

Twenty Years of Women in Development in Nepal : An Overview

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INTRODUCTION

The approach in Women and Development programme in Nepal during seventies and throughout the eighties has been to emphasize the efficiency aspects. It was argued that women by virtue of their pervasive participation in the rural economy, constitute a large resource which should be harnessed for accelerating the process of development. Therefore, programmes and policies which ignored women were inefficient, equity aspects were emphasized but as a secondary goal. Since equity was viewed as a welfare proposition, it was necessary to redefine the objectives of women's movement in efficiency terms. Today we are emphasizing efficiency as well as equity, and a precondition for an optimum use of human resources is equitable access to resources and opportunities for self-development both for women and men, but where women's development is limited by social structures with ingrained gender inequities - optimality of resource use can hardly be achieved. One of the major foundations of the East and South-East Asian miracle is involvement of female labour in export promotion. This probably would not have happened if women did not have relatively equal access to education and freedom of movement. No doubt, such involvement has had both positive and negative effects on women's status, but does present a visible example of what can be achieved by promoting women's participation in the economy. Experience has also taught us that participation is necessary but not a sufficient condition for improving women's status (Sen and Grown 1987 and Moser 1993). Today, for women activists the budge word is empowerment. What do we mean by empowerment? How do we evaluate women in development programmes (WID) in Nepal in terms of empowerment? Women's movement in Nepal is struggling with these issues and current paper is an attempt to evaluate WID programmes in terms of women's empowerment, and is heavily based on Population Census 1991 and Study Report by Stri Sakti on *Women, Development and Democracy* 1993.

Empowerment is an all comprehensive process and difficult to define in concrete terms. One way to define empowerment is as the process of gaining control over the self, the ideology and the resources which determine power (Battliwala 1993). It is all embracing, because it

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must address all structures of power. It is a process which enables women to meet both their practical and strategic needs. Practical needs relate to immediate problems such as poverty, water, health, etc. These needs may be met to certain extent within the existing social structures without challenging the ingrained power relationships, while meeting strategic needs, e.g. access to property and wealth, changing division of labour and the system of unequal wages, gaining control over their own bodies, etc., is challenging to the existing structures of oppression. As strategy, however, the process of empowerment may start with any of the multiple approaches such as income generation, awareness raising, adult education, family planning, health clinics, etc. provided the ultimate goal of freedom from all kinds of oppression is clear and a path to reach this goal chartered out. The end product of empowerment is development of a personality, which is self-confident understands the processes of social interaction and economic resource allocation and has power to decide enough options for choosing the way to work and to live. Thus the process of empowerment may be viewed in the following dimensions:

- Increasing women's access to economic opportunities and resources—such as employment and wealth and non-economic resources—such as education, knowledge, technology and health.
- Increasing women's political power—through women's organizations, solidarity, and collective action. Both qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to evaluate this process. Political ability to bring about changes in women's legal status, to direct resources to women, and to get access to positions of power, are of crucial importance.
- Raising women's consciousness about the symptoms and causes of the oppressive religious, economic, cultural, familial and legal practices.
- Strengthening women's self-confidence, an indicator of which is women's self-esteem about themselves and their capacity to interact with outside world beyond the domestic life.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

It has been established by various surveys and studies that women make substantial contributions to Nepal's economy, particularly in rural areas. *The Status of Women Study* completed in early 1980s established that women and girls together contribute more than 53 percent of the household income in rural households of Nepal. Several studies (Stri Shakti 1995, MOA 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d, 1994) have reconfirmed that women's labour contribution to Nepalese agriculture is substantial and tends at least to be equal to that of men. Nepal has two distinct

