

TOWARDS EQUALITY: THE DIALECTICS OF THE NEW WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Paper presented at the 20th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, November 1-3, 1991, Panel on "Political Struggle and Women's Definition of Justice in contemporary India."

FINAL DRAFT

INTRODUCTION:

Like other movements, the new Indian women's movement is not homogeneous but consists of many different types of groups, drawing on different parts of the population, organized in different ways, and working towards somewhat different goals within the overall context of women's interests. As is true for many other women's movements in other countries, the underlying concern of these groups has been with the many forms of inequality women face in public and private life. From time to time, many of the groups - in India as elsewhere come together around specific issues that have mobilized many women although this coalescence later gives way to loss of momentum and increasing internal differentiation.

It appears to us that the Indian women's movement, overall, is now in one of these phases of greater differentiation, based on what may be called the internal dialectic of the movement but probably also influenced by wider political events. Underlying this dialectic are large and unresolved questions of strategy (long - terms vs short-term), membership (essentially closed vs eager to recruit), organizational structure (autonomous vs somewhat structured), alliances with other groups or institutions (desired, tolerated, or opposed), as well as the broadly defined goals and ideologies of the group. In spite of these underlying differences, however, there is no question that there are solidarities that transcend them so that it is both possible and desirable to speak of an Indian women's movement.

In this paper, we begin with events in the 1970s that decisively shaped the emergence of what we here call the "new" women's movement. Special stress must be put on the constitutional bases for women's, equality as the guideline for this emergence. In contrast with some observers, we will argue that the strongest impetus to the new women's movement in India was provided by the perception during the Emergency (1975-77) that the Constitutional guarantees of equality were in grave danger. These constitutional guarantees were also the basis for the work of the Commission on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) that resulted in its Report Towards Equality, completed a few months before the Emergency.

This view also leads us to a suggestion (elaborated below) for future analyses by political scientists and historians that compare the Reports of three Commissions concerned with implementing these Constitutional guarantees: the Kalelkar Backward Classes Commission, the Mandal Commission, and CSWI (notably not called the Guha committee, after its Chair, Phulrenu Guha). A comparative analysis of the three Reports should make it clear that the issue of women's equality and the measures to be taken to attain it should not be examined apart from other equality issues also based on the Indian Constitution.

In addition to a brief discussion of the work of CSWI and some aspects of the Emergency from the "Insider" perspective that one of us (VM) had on these events, we will also discuss the anti-dowry and anti - rape agitations that served as mobilizing issues for major public demonstrations by the Indian women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and close with a brief reference to a movement of opposition to the National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women in 1988. In addition to legal and statistical references, these sections provide details of the agitation that may be remembered by participants but are often not well known by others. Our main purpose in discussing these issues in detail is to examine how the principle of equality as based on the guarantees in the Indian Constitution played itself" out in several concrete periods of intense activity by women for women.

The anti - dowry and anti-rape agitations, however, had quite different effects within the movement, for reasons we will try to suggest. The concept of a "dialectic" among parts of this movement at particular points in time and within the overall movement at different periods will be useful in distinguishing some of the strands of the movement, although this analysis cannot be fully played out in the present paper for reasons of space.

Another major mobilizational and organizational issue concerns the nature of women's studies and its role in changing the Indian educational system. Although we are deeply concerned with this aspect, there is neither time nor space to include it here.

Insiders, Outsiders, and Equal Collaborators

Now a brief note on authorship, in part because joint collaborative work with colleagues in other societies is an issue many of us must address outright rather than by indirection or omission because it is clear that such collaboration will - and must - increase in the future.

This jointly authored paper is being written as Part of nearly ten years of collaborative work on a variety of research projects. On all these occasions, sometimes one author's name comes first, sometimes the other; we think it does not matter. Writing this paper together has been a continuation of earlier egalitarian collaboration in jointly authored international reports, jointly organized and jointly chaired international workshops and conferences, using approaches that both of us have largely agreed on and making it clear when we disagreed. In this paper, we will occasionally identify who said what, when it seems important for the clarity of the argument. In this particular version of the paper, the name of the presenter at - Madison (HP) comes first for reasons of convenience; VM

presented a short version at an Amherst College seminar in, September 1991 (see also Mazumdar 1991).

But what distinguishes this particular essay from our other joint efforts and therefore needs a brief comment -- is that one of us, Vina Mazumdar, has been an actively involved Insider in many of the events we describe. On occasion, as Member-secretary of the Committee on the status of Women in India, as the initiating Director of the Indian Council for Social Science Research Programme on Women's Studies, and then as Director of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, she has been someone whose ideas and actions decisively influenced the course of the events we describe. The other of us, Hanna Papanek, as a US - based academic and consultant to the United Nations University, has been a kind of "Inside outsider" - observing events, commenting on them, and talking to participants, as part of a larger learning process. We think of ourselves as Equal Collaborators in what we write and in the academic organizing and research we have been doing under United Nations University auspices, as Co-ordinators of an international research network and project.

But these different models of working together, models that seem pragmatically obvious to us because they fit the needs of the people we work with (and sometimes for), appear to be under attack from various sides. Those who would deny some the ability to "understand" another culture seem to argue that only certain kinds of childhood experience enable such understanding. Of course -that is deeply but only partially true. There are many different kinds of understanding, some of the best of which come later in life. If they did not, we should all resign from the disciplines we teach.

Others, by contrast, attack the validity of the kind of understanding that comes from long association and may speak about the insufficient "scholarly understanding" said to afflict so - called Insiders because they "lack objectivity." We find these phrases hard to understand as a critique - how else is one to learn about people unless one gets close enough to develop mutual respect and rapport? Again, if we are to disclaim the capacities of Insiders to be scholarly, we should resign from the disciplines in which we do research that depends on personal participation and empathy rather than documents and numbers collected by others.

There is also no question that this paper, like much feminist scholarship, takes a position of committed advocacy. As one of us has argued, in discussing similarities between the study of poverty and the study of gender inequalities: "The study of inequality begins with the recognition that it exists - a value judgment - and only then goes on to document specific instances and to develop ways to move towards equality. By this definition, the study of inequality is an example of normative social science and implies the application of certain universal rather than particularistic standards of judgment" (Papanek 1989/90:3).

In addition to this acknowledged position of advocacy based on universalistic principles, moreover, we also write from the specific positions within the Indian and US women's movements that each of us, respectively, occupies and make no claim that this is a distanced analysis of all the different points of view within the Indian movements. Many alternative views can be found in the often ephemeral publications of other

groups and individuals and through interviews with other participants and other observers. Leslie Calman's fine forthcoming book-length study, *Women and Movement Politics in India* (which we have seen in manuscript) provides the most recent analysis of events and views in a much broader context than we can provide here.

Finally, we have been stimulated to undertake this paper for reasons of generational continuity, both among the women we write about and among ourselves as activists• and academics. We are both members of an older generation of feminists, now in our sixties, who have been inspired by working with others - some now in their eighties, others in their twenties, and not all of them women. Yet we are concerned that such superficial similarities as age increasingly seem to be a factor in growing differences among people concerned with gender equality again, not only women - and that the experiences of older generations in the women's movements of our time may be neglected.

