

OUR APPROACH TO THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

*“Only by emancipating all mankind
Can the proletariat achieve its own final emancipation.”*

Karl Marx

*“The proletariat cannot achieve complete liberty
Until it has won complete liberty for women.”*

VI Lenin

*“Women carry half of heaven on their shoulders
And they must conquer it.”*

Mao Tse-tung

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
PART I	
ORIGIN, SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND PATRIARCHY	
I Origin and Development of Patriarchy	2
1. Patriarchy Under Feudalism	4
2. Patriarchy Under Capitalism	5
3. Patriarchy in Semi-feudal, Semi-colonial India	10
II Base, Superstructure and Patriarchy	13
PART II	
ECONOMY	
III Economic Aspects Underlying Oppression and Emancipation	16
1. Domestic Work	16
2. Social Production	18
3. Family and Marriage	
PART III	
CULTURE	
IV. Patriarchal Culture and Gender Discrimination	25
1. Education	26
2. Media	26
3. Religion and Religious Chauvinism	27

4. Caste	29
5. Law	30
6. Motherhood	31
7. Widows, Spinsters and Single Women	32
8. Gender Stereotypes	33
V The Sexual Morality of Patriarchy	34
PART IV	
POLITICS	
VI Violence on Women	37
VII The Political Struggle Against Patriarchy	39
VIII Main Political Currents in the Women's Movement	42
IX Principle Trends in the Women's Movement in India	45
X The New Democratic Women's Movement	49
XI The Socialist Women's Movement	56
XII Our Party's Efforts in Building a Women's Movement	60

INTRODUCTION

The success of the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) of India and the victory of the World Socialist Revolution are closely related to the conscious participation of women. The elimination of imperialism and feudalism is related to the battle against patriarchy. The building of socialism is related to the elimination of patriarchy. Women make up half the world. But they are a suppressed half. It is the duty of the proletariat to make a comprehensive theoretical summing up of women's oppression. Appropriate tasks have to be set. Correct methods have to be drawn to release the initiative of the oppressed masses of women in the New Democratic Revolution. Let us bid farewell to all male prejudices in theory and in practice.

Let us struggle for women's emancipation by rallying around the slogan: "No women, no revolution!"

November, 2001

Part One

ORIGIN, SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND PATRIARCHY

I. Origin and Development of Patriarchy

The masses of women face twin oppression. Just as their male members they undergo class oppression. But at the same time they experience patriarchal oppression. Patriarchy is the system of male domination over women. The ruling classes of all exploitative societies institutionalize patriarchal oppression. But in addition to that, men who are at the same time oppressed by the ruling classes resort to patriarchal domination. All men generally practise thus patriarchy, which is institutionalized by the ruling classes. This is an important characteristic feature of women's oppression. This feature contributes to the pervasiveness of patriarchal prejudices. Thus while class oppression is more easily and readily understood, patriarchy becomes more difficult and complex to grasp. Class oppression and patriarchy are interconnected. Patriarchy feeds on class oppression and class oppression derives its strength and sustenance, among others, from patriarchal oppression. At all points of time, this living interconnection must be grasped and it is thus a dialectical approach that constitutes the cornerstone of the Marxist perception on the women's question.

Among our Marxist teachers it was Frederick Engels laid the foundation for the study of the women's question. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, written in 1884 is a pioneering work. Among other things, this book traces the origin of women's oppression. By demonstrating that women's oppression came into existence at a given point of history, Engels drew attention to the social origins of patriarchy. This book has since remained an ideological weapon for women's emancipation. Drawing from Morgan's researches, Engels established that women's oppression commenced with the rise of private property, that is, at the point of the break up of primitive communism to class society. Related to the rise of male domination is the advent of the monogamous family, which became an instrument for the consolidation and transfer of private property. Patriarchal oppression was instituted by the overthrow of mother right. The matrilineal clan-based gentile society of primitive communism saw the involvement of women in social production. But with the break up of mother right in the

course of transition to civilisation, the social nature of women's labour was broken. It was confined to the personal and domestic domain. Matriliney was substituted and mother-right was overthrown to be replaced by patriliney and patriarchy. Patriarchy heralded the commencement of class society. And this was how Engels summed up this transition: **“The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the house also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.”** (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*).

In India patriarchy emerged over 2600 years ago, though the process began much earlier. It was established by the time of the rise of the first state in ancient India – the Magadh state in 600 B.C. Though the Indus Valley civilization arose in 2500 B.C. in the northwestern part of the Indian sub-continent, it was a Bronze Age civilization that did not last and collapsed by 1800 B.C. At that time the numerous tribes spread all over India were at various stages of development. Most of the tribes in South and Central India were involved in primitive agriculture and those dependent on animal husbandry much fewer. Since women played an important role in the transition to agriculture and were actively involved in social production the societies were matrilineal. In the groups based on animal husbandry patrilineal practice seems to have already established itself.

The collapse of the Indus Valley civilization coincided with the beginning of the migration of Aryan tribes into India. The Aryan tribes already had a patrilineal society though women were involved in production. The process of class formation had already begun. These tribes spread through war enslaving the defeated groups. The period from 1000 B.C. onwards is the period of struggle and disintegration of the primitive agricultural and pastoral societies, and the development of classes and private property. The discovery of iron and the beginning of iron plough-based cultivation in 800 B.C. greatly accelerated this process. The production of surplus increased. By the time the first state emerged in the Gangetic plain, based on the Shudra holding system (i.e. a mode of production based on Shudra labour. The shudras were not slaves as in the West since they were not generally bought and sold, but they constituted the lowest rung in the social hierarchy based on whose labour most of the social wealth was produced.) Class society, private property and monogamy had been established. Patriarchy was already entrenched; women had lost their

significance in social production and relegated to a subordinate position. The institutionalization of patriarchy in India was completed with the emergence of feudalism.

1. Patriarchy Under Feudalism

Did patriarchy precede class society or arise simultaneously with it? This has been a topic of much debate between various feminist and Marxist schools of thought. Since the nomadic pastoral tribes such as the Aryans practised patriarchy and lived in the period prior to the rise of civilization, some argue that patriarchy preceded class society and hence will stay long after the abolition of class society.

There is no doubt that among the pastoral tribes such as the Aryans, males were the heads of the clans. These tribes were in the period of transition to class society and hence some of the features of the class society could be seen in their embryo. Class society had not emerged overnight but took a long period of transition. In this long process of transformation, one can perceive several features associated with class society in the upper stages of barbarism. Capture of slaves had begun, though a state had not emerged in the proper sense of the word. Patriarchy existed but it had not become an institution.

These societies did not consider women as inferior to men but, on the contrary, held them in high esteem. However, women's role in social production, which was dominant in the hunting-gathering societies, and in societies where primitive agriculture was predominant, became secondary in pastoral societies. And with the rise of class society women's status was reduced to that of a slave to man.

The feudal mode of production came into existence from around the fourth century AD in India. Feudalism meant the existence of a class of landlords that subjected tenants and bonded labourers to their direct exploitation. Under the feudal mode women were denied the right to inherit or own property or any control over the means of production. While women of the upper classes remained within doors, the labour of women of the tenant, the feudal classes exploited bonded labourer classes and artisan castes. Women were considered equivalent in status to cattle. A woman had no independent existence. She came to be identified either through her father, her husband or her son. Women of the tenant and bonded labourer classes had to accompany their husbands in toiling for the landlords. Thus

Women of the oppressed classes participated in social production. Yet it must not be forgotten that they laboured only in the lands where their husbands toiled; or they served that family of landlords to which their husbands had been bonded. The woman was always an appendage to her husband. It was this patriarchal relation that mediated exploitation of her labour by the feudal classes. Women's labour in social production was not recognised. It was thus not paid. Women's social labour was treated as an adjunct to that of her husband's labour. Patriarchy under feudalism gave no social recognition to woman or her labour. Thus patriarchal ideology secured the free labour services of toiling women for the feudal classes. Such unpaid exploitation of women in the feudal economy was achieved apart from open acts of violence, physical insult and ostracisation into sex-bondage sanctioned by religion. The attitude of feudalism to women is best epitomised by Manu's *Dharma Shastra*. Coming as it did at the point of decline of the shudra holding system and rise of the new mode of feudalism, the *Manu Dharma Shastra* became the testament of feudal patriarchy in India and played a key role in its institutionalisation.

Under feudalism the household was both a unit of production and consumption. The natural economy of feudalism was based on small-scale production. Commodity production was nominal. The household therefore combined agriculture and a lot of other handicrafts and sideline activities. There was no dividing line between such activities and that of domestic work and the cycle was unending. The sphere of domestic work was therefore expansive and it engaged a large part of women's labour.

Since production was small-scale, since the family was the economic unit for both production and consumption and, since household work engaged a major part of female labour, the patriarchal structure of authority and subordination became a feature not only within the family but also in feudal society as a whole. In Lenin's words: **“Paternalism is a part of a small-producer economy”**. This was the second major economic feature of patriarchy and its relationship with the structure of the family under feudalism.

2. Patriarchy Under Capitalism

The development of capitalism in the West brought certain drastic changes in the lives of women. It helped women to come out of the feudal seclusion and bondage and transformed their world outlook and values. The rise of capitalism roused the democratic aspirations among women, kindled

ideas of equality and freedom, and led to movements for the assertion of their democratic rights—something unheard of in the feudal society. It also brought some degree of freedom in sexual relations: free choice of partners which is, of course, determined by the class parameters, and the right to divorce, etc. Yet capitalism continued to rely on the institution of patriarchy for the extraction of surplus. Thus capitalism did not eliminate the institution of patriarchy but only modified the forms of patriarchal oppression.

The most important of economic changes that capitalism introduced was that it drew women into social production on a large scale. Women no more worked as adjuncts to their husbands. The capitalists drew them into wage labour relations as independent individuals. Thus women earned a wage of their own. But it would be wrong to presume that the participation of women in social production in itself constituted her emancipation. On the contrary, the participation of women as a social labour force was structured along a new sexual division of labour, which determined the form of patriarchal oppression under capitalism. Thus one may say that the changes introduced by capitalism do not end patriarchy. Instead, capitalism creates the objective basis; it provides the maturation of social and economic conditions for the movement for women's emancipation.

How did capitalism utilise patriarchy?

1. Though capitalism was born in the fight against feudalism, it also retained certain features of feudalism, albeit, with certain modifications. It was not a thoroughgoing struggle in all spheres. The ideology of patriarchy too was utilized with certain modifications. The ideology of patriarchy under feudalism saw that nothing was paid for women's labour. But capitalism made wage payments for women's social labour. However, the socially average wage that women got varied from one-fourth to a half of the average wage of men in capitalist society in the initial period. Thus patriarchal ideology contributed to the suppression of women's wages. It has provided for the extraction of super-profits for the capitalists. Taken separately, her wages are inadequate for the reproduction of her labour power. Patriarchal ideology gives women's wages a "supplementary" status to the income of the male in the family. Thus the widespread patriarchal notion that the male is the sole breadwinner while the woman only supplements her husband's income has gained credence.

2. Capitalism has drawn women into social production. But in doing so it has maintained a sexual division between male and female work. The work done by women under the capitalist is an extension of her domestic work.

For instance women work as domestic servants, sweepers, garment workers, nurses, school teachers, clerks, sales girls, secretaries, etc. Even when women are employed on the production line in textile, food processing, pharmaceutical or electronics industries a sexual division of labour is preserved in the respective factories. In the construction industry, in agriculture etc., this neat division of work between men and women is maintained to the extent possible. This is justified under various grounds. The most common being that women are incapable of doing physically exerting work, that they are better at work that requires a lot of “patience”, that their fingers are “nimble” and they are adept at performing labour that involves “minute” physical movements, etc. Thus capitalist patriarchy tries to preserve a so-called natural division of labour based on sex in social production. It is to its economic advantage that such a “natural” division between the sexes is reinforced since it allows for the easy manipulation of wages.

The sexual division of labour is also reflected in the distinction that is drawn between “skilled” and “semi-skilled” and “unskilled” work. Patriarchal ideology relegates women’s labour as *unskilled* and *semi-skilled*, justifying the low wages that are paid to her.

This sexual division of labour, it must not be forgotten, varies from one individual sphere of production to the other; and from each individual unit to another unit within a particular sector of production. Thus the sexual division which capitalism creates is arbitrary in that it varies from place to place. But behind this arbitrary division is the systematic attempt to enforce a hiatus that is seemingly “natural”.

3. Ever since the formation of class society domestic work has been the task of women.

Under capitalism, while women were drawn into social production on an independent basis, the burden of domestic work has not been done away with entirely. Under capitalism, women are thereby involved in both social production as well as domestic work. The total amount of work that women do is far more than what men do. The two spheres of the economy—social and domestic—are based on a sexual division. The ideology of patriarchy still comes in the way of mutual sharing of domestic work. The male proletarian feels that his day is done after he slogs himself out in the factory. He does not feel the responsibility of partaking in domestic work. Patriarchal ideology benefits him by offering him the privilege of not participating in domestic work. At a time when women have been widely integrated into the

working class, this ideology contributes to disunity in the proletariat along gender lines.

Domestic work performed by women of the working class (whether such women are themselves workers or not) serves to replenish and rejuvenate the most important commodity in capitalist society—the labour power of workers. By cooking, washing, mending clothes, nursing sick etc., women contribute in making labour power fit for sale.

Further, the woman plays a key role in the reproduction of labour power. She carries the unborn fetus in her womb, suckles children and nourishes them so that they grow up to become proletarian men and women capable of replacing the worn out and aged productive forces of capitalist society. Women's domestic work is therefore essential for the survival and continuation of the capitalist system. It replenishes and reproduces labour power for the capitalist. There is therefore a close interconnection between the two spheres of the economy - social production and domestic work. Social production rests on domestic work and domestic work is undertaken by consuming wages derived on the one hand by the men and women workers in order to purchase the daily necessities and on the other hand by the labour of women in transforming these articles of necessity for the replenishment and reproduction of labour power.