ecological belts- hill and terai, and corresponding farming systems. The hill agriculture is dominated by terrace farming and multitude of crops depending on the altitude and rainfall in the area concerned. Hill and terai areas also differ in terms of the ethnicity of the population inhabiting the area. These ethnic groups differ significantly in terms of how they relate to their women. This difference has been analyzed in detail by Acharya and Bennett (1981). In spite of the ethnic variations in social status of women, overall the hill agriculture seems to depend on women both in terms of labour input and farm management decisions (Acharya 1991, MOA 1993a 1993b and 1994). In the terai areas women's work patterns manifest class characteristics more distinctly. The upper class women confine themselves to those activities which can be performed within the household compound, e.g. cleaning and storage of grains, large scale food processing for the household. But the lower class women participate extensively in the field work-both as family and wage labour and also contribute substantially to the farm management decisions. The work burden among the women of various economic strata seems to be equal however, the women in the middle income strata have longer working hours. The poor women lack opportunities for employment due to limited size of the family farm and seasonal character of the demand for agriculture labour. Women in the higher economic strata may hire outside labour for more strenuous food processing chores. Women in the middle economic strata, often have longest working hours because they have to work in their own field, take care of family animals as well as the food processing for the household. In general women contribute over 58 percent of the labour input in agriculture.

Acharya and Bennett (1981) concluded that females contribute 51.6 percent of the labour required to run farms. Farming activities in these calculations include crop farming, kitchen gardening, livestock and forestry. Yet only 48.1 percent of rural women are reported economically active in 1991 census. This indicates that a large proportion of women's labour devoted to seeking out a living for their families still goes unreported. What is more disturbing is the increasing work load of rural women and decreasing female economic activity rates in urban areas (Table 1). While literacy and education is considered an avenue to well paid employment, urbanization is causing women to withdraw from labour force. This may be indicative of a reverse relationship between education and employment at certain intervals of development scale, the relationship looking like inverted U-curve. This needs to be investigated in greater detail.

Further, in rural areas, women's activity pattern is changing in favour of the group activities which has been defined as conventional economic activities in 1981 census and included agriculture, livestock raising, manufacturing at home and all wage/salary works. A second

group of activities which included hunting and gathering, fuel collection, water collection, house construction for self-use activities and food processing, was defined as expanded economic activities (subsistence economic activities in a later version by Acharya 1981). Findings of *Stri SAKTI* (1994) reveal that women are devoting more time to conventional economic activities in 1993 than in 1978 (Table 2).

Table 1
Selected Economic Indicators on Women's Participation Rates

SN	Indicators	Units	Urban		Rural		Overall	
			1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
1.	Economic Activity	Percent	31.5	20.3	47.2	48.1	46.2	45.5
2.	Women in the Total labour Force	percent	26.4	23.8	35.1	41.6	34.6	40.4
3.	Women in Agriculture	Percent	34.4	37.8	36.4	45.2	36.4	45.0
4.	Women in Non-Agricultural Sector	Percent	12.2	19.5	17.9	20.7	16.6	20.2
5.	Women in Manufacturing	Percent	12.5	27.3	16.5	20.9	14.9	22.9
6.	Female share in Agricultural Wage	Percent	66.6	75.0	88.6	86.8	—	—

Source : *Population Census of Nepal 1981 and 1991*, Various Tables 1, Acharya 1994.

Table 2
Activity Pattern of Adult (15 years+) Rural Women 1978 and 1992¹
(Time in Hours)

	Conventional Economic Activities		Subsistence Economic Activities		Domestic Activities		Total	
	1978	1992	1978	1992	1978	1992	1978	1992
Hills								
Bakundal	5.51	4.93	1.17	1.28	5.28	5.16	12.15	11.37
Pangma	4.99	5.62	3.20	1.99	4.19	3.23	8.37	8.90
Bulu	2.42	4.46	2.50	1.12	4.41	3.46	9.33	9.04
Mustang B.	3.64	3.79	1.38	2.01	3.78	3.92	8.80	9.72
Katarche	5.80	6.23	1.17	2.21	1.49	2.81	8.46	11.25
Thabang	4.93	5.10	1.70	0.95	2.37	6.01	9.03	12.48
Terai; Sirisia	2.36	3.01	2.02	0.88	5.60	4.66	9.98	8.55
Sukrawar	3.39	4.00	2.51	2.44	4.71	4.51	10.61	10.95

¹ Indicate survey years, publication dates are 1981 and 1995.

