

One cannot overlook the conditions of work in the informal sector, specific to women because they are doubly burdened, as women and as women workers. But at the same time if this position gets even worse, then it is important to investigate the causes for the change. SEWA does not attempt to link growing informalisation with the growth of structural adjustment programmes or broader structures of globalisation. On the other hand, they believe that the forces of globalisation can be beneficial to the poor in certain ways. They sometimes fall into the web of narrowly defining globalisation as the opening up of the economy and markets. SEWA's struggles aim at reaching the global market to the poor workers who cannot otherwise access it. SEWA in many ways acts as an intermediary between the government at the policy level and the poor women at the grass roots level. It intends to network between the global, national and local levels to guarantee employment and remuneration to this category of women workers in the informal sector. [170] One contentious issue, which is linked to their stand vis-à-vis globalisation with respect to the women's movement, is the problem of funding. SEWA has often faced allegations from other strands of the women's movement for taking foreign funds to sustain their organisational work.

---

[169] See Shramshakti Report on Self-Employed Women in the Informal Sector that was published in 1988. The report was intended to show women's extremely vulnerable conditions across diverse occupations, under high levels of discrimination, as well as the range of health hazards, women were exposed to on a regular basis.

[170] *World Of Work: India: Self-employed Women's Association (SE WA),* No. 36, November 2000,also see www.ilo.org.

The question of funding remains a sensitive one, on which it has been difficult to have an open dialogue without organisational prejudices and moral stances coming to the fore. Today there are three camps, the ideal one which raises its own funds, the untouchables which take foreign funds and the tolerable ones that take state funds.[171] A consensus on the various legitimate means by which organisations could actually raise funds is yet to be achieved within the women's movement.

It has been alleged by organisations like AIDWA, that SEWA belongs to the camp in the women's movement, which wants to "keep away from politics" and avoid confrontation with forces that have been responsible for the worst violence against women. AIDWA accused SEWA of taking over 80 lakh rupees from the Modi government to run training centres for affected women and using quite a big percentage of the funds for their own expenses.[172]

The BJP government headed by Narendra Modi was instrumental in planning and executing the Gujarat riots in 2002. It was evident that the Gujarat riot was no ordinary communal riot, no spontaneous outburst of pent up anger against the 'other'. Rather, it was a systematic carnage, characterised by targeted looting. It also involved killing of vulnerable Muslim groups, irrespective of age and gender. For close to three days Ahmedabad, Baroda, Bharuch and other major cities in the state were on fire, although there were notable exceptions like Surat and Kutch. And unlike many such previous incidents, the frenzy was not restricted to cities and their immediate environs. The countryside, be it the peasant areas of Mehsana or the tribal hinterlands of Panchmahals, soon joined in. In many ways it was a re-play of the dark days of partition, except that this time the fury was one sided.[173]

---

[171] Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, op.cit.

[172] *All India Democratic Women's Association Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004*, March, Published by AIDWA, New Delhi, 2005, pg.191.

[173] *Seminar* 513, Gujarat riots, May, 2002.

More shocking was the veritable collapse of the state apparatus, the law and order machinery. What was witnessed, with rare exceptions apart, was cynical partisanship, reminiscent of the 1984 Delhi riots and Mumbai during 1992-1993. The police played the role of the 'helpless bystander', or worse, active participants directing the rampage. Reluctance on the part of the state administration to call for immediate help was also evident.[174]

SEWA was active in restoration and rehabilitation work after the riots. However, the organisation has not taken a stand vis-à-vis the allegations directed against the state government being instrumental for the Gujarat riots. It is very clear from the annual reports, that SEWA continues to accept a large sum of money from the Modi government. Here, SEWA seems to completely discard its Gandhian roots and justify the ends over the means. This has drawn intense criticism from AIDWA. Though both the organisations have made valid claims, AIDWA's criticism of SEWA's funding policies cannot be trivialised.

AIDWA's critique of SEWA for "keeping away from politics" seems to be rather unjustified. SEWA has been one of the pioneering organisations involved in numerous instances of lobbying and implementation of policies beneficial for the informal sector. More specifically, one can look at the reason why SEWA split from the TLA to reiterate the fact that although it is a non-partisan organisation, it cannot be called apolitical.

