

# **How women's leadership can transform the Nation: Durgabai showed the way**

Lecture in honour of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh

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## **1. Introduction:**

I cannot really believe that I am here to deliver a Memorial Lecture in the name of Durgabai. She was always so present and commanding. I do not want to believe she is not here in Hyderabad goading me to get on with it, reminding me of the Andhra Mahila Sabha's work, urging me to visit and learn and write about it. Never satisfied with what I was doing, always pointing to something more. I saw her last while she was in bed here in Hyderabad, unwell but very alive and oh so loving. Holding her hand and sitting next to her on her bed, one felt one was receiving very special honours – more valuable than any honorary degree.

And now the honour of being asked to do a lecture in her name? That too is unbelievable, and I thank all of you for bestowing this honour on me. I only wish she was here. I would like to have her hear me and tell me what she thought of my ideas. Alas.

Many of you may not know that I knew her well – and through many routes. First, she was a great friend of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Kamaladevi was not only my husband's mentor, but became a second mother to me. So with Kamaladevi I used to meet Durgabai regularly in Delhi. Second, she was always interested in recruiting new people, especially economists to her mission and I was teaching economics at Delhi University in the 60's. She felt economists must understand the social sector and its values so we had our own meetings.

And I remember on one of her visits to our house in Jorbagh, she asked me who could do a good study of the value of social welfare. And I said Amartya Sen – as Prof Sen was at that time at Delhi School of Economics, known for his work on Welfare Economics; and a personal friend of mine from University days. Durgabai promptly rang up Prof Sen and got him to do a classic work on the cost benefit of

social welfare: even though that was not really the kind of topics or ideas he was discussing in his theoretical work on welfare economics. Prof Sen later told me how fascinated he was with Durgabai, how respectful of her commitment to social justice and remained an available resource to her as long as she was in Delhi. Her capacity to move a subject like social development into broader debates, to build its legitimacy and role, for which as you all know, she set up a Council in New Delhi- was extraordinary and revealed an exemplary mind.

So how to address a lecture in her honour? I could profile her contributions to the science of Social Development, to the creation of unusual and outstanding institutions like the Central Social Welfare Board; her influence on Indian political system; her personal life and its revolutionary aspects and so on. But should I? Those of you gathered here would know all about that and more.

So with your permission let me share with you some reflections on women's creativity and what is possible, and required, in the here and now of today and tomorrow;<sup>1</sup> and suggest that people like Durgabai and Kamaladevi might have done just that....

Nation Building was what most of us, both of Kamaladevi and Durgabai's generation and mine were doing from the 40's to the 80's. There was such a thing. To day this is not a word that is often used. Perhaps we think that "nation" has been built, and now just needs maintenance notably by the Sensex, the Media and non resident indians i.e.NRIs.

But I suggest that nation has not been built. The situation of India's people, especially its women and children, in many ways is worse than it was say in the 60's. I will give some figures later to prove this.

I would then suggest that for those of us, gathered here, whom I presume would like to carry forward the mission of Durgabai and her teams, - we need to get back to nation building. There is an opportunity right now, and working together we can capture it. We can revive both the method and the ethics that was used by our fore mothers in 1939, and exemplars like Durgabai and Kamaladevi in post independence India.

## **2. Women's initiatives in advising national policy: then and now**

In 1938, a National Planning Committee (NPC) was set up to chart the course of future planning in India, a sub-committee on women called Women's Role in Planned Economy (WPRE), was established in 1939 to "deal with the place of woman in the planned economy..." ranging from family life, employment, education and social customs that prevent women's participation in the economy.<sup>2</sup> The chairperson of the Committee was Rani Lakshmbai Rajwade, and the committee included prominent women of that time: Sarla Devi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Begum Zarina Currimbhoy, Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Joshi and Dr (Smt) Muthulakshmi Reddy.

Its depth of understanding as well its recommendations could have been drafted today. It was so farsighted. The report of the Sub-Committee<sup>3</sup> covered several areas: civic rights, economic rights, property rights, education, marriage, family and miscellaneous issues like widowhood, caste, prostitution etc.

