The State, Religious Fundamentalism and Women Trends in South Asia

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One of the crucial issues affecting women in South Asia today has been the growth of state sponsored religious fundamentalism. This is occuring in the context of increasing evidence of violence against women - dowry murders, sexual harrassment, rape often by the police and army, and the throwing of acid on women in the streets. (1) As a result of campaigns and agitations by women's movements, these incidents have been highlighted and the governements have passed some preventive laws, albeit with many loopholes and limitations. However what is significant is that in recent years there has been a shift away from even the liberal rhetoric of equal rignts for women and laws have been passed to withdraw the legal and political rights which women already had won. These developements are linked with the broader porcess of economic and political changes which have laid the basis for religious fundamentalist groups to grow, as well as for the support to these tendencies by the governments in these countries.

The emergence of fundamentalist groups is not specific to South Asia alone. Fundamentalist forces, often with state support have emerged in Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, and Malaysia, with Iran offering the best example of what implications this phenomenon has for women. Iranian women took an active part in the anti-imperialist struggle against the Shah, making the veil into a symbol of resistance only to find themselves pushed afterwards into the restricted roles of mothers and wives. The "chador" became a legally binding requirement, the age of marriage was reduced to 13 years and divorce became nearly impossible. (Haleh Afshar, 1985)

These trends with very specific injunctions for women can be seen also in developed capitalist countries, thus belying any link of this phenomenon with backwardness and underdevelopment. In fact manu of these movements use the latest and most sophisticated technology in modern communications. In the United States, the Moral Majority, with close links with the extreme right, have initiated a reign of "holy terror" with senators opposing the Equal Rights Amendment on the grounds that it undermines the family and "deprives men of their right to come home from work to a fresh martini, cooked dinner and a cheerful and compliant wife". (Flo Conway & Jim Siegelman 1984) Electronic evangelists fill the air waves with relentless exhortations attributing all of America's problems to the communist menace and the recent movements for racial, sexual and social emancipation.
In South Asia in recent years a number of developments show the increasing hold of religious fundamentalist forces in the region.

> In 1986 the Indian Parliament passed a bill called the Muslim Women 's Protection of the right of Divorce Bill, which withdrew a right from muslim women to appeal for maintainance under a special provision in the Criminal Procedure Code. This bill was passed after a period of mass demonstrations, strikes and petitions presented by Muslims and Hindus all over the country, as a reaction to a Supreme Court judgement to grant a 73 year old woman, Shad Bano, the paltry sum of Rs. 179 per month as maintenance from her husband. A simple issue of womens rights turned into an issue of minority vs. majority community interests and led to a withdrawal of legal rights for muslim women.
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> In Pakistan, the Hadood Ordinance of 1979 sanctionned flogging for adultery and rape, with little to distinguish the two, a Law of Evidence recduced a woman 's evidence to half that of a man, and a proposed Shariat Bill, now seeks to deprive women of even more political and social rights,including their participation in politics.
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> In Bangladesh, while there have not been specific changes in the law as yet, attempts are being made to assert "Islamic" codes of dress and conduct for women. Women announcers on television were told not to cover their heads and not to wear "bindis" on their foreheads. (2) At the moment there is a bill being debated on making Islam the state religion.

These attempts to reverse the status of women and withdraw the rights which earlier generations of women had won, all in the name of preserving traditions and the fundamental tenests of a religion needs to be understood in relation to the role of the state. While this is clear in countries where a religion is the state religion, even in countries which purport to be secular, there seems to be support if not outright sponsorship of fundamentalism. Interestingly these trends go alongside government policies and programmes to integrate women into development. These are not just part of the rhetoric of the International Womens Decade which most governments have to project as part of their "modern and progressive image". The apparent contradiction between special programmes for women's employment and skill training and the passing of restrictive laws which raise images of medievalism in the 20th Century, can be seen as two sides of the same imperative to control and direct women's labour, fertility and sexualitiy to suit both capitalist and patriarchal interests.

Although significant work has been done on the implications of capitalist development on women's work and the fact that the needs of capital and the needs of patriarchy can either coincide or conflict with each other, more work need to be done at a theoretical and empirical level on the relation between the state and women's subordination. This paper will look at one phenomenon -religious fundamentalism in the South Asian context. (i.e. Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) with a special focus on India, and its relation to state ideology and the women's subordination. The basis for the emergence of fundamentalism, the connection of this with the increasing attempts to reassert control over women, and the implications of such a state ideology for the women's movements in the region are discussed. It is argued that religious fundamentalism as a state ideology could provide a coincidence of patriarchal and capitalist interests in the present context in South Asia. These preliminary reflections will, I hope lay the basis for further theoretical understanding and more importantly, practical stategies to counteract such retrogressive trends.

The State and Religious Fundamentalism in South Asia

Post colonial states in South Asia have followed a capitalist path of development, notwithstanding the rhetoric of socialism, whether of the Indian or Islamic variety. There exist differences in the nature of the state, for instance, the specific constellation of class forces, the degree of dependence or independence from foreign capital, or the degree of repression and the right to assert democratic rights. However, development programmes in all these countries for agricultural and industrial growth, have resulted in structural changes in the ownership and control over productive assets, especially land which have furthered the process of class and sexual differentiation. One contribution the decade has made is the challenging of the notion that development policies are sex-neutral; today there is a wealth of empirical material which documents the differential effect of development policies on women and men. Technological changes, legislation, etc, interact with a pre-existing class and sexual division of labour, both within the community and within the household. This has resulted in a deepening of inequalities between women and men, in terms of their access and control over food, education, health care and productive resources. State intervention is today, explicitly restructuring not just the arena of the economic but also other arenas of civil society, those which concern the most "private" areas of religious beliefs, reproductive choices and man-woman relationships. (3)
Given this pattern of development, the continous aggravation of inequalities of wealth, income distribution and uneven regional growth, have resulted in various formes of oppositional movements for land-rights, higher wages, regional autonomy and implementation of legal rights. These movements have usually been repressed by governments and power weilding groups, resulting in a tremendous increase in class, caste, communal and sexual violence since the mid-sixties. The inability of the governments to tackle the roots of these problems has resulted in a crippling crisis of legitimacy.

It is in this context that the ruling parties in all these countries are seeking to create an ideological unity through the sponsoring of religious fundamentalism. This is expressed openly in General Zia 's Islamisation drives and in a more covert form in India and Bangladesh. In 1977, the secular principles of the Bangladesh constitution were reversed and since then, the government has been supporting the growth of Islamic institutions and linking up with Islamic state. At the moment there is a bill introcuced in parliament to make Islam into a state religion. In India , the complicity of the ruling party in the attacks on Sikh families in Delhi in November 1984, the succumbing to muslim and hindu fundamentalist pressures and the total lack of political will to solve the increasing communal tension in the country, have shattered the illusions of the secular ideology of the Indian state. The trend is towards a communal state ideology with majority hindu fundamentalism as a dominant component.
There are differences in the specific factors necessitating the use of religious fundamentalism to create an ideology unity. In Pakistan, the nationality question is the most important. The only way by which Punjabi domination in the economy, bureaucracy and military could be preserved by the ruling party was by stressing that there were muslims . A homogenous "muslim" identity had to be stressed to avoid confrontation with the very reaul structural inequalities between the provinces, each with their own distintive culture and language. General Zia himself, is said to have stated that without Islam, Pakistan, would disintegrate overnight. (4) In Bangladesh whose creation, in fact, is the best expression of the fragility of religion as the basis of national identity, the upsurge in Islamic activities is linked to other factors. The dependance for foreign aid on the oil-rich-Middle East, and the cooption of right wing fundamentalist forces in the ruling party, are some of the factors pushing towards the Islaminsation of Bangladesh. (Emajuddin Ahmed, 1983).