But capitalism, which depends also on the domestic work of women, has dubbed this sphere of the economy as inconsequential by taking advantage of patriarchal ideology. Domestic work performed by women has no social standing or value. It receives no payment. It is made to appear as if it has no social value. Yet the truth is that women's domestic work contributes to the creation of not only use values but also in the creation of an exchange value. The labour power of the worker is a commodity. It has exchange value and it becomes ready for exchange not on account of the mere purchase of articles of necessity by the worker through his or her wages but also by the labours of women in the family in transforming these articles of necessity. Hence, it must be recognised that the capitalist, while exploiting the worker at the point of social production, at the same time indirectly exploits the domestic labour of women.

4. Capitalism needs a reserve army of labour. At times of rapid expansion of its economy, it has drawn women into social production. Housewives are roped into its social economy. Thus women who do domestic work, in other words "housewives", are ready and available sources of surplus labour. This reserve army, with its big share of women, also serves as

a means to keep the general price of labour down and to retrench the work force at times of crisis. The patriarchal concept of “housewife” makes it easy for the working class to accept such dismissals. This is because her involvement in social production is considered as being incidental to her work as a “housewife”.

5. Home-based production under the aegis of capital is a form of capitalist organisation that is tailor-made to extract surplus from women’s labour.

In India, beedi and agarbathi rolling, ready-made garments, condiments, embroidery, lace making, etc, are either fully or partly organised on these lines. In a few capitalist countries, home-based production is extended to incorporate the watch and electronics industries too.

In this form of production, the capitalist provides raw materials to women workers and the finished product is appropriated. Quite often the capitalist relies on a network of contractors and subcontractors. Home-based production provides several advantages for the capitalist. The imprint of the concept of “house-wife” doing some extra hours of work to “supplement” the male income is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the worker’s family under this system. Home-based production neatly fits with the feudal patriarchal attitude that women should be confined to domestic work and childcare. Hence this form of capitalist oppression satisfies conservative feudal attitudes of the purdah system. Poor upper caste women also prefer this form rather than go out and do work on the production line as a worker. Similarly, a large section of Muslim women workers are exploited through this form of capitalist production. Home-based production does not get the recognition that social production otherwise earns for itself. It also deprives women of the higher social or class consciousness that can ensue from modern large-scale industry. The atmosphere in which it is conducted, on the other hand, provides great scope for the capitalist to suppress wages. Home-based production has thus come to stay as a specific form of capitalist patriarchal exploitation of women’s labour in the economy. Home-based production also multiplies the capitalist profits as there is no extra infra-structural expenditure.

6. Capitalism thrives on the commodification of Women. In the Monopoly stage of capitalism, i.e., under imperialism, these forms of exploitation of women continue in an even more intensified form and on a global scale. Imperialism is exploiting women’s labour not only in its home countries but also in oppressed countries. Imperialists are encouraging the

immigration of poor women from oppressed countries for low paid domestic work. Further it has taken the commodification of women's body to its penultimate by developing the tourism and entertainment / media industries, reaping super profits from it. A virtual sex industry has come into being, earning enormous profits in which millions of women and girl children from oppressed countries have been ensnared, under euphemisms like hostesses, housemaids, sex workers and what not. Under imperialist globalisation all this is being reflected in a stark form.

Thus it is clear from the above six points that capitalism especially in the imperialist stage, relies on the institution of patriarchy not only for the extraction of super profits, but also for its continuation as a social system. It further tries to utilise patriarchal ideology to create a division among the toilers along sexual lines. The unity of the proletariat and the success of the revolution led by the working class are closely dependent on and related to the emancipation of women from patriarchy.

The condition of women is even worse in semi-feudal, semi-colonial societies.

3. Patriarchy in Semi-feudal, Semi-Colonial India

India did not experience a thorough-going democratic revolution but was occupied by British colonialists in the 18th century, who allied with the local feudal forces to maintain their rule over the sub-continent. British colonialism upheld all the reactionary feudal aspects of Indian society including gender oppression.

British colonial rule had a major impact on Indian society including on women. For one, its economic policies led to a devastation of the agrarian economy and as artisan production leaving millions unemployed and impoverished. Women too lost their role in traditional domestic production and the burden of poverty and destitution affected them most severely in the famines that marked colonial rule. The sale of girls into prostitution also became widespread. During British rule the most reactionary forms of patriarchy were reinforced.

At the same time the British introduced certain structural changes in the economy. Land, which became a private property, was registered exclusively in the name of men. The development of cash crop production in large plantations, led women from the impoverished sections to become wage labourers. The development of the railways, the setting up of textile and jute

mills meant that the demand for labour increased. Women too became workers in these industries. Thus in India the female working class was born in the second half of the 19th Century. The needs of British imperialism led to the growth of modern education by the end of the 19th Century. Under the impact of the reform movement women from the upper classes took to education and entered professions like teaching and nursing.

Thus aspects of capitalism were introduced and the feudal economy modified to suit the changing needs of imperialism. After the withdrawal of the British in 1947, India became a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society under the rule of the big landlords and comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie. With the aid of imperialism they oppress the working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie.

Even while feudalism remains the predominant social relation, capitalist relations have also spread and the two coexist. Hence in India both the feudal as well as the capitalist varieties of patriarchy are visible. However they do not exist as separate entities. Just like other aspects of the semi-feudal semi-colonial structure, patriarchy exists in a combined form. It is with the help of this form of patriarchy that the landlords, compradors and imperialists oppress India's women masses. But due to the uneven development of Indian society patriarchal oppression has its specificities among the different classes, castes and tribes; its manifestations also vary in the big cities, in the towns and in the vast rural areas. While in the big cities and to an extent town's influence of capitalist-imperialist patriarchy is greater, in the villages feudal patriarchal norms dominate more.

The semi-feudal economy is the bastion for patriarchal oppression. Firstly, the landlord class cruelly exploits the labour of landless and poor peasant women. Secondly, semi-feudal relations in agriculture perpetuate small-scale production. This provides the basis for the household economy, and therein for the continuation of the family as a unit of production as well as consumption. This erects the patriarchal family structure of subordination of women and children. Thirdly, the semi-feudal economy thrives on an innumerable mass of small proprietors of land. It tends to limit the scope for social production especially among women of the middle and rich peasantry. These three economic features of semi-feudalism prop up patriarchy not only in the base but also strengthen it in the most reactionary manners in the superstructure. Antiquated gender values, the worst public insults on women, flagrant demands for Sati by Hindu fascists—this entire spectrum of the reactionary political culture of patriarchy is sustained by this

semi-feudal structure. In the interests of women, to release them from all forms of patriarchal bondage, feudalism has to be smashed.

Among the various nomadic and settled tribal communities too, by and large, patrilineal inheritance and patriarchy prevail, though in forms specific to the community's culture and way of life. Since private property has developed in these communities they share the basic characteristics of class society like monogamy / polygamy as well. Contrary to popular opinion regarding the sexual freedom available to tribal women, women in these communities too, in fact, are subject to patriarchal domination and prejudice. Though their role in social production is significant and their labour valued, yet women are denied ownership of the main means of production – land and cattle. Marriage and remarriage are determined by clan rules and customs, which restrict women's choice. Monogamy is strictly enforced for women and a woman committing adultery is subject to severe punishment. Besides, the different tribes have specific customs, which are aimed often in crude ways, at asserting the subordinate position of women and the control of the patriarchs over their sexuality and mobility. In some of the tribal communities of the North East, like among the Khasis where matriliney has prevailed, today it has been very much undermined by imperialist influence and the intervention of the comprador bourgeois Indian state with its patriarchal laws and policies.

Capitalist development spawned by imperialism has a reactionary character. It does not contribute to the development of the country. The imperialists and compradors have drawn a small section of women into social production but the worst kinds of patriarchal oppression have been introduced. Firstly, it has established a gender-based division of labour in the social economy. Secondly, it has kept the wages of women workers much below that of men. Thirdly, it has used the most repressive forms of labour exploitation in the export processing zones, in the garment sector, etc. Fourth, it has used the home-based production process to fleece out the maximum from women workers. Fifth, it has, while drawing women into social production, cared little to alleviate the domestic drudgery of women workers and employees. Sixth, it has used the unpaid domestic labour of women and children to keep the price of wages at the minimal. Seventh, in doing all this, imperialism and their compradors have utilised the most reactionary values of feudalism and have always sought to protect them.

Furthermore, imperialism has been undertaking a cultural offensive consisting of utterly degenerate and often sexist values. It has not only

given a new lease of life to patriarchy, but has made it all the more reactionary, violent and criminal. Imperialism has promoted prostitution on a large scale by developing the sex industry to earn enormous profits. The women workers exploited by imperialism and comprador bureaucrat capital, the women dependents of male workers exploited by these classes, and the broad masses of Indian women who everyday face the brunt of imperialist sponsored patriarchy, cannot find their emancipation unless imperialism and their compradors are destroyed.

II. Base, Superstructure and Patriarchy

Does patriarchy belong to the base or is it merely a superstructural phenomenon? This is an important question that needs an answer. It is a vital conceptual question concerning women's oppression. Our answer to this also has a direct bearing on the tactics and slogans employed by the proletariat in the fight against patriarchy.

The general treatment of women's question by revisionist parties and some socialist feminists is to regard it as a superstructural phenomenon. This is a superficial view of women's oppression. The revisionists, while upholding the Marxist view that women's oppression emerged with class society, understand this in a mechanical way. According to them patriarchy operates in the superstructure – in the realm of ideology, religion, culture, traditions, customs, law, family etc., - as a reflection of the exploitative class basis of society. Hence, one cannot think of fighting patriarchy as long as the economic basis is not radically transformed. Once the economic basis is changed, and a socialist economic basis is brought about patriarchy will also disappear. This is a distortion and vulgarisation of Marxism – a simplistic reduction of Marxism to economic determinism. The fight against patriarchy is postponed to an unknown future, nay, it is totally abandoned since revolution will change the economic basis and the entire superstructural edifice built on that base. Hence, in effect, class struggle and the struggle for women's emancipation do not get interconnected in practice.

Some feminists are locating the roots of patriarchy in the family. By looking at the problem in this way they are overlooking the fact that the family is itself based on certain economic and social processes – it is based on the very economic structure of society. It changes as the structure changes. By not giving due importance to the relation of the family to the wider economic-political structure they are also limiting their struggle to the realm of the superstructure.

Patriarchy is not just a superstructural phenomenon that can be eliminated with the elimination of the economic basis i.e., the exploitative class relations that constitute the base of any mode of production. Patriarchal relations are also economic relations. Relations of patriarchy means relations of subordination of women to men and to the exploiting classes not only politically and culturally but also economically and socially.

Firstly, patriarchy, by denying women ownership rights over the means of production, provides the material basis for their exploitation. Patriarchy determines the fundamental relations of women to the means of production. The denial of the right of ownership and control over the chief means of production to women had determined women's place in society right from the time of the slave-owning society in the West and the Shudra-holding system in India i.e., ever since the period of emergence of classes.

Whereas under feudalism this right to property is openly denied to women as inscribed in the reactionary Manusmriti and other literature of the feudal period, capitalism does it more subtly, in more sophisticated ways. This could be seen from the 350-odd year history of capitalist development in the West where women had gained nothing significant in terms of ownership of the means of production. It is a hard fact of the economy that even to this day, women own less than 1 percent of all property in the world. And in stark contrast they perform two-thirds of all the work.

Secondly, patriarchy determined the social division of labour along gender lines. The division between the domestic sphere and public sphere in which women are relegated to do domestic work while men are into social production, and then in social production itself the division between "women's" jobs and "men's" jobs (which is made to appear natural) are manifestations of this. Thus in both crucial aspects of the economy – control over means of production and division of labour, women's role and position are determined by patriarchy. A distinct division of economic activity also draws the relationship that women bear with men between the domestic and public spheres along gender lines. The economic fact underlying the question of the "backwardness of women" and the "advancement of men" is also related to the relationship that the sexes have towards domestic work. Domestic labour is a feature of the economy and it is a feature, which, to an important degree, characterizes the women in society.

To sum up, actual ownership or control over the means of production; participation in social production on an equal footing with men and abolition

of division of labour along gender lines; and releasing women from domestic drudgery and transforming domestic work into the public domain with men partaking in the domestic work on an equal basis – only these changes in the base will bring about the genuine liberation of women from patriarchy. For it is the above three features that constitute the material basis of patriarchy. Without bringing about these changes in the base, it is clear that, however much one may try to fill women in the public posts and legislative bodies; however fiercely we may struggle against the old ideas, customs, traditions etc., in the cultural sphere; and, whatever might be the position of women in judiocial terms, there will not be any basic change in patriarchal oppression.

Hence, our recognition of this important aspect (i.e., patriarchy being a feature of the base as well), will make a vast difference in our approval to the solution of the women's question and in our tactics of struggle both in the present stage of our revolution and after the victory of the revolution.

Besides this patriarchy as an ideology and as a social relation also operates at the realm of the superstructure. The relations within the family, the ideological framework developed through religion, education, law, custom media etc., reinforces and strengthens the patriarchal division of labour. Thus we must never lose sight of the fact that patriarchy is a phenomenon that exploits women economically and oppresses them ideologically. Hence patriarchy has to be tackled both at the base and at the superstructure. The war against patriarchal oppression should lead us into battle on both these fronts.

Part Two

ECONOMY

VI. Economic Aspects of Oppression and Emancipation

1. Domestic Work

Let us trace the evolution and transformation in the nature of domestic work in order to understand it concretely today.

