

## GENDER JUSTICE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*Vina Mazumdar\**

The invitation that I received to this Conference left me the freedom to present a paper, provide a key note on one of the six sub-themes, or simply participate in the discussion. However, since CWDS is one of the organizing partners, Dr. Sharma exercised her authority by insisting that I write something on sub-theme 2 which refers to Gender Justice in the context of violence and conflict, even if it is only a brief note. I seek all your forgiveness for shirking my responsibility because of advancing age, shrinking capacity and other pressures on myself. My note is limited primarily to raising certain key questions on the two major themes, or foci of this Conference – (a) A World in Transition; and (b) Gender Justice.

Those of you who have known me for long are aware that I have always opposed the introduction of abstractions like Gender when what we really seek are better opportunities for women to access their human rights and carry out their responsibilities – to themselves and society. My second quarrel is with the phrase ‘A World in Transition’. As a student of history I believe the world has been always in transition. Fortunately, sub-theme 4 provides the clue by referring to Globalisation.

The International Women’s Decade, internationalized the women’s movement, helped us from the 3<sup>rd</sup> world to find friends and allies in many corners of the world – in the North and the South. But many of the gains that we made during that time got washed away by the floodtides of globalisation and Neo-liberal economic policies that followed soon after. That this particular phase of global economic change has seen a sharp increase in conflicts and violence against women and children has been recorded by many feminist scholars. Noeleen Heyzer in her Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture (2004) links such conflicts to the production and trade in armaments and trafficking in drugs, human beings, as well as misappropriation or misuse of aid and other resources. A 2000 meeting of women in conflict zones with some members of the Security Council resulted in the Council’s Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. By Noeleen’s assessment, with which I tend to agree – recent wars have been far more damaging for women and children.

“In World War 1 – only 14% of deaths were of civilians; today it is estimated that this has risen to over 75%. The nature of the battlefield has changed : warfare is no longer fought in remote battlefields between armies but in our homes, our schools, our communities, and increasingly – on women’s bodies”.

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Admitting that the beginning of the new century has been both “painful and dangerous”, she finds evidence in Afghanistan’s history that “the intertwining forces of internal and external conflict, and social and gender injustice undermine the capacity of countries to move towards sustainable peace and development, and threaten global peace and security”.

Roots of such conflicts lie in interaction between political, historical and cultural factors. Patterns of governance perpetuate and reproduce inequalities and exclusion, leading to political mobilisation which are often along ethnic, religious, or ideological identities, plus forms of inequalities and exclusion.

Violence or wars may be initiated by both deprived or privileged groups or states. In many cases the roots lie inexperience of injustice or inequality. In the latter case mobilisation can be an engine for empowerment through collective action, provided the process does not reproduce fractured identities rooted in ethnicity, religion or tribe. Citing the monitoring and profiling of Muslims in the United States following 9/11 as a clear example of this, Noeleen finds some hope in the roles being played by women in conflict zones. They have mobilized within their communities and across borders to demand that “the international community put an end to violence, urgently address the impact of war on women and their communities, and protect the future of their societies, as well as women’s role in shaping that future”. International institutions need to respond positively to such non-violent forms of mobilization.

Unfortunately, she found that most international assistance or protection operations still neglect specific needs of women and girls. “Protection and humanitarian, assistance for women is glaring in its inadequacy”.

“Gender justice and women’s rights must be integrated in peace agreements and in the legal and institutional structures supporting post-conflict reconstruction. Without women’s participation and full involvement in peace-building, neither justice, nor development will be possible in a society’s transition to peace”.

Regretting lack of adequate recognition of women’s efforts for peace, Noeleen claims that ‘sustainable peace’ in such situations is ‘contingent on community-based involvement and ownership of the peace process’. If such ‘communities of hope’ break down – the failures lead to instances like recruitment of child soldiers, which pus efforts at peace, security and development back. There are however rare occasions when women’s recommendations reached more receptive ears. “23 of the Burundi women’s recommendations, made to the facilitator – Nelson Mandela, were included in the final peace accord”.