Source : *Stri Sakti, Women, Development and Democracy, Draft Report*, 1995, pp. 190-120.

Table 3
Female Migration for Employment from Rural Areas
(In Percent to Total Migrants)

	1978	1991
Hills		
Bakundal	31.0	48.5
Pangma	42.2	34.6
Bulu	36.6	42.2
Mustang B.	33.3	33.3
Katarche	46.1	20.8
Thabang	35.3	34.8
Terai	35.1	28.4
Sirisia		
Sukrawar	18.6	26.8

Source : As of the Table 2.

Table 4
Daily Hours Devoted to Domestic and All Work by Rural Men
(In Percent to Total work)

	Domestic		All Work	
	1978	1991	1978	1992
Hills				
Bakundal	0.94	1.38	8.16	8.93
Pangma	0.86	0.90	8.37	8.90
Bulu	0.94	1.12	6.21	6.84
Mustang B.	0.75	1.40	6.80	5.67
Katarche	0.52	1.20	7.65	7.91
Thabang	0.73	1.74	6.48	9.49
Terai				
Sirisia	0.52	0.97	6.95	6.15
Sukrawar	0.46	0.71	10.05	8.86

Source : As of the Table 2.

Generally, women are devoting less time to both subsistence economic and domestic activities. In this classification, domestic activity group includes cooking/serving, washing dishes, clearing house, laundry, shopping, child care and other domestic not included elsewhere. Increased participation of women in the manufacturing and service sectors have caused migration for employment (Table 3). The proportion of female workers in the non-agricultural sector has increased to 20.2 percent in 1991 compared to 16.6 in 1981. Women's employment in the manufacturing sector has increased by more than six fold during the decade and women now constitute almost 23 percent of the manufacturing labour force. Carpet and textile, the major exports of

Nepal, absorb most of the female labour which have provided new avenues of employment to the young women and exposed them to the world beyond the domestic horizon. No particular trend is visible in rural men's work pattern as far as distribution of time between conventional economic and subsistence economic are concerned. But rural men are devoting more time to domestic work as compared to 1979 (Table 4). The increase ranges from 11 minutes (Bulu) to as much as one hour (Thabang) daily per person. Thus, women participate extensively in Nepal's economy and there has been a shift towards market work in the last decade.

Government has initiated credit programmes such as production credit for Rural Women and Small Farmer's Development for women since early eighties. Two regional banks have been started in early 1990s which are emulating the Grameen Bank (Bangladesh) model for catering to credit needs of the rural households. A total of Rs. 411 million credit has been directed to women since early eighties under these programmes. Almost one million women have participated in various training programmes conducted under these programmes (Sharma and Acharya 1995). According to several case studies individual women participating in these programmes have gained self confidence and improved their family income sources. The SFDP's women development programme and PCRW programmes have successfully created social and community action groups who can articulate their needs and improve access to required facilities and opportunities (CWD 1989, IDS 1989). The question is, has increasing economic participation in the market increased women's access to and command over economic resources? Is this process widening economic options for women? Available informations are not adequate to answer these questions. Judging by responses to questions such as who keeps the household money and who goes to bazaar, women's role in the management of household resources is declining (Table 5). For example, the percentage of women who kept the household money has declined from 60.8 percent in 1978 to 48.6 percent in 1992.

Table 5
Selected Indicators of Command Over and Access to Household Resources in Rural Areas

Particulars	(In percent of Total)	
	1978	1992
I. Management of Money		
Women who keeps money	60.8	48.6
Women who goes to <i>Bazaar</i>	53.5	43.7
II. Role in Household Decision¹		
In Farm Management		
In domestic Expenditure ²	48.0	32.7
In Education of Children	53.4	39.0
In Gifts, Religious/Social and Travel Works	33.7	28.6
In Disposal of Household Products and Capital Transactions	59.8	37.7
	53.6	23.1

Note : 1 Includes decisions either made solely by women or jointly by both men and women in participation.

