

over other women and men. Such complexities become invisible when the term 'oppression' is used to describe the condition of women as a group."<sup>30</sup>

Lerner feels that the use of "subordination of women" has distinct advantages. "Subordination does not have the connotation of evil intent on the part of the dominant; it allows for the possibility of collusion between him and the subordinate. It includes the possibility of voluntary acceptance of subordinate status in exchange for protection and privilege, a condition which characterises so much of the historical experience of women. I will use the term 'paternalistic dominance' for this relation. 'Subordination' encompasses other relations in addition to 'paternalistic dominance' and has the additional advantages over 'oppression' of being neutral as to the causes of subordination. The complex sex/gender relations of men and women over five millennia cannot be ascribed to a simple cause — the greed for power of men. It is therefore better to use fairly value-free terms in order to enable us to describe the various and varied sex/gender relations, which were constructed by both men and women in different times and different places."<sup>31</sup>

The term **deprivation** is sometimes used to express women's situation but it is inappropriate because it hides the existence of power relations. Deprivation is the observed absence of prerogatives and privileges. It focuses attention on that which is denied, not on those who do the denying. Deprivation can be caused by a single individual, groups of people, institutions, natural conditions and disasters, ill health and many other causes.

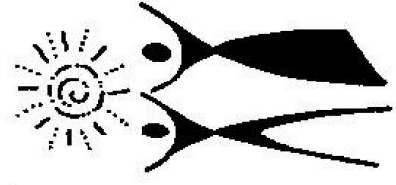
Since women's situation varies from society to society and at different times in history, one can use different terms to suit the situation one is describing.

## Gender and Development

**Why has gender become so important in development issues and debates?**

Over the last 10-15 years gender and development has indeed been discussed a great deal. There have been scores of conferences, trainings and workshops on the subject. Women's, or gender, concerns were brought to bear on development issues when it started becoming clear that planned development efforts, which were meant to improve the lives of whole communities, were either not helping women, or were actually harming them in many ways. Around the end of the 1960s and early 1970s (mainly) women researchers in different parts of the world started pointing to the neglect of women in development planning. Similar things had been observed earlier about the lack of participation and further marginalisation of the poor in this process. Planners assumed that development programmes would automatically benefit all members of communities, but this assumption was found to be invalid almost everywhere. In the 1950s when the newly independent countries began planned development, their model was the west. It was thought that industrialisation and modern agriculture would usher in growth and development, and the focus was on industrialists, landowners, rich farmers and entrepreneurs. Governments of developing countries were "betting on the strong", assuming that the benefits of development would "trickle down" to the poor majorities, and gradually whole communities would prosper. Little attention was paid to the income-poor and to women. Women's contribution to the household and to the economy was neither recognised nor valued.

During the First United Nations' Decade, 1960-1970, it became clear that the benefits of development were not reaching the poor majority. There was evidence of underemployment, food shortages



and further polarisation between the rich and the poor. As a result of these findings and the pressure from below, the goals of development and the means for their achievement were re-examined during the Second Development Decade, 1970-80. In countries like India and Bangladesh, NGOs working in rural areas pointed out the lack of participation by the poor and women in development programmes. This is when concepts like "people's participation", a "bottom-up approach", "redistribution with growth" and so on were debated, and the "basic-needs approach", accompanied by anti-poverty programmes, introduced.

In much the same way, it was discovered that even when a household benefits from development programmes, it does not follow that women in the household will benefit equally or benefit at all. Studies done from a feminist perspective — i.e., one which is guided by women's interests and concerns and aims to transform hierarchical gender relations and make them equal — in different parts of the world — provided data and evidence to show that gender-blind development plans had generally ignored women, their perspectives, needs and interests. This neglect meant that existing inequalities between women and men were not addressed, and second, women's action and potential contribution to and participation in the development process was ignored. Consequently, women were further marginalised and disempowered.

It was there for all to see that women were not given access to educational and training opportunities, technology did not liberate them from drudgery, and prejudice and misconceptions persisted.

**C**ould you please give some examples to explain these points.

Almost everywhere in the world women have been farmers and producers of food. Despite this, our planners, decision-makers and communicators have persistently refused to recognise their contribution. The very language of these gentlemen (and

ladies) betrays their discriminatory perceptions. Thus while referring to farmers they invariably use masculine pronouns like "men" and "he".

### *Development programmes leading to marginalization of women*

The result of these blinkers vis-à-vis women was, and still is, that in planning for agriculture and rural development, women have been neglected and further marginalised. Most training, information and credit for agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry have been given to male farmers, in spite of the major contribution of women to these activities. Extension programmes have been run almost exclusively by men, for men. By contrast income generating activities for women have remained conventional: sewing, embroidery, *papad* and pickle making, which have generated little income but many myths about what is feminine and masculine.

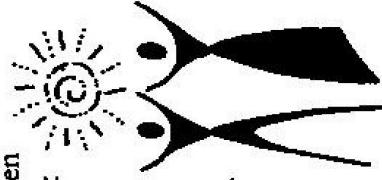
Agricultural development has normally and almost entirely been "manned" by men, right from decision-making to implementation. For example the massive and expensive Training and Visit projects for agriculture extension in India, planned and funded by the World Bank in the 1980s, totally ignored or bypassed women. Similarly, a report on media support for big reforestation programmes in Nepal did not mention women even once. Women have not even been involved in projects related to reforestation, water supply, grain storage or other activities which are managed primarily by, and are of critical concern to them.

What is more, we find that most technology has been given to and is controlled by men, while women continue to do the more tedious, repetitive and back-breaking tasks. Commercialisation of agriculture has led to greater control of cash and family resources by men, even when, often, women do the work.