Noeleen defines Gender Justice as ‘integration of gender perspective’ within every dimension of justice, and the role of women in shaping justice frameworks and rule of law institutions in ways that promote women’s human rights, legal equality and inclusion. Believing that transition periods offer opportunities for fresh agendas, she suggests three

foundations for a gender responsive framework for reconstruction: - (a) rebuilding state institutions for 'inclusive governance' with constitutional protection of rule of law and gender equality; (b) reconstruction of economic and social infrastructure designed to address root causes of conflict; and (c) healing psycho-social trauma through reconciliation to restore justice.

One of the positive examples she offers is in Rwanda, where UNIFEM supported women's leadership. This supposedly 'backward' or 'least developed' country offers an example to the rest of the world. 50% of its judges and 49% of its parliamentarians are women, which enacted an inheritance law guaranteeing the rights of women and girls to inherit property.

From another corner of the World, Diane Elson acknowledges her increasing concern at the threats that Gender-Justice faces from the Neo-liberal economic policies. The agenda was formulated in the 1970s, but acquired dominance in the 1980s. It "presumes that the best way to give substance to human rights is to reduce the role of the State, liberate entrepreneurial energy, achieve economic efficiency and promote faster economic growth". Recording that this agenda was voluntarily accepted by President Regan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, but developing countries were forced into it by the Bretton Wood Twins – IMF & the World Bank, she points out that the overall impact of this shift has been to strengthen private property and profit-driven Markets, while states have been forced into retreats. Consequences are visible in declining investment in health and education, with worsening human condition. Legal labour migration faced restrictions by developed countries, resulting in illegal migration with no protection. Overall effect was to increase controls on those without capital, and victims of stagnant employment opportunities.

While pragmatists recognise the possibility of failure by both states and markets, fundamentalists like Hayek believe that free enterprise is 'good in itself', while the state represents the greatest threat to liberty. 'Markets are realms of freedom', therefore taxation should be minimized along with public expenditure, and budgets must balance. For such fundamentalists – neither historical nor empirical evidence on outcomes of policies they recommended were important. The fact remains that neo-liberal policies failed to deliver economic growth in many countries – in comparison to the '50s and '60s – "the era of regulated markets and Keynesian macroeconomics".

In the poorest countries, the new policies brought decline in per capita gross domestic product (GDP), slowing down of the improvement in life-expectancy, reduction of infant mortality and school enrolments.

She argues that the Debt-crisis was itself a result or response to the neo-liberal agenda, because the new international money market was very different from the competitive market of neo-classical economics. Over-selling of loans by private banks was a major cause of the crisis.

Pragmatists emphasise *optimality* rather than entrepreneurship. They believe that it is more important to obtain maximum possible outputs from a set of inputs, decided by 'consumer sovereignty'.

Claiming that majority of economists belong to this group – who agree in principle that both states and markets can fail in economic efficiency, Diane argues that in the '80s and '90s the failure of states came to be identified as the greater problem. This historical fact led to ideas of the need for technocrats to determine macro-economic policy frameworks. But many were willing to concede the possibilities of bad failures, which could necessitate a bigger role for the State to ensure the provision of public goods. Between the 'twins' the World Bank demonstrated more pragmatism than the IMF, by resisting extreme privatization of elementary education.

In Diane's opinion, there are no direct links between the Rights included in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the neoliberal criteria for determining resource allocation arrangements. Pragmatic neo-liberals suggest links being created between greater availability of resources and enjoyment of Human Rights by setting targets for poverty reduction, enjoyment of health and access to education, and emphasizing the needs for poor people's participation.

Demands for alternatives to the neo-liberal agenda came from researchers, non-governmental organisations and agencies like the UNICEF, whose focus on poor children's well-being in poor countries made them demonstrate that economic growth in the '80s and '90s was much lower in most regions than that achieved in the '50s and '60s. Per capita GDP declined in the poorest countries. A comparison of their annual average growth rate in the two periods – 1960-80 with 1980-2000 revealed "a change to a *decline of 0.5%* in the later period, compared to an *increase of 1.9%* in the earlier". The same study found that progress in increasing life expectancy, reduction of infant mortality and enrolling children in school – all slowed down in the later period. In fact, the monetary policies of the Reagan-Thatcher era deepened the depression of the early '80s, depriving indebted countries of their export markets. IMF's conditionalities ignored warnings from some experts – against recycling petrodollars through the private markets. 'Heterodox economists' repeatedly proposed alternative methods to deal with the debt crisis – including ways of restructuring debtor economies, but these were ignored by the IMF.

