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The State, Religious Fundamentalism and Violence against Women: Trends in South Asia

'Beyond the Decade' somehow seems to conjure up an image of a period of progress, the assessment of which provides lessons for future progress. The picture, however, looks quite different if we look at what is happening to women in the South Asian context today. One gets an uncanny feeling of time moving backwards, of the wheels of history throwing us back into medievalism. Along with increasing evidence of violence against women - dowry deaths, acid throwing, rape etc, there have also been significant attempts by the State in these countries to withdraw legal and political rights which earlier generations of South Asian women had struggled for and won.

- In 1986 the Indian Parliament passed a bill called the Muslim Women's Protection of the right of Divorce, which withdrew a right from muslim women to appeal for maintainence under a special provision in the Criminal Procedure Code. This bill was the culmination of a period of mass demonstrations, strikes and riots between hindus and muslims all over the country over a Supreme Court judgement to grant a 73 year old woman, Shah Bano, the paltry sum of Rs 179 per month as maintenance from her husband. A simple issue of women's rights turned into a major communal issue resulting in a withdrawal of rights for muslim women.

  In Pakistan the Hadood Ordinance of 1979 sanctioned flogging for adultery and rape, a Law of Evidence reduced a woman's evidence to half that of a man, and a proposed Shariat Bill now seeks to deprive women of most political and social rights including their participation in politics.

  In Bangladesh, while there have not been specific changes in the law, attempts are being made to assert 'Islamic' codes of dress and conduct for women. Women announcers on television were told to cover their heads and not wear 'bindis' on their foreheads.

This process of the reversal in the status of women, the withdrawal of rights won through the efforts and struggles of earlier generations of women, all in the name of preserving the traditions and fundamental tenets of religion are not specific to South Asia alone. Religious fundamentalist movements have emerged in the most developed countries, thus belying any link of this phenomenon with backwardness and underdevelopment. In fact many of these use the most sophisticated developments in modern communications. In the United States the Moral Majority with close links to 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, a cooked dinner and a cheerful and compliant wife. And an array of electronic evangelists fill the air waves with relentless exhortations attributing all of America's problems to the Soviet Union or the sins of recent movements for racial, social and sexual emancipation.'

Fundamentalist forces , often with state support, have emerged in Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, and Malaysia, with Iran offering the best example of

Given this path of development, the continous aggravation of inequalities of wealth and income distribution and the growth of regional disparities, have resulted in various forms of oppositional movements for land rights, higher wages, regional autonomy and implementation of legal rights. Since the 1960's there has been a tremendous increase in class, communal, caste and sexual violence..

Faced with a crisis of legitimacy, the State in all these countries, has sought to create an ideological unity through sponsoring the growth 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 Islam -based political parties, whose objective is to make Bangladesh into an Islamic state. In India the carnage in Delhi in November 1985, and the governments support to fundamentalist muslim and hindu forces have shattered the illusions of the secular character of the state, which is being increasingly identified with majority hindu fundamentalism.

There are differences in the specific factors necessitating the projection of this ideological unity. In Pakistan, the nationality question is the most important. The only way by which Punjabi domination in the economy, bureaucracy and military can be preserved and the nation held together is by stressing that '...Pakistan was created by muslims for muslims and that we are all Pakistanis, mainly because we are all muslims...(Babar Ali,1986)General Zia himself stated clearly that without Islam, Pakistan would collapse like a house of cards.(T.Ali 1983). 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 dependence for foreign aid on the oil-rich Middle East, and the cooption of right wing fundamentalist forces in the ruling party are factors pushing for the Islamisation of Bangladesh.(Emajuddin Ahamed,1983).

In India the situation is more complex. The emergence of state sponsored religious fundamentalism has to be seen in the broader context of communalism. Communalism has been defined as the 'belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have,as a result, common social, political and economic interests.'(B.Chandra 1984).Analysis has shown that this assumption of a homogenous identity ignores the real divisions of caste and class and that in fact, a 'communal identity' has no organic basis but has to be created. Secondly, while communalism does not always include revivalism, in the present context in India religious fundamentalism is an essential component of communalism.Religion is notthe cause of communalism, it is 'only its vehicle' significantly for purely political purposes.

While in the decade between 1950- 1960 communal incidents were few, since the 1960's there has been a tremendous increase in communalism of all kinds - hindu, sikh,and muslim. A report of the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that there were 6258 incidents in 1977, 4182 in 1981 and 3690 in 1982 and the percentage of violent incidents had increased from 11.6% in 1977 to 17.6% in 1982.These incidents occurred mainly in urban areas, though recently, communal violence has spread to other areas as well.