This is equally true among academics where, in addition to age, differences in style may be creating artificial boundaries among us and leading to a mutual neglect of important intellectual creativity. The achievement of gender equality is very far from being won and we need all the mutual support from each other that we can get. The quest for women's equality is not a zero - sum game - although limited resources sometimes make it seem that way - but a common enterprise in which we stand on each other's shoulders. In any game where one woman seeks to "carve out space" at the expense of another, neither wins and ultimately both lose.

CONSTITUTIONAL ROOTS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE THREAT OF THE EMERGENCY

By the early 1970s, the Woman Question in India had largely disappeared from public debate. Indeed, the recognition of the new rights conferred on women in the First Five Year Plan had made it seem in the early 1950s that this was "the period of women's triumph" and many Indian policy makers spoke of a "revolution in the status of women" (Mazumdar 1979 : xiv). As a result, the findings of the Committee on the Status of Women in India about the serious economic, social, and legal inequalities faced by women in India came as a surprise to most people, including members of the Committee itself. Towards Equality, the Report that the Committee completed in December 1974, asserts that: "The reason for this lack of concern among the political elite to the problems of women is the absence of an active women's movement" (Towards Equality [later referred to as TE):298).

Many observers have, therefore, concluded that it was the publication of the Report, particularly the short form brought out by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR 1975), that brought the issue of women's equality back to public attention. But this view is misleading, even if the contents of the Report provided the factual basis for the debate stimulated by the new women's movement.

Others believe that the UN - sponsored Decade for Women (1975-85) provided this spark. This is correct only to the extent that the United Nations request to member governments for a report on each country's women led to the establishment of CSWI in

September 1971 - but few other governments responding to the UN request set up a group of social scientists rather than bureaucrats and even fewer had the political courage to issue a report that was highly critical of government inaction on issues affecting women:

The Shock of the Emergency

We would like to argue a different position, one that places the new women's movement squarely in the context of other movements concerned with the rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution and threatened by the Emergency's abrogation of these rights.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that it was the events of the nineteen - month National Emergency (June 1975-February 1977, i.e. starting six months after the completion of the Report) that provided the mobilizing spark for the emergence of the new women's movement. The timing alone should be proof: the public actions, protest marches, and organizing efforts that represent the new movement all started in 1977, once the sharp checks on political activity of the Emergency had stopped. The Report may have provided a mobilizational focus: Some activists in the women's movement after the end of the Emergency recalled poring over the findings of Towards Equality while sharing a jail cell, gathering anger, facts, and ideas that came in useful later.

But it was clearly the shock of the Emergency that sparked off many people's protests against the erosion of Constitutional rights and a transformation of the Indian state to an authoritarian, anti - democratic one .. The new women's movement was one of the spontaneous movements to provide wider opportunities for women to participate in changing the direction of political and social development in the country. It was the fear of losing the right to participate in the "political deliberations of the nation," as Mahatma Gandhi had put it, hitherto taken so lightly, that galvanized various groups into the protest movements of which the new women's movement was one.

Underlying Principles: The Report and the Movement

This new movement has three central preoccupations: equality, justice, and participation. The movement emphasizes equality as a general principle going far beyond just the equality of women; our paper will discuss this aspect in some detail. The second central feature is justice: the pull, despite a lack of knowledge and the opposition of class interests, toward picking up the issues of poorer women. This has given a special vitality to the movement and widens the horizon of issues with which it concerns itself.

The third feature is the emphasis on participation as an antidote to hierarchy, especially as an antidote to the power of the "knowledge elite," as institutionalized in the educational system (see also Sharma 1989 : 36 - 41). Activists" and "academics" -- a tension that makes sense only if interpreted in light of the deep-seated fear of the knowledge elite's long history of dominance in Indian society, since in actual fact many of the activists are also academics.

The CSWI adopted a set of principles to sum up the Committee's own ideological approach to the issue of women's status in society. These principles, summed up at the end of the Report's first chapter and excerpted below, contain the germs of these three preoccupations - equality, justice, and participation:

"We believe:

(1) that equality of women is necessary, not merely on the grounds of social justice, but as a basic condition for social, economic and political development of the nation...

(6) that disabilities and inequalities imposed on women have to be seen in the total context of a society, where large sections of the population - male and female, adults and children - suffer under the oppression of an exploitative system. It is not possible to remove these inequalities for women only. Any policy or movement for the emancipation and development of women has to form a part of a total movement for removal of inequalities and oppressive social institutions, if the benefits and privileges won by such action are to be shared by the entire women population and not be monopolized by a small minority.

(7) that if our society is to move in the direction of the goals set by the constitution, then special temporary measures will be necessary, to transform de jure into de facto equality." (Towards Equality 1974 : 8)

With these straightforward statements of ideology moving toward practice, the Committee concluded Chapter One of its Report but also explicitly pointed to difficulties in defining the concept of equality when it stated:

"Equality is an article of faith in our Constitution and guaranteed by specific articles. We could therefore, treat this as a settled fact, for which no discussion was necessary. Our investigation, however, proved that there was still considerable ambiguity as well as ambivalence in the general understanding of the need and implications of sex equality in our country" (TE : 8, emphasis added).

In other words, the facts and attitudes uncovered and compiled by the authors of the Report surprised even the members of the Committee themselves, who had begun their work almost naively confident that they would find the promise of the Constitution largely fulfilled in the twenty - five years that had passed since Independence. Their own work refuted this confidence and they immediately began to fight, not only to assure that the Report would be read but that it would be acted upon.

But one wonders if the Report would even have been read, much less seen as a mobilizing tool for a movement, if the Emergency had not presented a challenge to a view of the Constitution as providing protection for the rights of all citizens. Using the evidence given below, "we argue that it was precisely the experience of the Emergency that provided an urgent rationale to struggle for these values, especially during the period immediately after its end, when public political activities were once again possible:

How the Committee and the ICSSR Developed Their Mandates

However, it is important to stress, in retrospect, that some existing institutions were also able to begin this work very quietly during the Emergency, counting on the relative invisibility of The Woman Question. In the period of the Emergency (June 1975 to February 1977) that almost immediately followed the tabling [i.e. presentation] of the Report in Parliament on 18 February 1975 and the first series of debates on it, the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) took a decisive role in firmly establishing the subject matter of the Report as an issue for national debate.

Under the aegis of the ICSSR, a high-powered advisory committee on Women's Studies was established that kept the question of women's equality alive in spite of the limitations on public debate during the Emergency. Indeed, as J. P. Naik, then Member-Secretary of the ICSSR said to one of us (VM) at the time: "They've changed the nature of the polity. I don't know if this is an irreversible step... (but) let us concentrate on women. I don't think the powers that be will understand the implications of research focussing on women .. at least not just yet. It will take them a little time. Because I don't think we are going to be permitted to do much else otherwise .. "(see also Mazumdar 1991).

