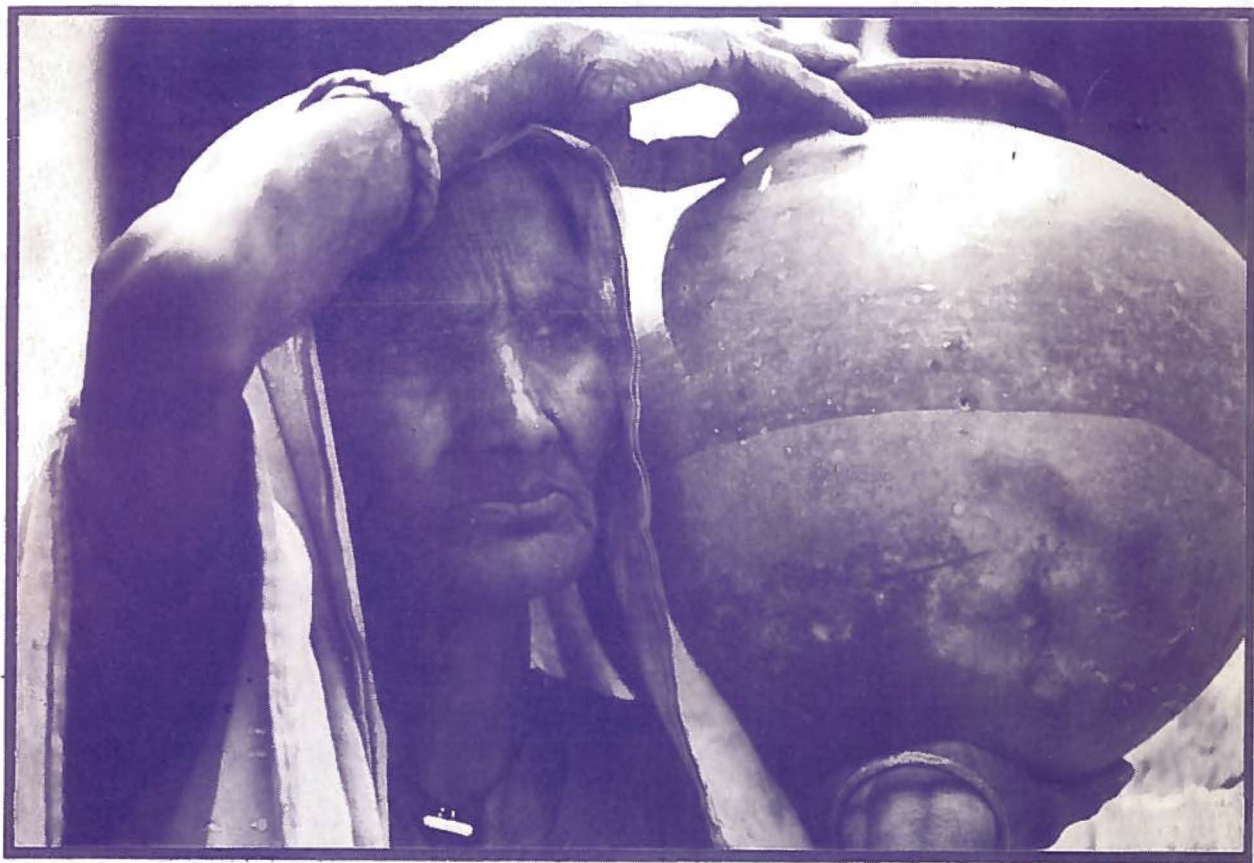


Diva

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women



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1990-1991



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South Asian Women: Towards A Critical Construction

by Saloni Mathur

The six of us sat comfortably in the den while Satish brought in a tray of Cokes and rested it on the coffee table next to a small bronze statue of Siva. All eyes were fixed on the large console television which occupied a corner of the room. Above it the VCR hummed rhythmically. We all scribbled busily like students in a classroom.

On the TV screen was a woman in a sari and her teenage daughter in jeans and Reeboks pulling back and forth on a rope between them. "No! Absolutely not!", barked the mother in Hindi as she yanked the rope towards her. "But why not, Mom?", cried the daughter in English as she tugged back on her end of the rope. According to the sub-title that flickered across the screen, the name of the drama was "A TUG OF WAR".

Hemi, the producer, got up and turned the television off. The young woman next to her, Rani, leafed through her notes and proposed to the room that the first skit highlighted some of the problems that East Indians experience in their confrontation with Canadian values. Hemi sat thinking with her pen in her mouth. Rani's point was a good one, she acknowledged, but perhaps we should refer to "dominant Western values", rather than Canadian ones. "After all, some "ghoras" (whites) may be watching the show, and it is not wise to appear negative to those with whom we share our home."

We sip on our Cokes and listen to Hemi's advice: "Please remember who is going to say what. Write it down. Be sensitive. Be succinct for the camera. Try to stay within the ten minute allotment..." And so on.

Until finally, we come to "THE TUG OF WAR".

Satish begins hesitantly: "Because she is a girl, I think that this daughter should not be so disrespectful to her mother. Maybe this skit should be edited from the show."

There is silence in the room. Outside we can hear an airplane beginning its descent into nearby Vancouver International. Hemi seems anxious... "But try to imagine...", she pleads as she pushes her hair back from her face.

"No", says Satish, decisively. "If I have difficulty with it, the older people will simply dismiss it. It cannot be on television."

Rani becomes engaged. "But it's not fair. It's not fair that my brother is treated so differently from me. There is a double-standard in which I get cheated." Rani thrusts her feet angrily onto the coffee table and accidentally bumps off the small statue of Siva.

Kuldip agrees with this point. I agree. Hemi agrees. The two men remain silent.

The tension increases in the room. Rani puts down her note-book and sits straight up. "But I have to fight back! My father never understands. It's the same for us all... the University Society of Sikh Women... they say... the double-standard is not fair." The young woman tries to continue, but is left without words.

"Please, maybe we should not ground the forum in personal examples", Hemi offers without anyone listening.

"But you know, Hemi. You understand. It's true in all the East Indian families," begs Kuldip.

Hemi: "Please, use South Asians or Indo-Canadians. There is no such place as East India, it's a British name for a trading company."

"But Hemi!!" The tears have almost come.

"Ok. Yes" Hemi speaks slowly. "As Indian women we feel the pain. We feel the frustration. We know the double-standard between men and women. There are differences which are not fair. The objective is change within the community. You must be patient. You must recognize the changes your father has already made. Everyone's fears need to be addressed...". And so on.

Satish looks down at the floor. The young men seem confused. They don't speak in spite of Hemi's efforts to encourage their ideas. The production meeting continues.

Earlier this year I did fieldwork which looked at the production of South Asian television broadcasting in several of Canada's urban centers. By looking at the daily practices of South Asian television producers and hosts, I became interested in the "world" of ethnic media as a zone of contestation, or as a set of negative strategies and acts of self-positioning in which a number of things were being played out. One of the things I found was that the difference of gender, in terms of the experiences of South Asian women, emerged as a very significant reality within this context.

The event I have just described is the story of a production meeting I attended in Vancouver. I tell it to highlight the repositioning strategies of South Asian women within the practices of their everyday lives.

I will return to this story shortly to illustrate what I mean by this.

But first, I would like to shift my focus briefly to explore the literature in the social sciences dealing with South Asian women, and which (logically) ought to inform this reality. However, the experiences of South Asian women in the Canadian context have been

addressed by academia in only minimal ways. Very little published research has focussed specifically on this subject. The works of Josephine Naidoo (1984a, 1984b & 1987), Ratna Ghosh (1981a, 1981b & 1984), and Helen Ralston (1988) provide the small exception to this. The work of Roxanna Ng (1981 & 1988), which looks at immigrant women more generally, may also be considered relevant. While there is, of course, many differences between different authors, in its sum, this existing literature amounts to what I feel is an uncritical construction of the "South Asian woman" in academic discourse. Let me explain...

First of all, each of these authors tends to look at South Asian women in Canada within the overall context of acculturation and integration, without any reflexive questioning as to the desirability of constructing such a context in the first place. Secondly, as Ames and Srivastava have pointed out in a very thorough critique, the use of objectivised methods like "random sampling" and "structured questionnaires", coupled with the use of neutralised categories like "respondents", the "study", "the findings", and the "sample size" perpetuates many of the limitations of conventional social science research. The effect of these studies is that the "South Asian woman" disappears into the normalised and masculinist categories of "science. No story has been told, no voices have been heard, and the differences between women are essentialised and minimalised.

A great deal of recent feminist research has focussed on research and analytic practices to challenge the entrenched ideal of objectivity in the social sciences eg: Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1987; Moore, 1988; Smith, 1987; Stacey, 1988). Donna Haraway sees objectivism and positivism as "god tricks", which (like God) promise a vision from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully. She argues for the politics and epistemology of a partial perspective - or a situated Knowledge, which is the view from somewhere, rather than from above, or nowhere. The "god trick", she says, must be exposed.

On the surface it may appear that Ghosh and Naidoo, who are both Canadian women of South Asian origin, have a special claim (by virtue of this alterity) to the situated vantage point that Haraway describes above. The same can be said for Roxanna Ng, whose work is in the area of immigrant women, and who is herself of Chinese origin and a fluent speaker of Cantonese. But in their work neither Ghosh or Naidoo identify themselves as South Asian women (the only way we know this is because of their names, or admit to their interest in the subject matter at all (Ames and Srivastava, 1989). Instead, this obvious relationship between "knower and known" is concealed behind an objectivist stance. Ng, on the other hand, makes reference to her background, but fails to locate this as a situated position, or as a perspective which might actually have informed her research. Rather than situating their knowledge in the results of their detached and impartial to the women they represent. The "god trick", in fact, is both everywhere - and nowhere.

Another point of contention for me is that in almost all of this work, the dichotomy between "traditional" and "contemporary" is frequently invoked to describe South Asian women. The women's clothing is often described as "traditional" (to indicate a sari or a salwar-chemise); the food they eat is either "traditional" cooking or something else; their religious beliefs are conceived as "traditional"; and the notion of "traditional values" is a common conception within the social sciences. The vagueness of this dichotomy as a descriptive mode for difference has led to the use of some really odd phrases like "strongly traditional", or "quite contemporary" or "less contemporary" or "more traditional"... and so on. My point is that the categories of possibility for South Asian women's experiences has

tended to be defined along a temporal continuum.

Johannes Fabian, in his book *Time and the Other* (1983) has examined the ways in which temporal categories have been used to construct, objectify and subjugate the "other" in current and historical anthropological practice. Time, he argues, "is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between Self and the Other...Time gives form to relations of power and inequality" (1983:ix). In Fabian's terms, to characterize the differences between South Asian women as either "traditional" or "contemporary" is to unwittingly reproduce the colonial relationship, and to further inscribe the hegemonic nature of our thinking about South Asian women.

Another way in which this is transacted is through the uncritical use of ideological language. For example, many authors use the term "immigrant women" in their writing. And although they may recognize that this is both a legal category on the one hand, and a socially constructed category on the other (which carries with it certain assumptions, usually non-white and third world) - these authors, nevertheless, employ the label in their work, which serves to further reproduce it.

But beyond this category, many other constructions are further embedded within the language of multicultural rhetoric. For example, Naidoo describes South Asians generally as contributing to "the richness and beauty of Canada's national mosaic", and characterizes the women as "a novel chip in this mosaic" (1983:37). Ralston and Ghosh frequently use the term "visible minority", with the latter going so far as to suggest that working class South Asian women are *even more* visible than their more privileged counterparts (My emphasis, 1984:153). What these authors fail to consider is the contradiction implicit in this sort of government-initiated thinking: precisely, that South Asian women are both visible and invisible - visible when they fit the ideological parts assigned to them, and invisible when it comes to recognising their lived realities in the discourse that professes to do exactly this. More obviously, however, the unreflexive use of categories like "immigrant women" or "visible minority" in academics has the result of conflating (or what I might call "white-washing") important differences into essential and homogenized notions of women. The term "visible minority" or "immigrant women" is void of any race or class recognition (not to mention the struggles within these). They are therefore a- historical and serve to reduce to meaningless the differences which they claim to honour (Cart and Brand, 1988:39).