Initially, when human beings lived in herds, there was no such thing as domestic work separately. Men and women together pursued occupations such as hunting, fishing, and food gathering in the beginning. Although women went on hunting expeditions often, they also stayed at home for considerable periods of time due to the need for bearing and rearing children. During this time they engaged themselves in food gathering from the surrounding areas and later discovered agriculture and cattle rearing by learning the skill of domestication of animals. The first natural division of labour was that between the sexes in the pre-class society.

Women were regarded in high esteem by society since human reproduction was considered as the most important and essential for social advancement.

The discovery of agriculture and animal husbandry by women brought about a gradual change in the way of life ending nomadic life and leading to fixed settlements. In course of time, food production and cattle began to contribute more than hunting in the fulfillment of the food requirements of the society. Hence, the work performed by women at home in primitive society was an indispensable part, and a more important one at that, of the social production. It has no resemblance whatsoever to the domestic drudgery done in class society. Thus until the introduction of the heavy plough and until agriculture and animal husbandry arise the domain of men with the dawn of class society or so-called civilization, the domestic work of

10

women had great social value and was the most important component of the total social wealth.

Domestic work has a whole range of labour activities. If it means cooking, laundering, cleaning, sweeping, child rearing, nursing, mending, buying rations and other necessities for women of the proletarian and petty bourgeois classes; while for peasant women the tasks are even more encompassing. Women wake up much before the men and they go to sleep long after them.

With the deepening ecological crisis, leading to the disappearance of village commons such as forests, pastures, tanks and wells, women's domestic work has become all the more time-consuming and arduous. It has also led to the general decline of the nutritional standards of the poor and landless peasantry.

The spread and penetration of capitalism leading to the rise of the industrial and service sectors and to semi-feudal agriculture has led to the drawing of women's labour into social production. The woman works not only in the house but she also becomes a labourer, a worker or employee, involved in social labour. While the capitalists and landlords draw her into the realm of social production, neither do these classes nor does their state relieve her of her domestic burdens. In fact the woman is a slave twice over. She is a paid slave outside the house and an unpaid slave within. Her participation in social production does not appear as a boon but an additional burden. Domestic work and social production are a double burden on women. This is how Lenin described domestic work and its impact on women in capitalist society: **“Notwithstanding all the laws of emancipating women, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on ... petty, nerve-racking stultifying and crushing drudgery.”** (*A Great Beginning*)

The Communist Party through its trade unions, peasant organisations and women's organisations should fight for the reduction of domestic burden on women. It should struggle for adequate compensation and facilities from the government and the capitalists in order to ease their domestic drudgery. Following the revolution, except for post-natal care that mothers have to perform and a few such other such similar functions, a good deal of private domestic work can be reorganised into the sphere of the social service sector such as: crèches for children, food at schools, hygienic eating houses for the community, community based laundries, cooperative cattle

sheds, sheep pens and pig sties, adequate piped water supply to houses, village level gobar gas based fuel supply, etc. All this and the granting of paid leave during and after pregnancy for all women whether in the villages or towns and cities can go a long way in reducing the domestic burden on women. But all these demands can only be fully realised with the success of the Indian New Democratic Revolution.

Another important aspect, which the proletariat must take up, is to fight the patriarchal notion that domestic work is to be undertaken by women alone. While creating awareness among women about this, it is necessary for the Party to first educate its cadres about male prejudices in this regard. Then it has to systematically mobilise men to share domestic work with women. This is however a long drawn process. It will have to involve education campaigns and solidarity campaigns, coupled with struggles of persuasion. While this is a protracted task and the objective basis for this to be implemented on a wide scale can come about only with the advance of socialism, this need not be an excuse to put off the campaign against patriarchal values in domestic work to some future date. It can be initiated in our Party, mass organisations and among the masses right now, on a small scale though, particularly in our guerrilla zones and prospective base areas.

2. Social Production

We have already looked into some of the key aspects concerning patriarchy and social production. The confining of women to the domestic sphere stultifies their thinking and narrows their consciousness. Contrary to this, the participation of women in social production opens up their social consciousness and develops their class thinking. It makes them understand the class roots of their enslavement. This motivates their participation in political struggle. And, it makes them understand as to who really benefits from their domestic slavery. Frederick Engels said: **“...to emancipate woman and make her the equal of man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant part of her time.”** (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) Capitalism has objectively played the role in bringing about this transformation in women. Yet, at the same time, the continuation of patriarchal ideology, concepts such as the male “bread-winner” and the female “housewife”, etc, discrimination along sexual lines in the realm of social production, home-based production, and so on, have con-

13

tributed to patriarchal oppression in the sphere of social production too. The notion that the participation of women in social production would lead to their emancipation, which some economic determinists had been exclusively emphasising in the name of Marxism, has clearly proved to be inadequate. Such an idea is mechanistic. Engels, it must be remembered, had nothing to do with the deterministic distorters of Marxism. He states in very clear terms **“the introduction of the entire female sex into public industry”** is **“the first premise for the emancipation of women”**. (*Ibid*, emphasis added)

We must emphasise that women ought to participate in social production. In this regard we must fight the feudal purdah system, which confines women to the domestic realm. But in doing so we must identify and fight against the sexual division of labour in social production and such other patriarchal practices too.

In today’s society, while women have come out in large numbers and participate in social production, yet they continue to perform those jobs, which are tailor-made to suit their “female nature”. This is nothing but an attempt to keep the woman submissive and docile by imposing norms of patriarchy. Few women, after many personal struggles, have been able to break this stereotype.

In the realm of agriculture this division is firmly stamped. Women perform particular agricultural labour operations while men perform certain others. All agricultural operations using oxen are the preserve of men. Seeding, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing are generally female jobs. The entry of agricultural machinery and capitalist methods renders a number of manual labour operations superfluous. Yet this affects women in a particularly patriarchal way. Agricultural activities involving the use of machinery are generally performed by men. Hence tractor and tiller operations, spraying, threshing, hulling, transplanting, etc are done by men leading to the general erosion of manual labour on the fields and the elimination of women’s labour in particular, from a good number of agricultural operations.

During the course of the world wars in the imperialist countries when there was widespread mobilisation of men for the front, women were encouraged to take to ploughing, male assembly-line production tasks or other male managerial jobs. Women took this challenge, compelled by objective conditions. The “male” stamp on labour differentiation, it was soon proved, was not “natural” but “socially” created. Yet, as soon as the

wars ceased and men returned from the front, the women vacated these “male” jobs and went back to their “female” preserves. Yet this proved one thing: that women can perform all those jobs which men claim only they are capable of on a social scale. Thus the difference between male and female work, on whatever criteria it may be based—that of “physical prowess” as feudalism does, or “skill” as capitalism does—is nothing but patriarchal prejudice.

Another important repository of male prejudice has been the trade union movement. Unions have seldom questioned patriarchal forms of capitalist exploitation of the women proletariat. They have also discouraged women’s participation in the trade union movement itself, sending her packing to attend to the domestic chores that await her in her home; thereby providing the men-folk the privilege of discussing politics and fighting the capitalists.

Yet another feature of patriarchy in social production is the surrender of wages that women receive to the male head of the house. Hence there is a double alienation that women experience. Firstly as agricultural labourers and industrial workers the product is alienated from them by the landlord or the capitalist. Then their wage is alienated from them by the male head of the house. This practice simultaneously damages even that social consciousness which women develop out of their participation in social production. This deprivation of wages takes place in two different forms. One is the more brazen manner of forcing its surrender. The second is subtler. The male wage earner so manipulates the domestic situation that the woman’s income is spent on domestic needs and the male wage earner keeps the privilege of spending his money for his fads and to accumulate property or wealth. In short, his wage belongs to him while her wage belongs to the whole family.

Another important aspect concerning social production is that women have only had to toil but have not been allowed the right of owning property. Under feudalism all the means of production were owned by men of the feudal classes. Women of the feudal classes shared the fruits of toil of the peasantry, but were generally not allowed to enjoy rights over property. The forfeiture of property which commenced with the origin of private property has continued right into the feudal period as a law of class society. While capitalism does not legally deny a woman from owning property, in practice, the reality is that property is owned and transacted by the males. It is this dispossession of all forms of social wealth, which reinforces the act of

depriving the woman of her wages too. Thus bourgeois democracy, which professes to ensure women equal rights over property, is only a sham.

The Communist Party must encourage women to participate in social production. But it must be remembered that women's participation in social production by itself cannot serve as a guarantee against patriarchy. It lays a sound economic foundation for the fight against patriarchy. In this sense it serves as an economic precondition. At the same time we must remember that social production itself is structured along gender lines. The party, its trade union movement, the peasant movement and women's movement must fight against this.

Of immediate importance is the need for the revolutionary woman's movement to pay attention to the retention of wages in the hands of women and the exercise of her independent will in spending it. The proletariat should uphold the democratic right of all women to hold property and obtain equal share in all ancestral property. Every individual plot that is distributed should be registered by the Revolutionary Peasant Committees separately on a fifty-fifty basis in the name of the wife and the husband, or, if the people prefer it otherwise, then under the joint names of the husband and the wife. And in case of disagreement between the wife and husband leading possibly to divorce, she will get her claim of 50% of the property that was distributed by the revolutionary movement. The struggle along these lines in the realm of social production can go a long way in enthusing the women masses to rise up, arms in hand and fight for the victory of New Democratic Revolution.

3. Family and Marriage

The family also, like other social institutions, has undergone transformation with broader changes in the social structure. The monogamous family, as we have already seen from Engels, came into existence with the development of private property. There are two aspects about the monogamous family that needs to be looked into. On the one hand is its role in the economy and on the other its role in instituting patriarchy.

The punaluan and pairing families were the basic economic units of society from the time of the upper stages of hunting foraging. The monogamous family operated as a unit of production and consumption in the period of the natural economy. Production was organised on the basis of family units. Tenants and artisans undertook production by relying on family labour. Bonded labourers were tied to the feudal families, again on a family basis. The surplus they produced was reaped by the families of the

landlords. The ownership of feudal property, as much as the extraction of surplus, was family based. The level of development of the means of production dictated the individual nature of production. This in turn made the family the unit of production under feudalism. Whether it was in the families of the landlords, or the families of the peasantry, all consumption was undertaken by the family as a unit.

But with the development of capitalism and the replacement of the former means of production with machines and therein the commencement of mass production, there was a socialisation of labour. Hundreds of workers were concentrated at one place. Production was no more organised on a family basis. Capitalism broke up and dispersed the former family based system of production. But most consumption took place with the family serving as a unit. It could be the paying of rent, it could be the purchase of groceries: these expenditures are made for the family as a unit. To this extent the roots of the family in the economic base of society—in the spheres of production and consumption as a unit— was weakened.

But did the new mode of capitalist production altogether eliminate the economic role of the family? It would be wrong to say so. Domestic labour, as we have already seen, plays a vital role in capitalism. It is the second pole of the economy. The first is the public pole which involves a considerable amount of labour activity. Domestic labour operates within the domain of the family. It plays the vital role of replenishing and reproducing labour power. The capitalist system relies on domestic labour also for its reproduction. Thus the economic role of the family has been retained, and it will continue to play its role in the base under capitalism.

Engels has said of the monogamous family that: **“Monogamy does not by any means make its appearance in history as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less the highest form of such reconciliation. On the contrary, it appears as the subjection of one sex by the other, as the proclamation of a conflict between the sexes entirely unknown hitherto in prehistoric times.”**

The monogamous family under class society has remained a bulwark of patriarchy. The monogamous family in feudal society is structured like the feudal estate. There is the patriarch that presides over the family. The woman and children are his subjects and have to serve and attend on him. Whatever income the wife and children earn must be surrendered to him. He takes no part in domestic work. He has to be first attended to. His word is law

within the family. He not only pronounces judgments but also executes punishments. He uses violence to keep his 'subjects' in order. He is the lord and master of his fiefdom—the family.

The patriarchal severity of the feudal family becomes less rigid as one descends the ladder of the social hierarchy of feudal society. Yet even among the property-less oppressed classes and castes, these patriarchal relations are generally reflected.

Under capitalism certain liberal influences might have seeped in. Yet the division of work between the man and the woman is retained, rather reinforced in the form of a capitalist contract, and with it the essential aspects of a patriarchal relationship continue within the family.

In Indian society marriage is generally patrilocal. As a girl she depends on her father, in marriage she lives in the shadow of her husband and with the death of her husband she falls back on her sons. Throughout her life, the woman is like a creeper needing patriarchal support.

Marriages are basically arranged. Choice of the couple and more so, the acceptance of the bride, is not taken into consideration in finalising a marriage. In India, marriage has increasingly become a means of extracting money from the family of the bride. Dowry has become the central question in transacting a marriage. Former traditions such as the payment of bride price have almost vanished. Quite often, it is the dowry that is more important for the groom's family than the bride. Dowry is the open sore of monogamous marriage in a society where market relations have spread.

The present day marriage and family - both are extremely oppressive on women. That apart, the family is the institution through which the ruling classes win support for their patriarchal ideology among males. In a society of class oppression, in a society ridden by caste oppression, the privilege which the patriarchal monogamous marriage bestows upon the men of the oppressed classes is what has kept the institution of patriarchy alive and going for the ruling classes. Without the structure of today's oppressive family, without the hypocrisy of marriages that make such families, social sanction for the patriarchal ideas of the ruling classes could not have been achieved. It is in the family, as a girl, that one learns to be submissive; and it is in the family, as a boy, that one learns to force out such submission. Hence any attempt to win real

democracy for the people should strike at the roots of the patriarchal relations within the family.