The Chilean case illustrates a key feature of the Neo-liberal agenda – "to preserve the position of the rich at the expense of the lower income groups". Research sponsored by WIDER proved the "pattern of widening inequality in household incomes in many countries through the '80s and '90s".

Alternatives to this trend requires changes at national and global levels. Though economically feasible, the hegemony of Neo-liberalism had made it difficult to build political support. Since Neo-liberal economics does not take into account possible gender differences within households, e.g. patterns of difference in labour markets, or culturally promoted divisions of labour, it is intellectually gender blind – and fails to see reasons why such policies affect women adversely.

The Indian economist, Krishna Ahooja Patel – who like many others in my generation, became ‘gender-conscious’ during the International Women’s Decade (1975-85) acknowledges the slow recognition of the ‘historical shift of economic predominance’ from the North to the Asia-Pacific region. Reasons for this shift include many non-economic factors, which have been neglected by economists. Quantitative indicators of development were mostly dominated by GNP, though they were designed as ‘socio-economic’. GNP was only recently replaced by Purchasing Power Parity – regarded as more realistic, is reflected in the Human Development Index.

Biases in data have proved the most common problem in analysing gender inequalities. Some Asian countries have tried more comprehensive household surveys to reflect women’s multiple activities. The Indian Census 1991 noted that States where women’s organisations were strong in rural areas, improved the quality of data, because responses were given by women, not men.

According to the ILO, Asia outperformed all other regions in the ‘80s. In 1990, developing Asian economies achieved 5.4% average growth rate. Within Asia – Thailand was the highest, Hong Kong the lowest.

Barriers to Gender-Justice varied between South Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific. An ILO analysis (1993), attributing a role to “female-led” economic performance was ignored by most economists.

Analysing the advancement of women in different countries/regions face serious methodological problems. Ideological issues become important in linking three streams of multidisciplinary research – (a) economic development; (b) sociology; and (c) gender studies .

In addition to these, there is the diversity of ownership – of modes of production in Asian countries. In some, the State is the main employer or the entrepreneur. Occupational hierarchy may lead to occupational segregation.

“When the Town and Village industry sector in Southern China ordains one job per family, the question of gender preference becomes relevant – as the younger males tend to get more jobs. In foreign economic zones – younger and single women seem to get priority”

Since East Asia chose export oriented industrialisation, the use of women’s labour increased their productivity, output and foreign exchange earnings. But the women increasingly depended on part-time employment, with precarious contracts. Inequality in wages vis-à-vis men continued despite the increase in numbers.

Higher economic growth rates *per se* does not eliminate gender discrimination in the labour market. Occupational segregation and inequality in income leads to higher poverty rates vis-à-vis men. Women’s poverty is high also in the richest countries of the

world. Japan and Canada lost position when gender disparity index was adjusted. Despite enjoying the highest position in the Human Development Index, Japan lost to 17<sup>th</sup> position, Canada, with the highest HDI in 1992, dropped to 7<sup>th</sup> place when gender sensitive analysis was applied.

In an interesting comparison of China and India on Gender Equity, Krishna found several anomalies. Historically, the two represent largest continuing civilisations, with long records of technological and scientific discoveries. They gave birth to majority of religions, schools of thought, beliefs and value systems which continue to guide people till today. Both refined techniques of oppression of women, but have the largest number of women workers in both formal and informal sectors. Between 1950-90, women's labour force participation rates showed a steady increase.

But the two countries carry the largest number of illiterate women (totaling 800 million in 1990). They also record the highest rates of female infanticide. The two together have the largest number of women in the industrial sector (100 million) – approximately double the number of industrial workers in all OECD countries (1990).

In the Index for the Advancement of Women, China ranks 9<sup>th</sup>, (out of 36 Asian countries), while India is 27<sup>th</sup>. But in average participation in national assemblies India is ahead.