Analysis of these incidents have shown that they were systematically planned with selective targets and were a disguised form of economic competition between sections of 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.The particular pattern of Indian industrialisation has led to certain sections of the population living off rentier and trading profits. Most of the members of this section come from the 'intermediate' or backward castes which form the hindu majority.(A.Vanaik,1985).It is these sections along with the newly emerging rural kulaks who are the bastions of reactionary ideologies. In fact, today, even caste conflicts get converted into communal clashes as seen in Maharashtra, Gujarat, U.P. and Haryana.(S.Patel,1985)

Over the years there has been the consolidation of hindu sentiments with communal organisations holding conferences and going on all India pilgrimages carrying holy water from the Ganges. Organisations like the Hindu Manch, Vishwa Hindu Parishad,Hindu Ekta Manch, along with the older RSS have emerged to create a sense of a homogeneous hindu identity.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 male dominated and aggressive about a hindu woman's place in society.

What is significant about this phase of communalism is the direct role of the state in supporting religious fundamentalism and more specifically hindu fundamentalist forces. This is in part an attempt to win the hindu vote for the ruling party but the 'numbers game ' simply imples playing off one communalism against another. In a sense this is why, inspite of the shift in the ruling party's strategy to woo the 'hindu vote' in recent years, the Muslim Women's Bill was pushed through in response to muslim fu ndamentalists given the poor showing in the recent local elections. However there seem to be deeper factors at work and have to do with the attempt to forge a 'national 'identity after the collapse of anti-colonial nationalism.

> "The second attraction of Hindu nationalism is the prospect it holds for the establishement of a new hegemonizing ideology.....Hindu chauvinism, disguised as nationalism, offers more than an expression of the cultural/ideological yearnings of the newly aggressive intermediate castes."
>
> (A.Vanaik 1985)

An essential element of this phase of communalism then is state sponsorship of religious fundamentalism as part of communal politics. This is occurring in the context of a growing authoritarian state structure. Over the years, there has been growing investment in the police, para-military forces and the army, along with the passing of laws like the National Security Ordinance etc which give wide powers to the police and the State.

State sponsored religious fundamentalism has very disturbing and specific implications for women. Feminists in the 'third world' have already shown that general issues are women's issues. The struggle against certain specific laws has to be linked with the issues of an increasingly authoritarian state and religious fundamentalism as a state ideology..

Communalism, Religious Fundamentalism and Women

The terms fundamentalism, revivalism, obscurantism,are often used interchangeably and ly.Commenting on the tendency to club together

heterogenous phenomena under the rubric of 'fundamentalism' Oliver 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 practice of the Shariat, which is the fundamentalism of the 'ulama; ..(O.Roy 1985)

Fundamentalism is "the return to..., the rereading, the quest for origins."This rereading, return to the origin can take many different forms and therefore it is not in itself a political position.A purely textual definition would equate the proponents of liberation theology in Latin America,who returned to the original christian communities of Christ, with the right-wing teleevangelists like Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts in the United States.Religious revivalism has played a revolutionary anti-imperialist role in the national movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, and has also formed the basis of millenarian movements and syncretic cults of working people -'the repressed in history'(D.Simeon,1986).Given the destruction of the cultural autonomy of the colonized, religion, gives the oppressed and dominated people a sense of self respect and confidence.

Another problem in understanding this phenomena is that movements as well as individuals change in content and positions.Veer Sarvarkar, the ideologue of 'Hindutva' and leader of the communal Hindu Mahasabha, whose speeches in the 1920's echoed Hitler's call for a militarised hindu race, was an advocate of hindu - muslim unity and a non - communal anti- imperialist in 1909. In the same way, the 'betrayal' of the Iranian revolution cannot be simply explained by positing a conspiracy theory.The millions of Iranian women who marched in 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 economic and social policies of the Shah.(Azar Tabari & Nahid Yeganeh 1982).Similarly, attempts by disadvantaged groups to rise in ritual status by strict adherence to 'traditon' or the Shariat are not seen by them as a return to medievalism but in fact as symbols of achievment.(G.Pandey, 1983)

Fundamentalism 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 constituting the support base of this phenomenon and what exactly is being revived.