The combined insights of the Marxist, feminist, and deconstructionist critiques suggest that all of this, in the academic context, is ultimately a political choice (Caputo, 1987; Ryan, 1982; Spivak, 1988). This position asserts that there is a necessary relationship between conceptual apparatuses and political institutions - that concepts are not only tools, but forces which act upon the lives of individuals. Categorizing is an instrument of power - or rather false power, which prevents us from thinking about complexity by covering it up with a category. Because there is no absolutely "appropriate" name or category, the act of naming is always a political act (Ryan, 1982:196). Furthermore, it does no good to propose alternative schemes which are then, in turn, formulated in the terms of the ruling discourse - for this is already assimilated and declawed. According to John Caputo, "the task of deconstruction is to keep the ruling discourse in question, to expose its vulnerability and the tensions by which it is torn" (1987:195).

The difficulty lies in accomplishing this task. What I would like to suggest is that the challenge rests in an articulation of difference, or of forms of difference which are realized as multiple and cross-cutting. An emphasis on the inter-relations of class, gender, race, and

age differences, and the ways in which these configure differently to shape women's experiences is one of the ways for countering (theoretically and politically) some of the hegemonic inscriptions of South Asian women in Canada.

Let me now return to where I began: which is the story of the production meeting that I attended in Vancouver.

The meeting I described was called by a woman named Hemi - who is the producer of a South Asian television series on a community channel in Vancouver. Hemi had come up with an idea for a show - which was to hold a one hour forum in which two panels of south Asians, young and old, would highlight and engage the community concerns presented in four short skits that she had previously taped and produced. The meeting I described was for the members of the youth panel only. There were five of us present: three women and two men - all Canadians of South Asian origin, and all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five.

One of them was Satish, and the meeting was held at Satish's parent's house in a wealthy new subdivision in Richmond, BC. The agenda for the meeting was to view the skits on Satish's parent's VCR and large screen television - and to rehearse our comments and responses in preparation for the live taping a couple of weeks down the road. One of Hemi's objectives for the show was to "educate the community" - with the implicit assumption that our South Asian viewers were somehow "uneducated". And during the meeting this became more explicit: our audience, we were told, was likely going to consist of rural workers transplanted from village India to the Vancouver Fraser Valley, and most of them were probably illiterate. Assumptions like these lay in stark contrast to the context in which we were considering them - that is, in Satish's parents wealthy household in an expensive subdivision in Richmond, BC. all of us were university students, and we each arrived separately in our own cars. Together in the room, in our appearances and mannerisms, we demonstrated all of the signs of privileged class backgrounds.

Thus, social class as difference among south Asians articulated with other forms of difference - and relevant to this context was the difference of age, expressed as an inter-generational category. As a group we represented the first generation of young South Asians to be squarely socialized within the Canadian context. Our ideas, our opinions and our values had been formed differently from our parents, and as such we presented a challenge to the constitution of our communities.

But it's not fair. I have to fight back! My father never understands. It's true in all the East indian families.

But during the meeting, in addition to this positioning, we were each positioned above all as South Asian - with a shared sense of tradition and a history which rests structurally in the margins of Canadian society. And with this positioning, came a displacement of the relationship between margin and centre - because within the confines of this space, (which was physically marked by certain South Asian symbols, like the figure of Siva) -we were not located in the margins, we were occupying a centre.

The line of difference was drawn along an "us" and "them" distinction, with "them" being the generalised *gora logue*. The choices of words and the act of naming became significant

in many ways, particularly with respect to whom we were not.

Hemi: Please, use South Asians or Indo-Canadians. There is no such place as East India, it's a British name for a trading company.

For Hemi, we were not "East Indian", an imposed name which, by virtue of its roots in British history, served to reproduce the master narrative and subjugate the object of the colonial encounter. We were, however, Canadian - but not in the dominant sense. In Spivak's terms, what was being contested was the shared experience of being not-quite-not-them. Explicit in the meeting was the recognition of difference: a difference which lay not in the relationship between "Canadians" and so-called "visible minorities", but more accurately in the relations between dominance and marginality within which all of us were Canadian.

But what emerged as most powerful in this particular context was the difference of gender.

"OK. Yes." Hemi speaks slowly. "As Indian women we feel the pain. We feel the frustration. We know the double-standard between men and women.

Unscheduled and unrehearsed, the emotional tensions surrounding gender came into the meeting in spite of Hemi's efforts to curb them diplomatically. The meeting erupted into the struggle for us, as South Asian women, to cope with the patriarchy experienced through our fathers and brothers (that is, a patriarchy based in the authority of the family and the importance of tradition), versus the dominant Western ideology of individualism in which we circulate everyday (that I might suggest is also patriarchal). For us, as young, privileged South Asian women, gender as difference is experienced constantly as a "double-standard in which I get cheated", and the strength of authority by which this gets imposed, left Rani and Kuldip during the meeting in utter frustration.

Gender as difference was experienced in difficult ways for the men as well.

Satish looks down at the floor. The young men seem confused. They don't speak in spite of Hemi's efforts to encourage their ideas.

As the women in the meeting increasingly contested their inscribed positions, Satish predictably offered a gender response - placing the reputation of the South Asian family in the moral stability of its daughters and wives. Unable to deal with the women's frustrations, and made humble by the realization both strategic and cautionary.

Hemi, too, knew the experience of pain, of frustration, and of a struggle that was all too familiar to her as she read the anxieties on the younger women's faces. For her, the difference of gender is experienced as the greatest constraint on her South Asian women's participation in culture production to a narrowly defined role. As a South Asian woman in charge of her own television production, and also significantly as a divorced woman and a

public figure within a community which is not accepting of this status - Hemi presents a challenge to the patriarchal social organization of south Asian media in Canada, and with it, to the social relations of an entire community.

And some the various forms of difference expressed within the meeting including generation groups, social class, and South Asian identity within Canada, became subsumed at the point of intersection with the most important difference in this particular context: the difference of gender.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To summarize, then, what I have tried to do by telling you the story of this production meeting is to emphasize how forms of difference intersect, cross-cut, and overlap simultaneously in any context, to shape the complexity of South Asian women's experiences. For South Asian women like myself, these differences are always experienced simultaneously, rather than in any sequence or pattern, but in different contexts invariably one can be foregrounded, or can emerge as more important than any other difference.

I have also tried to argue that this emphasis on difference as a way of thinking, has been absent in much of the literature dealing with South Asian women in the current context. Through the use of objectivised methods and detached language, of temporalised categories which distance the "other", through the unreflexive use of stat-initiated ideological labels (like "visible minority" or "immigrant women"), and through inadequate engagements with difference and alterity, the existing literature amounts to (in spite of any benevolent intentions) what I feel is an uncritical construction of South Asian women in academic discourse.

Finally, I would like to suggest that an articulation of difference embedded in discourse and practice, and a reflexive re-thinking of the relationships between them, can provide the theoretical and political basis for a more critical re-construction.

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(Saloni Mathur is studying Symbolic Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario and is involved with issues relating to South Asian women and community. This paper was presented at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Anthropological Society in Calgary, May 1990)

What's The Name?

**Jyoti,
Jasmine,
Jane,
Jase?**

by Sunera Thobani

[Diva prints this powerful book review as a starting point of the policy of confrontation South Asian feminists have to formulate and carry out. the policy of active confrontation against anything that undermines the dignity of South Asian women. Diva agrees with the rationale, tone and aggression of Sunera Thobani in reviewing this fiction.]

For decades now, we people of colour have been told that the problem with us is that we do not want to get assimilated; that we want to hold on to our backward, primitive, "traditional" cultures; that if only we became modern, assimilated, and took advantage of the civilized world we are now living in, changed ourselves, why, our problems would disappear. So what is new in that? Only that their ranks have now been joined by Bharati Mukherjee, who gleefully carries this "blame the victim" approach into 21st. century.

Jasmine, Mukherjee's latest novel, is characterized by her fast paced, short-take style of writing. She evokes powerful images, relying largely on provoking a displaced emotional response in her readers. **Jasmine** traces the adventures of Jyoti, born in Hasnapur, a village in the Punjab. We follow the transition that our heroine makes from being the village girl Jyoti, into an urban wife, Jasmine. Jyoti is willingly reborn in the image her husband, Prakash, has of her and is appropriately renamed **Jasmine** by him. Prakash is soon killed by a bomb, apparently meant for Jasmine, setting in motion a chain of events that sees Jasmine immigrating to the U.S. and becoming **Jane** in the process. Jasmine eventually chooses to become (and remain??) **Jase**, the woman re-re-re-reborn in the image, this time, that her American liberal-professor-lover has of her. Once she has cast off everything Indian about herself, except of course the exotic, and has made a sexual alliance with a white male in the Brave New America, Jase becomes truly "free".

The book in itself is mediocre, catering to an American audience. It deserves commenting on only because of the recent attention that has been focused on Ms. Mukherjee, and the

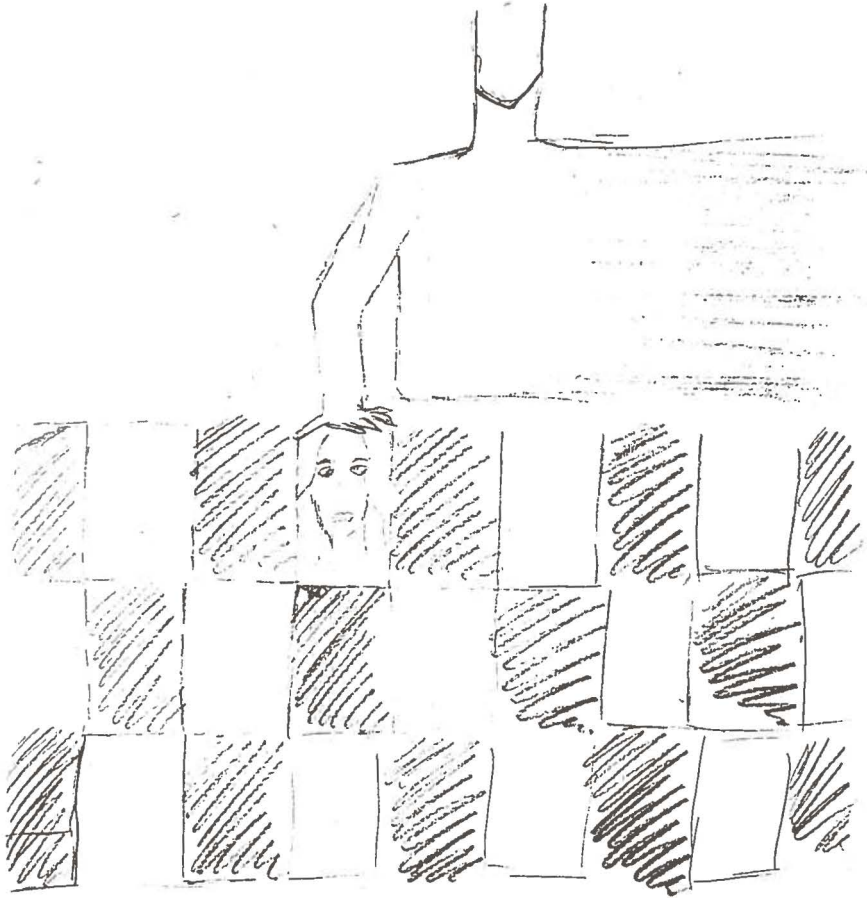
claim that her writing reflects the intersection of the first and third worlds. It is this claim that makes her writing an attack on Third World peoples who are engaged in the struggle for survival, dignity and genuine self-determination in a hostile, racist world.

Jasmine is smuggled into the U.S., with Ms. Mukherjee devoting much energy to creating an ethos that caters to the paranoia whipped up by the racist claim that the western world is being swamped by illegal aliens. A world-wide systematic network exists, Mukherjee informs us, that functions to smuggle illegal aliens into the western world. The perpetuation of such myths by Ms. Mukherjee, who claims to be writing of *THE* immigrant experience, clearly endangers Third World immigrants who are all viewed with suspicion and hostility, our right to be here being constantly questioned. Now the racists can claim to have the word straight from the horse's mouth.

