The "Gender Gap" in India and China: A Comparative Study

Krishna Ahooja-Patel

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an in-depth comparison of economic and political decisions as they relate to women of two of the biggest and oldest societies in the world - India and China. Based on long experience with quantitative data, the author also raises questions about how much such data obscures the experience of women.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait une comparaison détaillée entre les décisons d'ordre économique et les décision d'ordre politique et fait leur lien entre elles et les femmes des deux plus grandes et plus anciennes sociétés au monde: l'Inde et la Chine. En se basant sur une longue expérience et des données quantitatives, l'auteure soulève des questions sur la façon dont ces données obscurent l'expérience des femmes.

"...The creation of opportunities for women does not depend on a country's income level or economic growth rate ..." UNDP, Human Development Report, 1996, p.35

INTRODUCTION

What do India and China have in common? How do women fare in these huge, sub-continental countries? Both are the birthplaces of ancient cultures. Both attained their independence and liberation from colonial domination between 1947 and 1949. Both have gone through immense upheavals since then. Both adopted planning as an instrument of policy for accelerating their economic and social development. India and China are rivals in several senses - economic, social, political and also strategic. Both are looked upon as new aspirants to the coveted club of the global industrial centre. Both have set objectives of abolishing poverty, of giving their people full employment and a higher level of living. They have both marshalled the advances in world science and technologies to catch up with the levels achieved by the developed industrial countries. They have also faced serious domestic and external conflicts, including a war between the two of them.

Despite these similarities, the two countries have major differences in formulating and implementing their policies, plans and strategies for economic, social and political transformation. India chose political democracy, a mixed, but mainly capitalist economy and gradual social development. China, on the other hand, won its liberation through a revolution, which fundamentally altered its old structure of political economy and social power. It set the goal of achieving a socialist and finally a communist society and adopted central planning in the first three decades of its revolution. India and China have also fundamentally differed in the growth of their economies. India started at a slow pace of only 3.6 per cent growth per year, which accelerated in the last decade. In comparison, China's economic and social growth rate continued to be much higher, varying from one and a half to two times that of India's. In consequence, China has been able to raise its national output 10 to 12 times over the last 35 years; whereas India's real output rose only about six times in the same period. As a result, China has now emerged as one of the world economic and political powers. India, on the other hand, has regressed in the world economy and its political status in the world has declined. It still has

a long way to go to find its appropriate place in the world community.

The main issue addressed in this paper is how the advancement of women fared in the spectacular political, social and economic development of these two large countries. Did the rate of economic growth decrease or increase inequalities among social groups within their different regions? Is the advancement of women proceeding on a broad front of social change or is it limited to only a few sectors such as health and education? What role did the resource endowment, cultural and religious traditions and different sets of economic and social policies play in the divergent outcomes in the two countries? These are complex issues to which only partial answers have been provided in current development literature and more recently by feminist scholarship.

NON-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF DEVELOPMENT

In the 1990s, globalization[1] has acquired a variety of meanings and the term goes well beyond frequent references to the "global market place" or "global governance" or the management of the "global commons." Comparison of economies is considered competition: comparison of culture is accepted as diversity. Any process of comparative analysis normally involves statistical quantification or measurement of various economic and social factors with sophisticated tools and refined methodologies, but I shall argue that statistics should be only perceived as limited instruments of comparison. At best, the numbers reflect only half the story of the daily struggle of existence of the majority of the population of the world.[2]

When statistics are disaggregated by sex, a new dimension emerges in comparative analysis.[3] The available scientific methodologies are not yet sufficiently developed to iron out the bias and prejudices against women that have been captured in national and international concepts. The actual survival of women falls between the crevices of cold percentages, which are insensitive to "people centred development" or gender equality. It is now slowly being recognized by policy makers and women's movements that "women's issues" no longer belong exclusively to women's organizations; but are linked organically to the processes of development. There are proliferating references to "gender" in local, national and international fora among development experts, academics and activists who do not necessarily think of themselves as feminists. In international conferences, national media and policy making mechanisms, one repeatedly hears the mention of "gender bias," "gender sensitization," "gender planning" and "gender training." The historical process by which "women in development" was transformed to "gender and development" in 1980s is an interesting political story but outside the scope of this paper.[4]