In 1996, a Working group was set up by the Planning Commission to draw up an approach to women and development in the 9th Plan (1997-2002).<sup>4</sup> Some of the similarities between the two documents are striking. The Ninth Plan seeks a convergence of all sectoral services to benefit women. The 1940 sub-committee had recognised this in their report when they mentioned that the terms of reference for women in planning touches all aspects of life, since women are a part of any scheme and in equal terms as men. They also frequently refer to their recommendations to be considered by the Labour Sub-Committee, the Education Sub-Committee and so on. That is, the plans for women to be made within a general framework for each sector. This is close to the women's component plan of the 9<sup>th</sup> plan, which recommended that 30% of the expenditure in all sectors be reserved for expenditures which are specific to women. In the economic sphere, the Ninth plan 1996 touches on issues like legal safeguards for women to ensure equal pay for equal work, special assistance in the form of maternity benefits, child care, hostels, promotion of family responsibilities between men and women etc., all of which have been mentioned in the 1940 report.

Does this mean that women are “thinking” in the same way - in 1940 and 1996? Or that the same recommendations are valid still, since the earlier ideas were not incorporated? Or if they were acted upon, they did not bring the change intended? Or does it mean that even in 1940 these women, who did not have the benefit of 20 years “1975 - 1995” of women and development experience, its theory and practice and the exposure to four world conferences on women<sup>5</sup> - had the brilliance, the in-depth understanding to put forth ideas and structures which are up-to date? It is worth pondering over these questions as often, what is called the ‘new’ Indian women’s movement – post 1975, tends to see the previous eras as “conservative”, not progressive, not revolutionary.

### **3. Two women who transformed governance:**

Coming now to Kamaladevi and Durgabai, to them the notion of directing development meant the building of strong institutional arrangements, drawing on the commitment and expertise of voluntary action - but supported by the government. They abhorred “departmental” programmes and deliveries: a mode that crept in, in the 70s and 80s and which has taken away accountability to those who were to be served, and debilitated the alternative centers of power that these women constructed.

Both of them set up structures - outside of the government - but with government support, which became focal points of power, guiding national policies and budgets. Both brought to policy and programme, their personal life experience - of exclusion as well as skills. Durgabai's design of social development included condensed courses for women where girl drop-outs from school could pass the SSLC later in life by taking these courses in voluntary agencies; Hostels for girls, special schools for girls; mahila sabhas; reform in laws and each idea came from a personal gain, a personal exclusion. Kamaladevi brought to her design of development the interest in theatre and craft that was part of her mother's household.

Durgabai's most significant bequest to the nation was in founding the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB). While today, involvement of the voluntary sector in development is an oft-repeated statement, at a time when this was not recognised, she created an institution that facilitated such participation. The Board was founded in

1953 to promote welfare through voluntary agencies. Durgabai recognised that increasing welfare and better status for women would not be possible without budgetary provisions for them, and so, she mooted the idea of such a Board.<sup>6</sup>

What is worth observing is that the role of these board, be it Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) or All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) was not to administer but to fund grassroot agencies on a range of items, from livelihood, to adult education and provision of emergency relief. At any time the CSWB would be networked to more than 30,000 small ngos, - perhaps the biggest civil society network to use current language: and all funded by the Government of India. There were clones of a similar nature in the States and annual get together. These networks then became the biggest lobby for women as well as voluntary action and wielded more influence because of the nature of their structure as well as the profile of their governance – women leaders and activists of standing and expertise.

The fashion to day is to talk of civil society and state partnerships, to talk of the role of grassroot organizations in enabling the poor out of poverty and of networked lobbying. But to day these civil society organizations are conduits for donors – often from abroad including major players like the World Bank. Here were structures that were doing all this but as partners to the Indian State. Again something to ponder over.

In a definition that would not be out of place in any development document in the 90s, CSWB defined social welfare as a “truly cooperative venture between the state and the people”.<sup>7</sup>

To found such an institution when social welfare was not even included in the First Plan speaks volumes for her imagination and influence. As Dr. C.D. Deshmukh says, “ Durgabai lost no time in conceiving a Central Social Welfare Board and persuading me as Finance Minister to agree to an allotment of Rs. 4 crore in the plan for the two years left of the Plan period. Social Welfare had been nobody’s child till then”.<sup>8</sup> She also managed to procure 22.4 percent outlay for social services, the highest proportion of investment in any plan.<sup>9</sup>

Kamaladevi built the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB), Indian Cooperative Union (ICU), All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) and National Theatre Centre. She organised refugees and established townships for them near Faridabad; was a member of National Committee for Perspective Planning for Education; National Advisory Board for Industries; was the Chairperson of National Centre for Cultural Resources & Training; Children’s Book Trust; and Dolls Museum, and the Vice-President of India International Centre.<sup>10</sup>

Kamaladevi and Durgabai were married early - one was a child widow; the other re-arranged her marital life. Both then received education, in steps with large gaps, nurtured by other leaders like Margaret Cousins in the case of Kamaladevi and Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya for Durgabai. Women’s education had become a flagship as both had received education at a late age - as a form of rehabilitation after the blow of child widowhood.