In India, the situation is more complex since it continues theoretically at least, to be a secular state . Rather than a direct projection of religious fundamentalism as a state ideology, there is a more indirect sponsorship of fundamentalist forces. The emergence of state sponsored religious fundamentalism has to be seen in the broader context of the communalisation of Indian Society (5) "Communalism" as an ideology projects the "belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have as a result, common social , political and economic interests. "(Bipan Chandra,1984) Analysis has shown that this assumption of a homogenous identity ignores the real divisiions of caste and class and that in fact, a "communal identity" has no natural basis but has to be created. Inspite of the production of historical and contemporary studies which provide evidence of the above mentioned processes, many commentators continue to see the South Asian region as one torn by inherently antagonistic religious communities, with the roots of this antagonism traced to the medieval past. Recent attempts to analyse the Punjab situation, see the conflicts as the outcome of a "Sikh" history and tradtion . Such analysis not only ignores the very significant caste and class divisions amongst Sikhs, but also ignores the role of the ruling party in creating the present communal situation in that region. The demandes put foward by the regional opposition party in Punjab (Akali Dal) i.e. for water, territorial redivision with neighbouring states and Chandigarh as the state capital for Punjab, which were secular demands, were continouously ignored by the ruling party till they became linked with the communal demand for a seperate nation i.e. Khalistan. (Dipankar Gupta, 1985) The emergence of communalism as an ideology which leads to violence between groups who co-existed peacefully before has to be situated historically and in relation to the specific socio-economic and political factors leading to such developments.

Communalism in the colonial period

Historians have established that communalism in the Indian subcontinent, was a product of colonial underdevelopment, located most specifically amongst the middle classes. The breakdown of existing class identities and status systems, along with economic stagnation forced middle class Indians to compete with each other for the scarce resources. The ensuing frustration, combined with a sense of deprivation and fears of the loss of identity, created a volatile stituation in which a religious issue could trigger off immediate violence and extreme brutality. Given a crisis of identity, the protection of cows, or music before a mosque became crucial issues, issues of life and death, because these religious symbols came to represent symbolically, the preservation or destruction of these middle classes themselves. It is therefore, not accidental that communal struggles during the colonial period occurred mostly over government jobs, educational concessions and the political positions in the legislative councils and municpal bodies which enabled control over them. Communal struggles were therefore over secular issues. In fact, the "purely religious or theological content of communalism has tended to be meagre" (Bipan Chandra, 1984)

In addition , from the end of the 19th Century, communalism became an important instrument of colonial policy in the effort to thwart the rising national movement. Communalists, especially the Muslim League were encouraged through the ready acceptance of their demands, official patronage etc. The Indian national movement itself, though secular in its objectives, also used communal consciousness. There was a distinct hindu tinge in the leadership's work and thought. Many nationalist identified nationalism with the revival of Hinduism. Modern literature in

Bengali, Hindi and Urdu was partly communal in tone, portraying muslims as foreigners and oppressive lecherous tyrants, while hindus were portrayed as heroes struggling for positive values. Many leaders used hindu symbols, idioms and myths in their political speeches and writings. India was often referred to as the Mother Goddess or compared to Durga, Kali, and other Hindu goddesses. Gandhi too, appealed to people in the language of religiousity, for e.g. his interpretation of independance as Ram Rajya. (Bipan Chandra, 1984)

The same divisions affected women in the early women's movement and national movements. In their struggle for suffrage, education and legal rights, both hindu and muslim women attacked the system of seclusion. However, as communal divisions intensified, hindu feminists began to see purdah (seclusion) as a custom bought to India by muslim invaders and a cause for the fall in women's high status in the Golden Age, and muslim women, fearing that they would be swamped as a minority in a India ruled by a hindu majority , began to defend passages in the Quran about female modesty. (Geraldine Forbes 1982)

This Hindu tinge in the national movement and the susbsequent failure in fostering the development of a national consciousness in the post independence period, left the space for communalism and casteism to grow inspite of a secular Constitution. While communalism in the present period does not have the same causes as under colonialism, at level of ideology, it does find an echo in past memories of communal violence.

Contemporary communalism and the Indian State

In the decade between 1950-1960 communal incidents were few but since the 1960's there has been a tremendous increase in communal violence involving many more communities and creationg new divisions as for instance, between Hindus and Sikhs. These incidents occured mainly in urban areas, though recently, communal violence has spread to rural hinterlands as well.

Analysis of these incidents have shown that they were systematically planned with selective targets and were a disguised from of economic competition between the two communities. In many cases, the targets were Muslim artisans and small entrepreneurs who had achieved a degree of relative prosperity and were cutting out the traders who happened, to be Hindus. This competition for scarce resources - markets or jobs has even led to the old caste conflicts being converted into communal struggles today. (A.R. Desai , 1985 Asghar Ali Engineer, 1985) Another significant factor behind these incidents of violence was the evidence of the complicity of the ruling party in either engineering these riots or not acting swiftly to prevent their occurence. Fact after fact in Punjab, Delhi, Meerut, Bhiwandi, all point out the complicity of the ruling party and the state apparatus. (6)

Behind the specific "riot" however, is the much more disturbing growth of communal ideology amongst large sections of people. Over the years there has occured a consolidation of Hindu sentiments, a process which escalated when some dalits converted to Islam in South India. Hindu organisations held conferences, and went on all India pilgrimages carrying holy water from the Ganges. Organisations like the Hindu Manch, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Hindu Ekta Manch, along the older Rashtriya Swayemsewak Sangh, have initiated militant programmes to counter what they percieve as a threat to Hinduism. These organisations are highly authoritarian in structure, have para-military wings and an ideology of Hindu expansionism. For instance, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has openly declared that Hindus are the only people who accept India as their motherland and that national integration is synonymous with Hindu consolidation. This includes the recovery of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan as part of Greater India. Like fascist organisations elsewhere, these are all male dominated, if not exlusively male organisations. These organistations have been given state patronage, are allowed to function freely with members of the ruling party publicly supporting and attending their conferences and meetings.

This phase of communalism in India is significant in that it emerges in a context of rising religious fundamentalism. Communal tensions in earlier periods have not neccesarily been accompanied by fundamentalist movements. The other significant factor is the role of the ruling party in supporting these religious fundamentalist forces, especially Hindu fundamentalists. In sharp contrast to its positions in the late 1960's and 70's , the ruling Congress Party has now shifted from its earlier public condemnation of communalism and of hindu organisations and support to the victims of minority communities (in particular the Muslims) to a more generalised condemnation of communalism and the foreign hand in public pronouncements along with a series of concessions to communal demands, a refusal to indict individuals identified as being responsible for the violence, and a stifling of secular opinion, both, within, and outside the ruling party.