The Khalistan issue is fleetingly touched upon, with the Khalsa Lions presented only as a bunch of mindless, vicious thugs. Their struggle, in Mukherjee's version, is reduced to a personal vendetta against Jasmine, a Hindu woman, hated by all Sikh men. This distortion is ridiculous in the extreme. Add to this *masala* formula the depthless and unauthentic character of our heroine who remains untouched by the situations around her. One gets the sense that since her birth, Jasmine's only function is that of performing for her American audience. She hates India, which is presented as a rotting, filthy, stagnant society. However, even this loathing of everything Indian is not based on any substantial interaction by Jasmine with her environment. Rather, it is a loathing that is based on western racist images of India, seeing only dirty, greasy, cunning Indians. Along with the loathing, of course, comes Jasmine's unconditional acceptance of everything American as superior. Jasmine wants to model herself after the two white women who give her temporary assistance in America, while her mother, who has successfully fought to prevent Jyoti's marriage as a child to a widower, remains unacknowledged as a positive female image. This hatred of everything Indian propels, and accompanies, Jasmine into the U.S. Flushing becomes mini-India where obsolete Indians live out their obsolete lives stuck in a cultural ghetto. The fact that people of colour are forced beyond the comprehension of our Black Skinned White Masked heroine, who sees this ghettoized existence as freely chosen by professorji, Nirmala, and their family.

Ms. Mukherjee has perfected the art of sensationalizing the issues that Indian feminists have struggled against, such as female infanticide, dowry, ostracism of widows, the practice of suttee. But instead of any substantive analysis of these issues and their consequences for women's lives, they are trivialized and presented as props that attest only to the "exotic" nature of Jasmine, making her sexier and more desirable as a mysterious woman of the Orient. Jasmine uses sex to carry herself forward in her adventures, making sexual bargains with various males at every stage. Mukherjee presents these bargains as leading to greater "freedom" for Jasmine; free American, civilized style.

Jasmine validates the well known racist dual image of Third World women as both carnal, oversexed, lusty animals, and at the same time, orientally submissive, seductive, mysterious, feminine, "real" women. The sexual play acting that Jane engages in for the benefit of her crippled lover is worthy of any Mills and Boon publication. But, one must give Ms. Mukherjee credit, she really does pour herself into her writing.



**HETEROSEXUALITY REVISITED:
A Feminist Re-evaluation**

by Miriam Jones

[The following paper was presented at a panel discussion organized by Resources for Feminist Research, Toronto, April 1990.]

The ambivalence I felt about agreeing to speak this evening in part reflects the current situation around the issue: there is not a lot of literature or organizing going on right now, at least that I'm aware of. There are a few exceptions, however, there are some texts by both gay and straight writers, which would indicate a growing recognition of our common project to explore the social construction of sexuality.

In the seventies, feminist analysis meant analysis of the patriarchy. All the ground-breaking texts dealt with it, all the consciousness-raising groups dealt with it, all the discussion and the political practice seemed to relate to women redefining their roles under patriarchy. Lesbian organizing was taking place to an unprecedented degree, and the politics of sexual practice were being widely debated. Heterosexuality was revealed as a normative and oppressive institution. To feminists of my generation, that work is erroneously presumed to be to an extent already done, and so we have felt that we could 'move on' into the specifics of our own particular issues, to working in what are seen as 'broader' political or solidarity movements, and to discussing race and class, since we have 'taken care' of gender. In many senses this is a positive development. Effective political work more and more happens in coalition, because there is strength in numbers, and because we are coming to realise the commonality and interrelatedness of our specific struggles. But there remain unanswered questions and problems. Patriarchal structures still define all of us, and we are perhaps even more in danger, if our attention is focused elsewhere.

I feel that my remarks are more a series of questions, so I hope that you will take them as such, and we can all discuss things afterwards.

Heterosexuality must of course be understood as the dominant discourse, and its practitioners as privileged. Such an understanding relates to the broader political questions. But for people who practice it, heterosexuality is also a private sexual practice in need of a re-evaluation which can only be fruitfully undertaken within the broader historical context.

There was a poem printed in the current issue of *This Magazine* (April-May 1990), which is apropos to the subject of heterosexuality. It's called "*Reminders to straight girls contemplating Getting Laid*", by Meredith Levine:

Every straight woman
should sleep with at least
one woman.

Otherwise, he gets to be the authority
on your sexuality

Think about it
what do you know about how most women respond
when the only woman you've slept with is yourself?

Girl talk, although explicit

usually stops short of
Step by Step
goes instead for broad details:
'on top', 'on bottom', 'oral', 'anal',
'small', 'large', 'came', 'didn't come'

but he, he's slept with lots of women
he knows what he's talking about
when he says 'most women are like this' or
'aren't'
'do this' or 'don't'

somehow you end up feeling
you don't quite measure up

Once at a dinner
with twelve women after too much wine
a poll was taken

It was discovered that everyone present
had been told by at least one
male lover
that her clitoris is smaller than average

The text does raise an interesting point about the ill-defined nature of heterosexuality for feminist women. Even if we are not defined by men, we are still defined, inevitably, in relation to them. Or in relation to our relations to them. though, in some senses I am not comfortable with the construction of straight women in this poem -- they are passive and victimized.

We know about the concept of compulsory heterosexuality: heterosexual relations, sometime towards the end of the Victorian period, came to be defined as an unarguable, natural, biologically based and rigidly enforced social model, against which other practices were defined as deviant. How then do we women who sleep with men evaluate our sexual orientation as evolving and 'genuine' and not entirely socialized or prescribed? No matter how innate one feels ones sexuality, to live a lesbian existence is a conscious choice, made in the full knowledge of the consequences in a homophobic society which perpetuates violence against even those women who conform. There is no such self-reflexivity built into the practice of heterosexuality. As **Adrian Rich** points out (in **Compulsory Hetrosexuality**), heterosexuality is not seen to be in need of explanation. If heterosexual relations were as stigmatized and punished as are homosexual ones, would we risk so much to pursue them? Those of us who don't accept conventional, naturalistic or religious arguments, have possibly never articulated or even pondered whether or not we have a commitment of any sort to functioning as heterosexuals, or in what terms we would define that commitment. The very label is only

useful in relation to other practices.

Heterosexual people who don't accept the normative definitions must define themselves against them, and as those relations are so pervasive and slippery, much energy goes into the project. Questions of marriage or not, whose name to use, the division of labour, whether or not to have children and how to raise them, etc. etc. Then there are all the more subtle elements of everyday behaviour: how does one refer to ones mate? As husband, partner, boyfriend, lover, main squeeze? All these alternatives have their drawbacks, which may very well stem from the possessive form itself.

Heterosexuality, for feminists, comes to be defined by what it is not -- it is not lesbianism, and it is not Barbie and Ken, happily-ever-after. We never talk about what it is. It is forever defined in the negative.

Lesbians can often readily articulate the benefits of lesbianism and why it appeals to them, beyond the basic reference to sexual attraction. Can heterosexuals do the same, if we reject all the old tired notions of the naturalness of penile-vaginal penetration and the necessity of male role-models for children? Heterosexuality is not monolithic, though it is often constructed as such by gays and straights alike. If we do not want to accept the essentialist laws that violence is the ultimate consequence of heterosexual relations, and that masculinity intrinsically equals violence, then we need to think about the many things that heterosexuality is, or can be. We can never ignore, however, the historical construction of heterosexuality as a political institution, and how violence has traditionally been at least potentially inherent in normative heterosexual relations. I presume that most of us experience our sexual preferences as innate. For feminists, what does it mean to be innately attracted to people whom we also fundamentally feel to be our oppressors? Is it identification with the oppressor, a widespread version of the Stockholm Syndrome?

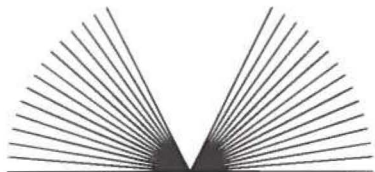
Sexuality has historically been defined as a male phenomenon or prerogative. Lesbians have redefined it, and reclaimed it, for women. Heterosexual women have had to define our sexuality in relation to men, from the Wife of Bath to Moll Flanders to Erica Jong's 'zipless fuck' to Kim Bassinger in 2¹/₂ Weeks. This is a much more troublesome and fraught terrain. Where is our sexual response located? Have we internalized the values of the colonizer? Recently, any re-evaluation is something we have had to do individually, and not as part of the feminist project. One response to these troubling questions is the validation of 'sexual play' and 'jouissance'. In other words, it becomes a question of attitude, rather than practice. If one enjoys wearing black lingerie and dancing for one's partner, or being tied to the bedposts, one is only 'playing', and subverting normative heterosexual values, by one's very consciousness of them. But how do we avoid what Adrienne Rich termed 'synapses in thought, denials of feeling, wishful thinking, a profound sexual and intellectual confusion'? Those of us in couples work to subvert 'Barbie and Ken', but how do we as individual women deal with the inevitable disjunctions? We must move towards a stronger understanding of the historical construction of our sexuality as a discursive practice.

Being a heterosexual is analogous to being a WASP in Canada. Other people have

'culture' and ethnicity'. WASP culture is invisible since it is practically in the air we breath. It is a given; it does not need to be defined or even thought of. Part of our project as whites doing anti-racist work is to recognize our privilege and decentre our perspective. As heterosexuals, we face the same necessities, for two reasons. In order to help fight the oppression of our sisters, and in order to understand our own construction we must locate ourselves within a series of potential responses to hegemonic social practice: 1) non-questioning acceptance, 2) an oppositional response to the normative construction of our sexuality; a response of resistance, and 3) a recognition of the dangers of co-optation. It is easy for us to 'play the game' -- there is less of a slippage for us than lesbians -- and we need to take responsibility for our privilege and resist co-option.

Within our other struggles, we are realizing the need for further work on heterosexuality. My friends who are AIDS activists have pointed out to me that they have had to confront the politics of heterosexuality in their outreach work to heterosexual women and prostitutes, for whom it is often very difficult to negotiate the use of condoms. In my own work in the pro-choice movement, I realised long ago that the anti-choice were not nearly so concerned with protecting the 'pre-born child', as they are with enforcing, with violence if necessary, a restrictive, retrogressive, and highly codified view of women's sexuality. We cannot simply categorize the pro-choice struggle in the liberal terms of freedom and personal choice, or of a fight-back against a right-wing backlash, real as the backlash is; we must also discuss it in the context of heterosexual power relations, and of redefining the possibilities for women within those relations, especially for those women of colour or of the working class, who are most restricted. Women are in danger in contemporary sexual cultures, and new explorations of heterosexuality will have practical implications for us all.

(Miriam is a graduate student at York University and is involved in the pro-choice movement.)



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Taking Care of Business

by Susan Crean

Copyright is not something you normally think about when you sit down to write a poem. Indeed, it is not something writers or readers have to be conscious of at all when engaged in either activity. It is in the interval between writing and reading that copyright matters; in the process of publishing which is to say the business side of things whereby works of art are "brought to the public" through some means (technique) of reproduction. Hence the term copyright, although the French, *les droit d'auteur*, (author's rights), is more to the point.

Copyright may not sound very literary, summoning up as it does images of contracts and percentages and impenetrable legalese, but it is nonetheless essential to literature. It is, in fact, the legal basis upon which all creative activity takes place including the huge and lucrative entertainment industries, broadcasting, data processing, communications, and informatics as well as traditional arts such as book and magazine publishing. Essentially, it is a property right, what is termed "intellectual property" in copyright parlance, and it belongs to the creator automatically, coming into effect upon creation. (This means it's not necessary for authors to register their copyright in Canada as it is in some countries.) The Copyright Act guarantees authors two kinds of rights, economic and moral: the right to exploit their work economically and to seek recompense for its use, and the right to protect its integrity. Moral rights have to do with the way your work is used (or abused) by others, whether or not you have been properly credited, or approved any changes or alterations to work, for example.