They commanded political attention because of the roles they played in pre-independence India in the freedom struggles. They both have narrated how they chose constructive work, rather than government work inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's call. It is said that Kamaladevi was offered a cabinet post in the first post independent government which she refused, saying she would rather "rebuild" the nation. But Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and others in power were part of her "team".

These Boards were composed of influential socio-political figures, with Chairpersons like Durgabai and Kamaladevi who were almost like cabinet ministers in the influence they had over government policy. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) and All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) were seen as important instruments of public policy, and they lobbied for large constituencies of "people".

#### **4. Some reflections on history:**

Does this not also suggest that the 'local' national experience of women, their participation in personal struggles as women<sup>11</sup>, as well as public struggles like the freedom movement, provides wise, radical, informed participation in public policy? – and was perhaps as, if not more, significant for nation building than the 75-95 experience? This is worth pondering<sup>12</sup> as this is the essence of the transformatory power that Kamaladevi and Durgabai, exercised – and of the early pioneers of the international women's agenda.

I have just had the opportunity to look at the history of the United Nations, with special reference to its intellectual life and that too with special reference to women. This is a project called the United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) ([www.unhistory.org](http://www.unhistory.org)), which consists of fourteen volumes on fourteen themes, and I have had the privilege of doing the book which is related to women. My book is called, "Women Enrich the United Nations and Development". What I found is that in the early days, i.e. 50s and 60s women from the developing world who went to the UN meetings, attended the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) were persons who came out of liberation struggles or from the social and economic movements of their countries. They had a stature and a voice which could not be ignored, and could actually influence outcomes, whether they were draft conventions or development designs. I have wonderful stories on how these women changed the founding documents of the UN apart from the shape and mandates of their institutions. For example, Hansa Mehta<sup>13</sup> took on Eleanor Roosevelt, and changed the language of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (the UDHR) –from "all men" to "all men and women". Many more.

All of these episodes do point to the importance of representation by those who have a political experience and stake – not only technocrats and diplomats. I think this experience is not only at the international level but at the national level too. Women who can be respected for their track record, who have a presence in the political firmament because of their groundswell work, can sway the policies better than the academics and the specialists and those who have come to power because of their genealogy. Note the power and presence of Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sanghatan (MKSS) or Ela Bhatt of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and many others. This has a lesson for us and I want to use it for the rest of my lecture.

## 5. Unfolding the learning

In the rest of this lecture I propose to unfold how we here and now, can learn from our fore-mothers and, if we grid our minds and loins, set things right:

**First some data** – To show how things are wrong and need to be set right, - on the deteriorating situation of the poor in India with special reference to the female of the species (I would not dwell on this except to say that I have taken out official data which reveals increase in the harshness and deprivation of poverty). (Annexure 1 gives the full text of this point). I have taken out data on overall increase in no of poor, worsening of the situation of women in agriculture both in terms of the load of work as well as the wages; in terms of nutrition especially of children, of the killing of female fetuses and therefore the extraordinary decline in the infantile sex ratio according to the 2001 Census, and then the condition of girls amongst of working children, as well as their sale into the flesh trade, and finally the total neglect of the most important life line for the poor, namely employment from the growth paths of the last decade.

**Second**, I would like to suggest that women have had the most creative, doable ideas and practices which could be a source of valuable advice to those in charge of the nation. Of course all of us are in charge of the nation, and Gandhiji particularly advised us not to exaggerate the power of the State or depend on it, but to depend on ourselves. True, but when I say those in charge of the nation, I mean those who are thinking of putting on the ground national programmes against a macro economic schema. Our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, who is attempting to enable India to prosper but carrying all its people with her, has even challenged himself by saying that India will evolve, during his government, a form of reform which would be a model for the rest of the world.

There is a real quest in the world, especially the countries of the South for such a model – some way of handling globalisation, not getting left behind as an economy; and yet accommodating the needs of economic and social justice, that is not leaving the people behind. It is perhaps the knottiest problem of this century- though others may think security, terrorism is the biggest challenge. So if he keeps his promise it would also be a great healing touch to the rest of the world.

And indeed, I say, this is possible as India is a fantastic laboratory of varied experiments in development with social and economic justice. We have been the beneficiaries of the Gandhian touch, which we still feel, even if we try to thicken our skin against that feeling. Dr. Manmohan Singh also quoted Gandhis talisman, to show how he proposes to set about this paradigm. So, I say we, the women's movement can enable the Prime Minister to keep his promise, more than any other constituency in India.