This shift in the stand of the ruling party on communalism was partly due to an electoral strategy to cash in on the "Hindu vote", especially in North India. When this strategy did not result in large scale support in the 1986 by elections, there was a shift back to and a succumbing to Muslim fundamentalist demands by pushing through the Muslim Womens Bill. The ruling party played one communalism off another in the electoral numbers game. However, it would be a mistake to see the consolidation of communalism today only as the backlash of a short sighted electoral strategy. There are far deeper factors at work which need further research and exploitation, to enable us to understand the reasons for people's responses to communal propaganda and the increasing crisis of the ideological legitimacy of the Indian State and its need for a new hegemonizing ideology.

An area for further exploration would be to see how far the attempt to forge a national identity after the collapse of anti-colonial nationalism would take the form of a projection of a Hindu nationalism. Such an ideology has today ready recipients in the products of the peculiarly Indian pattern of industrialisation i.e. the sections of the population who live off rentier and trading profits, the bulk of whom come from the "intermediate" or backward castes which form the Hindu majority. (Achin Vanaik 1985) It is these sections, along with the newly emerging rural kulaks, who today seem to be supporting the fundamentalist movements. Whether India becomes a Hindu fundamentalist state or not is an open question but the fact is that it is today a communal state with government support and even sponsoring of religious fundamentalism.

These developments are occuring in the context of a growing authoritarian state structure.Over the years there has been increased investment in the police, para-military forces and the army, along with the passing of laws like the National Security Ordinance, Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts Act,1984) etc. which give wide powers to the police and the state apparatus over the lives of citizens.

State sponsorship and the emergence of fundamentalist organisations among Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians along with an increasingly authoritarian state structure, has serious implications for the future of democracy in India. These trends in the South Asian region have also very specific and

disturbing implications for women. Processes of class formation and the construction of nationhood are not seperate from the particular forms of women's subjugation in these countries. In the present context, religious fundamentalism as a crucial component of communalism provides a lethal combination to prop up or resurrect patriarchal controls over women.

Religious Fundamentalism and Women

The terms fundamentalism, revivalism, obscurantism, are often used interchangeably and loosely. There is considerable controversy over the use of these terms. In this paper, religious fundamentalism is used rather than revivalism. Revivalism implies a "renewed attention to" or "interest in" while fundamentalism implies an adherence - often a strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles. Thus there could be movements of religious revivalism which could over time become fundamentalist i.e. focussing on only one set of principles can vary, as studies on Islamic Fundamentalism have pointed out. Commenting on the tendency to club together heterogenous phenomena under the rubric of "fundamentalism", O. Roy makes distinctions between fundamentalism in Islam which could be.

> "a return to strict religious practice, as we observe in many emigre milieus ; return to the observance of the text (study of the Koran and the hadiths), which is the fundamentalism of the madrasa ; and return to the religious law, to the practise of the Shariat, which is the fundamentalism of the "ulama"... (Oliver Roy , pg. 122, 1985)

Fundamentalism is the "return to..., the re-reading, the quest for origins". This rereading, return to the origins can take many different forms and therefore is not in itself a political position. A purely textual definition would equate the proponents of liberation theology in Latin America, who base their work on the original Christian communities of Christ, with the ravings of right wing teleevangelists like Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts in the United States. Movements inspired by religion - revivalist or fundamentalist have played a revolutionary anti-imperialist role in the national movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, and have also expressed the needs and aspirations of working people . Religious movements therefore are not necessarily conservative. Similary, religious fundamentalism does not always refer to the past - in fact what is being asserted as a basic tenet is often a totally modern practise. This is why it is problematic to call the recent occurence of sati as a revival. (7) In addition, the meanings that people give to these principles can also vary. For example, Iranian women who supported Khomeini, and marched in thousands, as organised militant contingents turning the veil into a symbol of solidarity and struggle, were not simply retreating to the past, but were asserting a certain positive conception of the future. Islam offered an alternative to the "consumerism and the modern consumer woman" projected by the Shah's economic and social policies. (Azar Tabari & Nahid Yeganeh,1982) Similarly , attempts by disadvantaged groups to rise in ritual status by strict adherence to "tradition" or the Shariat are not seen by them as a return to medievalism but in fact as symbols of achievement. (Gyan Pandey,1983)

Fundamentalism then, can only be understood in relation to a specific historical context. It is crucial to identify when it emerges, which are the social groups initiating as well as consituting the support base of this phenomenon and what exactly is being projected as the basic principles of adherence.

One feature of fundamentalism is its *selectivity* in choosing what is the true and original teaching. In the sense fundamentalism constructs a *particular* version of Islam/Hinduism/Sikhism/ Chritianity as the only valid representaion of that religion. This construction makes little distinction between what is textual and what may be local specific cultural practices. Most significantly it abstracts from history and projects that particular amalgam of belief, ritual and practice with a transcedental validity. In Pakistan for instance, the islamisation process selects elements from 19 schools of jurisprudence as well as customs and practises which existed in the 8th and 9th centuries in what is Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria of today. Similary, the "Hinduism" being projected by various Hindu organisations as the only true Hinduism denies the historical existence of two seperate and anatgonistic religious traditions amongst people designated as Hindus. One tradition was Brahmanism which was based on Vedic texts and the Dharmashastras, restricted to the upper castes, buttressed by royal patronage and the creation of a priestly caste. The Shramanic tradition (the Bakthi movements were seen as inheritors of this tradition) was popular amongst lower castes, had a universalistic ethic and exhibited a wide diversity in ritual and belief. Historically one cannot speak of Hinduism as such but a variety of 'Hindu' religions. (Romila Thapar, 1985) The Hinduism being claimed by fundamentalist organisations draws on the first tradition but here too it incorporates elements from caste customs, particularly Kshatriya notions of honour, as well. Social scientists have labelled this very modern Hinduism -"syndicated Hinduism" (Romila Thapar, 1985)

That this contemporay construction of Hinduism (the same process could be seen in other religions) has no need of either textual or historical verification was brought out very clearly in an interview with Ramanand Sagar, the producer of a television serial on the Ramayan recently. When asked about the historical sources for the film, he mentioned how during that period women did not cover their torsos but it was impossible for him to allow that on the screen since the image of Sita as a pure, chaste and ideal wife was so strong and important that showing her without a blouse would violate the moral message of the serial! (8) Similarly when the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan was discussing whether women should have the right to vote, whether blood money or compensation paid to a female victim should be half that of a male and whether women's evidence should be half that of a man's evidence in court, there was no discussion of "khula" which is the Quranic equivalent available to women, of men's right to the "talaq" form of divorce.

Since then the Hadood Ordinance and the Law of Evidence have been passed and there is now the proposal for a Shariat Bill which will extend the jurisdiction of the Shariat Court to all areas of life. However, even here there is the process of selectivity - while the Federal Shariat Court is seen as having only an advisory role regarding fiscal matters, in matters, of Muslim personal law, anu judgement passed by the court will be binding. Almost all the issues concerning women's rights fall under personal law. It seems that the criteriea for selection and implementation of true Islam is the crucial area of man-woman relations rather than more general theological issues.