The TLA (The Textile Labour Association) was the biggest single union of textile workers set up by Gandhi in 1917 in Ahmedabad. Though most of SEWA's programmes were developed jointly with TLA, its rapid growth strained its relationship with the main body. One

[174] The state government delayed in calling the army. The Prime Minister did not react for the first two days and then other than expressing pain, seemed more worried about the sullying of the country's fair name abroad. The Home Minister, himself and an MP from Gandhinagar, did visit but avoided his constituency. And the ruling party and its allies rushed to the defence of the administration. By the time, an element of order was restored even by official estimates, there were over 700 dead. Unofficial figures were close to 2000. Muslim houses and establishments lay completely destroyed and thousands of victims were huddled in refugee camps.

of TLA's major concerns and areas of conflict was SEWA's development programme.[175] Such programmes it felt would hamper SEWA's union activities. The debate between SEWA and TLA continued until SEWA made a public declaration supporting the Dalits during the 1981 anti-reservation riots in Ahmedabad. Charging the organisation with indiscipline, the TLA expelled it from its fold. The differences between the TLA and SEWA were not irreconcilable but an organisational split would have taken place sooner or later. Though both had their roots in Gandhian philosophy, one had remained static whereas the other had developed an independent status, its own style of functioning and its politics. SEWA's growth, popularity and dynamism were slowly influencing the hierarchical and paternalistic relationship between the two. SEWA's composition had compelled it to rethink its understanding of the formal and informal sectors, the relationship between unionisation and development, and men and women workers.[176] The split from TLA in certain ways was a highly political stand to take in order to start off as an independent entity. It was also a historic a stand to take. SEWA in certain ways questioned the basis of traditional trade unions and their evident neglect of issues specific to women workers. It's formation as an independent entity marked the beginning of evolving a specific politics involving organising women workers of the informal sector and striving for their empowerment.

One cannot underestimate the potential of an organisation like SEWA in organising women, given the sheer number of its members. The role played by SEWA becomes even more

---

[175] In 1971 with the help of TLA, some 8 000 women were enrolled as members for drawing bank credit. In ten years time, SEWA had already established a series of programmes for the self employed, for example their own bank, welfare schemes such as maternity benefits, widowhood and death relief, health security, crèches, a small housing project, a production unit for making quilts and a rural wing in collaboration with the TLA 's Agricultural Labour Association. Alongside these programmes, SEWA had staged some militant protests of hundreds of women (1978), moved the courts and appealed to the state to set up an Unorganised Labour Board (1980)

[176] Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, The *Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's movement in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1992.

important as the informal sector has traditionally been an area neglected by policy makers and the framers of labour laws.[177] Women workers are the worse victims of exploitation in the labour market in general and in the informal sector in particular. Facing globalisation with a pragmatic and pro-poor attitude has enabled SEWA to at least intervene actively in the lives of thousands of women by training them to cope with certain insecurities that emerged after globalisation. SEWA has been instrumental in fighting the cause of informal sector women workers through campaigns and through dialogues specific to labour policies with the Indian State,[178]also with international organisations. It has also been influential in terms of networking and reaching out to align with international organisations that work on similar issues.[179] Its basic thrust is to organise the poor women workers in the informal sector, to empower their members with sustainable income and provide for socio-economic security in order to pull them out of the viscous cycle of poverty.

AIDWA addresses the problems of women through multidimensional strategies including agitations, mass mobilisations, legal interventions, campaigns, seminars, publications, and counselling. These are implemented through formation of self-help groups, co-operatives and

---

[177] The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 with all their shortcomings, do not touch the bulk of the unorganised sector where women are employed in large numbers. One of the biggest drawbacks is that the informal sector is not recognised by the government and does not have the benefits of protective legislation.

[178]One of the many issues SEWA lobbied with the state for, was to take up a maternity scheme for landless agricultural workers, who constitute 75% per cent of the female population. In 1987, Gujarat State with SEWA's help began implementing the maternity protection scheme through the Labour Ministry. SEWA meanwhile continues lobbying with the central government to launch this programme nation-wide for self-employed women. .