**Third**, I would argue that it is women's experience of how to transform a situation, how to overcome a challenge - be it poverty, conflict or injustice that can show the way to achieve this model. I hope to develop this argument into a slightly more tangible shape for your consideration.

## 6. Shaping development: initiating transformation

One can give so many examples of how women have tried to shape development design to make it more humane and equity creating.

Self-financing: we have numerous examples. From Andhra and one that is now well known are the thrift societies which have developed into energetic financial services. For example there are 260 Women's Thrift Cooperatives (WTCs) with a membership of about 65,000, which have risen with their own savings and excellent self-management. Their performance has inspired men to follow suit and in the past ten years 185 men's thrift cooperatives have developed with about 38,000 members based again primarily on members own savings. The Cooperative Development Foundation based at Hyderabad has been instrumental in helping women (and now also men) to form these self-help cooperatives for thrift and credit. The prior emphasis is on thrift i.e. their own collective savings for providing credit to their members. Their distinction lies in the fact that they do not start with borrowed funds but operate with their own savings.<sup>14</sup>

Positive examples of the self help groups show that women can build on almost nothing and make it a transformatory experience. In Dharmapuri, women's bonding across difference on the self help purpose has led to a live movement of women vigilantes who are preventing child marriage, misuse of girls as domestic servants, dowry and have become a force for the administration to reckon with. This is an episode from the work of an NGO in Karanataka called SEARCH<sup>15</sup>. Recently it is reported that in Bastar the self help groups are running the midday meal programmes and it is the best implemented example from the whole of India.

Andhra's women also galvanized India by organizing the most widespread and unified action against the intensification of arrack sales.<sup>16</sup> Their valiant struggle and victory in recreating public policy was overpowered by conventional political power plays. Similar collective actions which could lead to a less violent, more environment and poor friendly landscape are spread all over the world – each time the local success has been a clear message to the how and what of development, but each time this has been swept aside by conventional reasoning<sup>17</sup>

There are many local struggles such as the powerful “sit-ins” of women in Nigeria against oil pipelines; and in Columbia against narcotic mafia to mention only a very few. These appear on the global screen, are applauded by vibrant networks but they cannot be sustained or enlarged in space to overpower the Empire. It is necessary to build an ideological solidarity and institutional mechanisms to be able to support such local efforts more effectively; to sustain and enlarge the space these women have occupied in many “local” places, so that they encompass the public and political sphere to the full. They define development and the “desirable” political economy, but we are not able to make out of them the theory, the concept or the paradigm so it becomes the macro idea.

What we need to do is to re cast such local choices by collectives of women into mainstream economic reasoning, which can build an economic program in modern language to be able to be heard and accepted.

Some of this kind of work has been done, and is being done in Academy. On measures, women researchers have shown that progress is not only material change, nor to be measured only with money. There are other elements, like equality, absence of violence apart from notions of care and love which are equally valuable ways of assessing progress.<sup>18</sup> Most theories of knowledge have been deconstructed by feminists and reconstructed, drawing from other facts and other logic.<sup>19</sup> Freud, Jung, Marx, even St Peter apart from other thinkers have been challenged by feminist theorists, showing how their very fact base is wrong, and their idea that there is a box called a theory which can apply to all is a presumption. Feminist discourse challenges the notion of a single dominant analysis or idea. There are no *gurus* here and no didactic treatises.

What we need is a conjoining of this skill or capability to theorise, to develop “plans” to the lived grassroot work and to really show that the new model is possible.

I suggest that there is a space available to us to day, as it was available in 1939 and again soon after independence when Durgabai, Kamaladevi and many others made their mark, namely the post general elections scenario. There is a questioning of the kind of reform process that was followed, there is a belief that it is the social movements analysis, attributing the election results to the increasing affirmation by social movements of the excluded such as Dalits, women and the poor.<sup>20</sup> That made the change and therefore they should be included in the consideration of programmes. There is a rethinking and reorganizing. There is a quest not only in the UPA but also in all other political gatherings, be it National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or State levels. We can fill it.

It is heartening to note that already some initiatives have been taken which are focused and I suggest very insightful. I am referring to the memorandum presented to Sonia Gandhi by 18 women’s organizations, called the mini CMP.

### **The Mini CMP**

The mini CMP that 18 women’s organizations have formulated not only a brilliant piece of focused thinking, but also reflects the extraordinary unity of thought within the disparate women’s organizations. However it needs some more steps for this engagement to fructify – not only for women but for the fulfillment of Dr. Manmohan Singh’s vision. The much larger and deeper inclusion of women in evolution of all public policies by the State – not a women for “women only” segment.