One feature of fundamentalism is its selectivity in choosing what is the true or original teaching.For example, classical muslim law was codified several hundered years after the advent of Islam and between the 1st and 3rd centuries of Islam's existence, there were 19 schools of jurisprudence.In addition since the basic framework of muslim jurisprudence was elaborated in the 8th and 9th centuries in what is Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria of today, it incorporates many of the customs and practices of those counteries and that period.In Pakistan today, the islamisation process is based on a selection of those injunctions which ensure the predominance of men rather than those protecting or promoting the rights of women.(F.Shaheed,1985).

In addition when Islamic injunctions come into conflict with the economic, political, or social interests of the state, then it is the

'spirit of Islam' that is invoked to justify a certain practice. For instance when the Council Of Islamic ideology in Pakistan was discussing whether women should have the right to vote, or whether a female vote should be half a male 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 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, any judgement passed by the court will be binding. Almost all issues concerning women's rights fall under personal law. It seems clear then that the 'selective implementation of Islam has been responsible for the entrenchment of an all -pervasive patriarchal system.'(F.Shaheed,1985).

This process of selectivity also emerges clearly when we look at the context and content of hindu fundamentalism in India today. The 'Hinduism' being propagated by various hindu organisations is an attempt to force a particular amalgam of belief, ritual and practise based on the linear model of Semitic religions, as the only, true hinduism.Far from the monolithic uniformity implied in the term 'Hinduism', there were in fact two seperate and antagonistic religious traditions historically - Brahmanism and Shramanism (R.Thapar, 1985).Brahmanism based on Vedic texts and the Dharmashastras, were restricted to the upper castes, buttressed by royal patronage and the creation of a priestly class. On the basis of a monopoly over Sanskrit it had a pan-Indian character. The Shramanic tradition (the Bakthi movements were seen as inheritors of this tradition) was popular among the lower castes , had a universalistic ethic and exhibited a wide diversity in ritual and belief. Historically then one cannot speak of hinduism as such but a variety of 'hindu' religions.

The crystalisation of what is called "Hinduism" today, occurred as a result of the confrontation with Islam and later with Christianity during the colonial period, as a result of which all indigenous sects were clubbed together as Hindu as well as differentiated as the'subordinate other'.The articulation of this "Hinduism" by nationalists gave it a political legitimacy and it is this 'syndicated hinduism' which is being claimed and projected by the hindu fundamentalist organisations today.

The same process can be seen in the formulation 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, Hindus.A process of secular reform to abolish all personal laws for a uniform civil code prior to independence 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.The formulation of Hindu personal law was the result of the same process of selectivity elaborated above.Hindu personal law as we know it today was interpreted initially in 1772 when Warren Hastings appointed ten Brahmin pundits 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 caste and communities - i.e

seperate customary laws existed for Nairs, Nambudris, Kulins ,Jats etc. The Draft Hindu Code was thus based on specifically Brahmanical interpretation of hinduism. Changes were introduced into this as a result of the struggles of women and men in the early womens movement and hence contained some rights for Hindu women. However it is significant that the Hindu Code Bill was only passed after Independence after a great deal of opposition.

' All personal 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 fo rms have existed as in the taravad of Kerala, economic changes and colonial policy have invested de-facto rights over property in the hands of men.State intervention through changes,for example in laws on inheritance have tended to maintain this patriarchal authority.It is significant that during the agitation in Punjab over the demands for sharing of water, territory and Chandigarh as the capital, a demand was put forward for a seperate personal law for Sikhs.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 relate to the need to maintain and keep control over property, especially land, by the rich peasant sections within the patriarchal family structure.It is also significant that while the other secular demands were ignored, the ruling party did begin to consider this demand.

The importance of the context and content of religious fundamentalism has to be stressed precisely because the phenomenon itself has the tendency to 'contaminate the tools of analysis'. Each outbreak of communal conflict (hindu/muslim, hindu/sikh,) raises once again the image of a South Asian region torn by inherently antagonistic religious communities, with the roots of this antagonism traced to the medevial past.Two stereotypes emerge from this conception - the communalist image of Hindus and Muslims as homogeneous 'two nations' ever since the medevial period and the nationalist image of a perfect Golden age of harmony shattered by British divide and rule policy. Both these images assume a homogeneity and national level uniformity which were objectively impossible prior to the developments in communications and markets in the late 19th century.(S.Sarkar1983, B.Chandra 1984).Although there were instances of clashes between hindus and muslims in past centuries, these were sporadic and equal in number to intra-muslim and caste conflicts.