[179] SEWA is one of the founder of WIEGO, a worldwide coalition of institutions and individuals concerned with improving statistics, research, programs and policies in support of women in informal sector of the economy. It is a co.-founder of HOMENET, which organises the home based workers at the grass root level and mobilise them for their rights. SEWA is also associated with STREETNET which aims at increasing visibility, voice and bargaining power of street vendors throughout the world
SEWA has taken an initiative for establishing regional network of grass root workers and their organisations engaged in traditional handicrafts in SAARC countries and other neighbouring countries in South Asia. Global Trading Network (GTN) is a joint initiative of the World Bank and SEWA. It endeavours to build autonomous facilitating network for global marketing of the products and services for grass-root level organising to self-employed poor.

other such methods. It has been part of numerous interventions, both through mobilisation of women workers and lobbying for reversing macro policies of government in favour of women.

Over the years, AIDWA has been instrumental in building struggles all over the country. Some of their specific interventions have been in the area of food security, equal and minimum wages for women workers, women's land rights and joint ownership rights in land. It is actively involved in organising Dalit women against upper caste oppression and also deals with issues, specific to tribal women and women of minority communities. AIDWA has also been a major player in exposing the politics of the right wing fundamentalist forces through a thorough critique of their perspectives and programmes specifically in the context of the Gujarat riots of 2002. AIDWA intervenes in mobilising women in favour of the election of pro women democratic and progressive candidates to the Parliament, State Assemblies and local bodies. It was part of the joint and successful effort to achieve one- third reservation of seats for women in local bodies and is now campaigning for the extension of reservation to higher elected bodies.

According to AIDWA, just as legislation is seen as a precondition for social change, so is raising public awareness and influencing government policy, understood as tactics for short-term gains in the struggle for women's equality. What is stressed however is the need for broader change in the socio-economic sphere and a broad programme to bring about such change. The second level of AIDWA's approach then, is the promotion of long-term and radical social, political and economic change. Raising public awareness regarding exploitation of the working class in general and the nature of women's oppression in particular, is one aspect of this strategy. What characterises both, is the emphasis placed on mass mobilisation and the need for change from below.

To further the struggle for women's rights, AIDWA believes that the first priority is to organise and mobilise the mass of women in struggles to better their own lives on issues of vital importance to them. It is also committed to co-operate with other women's organisations and groups (such as -trade unions, peasant organisations, youth and students and professional associations) to form a united movement throughout the country.

Both AIDWA and SEWA believe in the collaboration with other movements fighting for related issues. As a part of the women's movement in India, both the organisations aim at widening their base by creating issue based alliances on broad platforms nationally and internationally. There is a need to collaborate with organisations all over the world, which have successfully formulated a critique of structural adjustment policies. According to AIDWA publications, clear indications were evident in 1995 in Beijing itself, when the parallel NGO conference of women's groups across the world had discussed the negative impact of globalisation and structural adjustment programmes on women's lives. In India, as part of the struggle against the devastation caused by these policies, over 100 women's organisations brought out a publication called Womenspeak which documented the details of how these policies affected women directly.[180]

The opposition to SAP from the women's movement in India is multidimensional and encompasses women's response as citizens, as workers, as producers, and as consumers. The most inspiring example of growing resistance was the World March for women in 2000. Women from 159 countries marched together against structural adjustment policies, identifying the World Bank, IMF and the WTO as the main barriers to human development and human rights. Participation in these kinds of forums to establish linkages and formulate these kinds of critiques is very important for the worldwide movement against such policies.

[180] Brinda Karat, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.

Through these agitations and resistance movements, it is important to reach the respective governments, which after all implement these economic policies.

One point, which is not addressed by both AIDWA and SEWA, is to critically assess the question of women's work and the politics behind gender division of labour. According to Rohini Hensman,[181] the gender division of labour in industry is an extension of social division of labour in society. Whenever a job is done exclusively and predominantly by women, it becomes classified as being less skilled and of low value. On the other hand, where domestic labour is concerned, women are usually assigned exclusive responsibility for housework. It becomes 'women's work' not because women are more biologically suited to perform them, but because they belong to the domestic economy, which is supposed to be the woman's sphere. The most important characteristic of work done for one's household is that it is not remunerated in any way. Sometimes it is acceptable for men, to do the same task, provided they work as wage labourers, for example, as hotel workers or domestic servants. But presumably these men, like other men workers, would not readily do the same tasks in their own homes for no pay. The assumption here is that women are more suited for un-waged work, and can afford to do it because there is no necessity for them to earn. Woman's wages are mostly treated as supplementary.