The main points of the women’s mini CMP was<sup>21</sup>:

- Protection Against Domestic Violence Bill with amendments suggested by the women's organisations and implementation of the various recommendations of the Law Commission to reform laws concerning women.
- Universalisation of the Public Distribution System,
- Giving land ownership rights to women
- Special work schemes for poor women in rural and urban areas,

- Implementation of the non-coercive, non-targeted National Population Policy as opposed to the coercive anti-women policies in place in many States
- Strict implementation of the laws of sex selection and sex determination techniques and tests were other issues raised by the women's groups.
- An end to licensing for liquor vendes as a revenue source and a comprehensive liquor policy taking into account the concerns of women.

### The “main” CMP and Women

The inclusion in the CMP of special allocations for women out of various schemes however is one of those extremely unworthy and unworkable ideas, and there is enough evidence not only from the outside but even the programme evaluations of the Planning Commission to show that whether it is the tribal sub plan, or the women’s component plan as it was called in the ninth plan, it is an inappropriate method of leveling unequals. Women have been mentioned and many schemes are there, I would like to suggest that their ideas both on the design as well as implementation (not only of the Women oriented schemes but the whole package) need to be taken into consideration. At every stage, for example in the Commission for Farmers, farm women should be equally understood and represented. It is such inclusion that would enable the new paradigm to be success. Removal of poverty, or working with the poor to enable them to get out of poverty, enabling reduction in inequality through inclusive thinking, in which the women’s movement in India have been really brilliant. The women’s movement has the experience and the intellectual stamina to work on a unique Indian model of development, as it has been on this job now for many years, even though at the periphery.

Many of us from all across India have been working with the women elected to the Panchayat Raj institutions since 1993. I call them local level women politicians: lwps. We have found that not only have they a mind, but they are able to make plans as well as implement them with much greater truthfulness and practicality than the men. Whether it is in Uttaranchal, - where I actually witnessed a group of women break into groups just as they do in these high profile meetings of the UN and the World Bank and come out at the end of the day with clear public policy linked to the kind of governance that would make it happen –or in southern India.

However though there is much rhetoric about them, their voice and their minds do not get accommodated in the actual design or implementation of development. They are *one*, marginalized and boxed into “Mahilan ke programs”, and *two*, no fund ever is in their hands.

Nothing is more demeaning, if not downright silly, than having panels of economists and corporates to comment on a budget and then take the mike to the woman or rickshaw puller on the street, with the predictable analysis that they are looking at the price of kerosene and or the PDS – or the sales tax on cosmetics.

These “people” are interested in the lists of items being freed of trade barriers - take the milk producers of Kaira or the gum or cotton pickers of Gujarat or the tea shop keepers in Meghalaya. They have views on location of infrastructure projects –

take the Airport and Casino and fun city planned in Arunachal Pradesh, against the wishes of the women. Or the modernization of the Keithel Market in Imphal and similar infrastructure projects, Forest and Tourist management in Uttaranchal, Urban design and curriculum for schools of architecture in Ahmedabad, taxation policy especially sources of revenue collection in Bijapur District and so a million such examples of brilliant engagement of women, citizens in rebuilding an India that can live in peace with itself.

There is much effort and some success in bringing women into political processes. This success has come about through larger numbers in assemblies as voters or through affirmative action policies. These activities are based on the premise that placing women in power structures would be a step in bringing women's advice into the formation of policy, shaping the direction of social and economic development, as well as influencing the character of the state. It seems to me that while the momentum for affirmative action in political structures, quota systems and representation is gaining ground, the inward looking searching question 'why women' has not yet been answered, or even if answered it has not yet been supported by a philosophy or ideology which makes the demand that women should be in position of leadership.<sup>22</sup>

It is crucial that the excluded groups, including women, come up with well grounded economic discourse, enabling the creation of a new paradigm of economic progress – re thinking the measures, the goals and the institutional systems that will deliver the results. This home work is yet to be done. It is easy to be adversarial or even disapproving. It is difficult to be creative. I suggest we build that model around two poles. One Employment – a model which provides full employment and the second on the local self governing bodies. Naturally this can only be the elementary poles and much would have to be layered on to these poles – but they could be the first legs. What would be amazing would be if like the WPRE of 1939 or like the practical constructive programmes of Durgabai, we could come up with a striking program not only on paper but with our girded loins and creative minds as vehicles to implement it. Durgabai would be proud of us if in her memory we can come together, and grasp the opportunity before us.