Contemprary historians agree that communalism on a general scale is a modern phenomenon and a product of the process of colonial underdevelopement, most specifically on the middle classes. The absence of modern industries and education, along with shrinking government expenditure meant that the educated middle and lower middle classes were faced with increasing unemployment.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 situation 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 the middle class identity.It is not accidental that communal struggles in this period occurred mostly over government jobs, educational concessions and the political positions in the legislation councils and muncipal bodies which enabled control over them.

spread to rural areas

Communal struggles were therefore over secular issues.In fact the "purely religious or theological content of communalism has tended to be meagre"(B.Chandra 1985)In addition, from the end of the 19th century, communalsim 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 nationalists 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 with Durga, Kali and other hindu Goddesses. Gandhi too, appealed to people in the language of religiousity, for eg. his interpretation of independence as Ram Rajya.

The same divisions affected women in the early women's movement and national movement.In their struggle for suffrage,education and legal and civil rights, both hindu and muslim women attacked the system of purdah(seclusion).However, as communal divisions intensified, hindu feminists began to see purdah 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, became increasingly concerned about their 'muslim' identity and began to defend passages in the Quran about female modesty.(G.Forbes1982)

Inspite of attempts to counter communal interpretations, many social scientists fall into the communal trap. This can be seen in the recent attempts to analyse the Punjab situation as an outcome of a 'Sikh' history and tradition.Such analysis assumes that Sikhs form a homogeneous community, when in fact, they are sharply divided by caste and class.Even more significantly,such analysis ignores the role of the State. The actions of the ruling party in ethnicising what were secular demands,and subsequent repression led to the creation of a 'Sikh' identity in the last six years. Analysis of communalism in Punjab has to be based on this period rather than a resurrection of a distinctive Sikh history.

> "....communalism does not require that its passions be always traceable to hoary traditions in order to raise dust and settle it with blood."(D.Gupta , 1985)

Finally, while historical specificity in the analysis of communalism and religious fundamentalism is important, we also need to examine the fact that fundamentalism not only uses elements of the past, but it gives them a present through myth and memory. The deconstruction of the mythology of communalism is as important as locating its economic and political determinants.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 constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made."(R.Barthes 1979)

Communal mythology based on religious fundamentalism makes its version of the past and the present the most natural and obvious order of things.Recently a number of historical studies have begun to explore the areas of communal consciousness as well as the discourse on communalism, but

far more work needs to be done on the dimension of sexuality and man-woman relations as elements integral to the constitution of communal identities.Unless we can explain why not just certain classes but also women and men within these classes support or reject communalism, no amount of secular historiography or factual countering of communal propaganda can expose the communalists.

Communal identity and Control over Women

While communalism affects both men and women, the rise of religious fundamentalism as a crucial element of communal ideology has specific implications for women. The crux of the fundamentalist rhetoric - a call for a return to culture and tradition is almost always a call first addressed to women. It is significant that when western dress is rejected, no one demands that men should stop wearing suits and ties.

> "To cut your hair, speak English, wear the national dress without the chador, to not cover your head, to work in new occupations, to drive, to smoke, to participate in sports, are all signs of being a westernized woman.But men are allowed to do all of the above and much more without their national or muslim identity being challenged.(F.Shaheed 1985)

Women become symbols of culture and tradition.The culture and tradition that is resurrected is of course a particular one. Recent analysis of the 19th century debates on the status of women in the subcontinent, have shown how colonial officials as well as social reformers enforced the equation of tradition through a selective acceptance of certain religious texts.This resulted in giving a specific cultural practice like 'sati'(the immolation of widows) a religious sanction and a transhistorical meaning.(L.Mani,1986) An area that needs further investigation is how this 'particular' tradition created simultaneously a model of 'hypermasculinity' for men. Social reformers and cultural critics, even as dissenters based their interpretation of sacred texts on the core values of colonial ideology, which itself reflected changes in man-woman relations and cultural models in Britain during that period.(A.Nandy,19).The linear model of Hinduism made it possible to project the 'Golden Age' as an ancient version of the modern west. The next step was a logical sequence - cultural regression and the emasculation of hindus was due to the loss of contact with these scriptures and the corruption by foreigners. Like the myth of the 'Golden Age', the ideal of 'Indian' womanhood i.e. the' pati-vrata '- which ensured chastity, passivity and fidelity was consciously created as production moved out of the household and private property emerged requiring restrictions on women's mobility and sexuality.(U.Chakravarti 1986)The reiteration of this ideal through yearly performances of the Ramayana, in the films and on television give a clear message 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 ideal that fundamentalsism -syndicated hinduism- uses rather than the image of women from the alternative tradition, especially amongst the adivasis (tribals), where women were shown as independent and sexually uninhibited.