In addition to this strategic use of the issue by the ICSSR, however, the effect of this Report can be seen as a striking instance of the impact of social science findings on both government policy and mobilization at the grass roots. Earlier studies of women's movements in India commented extensively on the Report when it first appeared; more recently, Leslie Calman provides a careful retrospective view (see especially Draft Chapter 3). Calman points out that the Report not only called for "vigorous governmental action to improve the status of women (but also) located their advocacy of equality for women... (both) within the moral scheme of 'social justice' [and].. the developmental needs of the nation as a whole" (Calman, Draft Chapter 3 p.5).

Becoming Feminists: National or International Influence?

A further issue, often stressed by commentators on the Report, especially outside India, was the question of international influence. While there is no question that the call for a report on the nation's women issued by the United Nations prompted the setting up of committees and commissions in many countries, including India, in the early 1970s, further research is needed to determine how the members of the Committee on the Status of Women in India themselves perceived their mandate.

One item of interest in this respect is that they imposed on themselves a "self-denying ordinance" to use only Indian source materials for their empirical research (see also TE : 5 - 6) although there are occasional references to the situation in other countries, such as the family courts of Japan (TE:142), and occasional mention of non - Indian writers on India, such as Pauline Kolenda (TE:59). But the preponderance of Indian sources on India in the Report is over - whelming and recollections of Committee members make it clear that they were working, so to speak, from the inside of a major national problem that they only gradually recognized as such. While it would be tempting to see Towards

Equality as a product of international feminism, that was not the way the Committee worked.

Former CSWI members have generally been too busy to either write or talk about their work on the Committee but a retrospective study of their work would be very important to clarify issues not made explicit in documents, as well as to evaluate the impact of the Report on their own lives. Time is getting very short for such a study. Of the eleven members of the Committee (see TE: 377 - 8, ICSSR 1975), three were academic social scientists, the rest being drawn from backgrounds of social welfare organizations. The oldest member was a trade unionist; only she and the Chairperson of the Committee had participated in the Freedom Movement and the Women's Movement of that period. In 1991, nine of the members of the Committee are still alive. Most are still professionally active although many have already formally retired. Except for two of the surviving members, the others have been involved in varying degrees with the renewed debates on women's issues in the last fifteen years.

Furthermore, while this remains to be confirmed by detailed personal interviews, it seems that most members of CSWI did not consider themselves "feminists" when they began their work on Towards Equality - but many did so when they were finished. It is also relevant to note that the UN's call for a report was reinforced, in the Indian case, by the suggestion of the Minister for Social Welfare that the quarter of a century that had elapsed since the Constitutional guarantees of gender equality called for a comprehensive review of changes. This point reinforces the national emphasis sustained by CSWI throughout. (The Minister, Dr. Phulrenu Guha, became the Chair of CSWI and remains committed to women's issues. Dr. Vina Mazumdar, nominated to the Committee in April 1972, became its Member-secretary in September 1973, replacing Shakuntala Masani, and the tenure of the Committee was extended to enable it to complete its voluminous Report (TE:377 - 378). In view of the strong India focus of the Committee (and of at least some of the women's movements that developed), it may be difficult to argue, as Calman does, that "many activities to enhance women's status in India have been prompted, ideologically and materially, by international feminism" (Draft Chapter 3, p.4). This too is a point left to be explored.

THE DIALECTIC: TENSIONS, DIFFERENCES, AND UNITED ACTIONS

Our main focus in this paper, however, is more specific than a retrospective assessment of the history and impact of Towards Equality. Here we want to examine several issues that have preoccupied the several women's movements in India in the past twenty-five years but on which there has been only limited consensus. The disagreements on these issues -- which we here characterize as a dialectic - show some of the important ideological and organizational differences among movements and are also closely related to the social origins of the memberships of different groupings.

In our view, there is no doubt that class differences are a key factor in the dialectic but it is clear, especially in retrospect, that many differences have also developed over time and reflect changes in the political climate. Intervening political agitations particularly that over the Mandal Report in 1990 and over issues of religious fundamentalism have played a crucial role. It is also possible -- although the evidence on this point is less clear

- that individual and group differences on specific issues (particularly dowry) are shaped by social pressures associated with age differences, specific family obligations, and place of residence that make it harder to formulate clear - cut ideological positions that affect personal decisions. Obviously, these interpretations are themselves likely to be controversial and part of the movement's inner dialectic.

The roles of law and government in directed social change

The central feature of this dialectic is foreshadowed in *Towards Equality*, in a paragraph dealing with the role of the Indian Constitution: "There is no doubt that the Constitution contemplates, Attainment of an entirely new social governance from the inherited social, political and economic systems. In doing so the Constitution assigns primacy to law as an instrument of directed social change." (TE: 3, emphasis added). It is in this view of using law as an instrument of change as well as in the emphasis placed on departures from inherited systems that we ground our discussion of several major issues that have been debated within the various sectors of the Indian women's movement in recent years.

Comparing Three Reports on Affirmative Action?

The view stressing law as an instrument of social change that was so fundamental in *Towards Equality* and prevails in some sections of the Indian women's movement also leads us to suggest that the issue of women's equality and the measures to be taken to attain it should not be examined apart from other equality issues also based on the Indian Constitution.

A great deal has been said and written recently about both the reports of the Mandal Commission and the earlier Kalelkar Backward Classes Commission concerning remedial government action based on criteria of group membership based on ethnicity, caste, and economic status. The consequences of the Mandal Commission Report have been particularly widely publicized and discussed, in the press and by political scientists and others, both in the US and India. An important focus of analysis has been how governments in general and the Government of India, in particular, shape policies of affirmative action and how they use the findings of social scientists in doing so. Another widely examined point, especially in the case of the Mandal Commission Report, has been the violent nature of public reaction and changes in the, political atmosphere" believed to be related to it.

The CSWI Report clearly deserves to be considered in the same context as these other Reports that served as the basis for attempts at "affirmative action" by the Government of India, especially since it is grounded in the same Constitutional guarantees of equality. As a public document, *Towards Equality* continues to affect the way Indian policy-makers view their task, even if progress in implementing its recommendations has been slow. Yet the Report and its consequences have been kept largely secluded behind the "purdah of scholarship" (Papanek 1984) that too many academic analysts, both in India and the US, continue to inflict upon themselves and their students.

We think that a three-way comparison between these reports that call for various kinds of remedial measures by the Government of India would also highlight some of the similarities and differences between types of inequality based on ascriptive criteria, such as gender, ethnicity, caste, or religion, as well as the pervasive role played by socio-economic differences and class. Such a comparison could help to indicate the limitations of government action in addressing different kinds of inequalities and thereby have both- analytical and policy implications.

Dowry and Rape Agitations and their Consequences

What accounts for the differences that have been observed in mobilizing potential between the rape and dowry issues in the 1980s and 90s? And, no less important, what consequences have resulted from mobilization and legal or attitudinal changes? What have been the effects of intervening political events, particularly the deeply divisive agitation over the Mandal Commission Report in 1990 and the rise of fundamentalist sectarianism? What are some of the generational differences that manifest themselves in differences within the movement and in political action? These are sharply different questions, which we will address in turn.