It is only when the family ceases to play the economic role and it passes from being an institution of the base into that of merely the superstructure, that one can envisage a change in it. Only that can cause the collapse of patriarchy within the family and lead to its democratisation.

After revolution, the Communist Party must, as a matter of policy, unburden women of their domestic work not by merely calling upon men to share the drudgery but by devising measures to draw it out from the domestic into the public sphere of the economy. Women must be liberated in the fullest sense of the term from domestic drudgery; organised, as it is, within the confines of the household. Only then can their participation in social production be meaningful and encourage their achievement of social equality with men.

Thus we are not against the institution of marriage itself, but against the patriarchal structure of the monogamous family. We must fight for the replacement of marriage by arrangement to marriage by free choice. In our country, this should also mean solid backing and encouragement for marriages irrespective of caste, creed, religion and nationality. And more so when such marriages are with Dalits. Marriage itself has to cease being performed as a feudal ritual. Dowry must be banned in our guerrilla zones and divorce procedures must be made less cumbersome for women. All patriarchal privileges and attitudes including wife and child bashing that prosper in the family must be resisted by a sustained campaign of educate—persuade—struggle. A composite package of economic measures (which by itself would require the success of the social revolution), legislation and consciousness raising through the women's struggle and education to remould the outlook of men only can transform patriarchal monogamy that ties down women within the family and acts as a drag on the otherwise progressive thinking of oppressed men. What has to be smashed is the vice-like patriarchal grip over the monogamous family. All encumbrances for the realisation of democratic relations must be destroyed. The family must be built on the basis of fullest equality, love and sharing. From being a fortress of patriarchy among the people, the new monogamous family must unshackle the woman and elevate the man to dignity.

Part Three

CULTURE

IV. Patriarchal Culture and Gender Discrimination & Domination

The discrimination against women is the central theme that pervades patriarchal culture. The culture of patriarchy derives strength from the economic role of patriarchy and in turn it reinforces patriarchal relations in the economy. The existence of patriarchy in the economy and in culture assists the class exploitation of landlords and capitalists.

Among the broad masses of men, patriarchy is found to exist in various forms. Male chauvinism, and male prejudice are the most prevalent forms. Conscious efforts to overcome patriarchal attitudes and values are lacking even among progressive sections of men, who, in the normal course support the demands of the women's movement.

Male chauvinism is the expression of misogyny. From Manu in the early centuries of the first millennium AD to the religious bigots, these male chauvinists all believe in the suppression of women. This is a fascist patriarchal creed.

Most male members of the masses, including men who belong to the working class and poor peasantry, can be said to have this male prejudice.

And as regards the progressive male fellow travelers who are frequently encountered in the social struggle, the neglect of the women's question in their writings, speeches and practice is only one other way that extends the life of patriarchy.

Among the masses of women there is a contradictory state of affairs. While some are clearly anti-patriarchal, a good deal entertain pro-patriarchal views. Patriarchy operates with their consent and complicity. The strong entrenchment of patriarchy in economy and society has caused such women to internalise patriarchal values and attitudes. This is also theorised by male patriarchs, as "woman is the enemy of woman". It is handed out as "evidence" that it is not men but women who impose patriarchy. The internalisation by women of patriarchal values is also an important dimension of patriarchal culture and is an immediate hurdle that the women's liberation movement has to encounter.

1. Education

The female literacy rate in India is much lower than the male literacy rate. At times of groom hunting and match making among the urban petty bourgeoisie, care is taken to see that the educational level of the prospective bride does not surpass that of the groom. Education is a male privilege. It is one long battle with patriarchy for the girl child in order to continue with her education.

With the commercialisation of Education and the escalation in expenditure, even middle class families frequently deprive daughters of it opting to rather educate the sons. The textbooks represent patriarchal values. Content of schooling is patriarchal.

Factors such as Gender based harassment, the different games that are taught for the two sexes and the discrimination rampant in extra-curricular aspects of the learning environment are equally important factors in structuring the consciousness of girls and boys along entirely different lines. It would be no exaggeration to say that as far as women are concerned education and employment are frequently seen as a means for their marriage, as temporary engagements. The main vocation of women in life is considered as marriage- acquiring a family, tending the husband, old and sick, child rearing etc.

2. Media

The mass media is an apparatus, which is controlled basically by the imperialists, the big compradors and the state on behalf of the Indian ruling classes. Mass media that are not directly controlled by these classes also generally tend to serve them. These classes exercise their monopoly in the mass media.

The visual media and graphics in the print media are overtly sexist.

The themes that are churned out in the TV serials act as a powerful means to reinforce ideas of male hegemony. The visual media dishes out a good amount of what one may call family based sentimental drama in which the feudal and capitalist stereotyping of women takes place. The dance sequences and the lyrics go a long way in projecting her as a sex object. In the wake of globalisation, the deeper penetration and the more extensive spread of imperialist exploitation in the Third World, not only has the imperialist media imposed white characters as heroes/heroines of black, brown and yellow peoples; it has rammed down its own racist notions of beauty.

Sexism in the daily media and pornography is growing. The advertising agencies have spread consumerism, they have disseminated an illusory upper class life-style and in doing so they have used the woman's body to sell in a market glutted with indisposable wares.

Consumption of a range of beauty care products, home appliances and semi-processed or fully processed food products is made out to be the road to women's emancipation. The whole world that the mass media is bothered is that of the urban and rural rich. It has hardly ever tried to portray the life and the problems of peasant women or that of the female working class. It is the task of the revolutionary movement to fight all these patriarchal distortions and monstrosities that is disseminated by the mass media. The women's emancipatory movement must develop radically alternate content in the mass communication it undertakes.

3. Religion and Religious chauvinism

All the early religions that were born did so as part of the rise and establishment of early class societies. Religion is an ideological weapon for the exploiting classes. All these religious systems came up in the course of the rise of private property and monogamy. All these religions therefore reflect to a varying degree, powerful patriarchal views. Religion, which sanctified exploitative social relations, also sanctified oppressive patriarchal relations. All the sacred tracts of these religious systems, deify motherhood and woman's submission to man.

At the same time there have been other religions such as Sikhism, which came up at the point of growing opposition to the feudal social system. There were also many dissenting faiths within the major religious systems such as Protestantism, Veerashaivism and the Bhakti tradition. Some of these faiths had women saints such as an Akkamma and a Meerabai. While these reform movements did oppose ascertain practices of patriarchy and played a progressive role as far as women were also concerned, they did not however question the basic patriarchal tenets that religion had established. They soon became, after the initial reformist upsurge, brazen perpetrators of male hegemonic thought. Due to the idealist solutions that religions have offered women and due to their deification of the patriarch and the sanctification of male domination, it is impossible for women to find the way to emancipation through religion. In fact one of the tasks of the revolutionary women's movement is to fight patriarchal notions enshrined in various religious systems

The chauvinist and menacingly anti-woman face of religion becomes obvious. This is when it turns fascistic. At such times as is the case with Hindu communalism in India, the entire attempt, while targeting religious minorities, the oppressed castes and the democratic forces, is to curtail even those nominal hard won freedoms which women have come to enjoy. The entire attempt of Hindutva is to make Indian women docile Sitas and submissive Savithris. The Hindutva brigade led by the RSS has taken up a sustained campaign of remoulding the consciousness of India's women. According to them the Hindu women should confine themselves to the kitchen, children and religion, must be loyal to and worshipful of the husband. Social ostracisation of women is recommended in the name of "purity", "security" and "morality". Upholding manusmruthi, RSS ideology seeks to subordinate and rule women through notions of sacrifice to the family and state. It has formed organisations such as the Durga Vahini and Bharitiya Mahila Morcha with retrogressive elite and petty bourgeois women who lead anti women, anti people campaigns under the garb of 'Hindu' custom, 'Hindu' religion and 'Hindu' rashtra. These organisations along with their parent organisations of RSS, Bajrang dal etc., justify dowry system, glorify sati and being communal and casteist are vociferously anti-women as they speak in favour of molestation and rape of Muslim women and also rape of dalit women by upper caste men. They encourage and revive anti women practices of child marriage, witch hunting and devadasi system in addition to sati.

The threat of Hindu communalism combined with the reactionary content of religion as such has resulted in the growth of Muslim religious fundamentalism. This seeks to curtail women's rights, imposes dress codes, restricts her movement, hails complete submission to the men in the family, and restricts her right to education and work. They also oppose women's right to property, divorce and maintenance and are tightening their grip over poor Muslim women utilising the constant Hindu communal threat.

While all Religious fundamentalisms have to be necessarily condemned Hindu communalism with its fascist threat is the main danger that needs to be thoroughly exposed and strongly countered.

In the backward countries, imperialism thrives by sustaining religious practices by colluding with fundamentalist forces whenever its interests.

Hence the revolutionary women's movement should fight patriarchal, retrogressive, communal onslaught on women

4. Caste

The caste system in India is another oppressive institution. Coming into existence as a social system with the establishment of the feudal mode of production, thereby creating a caste-based feudalism in India, the caste hierarchy with purity-pollution criteria and untouchability was institutionalised in order to benefit the rule of the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins. The caste system, with its strict rules of marriage and kinship was utilised by the upper castes to regulate their privileged position in society and their monopoly over social wealth

Caste became the vehicle, along with monogamy, for deciding the line of transfer of property from one generation to the next. And regulated reproduction meant confining women, which in turn helped male hegemonic control over women.

Men of the upper castes are allowed to have sexual relations with women of the oppressed castes. If women of the upper castes develop a sexual relationship with men of the oppressed castes—more so with Dalits, this is dealt with most severely and the woman is either killed or excommunicated. Thus the children she will bring into the world will not get any property. This is how the oppressed castes have not been allowed a share in the monopoly of property of the upper castes.

Of all the oppressed women Dalit women are the most oppressed and constitute the lowest rung in the social order. Dalit women the vast majority of whom are poverty stricken and property less as a community suffer not only from class exploitation but also from caste oppression with its blatant patriarchal overtones. It is Dalit women who are mainly subjected to most abominable forms of sexual harassment and rape in villages, who are paraded naked, stoned to death as 'witches', turned into devadasis to satisfy the lust of upper caste/ class men, and become the constant butt in case of caste and state violence.

Caste is thus an institution which serves to promote patriarchy. It feeds on patriarchy and in turn it feeds patriarchy. The two have a symbiotic relationship. The smashing of the caste system and the destruction of untouchability, which is its most cruel face, should also be the concern of the revolutionary women's movement. It is a precondition for democracy and it is a precondition for marriage by free choice.

5. Law

The legal system of any society is fashioned in order to protect the property of the ruling classes, in order to iron out obstructions in the further accumulation of such property. The laws of feudal and capitalist societies also prop up patriarchy.

Bourgeois law was only another means to ensure the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the name of democracy. The legal system of any bourgeois society contains this contradiction between appearance and essence.

All this holds good for the women's question too.

The law has proved to be an accomplice to the dowry killings, to the rapes, to wife bashing, to eve teasing to gender based and sexual harassment, to pornography, to prostitution and trafficking in women to Sati killings, to child marriages, to the retrenchment of married women from factories, to the dismissal of female factory workers, to making divorce procedures hopelessly complicated and protracted, to allowing women no share in property etc. Blatantly unjust laws like the law on restitution of conjugal rights which only seeks to force the woman to comply to the sexual need of the husband before a judicial separation has been obtained, also exist.

Further the so called 'freedom of religion' that sustains and justifies women's oppression as a divine order has denied women equal rights in property, equal rights within the family, right to decide where women will reside after marriage for some the right to maintenance, for some the right to divorce and some the right to adoption etc. The women's rights are accordingly governed and curbed by these varied personal laws; depending on which community she hails from. Women's organisations have been demanding that these unequal and unjust personal laws be scrapped and an egalitarian code upholding the democratic rights of women be made applicable to all women, irrespective of community. But the state deliberately acts helpless and incapable of intervening in personal laws. Taking advantage of the situation, Hindu communal organisations have been proposing a uniform civil code, which in essence is a Hindu code, based on Manu's anti-women laws.

The law cannot ensure the emancipation of women. It is only the collective action of the masses of women against patriarchal, feudal and imperialist oppression that can ensure their liberation.

Legislations favourable to women are the result of struggles that women

have waged and particular acts are the byproduct of the history of the women's movement in a particular country. These legislations, despite their inbuilt loopholes, are advantageous to women in their day-to-day struggles. They must be utilised by the women's movement. But not in a manner that drowns the aspiration for women's equality in the achievement of a few legally sanctioned reforms. Instead, they must be utilised in a manner that exhausts these legislations and re-emphasises the need to advance the revolutionary women's movement so that it partakes in smashing the legal superstructure that patriarchy has enshrined. The recourse to legal redress for patriarchal abuses in a country, which is quietly being embraced by fascism, can be short-lived and frustrating.

In a country like India with a semi-feudal and semi-colonial social structure interwoven with a strong texture of patriarchy, caste oppression, national oppression and Hindu communalism, the shallowness of pro-women legislations is exposed to all the women of the country by the misogynic doings and bankruptcy of the black robed patriarchs.

6. Motherhood

What lies at the heart of the concept of motherhood are the notions that conceiving and rearing children are the major tasks and virtues in a woman's life. The woman no doubt has a major role in reproduction owing to the biological structure of her body, but motherhood thereby goes to emphasise that her very social mission is to bring forth progeny and nurture them through life.

Motherhood, as it is in vogue today, is a patriarchal concept that came into existence in the early period of class society and was particularly emphasised during the entire period of feudalism. Pre-class conceptions of 'motherhood', evident from the mother-goddess icons, represent an altogether different view. It provided for respect and higher status in the community in consensus with her special ability and role in reproduction. Women's added responsibility of giving birth to children was a socially recognised labour and the motherhood concept, which existed, then did not seek to restrain her otherwise. But in class society the concept of motherhood undertakes to narrow women's vision and restrict her role in society to that of family.