“The State itself plays a variety of roles in different phases of growth to determine that social inequalities do not become an organic part of society. There is no escape from the fact that economic growth and social equity must proceed on parallel lines to reduce gender inequalities”.

From the Caribbean, Peggy Antrobus, another scholar-administrator thrown up by the International Women's Decade, calls for *Transformational leadership*, to advance the agenda for Gender Justice. Within the context of globalisation and new brands of fundamentalism, only transformational leadership, which aims at social, economic and political transformation by women, to eliminate gender inequality at levels, she argues, can bring some significant change.

The contemporary debate has articulated three approaches to social change:-

- a. professional/technical – being the way development was first viewed in the South;
- b. Political – which acknowledges the existence of different groups 'defined by the uniquely shared interest of its members – each with different and often competing interests or goals. The groups may be ethnic, race, class, gender or location specific – usually with imbalances of power, which leads to conflicts when *competing for scarce resources*. Proponents of this approach favour state intervention to ensure equitable distribution of goods and services. This approach may promote concentration of power in a few hands or groups, omitting the marginalised. Positive changes are possible only when the powerful surrender

some privileges for the common good. Because gender relations are inherently unequal – this approach is essential in struggles for women’s rights.

- c. Counter – cultural – based on affirming the importance of cultural values of marginalised groups in shaping social change. Technocratic/bureaucratic approaches are apt to lead to marginalisation of local and indigenous knowledge, decrease in people’s initiatives and creativity, thereby preventing them from realising their full human potential.

This approach calls for the individual’s change in personal values, lifestyles and relations with others – for wider social change. It is also important to recognise the importance of *community organisations* in building a new society. This approach has more legitimacy in asserting women’s role in building a new society. Simultaneously, it asserts women’s empowerment as central to development interventions aiming at equality.

Peggy finds mainstream agencies like government and UN dominated by ideologies shaped by the professional/technical approach. The political approach, *in contrast* - starts with acknowledging gendered power imbalances, and the need to address them, if the goal is equity. Also, while addressing the role of the State, it reminds us how globalisation undermines the ‘State’s own capacity to ensure people’s basic needs.

The counter-cultural approach, however asserts women’s values, and “the existence of an alternative, female culture as an essential part of the transformation”.

Even if women ready to challenge the power of patriarchy are a minority, “other women in formal positions of leadership/decision making may be influenced, thus leading to greater sensitivity on gender issues, and more responsive to women’s issues, and more responsive to women’s needs.

Peggy cites several examples, including her own, of such ‘small minorities; within governments and UN agencies, having ‘dared to challenge the given’ within their own institutions. To achieve any success in such efforts, however, one has to first experience the transformation within oneself, leading to the ‘counter-cultural commitment’ to women. It is also necessary to learn strategies for coalition and alliance building – to promote transformational leadership within governments and international agencies.

The last author I propose to cite in this paper is Manoranjan Mohanty, the only male and the second Indian that I have tapped in my survey of literature. A political scientist, a generation behind me, he is not a graduate of the International Women’s Decade or the women’s movement, but a teacher who considered it worthwhile to put together a set of Readings in Caste, Class and Gender for the students of Indian Government and Politics. I find however several major agreements between him and the feminist scholars I have cited earlier.

Acknowledging the positive contributions of the increasing momentum of the women’s movement since the last quarter of the twentieth century, he also sees the negative impact

of Neo-liberal globalisation – which he recognises as a ‘new stage of capitalist development in India’. Increasing privileges for the capitalist class went hand in hand with increasing social conflicts, which could be manipulated by political parties. A threatened upsurge of the backward classes was neutralised by Hindu communal mobilisation.

Contemporary India demonstrates three powerful currents affecting social issues:- globalisation, authoritarianism and communalism. While the first affected all social groups, it increased political instability, leading to a consolidation of the ruling class consensus on pro-globalisation policies. While the major parties accepted the opening up of the economy, some sections sought a degree of protection in the Indian market.

The capitalist class in this new phase was not the typical anti-feudal, secular, modern universalist social force depicted by text books on European capitalism. The new breed played politics of religion, caste and ethnicity to secure leverage in its operations. They were also backed by wealthy Indian businessmen and professionals living abroad – today’s ubiquitous NRIs – who gave financial support to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and upper caste organisations on the one hand, and patronised backward class groups on the other.