First, on the question of divisions within the women's movement: It is clear that the unanimity of all those who participated in the anti-rape demonstrations of 1979-80 (discussed below) was the most striking feature of this period of women's mobilization. Nor was there any serious disagreement within the women's movement about the need to change laws and attitudes concerning rape, especially "custodial rape" or rape carried out by public officials. Government action was speedy and appeared, on paper, to be effectively for - mulated to prevent future "Mathura cases," as we note below, even though the overall number of reported rapes in India as a whole is on the rise.

On the dowry issue, by contrast, there has never been clear cut unanimity. In the past twenty years, divisions of opinion within the women's movement have increased rather than diminished, even as the number of dowry deaths mounts (see further below). And, as we note below, the differences of opinion often follow the lines of class differences, especially as these reflect the differential pressures under which individual women must make their decisions.

DOWRY: UNITY.ON FIGHTING VIOLENCE BUT DISAGREEMENTS ON TACTICS

The "dowry question" has been an important mobilizational issue for the new Indian women's movements but differences of opinion among various groups illustrate both those issues on which unity is possible and those where basic disagreements are likely to surface. In this respect, the dowry issue has certain parallels to the role that questions of reproductive choice and the role of the state play in the various parts of the US women's movement. In both instances, the social and economic circumstances of individuals seem to play a determining role in their precise interpretation of the issue and the specific actions they are willing to take (on the US issue, see especially Luker 1984, Papanek 1990b and forthcoming).

Violence against women, in the Indian case, clearly produced unified action whereas differences of opinion may be quite wide on diagnoses of the problem and tactical choices for action. An important shift concerning the dowry question has taken place in the last 10-15 years. It indicates a more general change in the orientation of the new women's movement but also shows more clearly than before some of the differences that divide sectors of the movement from each other. This is the shift from a concentration on changes in law and law enforcement to direct action to prevent and punish violence against women although still through the mediation of law.

Contained within this shift is another distinction: While there are disagreements within the wider women's movement about the causes, consequences, and methods of control of the institution of dowry, there is clear unanimity about the immediate need to stop dowry violence. In other words, there are two separate issues to be kept in mind in both the analysis of the problem and the understanding of differences within the movement, related to the distinction between dowry as an institution and dowry disputes as a source of violence.

The Dowry Issue: Dowry as Institution and as Source of Family Violence

First, in terms of definition, we think the clearest statement of the Indian practice of dowry is to call it simply "groom purchase" - i.e. a transaction in which a payment from the woman's side to that of the man is a necessary precondition of an arranged marriage because without it there will be no groom. This obvious but inelegant term is unfortunately not in wide common use although it is not unknown among women activists. For instance, on Women's Day in 1987, the Chandigarh Nonsense Club presented a satirical play in which a variety of grooms were put "on sale at a twenty percent discount to -"highlight a potent social evil" (Manushi 1987:#41,p.1). It is important to make this definition clear, as the term dowry has many other meanings in other societies. Within India, there are wide variations in definitions and practice (see, for example, Kolenda 1987) but we will not go into this aspect of the dowry debate.

Historically, the issue of dowry payments has been a subject of contentious debate in India for many years. Early in the century, dowry was expected to disappear with the spread of education, first for men, then for women. Instead dowry escalation has followed educational development (Mazumdar 1988) and dowry violence has increased in the educated classes. Complaints about the problem of the institution of dowry came to the CSWI from women of different classes during the Committee's fact-finding tours of India in the early 1970s. In particular, poorer women showed a lot of anger at the penetration of this practice into their families during their own lifetimes.

Towards Equality stated bluntly that "the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, passed with the ostensible purpose of curbing this evil, if not of eradicating it, has signally failed to achieve its purpose" (TE: 115). The Committee's recommendations, therefore, were primarily directed to removing the ambiguities in the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 to 'make it more effective. The Committee argued especially strongly that "offences, under the Act, should be made cognizable," i.e. that charges could be brought by persons other than those directly involved (TE: 115).

Murderous Escalation in Dowry Payments and Dowry Deaths

Despite the hopes of lawyers, reformers, and legislators, legislation to limit dowry payments, enacted as a result of past debate and following the pattern of previous sumptuary laws enforced by government, action, had had very little impact. Conspicuous spending on both weddings and dowries has continued to escalate, especially but not exclusively in the urban middle class. The distinction is not unimportant: weddings are meant to be conspicuous; dowries - being ostensibly illegal - are not.

It is clear even from casual observation in 1991 that dowry demands and marriage expenditures continue to escalate but it is even more striking that the institution of dowry itself also continues to spread. While the continued practice of parentally arranged marriages and caste endogamy both contribute to the persistence of dowry, it has penetrated even self-arranged marriages and marriages between partners from different castes and communities. In actual practice, as can be gauged from matrimonial advertisements in the Indian Sunday newspapers, parents stress the job qualifications and earning prospects of daughters (and potential daughters-in-law) and this becomes part of the dowry negotiations. The new code word "decent marriage" signals that a dowry is expected by the parents of sons. Obviously, since paying a dowry is a "cognizable offense" is cannot be openly mentioned in advertisements but there have also been recent pressures against the more blatant examples of indirect mentions.

At the same time, "dowry murders"- the deaths of young women that stand in some relation to disputes over dowry payments between the two parental families - are also disastrously on the increase. They are spreading to new areas of India, new classes of people, and new types of marriage arrangements but it is not clear whether the increase in dowry violence is a direct consequence of the spread of dowry as an institution or whether other factors are involved. We will return to this point below.

The increase in dowry deaths has been enormous and very rapid: ten - fold in six years, or 4,000 reported deaths in 1989, on an all - India basis, up from 389 in 1983. As a result of heavy pressure from several wings of the women's movement, since 1983 crimes against women are being reported' separately in Parliament. The figures (see Table I, below), while undoubtedly still greatly underreported are appalling. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that this is a true increase, not an artifact of better reporting. While reporting of dowry deaths may now be a little more accurate because of the new regulation that any "unnatural" death of a woman within the first seven years of marriage must be investigated by the Crime Branch, as a result of the Criminal Law Amendment, there is ample evidence from direct observation by groups and individuals that there has been a sharp rise in the number of dowry murders.

The speed of this change demands explanation. For example, Towards Equality in the early 1970s makes no reference to dowry murders in either the legal (pp.115-116) or the ethnographic sections (pp: 69 - 77) on dowry. Mention of violence in connection with dowry is made only once, in the legal section, which reports that a case of "a girl who was burnt in the legs and in the back by her in laws as she had not brought an adequate dowry" (but was apparently not killed) was discussed at a "fairly large meeting" but no

one there mentioned the need to interfere. "Many such cases" were brought to CSWI attention but the report mentions this point only as an example of "society's indifference to this social evil" of dowry (TE: 115) and not as an example of violence against women. It is difficult to judge in retrospect whether the Committee overlooked the evidence of violence because it was being so carefully hidden by the families involved. Or is it possible that a new type of violence, taking thousands of victims a year, could have developed in the short period of less than twenty years? If so, better explanations are called for than those offered so far.