In the mid-seventies when the Art Gallery of Ontario presented an exhibition of landscape painting sponsored by the Reed Paper Company which had been responsible for mercury pollution of the English and Wabagoon river system in North Western Ontario, artists whose works were borrowed from private collections without their approval charged their moral rights had been infringed. They did not want their work associated with an enterprise which was refusing to acknowledge (let alone offer redress) for the devastation

of native communities in the area caused by poisoned fish. Although they could not remove their paintings from the exhibition (crassly entitled **Landscape: the Changing Vision**) without being charged with theft, they were able to force the AGO to post a disclaimer signed by the participating artists at the entrance to the show.

More recently, artist Michael Snow had to take the Eaton's Centre to court to force the corporation to remove red Christmas ribbons which some dumb bunny had tied around the necks of his sculpted geese. At the time, the law required that Snow prove "damage to his honour and reputation" before the court could accept that his moral rights has been infringed. Today that would not be necessary because, in the meantime, the Copyright Act has been revised.

Three years ago this May, the minister of communications, Flora MacDonald introduced Bill C-60, the first of a projected two phase reform of the old act. The revision was a very long time coming. Thirty years had passed since a royal commission (the Ilsley Commission on Patents, Copyright, Trade Marks, and Industrial Design) had first proposed serious and substantial changes and even longer since it was generally recognized that the law had been superceded by technology. The Act passed by the Canadian Parliament in 1924 was based on British legislation penned in ink sometime before the outbreak of World War One. It therefore predated the invention of television, photocopiers, computers, VCRs, tape recorders, satellites and cable. All these technologies have vastly improved the distribution of creative work making it cheaper and easier for people to access information and imagery and to make copies of copyright material.

The old law had left creators in limbo. Although it provided them with rights to control their work, they had no practical means of doing so. It was, quite simply, humanly impossible to sleuth down those who were using your work in order to negotiate appropriate fees. Moreover, users could copy to their heart's content without fear of law-suits, for even if creators knew the identity of copiers, the penalties provided were so small as to make any victory pyrrhic and all suits prohibitive.

Composers and music publishers were the exception to the rule, having been given special dispensation in 1924 to set up royalty collection societies for the purpose of licencing broadcasters, theatres, orchestras and musicians to perform their work in public. For everyone else, there was nothing to be done. Users had no simple means of clearing copyright and creators, who were anxiously promoting the inclusion of Canadian materials in libraries and on school and university curricula, were not inclined to block access. True, creators could have set up organizations to administer their copyright collectively, but the moment blanket licenses (access to a repertoire of members' work) were offered for sale, they would have been operating a monopoly in violation of the Combines Act, and in restraint of trade. So creators turned a blind eye on the ballooning practice of illegal use and waited for the government to change the law.

It was, as I've said, a long wait. (And it would seem that what finally moved the Tory government to take action was money in the form of pressure from the computer and

recording industries who were loosing hundreds of millions of dollars to pirated editions.) Over a period of twenty years the creative community spanning all disciplines did a tremendous amount of research and worked diligently with federal bureaucrats who also did a tremendous amount of research to hammer out a modern approach to copyright. Undoubtedly, the watershed in the process was the publication of the so-called "yellow paper" on copyright reform by the federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in 1977. Written by Frank Keyes and Claude Brunet, the document established the centrality of creators' rights. In their introduction the two authors stated that it was "not inappropriate for this paper to deal primarily with creators and to define, in terms of limits of exceptions to those rights, whatever opposing interests might be recognized..." This approach was reaffirmed in the government's white paper, **From Gutenberg to Telidon** and the special Sub-committee on Copyright reform of parliament whose report was titled **A Charter of Rights for Creators**.

The provisions in Bill C-60 cleared the way for the establishment of royalty collection societies, increased the penalties for infringement so that the punishment in some way fit the crime, brought the term for moral rights into line with those of economic rights (the life of the author plus fifty years), entrenched the practice of paying artists a fee for the exhibiting of their work in public by creating an exhibition right, recognized choreography and computer programming as distinct copyright categories and included translation in the definition of literary work.

In January, Bill C-60 was passed by the House of Commons with the support of all three political parties and was duly sent to the Senate -- where it lodged for four months, held hostage by the Banking, Trade and Commerce Committee, while opponents lobbied for its defeat. What had been assumed to be items on which a consensus had been reached, turned out not to be dangerously contentious. This was so because certain groups who had absented themselves from the reform process suddenly woke up and took intense exception to parts of the Bill. Notable in this regard were the museums' association and the organization of art gallery directors who were dead set against the exhibition right (for reasons which turned out not to have foundation in either law or practice). Then too the Canadian Libraries Association which had formerly supported the formation of copyright collectives reversed its position, electing to use phase one to start fighting for exemptions due in the second. The Liberals who dominated the Senate were delighted at the prospect of holding up a piece of Tory legislation and were more than willing to lend an ear to the complaints of educators and museum directors.

The ensuing spectacle of our senior cultural institutions threatening to go to the wall to defend their rights as users against unruly and rapacious artists (which is the level to which the debate quickly descended) was truly astonishing. Artists were depicted as cranks and bandits who were trying to hold the education system up for ransom, willing to restrict the free flow of information, gouge students who can ill afford copyright fees and generally debase the quality of education.

The other side to this coin was, of course, the arrogance of these publicly funded, public institutions going after artists in this fashion, with rhetoric which had all the hallmarks of

class warfare. And the hypocrisy; for none of these accusation have ever been levelled at, say, Xerox or Cannon. Then too, there is the question of professionalism to consider, the outrageous indifference to the travails of the community who have had legal rights which have been unenforceable for sixty years and who have, therefore, been subsidizing the work of cultural institutions without recognition or so much as a tax receipt all that time. Flora MacDonald had it right when she told a meeting of the librarians in 1987 that "Theft is theft" and that they had no right to expect artists and creators to contribute to their professional career. Blissfully ignorant or merely callous, the librarians went ahead anyway, jeopardizing thirty years of work.

To make this story short, creators and copyright owners sprang into action, formed a coalition which successfully forced the issue. The Bill was sent back to the House of Commons, but was forthwith returned untouched to the Senate which agreed to pass it once assurances were given that phase two would appear in the Fall.

That was June, 1988 and there is still no sign of the legislation. Meanwhile, collectives have been established (the Canadian Reprography Collective represents English language writers and publishers) and are preparing to sign licencing agreements. This does not mean, however, that all's quiet on the educational front. The campaigning continues and last Fall Senator Lorna Marsden introduced a bill in the Senate (Bill S.8) which if enacted would give educators *carte blanche* to use copyright material if they are unable to obtain a licence "on reasonable terms and conditions". This, of course, could mean anything and everything. In essence, a licence for teachers to consider themselves licenced. And while the bill may have been designed to force the government to present phase two, it also proposes to undermine and disrupt the negotiation process now underway. Instead of urging provincial departments of education to start negotiating with collectives and to get broad blanket licenses in place as swiftly as possible, educators continue the campaign, calling for a boycott of Canadian materials.

All of this does make you wonder, though, at the message being given to students and the Canadian public about creativity and culture. This brings us back to where we began -- reading and writing and the necessity of paying artists so they can continue to create. You might expect teachers, university professors and librarians to understand this, even to exercise leadership in defence of the principle. To be fair, a few of them have expressed distaste for the positions taken by their administrations. But, though I hate to say it, most would seem to believe in the divine right of education and have little care or concern for anything beyond their own convenience. A sad comment, indeed.

SUSAN CREAN lives in Toronto and Vancouver and is the chair of the Copyright Committee of the Writers' Union of Canada. Her latest book, "In the Name of the Fathers: the Story behind Child Custody" was published by Amanita publications (Toronto) in 1988.

The Danica House Project

A Call For Support

The Danica House Project is an attempt to open a crisis centre for the survivors of sexual assault / childhood sexual abuse / incest.

A needs assessment has begun to gather information about the range women's needs in this kind of crisis and about the vision of Danica House.

If you are interested in participating yourself and/or providing an opportunity for women you know to participate, please call Denni Liebowitz at 658-4225.

INDIA CABARET:

Challenging Concepts of Chastity and Morality

Director: Mira Nair
India: 1986

Reviewed by:
Pervis Rawji

"Sleazy" says a friend of mine about Mira Nair's India Cabaret. Another friend labels this movie "pathetic", while someone else says "depressing".

The fact is, nobody comes away cold from this very powerful movie. With simplicity and honesty India Cabaret sets out to portray the lives of two or three prostitutes, without the hype of Indian Hollywood. In all the squalor we see, we are forced to examine our own values and to re-define our concept of beauty, wealth and happiness.

This film sets out to shock our sensibilities, for there is no attempt made at beautifying or softening the harsh contents with any pleasant scenes even of the Indian countryside. Only the reality of the lives of these women is portrayed: the dark nightclubs where they work in appalling conditions; their apartments overlooking the slums; the seemingly endless application of makeup; their cheap costumes and bodies defying the standards of beauty defined by West and East alike; the narrow passage, kitchen and hallway where they dress, smoke, eat and drink. all these images jarr one but eventually allow one to go beyond, to look on the optimistic side.

India Cabaret challenges concepts of chastity and morality. Rekha tells us that she was married at the age of eight and when she turned fourteen, she went to live with her husband. The man she married sells her to other men, in short, becomes her pimp and keeps

husband. The man she married sells her to other men, in short, becomes her pimp and keeps the money, of course. When Rekha turns to her family, she is rejected. So she runs away to the anonymity of big, bustling Bombay, where she becomes a dancer in a nightclub. Here Rekha learns to drink, please men and make money. She desperately dreams of being a wife and mother, surrounded and accepted by family.

Then we are taken into the "respectable" home of a businessman whose wife, children and parents are securely tucked away in a clean, well-run haven of domesticity, worlds away from Falkland Road, Bombay's red light district.

Here, the-wife-the-good-woman slaves away for children, husband and in-laws all day long. While this gives her a feeling of satisfaction, as she says in Gujarati, her desires remain locked in her heart, unspoken, unuttered. Cloistered within four walls, she lives like a bird in a gilded cage, her wings clipped. She is not exposed to new worlds or new ideas; she is bored and unfulfilled.

Of course, her husband frequents the cabaret on the pretext of business, while she waits up until all hours for him to return to her warm bed. His insensitivity comes through when he replies that this is her job, and this is what she married him for. One wants to bop him on the head for the smug smile on his face.

Money brings the cabaret dancers independence, financial security and some sort of confidence, but in India their line of work means they are rejected by their families along with the Hindu society. Nobody wants to associate with a hooker, a bad woman.

Rosy is a childlike, fun loving dancer who becomes wistful when she sees a wedding car drive by. We follow Rosy to her village where she is going to contribute a huge sum of money towards her sister's wedding which, by the way, she is not going to attend because she does not want to pollute the family and dishonour them in front of their guests.

When Rosy goes up the steps to her mother's house in the village, she takes the older woman's hand in greeting. The mother remains cold and unresponding. Rosy says that with the money she earns, she can support twenty family members in the city but nobody wants to accept that offer. They accept her financial help but resent being dependent on her.

Mira Nair outdid herself in Salaam Bombay, but this earlier film India Cabaret is remarkable too.

2000 Tiles in 8 hours, 5 tiles a minute...

by Sumika Perera & Bhadra Wickremasinghe

We went 25 miles off Kurunegala in search of women workers of a tile factory. We were to meet them in lunch hour, on the quiet, so that they would not get into trouble with their bosses. But this was not to be. After eating a few hurried mouthfuls of lunch they had to rush back to work. At nightfall we met one woman worker at her home. Her working day was not yet done. Bag in hand she was off to the market. We were able to speak to her only when she got back and began preparing the dinner. This was what we talked about:



At what time do you leave for work?

I must be at work by 7.00 a.m.

What type of work have you to do at the Tile Factory?