Cultural and Religious Factors

India and China, both situated in the region of Asia, are two of the largest continuing civilizations in the world. They have contributed technological innovations and inventions in various sciences, including astronomy and astrology. They also gave birth to the majority of the religions of the world and founded schools of thought, belief and value systems which continue to guide the daily life of its residents. Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are all found in these countries. The majority religions of China and India - Confucianism and Hinduism - have deeply influenced their socio-cultural development and these have had serious repercussions on women in their pattern of daily life. Islam and Christianity have also left their mark on millions of men and women in India and China, particularly influencing marriage, divorce and family, and the ethical code of daily behaviour. In combination with the patriarchal structure of both Indian and Chinese societies they have subjugated and oppressed women by institutionalizing discrimination against women and systematically preventing women's mobility from the household to public life. In fact, by a structured pattern of tradition, women's lives are made completely immobile in rural India where most women live and work. In China, women are assigned a narrower space in daily life which connects production to reproduction making "service to the family" its main objective. Intelligence, individual creativity and exploration

of ideas are considered to be in the male domain.

These approaches in the value system of India and China influence almost all facets of life despite the fact that the two ancient religions - Confucianism and Hinduism - are based on a distinctly different belief on the evolution of life compared to, for example, Christianity. The Hindu God Brahma, the creator evolved "half woman half man" or (Ardh-nari) concept and the Confucian concept of Yin and Yang are also more closely related to the biological modern theory of mixed male and female hormones.

Where Have All The Girl Children Gone?

One of the most important indicators of women's relative status in society is the ratio of male to female survival; that is, the number of years a woman is allowed to live. It has been argued that an "infant's probability of surviving childhood" depends on biological and economic factors as well as the care and nutrition a child receives. Evidence from many countries around the world including India and China indicates that females generally have higher "survival probabilities" than males at birth. If there is a deviation from this natural pattern, it is due to the differential care given to sons and daughters by the family. Therefore allocation of household resources, including food and medical care to girls are crucial factors in their survival. The recent UNICEF Campaign in favour of the girl child was the result of this new insight into the working of those societies in which girls are neglected or killed by deprivation.[5]

India and China both have large populations, which together amount to more than half the inhabitants of the earth. In 1995, China's population passed the 1.2 billion mark and India's reached 900 million. According to the 1991 census, of the total population of 836.6 million in India, 402.8 million were female - less than half, while in China the total number of female were 637 million or 49 percent of the population.[6] There are serious social and biological implications to being a woman in societies such as India and China. Girls in China were the main if not exclusive victims of infanticide and tended to have a higher infant mortality rate at all times, but more so during times of poverty and famine throughout China's history. One well-known survey records that in the 19th century one hundred and sixty women over 50 years of age were interviewed. They had between them a total of 631 sons and 538 daughters. They admitted that they destroyed 158 of their daughters but none of their boys. In India, recent surveys of some villages showed that girls were regularly suffocated after their birth by the members of the family, including the mother.

Demographers have constructed pyramids of age - cohorts according to which in both countries several thousands of girls die before reaching the age of one and more and more girls are destroyed in the womb itself, after sex determination and before the girl child is born. The data on the number of girls who die before the age of one is based on the registration of births. Large gaps exist in both countries, where in rural areas the birth of a girl is often not even registered. The figures on fetus destruction are provided by some hospitals in India; where this practice is frequent many hospitals do not keep those statistics. In several regions, the practice of selling girl children has been observed. Giving away girl children in marriage in lieu of debt to old men also continues despite legislation against the practice.

Freedom To Participate In Public Life

In China in the early fifties, all mass organizations, including women's organizations, were under the control of the Communist party. The next two decades in China witnessed political and social upheavals in which women's organizations played an important role by advocating women's equality as a part of the revolutionary struggle. But women's rights remained subsidiary to the interests of the Party and the State. In the first fervour of the aftermath of the Chinese revolution, from 1950 to 1953, the proportion of women elected to neighbourhood committees suddenly doubled from 22% to 48%.

The women's movement in the late 1950s and the early 1960s under the leadership of the All China Women's Federation encouraged women to take up new jobs and new skills; for example, women contributed to physical labour in building dams and dykes including those in Hunan Province. What is significant is that even during the

revolutionary fervour in China women were considered equal but physiologically different, and they were warned that they should not indulge in physical contest.[7]

In 1978 when "economic reforms" were introduced and "development of the private economy" was officially advocated, the nature of the labour market radically changed, and this continues to have serious impacts on women's lives. For example, export-oriented industrialization, commodity and consumer market mechanisms, decentralization of state control over enterprise management and economy dramatically increased the number of women in the labour market. It also increased their burden of work in the family as their responsibilities remained the same as before. Foreign investment enterprises expanded rapidly from 1979 to 1990 attracting a large number of women to the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and export processing enclaves. Although there are differences in regions and enterprises, the conditions of work of women are generally poor and their wages generally low. Large numbers of women left their rural communities and joined the global assembly as producers.[8] This migration to the SEZs gave them their own income which went a long way in enhancing women's individual status. They left behind the feudal oppressive structures in search of personal freedom.