Under a monogamous system of marriage, in an environment of natural economy, private property and class exploitation, the number of male children a man had was a sure means and indication of his wealth and strength.

To make matters worse motherhood, it must not be forgotten, is hailed only if she had male children. Women who did not conceive were declared as barren and their lives would become one hell. Patriarchal prejudice has it that the woman is “barren” and not the man. Given the patriarchal environment the lack of children or male offspring also provides men with a readymade excuse to go in for a second or third marriage.

The concept of motherhood basically served to delineate upper-class women from social production. And though the vast majority of oppressed class women continue to be engaged in social production this ideological concept has got extended to subsume their role in economy. Their fundamental role is seen as that of a wife and mother in family. Motherhood concept thus is a double edged weapon that crows down women, keeps them chained to the family, and at the same time uses their primarily homemaker’s image to pay lower wages both under feudal and capitalist mode of production, to ignore her contribution to economy by way of domestic production. Further much glorified motherhood theory tries to pull wool over the women’s eyes to the bare facts of her extended exploitation as unpaid domestic labourers in the indirect service of market and profit.

Hence it is the imperative of the revolutionary women’s movement to question the concept of motherhood, which reduces a woman’s striving in life to her task of reproduction and narrow family sphere.

7. Widows, spinsters and single women

Patriarchy, particularly of the feudal variety, has developed diehard attitudes towards widows, spinsters and single women. Capitalism has trimmed some of the more visible and outrageous conduct in this regard but has retained the core.

Indian woman’s already lowered status on account of being a woman further gets reduced to the dust with widowhood. Sati was the solution that Indian feudalism created for widows. The woman had to either throw herself in the funeral pyre of her husband or else she had to bury herself alive in the same grave that was dug for him.

Sati was one cruel way of regulating reproduction and thus the passage of private property down the established patrilineal line. It was for the very same purpose that the Brahmins also tonsured the widow and rid her of her ornaments and colourful flowers or clothes. It was for the same reasons that divorce did not exist in the feudal period. Wedlock was for life and beyond it. It was an eternal bond. The backward castes however did not tonsure women

but put to practice some of the other dreadful acts against widows. The oppressed castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy did neither. The reason is that they had nothing to transfer in the form of property. Hence Dalits and other oppressed castes also practiced widow remarriage and had a divorce code.

Sati and female tonsuring have generally faded out in India. Yet the Hindu communal male fascists who burnt Roop Kanwar at the stake are attempting to turn the wheels of history back.

India's patriarchal culture discriminates severely against single women. The underlying idea being that a woman should always live in the shadow of a man - her father, husband or son. She has no independent existence.

Hence male prejudice tends to harass all categories of single women—widows, divorcees, spinsters and those deserted by their husbands, more so if they manage their lives by themselves for any given length of time. Their attempt to lead an independent life is generally not tolerated. It is difficult for single women with or without children to rent a house, retain property or lead a life free from patriarchal social pressures. The patriarchal attitude that is built around such single women is to either somehow coerce them into sexual submission and thus into some kind of prostitution where possible or to get them married if they are unmarried single women.

Owing to much physical and mental abuse and gross indifference and irresponsibility of the men concerned generally, many households are headed by single women but they are not given adequate recognition or support by the government. They are completely ignored or deceived and exploited during compensation and rehabilitation programmes especially or during implementation of certain schemes.

Due to these added burdens that single women suffer and taking into account their courage and will to survive on their own despite it, the revolutionary women's movement should pay special attention to their problems and rally such women against the exploitative social system.

8. Gender Stereotypes

Gender discrimination has created certain fixed stereotypes. When one conceives of the virtues of man they have to be boldness, innovation, outspokenness, rationality, broadmindedness, etc. When one conceives of the virtues of women they have to be submission, loyalty, shyness, silence, emotionality, sentimentality etc. Such virtues attribute a kind of natural quality

to what is after all a result of social acculturation of the male and female psyches. The political struggle against patriarchy is to contend with such gender-biased stereotyping.

It must be remembered that while we have touched upon some of the more important issues (the question of violence and sexual morality will be dealt with separately) this list is far from exhaustive.

Gender bias has flooded our culture. It is as pervasive as it is powerful. The women's movement must study these and other questions in greater detail, arrive at a correct summing up of these cultural manifestations and draw up appropriate measures and means to combat them.

V. The Sexual Morality of Patriarchy

Engels said that the monogamous marriage did not mean sexual fidelity. On the contrary while the man always demanded fidelity from his wife, he on his part continued to successfully break it

When we speak of sexual morality of patriarchy we must first underline the double standards evident in it. Patriarchy continuously seeks to obtain the loyalty and fidelity of women through ideological and physical coercion. The woman has no right what so ever over her body. She is treated as the most private of all private property. Her body belongs to the man who owns her whole and soul. She is to act according to his dictates. While adultery by men goes unchecked and is justified as something natural to which women need to adjust and not raise a hue and cry, adultery or even traces of it by women is an unpardonable crime.

In fact feudal sexual morality always held that man in high esteem who had the greatest number of concubines. It was a part of the ruling feudal culture to have uninhibited and forced sex. Feudal class women were mute witnesses to the sexual escapades and the harems of their husbands.

Virginity is also made a great virtue and virginity tests are conducted by some to ensure the 'sexual purity' of women before marriage and even for some jobs. But premarital sex by men is a casual, understandable phenomenon.

All this is not to hold aloft the theory of free sex. For free sex ultimately treats both the woman's and man's body as market commodities operating by need and in pursuance of pleasure rather than any seriousness and commitment in building deep, meaningful relationships.

But one should note that as long as marriage is not based on mutual love and respect and as long as the family is structured on patriarchal lines, with the woman being at the beck and call of her husband, real equality and thus mutual trust and love cannot be realised.

Another overt, dark and despicable aspect to this double talk on sexual morality is the naked reality of prostitution promoted and institutionalised by feudalism and now turned into a highly profitable global industry by capitalism. Stringent sexual codes on women in family go hand in hand with adultery and rape of women by men in society. And as if that would not suffice women mainly from oppressed classes and castes are compelled to offer or sell their bodies for a price, to sexually gratify men whose sexual greed is taken for granted.

The Devadasi or Basavi cult was institutionalised by the feudal ruling classes in which the Brahmins had no small a role to play. Appropriating forms of worship that were in vogue among the Dravidian matrilineal primitive communist tribes, the Basavi cult was allowed to continue in the new social setting. But now the Basavis lost their former social standing. Drawn from the oppressed castes, Basavis were married off to the gods.

With the development of the commodity economy, the onset of capitalism and the ravages caused by colonialism and imperialism, the Basavi system was drawn into the sphere of organised prostitution. Imperialist plunder coupled with feudal strangulation of India has taken a heavy toll on the peasant and artisan masses. and working class families. Due to eco-destruction, and a host of other similar reasons, several lakh people have been uprooted from villages. Not all of them have found gainful employment. A good number of young women from such rural families end up selling their bodies to stay alive. With the growing tourism and hotel industries, child prostitution also has become a rising phenomenon in the country.

Particularly with the development of monopoly capitalism, sex, like religion earlier and liquor now, has been made into a new opiate of the masses. This is how Lenin described sex under capitalism: **“Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, is a phenomenon of decay. The proletariat is a rising class. It doesn’t need intoxication or a stimulus. Intoxication as little by sexual exaggeration as by alcohol.”** (Cited by Clara Zetkin) It is the ideology of patriarchy promoted by pornographic mass media overtly and covertly and shared by the masses of men that has made them customers of sex.

Prostitution is a process that demeans and dehumanises the women concerned and consequently the men too. Women and children caught in the web of prostitution have no recourse to law, any comfort or relief from society. They have to constantly undergo the harassment of lumpens, brothel owners, pimps, and police. With most of them in the hard clutches of organised prostitution by professional traffickers in women they can hardly ever escape or dream of a decent life. Many die young due to dreaded diseases for which there is no medical assistance. Used but unwanted they form the scum of the society, for whom none care.

The revolutionary women's movement must undertake extensive propaganda on the question targeting ruling class policies and patriarchy as the cause for prostitution. The solution as some imperialist agencies promote does not lie in changing their names to commercial sex workers or in legalising prostitution and providing some medical benefits thereafter. As long as women can be bought and sold there can be no respect for them as human beings. While demands and struggles to improve the desperate conditions of women in prostitution should continue by organising them, the direction should be to rehabilitate them and not endorse the phenomenon by any means. The role of the State and ruling classes in promoting sex as an industry should be exposed. The perspective should be to transform the very socio economic structure such that no woman ever need sell herself, body and soul, to make a living.

The debate on sexual morality of patriarchy should also make a mention of lesbianism for it is also a question of woman's right over self. Lesbianism one should note is also a product of patriarchal oppression. It stands against the notion of patriarchal family and women's oppression within. The violent opposition to lesbianism as something unnatural, destructive and perverse springs mainly from this fact. The use of lesbianism by ruling classes, to promote imperialist sex market through degenerate culture and distort women's perception of freedom and divert attention from real solutions to women's oppression needs to be exposed and strongly condemned. At the same time, its roots in existing patriarchal discrimination, sexual repression, violence and injustice should be understood and violence against lesbians should be condemned.

On the whole a democratic culture should be encouraged with equality of sexes at its core. Fight against double standards of sexual morality should lead to worthy man – woman relations which are based on mutual respect, concern and love, and not bartered or immersed in hypocrisy. It is the task of the revolutionary women's movement to take forward this fight in right direction.

Part Four

POLITICS

VI. Violence on Women

Violence on women is a characteristic of all class societies. Family, society and state perpetrate violence on women, and this is primarily mediated through men. Women cannot be kept in a state of subjugation and exploitation without the use of violence. To oppress women, i.e., one half of the population, the family, a microcosm of society, is an important instrument. When domestic violence gets sanction and is justified it is easier for the state to justify violence outside as well. Class society has constructed an ideological framework to justify and sanction violence against women – the courts, laws, the state machinery, religion, family, caste system, media, education, the arts and even literature – all these superstructural components justify violence on women.

Inside the family violence against the girl child begins even before it is born. Practice of aborting the female fetus is on the increase, thanks to the facility of modern science. Even after she is born, female infanticide is committed in various ways. All this is going on such a scale that it has affected the demographic pattern in the past decades.

Almost every male member in a family has authority over the female members of the household. This authority leads to violence on women. The discrimination practised against the girl child is an important form of oppression and violence. Within the family, beating, verbal abuse, forced incest – sexual harassment including rape is being commonly perpetrated by the male members of the family against women. Female genital mutilation is also being carried out in some communities.

And there is no limit to the power the husband wields on his wife. He can beat her, mutilate her, or do anything he wishes, including kill her for the most whimsical of the reasons. Internalization of patriarchal values among women has caused them to even believe that they cannot oppose this violence. The toiling men don't recognize the oppression of women and it blurs their vision of exploitation and liberation. It thereby aids the ruling classes in keeping the toiling masses divided. With the institution of marriage in India increasingly turning into a commercial transaction, a means of acquiring wealth, patriarchy has discovered the crudest form of violence –

“dowry deaths” or “bride burning”. This is a unique example of the dovetailing of feudal and bourgeois patriarchy to devalue the life of women so much that they can be killed for not bringing enough wealth.

Society – the community too wields total authority over women through the family. Women who wish to challenge tradition and lead their lives differently – who wish to work, to choose their life partners themselves – especially inter caste or inter religious, who wish to remarry, partake in social or political activities face all kinds of violence, including maiming and killing from the elders of the clan, caste, community.

Another form in which familial and social violence is manifest though in a more subtle form is mental and physical harassment of the girl child and wives that lead them to commit suicide. These are nothing but murders by the feudal patriarchal system that provides no dignity or security to women in distress.

Rape – sexual assault on women – is in essence a form of political violence on women. It is the exercise of male power over women. It keeps women under constant fear of attack; the stigma attached to rape is an even bigger psychological violence against her. Earlier, marital rape was not counted as rape. But with the growing struggle of women and rising consciousness rape within marriage is now recognized. The underlying motivation for rape lies in the patriarchal view that women are objects of sex and meant for gratifying the sexual desires of men. On the other side of the coin, this patriarchal concept also does not recognize the right of women over their own sexuality.

In our country men of the dominating castes have also used rape as an instrument of oppression of women of the oppressed castes.

Communalism has grown to be a menace since the time of colonialism. During communal riots minority women have been specifically targeted for sexual attacks. Such attacks and rapes are acts that demonstrate the achievement of the men of the aggressor community in insulting the men of the caste/religious group attacked, as women after all are their property and the rape of women is viewed as a violation of their property. Recently Christian women too have become victims of Hindu communal rapists.

Imperialists are using Third World women as guinea pigs for testing their anti-fertility drugs and gadgets. This is causing enormous physical harm and mental agony to these women. Imperialist cultural onslaught depicting women as objects of sexual gratification and pornography is directly encouraging violence against women.

Violence against women at their place of work by those in authority and male colleagues is much more common than generally supposed. The power exercised by landlords over their women agricultural labourers, the sexual harassment faced by women labourers at the hands of contractors, sexual attacks faced by domestic workers by male members of the families they work for, direct and subtle harassment faced by women working in educational institutions, offices, factories from their supervisors and bosses are widespread but most often unreported and unchallenged. Economic and social insecurity – fear of social stigma, fear of losing the job – often forces women to suffer the harassment in silence causing immense guilt and mental agony as well.