In the optimism of earlier decades, when it was thought that education and employment of women would be the panacea for gender inequality, optimists believed that dowry would be eradicated because it would no longer be necessary to "compensate" the in-laws for supporting an "idle" family member. Another answer was expected to be the "rousing of social conscience" - an expectation that led a Member of Parliament to hope, in the debate on the Dowry Prohibition Bill in the early 1960s that the law would not be needed (TE: 115). As we know, none of these expectations have been fulfilled. Indeed, the dowry for a highly educated daughter may be unusually large because it "is calculated according to the market value of the prospective son-in-law" who is likely to be older and even more highly educated (Kishwar 1986:4). The term "groom purchase" seems particularly appropriate in these cases.

The Joint Select Committee

Not surprisingly, in contrast to the earlier emphasis on changing the institution of dowry, by the early 1980s the issue of dowry violence had become the chief focus of the women's movement. This shift is illustrated by the history of two organizations, the Joint Select Committee of Both Houses of Parliament and the Dahej Virodhi Chetana Manch (Anti-Dowry Campaign Forum).

The Joint Committee was appointed in, 1981 to review the working of the Dowry Prohibition Act; it was an all - party Committee, all of whose members were women, and issued its Report the same year. Despite sharp, political differences along party lines within the Committee, there was unanimity that punishment against dowry violence had to be made stronger as a deterrent. The Committee was also unanimous on the need for an implementing machinery which would also monitor and report on the effectiveness of the laws on dowry to Parliament on a regular basis.

On the issue of the institution of dowry, however, there was a major difference. The Opposition members (from all the left parties and the Janata Dal) viewed dowry as a manifestation of escalating marriage expenditure. In a move reminiscent of the actions of some caste councils in the 1920s, these members wanted severe restrictions put on marriage expenditures because they were convinced that it would be impossible to control dowry payments per se because these transactions could be hidden so easily. Marriage expenditures, on the other hand, were easier to see because maximum visibility was, of course, their purpose. The Congress members, on the other hand, felt these demands to be excessive and would agree only to a less stringent restriction on specific expenditures connected with a marriage (suggested amendment for Section 2(A)1 of Dowry Prohibition Act; Samya Shakti Vol.1, No.2, 1984).

In other words, these disagreements showed a reluctance on one side of the issue to make radical alterations in what was seen as an important social practice. Differences of opinion on limiting the actual practice of dowry have persisted even in parts of the women's movement, as we note briefly below. They surely play a role in limiting the extent of movement activity against dowry as an institution, and - as we would argue - thereby limit the potential of the movement to address the phenomenon of dowry violence and murder in an effective and united manner.

The DVCM

Since the report of this Joint Committee led to no action from the government for over a year, a joint front of organizations was created in 1982, the Dahej Virodhi Chetana Manch (Anti-Dowry Campaign -Forum) or DVCM, The leaders of the Forum included some of the Opposition MP's who had served on the Committee but it also included non-political, non-party groups like the YWCA of India, the All-India Women's Conference, student groups, trade unions, women's research institutes (like CWDS, the Centre for Women's Development Studies in New Delhi), and autonomous women's groups (like Saheli). The DVCM's objectives were two- fold: (a) to demand that government implements the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee, and (b) to create anti-dowry consciousness among the general public, particularly the student generation in educational institutions. A massive march was organized in 1982 in which all these organizations participated - even the YWCA of India came out on the street for a protest demonstration for the first time in its hundred - year history - and went to Parliament to demand that the Dowry Prohibition Act must be amended in light of the recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Throughout the entire 1982 march, the anger of the marchers was directed against the atrocities committed in the name of dowry rather than against the institution of dowry. One of us (VM) remembers shouting the memorable slogan along with the crowd: bahu jalanewaleko phansi do, phansi do ("All those who burn their daughters-in-law, hang them, hang them") - a passionate expression of retributive justice not, however, reflected in the recommendations.

The Law Commission

The intensity of these public protests had an impact on the Law Commission (a statutory official agency to review and recommend needed changes in laws), which, without waiting for a reference from the government, took up examination of dowry deaths. In their very thorough examination, they went far beyond the Prohibition of Dowry Act itself. In its report, as Lotika Sarkar has noted, the Law Commission recommended "not only how the substantive law on dowry should be changed [but also] what changes are necessary in the Evidence Act which will facilitate the prosecutions against persons who have committed a murder in cold blood.. or driven a woman to taking her own life" (Sarkar 1988 : 78). While having little to say about preventive measures, the Commission recommended that the following provision be inserted into the Penal Code:

"Whoever, by persistent acts of cruelty, drives a member of his family living with him to committing suicide shall be punished with imprisonment of either description, which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine."
(Sarkar 1988:79)

Failure to Continue Mobilization and the Debate over Causes

The DVCM failed to continue its campaign to conscientize the younger generation, particularly students, and to persuade them to reject dowry marriages as a whole, in spite of some initial encouraging responses. This failure shows " the persistence of pressures from the inherited social system, further aggravated by rising living standards and economic expectations in some classes and communities, particularly in the urban middle class. In contrast to the generally discouraging middle class response, however, organization building and empowerment. of poor women in both rural and urban areas provide several examples (Bankura, SEWA, Working Women's Forum) of successful resistance to dowry and outside intervention by women's groups in post - wedding dowry disputes.

Is it possible that the apparent class difference in movement action on the dowry issue at the present time is also related to the lack of pressure exerted by women's groups to gain a clearer understanding of the family dynamics (both intra and inter - family) involved in dowry violence and murder? How are social and personal situations of women activists involved in shaping their ideological positions on the issue of dowry as an institution and how does this affect understanding the deep roots of dowry, violence?

For example, one of the most discouraging aspects of the dowry debate concerns the matter of women's purported "resistance" to persistent demands from their in - laws. The notion is beginning to be voiced - even within some women's organizations -- that it is this resistance from the women that leads to dowry violence. If indeed there is evidence of some degree of resistance in recent dowry murder cases, it is often a very belated response to years of harassment. In any case, what is going on here? Have things deteriorated to the extent that some families think they can get away with murder being "explained" by evidence that women are no longer putting up with bad treatment and extortionate demands on their natal families? And why are the women themselves not returning to their natal families, with or without their children, for protection? It is a pity that this potential for resistance has not been strengthened by the efforts of women's organizations and educational institutions so that it can be made effective before a marriage takes place that has the built - in time bomb of dowry payments and their consequences.

For another example, in the often heated debate about the institution of dowry within the women's movement, the justification is sometimes offered that dowry payments represent an advance share of the daughter's inheritance from her natal family. Because it is well known that women's inheritance rights are often not well enforced, some people have argued that it is preferable for her to receive at least some assets in the form of dowry. What this analysis over - looks is that dowry transfers in Indian families are seldom enjoyed or controlled by the bride who brings them to her in - laws home.