The Emergency (1975-77) and post-emergency developments had weakened the polity’s capacity to balance the challenges of economic development with demands of emerging social groups. The 1980s saw a democratic upsurge, of Dalits, Adivasis, Women, Peasants and regional identity groups. A series of economic crises pushed the ruling classes to accept Western capital to cope with the challenges. By the end of the ‘90s, the Indian capitalist class had to face the challenges of movements for regional autonomy and social movements by women and others.

Interestingly, liberal democratic practice in India allows a combination of contradictory methods. Ideologies of the social movements is appropriated by the State. At the same time, investment plans are formulated on the rules of productivity and profit – which isolate the poor and the struggling forces from the market-centred development process. An advanced capitalist sector coexists with the small capitalist, and feudal forces continue with vast sections of people remaining in poverty, underdevelopment and social oppression.

“It is this context of power dynamics in India at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which has to be kept in view to discuss the social dimensions of Indian politics”.

Class politics of capitalist globalisation got seriously entangled with the politics of caste, gender, ethnicity and other similar categories. The specific form that such combinations take in different contexts determine the contours of the conflict. This complexity has a long history which can be traced back to the colonial period. Gender politics too is part of the same history, rooted in the division of labour between men and women and the distinction as well as the social gradation between manual, intellectual and administrative labour. The gender question undergoes a review when social contradictions increase, and

becomes 'integrated with the struggle for equality on all fronts'. Calling women 'the weaker sex' is 'an ideological statement rather than an empirical fact'. Recognition of women's capacity for work outside the household increased with (a) critiques of feudalism and capitalism from women's perspective; (b) innovative reinterpretations of religion to promote the ideal of gender equality; and (c) realisation that gender inequality was higher among the upper orders of society.

Liberal democratic politics and a mixed economy in post-independence India led to new social complexities. Electoral politics provided formal equality to all citizens. Abolition of Zamindari, policies for rural development, panchayati raj and expansion of education – all significant steps to enhance citizen's rights – increased dynamism in the caste-class order. The Electoral system increased the significance of middle and lower classes, while reservations gave scheduled castes and tribes increased opportunities – giving rise to emergence of elite groups in their ranks. "Thus politics created autonomous realms of struggle and competition"

By the late '70s, power dynamics had acquired a new pattern. Previously oppressed groups had understood their democratic rights, and fragmentation of traditional authorities by the electoral process brought the agenda of democratic transformation centre stage. This led to violent confrontations between the State and the struggling groups. The advent of globalisation with the ideology of Neo-liberalism clashed with the alternative agenda of egalitarian, sustainable development from below.

Globalisation isolates non-economic issues, which enhances poverty and deprivation. Women's Studies research reported adverse impact on women through the '90s, with rising insecurity and irregularity in work opportunities, withdrawals or reduction of welfare measures and public support for health, education and maternity care. All these produced adverse impact on women.

Post-independence history of India indicates three distinct trends: (a) growth of a consensus to eliminate caste hierarchy; (b) increased consciousness among deprived castes, leading to their increased political mobilisation; and (c) persistence of caste inequality and upper caste domination in the political economy as a whole.

The decline in the State's economic role and expansion of the private sector in the era of globalisation has increased opportunities for upper classes/castes. The State used the reservation policy as an alibi for not undertaking critical measures like land-reform, education and special employment generation for scheduled castes. Political parties, the bureaucracy and local elites constitute the power nexus likely to dominate the panchayati raj with a semblance of democratic participation.

The political agenda of the Women's Movement discovered new oppressions, such as the 'population explosion' discourse resulting in several debates on the strategy and tactics of women's liberation.

In Mohanty's opinion – the “Women's Movement made a major contribution to the discourse on domination and freedom”. He too pleads for a ‘fresh look’ at cultural history from a feminist perspective.

Despite the variety of themes, and focus covered by the authors in this volume, there is a general agreement that people's conditions have worsened with the advent of globalisation.