Thus it is important to first establish the gender based discrimination faced by women workers in the workplace and secondly, to also probe into the politics of gender division of labour within the household. The discrimination at the societal level within the household is in other words reflected in the gender-based discrimination in the work place. To understand the extent of this discrimination, it is important to qualify the nature of work women do within

[181] Rohini Hensman, 'Impact of Technological Changes on Women Workers', in N. Rao, L. Rurup. , R. Sudarshan, (ed.), *Sites of Change*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1996.

and outside the premises of the household. Also to be able to have a critical understanding of the category of women workers, it is important to theorise their position as that of being doubly exploited i.e. as women and as women workers. Although, AIDWA attempts to question the premise of gender division of labour in society, they are not questioning why women do 'women's work'.

SEWA on the other hand does not deal with the issue of gender division of labour within and outside the household. Although they principally work with women workers, they fail to achieve what they call 'empowerment' for their women. The members cannot achieve empowerment based on economic and social security without questioning their exploitative position in society. What can be observed, is that there is a general dearth of understanding of exploitation which women workers face based on any gender-based ideology. Exploitation is defined unidimensionally in terms of the context of the informal sector only. The analysis of discrimination faced by women workers in the informal sector based on gender is somehow not conclusively conveyed. SEWA characterises their members as the vulnerable victims of informalisation of work simply because they cannot organise and evolve a united voice against these kinds of work patterns. To organise these women and make their dissent visible, SEWA came into being. SEWA does not develop any broad linkages between growing informalisation of the labour force and the predominance of women doing certain kinds of jobs in the informal sector. Instead of merely holding informalisation responsible for deterioration of the conditions of work done by women, it is also important to question the politics of why women are favoured to do jobs which are casual, lowly paid and irregular. It could be deduced from this analysis that the growing discrimination against women workers in the informal sector is not just due to the characteristics of informalisation of work patterns, but also due to the underlying predominance of gender discrimination in the overall labour market.

Therefore, it is important to articulate the position of women workers in terms of their discriminated position in society and in the labour market. Assuming that both AIDWA and SEWA belong to the women's movement, this non-addressal of contextualising the position of women workers from a gender perspective cannot be overlooked.

Women's organisations singularly cannot bear the onus of organising dissent and evolving a worldview of fighting for workers rights. The ultimate responsibility of implementing policy changes and improving the situation of women workers lay with the government and the state machinery. The laws have to be compatible with the notion of improvement of women workers and their overall development. One cannot underestimate the functions of mass based organisations like SEWA and AIDWA in influencing policy measures. However what remains a lacuna in their critique of some of the policy measures adopted by the government, is the overarching gender insensitive approach of the Indian State. Though other strands of the women's movement have been active in questioning this stand of the state, AIDWA and SEWA has not been instrumental in critiquing the state from a gendered point of view. Instead the attempt by both the organisations have been to point out the absence of certain policies or demand new policies for the upliftment of women workers.

It is important to articulate the dissent of women workers by organising them to demand for policy changes. Also equally critical are the actual changes in policies. All in all it is a two way process of development and change. Hence, it can be concluded from the above discussion that the women's movement and the state machinery together with their respective stand on this particular issue have to reconcile to an environment conducive to the women workers in the era of globalisation. Since AIDWA and SEWA both form an intrinsic part of the women's movement, it is important to understand their stand on the issue to get an idea of the diverse strands of the heterogeneous women's movement in India. This should mark a starting point to probe into the possibilities of bargaining for gender sensitive policies with the Indian State.

Bibliography

Books and Booklets

All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 1998-2001, AIDWA Publications, New Delhi, March *2002.*

AIDWA 7th National Conference, Commission Papers, AIDWA Publications, Bhuvaneshwar, 18-21 November 2004.

All India Democratic Women's Association 7th national conference report sections I and II, AIDWA Publications, Bhuvaneshwar, 18-21 November, 2004.

All India Democratic Women's Association, Perspectives, Interventions and Struggles 2001-2004, AIDWA Publications, New Delhi, March 2005.