The impact of this ideal is increasing. In parts of Rajasthan, there has even been the revival of sati.In Delhi, in the last few years a number of sati temples have been built and every year there are processions with huge floats of pyres with women walking dressed in their bridal clothes. The leaflets and speeches say that sati implies high moral values for women -

the highest being total loyalty and devotion to the husband.Even in certain tribal areas where female sexuality and reproduction were not directly controlled, adivasi women have begun to adopt 'hindu' customs. Movements in these areas ,struggling for a seperate state on the basis of tribal identity, become ambivalent when it comes to questions of monogamy and restriction of divorce, sometimes going to the extent of denying the freer and more equal relations in early tribal society. Political legitimacy requires respectability, usually a middle class Hindu notion of it, and that comes from 'taming your women' even if it implies a loss of tribal custom.(R.Kumar, 1982).

It is necessary to stress this wider implication of religious fundamentalism , because so far communalism has been seen in the women's movement in India at least, mainly in terms of the issue of personal laws and the fact that women are often primary victims of communal violence. Where the violence has been male selective, as in Delhi in November 1984, women were raped and 3000 widows were left defenceless and destitute.In cases where women were the main breadwinners of the family, curfews and restrictions on mobility affected them more severely . However ,while in most cases women have been victims of violence, in some women have also taken part in communal agitations.In the anti-reservation riots in Ahmedabad which turned into communal attacks, upper caste women organised in Vali Mandals and confronted the police in support of the anti-reservationists.A report by the Women and Media Group points out that-

> "It is clear, though, that the support of women was gained by appealing to their maternal emotions, by telling them that their children would be deprived of seats,rather than by trying to educate them on the larger political issues involved in the reservation of seats. They are, however, not unaware of the specific issue in this years agitation-...."(Women and Media Group, Bombay, 1985).

The assertion of religious fundamentalism within a communal context,has a far deeper and more insiduous implication for women, with variations depending on differences in caste and class.

We need to move away from the specific 'riot' and examine the broader context of the ideological and material factors which determine these incidents.Communal consciousness arises as we have seen , in situations of insecurity and fear of the loss of social or economic status . External symbols become crucial for the creation of communal identities and here we find that one essential component of this identity - whether it is national, religious or caste based, is the assertion of patriarchal control over 'your own women'.Communal propaganda is full of the fall from greatness in the past, challenge of domination today, need to prove strength, courage and manliness. What better way to prove manliness than by showing 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 to hold on to. 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 humiliate him and show access to his property. For example, in the Jabalpur riots in 1961, the cause of the riot was the economic competition between a local muslim bidi (cigarette) magnate and his hindu competitors, but what sparked of the riot was the fact that the son of the muslim owner had eloped with a hindu girl.Along with economic competition, the loss of their women was seen as a direct attack on their manhood.

Crucial to identity creation are the notions of 'izzat'(honour) and 'biradari'(brotherhood). A family's honour depends crucially on the con

duct of women '...if the honour of a family's women is lost so also is the family's entire public position.'(Pettigrew,J.1975). While earlier judgements on the issue of maintenance for muslim women went un-noticed, the Supreme Court judgement on the Shah Bano case, contained specific remarks against 'muslims' and given the general economic and political situation, was seen by a section of the muslim community as a direct attack on their identity.

> 'For the muslims today, the imminent danger is to their culture and identity, rather than to their lives and prosperity." (Maulana Abdul Lais, Emir of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, in India Today, Jan 11, 1986).

The imagery of communal riots is full of sexual stereotypes.

> "They captured beautiful Hindu women, forcibly converted them and utilised them as temporary partners of life. Hindu women were threatened, molested and compelled to run half naked for shelter to forests ...."(Times of India, 1921, in B.Chandra, 1984).

In the communal image, a muslim was/is a man of low morals and uncontrolled lust, who was ever 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 exits 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 into our homes. But now they want our women. We must beat them and teach them a lesson."(R.Jhabvala, 1981).

Whether it is an attempt to reassert traditional authority, or to create a certain identity in the context of economic dislocation, women tend to become crucial symbols of the status of the community. This process gets exaberated in the context of state supported fundamentalism.

This process can also have implications for women's right to birth control. The rhetoric of communal riots is full of the increase in the 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 such a context, could be directed not just on a class basis, as it has been so far but also on a community basis like other states 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 lose control over their own bodies.