A similar process of selectivity can be seen in the codification and implementation of personal laws in India. While a common criminal code exists for every Indian citizen , areas of marriage, inheritance , divorce etc. are governed by separate personal laws for Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. More studies need to be done one on the process by which these personal laws were codified involving not only a specific interpretation of each religion but also the incorporation of the assumptions of colonial administrators and native representatives. (Lata Mani, 1986, 1988) Hindu personal law for instance, was interpreted initially in 1772 when Warren Hastings appointed ten Brahmin pandits from Bengal to compile a digest of Hindu scriptural law in civil matters - marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession. These interpretations, however were only codified into one uniform law in 1941. Prior to

this, there had been separate laws for different castes and communities i.e. separate customary laws existed for Nairs, Nambudris, Kulins, Jats etc. The Draft Hindu Code was thus based on specifically Brahmanical interpretations of Hinduism. Changes were introduced into this as a result of the struggles of women and men in the early women's movement and hence contained some rights for Hindu women. It is significant , however, that the Hindu Code Bill was only passed after Independance after a great deal of opposition. A process of secular reform to abolish all personal laws for a uniform civil code prior to indenpendence was scuttled on the grounds of political expediency and although the ideal of a uniform civil code is enshrined in the Directive Principles of the Constitution, till today, seperate personal laws continue to operate.

It is not accidental that issues of religious identity are tied so closely with the regulation of relations between men and women . All personnal laws, including the reformed Hindu law have certain common features which reinforce the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal family. This is the main family form in India, especially in the north, central and eastern parts of the country. Even where matrilineal forms have existed, as in the taravad of Kerala, economic changes and colonial policy have invested defacto rights over property in the hands of men. Government intervention through changes for example, in laws on inheritance have tended to maintain this patriarchal authority. In situations of the breakdown and emergence of new class / caste / communal identities it is these elements of man - woman relations which become crucial markers of identity. It is significant that during the agitation in Punjab, a demand was put forward for a seperate personal law for Sikhs as well. This customary law deprives women of the right to property, and to divorce and contains the provision for a widow to marry her husband's brother. all these features link patriarchal control to newly emerging class interests particulary the need to maintain and keep control over landed property by sections of the Punjab peasantry. It is also not accidental that that while the ruling party ignored the other secular demands for water, territory and Chandigarh as the capital city, this communal demand was being considered.

It is this linkage which needs to be explored to understand why religious fundamentalism has very specific implications for women. In this section we wil look at two areas which illustrate this linkage - the emergence of fundamentalism as the result of a challenge to and breakdown of traditional patriarchal structures and the process of identity creation in situations of social and economic crisis.

Challenges to and breakdown of traditional patriarchal structures

> "If fundamentalists are calling for the return to the veil, it must be because women have been taking off the veil " (Fatima Mernissi, pg 8, 1987)

There are two processes occuring within the South Asian context which are leading women to "take off the veil "- the changing demand for women's labour as a result of capitalist developments in agriculture and industry and the challenge of a newly developed consciousness about the rights of women.

In India, since the 1960's agricultural development has been based on a technological package to increase agricultural productivity, marking a shift away from the earlier focus on land reforms. The effects of the Green Revolution have been extensively documented. Although there are regional differences, depending on prior patterns of landholding and landlessness, as well as technological contraints imposed by the kind of crop, there have been considerable changes in women's participation in wage labour and their postion relative to men in the rural areas. Capitalist development has resulted in many peasants and marginal farmers losing their landholdings at the same time as there has been the crystalisation of a new layer of rural kulaks (rich farmers) . There has been a dramatic increase in the number of agricultural workers, within which section the number of women is higher and increasing faster than the number of men. The 1981 Census showed that half of all rural female workers (as against a quarter of all women is more seasonal and as a result, most women are casual workers. The numbers of female cultivators has declined relative to men, highlighting women's lack of independent access to land. (Bina Agarwal, 1985, Gita Sen,1984) In addition, in 15 states, surveys reveal an increase in the differential between male and female wages, with women's earnings being close to half or less than half of men's earnings.

On other hand, the emergence of a rich peasant class had led to the withrawal of women of this section from work in the fields. However, this has not meant an improvement in the status of these women. Seclusion only serves to hide the labour women perform within the household, which sometimes increases as a result of hiring in wage labour. In any case, this process does not result in any increase in women's economic control over resources and property or descision making. (Ursula Sharma 1980)

In Bangladesh, there has been an increasing trend of landlessness documented along with an increase in the number of poor female headed households. Female headed households are estimated to range from 6.4% to 16% of all rural households. Around 40% of all rural women are today seeking wage employment. (Jannuzi & Peach, 1977)

Studies done on rural areas in Pakistan especially in the Punjab point out the high degree of male out-migration and the importance of foreign remittances in changing the rural setting. Although men do return home for crucial production periods, women have begun to enter areas of work and take over desicion making in spheres previously the prerogative of men. One study notes the contradictory implications of these changes. While some women are wearing modern clothes and cosmetics, for many others there is now the introduction of seclusion as women are withdrawn from work in the fields. The same study also points out to the increase in social networking between women in different households and the issues which are discussed together range from marriage alliances, problems with family members to monetary matters. (Naveed -I- Rahat,1986)

There are also variations in the effects of industrialisation strategies, but certain broad trends can be identified. In India, women were mainly employed in textiles, mines and plantations. In all these sectors there has been a decline in women's employment, especially in textiles and coal mines. Of all non-agricultural jobs that women lost during the period of 1911 and 1961, only 8% were due to these jobs becoming obsolete and in the remaining cases (92%) women were simply replaced in their past occupations by men. (Nirmala Banerjee, 1984) However it is important to note that women are still employed by these industries either as contract labour or through the decentralisation of production to sall sweatshops or home based units, especially in the textile industry. (Amrita Chhachhi,1983), The decline in the relative and absolute employment of women in the traditional sectors is also a part of the general crisis of these sectors of the economy. in modern sub-sectors like pharmaceuticals, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, machine production, heavy chemicals, which anyway have a low labour absorption, women are concentrated in certain industries like garments, food processing, electronics i.e. the new export oriented factories, many of which fragment production to household units, as well as in the unorganised sector. A study on the unorganised sector in Calcutta points out that not only is womens employment in this sector

increasing faster than mens emplyment but that men and women are now, competing for these scarce jobs. Census figures with all their limitations, have also registered an increase in the work force participation rate of urban women i.e. from 11% en 1961 to 14% in 1971. Since womens employment in the organised sector is less than 33% of the urban female employment, this increase of regis tered employment seems to be in the unorganised hence low waged sector . (Nirmala Banerjee, 1985)

In Bangladesh, given the low level of industrial development, women are only rencently being employedin the new export industries set up in and around Dhaka. 80 to 90% of the garment workers are young, unmarried women, mainly from the urban areas. (Fazila Banu Lily, 1985) In Pakistan, data based on the 1975/76 CMIU shows that the total non-farm employment for women was less than 3% of the total. In the manufacturing sector women again are concentrated in the food processing, textiles, cotton ginning, pharmaceuticals, garments and electronics factories. The CMI date clearly does not reflect the level of women's employment since it does not include the category of casual contract labour or subcontracted home based production. Various case studies have revealed high rates of female employment in the unorganised sector. (Nighat Said Khan, 1985, Sabeeha Hafeez, 1981) Contrary to the general impression, there are quite a few single women working in urban based industries, i.e. not necessarily only widowed or divorced women (Sabeeha Hafeez, 1981)