In fact, instead of working on raising the consciousness of younger women and men to empower them to resist parental pressures, some women's organizations have been preoccupied with advising parents of daughters after violence has occurred and the young woman is dead. These parents are obsessed with the wish to punish the son-in-law and his family and ask these - organizations to help. We can understand these parents grief but we also feel very strongly that parents of daughters are often part of the problem of dowry murders. Those who fail to provide - psychological support during the period when tensions may be building that eventually lead to violence must share part of the responsibility for the death of their daughter. Indeed, the question most often asked about Indian dowry murders in other countries concerns the role of the natal family - even people from societies where marriages are also parentally arranged usually assume that the daughter's strongest support against harassment from in-laws will come from her own parents. They cannot understand why this does not happen often enough in India. Again: what is going on here?

The most common "explanation" of the increase in dowry murders offered in conversations in urban North India is that the extortionate demands for higher dowries, and the insistence on getting more, are based on "consumerism." We find this an odd and unconvincing "explanation" that leaves out precisely what must be explained: violence and murder. Given the social and cultural context, even of highly competitive urban life in North India, is it likely that people would kill the mother of their grandchildren in order to get a better refrigerator or a bigger car? If the answer is yes,- as "consumerist" explanations seem to assume, then what is going on in these families? And since our concern is primarily with the apparent inaction of women's movements on this issue what is holding back more vigorous efforts to find out?

Of course, the consumerist explanation has also been sharply criticized by feminists, as for example in a lengthy 1986 article on dowry in *Manushi* (Kishwar 1986) pointing out that this theory would make sense only if the world were permanently divided into parents of boys and parents of girls. Yet it is oddly persistent in conversation and may suggest a deep-seated reluctance to confront the problems inherent in a practice about which the speakers are themselves very ambivalent.

The Need for Empirical Studies as Antidotes to Inactivity

More empirical studies of dowry violence and the spread of dowry practice are obviously crying out to be done. Given the amount of speculative talk about the dowry murders, it does seem odd that not more is known about the events preceding the murders - and, above all, that more women's movements are not pushing harder to find out the details. To date, there appear to be only a few women's organizations that are systematically collecting information from women who come to them for help in cases of violence, whether dowry-related or other - wise, although there surely are other groups accumulating such evidence that we don't know about. But there seems to be no clear concerted effort, at this time, to do so on an all - India basis or, at the very least, for the areas in which dowry murders are most frequent.

The beginnings of such an effort are in place. For example, Saheli of Delhi, one of the best known autonomous groups, which has been very active on this issue, conducted

studies of police reports on women's deaths by burning as early as ten years ago and of burn cases at a Delhi hospital (Mehra 1984, cited in Minault 1986) and is known to have continued its active involvement in both action and research. The Women's Centre in Bombay reports informally that they have collected information on about 800 cases of violence against women and are beginning to analyze it. This group, which defines itself as being in the mainstream of the autonomous feminist movement in India" (Women's Centre 1983) has from the beginning emphasized "support structures for women in distress."

We feel strongly that further detailed empirical studies - especially if carried out by concerned women's groups - are absolutely necessary for two reasons: first, in order to gain an understanding of a problem that clearly defies existing attempts at social control, and second, to provide a focal point for new mobilizational efforts by women's movements. We therefore briefly offer some possible hypotheses, largely based on evidence of violence against women in other countries, particularly the "battered women's syndrome" widely discussed in the US but surely found elsewhere as well. Observations of hostage situations may also be useful in understanding the nature of the relationship between "bully" and "victim" -- a relationship that comes to mind when hearing anecdotal accounts of dowry violence and murder (Papanek 1990a).

To begin with, it may be useful to redefine the situation as one of family pathology - not only in terms of a pathological situation within a domestic group but also in terms of the relationship between the two families involved in a dowry relationship. This may make it easier to go beyond those existing analyses of dowry problems that blame "consumerism" for dowry violence and extends the search for causes to the social relations among families and the psychological dynamics of relations within the domestic group.

In the relationship between the two families linked by dowry negotiations, the marriage of their children, and possibly shared grandparenthood, many observers have stressed the lower social position of the bride's parents vis-a-vis those of the groom, regardless of other status indicators and have suggested that this reflects the lower social status of women in India. As Madhu Kishwar has put it, in the context of a broader analysis that emphasizes the many aspects of women's inferior status in Indian society:

"Every marriage and dowry ritual publicly places a stamp of unequal value on the bride and groom. In other transactions, such as charity, one who gives is defined as superior and one who takes as inferior. But dowry giving, like giving to a brahman or an overlord, or offerings to a god in the course of worship, is a ritual giving from or on behalf of an inferior to a superior" (Kishwar 1986 : 10).

Under these circumstances, the daughter's natal family is seen as rendered powerless vis-a-vis her in-laws by several forces: the ritual that has placed them, albeit voluntarily, in a lower position and the financial stress of the recurrent payments exacted from them. This explanation fits well into the explanation of "family pathology" that we briefly present here as it suggests some of the social forces that may so disable a particular natal family that they do not come to the aid of a threatened daughter.

In our view, the key issue here is the unwillingness of the natal families of brides to come to their defense when they are harassed or even beaten. What is going on here? From public testimony after a dowry death, families are known to have refused to take a daughter back when she was harassed only to regret it after she was murdered. More generally, it is also clear that families are unwilling to give up control over their daughters in the choice of a spouse and that many families make marriage choices on the basis of cursory investigations of the groom's family situation, particularly if he is a "green card holder" and resides abroad. All this suggests a lack of concern for the daughter's future except for dowry negotiations. There is a great deal of worried conversation about these situations among urban Indian women, within and outside women's organizations, as well as some media publicity but few facts.

Observations made of "bully-victim" relationships and, indirectly, of hostage situations suggest that lack of resistance to initial aggression by the victim usually leads to an escalation of aggression, particularly if it is clear that no one else is coming to the victim's aid. In some instances, the escalation then leads to the aggressor's own feeling of loss of control over his or her violent impulses, as violence continues to go unpunished and unresisted - and it is this final rage that may lead to murder, as in cases where aggressors have been known to say "she made me do it" in cases of wife battering.

Using research findings from other societies presents obvious problems, such as the importance of being sensitive to specific societal and domestic contexts, differences in family organization, etc. but these problems should not be insurmountable. While some efforts have already begun toward communication among women's groups and women researchers in different countries on the problem, of violence, these have not yet gone far enough and should be encouraged.

RAPE AGITATION: A SPONTANEOUS BURST OF UNANIMITY

The issue of rape, in sharp contrast to the dowry issue, mobilized the Indian women's movement very rapidly and with great unanimity. The anti - dowry agitation was nearly three to four years in the making, as discussions of the many aspects of a complex issue were developed through a series of seminars, meetings, reports, and studies, often financed by the Government of India. As we have noted, disagreements remained and some have sharpened in the years since the anti-dowry agitation peaked in the early 1980s.

The Open Letter on the Mathura Case

But the issue of rape - particularly "custodial rape" - became a mobilizing focus for the women's movement in a sharply different way. On September 16, 1979, four law teachers issued An Open Letter to the Chief Justice of India (Baxi et al. 1979 : 1979 4 SCC), in response to the judgment in Tukaram v.state of Maharashtra (1979 2 SCC) having been struck down by the Supreme Court. Since there can be no appeal against judgments of the Supreme Court, the open Letter was the last resort of these four lawyers.