But the most dangerous of all these kinds of violence is state violence. The state being the most organized instrument of violence, which is controlled by and serves the ruling classes. The violence of the state, which is patriarchal, is political and fascist in character. When it targets women it does so in a patriarchal and gender specific way. In the course of suppressing political movements, the police and armed forces pick on women, abuse, humiliate and assault them with the specific aim of breaking the resistance. The state bureaucracy also deliberately turns a blind eye to this. It should be remembered that not only do the arms of the state directly perpetrate violence on women, but that the state is the authority which sanctions the violence on women in the family, society and work place. It protects the male members of the family, the caste, and the Hindu fascists who commit violence against women.

Our women's movement should expose the fact that the state is behind the various kinds of violence against women, either directly or indirectly. Hence while taking up all cases of violence against women, we should also expose the patriarchal bias of the state and its machinery, and that violence on women cannot end as long as this oppressive state exists.

VII. The Political Struggle Against Patriarchy

One of the characteristic features of patriarchy—more so of feudal patriarchy than of the capitalist variety—is to keep women out of social life.

But how has this banishment been achieved? This is because patriarchy is above all a political relation too. It needed power to break up mother-right of the gentile society. And once that was smashed it needed the exercise of political power to put the woman in her place. The ruling classes of society exercise this power of patriarchy. But in bringing it into operation they take the

assistance of male toilers. Without the fringe privileges that men of the broad masses derive within the family and but for its massage of the male ego, it would become impossible for the ruling classes to reap the benefits of patriarchy. Hence patriarchy is also political since the ruling classes, on account of it, deprive women of the power to determine their lives. The struggle against patriarchy for women's emancipation is therefore also a political struggle.

But following the development of capitalism and the growing participation of women in social production, there was a commensurate increase in the numbers of women that participated in the general social life. However all these women who have come into social life are regularly harassed by patriarchy. Moreover, the reform that capitalism has conceded has been basically to a rising section of petty bourgeois or elite women, quite a few of whom are absorbed not only as spokespersons for the exploitation of capitalism but also grow consciously silent about the patriarchal oppression of working class and peasant women.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the reform movement in India took up women's issues and tried to bring some reforms with the help of the British administration. This led to an increase in women's education, their participation in social life. In the beginning of 20th century they began taking part in political sphere too in big numbers. They were active in the political parties and participated in activities of the national revolutionaries of that period and in the Azad Hind Fauz of Subhash Chandra Bose. They were in the forefront in all the struggles taken up as part of the anti-British movement. Under the influence of the suffragette movement in the West some upper class women even gave petitions demanding voting rights. But neither during the anti-colonial movement nor after the transfer of power in August 1947 the political struggle against patriarchy was on the agenda of the main bourgeois parties, which played the major role in the political arena.

Though an effort was made by the communist women in the CPI to take up the fight against patriarchy the Party had no proper perspective on the question. As the party turned revisionist the political struggle against patriarchy was also further pushed to the backseat.

Meanwhile, with the growth of the women's movement and the rising consciousness of women against patriarchy, the bourgeois parties have also been forced to take up struggle against certain aspects of patriarchy albeit nominally. Since these are the very parties that use patriarchy for their

survival their efforts are half-hearted. And their recent panacea for women's problems is 'empowerment of women'. By making them part of the electoral process, by getting them elected to some seats they say women are empowered. Though the ruling classes desperately have the need to keep the people in illusion about the parliamentary system, still there is so much of patriarchy in them (apart from other reasons) that they are not even allowing the 33 1/3% representation for women in politics Bill to be passed.

Even while exposing this patriarchal attitude, our main focus should be on exposing the sham of empowerment of women within this system. Real empowerment is not possible without control over means of production. It requires a revolution from the village level to achieve this. By becoming part of revolutionary councils from the village level onwards women empower themselves in the real sense. The political struggle against patriarchy will not be possible without women being in the forefront in the political sphere. Their participation in politics becomes a pre-condition and a guarantee for the political struggle against patriarchy. So it follows that we strive for 50% representation of women in all mass organizations and at all levels of administration.

Even though some autonomous women's groups and some individuals are also talking of struggle against patriarchy, since they do not see the struggle against patriarchy as a struggle against this system also, all their efforts will only bring about some reforms in this system but will not eliminate patriarchy altogether.

Since patriarchy is there in the base and the superstructure, the political struggle against patriarchy encompasses both these spheres.

Experiences world over and especially in the countries where revolutions were successful have shown that the success of the revolution or the revolutionary changes brought about in the constitution or the laws do not automatically put an end to patriarchy. Actually it is a continuous fight, which has to be fought prior to the revolution and after the revolution's success also. Though revolutionary men also take part in this fight it is the women of the revolutionary classes who should be, and naturally will be, in the forefront of this fight.

The proletarian party alone can lead this struggle to the end. In the NDR phase and during the socialist construction period the fight against patriarchy continues as an integral part of the process of social changes that take place. The advent of communism, abolition of private property and

elimination of all ideology stemming from it will put an end to this political struggle against patriarchy. Thus there is a line of demarcation that has to be drawn while fighting patriarchy in the political realm. This is the dividing line between bourgeois reformism and proletarian radicalism in the women's movement. The question of a proletarian and bourgeois orientation is vital to the women's movement because it is the question of the complete overthrow of patriarchy as a social institution or its continuation on a reformed basis that is called into question.

VIII. Main Political Currents in the Women's Movement

Bourgeois Feminism

The perception of the women's question from the bourgeois ideological viewpoint is bourgeois feminism. Historically bourgeois feminism came into existence with the rise of the bourgeoisie.

Starting from Rousseau of France and Mary Wollstonecraft of Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, bourgeois feminism began to come of its own. Later, liberal political philosophers such as JS Mill took well-argued feminist positions. Responding to the struggles that women took up, one section of the liberal intelligentsia began to speak and theorise on behalf of women. Composed of a good number of women liberals, these feminists began to write on women's oppression. The major issue of struggle that bourgeois feminists related to in the initial period was the women's suffrage movement that took place in Europe and America in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Socialist Feminism

By the 1960s, one section of women intellectuals who came under the influence of Marxism ideologically distinguished themselves from the liberal bourgeois feminists and took on the name "socialist feminists". However, it is only a small section of these socialist feminists who applied Marxism consistently, the major section adopted a non-proletarian ideological viewpoint on the women's question. Therefore, despite the socialist label, they need to be broadly classed with the bourgeois feminists.

There have been four major contributions that socialist feminism has made to the understanding of the women's question.

Firstly, the question of domestic labour was brought into sharp focus and Marxist principles of political economy were applied in its study. The role of women in domestic work and the relationship between the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and the reproduction of labour power and therein the vital role of women in this was theoretically summed up. This not only strengthened Marx's labour theory of value but also correctly located the role of women's domestic labour in the capitalist mode of production.

Secondly, women's involvement in social production was brought up for scrutiny. And, it was observed that while capitalism drew women into social production on a large scale, it simultaneously created a division of labour between male and female workers. Thus it was proved that capitalism retained a sexual division of labour in social production and this division was utilised to depress the wages of women below that of the male wage. This was yet another demonstration of the institutionalisation of patriarchy in a capitalist economy. This analysis is significant since it exposes capitalist patriarchy in the sphere of social production. It provides a framework not just to study capitalism, but also to investigate the continuation of these capitalist patriarchal relations in the sphere of social production in the socialist economies.

Thirdly, drawing from Engels' contributions, socialist feminism further developed the concept of patriarchy. Patriarchy was analysed not merely as a form of oppression but as a full-fledged social institution. Applying Marxist methodology it was clearly defined as an institution, which operated in the base as well as the superstructure. This integral understanding has assisted the focusing of patriarchy as one of the targets of social revolution in concrete and tangible terms.

Fourth, the patriarchal features of the state have also been brought out.

These positive contributions need to be taken into account.

But Socialist feminism also has its bourgeois origins and perception. These are a negative influence and must be combated for the success of women's emancipation.

Now let us look at some of the general trends of bourgeois feminism.

Gender sectarianism or gender exclusivism is the main underlying aspect that is to be found in bourgeois feminism. It might be manifested in the following ways:

1. Seeing women's oppression in isolation from the social system. The relationship between class oppression and the rise of patriarchy as an institution is lost sight of. Such a perception inevitably leads to reformism.

2. Seeing men as the targets of women. Since men generally bear patriarchal prejudices against women and enjoy some of the privileges of female domestic labour, men are seen as the cause and reason for women's oppression. Instead of fighting patriarchy as a social institution, which serves the ruling classes, this perception encourages the fight against men of the toiling classes.

3. Anti-patriarchal struggle is emphasised while class struggle is either negated or de-emphasized.

4. Women are seen as one bloc. Class divisions and class contradictions among the different classes of women, and particularly that between women of the toiling classes and those of the ruling classes are glossed over. The problems of petty bourgeois and women of elite sections are exclusively projected in the name of a general women's movement.

5. A good number of socialist feminists including, bourgeois feminists constantly demand the women's movement to preserve its "autonomy" and "independence" from the organisational influence of the communist party. Thereby it seeks to secure the influence of the bourgeoisie instead of that of the proletariat over the women's movement.

Apart from this basically exclusivist trend, bourgeois feminism has certain other general features. It has reformism at its heart. This is counter posed to revolution. Quite often it confines itself to merely addressing superstructural aspects rather than locating women's oppression in the base also. Further, feminism also attempts to personalise the women's question, reducing her interests to that of her domestic world and the priorities that arise from it.

There are many other specific expressions and arguments placed by bourgeois feminism. The ideological debates with these different schools of bourgeois feminism is important for the sharpening and development of a comprehensive Marxist theoretical view of patriarchy and women's emancipation.

Socialist Stream in International Women's Movement

Even as the development of capitalism led to the rise of the bourgeois women's movement especially demanding the right to vote, another stream

was developing simultaneously in Europe among the working class women. Socialist men and women began organizing a working class women's movement in the end 19th century and beginning of 20th Century of whom the most prominent were Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, Krupskaya and others. They were the theoreticians and the leaders of this movement. They even held an international conferences of socialist women. Fredrick Engels and August Bebel wrote books on women's emancipation with a Marxist view which served as a guideline for this movement. They were part of the revolutionary movements of their respective countries.

Though they supported all the bourgeois democratic demands of the feminists like the right to vote, they were for universal suffrage. Criticizing latter's bias against black women and poor women they also put forwards the demands of the working class women like 8-hour working day, facilities at the work place etc. They organized huge rallies, demonstrations, and strikes and won many demands. They also had to fight for the right to participate in all the struggles with their class brethren. The proletarian men who were at first reluctant to join them, or had to give in, in the face of their determination.

While the bourgeois women's movement represented only the interests of the white, upper class women, the socialist women's movement very clearly demarcated itself from it and represented all that was democratic and served the interests of the majority of the toiling women. The stream of socialist women's movement continued in all the countries where communist parties organized women in the struggle against patriarchy and in the overall struggle against the exploiting system. In Russia, China, Vietnam, and Korea women played a prominent role in the pre-revolutionary movement and in the party and in the army. Till today in all the third world countries waging armed struggle the legacy of the socialist women of the 19th century is being carried forward. Our women's movement is also part of this legacy.

IX. Principal trends in the Women's Movement in India

Social Reform Movement

In India, the liberal bourgeois trend was manifested in the early social reform movement led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Veereshalingam, and others belonging almost exclusively to Brahmin castes. It was confined to legalist, constitutional methods. It appealed to the British colonialists to

change the legislation thus reforming the position of women. It was directed mainly against feudal practices such as Sati, child marriages, and campaigned for widow remarriages, education for women, etc. These reforms were aimed mainly at improving the status of upper class women.

In the last two decades of the 19th century, a new trend of equating nationalism with Hindu revivalism made its appearance in the social reform movement. It was represented by Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission and Annie Besant's Hindu Association to some extent. They supported remarriages of child widows but opposed those of adult women, encouraged education of women but stated that this was meant to mould women into good housewives.

The participation of women in the anti-British struggle, working class movements, anti-caste and other socio-political movements increased significantly since the 1920s. The All India Women's Association, formed in 1927 under the leadership of liberal women reformers belonging to upper caste and upper class sections, represented a liberal feminist trend. The activities were confined to hall meetings and passing resolutions for the betterment of women. They did not attempt at mobilizing the women of the lower classes and the religious minorities.

It was the anti-caste movements led by liberal bourgeois reformers like Jyothiba Phule, Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar) and Ambedkar, which mobilized the masses belonging to the toiling classes and castes. They opposed the caste structure, Brahminism and patriarchy, supported the equality of the sexes, and nurtured a democratic ideology. However, they did not see the roots for women's oppression in the feudal socio-economic system but in Hindu religion and culture.

Contemporary Trends

The contemporary women's movement took shape in the historic revolutionary struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The heroic Naxalbari upsurge enthused and rallied vast masses of women along with students and youth. Women began to participate in a big way in political movements. The women's liberation movement in the West also exerted its influence on urban women in India. The broad-based democratic movement after the Emergency also witnessed the broadening of the social base of women's movement. Some autonomous women's organizations sprang up in several states and an All India Conference was held in 1980. These women's organizations focused mainly on the women's oppression in the family along

with some issues of discrimination and atrocities on women. The success of some women's organizations led to a renewed interest among the political parties to revive their women's organizations or establish new ones.

The state succeeded in co-opting the leadership of these autonomous women's organizations through measures such as forming a Women's Commission by including feminist leaders, providing funds to these women's organizations and for women's studies, introducing new laws or amending the laws concerning women's issues, etc.

We can broadly classify the main political currents in the women's movement in India into three: the reactionary trend, the reformist trend and the revolutionary trend.

All those women's organisations and bodies, which ruling class parties have formed, from the RSS to Congress, may be brought under the first category. Imperialist sponsored Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) must also be included in this trend. While there are differences between the various forces and their women's organisations and one can possibly have contradictions with the other within this category, they have one common feature. And that is they are either sponsored by the ruling classes or they seek to serve the ruling classes by organising women. This is the underlying political feature, which is common to all the women's bodies in this trend.

