

## A NOTE ON SOME QUESTIONS/SUGGESTIONS IN FORGING PARTNERSHIP IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Since the theme of the bilateral Conference has two clear goals (a) development perspectives in the new millenium; and (b) forging India-Pakistan partnership, **my first suggestion is to treat the second as the primary objective. As far as development perspectives in the new millenium are concerned - there can be many, not just two perspectives.** All the three terms in the proposition are loaded with controversies, some ideological, some perspectives and some reflecting high levels of specialisation in particular aspects of development studies. **The procedure most suitable for promoting partnerships on such a contested arena would require opportunities for free debates and dialogues, collaborative activities between small groups of like-minded social scientists/institutions, so that the debates get strengthened with substantive research and analysis, providing empirical bases for some of these debates that stay confined to the boundaries of insurmountable differences.**

In my personal experiences I have come across remarkable similarities with research on poor women - rural or urban - and their encounters with the increasingly globalised processes of economic transformation, social change and population dynamics. I would claim that this commonality has provided the best basis for social scientists involved in women's studies being welcome in either country. At a pure policy level, however, we have faced resistances in both countries - in the approach to women's relationships to these changes - even in putting faces on the diversity of impacts - ongoing/likely/possible on different groups of women in our countries. At yet another level there have been variations in the impact of women's studies across different social classes, institutions, and sectors of development.

In my two forays into Pakistan (a) to discuss the possibility of women's studies into the school curriculum (organised by the Aurat Foundation and Information Services, Lahore, 1989); and (b) to participate in the South Asian Regional Conference on Peasant Women on Environment and Agricultural Development (sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Lahore, 1992) - I found that partnerships were not only possible but could be extremely enriching and dynamic. It was easier to bring round Chairpersons of Text Book Committees of the four Pakistani Provinces to our approaches to educational/curricular reform, than I had found among their counterparts in India. Perhaps this lay in the fact that these officials shared our (especially mine) views on the critical necessity of educational reforms at the school level to prevent the life experiences of the majority of women in our two countries becoming 'invisible' and therefore 'devalued' in the eyes and mindsets of their children. On the second occasion we had a contingent of peasant women speaking on their own behalf on issues relating to the management of natural resources, agricultural development, and their perspectives for reforms in these areas. We discovered that national, linguistic, religious, even ecological differences did not matter - because in front of our eyes South

Asian peasant women from the hilly regions of Hunza and Nepal, and the alluvial deltaic regions of India and Bangladesh, and the coastal regions of South India established communication with each other and spoke with one voice, with identical suggestions, demands and recommendations. Since this regional conference succeeded four National Summit Conferences of Peasant Women, we also had the Reports of the Summits to compare in addition to what was discussed in the Lahore meeting.

This brings me to **three major suggestions towards building partnerships**:- (a) collaboration in women's studies research, on comparable groups/issues, methodologies and frameworks; (b) collaborative dialogues on policy research and action research in specific areas/sectors (e.g. education, health, agriculture, environment, employment, infrastructure - social and physical etc.) of development in the last few decades; (c) defining 'indigenisation' of social sciences (offered as a necessity for promoting women's studies in Asia : UNESCO-ICSSR Workshop on Women's Studies and Social Sciences in Asia, Delhi, 1982). I dare say this term has been used by others apart from women's studies scholars. But there is tremendous confusion as well as resistance to such a suggestion among the majority of social scientists. From the 1970s those social scientists who served on or assisted the work of the Committee on the Status of Women in India have also been questioning other more familiar terms like **tradition**, modernity, customs, modernisation, development, community, identity, culture etc. I have found two straight questions regarding tradition very handy in challenging fellow social scientists in both countries and elsewhere: **Whose tradition? How traditional is the tradition?**

In my opinion, indigenisation of social sciences only means not borrowing theories of social change/dynamics developed in other corners of the world with different histories, cultures and stages of economic transformation - without questioning their relevance in our contexts - and applying them blindly for research or policy. Similarly, customs, traditions have also never been static. If we want to recover some at least of the lost histories of large sections of our peoples (the largest amongst these being women - cutting across all classes, castes, communities, languages etc. of our two countries) to expand and enrich our own capacities as social scientists, we have to develop several new workable indigenous methods. That does not mean we want to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world's knowledge elites, but to have some confidence in our own capacity to develop new methods and theories, derived from perhaps comparative research in our two countries.

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