In the Eighties a review of eleven major rural development projects in Nepal showed that the productive roles of women were completely ignored because of distorted concepts of "housewife",

“head of household”, and “economic” activity. In most of these projects, new farming technologies and machinery were made available only to men and applied only to male tasks, such as ploughing. When mechanisation was introduced for a female task such as husking or milling, it was transformed into men’s work. This happened with the introduction of mechanised milling for high yielding rice varieties in Indonesia and Bangladesh. As a result, in one stroke large numbers of women were deprived of whatever little they were earning earlier.

Women have also been excluded from owning or controlling land, the most crucial productive resource in agricultural economies. An FAO study has pointed out that traditional systems of land tenure often allowed women to grow food for themselves, their children and extended families, without recourse to formal land ownership. Some land reform programmes, however, have given titles to land to individual men with the result that women may no longer have access to or control over it. At the same time the new owner may decide to sell rather than cultivate the land, taking it out of use for producing food for local consumption.



Because land deeds are made out in the names of men they become the legal heads of household. As such it is only they who are entitled to receive loans, participate in government schemes, become members of co-operatives, etc. This is so even in places like the hills of UP in India where most agricultural work is done by women because of male migration to the cities. It is the same story when it comes to training.

An analysis of many irrigation resettlement schemes like the Mahaveli Scheme in Sri Lanka, the Muda Scheme in Malaysia, and the Mwea Scheme in Kenya shows that they were planned with a nuclear family (a male head and a female housewife-helper) in mind, ignoring existing customary practices which gave women relative autonomy as producers in these communities.

Feminist researchers have pointed out that in the Mahaveli Scheme in Sri Lanka married women were not entitled to plots of land, and because the family was asked to name only one heir, this was usually the son. Thus, contrary to Sinhala customary law and practice of bilateral inheritance whereby both sons and daughters have a right to the family paddy land, and where married women too have independent and unalienable land ownership rights, in the scheme villages, wives were considered to be dependants. Again, because they were not given land titles, women had little access to agricultural extension information, institutional credit and co-operative membership. Thus women were marginalised and disempowered in new ways.

Extension trainings too, it has been found, neglected women, and cultural attitudes further discourage contact between women and male extension agents. For example, in one area of north-west Bangladesh, women traditionally selected seeds for planting. When a new variety of high yielding wheat was introduced the results were disappointing; it was found that women were choosing wrong seeds because the extension programme had been directed only at men.

Thus the experience of different parts of the world shows that women have been pushed out of mainstream agriculture in the name of “development”. Earlier, men and women were equal partners in agriculture. Their knowledge, contribution, and participation in decision-making were more or less the same. Gradually, male farmers were singled out for attention by male “developers”; they got machines to lighten their burden and to increase efficiency; they were made members of co-operatives and development committees. Cash-crops delivered cash into the hands of men. Commercialisation of agriculture also marginalised women because markets, banks and trading centres are “public” spaces and thus beyond the reach of most women.

Other areas of economic activity provided similar insights. For example, in India it has been found that as a result of



mechanisation and modernisation women lost their jobs in the textile industry where they had been employed in large numbers. This economic marginalization has led to women's social marginalization and to a lowering of their status. This may be one reason why, for example, dowry, and female infanticide and foeticide in India have spread to areas and communities in which they did not exist earlier. This may also be one of the main reasons for the continuing decline in the female-male ratio in South Asia. Economic redundancy seems to have lowered the chances of women's survival.

## **How would you characterise such a development paradigm from a feminist perspective ?**

Many socialist feminist researchers have gathered enough evidence to show that monetisation and the commercialisation of production have led to the marginalization of women and the poor. Capital accumulation makes it possible for some people to accumulate more and more even as others lose control over land and other resources. The only thing they control is their labour power, but the value of their labour is not determined by them. In fact, Engels has said quite categorically that it was private property that led to the creation of class and gender hierarchies. According to him the need to control women came along with the emergence of private property. Male control over women's reproduction and sexuality made for the world historic defeat of the mother right. Further, the position of bourgeois women is much worse than that of working class women because bourgeois women themselves are property, they are merely the carriers and producers of heirs.

Economists Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze came to similar conclusions from their research on Female Male Ratios (FMR) in India.<sup>32</sup> They show, first, how since 1901 the FMR for the whole of India has been going down systematically. Second, they show

that generally figures are higher among poor, illiterate working classes and castes.

In 1901 lower caste charvats in UP had an FMR of 986 compared with 937 for the state population as a whole. By 1981 the FMR was more or less the same among Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other castes. This is because the SCs and STs of UP are today more like the 'higher' castes, which means they have also begun to practice the patriarchal neglect of women thereby reducing their chances of survival. In other words these figures prove that the patriarchal norms of higher castes are spreading to others.

This process, Sen and Drèze say, is particularly strong when the disadvantaged castes experience upward economic mobility. It is quite shocking and bewildering to be told by them, that higher levels of poverty tend to go with higher FMRs. It is in fact, plausible that the partnership aspect of gender relations is stronger in poorer households, where survival depends on effective co-operation, than among privileged households where women tend to have a more dependent and symbolic position.

Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, a German feminist scholar presents a similar hypothesis. She writes that the appalling situation of the majority of Third World women is not a remnant of archaic systems of patriarchy, or a sign of backwardness and underdevelopment; on the contrary, it is a product of modern development. According to her, the housewife as we know her today, emerged in the First World during the 19th century. She is the result of a protracted historical process comparable with and closely related to that of proletarianization. Bennholdt-Thomsen terms this process 'domestication' or 'housewifisation' and she goes on to say that as soon as the modern money and commodity economy gains hold, women find themselves relegated to the unpaid or lowest paid spheres of work. In particular, women cease to be able to live autonomously with their children in a world which runs on the money to which they have such restricted access. Growing