### **Some data on the deteriorating situation: with special reference to gender differences:**

#### *Overall trend in poverty*

Contrary to the official claim that poverty has decreased, a recent article (The Hindu June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004) which has made the poverty estimates of the NSSO comparable shows how the official estimates overestimated the decline in poverty by more than 70 per cent. The exercise re-calculated the 50<sup>th</sup> round estimates for 1993-94 to make it comparable to the 55<sup>th</sup> round data for 1990-2000. Further, over-estimation in food consumption was corrected by using information from other nearby annual NSS rounds. This simple exercise places the decline in poverty ratio between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 at a mere 2.8 percentage points, not the hype of 10% decline given by the NSSO.

In terms of the number of poor, while the official estimates showed a decline of 60 million, the revised estimates show an increase in the number of poor by 5-6 million.

The picture (after adjustment for overestimation) suggests that inequality increased in rural areas as well as urban areas. ... Between 1993-94 and 2000-01, the top 20 percent of the urban and rural population, according to consumption expenditure, increased their per capita consumption by 40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The comparative figures for the remaining 80 percent of the rural population involving some 600 million people witnessed a growth of per capita consumption of only 3 percent over the same period.

Another dimension of the growing divergence in per capita consumption is the experience of those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, the poverty ratios for the SCs declined in both rural and urban areas but at a slower rate than that for the general group. In terms of absolute numbers, the number of poor among the SCs increased substantially in the urban areas.

#### *Relevant to women and girls*

#### *Impact on Nutrition*

The Approach Paper to the Indian Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) referring to the average growth rate of 6.5% in the Eighth and Ninth Plan periods, making India one of the ten fastest growing developing countries, says:

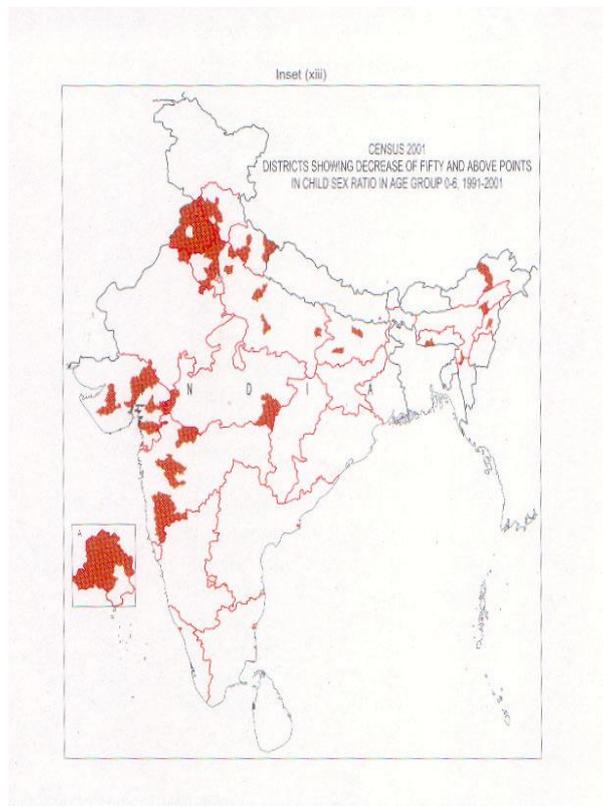
These positive developments are, however, clouded by other features, which give cause for concern suffering even more severe malnutrition. The infant mortality rate has stagnated at 72 per 1000 for the last several years. . More than half of the children 1-5 years old in rural areas are under-nourished, with girl children suffering even more severe malnutrition.<sup>23</sup>

### *Increase in women's poverty with special reference women in agriculture*

A study conducted by the World Bank in Uttar Pradesh, which, with 160 million people is India's most populous state, reveals that a higher proportion of female workers than male workers is involved in low paid casual work, primarily in the agriculture sector.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, there has been a *feminisation* of the agricultural workforce, as the relative proportions of both female cultivators and female agricultural labourers have grown. Three quarters of women's employment days were in agriculture, as compared to only 40% of men's. Women were also three times more likely than men to work as agriculture labourers – work that is backbreaking, insecure, and low status. In contrast to men, women rarely held regular jobs or jobs in the non-farm sector, while these activities were left to the men. When they did obtain such employment, women were again relatively underpaid and confined to unskilled activities'.<sup>25</sup>

### *Further data on discrimination against*

A look at the map of India.<sup>26</sup> Census 2001 provides comparative data, further translated into map of infantile sex ratios. I look at these maps of India, shows up what I call "the blood stained hands of Mother India". The red patches are where the child sex-ratio, that is of children between 0-6 year, has fallen by more than 50 points in 10 years 1991-2001. Earlier the reds were mainly in Haryana/Punjab: and in Salem in Tamil Nadu. Now the stains are appearing in other states like Andhra and Gujarat and Maharashtra were some districts have also shown decrease of fifty and above points in Child Sex Ratio – revealing another Indic tradition, the killing fields for the females of the species. I suggest that this deterioration is also partially due to increasing "pressures" and increasing poverty on society especially families.<sup>27</sup>





### *Discrimination of Child workers*

According to the ILO, of the more than 200 million working children in the world, girls under the age of 16 years are engaged more in domestic labour than in any other category of work.