The Women's liberation movement in China is now considered to be a part of the social revolution which improved the social status of women so that they could exercise their social rights and realize their value as social beings. As in India during the struggle for independence, so in China during the war of liberation, women's organizations and women's movements came of age and shifted their focus from welfare to equality and the struggle to achieve equal rights with men.

In India, one of the lasting contributions of Gandhi to the women's cause was that he gave it a moral legitimacy. He helped create a traditional, social and political atmosphere in which even today hardly anyone will publicly stand up and explicitly oppose women's fundamental rights or deny them participation in politics. The role, status and position of women has been far from static in India. Throughout its history, it has ranged from women occupying considerable authority and freedom to periods in which they were subjugated and enslaved. It was the movement for national freedom in the early 19th century that urged social reform and promoted education programs for women. It was not until the 20th century that women participated directly in the freedom struggle and then against immense odds, especially if they came from traditional families. Earlier attempts by women to acquire higher education and professional courses did not receive much encouragement. It was the leadership of Gandhi which gave direction and strength and drew women in large numbers to the political struggle. The remarkable feature of his message was that literate and illiterate, rural and urban women, elite and peasants, all should join the mass movement for freedom.[9]

One of the most significant writing on the condition of women in India is found in a report called *Towards Equality*, published in 1974 by the Committee on the Status of Women in India for the celebration of the International Year of the Woman in 1975.[10] This landmark report had a dramatic effect on the Indian women's movement. After three decades of independence and planned development, Indian women scholars were startled by the fact that women were continually marginalised in economic policy decisions. Many chapters of this report dealing with religion and culture and women's political status have been subsequently superseded by new and innovative research by eminent feminist scholars in India. Another significant text on the self-employed women in the informal sector, based on extensive field surveys in different parts of the country was published in 1988 under the leadership of Ela Bhatt. It detailed women's vulnerable working conditions across different occupations and showed continual discriminatory practices against women at the work place.[11] Recent official reports published in 1994 and 1995 have pointed out the trends towards growing violence against women, particularly in the family. It seems that the home is more dangerous for women than the street. The falling sex ratio and the negative impact of structural adjustment has further exacerbated their conditions of life and work. There is a large number of women's

organizations at every political level in almost all the states and territories of India. Indian women have organized themselves in groups and associations on a wide scale to fight collectively against oppression. The Indian women's movement is considered to be one of the most articulate and forward-looking movements on the global feminist stage. Recently, their efforts have resulted in a new law which, when adopted, will give women 33 percent representation at the local and district levels of government.[12]

Today, both India and China have the most sophisticated and revolutionary legislation protecting women and promoting equality of rights. The Constitution of China, interestingly enough one of the shortest in the world, stipulates equality of rights between women and men. As suggested by a Chinese woman correspondent, "...the thoroughgoing liberation for women is not something ready-made...". On 3 April 1992, the 5th session of the 7th national people's congress promulgated the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*. The first article of this law guarantees equality and allows "full play to women's role in socialist modernization." The Constitution of India also ensures equal rights and equality of opportunity of treatment between women and men.[13] A special provision prohibits discrimination against women and guarantees special facilities such as reservation in education and employment. Despite the fact that one of the Constitutional articles has guaranteed free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 years, 80% of women in rural areas are illiterate and only 2% have gone beyond matriculation. In China, where the number of illiterate women is lower as a proportion of the population, parents are given the responsibility of ensuring that female school age children receive compulsory education.

DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT MODELS

The conceptual relationship between economic growth and gender equity can be tested in these two countries by taking a different set of development indicators which involves, in the first instance, changes in the structure of distribution of income and elimination of poverty, particularly affecting women.

India and China formulated their industrialization policies in the early 1950s and today have the largest number of women workers both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. In both countries, there has been a steady increase in the labour force participation rates of women from 1950 to 1990.[14] These two countries combined also have the largest number of women in the industrial sector of their economies; estimated to be over 100 million, approximately equal to the number of women industrial workers in OECD countries in 1990.

Within China in different provinces and within India in different states, the percentages of the rate of participation of women varies considerably as they enter different stages of industrialization. Both countries have, in principle, attached central importance to the advance of women in their development models, aiming to eliminate the gender gap.