Broadly then one can see that capitalist development , in agriculture and industry , has resulted in an increase in landlessness, increased dependence of women on wage work which is seasonal, low earnings and the increase as well as invisibilisation of their work in the unorganised sector. In broad terms then more women are being forced into looking for work and the work that is available is in the unorganised sector, with a large section engaged in subcontracted home based production. The new export oriented industries are drawing in a new layer of younger women. Although studies of these industries show variations of age and marital status thus showing a deviation from the South East Asian model, many of these young girls are having to take over the traditional obligations of fathers and brothers for instance, to provide a dowry for their marriage and are now earning their own dowries. Studies of young women workers in the garment and electronic factories show a sizeable number who come, from disintegrating middle class to lower middle class families, who hope to earn enough to have a large dowry which is seen as the passport to marriage and an escape from factory work.However the bulk of their earnings were in fact going towards household expenses, as the families struggled to maintain a increasingly threatened middle class status. In these families, the traditional structure of male provisioning could be maintained in practice. (9)

The pressures of increasing poverty in the countryside as well is forcing a renegotiation of structures of authority. As women are moving out of the homestead in search of work and therefore away from the direct control of family patriarchs, they are entering "male space" in search of wage labour. in addition there is the attempt to reassert control by regulating women's mobility and access to wage labour and product markets. Marty Chen describes such a process in rural Bangladesh :

> " ... Patriarchal control over poor women's labour is operated not by the family patriarchs but by the village patriarchs The Village patriarchs, men from rich households, control the paid labour opportunities within the village and dictate the norms of purdah and status that discourage women from seeking wage employment or engaging in trade outside the village. Indeed to show their disapproval of women who break these norms, village patriarchs have been known to stop hiring those women to work in their households and to stop extending them credit or other forms of patron-client service." (pg.221, 1986)

These material processes which are threatening traditional patriarchal structures, can create conditions for the emergence and support for ideologies that stress women's traditional roles. In Iran, this took the form of a move to drive women out of office jobs, the closure of workplace nurseries, and the restoration of the husband's right to bar wives from paid employment. (Haleh Afshar, 1985)

There has been extensive documentation of the link between the demands of the capitalist economy and the emergence of ideologies which justifiy the exlusion or incorporation of women into the labour force. The best example, is of course pro-natalism in Nazi Germany in the early thirties and its reversal in 1937 when women were exhorted to contribute to the war industry. These ideologies do not always functionally respond to the needs of capital in a purely economic sense. Ideologies of domesticity for women are being forced to seek work. Religious fundamentalism as a state supported ideology in the given economic and cultural context of South Asia could provide a similar justification for controlling the mobility, fertility and sexuality of women. Already communal organisations have started issuing aggressive statements about the right place of women. In the communal violencerecently in Ahmedabad, Hindu fundamentalists put forward what they called a "theory of truth" (satyawad) , in which they condemned abortion as murder and advocated that women return to the home and give up their jobs in favour of unemployed men.

> "These communalists prescription for us is that we stay at home and lose ourselve in our husbands, children and religious texts. To do otherwise is to be a witch, a fallen woman and an insult to manhood". (Mira Chaterjee, pg 6, 1986)

Apart from the changing structures of women's work, the other factor which could lay the basis for support to fundamentalist ideas is the growing strength of the women's movement and a generalised awareness about women's rights in the region. There has been a rich tradition of women's struggle aigainst patriarchal structures in the history of South Asia. The nature of these struggles has depended on the specific historical circumstances and options available for women during these periods. The early 20th century women's movement for example, did not question the sexual division of labour within the family, but did build independent organisations and fought militantly for equal rights, wheter for the right to property which benefited few women, or for the vote, which (at least potentially) benefited all women, as well as for higher wages, food and the right to organise which benefited working class and peasant women. (10) After independence there was a lull but in the late 1960's and early 1970's in India a new womens movement emerged.

The economic crisis of the sixties led to numerous working class and peasant movements all over the country, and in the early seventies, women's issue bagan to be taken up in the context of these general struggles. In urban areas, small women's groups emerged, constitued by women who were or had been linked with radical left groups as well as activists involved in development work. After the lifting of the Emergency in 1977, women's groups mushroomed in the larger cities of Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore. What was new about these groups was the fact that they autonomous organisations (i.e. not linked to political parties), used different forms of organising based more on the consciousness raising model rather than the mass recruitment strategy followed by the party linked womens organisations, with a stress on non-hierachical internal organisation structures. Since the seventies, the new women's movement has grown

tremendously and has taken up the issues of dowry murders, police rape, domestic violence, reproductive rights and recently the issues of rights for Muslim women and sati.

There are two levels at which the issues of patriarchal control are being challenged. The first, and the dominant trend is to expose and agiate around the most extreme manifestations of women's subordination in India - dowry murders, police rape, abortion of female foetuses after amniocentesis, sati etc. This is done often within the terms of the arguement of the early social reform and 20th century movements of condemning these as social evils and therefore mobilising a much wider layer of public support. The second level is the less publicised work that women's groups particulary the women's centres in Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore are doing in connecting these extreme forms to the structural violence against women within the existing patriarchal family system. The issue of dowry murders is linked to the much more hidden and more widespread issue of violence within the family and the fact that women do not assert their right to property.

Such issues provide a far greater challenge to patriarchal authority and as a result provoke a more violent reaction from conservative sections of society. A case which has not recieved that much publicity but which I feel is significant in illustrating this second level of the womens movement's struggles is that of a 21 year old girl Asha who wanted to study and work rather than get married. A women's center took up her case, found her a room in the hostel and informed her family of her descision to study and live in a womens hostel. The men of her family arrived at the centre ; manhandled the volunteers and then filed a case of Habeus Corpus in the Supreme Court accusing the centre of kidnapping and running a prostitution racket! After many dramatic incidents, the Supreme Court finally passed a judgement stating that a 21 year old was mature enough to make up her own mind and decide what to do with her life. Such a simple judgement yet it was the first issues where centre volunteers were attacked physically as well as slandered in the press. This violent reaction which agitations against dowry murders have rarely provoked, was due to the recognition that this simple judgement was in fact eroding one of the pillars of patriarchal authority within the family and therefore had radical long term consequences. In fact, after judgement the centre recieved numerous letters from young girls requesting support to leave their families and work, requests which the centre with its limited resources could in no way handle ! (11)

Athough many of these struggles are occuring in big cities and movement has yet to extend to the larger number of women in rural India, there has been the emergence of a generalised awareness of womens rights and women are becoming aware of options that are available to them. This implies that they are no longer willing to submissively accept traditional patriarchal controls. Even if they may not directly challenge men's authority, in every family which has access to the radio, T.V. and newspaper (and that includes a large section of rural and urban people) there is a process of questioning, a shaking of the grounds of legitimacy. Such a process is extremely threatening and it is natural that attemps will be made to reassert traditional controls. In this context religious fundamentalism could provide a ready ideology specially since the pre-existing structures of the patriarchal household with intra-household discrimination between male and female access to food, health care and other resources has often been justified in the name of religious traditions. The pre-existing culture of son-preference has already made the South Asain region significant in having a declining sex radio i.e. the decline in the number of women relative to men in the population.