The four law teachers minced no words when they wrote "Your Lordship, this is an extraordinary decision sacrificing human rights of women under the law and the Constitution" (1979 4 SCC : 19). Their letter further emphasized the social context of the Mathura case - the young victim's low "socioeconomic status, the lack of knowledge" of legal rights, lack of access to legal services, and the fear complex which haunts the poor and the exploited in Indian police stations" (op.cit. : 21). But it also asked a fundamental question: "Must illiterate, labouring, politically mute Mathuras of India be continually condemned to their pre - Constitutional Indian fate?... Nothing short of protection of human rights and constitutionalism is at stake" (op.cit. : 21-2).

This case came to be known as the "Mathura Case," after the name of the young orphaned Harijan girl who had been raped by two police constables inside the police station. Three of the four signatories (Lotika Sarkar, Upendra Baxi, and Raghunath Kelkar) had been associated with the work of CSWI (Sarkar as a Committee member and Baxi and Kelkar as members of the Law Task Force that helped to draft the Law chapter of Towards Equality).

The Open Letter was sent to newspapers, civil rights groups, and women's organizations - a procedure widely followed by other groups in the post - Emergency period when it was felt that fundamental rights were again being threatened. Since similar police abuses, especially of Harijan women, had been widely known in the years before the Emergency but had produced no responses from women's organizations beyond an occasional resolution, many readers of the Open Letter hardly expected this to be different. They were 'wrong.

Agitation on Rape Issue

Spontaneous agitations took place with startling speed in the cities of Gujarat and Maharashtra (where the press reported the Open Letter most fully). New organizations of women, ready to challenge rape through public campaigns, came up in many cities. The Forum Against Rape in Bombay organized a protest march which drew participants from a cross-section of women. The march included the students and teachers of one elite institution, Sophia's College, led by their Principal, Sister Mary Braganza, a dedicated senior nun whom no one would have associated with "agitational" politics.

A number of Delhi organizations jointly appealed for observing a Rape Week, culminating in a Protest March on International Women's Day, March 8, 1980. Politically aware student, professional, and workers' groups joined this march - they still had vivid memories of the Emergency days and new fears now that Mrs. Gandhi had been reelected. For many of them, this was their first involvement in agitation on a women's issue. They developed street plays and shouted slogans before the Supreme Court-. Some passersby watched, asked questions, then said ham bhi challenge (we too will march). Opposition members raised questions in Parliament and joined the press in criticizing government inaction in changing existing rape laws. There were more press reports about incidents of rape and gang rape of poor women in many places. Indeed, press coverage of rape as the most pressing "women's issue" was so heavy in mid - 1980 that the global UN conference on women being held at that time in Copenhagen was hardly covered at all.

The Law Commission

The impact on public opinion and the government was immediate and clear. For the first time since the establishment of the Law Commission in the 1950s, the Government of India asked it to undertake a special study on a woman - specific law dealing with "the offence of rape and assaults on the modesty of women" (84th report of Law Commission cited in Sarkar 1988 : 61-2). In a "demi - official letter" by the secretary to the Ministry of Law and Justice to the Secretary of the Law Commission, he stresses the need for haste "in view of the strong public opinion on this point" and admits that there had been criticism that "the law does not contain enough safeguards" (cited in Sarkar 1988 : 62).

The Commission consulted a number of women's organizations, activists, and legal experts (including the four whose Open Letter had sparked off the agitation) before finalizing its report. Making a departure from its earlier practice, the Commission listed the names of the women's organizations and activists whom it consulted.

Criminal Law Amendment of 1981

The Law Commission's recommendations stirred up an even wider public debate on rape and the role of public officials (see Baxi et al. 1980) concluding in the Criminal Law Amendment of 1981 which prescribed a differential treatment for cases of custodial rape (a) by transferring the onus of proof of innocence to the accused rather than the victim; and (b) through a mandatory higher minimum punishment (7 years imprisonment) sought to uphold two basic constitutional ideologies. First, that the Indian Republic's claim to recognition as a welfare state required higher accountability of public servants; second, that the principle of equality before law became meaningless unless courts took into consideration the socio - political inequalities that often affected the victims in such cases.

Other significant departures in this amendment were (a) recognition of marital rape and (b) shift to viewing rape as a violation of a woman's human rights and not an attack on her chastity, modesty or respectability. In fact, courts were directed not to admit evidence regarding the woman's previous sexual history or character, unless compelled by norms of a fair trial. Implications for the Women's Movement ,Although the law has not significantly affected the incidence of rape, because enforcement continues to be poor, for the women's movement the unanimity achieved on this issue was an ideological breakthrough. The pursuit of equality" hereafter could not ignore the contexts of unequal power relations, not merely within the domestic or economic realms but must include the gray regions of socio-political relations, complicated by the institutions of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, and the often undependable character of state power.

This radical thrust has continued to characterize a substantial section of both activists and analysts in critiquing development strategies that benefited the well-to-do while marginalizing and impoverishing the majority of the poor; in opposing legislation or policies that threatened the legal or constitutional rights of either the poorer section (e.g. the Hospital and Other Institutions Bill 1988), or minority rights (the Muslim Women's

[Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986) and in demanding priority for inclusion of women in all anti- poverty programs.

Women activists and organizations have become involved in far larger numbers in various activities to assist poorer women - to become literate, to improve their economic position, to obtain access to legal or other essential services, and above all, to organize for empowerment. Since 1980, it has been impossible for the women's movement to ignore cases of violence against poor women in rural or urban areas, even to the point of condemning women from the upper classes who were party to such acts.

CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES

We have tried to illustrate aspects of the new women's movements in India from a specific perspective on the crucial question of the constitutional guarantee of equality for Indian women and the role of law in achieving equality as a goal. In spite of impressive unity in demonstrations over the rape issue, divisions of perspectives, priorities, and methods of political action persist and may have become wider in recent years on a number of issues. There are obvious differences within the overall movement on how the goal of equality is to be achieved. These differences can be seen both in terms of issues and organizational structure.

With respect to issues, and the strategies and tactics used to pursue them, Leslie Caiman has drawn a distinction between a "rights wing" and an "empowerment wing" of the Indian women's movement. While Caiman's analysis is impressively thorough, it may be that the sharpness of this distinction is over - stated, even though clear differences in organizational principles and immediate goals must be acknowledged.

The concept of rights in the Indian context is essential to protect women's quest for equality through opposition to "the inherited social system" and the newer revivalist ideologies. Nor is it correct to say that the "rights wing" does not also seek "empowerment." Rather, these groups stress the question of "empowerment for what" by means of women's political and social responsibility and action. The repeated extension of these groups' struggles from women - specific issues to national issues, such as secularism, egalitarianism" and democracy demonstrate this broader view of empowerment.