Barrett, Michele, 'Gender and the Division of Labour', *Women's Oppression Today: Problems with Marxist Analysis,* Verso Editions, London, 1980.

Banerjee, Nirmala (ed.), *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario,* Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

Bhaduri, Amit and Deepak Nayyar, *The Intelligent person's guide to liberalisation,* Penguin, New Delhi, 1996.

Bhambhri, C.P, *Globalisation India-Nation State and Democracy,* Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2005.

Bhasin, Kamla, *What Is Patriarchy,* Kali for Women, Delhi, 2000.

Bhatt, Ela, 'Realty for Poor Self Employed Women', *Global issues local insights: Round table on Listening to the Voices of the poor Self Employed Women,* March 16, 2002, SEWA publications, in New Delhi, April 2002.

Breman, Jan, 'A Question of Poverty', *The Laboring Poor in India,* Oxford University Press, 2003.

Chatterjee, Mirai, Sunayna Waliya, Kohli Sweta, *Occupational Health of Women Workers in the Unorganised Sector,* SEWA Academy, Mahila Sewa Trust, Ahmedabad, 1998.

Chatterjee, Partha, *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

Chatterjee, Partha, *State and Politics in India,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

Chomsky, N, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues,* South End Press, Boston, 1993.

Crowell, W. Daniel, *The SEWA Movement and Rural Development, The Banaskantha and The Kutch Experience,* Sage Publications, New York, 2003.

Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 23, Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1922.

Firestone, Shulamith, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Bantam Books, New York, 1970.

Gandhi, Nandita and Nandita Shah, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1992.

Ghosh, Jayati and C.P. Chandrasekhar, *The Market that Failed: Neoliberal Economic Reforms in India*, Leftword, New Delhi, 2002.

Gothoskar, Sujata (ed.), *Struggles of Women At Work*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1992.

Hasan, Zoya (ed.), *Politics and the State in India*, Sage publications, New Delhi, 2000.

Held, David and Anthony McGrew, *Globalisation/anti-Globalisation*, Polity, Cambridge, 2002.

'Impact of Economic Policies Or Policies Of Orthodox Stabilisation And Structural Adjustment On Women', in *Towards Beijing, A Perspective From The Indian Women's Movement*, AIDWA Publication, 1995.

Islam, R, *Perspectives on Employment Generation in India*, ILO, New Delhi, 1994.

Jaggar, Alison, 'The Politics of Socialist Feminism', *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Rowman and Littlefield, 1983.

James, Selma and Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, Bristol Falling Wall Press, 1973.

Jhabvala, Renana, *Liberalising for the poor*, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 1995.

Joshi, Vijay, *India's Economic Reforms: 1991-2001*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Jhabvala, Renana, *Structural Adjustment Programme: Issues and Strategies for Action for People's Sector Women Workers in India*, SEWA publications, Ahmedabad, 1999.

Jhabvala, Renana, 'Globalisation, Liberalisation and Women in the Informal Economy', in Veena Jha (eds.), *Trade, Globalisation and Gender –Evidence from South Asia*, UNIFEM, 2003.

Karat, Brinda, *Survival and Emancipation Notes from Indian women's struggles*, Three Essays, New Delhi, 2005.

Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993.

Lerner, Gerda, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986.

Mazumdar, Indrani, *Emergent Contradictions Globalisation and Women Workers in India*, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, May 2004.

Menon, Nivedita (ed.), *Gender and politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi; New York, 1999.

Rose, Kalima, *Where Women Are Leaders; The SEWA Movement In India*, Vistaar Publications, London; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books Ltd, 1992.

Rose, Kalima, 'SEWA's: Women in Movement', in, Nalini Vishwanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff, Nan Wiegersma (ed.), *The Women Gender And Development Reader*, 1997.

Sen, Ilina, 'Industrial Restructuring And Women Workers: A Case Study' in Rao, N. Rurup. , R. Sudarshan (ed.), *Sites of Change*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1996.

Sen, Ilina, 'Feminist Women's Movement And The Working Class' in Nivedita Menon (ed.), *Gender And Politics In India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

Walby, Sylvia, *Theorising Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Women Speak; United Voices against Globalisation, Poverty and Violence in India, published by Six Women's Organisation, Progressive Printers, New Delhi, 2000

Women in the New Economic Order, AIDWA Publications Series, New Delhi, January 1999.