2 Includes small food items, clothing and durable.

Source : As of Table 2.

Decisions made within the rural households are divided into five categories, farm management, domestic expenditure, education, gifts, religious and social travel and disposal of household products and capital transactions. In all of these, women's contribution to rural household's decision making process seems to have declined. Why this is happening is not explained by the Stri Shakti study. One cause may be of increasing commercialization of agriculture which is changing the pattern of household expenditure and investment. Women know less about new technology and commercial agriculture than men do and therefore, are getting marginalized from the farm management. Changing pattern of household expenditure in favour of market goods and investment beyond small household industries have also tend to reduce women's input in the decision making process. But all these are only conjectures and may be explained only by in-depth research of these processes.

Credit programmes also have reached to only a small proportion of rural women. The agricultural credit survey (1991/92) indicates that among women who reported borrowing, only 15.4 percent did so from institutional sources, i.e., from agricultural or commercial banks or other institutions. Among borrowing men, slightly more than 30 percent had access to institutional credit. Among non-institutional borrowers, moneylenders and friends and relatives dominated lending to both men and women. (Sharma and Acharya 1995).

Legally women's access to property has changed little since 1975. Daughters in Nepal has only limited right to inheritance in their paternal property. They will inherit equal share with their brothers only if they remain unmarried until the age of 35. Women's right to property is ensured in her husband's household and is conditional on her life long sexual loyalty to her husband, surviving or dead. Further, to inherit in her husband's household property she must have been living married life at least for 15 years and reached 35 years of age. Even when she inherits she may not dispose of all her share, as her husband has sole authority over undivided family property, and may dispose it without her consent, and to deprive her from property brothers may divide the property among themselves before a sister reaches 35 years of age. In this case, they will only have to keep aside her marriage expenses. Thus, women's access to wealth is severely limited under the Nepalese legal system and it has changed little during the last twenty years. Moreover, overwhelming majority of women do not know about their legal rights over property and do not want to or can not use them because of social codes, though they are conscious about it.

Well paid employment is another channel by which women may get access to economic resources. But her access to such employment is constrained by lack of education, restricted mobility and family responsibilities imposed by the culture. Although a substantial proportion of Nepalese women, 45.5 percent, are reported economically active, an overwhelming majority of them, 90.5 percent, are concentrated in low yield subsistence agriculture. Nepal's agriculture is dominated by subsistence farming, and households derive 69 percent of their income from family farms and women contribute more than 54 percent of the household production. But, they have little control over the product of their own labour, as they labour mostly in the family land.

Women's limited access to major avenues of wealth accumulation, inheritance and employment has created difficulties in the implementation of credit programmes also. Although both SFDP and PCRW are supposed to be project oriented (Acharya 1989) and lending decisions under them to be based on project viability rather than collateral, this is applicable only to small loans. Women have difficulty in getting larger loans which is collateral based even under these programmes. Banks also usually demand parental guarantee of repayment if their clients are unmarried women, because if the girls get married they leave the natal household, making it difficult to keep track of them. Even NGO organized groups tend to exclude unmarried girls (Sharma and Acharya 1995). These are vivid examples of how ingrained property rights and cultural practices put limit to women's advancement.

SOCIAL OPTIONS

Women have few social options for survival other than marriage. More than 86 percent of women are married by the time they reach the age of 25. In the Indo-Aryan communities, overwhelming cases in marriage is arranged by the parents for both boys and girls. The marriage partners, specially girls have little say in this arrangement. Once the girls are married, they are committed for life, they have little say in the management of their time or how they want to live their lives. Therefore, mean age of marriage is an important social indicator of women's status. If girls are married early, they are tied for life without even knowing it. Women who are married after puberty will have better say in the choice of their life partners. Besides, early marriage leads to early pregnancies and related health hazards. Therefore, whether women have knowledge, options and resources or not for regulating their own fertility, determine social status of women.