Women in Development Planning

Both India and China belong to a minority of countries in the world which have introduced the gender dimension in the planning process. In India, welfare measures for women were provided in the very first five year Plan in 1951, but more significantly the second Plan (1956 - 1960) recognized women as workers, proposing maternity protection, child care and underlining the need to eliminate unsafe work. It was only in the third Plan (1961-66) that women's education was considered as a major step towards their advancement. By the time the fifth Plan was adopted, it was becoming clearer that the labour market was seriously discriminatory against women. It was then that the need for formal policy to expand women's education and training was recognized. During this period, the UN Decade For Women also heightened awareness on women's rights. In 1986, a National Plan of Action was drafted to coordinate programmes affecting women in various ministries and departments.[15]

The major shift from the welfare concept to the development approach occurred during the sixth Plan, when a separate chapter devoted to

Women and Development was incorporated in the Sixth Plan itself. Women's persistent poverty, especially in rural areas, gave rise to a special women's income generating programme in 1982. Income generation became a political slogan in the late 1980s. The seventh Plan recognized the complexity of the problem and underlined access of women to critical resources such as land, credit and training, better wages and improved access to social security. The eighth Plan (1990 to 1995) took a more comprehensive view of the contribution of women to the Development process as equal partners. In the 1990s, specific programmes for women are under way in various Ministries including Industries, Cooperatives, Education, Health, Labour, Urban Development and Social Welfare.

A fundamental change in China's economic policy in the 1990s was the rapid shift from the previous import-substitution industrialization to an exported oriented strategy described as "open door policy," when its trade figures jumped five fold between 1978 and 1990. China's dramatic entry into the world economy with its offer of the world's cheapest and disciplined labour had great impact on women in the labour market. In 1993, there were about 148 million urban workers in China, among whom 37% or 53 million were women. It is estimated that more than 50 million peasant women were working in Foreign Economic Zones (FEZs) and Township and Village enterprises (TVS) in 1995. The specific Economic Zones in the Coastal regions mainly employ young single women between the ages of 17 and 23. In these private enterprises women received lower wages than the national minimum stipulated by legislation. The 1992 law on protection of Women's Rights was promulgated, but a recent survey of enterprises in Guangdong and Shandong reveals that the conditions of work are poor and that more than half offer maternity leave that is shorter than the statutory ninety days.

As a consequence of the shift from the collective development strategy to socialist modernization in 1982, and now more recently in 1991 to the "socialist market economy," the number of women working in industry has also grown to 22 percent of the population. The "economically active" female population engaged in agricultural activities is higher than that of men. At present, the intra-provincial composition of labour force in China indicates that the largest number of women, approximately 15 million (as opposed to 17 million men), in the modern sector are working in Guandong province. Guandong is often cited as the fastest growing region in China, in Asia, and perhaps in the world. It covers an area of 180 thousand square kilometers and has a population of 63 million. From 1978 to 1991 the per capita income of this province jumped from Y313 to Y2134. It has been used as a laboratory for various "economic reforms" and it has consistently been more aggressive in opening up its economy than other provinces. Three of the original Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were established in Guandong in the mid-1980s. In 1991, Guandong received 68% of all investment in China by Hong Kong and Macao. Many domestic enterprises export products through cooperations in Hong Kong and it is estimated that over three million people in Guandong are now working directly and indirectly for Hong Kong businesses: the majority of whom are women.

China ranks ninth out of a total of 36 Asian countries in the new index on the advancement of women which I constructed for Asia and the Pacific.[16] In comparison, India's IWA rank is twenty-seventh, or significantly lower than that of China. Indeed, of all the seven indicators for which data have been shown, China leads India in all of them except for one - average female participation in national assemblies. Global data suggests that a much greater advance for women is possible even when a given country does not have a relatively high per capita output or income. For example, before 1980 in Sri Lanka and in 1990, two States in India (Kerala and Tamil Nadu), had higher education profiles for women, which had a direct impact on reducing fertility and increasing employment of women. The sum total of these changes enhanced their legal and economic status. Even with relatively low financial resources being devoted to the education and health sectors, it was possible to attain comparatively higher advancement for women and raise their economic and social status. In a certain sense, women's

advancement is a cost-effective method of policy concentration. This has called for policies of affirmative action in various economic sectors favouring women's equality.