The most grotesque form of child domestic labour is manifest in the case of victims of trafficking and those in debt bondage. These children are exposed to physical, psychological or sexual abuse. The recommendation (190) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour draws attention to their prevalence in a family setting.

The Government of India has ratified eight of the 30 ILO Conventions and Recommendations pertaining to child labour. But all of them, including the Conventions on Underground Work and Night work or young persons, relate to children only insofar as they prescribe a minimum age of admission to employment. Despite the recommendation of the SNCL and demands from national trade unions, the Government is yet to ratify the two fundamental Conventions that deal comprehensively with child labour.<sup>28</sup>

### *Trafficking in women and girls*

One of the most extreme examples of the feminization of poverty is sex trafficking. It is the intersection of sexism and poverty where young girls become the first resources in poverty. About 1.3 million women and children are trafficked into prostitution, cheap labour, domestic servitude and the entertainment and pornography industry every year. Many of them are as young as seven. All countries are source, transit or destination countries.

We have heard about the increase in rape, increase in burning, increase in sale of girl children into trafficking – the trafficking in women now has a value which is greater than the trading in narcotics. Sale of women has become as explicit a business as drug peddling. While Interpol has been alerted and has rules for controlling and punishing trafficking in narcotics, the trafficking in flesh which has a larger economic turn over has not yet been given an equal recognition. The UN describes trafficking as recruiting or transferring human beings into exploitative situations through force or other forms of coercion or deception – or through “the abuse of position of vulnerability.” The International Organisation for Migration says this trafficking generates \$8 billion each year.<sup>29</sup>

### *Neglect of a crucial life line: employment*

After a review of progress in combating unemployment in the first two decades of planned development (end of 60's), the late Prof. Raj Krishna a former Member of the Planning Commission concluded:

The grave national problem of unemployment has defied solution in spite of two decades of planned development ... reason is the tragic phenomenon of *positive unemployment growth* associated with a *positive output growth*.

After four decades of planned development i.e. by 1987-88, the tragic phenomenon of disjunction between output growth and employment growth pointed out by Raj Krishna two decades earlier had not only continued, but further compounded.

During 1983 to 1987-88 GDP shot up from 3.5 to 5.3 but the employment growth rate fell from 2.82 during 1973-79, to 1.55 in 1983-88. In agriculture, the employment growth rate declined from 1.8 to an insignificant 0.07 in the 15year period ending 1988.

The reforms introduced in 1991 were precisely aimed to slim the state and correct the distortions attributed to over centralization. Dismantling of controls, liberalisation, privatization, disinvestments, marketisation, transparency, exit policies were all packaged to move the economy and to reduce poverty and to promote employment by making the pattern of industrialisation labour intensive. After ten years of reforms (1991-2001) a review is provided by the *Planning Commission in its 2002 paper* titled 'package of ten millions jobs a year in the Tenth Plan 2002-2007'.

The paper reveals that "the employment generating capacity of the economy and especially the organised sector vis-a-vis the GDP growth is 'declining fast over time (1983 to 2000)', in spite of the fact that during the same period GDP growth accelerated from 5.2 to 6.7 percent per annum". The explanation: "there has been an even more significant decline in the labour intensity - employment elasticity to value added has declined from 0.52 to 0.16".

The report makes the devastating observation that in the late nineties the organised sector reached "almost a near jobless growth" and in agriculture, "employment growth touched near zero".

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Padmaja Naidu Memorial Lecture, *Indian Women; Today and Tomorrow*. Published by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. to K.T. Shah's Introduction, (pg. 27) of "Woman's role in Planned Economy". Report of the Sub-Committee, National Planning Committee series. Bombay: Vora & Co. Publishers, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Presented on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1940

<sup>4</sup> Approach paper to the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), Planning Commission, Government of India, 1996

<sup>5</sup> Mexico - 1975; Copenhagen - 1980; Nairobi - 1985; Beijing - 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Deshmukh, Durgabai. "Chintaman and I", Allied Publishers: New Delhi. (1980). Page 62.