We have to carry the fresh out tiles to the oven for firing. These have to be stored on high racks. After the firing we have to climb the racks again and collect the tiles. Sometimes when there is an urgent order, we must go into the oven before it cools sufficiently. At times like this the tiles are still burning hot and we have to protect our hands with old jute bags. Then we carry the tiles to the lorries and load them. Sometimes, the lorries arrive in our lunch break. When that happens we are required to stop lunch and begin loading. We dare not refuse.

Do you get extra time off for lunch when you are required to work during your lunch break?

Never. Often a break is just a few minutes. We have a 5 minute break in the morning for tea. The evening break for tea is just 3 minutes. The lunch break is the longest - 45 minutes, but often we are called upon to work at this time.

Can you describe the racks on which you stack tiles?

They are about 80 feet in height. There are strips of wood along the racks, which we climb to reach the top. Each of us climb into different shelves and pass on the tiles to the woman below us. We use this method, both when stacking the tiles as well as when removing the baked tiles. Once the tiles are removed, we file them on to 'basins' and carry them out to the lorries. Often the basins too are very hot.

Is there anything more you have to do?

Yes. Two of us must carry tiles from the tile making machine to the oven, The machine makes two tiles at a time and we are supposed to carry some on our head and in both hands and run a distance of about 150 yards to the oven and run back again to collect the next batch. Raw clay tiles must be put into the oven immediately they are made. If not, they crack, especially if exposed to sunshine. So we have to keep running at top speed to keep up with the production of the machine. However fast we are the machine is faster and the tiles keep piling up. We can't slow down. If we do, the supervisor scolds us. 4000 tiles are produced a day and at any given time two women must run from the tile maker to the oven transporting these unbaked tiles. The women working by the machine are changed every 15 minutes, so that the speed of transport does not drop.

Who are your supervisors?

Two men oversee the work. One of them is really very strict. He often scolds us. Sometimes he uses bad language. If we delay at our work he beats us with a stick. I used to get beaten in the early days. But I am very fast now and so I'm able to escape the stick.

How long does it take to stack an oven?

We start at 7.00 in the morning and it takes us till about 1.00 p.m. to finish the stacking. We must stack about 12,500 tiles in a single oven. It takes about a week to bake the tiles. The larger factories bake about 2 to 3 loads of tiles a week.

At what price do they sell the tiles?

1000 tiles fetch Rs.3,200.

How many of you work at the factory?

There are about 20 men and 25 women.

How much are you paid?

The men are paid Rs.40 a day. The women earn only Rs.23. We work about 9 hours per day.

What about leave ?

If we ask for leave the day before, we are allowed a day or two off. However they deduct a rupee from our wages for the first day of absence. If we are absent three days in a row, the deduction is three rupees. If we stay away for over five days, we loose our job. A woman was dismissed recently for being absent 5 days.

Are you entitled to any holidays?

No. We must work everyday. Even on Sundays and Poya Days.

Do you get paid extra for working on holidays?

No. We have heard that in other places workers are paid double on holidays. We asked our supervisors about this. We were told that this extra amount was being added to our Provident Fund.

Do you have a Provident Fund?

They say we do. Only three workers have received their books to date. No one else.

Do you get any bonus payments?

Yes. At Christmas time we get an extra payment. But if we have taken too many days off, the payment is lessened. If we leave during the year, we are not entitled to this bonus. Once, a man who had just worked a week had to leave because his hands started blistering. This happens sometimes when your skin is sensitive to clay. They deducted Rs.15 from his pay because he left in a week.

Are you entitled to the wage increments stipulated by the Government?

I don't know if we are. Once we learn the work, we are paid Rs.32 a day. When I began working here I was paid Rs.20 a day. After some months they increased it to Rs.24 and later to Rs.26. I have been paid at the rate of Rs.32 a day for about a year now.

Is the time of training difficult?

Yes, new hands are really loaded with work. They are paid less as well. Trainees are not allowed to climb up and stack the shelves in the ovens. They have to fetch and carry the tiles, always on the run. If by accident they drop a tile, they are beaten with a stick by the male supervisor.

Are the men treated in the same manner?

Yes. The men are also sometimes beaten with a stick. But it is the women who get beaten and scolded the most. If we work fast and efficiently, then we escape the stick. We are also not allowed to chew beetle leaf or smoke beedies while working as the supervisors think this will distract our attention.

Have there been any accidents at your workplace?

Yes. One of the workers caught his finger in the tile press and had to be taken to hospital. His finger had to be amputated. I do know he was given some money for medicines but I do not know if he was given any compensation.

Have any of the workers complained to the management about their working conditions?

Whatever hardships we have to suffer not one of us dares to open our mouths and complain for fear of loosing our jobs. We are given jobs on the condition that we don't complain, don't answer back. We are warned that if we do so we will loose our jobs. There are workers among us who carry tales to the supervisors, so none of us dare say anything in public. In fact, please don't use any names when you write up this story. We are all afraid of loosing our jobs. If they dismiss one of us, there are ten others waiting to fill the vacancy. This is what we are always told. There are a number of workers who come from a great distance away. It is people like us who do not have the means to make our own tiles and market them that come to factories such as these seeking employment. People who have the means, however slender, make tiles as a home industry.

Is it possible to save any part of your wage?

No. It is impossible. Sometimes I don't have sufficient to tide over the days needs. If my husband too is unable to earn something during the day, we have to borrow money.

Are you given any maternity leave?

We don't get months off. When the birth is close at hand, we are given less work and are allowed a few days off for the delivery. They prefer to employ unmarried women. Sometimes, when a woman gets pregnant, they discontinue her work.

It is illegal to discontinue work for pregnant women in this way. Are they re-employed after the delivery?

No. Most things are illegal and unjust. But what can we do about it? We must work the way they want us to, if not we loose our job.

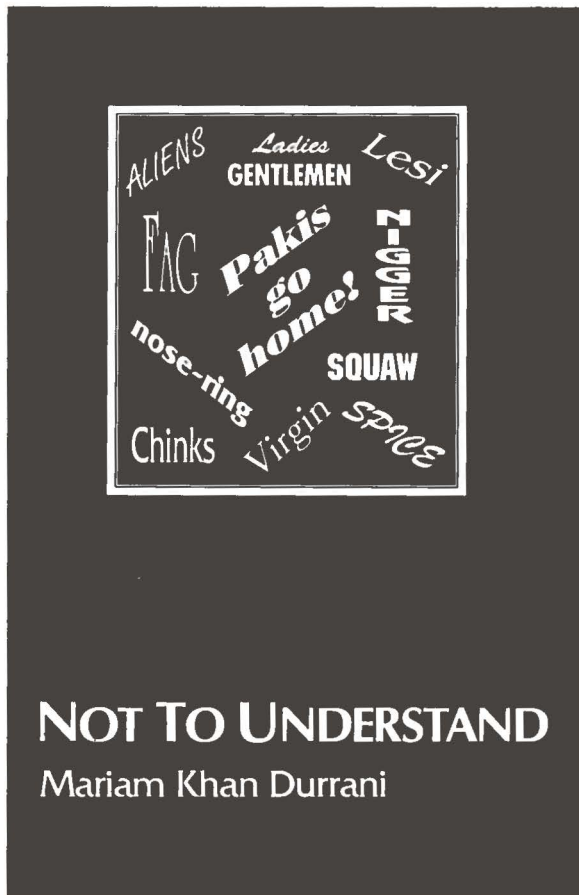
She had just finished cooking the night meal and we took leave of her.

Courtesy KANTHA MAGA a journal of the Progressive Women's Front. Columbo, Sri Lanka, no.7, May 1990.

When I first started writing poetry, I would go outside and look around, and then I would just write all kinds of poems about how things looked. Now I have done so much more that I can write poems about how things feel. I think that is what I love about writing poetry. You can write it like you are looking at it, and then you can write it as you are feeling it.

Poetry, now, is my partner in life. To be able to write poetry has made growing up much more interesting."

M.K.D.



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Passing Through Whorls of Memory:

by
Jyoti Sanghera

[Part 2 of 2]

"My brain must have been infested by maggots and worms when I made the decision to come here"

Darshan Kaur

As I entered the street upon which Darshan Kaur's house was located, I saw her farther up, walking down the streets. As I drew closer, I saw her bend down and retrieve two squashed empty cans of some soft drink, inspect them momentarily and drop them into a large plastic bag she was carrying. By this time I was upon her. I pulled alongside her and opened the car door for her to get inside. She was taken by surprise and appeared somewhat embarrassed. Before I could say anything she ventured to open the plastic bag sitting on her lap to show me its contents. It was full of empty cans and bottles.

"Well," she said a trifle defensively, "Why let this stuff be dumped in the garbage when I can make a few cents off each one of these. Besides, I don't like to live on a cluttered street". I had come to see Darshan Kaur for the second time, and it appears, had caught her unaware.

I had acted upon her bidding for the last time she assured me,

"Oh sure, come anytime. You will always find me in this neighborhood. No, no, there is no need to phone. Just drop by any day. We live here like in India - no phone, no formality, just follow our heart's bidding".

However, Darshan Kaur is a woman not to be upstaged. She lost no time in gaining control over the situation. This she did by immediately giving me directions on which way to go, to watch out for a couple of cyclists, under which tree to park, and not to park too close to the curb. As she proceeded to hustle me by the side entrance into her low-ceilinged basement, she shouted some pleasantries to the women in the neighboring houses, a few instructions to the landlady above and announced our advent to the woman who lives with her in a loud shrill voice. She was in command now and already enjoying this fact. My mind went back to the first time I had visited her. How different that scenario had been!

When I was first ushered into Darshan Kaur's presence by the woman who lived with her, I was struck by the sight. She sat buried waist down in a large bed under a quilt. Most of the space in the room was taken up by the bed. Around her, huddled together on chairs sat two other older women whom she introduced as her friends. "I have 400 friends, by the way", she announced. As I stood looking around a little helplessly, she reached out and pulled me onto her bed, laughing in merriment at my confusion. "Sit here beside me, so that I can see and hear you better", she chuckled. Upon asking me about what village I hailed from in Punjab and the names of my grandfather and grandmother, she emitted a loud whoop and clasped me to her bosom. So there I lay pinned down on her bed, with the tape recorder jabbing into my ribs as she proceeded to wade through my genealogy, for the benefit of all present. "So you are my daughter now", she declared with obvious power and pleasure, as she peered down at me trying to collect myself. Then she immediately shifted her attention to the suitcase lying under her bed and ordered her house-mate to place it on the bed. With careful and calculated timing, she slowly lifted the lid of the suitcase and like a magician, threw open its contents for all to see. For a few moments the little room was filled with exclamations as hands reached out gingerly, to feel the contents of the bag. Darshan Kaur leaned back against the bed post and basked with a sense of patent importance in all the curiosity she had generated. Clearly, she was an incorrigible performer and sought to seek advantage from every possible situation. Every gesture and move was planned to maintain her centre stage position. From that vantage point, she proceeded to survey the scene around her and make quick mental calculations on what move to make next. She would needle, cajole, ridicule, sternly admonish, placate and flatter those around her in quick succession. For instance, noticing the woman who lived with her leaning by the door to listen to what was transpiring in the room with obvious interest, Darshan Kaur's gaze hardened. Stopping her sentence midway, she fixed her cold, stony gaze upon the younger woman; obviously this person was under her control and dependent on her. What followed were a few moments of chilling and theatrical silence. I watched that woman shrivel under Darshan Kaur's vitriolic look and simply melt away into the kitchen. Pleased with the effect, Darshan Kaur's brow relaxed, she allowed her countenance to settle into an abundant smile and shouted in a syrupy voice after her recent victim; "My child, prepare some lunch for these friends of ours. We are not going to swallow a mouthful of this interview to appease our hunger, are we now?"