Control over women and the exercise of patriarchal authority 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 South Asia today, this control is exercised by particular men (usually on the basis of kinship relations) i.e. it is fathers, brothers, or husbands who have rights over their daughters, sisters and wives. What is significant about state sponsored religious fundamentalism is that it not only reinforces this

patriarchal control, but more importantly, shifts the right of control to all men. The state becomes the pure representation of patriarchy - it gives every and any man on the street the legitimate right to stop any woman who does not conform to the 'traditional and proper' role assigned to her. This process is clearly seen in Iran where 'Hezbolahis' (members of the party of God) attack women on the streets with guns or knives if they are not wearing the chador. Recent press reports from Punjab mention that in the campaign by the extremists against liquor, meat and tobacco shops, women who were not wearing salwar- kameez were harrassed.

There would be differences in how far this shift is actualised, depending on whether the context is a multi-religious or mono religious one. However, challenging this control would invite severe repercussions. The danger of fundamentalsim as a state ideology (which makes it akin to fascism) is precisely that it speaks in an 'ideological- sexual language' with which people are already familiar. Macciochi in a controversial paper, shows how fascist ideology evoked a system of signs and representations constructed out of Christianity, which enlisted the support of women for Mussolini. (Macciochi, 1979).

> "....if you are taken in by the Catholic church's adulation of the Virgin Mother, you will also be open to address as fascism's Fertile Mother; if the Holy Family is an ideal relation in your eyes, you will be readily incorporated in the fascist family." (J.Caplan, 1979)

While Macciochi analysed the relation of women to fascism, at the general level the important point is that fascist ideology was based on a recombination and transformation of pre-existing ideology. In the South Asian context, state sponsored religious fundamentalism would intensify the pre-existing patriarchal structure leading to increasing violence against women.

South Asian Patriarchy - direct and structural violence

That violence against women has increased in South Asia is a fact with which most people are familiar with by now - the continuing dowry murders in India, where in spite of agitations, in 1983 around 690 women died of burns in Delhi alone, the increase in acid throwing and dowry deaths in Bangladesh, the flogging of women, rape and naked parades in Pakistan. There is however the hidden and indirect structural violence that women experience every day within the patriarchal family. The clearest and most disturbing indicator of this structural violence aagainst women is the declining sex ratio 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 to 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. (I.Sen 1986)

Although there are regional variations, studies have now established that this unusual sex ratio is due to higher female death rates which are a result of unequal access to food and health care within the household. This is confirmed through an analysis of both, direct indicators such as assessment of food intakes in relation to work requirements as well as indirect

indicators such as male/female differentials in malnutrition, morbidity and mortality(B.Agarwal,1985).Assessment of the food consumed by women shows that their average consumption of calories is only two - thirds that of men.A study of agricutural labour households in Kerala notes that on working days, a woman's calorie intake fell 20% short of the recommended standard, while a man's fell short by 11% of the recomended standard.During unemployment the respective short falls were 50% for women and 26% for men. More careful and detailed measurements undertaken in a Bangladesh study also bring out the inequality in intra-household distribution of food.(B.Miller,1981,L.Gulati,1982,S.Batliwala,1982, B.Agarwal 1985, A.Sen & S.Sengupta, 1983)

Strong supportive evidence is provided by other indicators. There is a higher prevalence of malnutrition and slower growth amongst girls relative to boys. In Punjab for instance, female children are breast fed for a shorter time and given less supplementary food.The same pattern of sex differentials is revealed in women's access to health care.Women's illnesses are usually ignored until they reach chronic proportions, as seen in hospital admissions, child mortality fiqures etc. This sex bias occurs in most households although it appears to be sharper under conditions of poverty. This discrimination occurs in spite of the fact that women put in longer hours of work and contribute to the basic needs for the survival of the household.Given this pre-existing culture of son-preference, the growth of religious fundamentalism would intensify discrimination and neglect of women within the household.

State ideology and women's labour

There has been extensive documentation of the link between the demands of the capitalist economy and the emergence of ideologies which justify the exclusion 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 often articulated in situations where in fact larger sections of women are being forced to seek work.A similar process seems to be occurring in South Asia.

In India, since the 1960's agricutural 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 constraints imposed by the kind of crop, there have been considerable changes in women's participation in wage labour and their position 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 rich farmers (kulaks).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 rural male workers) were wage workers. At the same time, wage work for women is more seasonal and as a result, most women are casual workers. The number of female cultivators has declined relative to men, highlighting women's lack of

independent acess to land.(B.Agarwal,1985) In addition, in 15 states, surveys reveal an increase in the differential between male-female wages, with women's earnings being close to half or less than half of men's earnings.