The impact of economic reforms on women in India is just emerging as an issue of analysis. The two periods of pre-economic "reforms" for which data is available, that is 1972-1973 and 1987-1988, indicate that during the first period the participation rate of men in the labour force remained constant; while that of women marginally improved. In the second period the unemployment rate for women was higher than men's: that is 6.2% compared to 5.2%. From 1990, the situation of women in the labour market became slightly worse. Urban women had additional employment opportunities in the organized sector; while the majority of women workers were being absorbed in the informal manufacturing and service sectors. India has a large number of women who are self-employed and who work on casual wage and piece rates.[17] Since 1995 with high rates of inflation and increasing prices, women's income has declined in general.

The censuses in India in 1971 and 1981 have raised controversies about the definition of women as "workers," mainly due to the fact that a large part of their labour and work hours were excluded from official statistics. This exclusion applied to three main areas; namely, agriculture, household, and the informal sectors of the economy. In 1991, there was a weak attempt to redress the imbalance of the last two decades by introducing in the census questions relating to the multiple tasks of rural women as described above. The rationale being that the large part of unpaid work considered to be non-economic activity could be partly brought into the orbit of economic activity. The results still show a series of imbalances and distortions but the status of the women workers has been considerably enhanced by creating awareness at the policy level.

The 1991 data showed that women are crowded into agriculture and have lower percentages in industry trade, commerce and the services. The distribution of the male and female workforce over the nine categories in terms of employment is described in the census. The percentage of the female workforce is 80.19 as compared to only 67.46 percent in agriculture. Here again, whereas cultivators constitute the larger share (46.26%) of the male agricultural workforce and agricultural labourers constitute the smaller share (21.25%), the situation is the reverse with respect to women. The percentage of females working as agricultural labourers (50.4%) is much larger than the percentage of those who are cultivators (29.69%). Thus, not only is a larger portion of the female workforce crowded in agriculture, but most of it is working at a lower level.

Indian women are poorly represented in manufacturing (2.76%) as compared to men (6.61%). They are even more poorly represented in trade and commerce (females: 1.78% vs. males: 6.36%), and in transport, communication and other services (females: 2.25% vs. males 9.21%). Mining, quarrying, fishing, and forestry constitute the only occupational category in which the percentage representation of the female workforce (2.89%) is identical to that of the males (2.89%). And, household industry is the only category other than agriculture where their participation (4.5%) is larger than that of the males (3.37%).

In addition to the latest population census held in February 1991, an alternative source of data is the *National Sample Survey*. Based on these two sources, different profiles of women emerge in different states of India. At an all-India level, the percentage of women working in agriculture is over 80%, the largest numbers being found in Andha Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. The number of women working in the manufacturing sector has shown a steady decline since 1981. The latest statistics reveal that on an all-India basis, less than 10% of women work in industry. The occupational patterns also indicate that in urban areas the largest number of women are to be found in the occupation group entitled "production and related workers." There has also been a steady decrease in female-male wage ratios in textiles, clothing, metal, machinery, and transport industries. A study undertaken in 1994 showed that the female wage rates were around 70% of those paid to males. Generally, women workers are more likely to be employed in industrial occupations with a typical

female orientation. In the context of traditional societies, there is also a demand for women in low-skilled or unskilled operations using labour-intensive techniques. (*Sharamshakti* - "labour power")

RELEVANCE OF DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The survey of women's share in total employment in India and China shows that higher ratios of economic growth *per se* do not eliminate inherent discrimination against women in the labour market. It is also evident that occupational segregation and inequalities in income might have also increased, resulting in relative poverty of women compared to men. Recent international studies provide empirical evidence for the view that while the absolute conditions of women might have improved, their relative situation compared to men has not fundamentally changed in either of these countries.

Information collated for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) has further proved this general conclusion. During the last 30 years, economists have constructed several development models, raised a host of controversies on how to measure "poverty lines" within countries, and theorized on how to reduce the development gap between rich and poor countries. However, it needs to be emphasized that while the extent of poverty differs among regions, countries, and social groups, poverty is not only a problem of developing countries. During the 1980s, more and more enclaves of poverty have appeared in the rich industrialized countries and in India and China. Nowhere does a consistent rate of economic growth guarantee the satisfaction of minimum needs, which has become the main responsibility of women worldwide. Most importantly, more and more women are being classified as below the official "poverty line" of most countries. Poverty lines, profiles, and indicators are building-blocks for poverty analysis and policy design. Frequently, and as a rule of thumb, most of the current development models, conceptual frameworks, and development strategies do not properly take into account the gender dimension or even refer to the contribution of women in the economy.