<sup>7</sup> Ganguli, B.N. (ed.). 1977. "Social development: Essays in honour of Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh. New Delhi. Sterling, Page 253

<sup>8</sup> Ganguli (ed.). op.cit., Page 218.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopaedia of Social Work, Page 187

<sup>10</sup> Bannerjee, Syrene R. (ed.). Who's Who in India 1985, A Business Press Publication, Page 76.

<sup>11</sup> See section on life of Durgabai Deshmukh

<sup>12</sup> Devaki Jain, Women's contribution to political economy, then and now, in "*The Vocabulary of Women's Politics*" Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2000

<sup>13</sup> Hansa Mehta, an Indian delegate to the meeting of the Human Rights drafting committee, protested at the use of this gender-opaque language. "That would never do," she said. " 'All men' might be interpreted to exclude women." Although Eleanor Roosevelt tried to argue that the women of the United States had never felt they were left out of the Declaration of Independence because it said "all men," she eventually had to agree with the other women, mostly from the South, who felt strongly on this point. Thirty-two voted in favor of the change; only two countries voted against it and three abstained. The formulation was changed from "all men" to read "all human beings." (Amy Eckert, "Universality by Consensus: The Evolution of the Universality in the Drafting of the UDHR", in *Human Rights and human Welfare*, Vol. 1:2 Columbia (April 2001) quoted in Devaki Jain, "Women Enrich the United Nations and Development, – forthcoming publication by Indiana University Press in 2005

<sup>14</sup> Sahavikasa, Newsletter from Cooperative Development Foundation, Vol. 6, Issue 3, March 2004, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh

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<sup>16</sup> *Reworking Gender Relations, Redefining Politics: Nellore Village Women Against Arrack*. Based on the report from Anveshi, Hyderabad Economic and Political Weekly, Jan. 16-23, 1993; When Women Unite: The Story Of An Uprising, A Documentary By Nata Duvvury and Shabnam Virmani, 2000

<sup>17</sup> Devaki Jain, "*Women's Rights between the UN-Human Rights Regime and Free Trade Agreements*", Globalising Women's Rights: Confronting unequal development between the, UN rights framework and WTO-trade agreements, Bonn, 19-22 May 2004

<sup>18</sup> Genevieve Vaughan, "The Enigma of the Gift and Sacrifice", Mothering, Communication and the Gifts of Language for Rice University conference, (1999); Devaki Jain, 'The Politics of Measurement: HDR Values', paper presented at 'Women and Human Development Report' 20-21 February 2003, Bangalore ([http://hdr.undp.org.in/events/Gndr\\_n\\_Gvrnce/hdr\\_values.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org.in/events/Gndr_n_Gvrnce/hdr_values.pdf))

<sup>19</sup> Devaki Jain, Women's Participation in the History of Ideas: The Importance of Reconstructing Knowledge, National Institute for Advanced Studies, 6 February 2002

<sup>20</sup> Yogendra Yadav, "Radical shift in the social basis of political power", *The Hindu*, May 20, 2004

<sup>21</sup> 'Women's groups meet Sonia' by Aarti Dhar, *The Hindu*, 27 May 2004

<sup>22</sup> Devaki Jain, 'Nuancing Globalisation'; Paper delivered at the Nita Barrow Memorial Lecture at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of West Indies, May 2000

<sup>23</sup> Planning Commission, Government of India, *Approach to the Tenth Plan 2002-2007*, New Delhi, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Valerie Kozel, and Barbara Parker 'A Profile and Diagnostic of the Poverty in Uttar Pradesh', World Bank, 2001,. Paper presented at a Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop in New Delhi, hosted by the Government's Planning Commission and the World Bank, 11 January, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Valerie Kozel, and Barbara Parker 'A Profile and Diagnostic of the Poverty in Uttar Pradesh'.

<sup>26</sup> Map 1 indicates Districts with below 850 Child Sex ratio (the Punjab) and Map 2 of Districts showing decrease of Fifty and above points in Child Sex Ratio (in Age Group 0-6 ) Census 2001

<sup>27</sup> Devaki Jain, "Through the looking glass of poverty", New Hall Cambridge, Oct 19<sup>th</sup> 2001

<sup>28</sup> Garimella Subramaniam, "Children at Work", *The Hindu*, Bangalore, June 12, 2004

<sup>29</sup> Amanda Ripley, "When the meninas came to town", *Time*, Vol. 162, No. 15, October 20, 2003, p. 41