Differences Among Groups on Lobbying and Consultation

In this concluding section, we will discuss this distinction primarily in terms of the positions that different women's groups have taken vis-a-vis government action -- specifically on the question of lobbying and the responsibility of government agencies to consult women's groups on policy issues.

These are also the issues on which the basic organizational principles of specific groups are of particular importance, although we have not stressed these structural aspects earlier in our paper.

For example, some of the autonomous feminist groups reject all supportive developmental action by government agencies as "welfarism," not empowerment. Some radical feminist groups object to taking government funds for such purposes as they believe it could lead to "cooptation." Both types of groups have serious reservations about forging alliances with other political groups as they believe the latter to be all basically patriarchal in ideology and behavior (see also Sharma 1989:11-28, and selected chapters in Calman). Membership and leadership of the autonomous groups is drawn from the urban middle class. They have, on the whole, more highly educated women, some with earlier association with radical political movements, than other groups. Despite their limited membership, they are highly visible, articulate and mobile. Some of their writings are well known outside India as the "voices of Indian feminism" and they acknowledge the inspiration of western feminist theory and literature in making them conscious of gender inequality in India.

By contrast, those sections of the movement that includes former members of the CSWI and activists or analysts influenced by Towards Equality are accustomed to different strategies of achieving movement goals. These strategies are reflected in their organizational structures. Although there is considerable diversity among these groups, they do have a specific organizational structure, laid down in their rules and regulations. These structured groups generally strive to be as egalitarian as possible and sometimes offer a sharp contrast to the organizational pattern of similar institutions in the larger society.

Nevertheless, in groups that take the form of institutes or organizations, a division of labor is inevitable and does bring with it differences in power, authority, and responsibility. In groups that are part of the university system or are funded, at least in part, by government agencies (such as the ICSSR), some degree of organizational structure is required by the larger bureaucratic system. In at least some of these groups, connections with like-minded individuals in the government bureaucracy are of considerable importance in achieving movement goals.

In the history of the development of the women's movement in the 1970s, the first set of activists in this second group came from the ranks of politically active socialists and communists, women trade unionists and slum mobilizers. They were senior women (Mrinal Gore, Promila Dandavate, Ahilya Rangnekar, Sushila Gopalan) with recollections of the last phase of the Freedom struggle. Like the social scientists on the CSWI or others who became active in the movement after being transformed by their research among poor women, these women carried a sense of shame and guilt at their own ignorance of and indifference to the conditions of poor working women in the invisible informal sector, in rural or urban areas. From this point of view, they represent a home-grown species who can challenge critics who describe the women's movement as a western import. Some of them have created large organizations with membership from various classes but participate in the general movement "to transform our own consciousness," in the words of Sushila Gopalan, a CPI (M) Member of Parliament.

A joint front of seven of these national organizations, in existence since 1980, has forced some government action in favor of women in the government's successive Five Year Plans. This is in addition to many earlier activities by individuals who lobbied members

of planning bodies and senior civil servants with respect to issues affecting women, especially in employment and education, and with regard to previous neglect of data on women available from national censuses and Towards Equality.

Opposition to the National Perspective Plan for Women

In 1988, the joint front group opposed the government's own National Perspective Plan for Women on several grounds. This Plan was developed under the personal leadership of a woman minister (Margaret Alva) and without the involvement of the relevant sectors of the government bureaucracy. The joint front opposed the NPP on several grounds, hammered out at a national meeting of forty women's organizations called together by the joint front and attending at their own expense in August 1988.

The criticisms were as follows. First, they felt that the NPP sought to isolate women's problems from the general macro problems facing the country, at least partly due to the wrong policies of the National government. Second, the NPP offered no resistance or ideology to counter the revivalist fundamentalist movements, encouraged by mistakes made by this Rajiv and earlier governments, which threatened the egalitarian and secular ideology of the Constitution.

Third, the measures proposed in the NPP to counter violence against women were too weak in the eyes of the women's movement. A Commissioner (with only the rank of a Joint Secretary) was proposed for this function within the Department of Women and Child Development. The joint front pointed out that even the constitutionally established commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, with his rights to report directly to Parliament, had been ineffective in preventing atrocities against members of scheduled castes and tribes. A middle-level officer within a New Department recorded as a district junior within **the Gentle Hendry** would be even less effective.

Fourth, the proposed reservation of thirty percent seats for women in all elective bodies, from local to national levels, to be filled by nomination, was seen as a blatant effort to subvert constitutional democracy and guarantee the continued J power of the ruling Congress Party. The criticisms of the joint front, particularly on this last issue, gained the widespread support of the press and of a substantial section of even Congress MPs. One editorial pointed out that it would be a serious error to see this debate as "only a petticoat war" and stressed the political skill and experience of the groups and individuals in the joint front. The document was quietly shelved.

But it is important to clarify the position of the joint front on the nominations issue, as it stresses a distinction that may appear to be an inconsistent position on reservation of seats for women and their nomination to such seats. First, there is unequivocal insistence that women must be elected, not nominated to seats at any level. Second, while there is strong opposition to reservation of seats in state and national legislatures, the reservation of seats on local councils (municipalities and village panchayats) is supported. Here the reason is that special encouragement for women candidates is clearly needed at the local level.

Rural women, as a whole, represent part of the marginalized groups. Rural poor women, who make up the majority of the country's entire female work force, are the most marginalized of all, yet their voices must be heard. Similarly, in the urban areas women in slums and working in the informal sector represent the majority but have no say in municipal decisions that affect their lives. The joint front believed that mandatory provision for the representation of these marginalized groups would also encourage new leaders to emerge from these groups. This would be a key method for attracting mass support and the development of leadership from among poor women.

Conclusion

We have offered this brief review of the most important recent activity of the joint front because it provides a fitting conclusion for a paper emphasizing a particular strand of the Indian women's movement - those structured groups who stress the constitutional guarantees of women's equality in a larger context and for whom necessary changes in the existing society must be made through changes in laws and their implementation. The joint front's opposition to the National Prospective Plan (NPP) offers the clearest statement to date that the new Indian women's movement not only insists on being consulted when government policies concern women but is also actively seeking ways of bringing more women, especially from poor sections of the population, into the political process.

Table 1
NUMBER OF CASES REPOTED AS CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN
(All India)

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Rape	5298	6203	6356	7321	7767	8706	7856	1445
Molestation	11814	14141	15160	16393	16292	17836	16683	366.
Chain Snatching	2789	3107	3233	3499	2283	-	-	-
Kidnapping of Women and girls	6446	7297	8440	8906	9016	9633	11126	1842
Eve- Teasing	2934	3081	3531	5064	7270	10109	9625	1455
Dowry deaths	389	558	837	1319	1912	2209	4006	694
Dowry deaths by burning	-	-	370	451	792	922	-	-
No. of immoral Traffic (Precention) act case registered	-	-	-	17494	13852	-	-	
Female Suicides	-	-	21187	20266	18283	-	-	-

- Figures for the first six Months.
- Figures for 1985 are based on annual figure for the report of 'Accidental Deaths and Suicide in India'

Source: Parliamentary proceedings (1983-1990, Monsoon Session)

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