The methodology of measurement of poverty is not new, having been on the economic scene for more that four decades.[18] On this point substantive research has been undertaken by various UN agencies, at the international level and in India and China. When in 1990 the UNDP constructed a Human Development Index (HDI) on the basis of three development indicators - life expectancy, adult literacy and purchasing power parity - it expanded the definitions of poverty and development to include human welfare. This index is of some interest in measuring the advancement of women among various regions or countries. UNDP defines "human development" as a process of "enlarging peoples choices" adding that "income is clearly only one option."[19] According to the report, in all types of deprivation, poor rural women, whose number is estimated to be between two hundred million to three hundred million in India and China, are considered to be the victims of the "greatest deprivation," lacking the basic necessities of decent life. Millions of these poor women continue to be illiterate; more in India and fewer in China. Their real incomes have not increased substantially and in some parts in India, they have even fallen. In both these countries births are still unattended by health personnel, and women continue to face a high risk of death during childbirth; again more in India, less in China. Many women and their children have almost no access to health care in India, although the situation in China is slightly better in some regions.

Even in countries with the highest levels of human development in the world, there are marked differences between levels of achievement between men and women. Refining further its gender sensitivity index in 1993, the UNDP Human Development Report concludes that Japan ranks first in the world according to its HDI index, but dropped to number seventeen when the index was adjusted for gender disparity. In 1992, according to the same index, Canada topped the list, but dropped to seventh place when the gender sensitivity analysis was applied. Some of the reasons for this drop in rank relate to education and employment in both Japan and Canada. In Japan, the post secondary enrolment ratio for females is only

two-thirds than that of males. Similarly, in employment in that country, women's average earnings are only 51% that of men's. Women in Japan are also generally excluded from decision-making positions, where they hold 2% of parliamentary seats, and only 7% of administrative and managerial posts. Unlike other countries in Asia, Japan does not have any women at the ministerial level.

I have made the points above to show the complexities of linking economic and social advance with gender inequalities. In this paper I have attempted to evolve an alternative methodology to compare countries on the basis of a combination of available development indicators. The development indicators selected were based on the data from 1980 to 1987 derived from the *World Development Report*, 1988 and the *Human Development Report*, 1990. The UN decade for Women generated a global data from 1976 to 1985 compiled from the three world conferences of the United Nations: Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). These international conferences created the basis for a systematic compilation and analysis of data supplied by governments and the research of individual experts. Despite these surveys and studies, the crucial question of measuring the gender distance or the gender gap among countries has not been addressed adequately.

Figures, numbers, data - are frozen in time and do not lend themselves to real, precise and "scientific" comparisons. As each development indicator is evaluated and given a different statistical weight culturally and ideologically, it emerges as a new indicator and pulls down a country in ranking, or places it higher on the top of the list. It is for this reason that a new Gender Development Index (GDI) was constructed, which uses the same variables as the Human Development Index (HDI).[20] The difference between the two is that the GDI adjusts average achievement of each country in life expectancy, educational achievement and income in accordance with the disparity in achievement between women and men. The indices are added together with equal weight to drive the final GDI value: the higher points show lower ranking. For example India ranks 103 out of 153 measured countries; while China is few points higher, ranking 79. In order to measure the relative empowerment of men and women in political and economic sphere of activity, another index called Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) has been constructed which takes into account the percentage share of men and women in administrative and managerial and technical jobs. But none of these indices or ranking provides a comprehensive picture of women's advancement on a comparative basis.

If the main objective is to compare the degree of women's advancement in different countries and thereby show which country is more advanced, it is not possible to rely exclusively on any available indices constructed at the international level. A new index will need to be constructed which is based on variables beyond real per capita income and life expectancy of women. A much more broad-based approach involving several indicators is necessary to reflect the level of women's advancement in different Asian countries. It must include all dimensions of women's lives: women as producers, women as reproducers, women as consumers, and women as citizens. For this study, seven indicators were: Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB), Post-Secondary Education (PSE), Labour Force Participation (LFP) and Participation in Parliamentary Assemblies (PPA).[21] These seven indicators are basically self-explanatory and correlated to the seven roles of women in the family, economy, and society. This does not mean that they are sufficient to portray the multi-faceted and multi-skilled images of women critical to determining which country is more advanced than another. Of the seven development indicators on women's advancement, only one, purchasing power parity (PPP), has not been disaggregated by sex. This indicator underscores all the others because women have less income and therefore less purchasing power than men. In fact, it is the single most important indicator which determines the status and empowerment of women. No money = no power, in modern life.

What emerges from the above discussion is that "gender equality" is a concept that goes well

beyond the political form of government. That a particular government is labelled a democracy or its functional style is considered dictatorial or that it follows a liberal economic model or has established a system of centralized planning and/or socialist economy may not be directly or indirectly related to the enhancement of the status of women and to the empowerment of women.