## **Conclusion**

Back in the 1950s, when I was teaching international politics to post-graduate students in Patna University, I stumbled on a little book titled ‘Death pays a Dividend’ by Fenner Brockway and Frederick Mullaly. A 1941 publication, coming out in the middle of World War II, it received little publicity. The copy I found had been brought by my brother-in-law, then serving with the Armed Forces Medical Service in Iraq. The documentation was solid – two Royal Commissions (UK), and a Senate Committee (USA) used data gathered during the inter-war period to prove unscrupulous selling methods adopted by leading manufacturers of armaments in Britain, Europe and the United States. Distinguished political leaders from the USA, UK and some European countries were identified as hirelings of these companies who disrupted the League of Nations' efforts to promote disarmament. One such person ended up as the President of the United States. Products of these companies were being used by both sides engaged in the two World Wars, as well as in regionalized wars in the Far East and Latin America.

Even though Brockway was a M.P and Gollancz a leading publisher, I was unable to find a single copy of this book in either Oxford or London in the early sixties. The lessons I had drawn from that book received further confirmation over half a century later, from Noeleen's findings from different corners of the world. I also agree with her own assessment of the critical *importance of collective interventions by women in the winning of peace and security particularly after formal cessation of hostilities*. In a session of the International Conference of Sociology in Madrid, I heard Johan Galtung - the scholar and peace activist - state emphatically that three-fourth of the participants in the global Peace Movement were women.

Though I have no experience of winning peace after a war, the experience of listening to women victims of communal riots during the last 20 years or Naga village women being prepared to talk freely to the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) about how they were harassed by the army's presence in their region – all tend to confirm the lessons that Noeleen cites from Africa.

Mohanty fortunately is an optimist. Describing the 20<sup>th</sup> century as one of democratic upsurges which overthrew classical forms of imperialism and colonialism, he views the contemporary turbulence as the mark of a ‘creative society’, in which all the old forms of ‘subdued contradiction’ are out in the open – challenging patriarchy, ethnic/race/caste dominations, and ‘the new brand of capitalism’.

‘Creative society’ is a phase in which a large number of contradictions become articulate and active, with political mobilisation ready to oppose and resolve them.

“These social movements seek to alter the prevailing structure of power, project values of justice, equality and freedom, and add new dimensions to them”.

Such movements include challenges to the nation-state’s supreme authority, when it undervalues people’s desire for autonomy; environmentalist challenges to particular types of development; and ‘any formation which suggests a terminal view of the history of society’.

Capitalism is hostile to the creative society, thus abandoning its own earlier history of deifying Reason. The contemporary form of capital is riddled with Trans-national Corporations, technologies and information networks which are supposed to promote organisational creativity and rationality – but do just the opposite. It propels market homogenisation, leaving little room for variety and choice; and transforms people into ‘standardised consumers of goods and services’. It seeks to alienate human beings from their cultural settings and produces new inequalities.

The new technologies deskill human beings by standardising the labour process. This leads to the decline of many arts and crafts, curbing creative urges of human beings. The outcome is a homogenisation of identities and centralised production process which resist multiple structures of autonomy. Consumerism curbs cultural creativity and a moral/ethical existence.

The concept of a creative society captures the social upsurges of a post-colonial world, which is still to be understood or accepted by Western Political theorists.

“The liberation struggles which overthrew Western imperialism were never fully comprehended by mainstream Western theorists. The Cold War, the collapse of the USSR and the global advance of capitalist modernisation in the early ‘90s seem to have created a further hiatus between Western political theory and post-colonial societies. Concepts such as creative society seek to grasp the multiplicity of contradiction in Asian, African and Latin American societies and at the same time ask these questions about Western societies”.

Individual freedom can become possessive or exclusivist – and tend to be rarely sympathetic to others. But *liberation and fulfillment* are central values which contextualise individuals in a class/caste/ethnic group/gender – in other words – ‘a bundle of identities’. Participation in a social movement indicates the particular type of domination being resisted individually or as a group. Human beings seek freedom – to realise their creativity.