I must confess, I was visibly impressed by this woman - she was an actor par excellence. She displayed such a tremendous hold over emotions, both her own and over others; I cannot say I liked her as a person. On the contrary, there were moments when I decidedly disliked her and did in fact enter into an altercation with her. As our argument began, like a cat whetting her claws, she surveyed me with sudden and new interest. A mean glint appeared in her eyes as they narrowed in concentration and belligerence. However, as I continued to speak, packing my argument with concrete information, I sensed her making a quick mental judgement. It would not be to her advantage to entangle horns with me on this issue; I must be undermined in some other way. She immediately pretended to lose interest in me and my "glib talk", as she later referred to those arguments of mine she did not like, and pulling out a fabric length from the suitcase turned to her friends and asked winsomely, "isn't this as colourful as a garden in spring?" Of course, she had managed effectively to swat me like an annoying fly and capture the scene, once again. I could not help but admire her suave and shrewd skills.

At 64 years, Darshan Kaur looks amazingly youthful. Her keen intelligence and perceptiveness lends her an air of perpetual agility and preparedness. Her glance shifts rapidly as she sizes up every movement and scenario in the room and assess its potentialities. "Where is this woman coming from?" I asked myself as I became increasingly fascinated by her act. Evidently a survivor and a fighter to the hilt, Darshan Kaur had managed to chisel out quite a niche for herself with her crafty manipulations. And yet, there was something about her I could not quite figure out. Despite her overt villainy and slyness, she was not a woman who would hunt with the hounds. Through her unrelenting and ruthless life she had set up some principles on a pedestal; she would allow no one to bring them down. She had her own code of ethics, her own manner of functioning to which was fiercely loyal. This was not a woman who was shallow and invertebrate - she was strong and wilful. I guess, that is why despite myself, I respected her. Above all, she openly and avowedly claimed allegiance to the underdogs: "I may be illiterate, but for me there is only one truth and one justice - and that is the one which stands on the side of the poor and the suffering".

Presented below are some fragments out of Darshan Kaur's socio-history. In comparison to the sessions I had with other people, the ones with Darshan Kaur were more one-sided. I experienced myself as much more of an interviewer with her than with any one else. In part, this had to do with her personality - she wanted to perform and spread out over the entire canvas. Flagrantly egoistic and self assured, every now and then she would issue challenges such as, "Is there any one in India, any aged tree or man who is as firmly rooted in this earth as I am", or "no one in the whole of B.C. would have the same stamina and speed as me in picking fruit on the farms". She was immensely aware of her grounding in her past and in her history, upon which she would frequently rely for ratification and validation through phrases like "you think these hairs have turned grey in the sun - they have greyed with years", "I am not milk-sop or a wisp of a waif born yesterday". My sessions with Darshan Kaur were not very smooth. She was quick tempered and easy to rise, with the result that there was a nebulous cloud of tension and discomfort floating around. However, while, on the one hand she discharged acerbic darts, on the other she would also occasionally go out of her way to be nice and warm. But, it was all on her terms.

As I transcribed and translated her narrative, I was astonished and quite mortified to discover that it appeared relatively flat. It failed to capture her multi-faceted and extremely volatile personality. Were I to read her story as a stranger to her manner, I would possibly find it of some merit, but Darshan Kaur is one of those women in whose case verbal language is almost entirely dominated and overshadowed by her personality and the manner in which she performs. What she says is vastly magnified by the manner in which she delivers her words. Having interacted with her and watched her countenance and her voice display stunning versatility, I was discontent with the relative tameness of her written narrative; I was disappointed because the woman who emerges through the written narrative is not a patch on the one I had met and beheld. The narrative is what follows:

"All my life, all my life of 64 ripe years I have been a farm worker. In India I worked on the land, and here, in Vancouver I have worked on the land. The difference is only this; in India the land I worked on was my own and here I am a hired hand. Oh sure, that makes a difference. There we were landowners, here we are workers; from owners and masters we have turned into servants and slaves - is that not a difference? Those who cannot see it are blind. And there are many who do not see it, or don't want to see it. Who likes to go around

feeling they are nothing, worse than dust under the feet. But that is the truth. These gora (White) people can throw us out any time - it is their country after all. But our people are such fools. They are like mindless pigeons who sit with closed eyes thinking if they cannot see the cat maybe the cat won't see them either. One day the cat will crouch upon them quietly and wallop them. Then it's all over, finished.

"This is what I tell them when I ask them to join the Union. Now the Union was formed seven, maybe eight years ago. We struggled a lot, there was much noise. So I told the Union guys, "now the Tandoor (clay oven) is hot, make as many rotis (pan-roasted Indian bread) as you can." And the first year many people joined. I personally made many members - we would go knocking from door to door, explaining and telling the people, "join the Union, join the Union". And many did.

"But next year they fell away, lost enthusiasm and turned into cold tavas (flat pan used for roasting Indian bread). They don't pay their dues, now I can not go around paying for every body. I break my head explaining the merits of joining the Union to our women, but as soon as they reach their homes they forget. My words enter through one ear and come out through the other. Now, you tell me, what can one do for frogs who want to stay in their dark and stagnant well?

"Ever since the Canadian Farmworker's Union was formed, I have been on its Executive. Many people have photographed me, I have also been on television - did you know that? Well, they need to have a woman on the executive; now there are two of us. In the beginning when I was very active, contractors and framers stopped hiring me.

"For two years I suffered. Nobody would give me any work. I had to fill my stomach. Now, I can't eat the Union, can I? I tried finding work in restaurants as a dish washer. I pleaded to be hired as a cleaning woman. Nobody would give me work; "you don't know English" they would say. And, they are right too. Why would they hire me when they could find a young woman who speaks gitmit-gitmit English?

I never went to school, see. In those days our parents would keep us all wrapped up and covered, leave alone send us to school. Any way, so finally some contractors started hiring me for farmwork only after I promised that I would not engage in any Union or organizing work. Yes the Union made some gains, but minor gains.

However, even today on many farms there is no place to go to relieve ourselves. We just squat behind bushes and get ourselves scratched. There is no provision for water. The contractors don't let you eat lunch in peace. No sooner have we unwrapped our lunch that they start ordering us to get back to work. We were not paid on time. Often the contractors don't pay till the end of the farmwork season.

"How can anyone work without payment for four months, but our people do. I don't accept that kind of nonsense though. We have no benefits and no medical plan. Now, I paid thirty dalley (Panjabi-fied version of 'dollar') recently to get one tooth extracted. Imagine, each rotten tooth is worth thirty dalley here. In India some village quack would just pull it out for free.

"So why did I come here? Why did I come here, she asks me? Sisters, why did we come here? Out of madness. My brain must have been infested by maggots and worms when I made the decision to come here. I have twenty times six acres of good irrigated land in Panjub. I have one son in Panjub. So, some rabid dog must have surely bitten me that I decided to come here.

"My foolish one, that very question I ask myself. If I was sensible, I would have kept a good mare in my village and gone inspecting my fields and crop twice a day. But, no - it was destined that I come here. Two of my sons were already here; they had been sponsored by a relative. So fifteen years ago, they filed papers for me and I brought this body of mine here.

"Oh sure, I was miserable in the beginning. Ever since my husband died when I was 26 years old, I had been my own master. Now, I came here and became confined to my son's home. They too began to boss over me, "do this and that, and this not that". But, they had forgotten their mother's nature. Within thirteen days I picked up my bundle and went to live in a cabin on one of the farms.

"It was summer time and farmwork was swing. There, amidst our women and men, my heart felt free once again. I felt at home with that work. Nobody can beat me at work. Since that day I have lived on my own and worked each year on the farms. Once the coins began jingling in my pocket, I began to feel more comfortable here.

"Why do our people come here? It's for the money - as simple as that. The work we did in India was just as back-breaking, even though it was on our own land. But there, we are unable to save. After six months, or ten months the crop is ready to be harvested and then there are all those loans to be paid, seeds to be bought, pesticides to be sprayed. In the end, the poor farmer is left empty-handed. And if the rains fail or the winter is too severe, then you are finished.

"No, in India people may have called themselves zamindar (landlords), but all they had was the land. Now, you can't eat land, can you? Here, at least you can save something. If you earn \$25 a day on the farms working 12 hours a day, you will eat \$10 and save at least \$15. That's what all our community does, save and save like ants. Instead of twice, we will eat once a day, put a few drops less of milk in the tea, eat only dal-roti (lentils and bread), and save. That's the only reason for coming here. Now, look at me. In India, I had a huge chest full of quilts, but here this is the only quilt I have.

"What do you save for - she ask me what do I save for? For the future, and for my son's family in Panjub. You see this suit case full of fabric? My sister-in-law is going back to India tomorrow and I am sending dress material for each relative of mine there, and also for others in the village. I also send money to buy more land.

"Sure, there is a ceiling on the amount of land one can own in India but who cares. In our village, people have registered land in the names of cows, buffaloes, dogs, donkeys. Who is going to check? If the patwari (land revenue clerk) comes to check, I have instructed my son to slip some money into his pocket or give him one of these imported watches.

"And then, with whatever is left, I make trips to India. Sure, I go every other year. That is the only place where my spirit heaves a sigh of relief. You should see when I go there! All my relatives from far and wide come to see me. Of course, I know many of them just come to see what I have brought for them and for the others. Last time I took a red fabric, very soft, for my daughter-in-law and a different one for my brother-in-law's daughter-in-law and she got so upset. She has not spoken to my daughter-in-law in a whole year. So next time I go I am going to hand her the keys to my suit case and ask her to select what she likes.

"I go with two large cases, all loaded with gifts. The villagers fall upon them like flies on gur (jaggery). I let them fight and argue, but if it gets nasty with one growl from me and their tails hang between their legs. Sure, I like to go to India, there I get so much respect and honour.

"Sure, some of my relatives know what work I do here. Why should I hide - I am not ashamed. I do not steal or snatch from anyone. Yes, I know many people do not disclose that they are doing just farm labour. There was this one-eyed guy who went back from here the same time I was there. He is from the neighboring village.

"One day, the carpenter from that village comes and says to me "chachi (father's younger brother's wife), that Ganda Singh speaks English like a real gora Sahib. And he says he owns a big mechanic store". Now, I know that fellow has less brain than a mosquito, and I know he speaks not a word of English. So I thought to myself, "should I go there and let the cat out of the bag?" After two days I went to that village, and he was holding court under that big pipal tree in the village. As soon as he saw me approaching, he turned pale like a jaundiced cow. He came running and fell upon my feet, whispering urgently, "chachi please don't tell them, please don't tell them". I took pity on him - after all, he wasn't doing anyone any harm, only telling them tales. He was pretending to be Mulroney or this guy, Vander Zalm - and he is no worse than them.

"Sure, these goras (Whites) don't like us here because our people are 'dumm' (Panjabified 'dumb'). No the goras are not 'dumm'. If they were would they be able to rule over such a vast country like India? Our people are totally 'dumm' - they can work like mules in the farms, but that is all. Their brains are under their knee-caps. The amount of work our people do in the farms, no one can do. Oh sure, the Chinese also work as hard, but I mean the goras. They come to the farms but cannot work like us. Every hour they need a break and rest. That is why they hire us on the farms. You think they have any special love for us - they are not our chacha-taya (father's younger and older brothers).

"When I go to the 'Playamint' office (Unemployment office), the goris there harass me. First, I have to take someone with me who can speak English. Then they ask me all sorts of questions like, there is work here and there...But I give it off to them. I ask them, "do you even know what a farm is like? Do you know where berries grow? Well let me tell you they don't grow on puppy-dogs' tails".

"Of course we are not equal here. Which fool will say we are equal, everywhere we go we are looked down upon. Why don't I go back then? I am not a fool - I may have been bitten by a mad dog once when I headed this way, but I am not crazy now. Within one year I am going to start getting pension - a pretty sum of money too. If I return now, who will call me wise? I will loose the opportunity to get that pension. After I am on regular pension, I can do as I please. I won't have to break my back crouching under bushes and plucking those godforsaken berries again.

"What is worse, our own children spurn us, their old parents. To them we smell of masala (spices), and they find us dirty and embarrassing. They sit on floors covered with rugs and we squirm in these dump-holes. By rubbing shoulders with the goras, they think they too will turn white.