The most reactionary trend is the one led by the RSS –BJP combine which are trying to mobilize women *sewikas* in large numbers in the name of Hindu nationalism. The newly formed *Durga Vahinis* are meant for protecting the interests of Hinduism and for perpetuating patriarchy. Democratic women's movement cannot be strengthened without a consistent and uncompromising fight against this Hindu communal trend.

The reformist trend is basically composed of the bourgeois feminist organisations that fight patriarchy and women's organizations linked to the national liberation struggle, and revisionist women's organizations. They do not generally entertain funding from imperialist agencies or the state.

The first is composed generally of women professionals; it also has a good number of bourgeois feminists and "socialist feminists"; it has votaries of an "autonomous" women's movement. The social base of this segment of the reformist trend is essentially petty bourgeois. But this segment of the reformist trend works in small groups and does not have any mass based women's movement under its leadership. The second segment that constitutes this trend has been able to mobilise women masses in political

struggles and they are generally tied politically and organisationally to the national liberation movements that are today waging armed struggle against the Indian state. The perception and emphasis of this section in the women's movement is to fight for national liberation and to arouse women for this task. They either do not perceive patriarchy, or if they do, then they tend not to emphasise it.

The third, the revisionist women's organizations, represent a trend that is a deviant from bourgeois feminism but is the same in essence. The revisionist parties' understanding of the women's question is basically mechanistic and economy-deterministic. The following inadequacies may be listed in revisionist perceptions of the women's question.

1. Like a few bourgeois feminists revisionists too see patriarchy as a system that operates only in the superstructure and not the base. Thus the economic foundations of patriarchy are negated and the entire question is reduced to one of cultural struggle against patriarchy.

2. The chief thrust of revisionist analysis and practice is to reduce the women's movement into a constitutional reformist movement.

3. There is the tendency to mechanistically counterpoise the struggle against patriarchy with class struggle. And quite often in the name of interest of the class struggle, the struggle against patriarchy is undermined.

Due to their line of parliamentarism, the mobilization of women is subordinated to their overall aim of increasing their vote bank and hence they limit struggles to constitutional reforms and strictly legal bounds. Since the revisionist parties serve the ruling classes, their mass organizations, in spite of their advocacy of reformist programmes, should be distinguished from other reformist organizations. While we ally with the women's organizations belonging to the reformist trend on common issues faced by women, we should be more selective and cautious in going for united activity with the women's organizations belonging to the revisionist parties.

All these segments in the reformist trend though have different perceptions, can only reform the status of women but not radically transform it, and none of them target the social system that nurtures patriarchy.

The third trend called the revolutionary trend has Marxism as its guiding ideology and perceives not only the ruling classes of the social system as its enemy but holds that patriarchy is built into the system in the service of the ruling classes. This trend therefore fights against patriarchy by mobilising the broad masses of women, composed in the main of

working class and peasant women, as part of its fight against the ruling classes and fights against the ruling classes as part of its fight against patriarchy. It does not see a contradiction between the two and places emphasis on both aspects.

Even while conducting ideological struggle, we should also strive to initiate issue-based joint activity with the reformist women's organizations and the women's organizations belonging to the revisionist parties that advocate a reformist programme.

X. The New Democratic Women's Movement

The targets of the Indian New Democratic Revolution, the big landlords, the comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie and imperialism are also the perpetrators of patriarchal oppression on Indian women. Hence struggle against these classes and their state also encompasses the women's liberation struggle against patriarchy. There is a continuous and lively dialectical relationship between the two. One cannot be conceived without the other. The struggle for NDR opens new vistas for women's emancipation from patriarchy and the struggle against patriarchy energises the NDR. The NDR, harbinger of liberation for the Indian masses, is the sure road to women's emancipation.

But who should lead the women's liberation struggle? The class that leads the NDR, the proletariat, must lead the women's movement through its party, the Communist Party.

Women workers are the most revolutionary section among the women masses of India. They are involved in social production and earn a wage, which broadens their consciousness and gives them a measure of independence within the family and society. Given their advanced consciousness as workers they easily unite and feel the need for a revolutionary women's organisation.

Women landless labourers and poor peasant women come next. They are the closest and trustworthy allies of the proletariat and together are the most numerous and most revolutionary classes in the village. The severity of patriarchal oppression on the one hand and their own capacity for self-assertion and resistance makes them the most eager adherents to the call for women's emancipation.

The service, artisan and middle peasant classes of the village respond favourably to the women's movement. They partake in agricultural or

physically productive labour and thus are reliable allies in the anti-feudal anti-patriarchal struggle in the village.

In the towns and cities women who are not by themselves workers but belong to the working class families naturally all share the difficult life of the male workers. These women are the first to express solidarity with the proletariat's struggles and are the ones that follow women workers in struggle against patriarchy.

The female student community constitutes the militant wing of the female intelligentsia. Their numbers are growing each day and they aspire to break away from patriarchal bondage and lead an independent life. If moulded properly in revolutionary ideology, they can serve as a good source of cadre force for the revolutionary women's movement.

Middle class women, due to social exposure and their role in social production, tend to display a positive approach to the women's movement. The numerically dominating in them comprising the lower strata of middle class employees such as anganwadi instructors, school teachers, etc, have the potential to come out as active participants in the revolutionary women's movement. The upper section of middle class women employees and professionals is prone to the influence of bourgeois feminism. They provide the social basis for the growth of bourgeois feminism and supply its more articulate representatives. Despite their ideological differences with the revolutionary women's movement, there is a bright scope in the long run for building a united front with them.

There is a growing section of women entrepreneurs in the bigger cities. They always like to bask in their glory and are the best living epitomisation of bourgeois feminism—they being bourgeois and feminist at once. One section from them belongs to the national bourgeois class. Although they exploit female (or male) workers, these entrepreneurs can play a revolutionary role now and then.

Women of the rich peasantry and women who depend on urban middle class men and men of the national bourgeoisie class do not partake in any form of social production. They are confined to the family. Although these women belong to the revolutionary classes and thus support the NDR, they tend to internalise patriarchal values to a great extent. The Hindu communalists rely on them for spreading their reactionary notions of motherhood and Sita-like pious wife-hood. Such women are victims of patriarchal domination within the family, and more so if they belong to upper caste Hindu or conservative Muslim families.

Hence this section can, even without being an active participant, extend its strong sympathies and be receptive to the propaganda of the revolutionary women's movement.

Another section of oppressed women in India is the growing number of prostitutes who are the worst victims of imperialist onslaught on women. They despise this society and its double standards and are desperate to get out of that kind of life. So they will also support the New Democratic Revolution, which promises to put an end to prostitution and ensures them a dignified way of life. In some revolutionary movements they played a very heroic role. Though organizing them is not that easy and may not be possible immediately, the revolutionary women's movement should strive to work among them with proper demands and slogans.

Women of the landlord and comprador classes face some patriarchal restrictions. But as members of the ruling classes, they survive only through feudal and imperialist exploitation and oppression of India's toiling masses. They are the repository of internalisation of extreme patriarchal attitudes and have a parasitic character. They support every act of repression on the revolutionary masses. They are the enemies of the Indian NDR.

Some bourgeois feminists only see the feminine constituency but not the class character of such women.

The motive forces of the Indian NDR are the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. The revolutionary women's movement will be led by the proletariat, the women's section of which will be in the forefront of the revolutionary women's movement, the landless and poor peasant and tribal women will be its most enthusiastic and most numerous participants; women belonging to working class households, the female student community, women professionals and middle peasant women will be its reliable participants. Housewives of the upper stratum of middle classes, rich peasant women and women entrepreneurs of the national bourgeoisie will play a passive yet supportive role and one section from among them will be active participants in the revolution and one section will vacillate. The women's liberation movement is an important stream of the NDR. It strengthens the NDR and is in turn strengthened by it.

The NDR spreads by the formation of innumerable guerilla zones and establishment of bases. In other words, by the deepening of class struggle, scope is opened up for the deepening of the anti-patriarchal struggle too. Similarly, the deepening of the anti-patriarchal women's movement deepens

the advance of the class struggle too. In the protracted process of NDR, care must be taken to advance appropriate slogans at each stage, twist or turn in the movement concerning the general political, economic and cultural spheres; and for the anti-patriarchal political, economic and cultural realms. It is only by doing so that the enthusiasm of women in waging class struggle is kept in line with their enthusiasm for fighting patriarchy and emancipating themselves even as women.

What will the NDR fetch women? How will it lead them towards emancipation?

“Land to the tiller” is a cardinal slogan of the NDR. Since women are an indispensable part of the agricultural labour force, they will receive half of all the land that is seized and distributed by the revolution. Thus peasant women, who were denied any rights over property, will at last get their share of land. This will not only smash feudalism but also one of the glaring aspects of feudal patriarchy.

Women will be ensured equal wages for equal work. This slogan will destroy one of the major pillars of the semi-feudal semi-colonial patriarchal economy. Women workers and landless and poor peasant women involved in social production will be able to resolve a major stumbling block of patriarchy in the economy.

We have seen that the semi-feudal economy strangulates and obstructs the participation of women in social production. The destruction of feudalism will open up wide scope for women to participate in agricultural activity in the form of mutual-aid teams. The development of new rural and urban industries as a result of the release of productive forces will be able to draw in women on a large scale into social production. In social production itself women will be ensured at least 50% of all jobs and thus the rapid transformation of women’s economic life will be guaranteed.

Domestic work in the cities will be increasingly brought under the scope of cooperatives and in villages mutual-aid for domestic work will initiate the process of its transformation into the public sphere of the economy from the private domestic sphere.

These would then be some of the more important of economic changes in relation to women.

In the cultural sphere a new and democratic code of marriage by free choice and freer divorce procedures will be legislated and implemented. The practice of dowry will be abolished. Violence on women within the house or

in public will be dealt with seriously. The emphasis will be to overcome patriarchal subordination within the family and democratise it. Prostitution will be abolished and former prostitutes economically and socially rehabilitated. Primary education will be made compulsory for all children. One that upholds gender equality will replace patriarchally biased syllabi. Unskilled women entering social production will be given training to acquire skills so as to lessen the gap between male and female work on the basis of skill. The new democratic state will take up the task of meeting the medical expenses of people. Pre-natal and post-natal care will be ensured by the commencement of rural hospitals. Women will get paid leave during this period.

Women will be drawn into the political mainstream ensuring their equal participation in the exercise of political power jointly with men on a social scale for the first time in history. It is good to remind ourselves of what Lenin wrote in his *Letters from Afar*: **“If we do not draw women into public activity, into the militia, into political life; if we do not tear women away from the deadening atmosphere of household and kitchen; then it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible even to build democracy, let alone socialism.”**

These would then be some of the more important economic, cultural and political changes, which the NDR will ensure women. Achieving the above-mentioned changes, however, is an arduous process. Resistance to these changes will be strong not only from the reactionary feudal and bourgeois classes but also from a section of the exploited masses who are under the cultural influence of the above classes. Hence, along with the class struggle in the economic sphere, cultural revolutions become indispensable for transforming the old deep-rooted ideas, customs, habits and culture.

One must, while looking at these phenomenal changes, not forget that the NDR will not altogether eliminate patriarchy. It will be successful in more or less destroying feudal patriarchy. But the capitalist variety will continue to contend with the rising aspects of women’s socialist equality. Just as the NDR paves the way for the transformation of society to socialism, similarly, we may say that the NDR by attacking patriarchy and eliminating most of its feudal manifestations and certain capitalist manifestations, will lay the basis and open the road for the emancipation of women.

Those who fail to see this process, that is, the relationship between NDR and socialism and consequently the relationship between laying the foundations for women’s emancipation and achieving complete emancipation, tend to fall into deviations in comprehending the women’s question.

There is a mutually supportive relationship between the class struggle for NDR and the anti-patriarchal new democratic women's emancipatory struggle. One strengthens the other. However, a contradiction can always emerge as a result of wrong handling.

If class struggle is undertaken without providing the fullest scope for an attack on patriarchy (which is a mechanistic or a "male" viewpoint) or when the anti-patriarchal struggle is pushed beyond the point where it affects the unity of the men and women of the revolutionary classes (which is a one-sided and "feminist" viewpoint) thereby upsetting the further progress of the class struggle, a mutually contradictory situation can arise. Both these deviations must be avoided. When a Communist Party is rectifying the first type of mistake and opening up the attack against patriarchy as part of the progress of the class struggle, care must be taken to see that the movement does not land up in the embrace of the second deviation and, vice versa.

The revolutionary women's movement may address itself to the following long term and short term demands.