Distinctions have to be made between people's movements and mass organisations. Contemporary movements enjoy a high degree of autonomy; they mostly begin at the grassroots level and may embody a degree of spontaneity among local people. Lastly, the variety of local issues that spark off a movement cannot be easily accommodated within the framework of political parties. The advantage of a mass organisation is a vertical integration of movements or campaigns with larger electoral or other political lines of a party. The latter provides a cohesive, integrative framework lacked by movements.

But the mass organisation approach may lack the capacity to recognise the 'specificity and autonomy of a range of social contradictions, because their analytical methodology takes an aggregate view of social formations'.

Movements, on the other hand, sometimes become so autonomous that they cannot achieve interconnection with other people's struggles. This can hamper their ability to make any impact on the State.

In India movements have used provisions in the Constitution to make demands on the State. The State's occasional repressive response is due to its non-recognition of the character of the creative society.

At a fundamental level every social movement embodies autonomy and interconnection. In the case of the women's movement in India that erupted in the 1970s however there were some other distinctive features. One was provided by the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. Being an official committee constituted by the Government of India, its Report/recommendations were presented before Parliament, debated through two whole days and published as an official document.

The revived Women's Movement, with its academic arm in Women's Studies was able to cultivate and promote the *interconnection* considered essential by Mohanty. Friendly and supportive allies were available within the bureaucracy and other professions. The Constitutional provisions for gender equality were used to establish and promote coalitions. Plans for women's development – from the bottom up – were formulated by various working groups, which included officials, academics and activists. When they ran into opposition within the government a national coalition – of six national Women's Organisations combined with the Centre for Women's Development Studies – an autonomous research institute supported by the ICSSR. The coalition – known as the Seven Sisters, has been in existence till now – over nearly a quarter of a century. Older members, drawn from academia, the bureaucracy or political parties, remain united in their commitment to gender equality. They may not use terms like 'interconnection' or 'creative society', but have no hesitation in viewing themselves as active practitioners and participants in India's democracy, and acknowledge the need for gender justice in the new century.

In my opinion, one of the most critical issues facing the world today is the increasingly skewed gender imbalance among children and adolescents. I would plead with all of you to face the threat facing the developed North, and the developing nations of the South. I

am proud that the SAARC Summit acknowledged the gravity of the issue when it dedicated the 1990s to the Girl Child. True, girls went ‘missing’ at a faster rate during that decade but some of the measures adopted (e.g. the PNDT Act in India) have made some difference. Looking at the UN Population Division’s time series data (1950-2000), I do find some improvement in the South Asian countries, not visible in the countries of the North. The questions that need to be asked at this juncture are:

- a. Why are the poorest countries of the world – listed as the ‘least developed’ – kinder to the female of the species?
- b. Why do the richest countries of the world invest so much in the production of more and more destructive armaments?
- c. When are feminist scholars across the world going to examine the connections, if any between industries that thrive with conflicts, and technologies that devise methods of getting rid of unborn girls?

My common sense tells me that increasing imbalance in the younger age groups must, and will contribute to increasing violence and conflict. I would plead with all of you not to ignore this issue, but give it due consideration in planning for a less violent world in coming years.

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## **GENDER JUSTICE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

### **Abstract**

*Vina Mazumdar*

The paper argues that the current phase of global economic change has seen a sharp increase in conflicts and violence against women and children. Such conflicts are linked to the production and trade in armaments, trafficking in drugs and human beings and misuse of aids and other resources. This not only undermines social and gender justice but also the capacity of countries to move towards sustainable peace and development. Roots of such conflicts lie in interaction between political, historical and cultural factors; patterns of governance which reproduce inequalities and exclusions often leading to political mobilisation along ethnic, religious or ideological identities.

The advocates of alternatives in development call for transformational leadership to advance the agenda of gender justice and assert ‘women’s empowerment’ as central to development intervention. Despite positive contributions of the women’s movement since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the negative impact of New-liberal globalisation has affected many social groups adversely. Liberal democracies show many contradictory trends. Class politics of capitalist globalisation gets entangled with the politics of caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and other categories and determines the contour of the conflicts. A large number of contradictions become articulate with political mobilisation ready to oppose and resolve them. The revived women’s movement with its academic arm in women’s studies, embodies the upsurge to seek and promote values of justice, equality and freedom.