Journals and Articles

Agnihotri, Indu and Vina Mazumdar, 'Changing terms of Political discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22, 1995.

Ahmed, Iftikhar, 'Technology and Feminisation of Work', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 30,1994.

Bagchi, Amiya Kumar, 'Economic Reforms and Employment in India', *JCASS symposium Series 6*, 1998.

Banerjee, Nirmala, 'Structural Adjustment Programme And Women's Economic Empowerment' in Rao, N.L. Rurup, R. Sudarshan (ed.), *Sites of Change*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1996.

Banerjee, Nirmala and Swasti Mitter, 'Women Making A Meaningful Choice, Technology And New Economic Order', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 19, 1998.

Bhattacharya, B.B and S. Sakthivel, 'Feminisation of Indian Labour Force – Evidence from the Literature' in *Labour and Development*, Volume 8, Number 1 & 2, December 2002.

Buch, Nirmala, 'State Welfare Policy and Women, 1950-1975', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 25, 1998.

Chatterjee, Mirai, 'Where Women are the Leaders Some Experiences of the Self Employed Women's Association', Anuradha Maharishi and Rasna Dhillon (eds.), in *A Common Cause NGO's and Civil Society,* National Foundation for India, New Delhi, 2002.

Chatterjee, Mirai, *Social Protection in the Changing World of Work, Experiences of Informal Women Workers in India,* SEWA Publications, Ahmedabad, 2003.

Chatterjee, Mirai, 'Social Security through Health Insurance', *Seminar* 541,September 2004.

Currie Bob, 'Governance, Democracy and Economic Adjustment in India: Conceptual and Empirical Problems', *Third World Quarterly,* 1996.

Das, N. Arvind, 'The Political Economy of the Economic Reforms', *JCAS Symposium Series 6,*1998.

Desai, Manisha, 'Transnational Solidarity, Women's Agency Structural Adjustment And Globalisation', A. Nancy and Manisha Desai (ed.), *Women's Activism And Globalisation Linking Local* Struggles *and Transnational Politics,* Routledge, New York, 2002.

Eisenstein, Zilla (ed.), 'Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism', *Monthly Review Press,* New York, 1979.

Ghosh, Jayati, 'Gender Concerns in Macro-Economic Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 30, 1994.

Ghosh, Jayati, 'The Challenge', in *Seminar 429,* May 1995.

Ghosh, Jayati, 'Liberalisation Debates', in Terry Byres (ed.), *The Indian Economy: Major Debates since Independence,* Oxford University Press, Delhi; New York, 1998.

Gothoskar and Banaji, 'Making the Workplace a Better Place for Women', *Manushi,* no 24, Sept-Oct, New Delhi, 1984.

Hensman, Rohini, 'Impact of Technological Changes on Women Workers' in Rao, N.L. Rurup, R. Sudarshan (ed.), *Sites of Change,* Tulika, New Delhi, 1996.

Jhabvala, Renana, 'Wages for Unorganised Labour', in *Seminar 452,* April 1997.

Jhabvala, Renana, 'Liberalisation and Women', *Seminar 531,* November 2003

John, Mary, 'Gender and Development in India, 1970s-1990s, some reflections on the Constitutive Role of Contexts', *Economic and Political Weekly,* November 23, 1996.

John, E. Mary, 'Feminism, Poverty and globalisation: an Indian view', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* Volume 3,Number 3, 2002.

Jones, Jan Sinclaire, 'Women And Technology Problem of Technological Unemployment or Deskilling', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 20- 27, 1996.

Kalegaonkar, Archana, 'Pursuing Third World Interest, Compatibility of Feminism With Grassroots Development', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 26, 1997.

Karat Brinda, 'fighting for a basic human right: a life free from hunger', *Women's Equality*, Jan –March, 2003

Kothari, Rajni, 'Globalisation and Revival of Tradition, Dual Attack on Model of democratic Nation Building', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 25, 1995.

Loveridge, Patricia, 'Approaches to Change: The All India Democratic Women's Association and a Marxist Approach to the Woman Question in India', in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 1994.