There is a subtle but significant distinction between equality and equity. It is often assumed that justice is the same as equality. Equality is mathematical and measurable in percentages: equity on the other hand, is giving women a "fair deal" to advocate social justice in their treatment. If "gender equality" is beyond political structure, economic systems and social order, what are its determinants? Two decades of surveys and studies from all regions and continents show that countries which adopted "affirmative action" as an instrument of policy or undertook legislative measures which positively discriminate in favour of women (standing structural and institutional practices on their head), have succeeded in advancing the cause of women's rights. Countries that did not take specific action or adopt special measures in political, economic or social policies have had serious difficulties in moving towards gender equality. The process of social transformation at the national level in India and China was achieved through policies of affirmative action, politically debated and accepted by consensus. Both countries adopted anti-discriminatory laws, legislated equality policies and attempted to treat women with equity in the face of century-old traditions. The results of these efforts are different due to institutional change - more radical in China: slow and ad hoc in India.

As generally understood, "affirmative action" involves treating a sub class or a group of people differently in order to improve their chances of obtaining a particular political goal. China and India both undertook these objectives through legislating equality, for example, in equal pay, maternity legislation, and equal rights in political participation. History has been perceived by some scholars as a continuous struggle to achieve greater social justice in the form of a higher degree of equality among groups and between individuals. Distributive measures in favour of the poor, the majority of whom are women, involving preferential treatment are now widely accepted as political legislatives, even by those who oppose affirmative action on other grounds. Preferential treatment, for example, when women need protective legislation such as maternity benefits or child care allowance may also be justified on social utility grounds when the service performed by those who benefit from the preference would not have been performed otherwise.

Two alternative policies have been used to achieve these objectives: either to expand employment opportunities for women to increase their numbers in the labour market or to apply a policy of preferential treatment in recruiting more women to top jobs. Both these types of policies were used by India and China during the last few decades: from constitutional provisions, anti-discrimination or equality laws to changing family codes, marriage laws and labour legislation. Similarly, public pronouncement of government authorities particularly in international conferences on women since 1975 have slowly moved towards accepting "gender equality" as a part of national development policy.

In the case of China, the 4th UN Conference on women in Beijing in September 1995 was a landmark in its political history when the entire government, its ministers and relevant departments focused on women's rights when women as world leaders were invited there. The attempts to address inequalities, particularly for women was a real policy tool which has been used by both countries in different forms although with very different results.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In several respects, the statistics show that women in China are more advanced than in India in important indicators such as literacy, education, maternal mortality, infant mortality and labour force participation. Fewer girl children die at birth, more girls and women are literate, fewer women die at child birth and a higher number are working outside the house. Their health standards are higher and they live longer. The numbers of poor women

in the population as a whole in China is lower. In India, on the other hand, higher numbers of women are illiterate, life expectancy is lower and the differentials in wage levels and income are much wider. Among the poor women, poverty is more uniformly spread in China, while among women who fall below the poverty line in India, the differentials are also wide.

There are several general surveys and scholarly work on the comparative rates of economic growth in India and China. These form part of the data base of the global trends in the world economy. The 1950s is considered to be a watershed decade in their histories. Both countries began their independent journey towards economic growth and social progress by choosing different development models. In 1949, China succeeded in consolidating its territory after a long and revolutionary struggle and was recognized as a full sovereign member in the international community of nations. It took more than two decades for it to be recognized as a member of the United Nations. India became a republic in 1951, emerging from a long period of colonialism as an independent nation, having waged its own political struggle against British imperialism. It continued to be a member of the community of nations and took its rightful place as one of the founding members of the UN family. Thus, both countries began their separate paths to development with divergent ideologies emerging from political and social upheavals/revolutions which threw out the old political structures and institutions. Their economies were labelled differently: a centrally planned economy in China, and a mixed economy in India.

Development indicators can only provide quantitative analysis; it is the qualitative research collated from various social science disciplines that would reflect the real condition of life of women in India and China. While it is quite evident that economic growth is a prerequisite for eliminating poverty and increasing incomes, it is also imperative that the pattern of development creates social structures which ensure equity among various groups on the basis of a social consensus. The non-discriminatory formal policy, equality legislation and affirmative action are important instruments to bring about changes in social perceptions about women. This means that the state itself plays a variety of roles in different phases of economic growth to determine that social inequalities do not become an organic part of society. There is no escape from the fact that economic growth and social equity must proceed on parallel lines to reduce gender inequalities.