While in most countries, developed and developing, women outnumber men, the populations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal are exceptional in having an adverse sex ratio. In Bangladesh in 1981, there were 94 females of 100 males, in Pakistan there were 87 females to 100 males and in India there has been a long term decline in the proportion of women to men in the country's population. According to the 1901 census there were 972 females per 1000 males while in 1981 there were 935 females per 1000 males. The recent rise in the latest census is restricted to certain regions and does not seem to project a reversal of the earlier trend. (Ilina Sen, 1986) Although there are regional variations, studies have now established that this unusual sex radio is due to higher female death rates which are a result of unequal access to food and health care within the household. (12)

Numerous studies have by now established that son-preference is not linked to religion but has a close correlation with labour force participation of women. The practise of dowry for instance has spread in the last 30 years in India to entire communities and castes who had no tradition of this form of marriage payment. Even in the predominantly Muslim countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the practise of dowry has increased and both countries have a Dowry Prohibition Law. (13) While labour participation is an important variable, the increase in dowry practises do not always relate to the withdrawal of women from work outside the home. 'Cost-benefit ratio' analysis (i.e. dowry as a form of compensation for the addition of a non-productive member and bride price as compensation for the loss of a productive member) is not only narrowly economistic, but cannot account for the fact that large numbers of women have been earning their own dowries and continue to work after their marriage . (14)

The increase in dowry has to be seen in the context of rising consumerism (commodities and bank loans openly for dowry), the competition to get men with jobs in the organised sector (a new form of hypergamy), which is also a form by which certain men are accumulating seed capital to set up new businesses or investments. There have been quite a few cases of men marrying two or three times, each time collecting a dowry and murdering the wife.

While further research has to be done in this area, it is also important to look at what kind of ideological belief system legitimises these practices and its violent effects in dowry murders. If we are not to fall into the biological trap of seeing inherent evil in these acts of violence, then it is necessary to look not only at the material basis but also the legitimising belief systems which sanction such practices. The recent incidents of sati, where large crowds gathered to watch a woman being burned, and the subsequent defence of this in the vernacular press and by sections of the intelligentsia can only be understood by examining the ideological systems which legitimise this. Specific cultural practices can acquire a more widely embracing religious sanction and in a context of pre-existing son preference, religious fundamentalists could find support for asserting 'traditional' roles for women. It is significant that Hindu fundamentalists have not condemned the burning of Hindu brides though they have been vociferous over the issues of Muslim women's rights !

The challenges to patriarchal structures of authority, arising from the demands of the capitalist labour market and as a result of the confrontations by the women's movement, leads to attempts to reassert control and reimpose systems of domination. It is in this context that religious fundamentalism with its emphasis on circumscribed roles for women can find ready support. However, the significance of man-woman relations in understanding the emergence of fundamentalism also lie in the broader process of identity formation in the context of socio-economic changes.

Communal identity and control over women

In this section, some tentative links between notions of masculinity / feminity and the construction of communal identities are explored. This is an area which needs a lot of research as well as conceptual reflection since there is always the danger of a crude psychological reductionism. In this paper it is only possible to make some connections which would have to be developed much further.

Communal identities do not exist as fixed primordial essences but as we have seen emerge in particular socio-economic contexts and are created identities, which attempts to homogenise other differences within the community. In this process of identity creation women figure in crucial ways at a symbolic level they become symbols of culture and tradition, i.e. identity markers while at the material level their particularised feminine identity forms the complementary role to enhancing a particularised masculine identity.

The crux of the fundamentalist rhetoric - a call for a return to culture and tradition, is almost always a call first addressed to women. When western dress is rejected, no one demands that men stop wearing suits and ties. Once again the sex-selectivity of fundamentalism becomes obvious as women who "cut their hair, speak English, wear national dress without the chador..." are attacked for being western while "men do all these without their national or muslim identity being challenged. "(Farida Shaheed, 1985) Women are neither acknowleged nor allowed to be producers of theology, although they are the main practitioners of religion and hence the reproducers of culture and tradition.

`The culture and tradition that is resurrected is, of course, a particular one. Along with the myth of a "Golden Age" anoter common feature of fundamentalism seems to be the stress on a martial tradition. The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh from its inception built its ideological and organisation structure around the "akhara" (traditional gymnasium) with "lathi" (a five foot stick used as a weapon) training by former army officiers, uniforms and strict military discipline. This "kshatriya (warrior) model which combined elements of militancy, vigour, and domination, was called upon to overcome the percieved cowardice of Hindus." (Walter K. Andreson & Shirdhar Damle, 1987) In May 1922, the Dehra Dun branch of the Hindu Mahasabha made a statement of warning :

> "The Hindu race once so great and glorious is truly speaking nobody's child now. The result is that it is usually the Hindus who fall an easy prey to the agression of those more unitided and virile" (Anderson & Damle, pg. 28, 1987)

This emphasis on virility occurs as a constant theme for instance in the reminicences of older RSS members who attributed the popularity of the paramilitary training among young middle class Hindu men in Nagpur to the fact that it proved that these young men were equal in manliness to the British soldier. Its ultimate expression is conveyed by the statement made by Gopal Godse, the brother of Nathuram Godse, an ex-RSS memeber who assasinated Gandhi :

> "Our motive was not to achieve control of the government ;... we were simply trying to rid the nation of someone who had done and was doing great harm to it. He had consitently insulted the Hindu nation and had weakedened it by his doctrine of ahimsa. On his many fasts, he always attached all sorts of pro-Muslim conditions... He never did anything about the Muslim fanatics. We wanted to show the Indians that there were Indians who would not suffer humiliation-that there were still men left among the Hindus." (Anderson & Damle, pg 51, 1987) (Emphasis mine)

An area that needs further investigation is how the "traditions" that were resurrected by different groups -social reformers, cultural critics and fundamentalists -during the anti colonial struggle in India, were in many ways based on core values of colonial ideology. Colonial ideology itself was based on changes in man-woman relations and cultural models in Britain an its incorporation into oppositional nationalist ideology in India,simultaneously created a model of "hypermasculinity" for men. ' (Ashish Nandy, 1987)

In the present period one can see a similar emphasis on the military model amongst fundamentalist groups. In Punjab, for instance the Sikh fundamentalists have drawn on the Jat culture and the warrior legacy of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh rather than the tradition of the first and earlier Gurus who emphasised peace and reflection.
The same process of selectivity occurs in the choice of the female symbol. The ideal of "Indian womanhood" -Sita- as the passive, chaste, faithful wife who worships her husband, is based not only on a choice between other known female figures like Draupadi or Radha, but is also a choice of a popular version of the epic Ramayana written by Valmiki and Tulsidas as against other versions which show Sita as a more assertive person. (Romila Thapar, 1985, 1987, 1988.) (48)
The reiteration of the "pati-parameshwar" (husband as god) model through the yearly performances of the Ramayana , in films and television has a clear function in ensuring that women had to be confined within the household and that "tradition "sanctioned violence to ensure that women remained within these boundaries. It is this alternative tradition, especially amongst the adivasis (tribals) where women were independant and sexually uninhibited.