Mohan, S and S.Himmelweit, 'Domestic Labour and Capital', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 1, 1977.

Molyneux, Maxine, 'Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate', in *New Left Review*, no 116, 1979.

Narayana, D, 'Financial Sector Reforms: Is There a strategy for Agricultural Credit', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 16, 1993.

Patel, Sujata, 'Construction and Reconstruction of Women in Gandhi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 20, 1988.

Patnaik, Prabhat and C.P Chandrasekhar, 'Indian Economy under Structural Adjustment', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 25, 1995.

Shah, Nandita, Sujata Gothoskar, Nandita Gandhi and Amrita Chhachhi, 'Structural adjustment, Feminisation of Labour- Force and Organisational Strategies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 30, 1994.

'The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no 83, 1974.

'The Problem', Gujarat riots, *Seminar 513*, May 2002.

Women's Equality, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, Vol.-VIII no I, New Delhi, 1995.

Women's Equality, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, April-June 1998.

Women's Equality, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, October-December, 2002.

Women's Equality, Quarterly Bulletin of AIDWA, New Delhi, July-September, 2003.

Women's Equality, journal of the All India Democratic Women's Association, New Delhi, numbers 1and 2, 2004,

Women's Equality, journal of the All India Democratic Women's Association, New Delhi, October-December 2004 and January-March 2005.

Pamphlets, Papers Presented at Conferences and Reports

Aims and Objects Programme Constitution of All India Democratic Women's Association, New Delhi, 1981.

Bajaj, Manjul, *'The impact of globalisation on the Forest sector in India with special reference to Women's Employment'*, Paper commissioned by the study group on Women Workers and Child Labour, National Commission on Labour, Government of India, 2001.

Before its too Late: Lok Swasthya on HIV/AIDS, A Lok Swasthya Publication, Ahmedabad, 2003.

Building Capacities for Leadership and Self Reliance, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad

Central Committee Document on Mass Organisations, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Progressive Printers, 1981.

Engels, Friedrich, *The Early Development of the Family*, a Free Press Pamphlet, 1942.

Ghotoskar, Sujata, 'Women, Struggles and Movements', Paper presented at *The National Conference on Women's Studies*, Volume I, 1-4 October, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1986.

Ghosh, Jayati, 'The Human Development Report 1995; A Consideration from an Indian Perspective' for a Workshop on *The Human Development Report 1995: The Structural Context for Empowering Women In India*, Organised by FES and UNDP, December12 &13, 1995.

Ghosh, Jayati, 'Macro-Economic Trends and Female Employment; India in the Asian context', paper presented at *Seminar on Gender and Employment in India; Trends, Patterns and Policy Implications*, organised by the Indian Society of Labour Economics and Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, December 18-20, 1996

Jhabvala, Renana, 'Women's Struggles in the Informal Sector: Two Case Studies from SEWA', Paper for *The National Conference on Women's Studies, Theme: Women, Struggles and Movements*, Volume I, 1-4 October, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1986.

Jhabvala, Renana, 'A Case Study of Interventions in the Labour Market', Paper presented at a *seminar on Gender and Employment in India; Trends, Patterns and Policy Implications*, organised by the Indian Society of Labour Economics and Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, December 18-20, 1996.

Jhabvala, Renana and Ravi Kanbur, 'Globalisation and Economic Reforms as seen from the Ground: SEWA's Experience in India', *Paper Presented to the Indian Economy Conference*, Cornell University on April 19-20, December 2002.

Menon, Nivedita, 'Women in Trade Unions: A Case Study of AITUC, INTUC and CITU in the Seventies', Paper presented at *The National Conference on Women's Studies, Theme: Women, Struggles and Movements*, Volume I, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1-4 October, 1986.

Nanavati, Reema, *Feminise Our Forests,* SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 1996.

Nanavati, Reema, *Making the Poor Women Reach Markets: SEWA's journey proceedings of Bank –Fund meetings in Prague,* SEWA publications, 2000.

Nanavati, Reema, *'Does Empowerment Matter for Economic Development',* Presentation to: Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) Lourence, World Bank, SEWA, Ahmedabad, November 20, 2000.

Nanavati, Reema, 'Globalisation and the Poor', *Global issues local insights: Round table on Listening to the Voices of the poor Self Employed Women,* March 16, 2002-New Delhi, SEWA publications, April, 2002.