Immediate Tasks on which to rally women as part of the NDR:

1. *An equal share with men in all feudal property distributed to the poor peasantry as part of the ongoing democratic agrarian revolutionary struggle.*
2. *An equal share for women of all the progressive classes in all inherited or earned property.*
3. *Equal pay for equal work.*
4. *End to all imperialist-capitalist inspired sexist propaganda and an abolition of prostitution and the entire sex industry.*
5. *End to all violence by the patriarchs and the state on women. Severe actions against all these outrages.*
6. *Ban dowry. Fight to end arranged, traditional and extravagant marriages. Demand for free choice in marriages, simple marriages and encouragement for inter-caste and marriages.*
7. *Adequate job reservation for women in state and central governments.*
8. *Free and compulsory education for all women. Co-education. Against all feudalist communalist and imperialist distortions which discriminate against women in the realm of education.*

9. *Strict action as the case may warrant against amniocentesis female infanticide, anti-women birth control measures, discrimination among children based on sex.*
10. *Against portrayal of women in religion, against communalism, against the Manudharma Shastra against personal laws which discriminate against women.*
11. *Against all media distortions of women.*
12. *Campaign against anti-woman customs among tribal and other minority groups.*
13. *Comprehensive health care facilities and services for women, ban on all anti-woman birth control techniques*

Long Term Post-Revolutionary Tasks:

The tasks of our Party after the NDR should include:

1. *Full participation of women in social production, i.e., altering the relations between sexes in social production.*
2. *Socialisation of domestic work.*
3. *Sharing of domestic work by men, that is, transforming the relations between the sexes in the realm of domestic work.*
4. *Political participation and the joint exercise of political power by women.*
5. *Collectivisation of all private property and a fight for the abolition of the patriarchal family system. Establishing socialist man-woman relationship*
6. *Abolition of privatized home-based industry and the entire system of wage labour, to replace it with socialised production and ownership.*
7. *Express solidarity with women and struggling people all over the world.*

XI. The Socialist Women's Movement

The transition from NDR to socialism opens up prospects for the elimination of patriarchy. Mao Tse-tung said: ***“Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realised in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole.”*** (*The Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*)

However, even this, it must not be forgotten, is a long process, in which proletarian women will have to play a key role by continuing to struggle against a few remnants of feudal patriarchy and against the immediate and more pervasive capitalist patriarchy.

In the economic sphere socialism opens the prospect of completely engaging in social production the till-then-hidden and unshackled work force that laboured within the four walls of the household. This will be an immediate and widely pervasive transformation in the lives of women. Speaking on March 8, 1918, Lenin drew the relationship between socialism and women's emancipation when he said: ***“The...principal step was the abolition of the private ownership of land, the factories, and mills. This, and this alone, opens the way for the complete emancipation of women, their emancipation from “domestic slavery”, by passing from petty, individual domestic economy to large scale social economy.”*** Again Lenin said on a different occasion: ***“The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty house-keeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into a domestic labour, which was till then the burden of the woman, will be transformed so that it becomes a part of the public socialist economy. This will greatly reduce the burden that befell women. The remaining domestic work will have to be undertaken by persuading husbands to take an equal share in it as part of an educate-persuade-struggle campaign. Without the supportive role of the transformation of domestic work into the public sphere, any one-sided emphasis on drawing women into social production will only be a wrong way of doing things. It will overburden women and dampen their enthusiasm to participate in the struggle for socialism.”***

In the sphere of social production, the division between sexes will have to be eliminated by a conscious campaign of providing women with the training to shift from unskilled and semi-skilled to skilled jobs (which itself is related to the overall pace of the industrialisation of the economy) and by breaking all male preserves in social production. Mao Tse-tung spoke of the contradiction between mental and manual labour, in the period of socialism. It must be remembered that such contradictions will also be reflected along gender lines. A conscious policy of filling 50% of all jobs by women, a policy of protective reservation, can help achieve resolve this task more speedily.

In the feudal economy the family is both a unit of production and consumption. In the new democratic economy it gradually ceases to be

a unit of production while it continues to remain a unit of consumption. But in the socialist economy, with the socialisation of production, the family-unit:

1. Loses all relations with social production.
2. Its role as a unit of consumption is gradually undermined.
3. The gradual decline of domestic work eliminates the sexual stamp on the remaining nominal domestic work that is performed as a result of husband-wife sharing of such work.
4. Under socialism, the family ceases to belong to the base and becomes an institution, which is confined to the superstructure.

In the political sphere, not only should the Communist Party be able to reflect these anti-patriarchal changes but also it should prepare itself to carry forward the struggle to emancipate women. It is imperative, apart from other ideological questions, that at least half its members at all levels should be women.

Further, women should be present in equal numbers in all decision-making bodies.

Hence political activity, a territory which women were hitherto forbidden to tread, would be made into a “natural” part of the female constituency.

In the sphere of culture, with the spread of socialist values and the elimination of all patriarchal forms of subordination and male privileges, the unburdening of woman’s domestic labour and the sharing of domestic work on an equal basis, the decline of arranged marriages to be replaced by marriages of free mutual choice; the relationship between husband and wife within the family will be put on a truly democratic basis, on a social scale, for the first time since the institution of monogamy came into existence. The presumption that the family will collapse as an institution with the arrival of the socialist stage, as is argued by a few feminists, is not borne out by facts. Instead the family will have experienced drastic transformation. It will have retained its monogamous structure but will have lost its patriarchic essence. It would have, in the process, acquired a democratic essence and achieved what Engels said was not just the “reconciliation of man and woman” but would reflect “the highest form of such reconciliation” since the time that monogamy made its appearance. Engels raised this question and answered it this way: **“Having arisen from economic causes, will monogamy then disappear when these causes disappear?”**

“One might answer, not without reason: far from disappearing, it will, on the contrary, be realised completely Monogamy, instead of collapsing,

at last becomes a reality—also for men.” (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*)

What shape will the family take under communism? Borrowing some wisdom from Engels, we must say: the less said about this the better. Any speculation in this regard can only remain fanciful. Let us contain wild imagination. Let us put our faith in the communist men and women of the future. And let us believe that their institutions, including that of the family, will best reflect the interests of gender equality and communist morality.

When further transformation takes place with regard to health care, media content, education, art and literature and culture, both male prejudices and the internalisation of patriarchal views by women will lose their material basis in society. The final emancipation of women, with each passing day, will become more and more of a reality. At such a point of time society would also have passed into the stage of communism.

The struggle against patriarchy in the period of socialist transformation is more easily said than done. It will be possible only with the advancement of the class struggle in the base and in the superstructure. Just as the women’s liberation movement relies on and contributes to the advance of class struggle in the period of the NDR; similarly, it is the advancement of class struggle under socialism and the fight against the bourgeoisie in the sphere of ideas and the manifestation of bureaucracy in the sphere of production that will deepen, enrich and strengthen the anti-patriarchal struggle. It must not be forgotten that apparent “non-class” aspects of society such as gender discrimination, national discrimination, etc, have come up in society at particular historical junctures, not as an end in themselves but to serve the rising classes of the particular historical epoch. Hence the Marxist assertion that nothing is above class in a society founded on class division. All social institutions in class divided societies serve the interests of specific classes. Hence the continuation of the bourgeoisie is directly related to the continuation of institutions or the remnants of institutions such as patriarchy, national discrimination, etc which prop up the bourgeoisie. Therefore the continuation of patriarchal values in socialist society only demonstrates that the bourgeoisie is still alive. Hence, the elimination of patriarchy is closely linked with the elimination of the bourgeoisie.

In the Soviet Union and China immediately after the success of the revolution, the socialist governments changed all the laws and constitutional provisions, which were anti-women. Women were given full opportunities to study, to work, to participate in politics, social life and all

other spheres. Soviet Union was the first country to provide the right to abortion. In a span of about 30 years, the achievements of the socialist societies in the process of emancipation of women are unprecedented. Those who say that even the socialist societies have failed, refuse to see these achievements.

But all these were possible due to the class struggle that went on between the bourgeois and socialist forces. Whenever the rightists (bourgeois) gained the upper hand, the agenda of women's liberation was also pushed to the back seat. For example, in China, Liu Shao-chi asked the women workers to go home. The logic was that – there were no employment opportunities for all, so the women can serve their 'socialist' husbands at home whereby they can participate in socialist construction with renewed energy. In all the fields they tried to turn back the wheels of progress.

Again when the correct line was established in the party the question of women's emancipation was brought into the agenda and appropriate steps were taken to ensure it. All kinds of feudal remnants were fought against severely and the women themselves led this struggle against patriarchy.

The restoration of capitalism is therefore also possible by its reliance on patriarchy on the one hand and feminism on the other. Equating socialist states with the restored capitalist states is not only politically incorrect but also distorting the reality. Complete emancipation of women is possible only through the continuation of class struggle in socialism. The continuation of class struggle under socialism is a major contribution of Maoism. It is only with such an ideological weapon that the women masses can eliminate all forms of patriarchal restrictions and win their final emancipation. Cultural revolutions, in order to attack capitalist ideas in the superstructure and in order to advance socialist consolidation, demands of women that they launch continuous revolutionary struggles against all manifestations of patriarchy till the capitalist interests that it represents is conclusively and irrevocably eliminated; and women are finally emancipated.

Hence the period of socialism is not of mere economic transformation and construction. Such a view would be economism. Instead it is a long and protracted period of cultural revolutions. Such cultural revolutions may either have an anti-patriarchal aspect as part of various other aspects targeting the bourgeoisie or they may even at times be primarily anti-patriarchal. This depends on the specific aspects of the contradiction that a particular cultural revolution is expected to resolve at a particular historic juncture.

XII. Our Party's Efforts in Building a Women's Movement

We have seen so far what constitutes the women's question. Let us now briefly turn our attention to our party's attempts in realizing these aspirations of the oppressed masses in areas where we have organized and led struggles and the principal shortcomings in our understanding and practice.

The fire of Naxalbari, which spread across the country in the late 1960s and charted out the correct path for the Indian revolution after several decades of revisionist practice in the Indian Communist Movement, also inspired many women to join the struggle for the liberation of the Indian masses. The seven women who were killed in Prasadjote village were among the first martyrs of the Naxalbari struggle. Ever since its establishment in April 1969, our Party has been striving consciously to bring women into the revolutionary movement. Several women comrades became martyrs in the course of fighting the feudal forces and the Indian state. Among them were immortal sisters such as Coms. Nirmala, Ankamma and Saraswathy. By organizing the adivasi peasants of Srikakulam and leading the guerrilla struggle against the enemy, they proved what proletarian women were capable of achieving.

After the severe setback to the revolutionary movement in 1972, it was once again from the early 1980, that women began to participate in the movement in considerable number. And in the last two decades, hundreds of women comrades sacrificed their lives in AP, DK, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and elsewhere while fighting alongside the male comrades under the leadership of our Party. The lives of these comrades are filled with uncompromising and relentless struggle that demolish the invincibility of patriarchy. They stand as shining examples to all women and men comrades in our party today and to all those members who will join us in the years to come. Their lives prove how it is only Communist women, imbued with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, who can erase all differences of gender and achieve all that has been accomplished by men.

In the mid-1980s, Dandakaranya witnessed the recruitment of tribal women into our squads as a result of their increasing mobilization in mass struggles which had been commenced since the beginning of the 1980s. Soon our party formed the Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangh (KAMS), which took up

many struggles of the tribal women and also united with the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangh (DAKMS) on general issues. The KAMS hastened the recruitment of women to our squads so much so that today nearly one fourth of our squads in Dandakaranya are composed of women guerrilla fighters

However, in Telangana where our movement is older we have not built any organization for women in the initial stages although women have been active in our mass struggles and were recruited in large number. This has surely hampered our political work and prevented the fuller development of our armed struggle.

Now in AP, NT, AOB we have a women's organization Viplava Mahila Sangham (VMS). We have been able to build some urban women's organizations in some states, mobilize petty bourgeois and working class women, and also do a lot of revolutionary propaganda among women. This created a good impact in these states and many women were also recruited. We are however still seriously lagging behind in building women's organizations and women's movement in some states. We have to overcome this weakness at the earliest through conscious and consistent efforts.

In Bihar-Jharkhand, we had failed to undertake a conscious and consistent effort to mobilize women in a big way with the revolutionary movement. Those women comrades, who came with the Party and the struggles, could not be developed with Party cadres and retained for long.

Our failure to build up a powerful women's movement is mainly due to the lack of a comprehensive understanding on the women's question as a whole and, particularly, due to our failure to recognize the importance of taking up the struggle against patriarchal oppression. Hence, even in our stronghold areas, we did not pay serious attention to issues related to patriarchal oppression such as dowry, sexual harassment, violence against women, etc. Anti-patriarchal struggle has been weak even in our own mass organizations and in the families of our local leaders. Thus we have not been able to adequately relate the NDR to the anti-patriarchal and the class aspirations of the women. The demand for land to the tiller was not articulated on behalf of the landless women masses for a long time. Further we have not fought for equal wages for women with men although we had fought for a general hike in wages for men and women. We failed to educate the entire Party that unless these class demands are clearly articulated the full force of the women masses cannot be unleashed against feudalism and imperialism, and unless that is done, patriarchy also cannot be eliminated.

Our failure to take up appropriate slogans on women's demands at the appropriate time had affected the movement in terms of recruitment of women cadres and democratization of family relations in the areas where our movement is strong. Besides spontaneity and subjectivism, this was also due to our lack of deep understanding regarding women's question. We also could not identify the various manifestations of patriarchy in the society and the party in time, which hampered the advance of the movement.

Educating the party cadres on the women's question is one of the important tasks before the Party today. Classes concerning the women's question should not be confined to women alone. The women's question very much concerns men also. It is imperative that all comrades upto the level of organizers have a correct theoretical understanding of the women's question, after which it may be taken to lower levels. It would be good to combine this effort of education with self-critical reflection so that the remnants of whatever patriarchal views or prejudices that persist may be erased.

Prior to the merger of CPI(ML)(PW) and CPI(ML)(PU) in August 1998, a circular was released by the then CC of the erstwhile PW in 1995 and a *Perspective paper* on the women's question was circulated in the Party. Classes were held on the women's question and opinions and suggestions were collected from the party cadres. This Approach Paper is based on the earlier perspective paper and is further enriched by the new CC after the merger of the two Parties.

With the understanding contained in this approach paper there can be no doubt that our Party will overcome the shortcomings concerning our work among women and succeed in building a powerful women's movement. Our Party, with its glorious fighting traditions laid down by thousands of martyrs, should strive to give leadership to the millions of oppressed women masses of India and lead them to liberate themselves from all forms of semi-feudal, imperialist, patriarchal oppression.

RRR