ENDNOTES

1. For a more elaborate meaning of the term globalization, see Keith Griffin, UNRISD, Geneva, 1992. Also see UN, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and Pacific*, New York, 1997, pp. 5-7.

2. See in particular Table 33, World Bank, *World Development Report*, New York, 1988. For subsequent international efforts, see UNDP, Human Development Reports, 1993, 1995.

3. There are several methodologies in which women's work and performance in the economy and society have been quantified. For the latest results see UN, *World's Women: Trends and Statistics*, New York, 1995.

4. UNDP, *Guidelines and Checklists on Women in Development*, New York, 1985.

5. UNICEF, *The Progress Of Nations*, New York, 1996.

6. *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific*, ibid, p. 63.

7. All China Women's Federation, *Statistics on Chinese Women (1949-1995)*, Research Institute, Peking, 1995.

8. For percentage distribution of workers by industrial categories, see Table 8, "Distribution of economically active population by occupation" in UN ESCAP, *Achievements of the UN Decade for Women in Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok, 1987, p. 24

9. Madhu, Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay (Special Issue on Women's Studies), 1985.

10. Government of India, *Towards Equality, Committee on the Status of Women*, New Delhi, 1974.

11. Ela Bhatt, *Self Employed Women in India, Sharamshakti: National Commission on Self Employed Women*, New Delhi, 1988.

12. Pamphlet produced by Mahila Sangh, Ahmedabad, India, 1997 (Hindi).

13. Art. 43, *Constitution of India,* Government of India Publications, New Delhi, 1976.

14. Patel, S. J., "East Asia's Explosive Development: Its Relevance to Theories and Strategies" in *Unravelling the Asian Miracle: Explorations In Development Strategies.* Geopolitics and Regionalism (Ed. Jayant Lele and Kwasi Ofori-Yeboah), Queens University, Dartmouth, 1996, pp. 27-39.

15. Wu Qing, "The Impact of Economic Reforms on Women in China" in *Asia-Who Pays for Growth? Women, Environment and Popular Movements*, (ed. Jayant Lele and Wisdom Tettey), Queen's University, Dartmouth, 1996.

16. Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC), "The Effects of Growth and Planning", *Issues in Women in Development,* December, 1991.

17. For detailed analysis see Table 1 and Table 11. For an analysis of the criteria for the construction of the Index of Women's Advancement (IWA), see author's "Gender Inequalities among Nations", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 13 February, 1993 and *Quilting a New Canon, Stitching Women's Words* (ed. Uma Parameswaran), Sister Vision, Toronto, 1996.

18."Women in Human Development Reports", *INSTRAW News*, Special Issue 1996, No. 24/25.

19. World Bank, Poverty. "Comparisons: a Guide to Concepts and Measures," Working Paper, 1994, No. 88.

20. See "Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)", in UNDP, *Human Development Report,* New York, 1995.

21. For definitions of development indicators, see Annex I. UNDP, *Human Development Reports*, New York, 1991, 1993.

ANNEX 1

Definitions of Development Indicators

1. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP): adjusted estimates of GDP levels to exclude exchange rate and price distortions, reflecting thereby the real (as opposed to nominal) per capital income of the countries concerned.

2. Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR): refers to the number of female deaths that occur during childbirth per 100,000 live births, MMR figures are relevant because they reflect the ability of a country to care for the special health needs of women during pregnancy and childbirth.

3. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR): is the number of infants who dies before reaching one year of age per 1,000 live births. IMR reflects the quality of nutrition and care of infants and pregnant women, as well as achievements in female literacy and education.

4. Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB): Figures on women indicate the number of years a new-born female infant would live if the patterns of mortality at the time of birth remain the same throughout its life. The LEB reflects the quality of health care delivery, and nutrition levels available to women, as well as possibly the biological resiliency of women to live longer, as is the general case, than men.

5. Post-secondary Education (PSE): Figures show the extent to which girls advance in education beyond the secondary level, compared with boys. This indicator portrays the extent to which women are given equal opportunities to acquire formal education.

6. Labour Force Participation (LFP): comprises the percentage of "economically active" women aged ten years and over, including so-called "economically inactive" groups. The concept of economically active is restrictive and does not, for example, include activities of home-makers or care-givers who are mainly women. Labour force figures in developing countries, therefore, significantly underestimate female participation rates.

7. Participation in Parliamentary Assemblies (PPA): is the percentage distribution of seats between men and women in national parliaments. This figure is taken as a proxy indicator of the extent by which women participate directly in the political life, and thereby exercise a certain degree of decision-making and bargaining power for determining the direction of state policies.