"You know that old saying: "In his attempt to glide like a swan the crow forgot even his own crow-waddle". Well that's the fate of these pitiful fellows here. They lie and cheat, and the more they try to be like the goras, the more goras shun them. They are equally ridiculous when they return to their villages in Panjab behaving like the washerman's donkey who happened to pass by the police station and thought he had become superior to the rest of the donkeys in the village."

Immigrant Women's Struggle in Norway

The Fight to Put Racism on the Agenda

by Fakhra Salimi

Norwegian society, with the help of its numerous experts, has defined the situation of immigrant women as problematic. It has been asserted that the problems of immigrant women such as isolation, dependency on their husbands or language problems are due to their family and cultural background. The cultures of the immigrants from the so called Third World are often characterized as "hostile to women" as compared to the "democratic values" of the West. Subsequently, numerous institutions have, with their definitive self righteousness, proposed solutions such as sewing and cooking courses, dance and entertainment etc. in an attempt to "integrate" immigrant women within Norwegian society.

Immigrant women from the Third world, on the other hand, are defining different realities. We have stressed the fact that we represent various cultural, economic and political backgrounds. The factor which unites us in Norway is racism as well as our shared invisibility created by the Norwegian society. We maintain that as immigrant women we are workers, political activists, homemakers and much more. But this multiplicity of our character has often been ignored by those who analyze our situation.

The experience of immigrant women further shows that a constant struggle between our self conception and the way society conceives us begins the very day we enter Norway. As society forces us into anonymity and characterless plurality, the struggle to free ourselves and regain our individual character and identity intensifies with the passage of time. And as society speaks for us, feed us with information about who we are and provides us with explanation to our problems, the urge to speak for ourselves and define our own situations become stronger.

Women and Migration

Norwegian authorities introduced an immigration ban in 1975. Since then most of the women from the Third world have come to Norway through exemptions to the law, particularly of family reunion regulations.

Like most European countries, immigrants were allowed to enter Norway in order to nourish the Norwegian economy. It was the cheap labour force which was needed for the booming industry. The Norwegian society has been interested in extracting the maximum possible profit out of the migrant labour force with a minimum of expenses and investments

on their welfare. The need for the cheap labour force still exists, but the institutional racism does not allow black people to migrate freely as work seekers. Through immigration regulations the Norwegian authorities decide who should enter the country and on which premises. The combination of racism and sexism within the immigration regulations decides the fate of black women. As most women have come to Norway after the immigration ban their legal status for the first three years is dependent on husbands. If the marriage should dissolve before this period, the women are threatened with deportation. Immigrant women are in this way defined as appendixes to their husbands and possess no legal rights of their own. Immigrant women have raised their voice against this injustice. They have tried to expose the hypocrisy of Norwegian authorities who claim to perpetuate equality among sexes but denies basic rights to immigrant women.

Racism and the Women's Movement

As an anti-racist struggle and the struggle for the rights of black women is to be fought within Norwegian society at large, immigrant women have tried to seek alliances outside the immigrant community. A number of Norwegian women's organizations have been important allies.

Sister solidarity with the Third World women is one of the important slogans for many Norwegian women's organizations. Some support development projects in the Third World to improve women's socio-economic conditions there. Women's organizations in the Third World are also given moral and economic support. In short, solidarity from the Norwegian women is expressed on various levels. It encouraged black women to take up the issue of racism within the women's movement. But, to our astonishment, most of the women were offended and rejected the idea of racism as prevailing also within their organization. It was further maintained that the anti-racist struggle is subordinated to the struggle against patriarchy and capitalism and could not be given equal priority.

For immigrant women facing the increasing racist and sexist attacks both from the authorities and from society in general, it has been a feeling of being caught mid-stream, where one either loses control and is drowned on the spot or is forced, through a show of strength to free oneself and swim across. The past ten years of struggle indicates that immigrant women have managed to swim, if not across at least away from the deadly currents!

Immigrant women are organized within national as well as cross-national organizations. The struggle against racist and sexist discrimination has brought new dimensions within Norwegian women's movement and has broadened its horizons. Black women in Norway have forced white Norwegian women to integrate anti-racist perspectives within national and international solidarity work. The growing racism within Norwegian society is one of the major challenges which the women's movement should be prepared to meet along with the struggle against sexism.

shared moments with working children
**THE LEAVES THAT ARE GREEN
TURN BROWN**



[Part 1 of 2]

by Meera Dewan

"My first son died of an unknown illness. My second son married my first son's widow and moved out. A wolf took away my third son. So my fourth son, even though he is 11 or 12, naturally has to work".

Dokri, mother of a working child - Sufipur Village

"I started work in the factories when I was 8 years. Now, after four years of work, some factories are closed. I'm unemployed, but maybe new factories will come up".

Ashok, 12 years - glass factory worker

"We live in a free country. Our children walk free on the streets - free to work, free to stay hungry. They're free to survive, if they can".

Amma, grandmother of 13 working children

These are some of the 'casual' comments my colleague Tripurari and I heard on our location research for my recent film on working children. We were not in some dense forest in remote, interior India. We were not in the 18th Century Europe where poor children were just the right size to slide down frighteningly black chimneys. We were in India - no longer a colonised nation, but a free democratic welfare state that believes in social justice, a state centred around the child as the builder of the society of tomorrow. We were, in fact, only three hours away from our capital city, almost within the shadows of Taj Mahal. We were in Firozabad, "the Belgium of the East", as the many glass factory owners there call it.

Here, beautifully designed wine glasses, exquisite, twinkling chandeliers and sparkling beads are some of the glass products made for India and export. To the raw materials add the sweat, blood and life of about one hundred thousand workers, all on daily wages much below the minimum rate. Of these workers, about 25% are children below 12 years.

But first let me go back to how and why I stumbled upon this inferno which consumes the youth and adulthood of its workers, without paying them a fair wage, and yet gets up to 90% subsidies from banks. I had earlier made two films, both of which were on issues concerning women. The first was "Gift of Love", on the oppression and killing of young brides for dowry, and the second was "Yes. I am a Working Woman" on the dual problems of exploitation as a woman and as a worker in the unorganized sector.

Being a woman, being a single woman with a child, and being involved with a women's group, these subjects seemed a natural outcome of my experiences, exposures and, of course, empathies. Then came the questions - from friends, from the press, from film making colleagues, and even from my government sponsors: "Would I make films relating only to women's problems?" Then came not a question, but a simple statement from my son who was about six years old: "Because you are a woman, it is easy for you to make films on women. Why can't you make a film about children?"

Here was concrete criticism? Maybe my son too remembered our newly formed friendship with the little newspaper boy. And maybe it evoked in him too the image of the little newspaper boy, clutching his newspapers and a little baby, weaving expertly through the rush-hour traffic. This recurring image had been haunting my nights.

I approached the Ministry of Social Welfare. Yes, they would support my film on working children, and I had a free hand. It was three years, and three films later that the money finally arrived. By now I was the customer of many more little newspaper boys and girls, but they all had the same haunting eyes.

For a documentary film maker, one of the most difficult and yet one of the most rewarding experience is that every film opens up a new world, challenging one to unlearn the past, and learn the new subject with humility. You can carry all your technical skills and creativity into your next venture. But the knowledge of a new subject, the human contact and empathy with people who live and know and suffer the problem, and hopefully the ability to strike the right balance between one's emotions and factual credibility - these are some of the challenges, excitements and fears. But the best pay-off to me is to try and open

one's mind and heart and at times one's soul to feel for and live with the people the film is about and, at times, let it all overflow.

Where does one start in a country where children work in almost every place? Which group does one focus on? The child who works within his or her family, on the fields and the farms? The self-employed newspaper sellers, head loaders, or some other modest little entrepreneurs in the city? The abandoned or runaway child, a survivor by circumstance?

Fortunately for the Indian documentary filmmaker, and unfortunately for the society and its people that she or he reflects, our country offers tremendous possibilities. Every alley is a possible location, every human rights issue a possible theme, and almost any poor family the cast. In this case, after attending many seminars on child labour, reading some books, talking to experts, I decided to meet Firozabad's child workers.

I decided to tell the bosses of the glass factories that we were doing a film on India's advanced glass products for the Festival of India in the USSR.

They welcomed us. For them it was normal to see six year olds running between furnaces with hot iron rods larger than they. We tried to disguise our horror. We kept all our questions to the process of glass manufacture, as if the little people running inside the hot factory shed to make it all happen, in their tattered vests and bare feet, were just a normal pleasant sight. After all, they are only poor children, and poor children can literally play with fire.

We decided we would try to talk to some children in their homes, not wanting to make the factory owners suspicious. In Firozabad's male dominated streets, Tripurari and I would cover our heads and walk silently, eyes down, so as to be less conspicuous, looking for huts and homes. One Sunday afternoon, we saw a group of women chatting on a charpoy under a secluded tree. We asked them for a drink of water. Two hours later, all of us women ended up together - singing, eating 'paans' and even dancing! Gently we probed - of course, their children worker - the girls at home and the boys in the glass factories. We met some of them - polite and hospitable, yet gaunt, and again those same haunting eyes.

More days passed in friendship. The girls were not allowed out, so we would take the boys who had not found work on that particular day "to show us their town". They were about the finest escorts we would have had. Always protective, no roadside food seller was allowed to cheat us, no young man dare 'accidentally' bump into us. And yet, with all this maturity, the carefreeness of an eight-year-old would somewhere inside show through. Even haunting eyes can sparkle. It was a heartwarming and admirable, yet sad combination. Little people burdened with all the stress of adult life coping with dignity and self-respect. They would tell us about how much fun you could have over a cup of tea after a day's work, some evenings you could play "match-match" - just like rich people. It was so easy to fall in love with these 8 and 10-year-olds. We wanted to bathe and scrub them up at our modest lodge, but restrained ourselves. We got them shoes - the cheapest blue cloth shoes at a local shop. But they looked so smart, so proud. It was our token of affection and maybe also of

possessiveness - those boys with blue shoes, they are our friends. You can spot them well from all the other barefoot boys. In Ferozabad's glass factories, the boys do not just have bare feet, they have bruised, cut, infected, blistered or burnt feet, from walking without footwear on the white hot floors.

Returning to our lodge at nights, we looked for some sanity in the situation - after each day's horrifying and heart wrenching stories. We clutched at straws - "see how responsible they are", "what considerate and brave children" etc., but we saw no windows of hope.

There were no voluntary agencies, no trade unions even for adult workers. Sadly, there still are none. We now clearly saw the deliberate, vicious cycle of poverty that kept children oppressed by another class and another generation.

We were angry. We wanted to share the anger with our film viewers. Maybe the collective feelings would lead to some action. But film making being such an expensive media, the inevitable doubts come to my mind. Am I really justified in spending more money on the film than a child can dream of earning in his lifetime? During intense moments, I wrote imaginary letters to the Ministry informing them that instead of making a film on working children, I had used the budget to buy shoes for every child in the factory so that he does not walk on a bed of heat and glass splinters anymore.

This is the most painful process - when one comes to share with people their problems, empathizes with them, when they open themselves to you. Then you must be objective and professional. Stand apart. Think of filming logistics, camera angles, shooting ratios. It seems a betrayal - this was the real reason why we came and reached out. And now is the time to meet the creative challenges and the time for meeting deadlines.

Once filming started, it was fun. We "hired" four of the boys every day to carry a light, a tripod or to organise tea. It was a way of not offending them by offering money and integrating them into the project. It was also an unsuspecting way to get them into the factories. Once they were in, they would work on their normal specializations, and we would film our boys! After a few shifts they were not just doing their jobs - we were all enjoying ourselves on video. We would play back what we had filmed and they would make suggestions and comments. We became part of a close-knit crew.