These symbolic representations of masulinity and feminity are crucial to the process of identity creation. Communal consciousness arises as we have seen in situations of insecurity and fear of the loss of social or economic status. Notions of "izzat" (honour) and "biradari" (brotherhood) are the main elements which link a family's honour with the conduct of women. A family's public position is lost if the honour of a family's woman is lost. These notions get generalised to the community having total control over their "own women" . Communal propaganda is full of the fall from greatness in the past, challenge of foreign domination today, the need to prove strenght, courage and manliness. What better way to prove manliness than by showing that your women are under your control. If the community is losing its economic status, its social status, at least it still has one form of property wihtin its reach. The fact that women are raped during communal riots is an expression of the same principle. Rape of the other man's woman is a way to humilate him and show access to his property. Many riots are sparked off by alleged acts of harrassment of women of one community by men of the other community. Threats to or the loss of their women, in a situation of economic competitveness, is seen as a direct threat to manhood. In the Jabalpur riots of 1961 for instance, the cause of the riot was the economic competition between a local Muslim bidi (cigarette) magnate and his Hindu competitors, but what sparked off the riot was the fact that the son of the muslim owner had eloped with a Hindu girl. (Asghar Ali Engineer, 1984).

Communal identity and control over women

The imagery of communal riots is full of sexual stereotypes.

> "They captured beautiful Hindu women, forcibly converted them and used them as temporary partners of life. Hindu women were threatened, molested and

> compelled to run half naked for shelter to forests... " (Bipan Chandra, pg. 281, 1984).

In the commual image, a Muslim was/is a man of low morals and uncontrolled lust, who was/is never ready to seduce, abduct, and assault hindu women. The Hindus were seen as mild, docile and emasculated. These stereotypes have often been transfered to other communities without much change. The same stereotype as the Muslim now exists for the Sikh, or the adivasi or the dalits. During the caste riots in Ahmedabad in 1981, it was said -

> "... the harijans do not really want reservations, they want our women. Once they could only come as far as our toilets. Then we felt sorry for them and let them come into our homes. But now they want our women. We must beat them and teach them a lesson." (Rehana Jhabvala, pg. 12 1981)

The speeches of communalists are similary peppered with references to the "violation of our sisters and mothers" and exhortations to take revenge and prove that the men of that particular community are still men. Whether it is an attempt to reassert traditionnal authority, or to create a certain identity in the context of economic dislocation, the symbolism of the community gets tied closely with a particular meaning of femininity and masculinity. This process of identity construction results in a series of measures which leads to increasing patriarchal control over women.

We have already discussed the trends towards controlling women's labour. This process can also have implications for women's right to birth control. The rhetoric of communalism is full of the increase in numbers of the other community, the excessive breeding of the muslims, etc. For instance, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has published a pamphlet which argues that due to polygamy, by the year 2000, Muslims will outnumber hindus. In fact, studies reveal that the fertility rate of muslims has been declining and anyway has no relation to polygamy. It is not too far fetched to imagine that population policy, in a context of state - supported fundamentalism, could be directed not just on a class basis, as it has been so far, but also on a community basis like other countries in South-East Asia. On the other hand, the fears of a minority community can mean additional pressure to produce more and more children. In either case, women increasingly loose control over their own bodies.

Control over woman and the exercise of patriarchal autrhority has to be differentiated across classes as well as decomposed to allow for the variations that emerge if the control is over women's labour, or sexuality or fertility. Given these differences , however, in souht Asia today, this control is exercised by *particular men* (usually on the basis of kinship relations) i.e. it is fathers, brothers, maternal uncle or husbands who have rights over their daughters, sistiers , nieces and wives. *What is signigficant about state sponsored religious fundamentalism is that it not only gives further legitimacy to this control but, more importantly, shifts the right of control to all men.*

The legitimacy given by the state to follow and enforce a particular interpretation of a religion means that any man on the street can stop any woman who does not conform to the "traditional" and "proper" role assigned to her. This can be seen clearly in the countries where the State is declared a mono religious state. In Iran, the "Hezbolahis" (members of the party of God) attack women on the streets with guns or knives if they are not wearing the chador. (Haleh Afshar, 1985) In a multreligious context, this right would extend to all men of that community. Recent press reports from Punjab mention that in the campaign by the extremists against liquor, meat and tobacco shops, women who wear saris, pluck their eyebrows and put on lipstick will face dire consequences"! (15) There were reports of such control by Muslim fundamentalists when they shaved the head of Shabana of Perunthura and Zulaikha Bibi from Kerala who was given 101 lashes as punishment for the violation of muslim personal law. (Imrana Qadeer, 1988) At the moment such incidents are few in South Asia but continued state sponsorship of fundamentalism would intensify and sanction such acts of violence.

Given the context and background sketched above, the emergence of state supported religious fundamentalism clearly has very serious implications for women. The contradictory tendencies at the level of government policies for women and development with the aim of drawing women into the labour market, and the attempts through legislation to restrict womens access to the public world are part of one process by which the interests of patriarchy and capital are ensured. Religious fundamentalism as a state ideology thus provides the possibility of a coincidence of interests between patriachy and the demands of the capitalist economy. This remains of course an uneasy coincidence but it would be a mistake to continue seeing the logic of the market as necessarily leading to a liberal ideology of womens work. An ideology of restriction even though large numbers of women are being drawn into work outside the home and therefore competing with men, can be a viable ideology of legitimation.

There are however, other countervailing tendencies within South Asia which could reverse these trends. One of these are the growing social movements which are challenging and questioning the overall paths of development as well as specific issues of patriarchal control.

In India, for instance, feminists from the women's movement and the democratic rights movements have entered the arena of general politics. Women's groups have been one of the first to condemn communalism, have been actively involved in supporting victims of communal violence, and held special investigations into the situation of women during communal clashes. Most significantly, feminists have taken initiatives in supporting proposals for political solutions for instance in Punjab and are engaged in a national discussion on the dangers of rising fundamentalism.(16) At present, there is a debate on the issues of the demand for a uniform civil code. While all sections of the movement agree in principle to the demand for a uniform civil code, there are differences on strategies and implications, since this demand has also been put forward by Hindu communal groups, and as a result creates fear in the minds of minority groups. Some sections of the movement support a strategy of reform within seperate personal laws while others have pushed for a uniform civil code.

In Pakistan, women groups have been fighting on the terrain of religion itself and have argued for improving the conditions for women within the Islamic structure.

In Bangladesh, there are strong representations being made by minority groups and women's groups against the proposed bill to make Islam the State religion.