On the other hand, the emergence of a rich peasant class has led to the withdrawal of women 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 hired wage labour. In any case, this process does not result in any increase in women's economic control over resources and property or decision making.(U.Sharma,1980).

If we look at industrialisation strategies, the story is similar.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 mining. Of all the 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. (N.Banerjee 1984) This decline in relative and absolute employment of women in the traditional sectors is part of the general crisis of these sectors of industry. However the growth of the modern sub-sectors like pharmaceuticals, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, machine production, heavy chemicals, which anyway have a low labour absorbtion, women are concentrated in only certain industeries like garments, food processing, while in pharmaceuticals, apart from a few companies, the proportion of women has fallen and there is discrimination in recruitment.(URG Report,1985)

There has however been an increase in women workers in the unorganised sector, especially in homebased production. Even according to census statistics, 84% of all working women in 1971 and nearly as many in 1981 were in the unorganised sector.

In Bangladesh an increasing trend of landlessness has been documented. With the inclusion of landless households owning less than half acre of crop land, the functionally landless is estimated at 48% of all rural households.(Jannuzi & Peach 1977). Female headed households are estimated to range from 6.4% to 16% of all rural households.(Cain et al, 1979) Around 40% of all rural women are today seeking wage employment.The new garment factories are located in and around Dhaka and employ mainly women, but in the countryside there are few options for women. (rice mills) The pressures of increasing poverty imply that while traditional structures of male bonds and obligations are weakening, there is simultaneously the assertion of patriarchal control over women's mobility and acess to wage labour and product markets.

> "...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 oppurtunities 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 services."(M.Chen 1986)

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 invisibilisation of their work in the unorganised sector. The combination of unemployment in general, with the resulting breakdown of traditional structures of patriarchal support and the fact that increasing number of women are seeking work in spheres previously restricted to men ,can create conditions for the emergence of 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.(H.Afshar, 1985).Religious fundamentalsim as a state supported ideology in the economic and cultural context in which women exist in South Asia today, could provide a similar justification.In the communal violence recently in Ahmedabad, hindu fundamentalists put forward a 'theory of truth'(Satyavad), 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 ourselves in our husbands, children and religious texts. To do so otherwise is to be a "witch, a fallen woman and an insult to manhood."(M.Chatterjee,1986)

Recent studies have been examining the link between female labour force participation and cultural practices like dowry and purdah.[]This also seems to correlate with differential mortality rates of female infants and children.(B.Miller 1981, P.Bardhan 1974,1982, B.Agarwal 1985). In the last 30 years there has been a shift from bride wealth, which was the main form of marriage payment in India to dowry amongst entire communities. This has spread even amongst lower castes and classes which had no tradition of dowry, although the rapidity of the transformation varies regionally. Even in the muslim counteries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the practise of dowry has increased and both countries have a Dowry Prohibition Law.

In Pakistan, the '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) has been changed in a number of ways. While in tribal areas, bride price which is customary is called the mehr while in urban areas, it has been reduced to a paper formality with marriage payments taking the form of dowry.The marriage license also distorts the original principle of economic independence implicit 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."(F.Shaheed 1985).

In Bangladesh too studies have shown the shift from 'Pon'(bride price) which was restricted to richer farmers, to the widespread practice of dowry in rural areas. (S.Alam 1985)In a survey of violence against women in Bangladesh, in 1983-84 ,54% of murders in rural areas were due to dowry demands. In Pabna district in 1981-82, 182 women killed themselves due to domestic fights or failure of parents to give dowry.

While labour participation is an important variable, the increase in dowry practices 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 a compensation for the loss of a productive member) is not only narrowly economistic but cannot account for the fact that large number of women have been earning their dowries and continue to work after their marriage. While working in a women's centre in Delhi between 1981-83, I found numerous married working women coming for help due to harrassment over dowry.In addition ,such an approach excludes household work plus child bearing and

rearing from the category of 'productive' work.(M.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 and is wealth that accompanies the woman and is paid to her husbands family not to the bride herself. It is interesting that the term used for this kind of marriage transaction in Bangladesh is 'daabi' which means the demand system.'This demand is a condition of marriage' which can also continue after the marriage.(R.Ahmed & M.S. Naher 1986,U.Sharma 1984).