After the film was complete, it was shown at various meetings, workers' seminars, unions, film societies, schools etc. It was telecast on National television and was well reviewed by critics. After one screening, an eminent woman MP took the initiative to get the Labour Minister to visit the Ferozabad factories and see for himself the children's plight. In spite of the Ministry politely informing the factory owners of the proposed visit, the MP, Ela Bhatt found children locked away in a dark room in one of the factories. The Minister said all child workers should be replaced by adults within two months. Nothing was said as to what the children should then do. Could they go to school? Was there a school in their home village from where many children come to live in the factories? Would they roam the streets? And for all those whose income was crucial for the survival of their families, would they now be looking for other jobs which did not exist in Ferozabad? Could they fight for

their rights - as children or as workers? Will those same gaunt faces, those same haunting eyes find themselves selling their youth and adulthood in some newer version of hell?

It is almost a year since the film was made. I am still angry. In fact, I feel more angry now. If, as our Government says, we have only 14 million working children in India, is it imperative that 25 thousand young boys should burn away in Ferozabad's infernos for Rs. 5 a day? Is it too much to expect from a country self-sufficient in food, a country we so proudly declare as the tenth industrialized power in the world, is self-respecting, voice of the Third World, voice against Apartheid and oppression and injustices, to supplement the meager earning of 14 million children?

Does our economy, our polity, our Constitution, our commitment to the future, and, most important our conscience permit us to let these little slaves burn away their lives only because they are young and poor and voiceless? Gaunt faces, underfed little bodies and haunting eyes can only move us. And move us with no lasting value either?

Sexual Harassment and the Law

A Danish Perspective

by Hanne Petersen
Law Faculty, University of Copenhagen

Denmark has no actual legislation which directly prohibits sexual harassment. The Danish Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in the labour market covers some forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, but not all. Especially in cases where sexual harassment is "only" part of a hostile environment of work it will probably be difficult to use this legislation.

Denmark has a very strong tradition of legislative non-intervention in the labour market. The social partners have preferred to regulate their relationships through collective agreement, and only when they ask for legal intervention is it introduced by the Danish Parliament. They have not asked for any initiatives in this area. Denmark also has a tradition of looking towards experience from the other Nordic countries and none of these have legislated directly in this area.

The strong traditions of regulating by collective agreement is one explanation for the fact, that the social partners in the Danish labour market have also been very reluctant and maybe even hostile towards labour market regulation coming from the European Community since it is mostly directed towards protection of the individual. Both of these are moulded on a male norm.

The Ministry of Labour is strongly guided by the wishes of the social partners, concerning legislative initiatives. Therefore it cannot be expected to take any action on its own in this area. And it would be very surprising if the social partners would take any initiatives to regulate the problem of sexual harassment through collective agreements in the near future. Their general attitude towards questions concerning gender and especially sexuality are not openly hostile but certainly rather hesitant and reserved.

This can also be said about the Danish Equality Council, an administrative agency established to improve equality between men and women in society. The social partners are represented in the council, which might be one reason why it has not wanted to address the issue on its own.

Anyhow, we are witnessing an increasing awareness that sexual harassment is a real social phenomenon and an acute problem for women. An awareness which in the long run hopefully cannot be overlooked by institutions and organizations in the political and legal sphere and in the labour market.

Research has been done or is in progress in all the Nordic countries mostly done by lawyers or sociologists, or as in Finland, by the Ministry of Social Affairs. I think we now need some research on the economic aspects and consequences of sexual harassment for both the individual women, unions and employers, since this might illuminate the relationship between sexuality and power.

The media has not, surprisingly, shown a great deal of interest for cases concerning sexual harassment. Whatever negative or mixed feelings one may have about the way the issue is treated by the media, it is obvious that media attention has contributed strongly to the increased consciousness.

One of the obstacles to a change of attitude towards sexual harassment has been the fact that Scandinavian women have tended to view the so-called "sexual liberation" of the 60's and 70's as a real benefit of great value for women.

We have tended to overlook the fact, that this "sexual liberation" did not necessarily mean an end to power and abuse of power linked to and integrated with sexuality. And it has frightened us from talking about sexuality. It did not bring an end to economic inequality in our own countries which continuously guarantees the possibility of sexual exploitation based on economic power. Perhaps the improved economic situation of women which we have anyhow experienced, has even contributed to a global redistribution of sexual exploitation. The phenomenon of male sex-tourism from overdeveloped countries to underdeveloped countries may be viewed as a reorganization of the sexual division of labour and a geographical shift of the balance of power between men and women.

The increased attention has forced some of the trade unions, that have a majority of women members, to take action. The clerical workers union, which is the biggest Danish Union with more than 300,000 members, more than 75% of whom are women, has been writing on sexual harassment in its union paper for the last few years and it has also held local seminars and courses. Until now its members have been involved in 2 court cases concerning sexual harassment. One of the cases is on appeal now.

Besides these two court cases, which have been decided at lower courts, there has been one other case where the question has been raised whether sexual harassment constitutes a violation of the Equal Treatment Act.

This case has caused a lot of media attention, and it reveals some of the mixed feelings about the issue among the trade unions. It was brought by a social worker, who had a part time job for a local union of unskilled male workers. She was not unionized herself. When she refused the sexual advances made by the elected boss of the union, her tasks were changed and immediately after she was dismissed. She brought an action against the local union for unfair dismissal on the grounds of lack of formal competence for dismissal and for violation of the Equal Treatment Act because of sexual harassment. She has not been supported by the social worker's union, and the top level of the union of male unskilled workers had not found any reason to dissociate itself openly from the local union, neither have the individual members, at least not in public.

On the contrary, her former boss sued her for slander - something which has happened in several of these cases. The reason for this was to put her under severe economic pressure, since public legal aid cannot be granted in cases concerning slander. The woman has received some legal aid in her own case at the lower court, which she lost. In spite of the fact that she might be ordered to pay all the costs of an appeal case herself, she did appeal to the Danish High Court. The High Court has been less restrictive to accept evidence to the benefit of the harassed woman than the lower court, but nevertheless the question of evidence is a very important one in these cases besides the problems of costs for an individual woman who wants to take action.

In the area of sexual harassment, I think it is necessary to work with a two-pronged legal strategy in a country like Denmark.

For one, it is necessary to increase the awareness of discrimination among women and the social partners in the labour market, since this is a prerequisite for increased action. It is important to improve the protection against discrimination. The only kind of discrimination which is forbidden for private employers in the Danish labour market is discrimination based on sex and EEC-nationality. Private employers are free to discriminate on the grounds of race, ethnicity and age as much as they want. This constitutes a violation of the obligations of non-discrimination on the basis of, for instance race, emanating from UN conventions. They have been ratified by Denmark, but they are not considered part of national law. So we need to increase our general sensibility towards questions of discrimination.

On the other hand it is also very necessary to broaden our understanding of sexual harassment and our legal claims concerning sexual harassment. If we view sexual harassment as a phenomenon which is to be fought in order to establish the dignity of women, I think it will be necessary to develop some sort of common and public standards of expectations and behaviour - they may be somewhat different in different countries, with different traditions and cultures. Even if we get an EEC-directive it will almost certainly be so general that we will have to fight nationally and locally about the interpretation. It will be a very important political and legal task to create these standards as public standards. It will imply an exposure to the public of values and behaviour, that has previously been not invisible but very often unseen. We should be aware that we want to fight sexual exploitation

in its different forms. Sexuality and norms towards sexuality must not be condemned to the sphere of privacy. We should also be cautious to try to "protect" women through claims of anonymity for fear of victimization. The fight about what women will and must tolerate and accept has to be fought in the open. We will have to change the "normal" attitudes and "normal" behaviour of "normal" men. This is the only way to secure the dignity of women and also to attack the intolerable behaviour in society of individual men, whilst at the same time protecting them against arbitrariness - something which the courts will be very concerned with, and which I also think should concern us.

70 women lawyers meet in denmark

by Leise Dollner

**Institute of Criminal Science
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From 5th to 8th of April, about 70 women lawyers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland gathered at Gilleleje in Denmark to discuss several aspects of women and health.

At the beginning of the conference some papers were read, of which the first two gave us some general perspective on the issue.

Lis Frost (senior lecturer from the University of Aarhus, Denmark) presented her views on "The Development of the Concepts of Rights in Health Sector". She made an historical-philosophical analyses of the strategy which has been upheld by many women lawyers while campaigning for the rights of women. She put a big question mark to this strategy, whether, the women would really benefit out of this strategy and that, it would be more correct to say, that it is rather a question of rearranging the society, outside the orbit of the (women) welfare-ethic. The next step is how to make these two strategies work together or besides each other.

Senior scholar Henriette Sinding Aasen from the University of Oslo, Norway gave on the a resume on special ethical issues in gen-technology. She documented how medical science, in this area, from the very first year of this century was developed in the interest of keeping a control on nature and human being. It was a clear expression of the theory of eugenism,

which became an ugly phenomena during World War II because the Nazis used it, even though it was related to the popular demand of the right to have a healthy child and therefore, of late the right to have one's own child.

Other papers were about the legal and ethical problems in the individual countries on issues like gen-technology, test tube babies, surrogate mothers, semen and sperm donation etc.

Between the lectures and discussion, there were different workshops held on the singular aspects of women and health. For example about reproduction-technology, contraception, abortion, venereal diseases, pregnancy, child delivery, and work environment.

It is always difficult to assess the concrete results of such a conference. The interesting point, however, was the attempt of participants to correlate issues of women's rights in the health sector with those of the society as a whole. On the other hand, the struggle for women's rights is a fight that has been necessary and which continues to be of importance in most areas of lives of women. It is interesting to see, how we formulate and practice this contradiction and mutual dependence of women's rights and (general) welfare-ethics.

Tell Me It's Alright

by Suman Goyal

Tell me it's alright.
I need to hear it
from someone
other than myself.

Sometimes
a brave smile
is all I can afford.
But even this
is too much.

So just this once,
soothe me a little
and tell me its alright.

Stumbling

I carry this burden
which seems to grow heavier
with every step.
Then I stumble
but do not fall.
I cannot fall.
I will not fall.
..... I just stumble.

And on occasion
lighten this burden
with a few shameless tears
and a little dignity.

For A Moment

This life
sometimes overwhelms.
When this happens
sit back and let yourself go.
Listen to the whispering
of the raindrops.
Mourn a little for a dying sunset.
And for a moment see this existence
for what it is.
Just a careless lover
passing through the night.

The Shelter

When I am running
I am actually crawling.
Crawling on all fours.

Like a hunted animal
seeking shelter
from this hell
called life.

And as I draw closer
to my shelter,
I find myself in a field
beneath a sea of stars.

They shine into my soul
allowing me to take
another step forward
towards that shelter
called peace.

What is Mine

I experience this silence
Allowing it to transport me
Onto a journey.....
far, far away from this place.

Into the depths of my soul
I wander
Aimlessly.

The territory is not familiar
but it belongs to me.
It is mine.
And I take ownership of it.
Embrace it.
When it shines and when not.

Untitled

There is violence
in this exchange

When I shed my skin
And blindly offer this body
to this scaffold of lust.

My heart weeps
and dreams in unison
as you take
this nameless body
and mould pleasure
from it.

When you take that
which is not yours
And I give that
which belongs not to you.

The knowledge of this
Construction is ignored.
But I continue to bleed
from this violence.

The Rain

There is a soft rain.
A peaceful rain
falling gently
within me.

There is a tenderness
about it.
As it consoles me
from the harshness
and the cruel tricks
life plays.

There is a soft rain
Guiding me.
To understand.
And to accept
peacefully and
with gentleness.

And there is a soft rain
which mourns
with a silent understanding.
of my knowing,
of my feeling.
And the sky-filled
despair of it all.



SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE

A BOOK OF LETTERS BY WOMEN OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women will be putting together a book in which the voices of under-represented groups of women will be heard. It will be a collection of letters written specifically for this publication. We are looking for the living, personal accounts of women who, because of their ethnicity or racial origin, believe it important to share their thoughts and feelings.

We want to hear your description of the difficulties and pleasures of living and working in Canada. Whether you were born inside or outside Canada, we ask you to share your ideas and experiences with regard to racism, sexism, and discrimination in the paid labour force and in home life.

The deadline for letters will be October 30, 1990. If you are interested, let us know and we will send you more details. Contact:

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Canadian
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Conseil
consultatif canadien
sur la situation de la femme