'Not Proper Job', Report on the International Conference on Homeworking Making Recommendations to improve Legislation for Homeworkers, in *News From Irene, International Restructuring of Education Network of Europe,* The Netherlands, 7th -10th May.

SEWA Annual Report 1991 - Self Employed Women's Association, Mahila Sewa Trust, Ahmedabad, 1992

SEWA Annual Report 1997 - Self Employed Women's Association, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad.

Labouring Brick by Brick: Study of Construction Workers, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 1999

The Gum Collectors: Struggling to Survive in the Dry Areas of Banaskantha, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 2000

SEWA Annual Report 2002 - Self Employed Women's Association, SEWA Academy, Ahmedabad, 2002

Shah, Nandita and Nandita Gandhi, 'A Backgrounder: Women's Work in the Informal Sector' *International Workshop on Women Organising in The Process of Industrialisation in India,* The Hague, Netherlands, April 15-26, 1991.

Shramshakti, National Commission of Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, New Delhi, 1988.

Sudarshan, M. Ratna, 'Globalisation and its Impact on Women: Findings from the Hearings conducted by the National Commission for Women', for discussion at the *Conference on Impact of Globalisation on Women,* National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 17th Sept 2004.

Swaminathan, Padmini, 'The State And The Subordination Of Women', Presented at the *Third National Conference Of The Indian Association For Women's Studies,* Punjab University, 1986

Tendulkar, S.D, K.Sundaram and L.R.Jain, *Poverty in India, 1970-71 to 1988-89,* ILO-ARTEP, New Delhi, 1993

Swaminathan, Madhura, 'The Impact of Policies of Orthodox Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment on Women: Some evidences from India', Workshop *on the Human Development Report 1995: The Structural Context for Empowering Women in India*, organised by FES and UNDP, Neemrana, 12-13 December 1995.

Swaminathan, Madhura and Brinda Karat, 'Impact of New Economic Policies of Structural Adjustment on Women', *Women's Equality*, Quarterly bulletin of AIDWA, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1995

Swaminathan, Madhura, 'The New Economic Policies and Rural Women', *Women's Equality*, Quarterly bulletin of AIDWA, July - September 1998.

Standing, Guy, 'Global Feminisation through Flexible Labour: A Theme', *Revisited World Development*, Vol. 27, No 3, 1999.

Struggle and Development, Annual Report, 2003, Self Employed Women's Association, Shree Mahila SEWA Trust, Ahmedabad, 2003

Towards Equality, Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Department of Social Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi, 1974

Unni, Jeemol, *Urban Informal Sector: Size and Income Generation Process in Gujarat*, Gujarat Institute for Development Research, Ahmedabad, 1999.

Visaria, P. and J Unni, *Self-Employed Women Population and Human Resource Development*, Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmedabad, 1992.

Internet Sites

Workshop on *Globalisation and its Impact on Women Workers in the Informal Economy*, Organised by SEWA Bharat, UNIFEM and Global Network Asia, 4th-5th December, 2002, http://www.sewa.org

Women Fighting Poverty With Trade, SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre, SEWA Publications, http://www.sewatfc.org

Marzia, Fontana and Yukitsugu Yanoma, 'Democracy and Civil Society', *Shaping Globalisation for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security*, 2020 Focus 8, Brief 11 of 13, August 2001, www.ifpri.org.

www.thehawkeye.com/columns

http://www.sewaresearch.org/global.htm

http://www.wiego.org/papers/carrchenglobalization.pdf

http://arts.cornell.edu/poverty/kanbur/jhabvala-kanburMITpress.pdf

http://www.inmotionmagazine, interview with Ela Bhatt, Published in Motion Magazine December 18, 2003.

www.ilo.org/public, world of work, no.36, November 2000,Archived articles, India, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/articles.pdf

http://www.global-labour.org/trade_unions_and_the_informal_sector_wiego.htm

http://www.ilo.org/actrav

http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/books.htm, A fair Globalisation: The role of the ILO

http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/books.htm, A fair Globalisation: Creating opportunities for all.

http://www.ifwea.org/journal/0200/giving_homebased_workers_a_voice.html

http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role/globalact/business/2001/001tu.htm