The increase in dowry has to be seen in the context of rising consumerism (advertisements openly sell commodities 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 accumulate capital.There have been a number of cases of men marrying two or three times, each time collecting a dowry and murdering the wife.Further research has to be done in this area but it is clear that such cultural practices can easily acquire religious sanction from a 'syndicated hinduism' and result in increased violence against women. The virulence of this culture of son-preference was bought out in a horrifying way in 1982 when it was discovered that amniocentisis (a test to predict the sex of the unborn child) was being used to abort female foetuses in private clinics in North and Western India.It is significant that hindu fundamentalists have not condemned the burning of hindu brides in Delhi, though they have been vocal on the Muslim Women's Bill.

Challenging patriarchal structures - the womens movement

There has been a rich tradition of women's struggle against 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, for example the early 20th century women's movement , did not question the sexual division of labour within the family, but there was independent organisation and struggle by women for equal rights, whether for the right to property which benefitted few women, or for the vote, which (at least potentially) benefitted all women, as well as the demands for higher wages, food and the right to organise by working class women.(Forbes,1984, Chakravarty.R. 1980, Velayudan M. 1984)After independence there was a lull but in the late 1960's and early 1970's in India, a new women's 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 issues began to be taken up in the context of these general struggles. In urban areas, small women's groups, emerged , constituted by women linked with radical left groups.After the lifting of the emergency, numerous women's groups mushroomed in the larger cities of Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore.What was new about these groups was the fact that they were 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 women's organisations, and a stress on non - hierarchical internal organisational structures.Since the seventies the new women's movement has grown tremendously and has taken up the issues of dowry murders, rape, domestic violence, etc.Apart from agitational groups, womens centres have emerged to support individual women in urban areas. In rural areas mass organisations of agricultural workers, adivasis, mine workers, have also organised around issues specific to women, as well as raising fundamental questions about development itself, like the Chipko movement in

North India against deforestation and ecological destruction.Although the movement still has to extend to the larger number of women in rural India, it has succeeded in creating a generalised consciousness about women's issues.

The most important thing in recent years has been the entry of feminists into the arena of general politics. Women's groups have bee n one of the first to condemn communalism, have been actively involved in supporting victims of communal violence, held special investigations into the situation of women during communal clashes, and most significantly are taking part in a national discussion on the dangers of fundamentalism.At present there is a debate on the issue of the demand for a uniform civil code.While all sections in the movement agree in principle to this demand there are differences on the strategies and implications, since this demand has also been put forward by Hindu communal organisations and as a result immediately 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 have been fighting on the terrain of religion itself and have argued for ameliorating the conditions for Pakistani women within the Islamic structure.

The crucial issue facing women's movements in South Asia is an understanding of the nature of the state and state ideologies.Although the movement has challenged patriarchal structures, it has tended in practise to operate within the assumption of a liberal state. Most campaigns tend to focus on changes in the law and today even that formal demand is not achievable.State sponsored religious fundamentalism has shattered any notion of a begnin and liberal state and is the forerunner of fascist state with frightening implications for women.The choice is not between giving up a struggle for changes in the law and direct action against the state but in developing strategies which counter the powerful forces of state sponsored religious fundamentalism.

This implies tackling wider questions , not just of the socio - economic basis of communalism, but also the issue of cultural identity .Feminists in South Asia have taken different stands on what constitutes the basis of an alternative cultural identity. Some have argued for religious reform, either on the basis of the humanist essence of all religions (G.Dietrich,1986), or for tactical reasons,(F.Shaheed1985), to reach out to the vast majority of women who are believers.Another view is to draw on anti-hindu culture of the Dalits and adivasis in India,to build an oppositional culture.This issue is today a crucial one in post-colonial states given the problem of nationalism and the destructive implications of an identity based on caste, community or the family, especially for women.This requires a reassesment from a feminist perspective,of what is the basis of nationalism and the nation state, whether it is possible to make a distinction between religion and culture, and how far the women's movement,given its internal differentiation,can project an alternative culture for women.

The problem of which cultural tradition to relate to and what symbols the womens movement chooses to express its identity is a difficult one - there has been for instance the use of symbols of female power - Shakti, Kali - but these have also been used by Hindu communal organisations, as a symbol for Indira Gandhi and were the same 'hindu' symbols used during the national movement.These questions however are crucial since what women are faced with is not only an authoritarian state but one which legitimises itself through an ideology asserting patriarchal

control and violence against women.Challenging this , as women in South Asia are doing, lays the basis for a redefinition of man-woman relations and a newer vision of society as a whole.

'The State, Religious Fundamentalism,and Violence against Women: Trends in South Asia

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