These developments have led womens groups to directly confront the ruling parties in their countries. This is a significant development since inspite of militant struggles and anti-government and anti-patriarchal slogans, most of the campaigns were directed towards changes in the laws and often demanded more intervention by state authorities in implementing these laws. In practice, the movement has operated with the assumption of a liberal state. Today, it is clear that even demands for legal changes are not going to be granted easily. This implies that womens groups will have to develop a fuller understanding of the State and State ideologies and evolve strategies which go beyond reflex actions. It would mean tackling the wider questions, not just of the relationship between patriarchal control and the socio-economic changes in the region, but also the problematic issue of cultural identity creation. Although the present constitution of communal identities is repressive for women, there are positive elements which lie behind the need for cultural identity in the present context. This has to do with the broader process of the failure of the creation of a national identity in post colonial states as well as the restrictions in a identity based on caste, community or the family, especially for women.

In the discussions on what constitutes the a basis for an alternative cultural identity, feminists in South Asia have taken different stands. Some have argued for religious, or on the basis of tactical reasons to reach out to the vast majority of women who are believers. (Gabrielle Dietrich, 1986) Another view is to draw on the anti-brahmanical culture of the dalits and adivasis in India, to build an oppositional culture. All this requires a reassessment from a feminist perspective, of what has been the content of nationalism and the process by which each "nation state" was constituted in the region, the limitations of the present definition of secularism, the problems in trying to seperate religion from culture and finally whether the womens movement, given its internal differentiation, can project an alternative culture for women in each country.

While these are crucial questions for future strategising, at a practical level a significant development in the last few years is the linkage and exchange between feminists in South Asia. These exchanges have had a tremendous emotional impact as women shared their common problems even as their governments prepared for war against each other. This process of the sharing of common experiental situation, the questioning of "national" borders and restrictions on travel and visits and the identification of similar issues and struggles is creating the basis for the emergence of a regional perspective. (17) Such a perspective is crucial since the link between the state and religious fundamentalism in each country is closely tied to the political dynamics of the South Asian region as a whole. The strengthening of such initiatives provides hope for a process of democratisation and a redefinition of man-woman relations within the region.

Footnotes:

1. Reports from Bangladesh reveal a number of cases where women considered deviant, or wilful by ex-husbands or lovers, have had acid thrown on their faces. (Women for Women, 1986)

2. "Bindis" are dots of coloured powder put on the forehead. Originally these were fertility symbols or caste marks but now are used for cosmetic decoration by women of all religious communities. Although there is no evidence to prove that this is a specifically hindu custom, in Bangladesh it is being seen as such. Similarly in newspaper in Pakistan there are regular discussions on whether the "sari" (a 5 to 6 yard cloth worn by women, draped in different ways) is a "Hindu" dress even though it is worn by women all over South Asia, including Sinhalese women in Sri Lanka.

3. There is an ongoing debate on the relation of women and the state. Some have held the view that the state does not directly play a role in womens subordination, but does so indirectly through supporting a specific form of the household ie. the male breadwinner and dependent housewife model. (M. McIntosh 1978) The state is also seen as projecting an ideology which justifies this structure. Recent studies of the Scandinavian countries have emphasized that as a result of welfare policies, women today have shifted from a dependence on individual men (private dependence) to direct dependence on the state (public services). These discussions have pointed out the intended as well as unintended consequences of public policies on womens position, thus showing the absurdity of the private/public dicotomy. (A.S. Showstack Sasson, 1987) While such work on analysis of government policies is valuable , we still do not have a conceptualisation of the household as a constitutive structure of the state. Such a conceptualisation would have significant implications for class analysis and the characterisation of the state.

4. Quoted in Tariq Ali (1983) See also articles by Babar Ali (1986)

5. The term "communal" is used here with the connotations it has accquired in South Asia rather than the collectivist and positive meaning it has in the West.

6. Reports by the Peoples Union of Democratic Rights / Peoples Union for Civil Liberties, 1984

7. Apart from the historical evidence which shows that sati was restricted to certain regions and caste groupings, descriptions of the Sati Sthal in Deorala and the daily ritual show the incorporation of modernised songs from the films and electoral slogans, none of which have anything to do with "tradition" let alone Rajput traditions. (Romila Thapar 1988, Madhu Kishwar & Ruth Vanita (1987).

8. Interview on BBC Asian Programme , May 1st, 1988. The function of communal mythology is to deprive " the object of which it speaks of all History
"... myth is speech stolen and restored... myth is constiuted by the loss of the historical quality of things : in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. ("Roland Barthes pg.131, 1979). Communal mythology based on religious fundamentalism makes its version of the past and present the most natural and obvious order of things.
Recently a number of studies have begun to explore the area of communal consciousness as well as the discourse on communalism. A lot more work needs to be done on the dimensions of sexuality and man-woman relations as elements central to the constitution of these identities.

9. These observations are based on data collected by the author form electronic factories in Okhla Industrial Estate, Delhi, and forms part of her Ph.D. research on the changing structure of women's employment in India.

10. It is only in the last few years that research on women in peasant and working class movements is being published and gives a picture of rich and militant womens struggles.

11. This is based on a partial involvement with the case while working as a volunteer in Saheli- a womens resource centre, New Delhi. A brief report can be found in Manushi, Jan-Feb, 1983.

12. Numerous studies have documented the sex bias in allocation of food and access to health care. See (Barbara Miller, 1981, A . Sen & S.Sengrupta 1983, Bina Agarwal, 1985)

13. In Pakistan, there have been modifications in the practice of "haq-mehr" (the obligation of the husband to gift a certain amount of money to the wife, which is mutually agreed and recorded in the marriage contract). In tribal areas, the customary bride price is now called the mehr while in urban areas, marriage payments take the form of dowry. The "haq-mehr" has been reduced to a paper formality. The formulations in the modern marriage license also distorts the principle of economic independence inherent in the "haq-mehr" by stating the marriage of (the bride) in exchange for X amount of haq-mehr to (the groom) has been agreed upon." (Farida Shaheed, 1985) . In Bangladesh too, studies have shown the shift from "pon" (bride price) which was restricted to richer farmers, to the widespread practise of dowry in rural areas. (Sultana Alam 1985). in a survey of violence against women in Bangladesh, in 1983-84, 54% of the murders in rurral areas were due to dowry demands. In Pabna district in 1981-82, 182 women killed themselves due to domestic fights or the failure of parents to give dowry.

14. A narrow economistic approach excludes house work plus child bearing and rearing from the category of 'productive' work. Maria Mies (1986) . Dowry also cannot be seen as a form of pre-mortem inheritance since it is fixed in relation to the marriage market and not as a fixed share of the estate. In addition it is wealth that accompanies the women and is paid to the husbands family not to the bride herself. (Ursula Sharma, 1984). It is interesting that the term used for this kind of marriage transaction in Bangladesh is "daabi" which means the demand systems. This demand is a condtion of marriage and can continue after the marriage. (R. Ahmed & M. Naher, 1986).

15. This report was printed in the Illustrated Weekly , Feb.,1987.

16. Manushi for instance visited Sant Longowal in the Punjab and arranged meetings in support of the accord in 1986.

17. A numer of workshops with South Asian women have been held in the last few years. 30 women spent a whole month in Koitta, a village near Dacca, Bangladesh in March 1986, debating and discussing issues of women and development. A number of collaborative projects as well as strong friendships emerged as a result of these interactions. Report PAWF/FAO is forthcoming in 1988.

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