On both these counts, women's status has somewhat improved in the last two decades. The mean age of marriage for women has increased by one year in the 1980s. The urban/rural difference in the mean age of marriage, however, has also increased during the last decade (Table 6). Still 7.8 percent of women are married before they reach 15 years of age.

Women's awareness about the access to family planning services is increasing slowly. Nepal Fertility and Health Survey (NFHS 1991, Tables 9.2 and 9.9) reported that almost 92.7 percent women knew about at least one method of family planning and 24.1 percent practiced it. Only 7.6 percent women practiced family planning in 1981. Infant and child survival rates are improving and maternal mortality is estimated to be declining also (Table 7). Total fertility rate is declining albeit slowly (Table 6). Women now may expect to live longer as life expectancy at birth is increasing. Male/female sex ratio is improving to approach the universal proportions between the sexes.

However, with opening up of new areas by transportation the spread of venereal diseases is increasing (Dixit 1992). More and more women are becoming victims of family planning methods failure (Tamang et al. 1994). With increasing resource constraints on the household, violence against women is increasing. Girl trafficking and prostitution are on the increase (Sadhana 1992). Although no authentic data are available on dowry demands, it is felt to be increasing, specially among the middle class. Dowry is becoming one of the methods of capital accumulation as in India, and with emphasis on population control women may also be losing command over old age insurance in the form of their children.

Education is another indicator of women's social status. Education provides access to knowledge, increased possibilities of contact with world outside the domestic/local and increased opportunities for better

paid employment. Thus proper education by itself is empowerment. Besides, it is a channel to empowerment in other directions.

Table 6
Selected Social Indicators

SN	Indicators	Units	Urban		Rural		Overall	
			1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
1	Sex Ratio	Men per 100 women	115.2	108.4	104.3	98.5	105.0	99.5
2	Mean Age of marriage for Women	Years	18.5	19.6	17.1	17.9	17.2	18.1
3	Total Fertility (Ages 15-49)	Number per 100 births	5.8	3.5	6.4	5.8	6.3	5.6
4	Literacy Rate (6 years+) Male Female	percent	50.5	66.9	21.4	36.8	23.3	39.6
		percent	61.1	78.0	32.0	51.9	34.0	54.5
		percent	38.2	54.8	10.3	22.0	12.0	25.0
5	Graduates Among 20-24 age group Male Female	percent	5.26	4.26	0.37	0.38	0.73	0.83
		percent	6.64	5.29	0.68	0.70	1.16	1.29
		percent	3.76	3.19	0.09	0.11	0.34	0.44
6	Female Among School completers	percent	31.6	36.7	11.9	17.1	20.3	23.8
7	Female Among Graduates and above	percent	21.7	23.9	8.4	8.8	15.6	18.3
8	Literacy Among (10-14 Ages) Male Female	percent	67.6	83.4	36.8	61.2	38.8	63.2
		percent	73.9	88.0	49.2	74.8	50.8	76.0
		percent	60.1	78.2	22.3	46.6	21.2	49.3

Sources : CBS, *Population Monograph of Nepal 1995*, pp 51, 86, 74, 106, 111, 113, 448, 378-381.

Table 7
Life Expectancy and Mortality Estimates¹

Details	Unit	1974/75	1991
1. Life Expectancy	Year		
Female	Year	42.5	43.5
Male	Year	46.0	55.0
2. Maternal Mortality	Number per 100,000 births	515	NA
3. Infant Mortality	Number per 1000 live births		
Male		141.2	94
Female		123.0	101
4. Child Mortality	Number per 1000 children between 1 and 5 years		
Male		125	36
Female		139	50
5. Death Rate	Number per 1000 population		
Male		18.6	12.9
Female		20.4	13.6

¹ Urban/Rural breakdowns not available for male and female separately.

Source : C.B.S. Population *Monograph of Nepal* 1995, Tables 9, 10, 18 and p 110 for MMR.

Nepal's educational facilities have improved significantly in last twenty years. Female literacy rate has almost doubled since 1971 to 25 percent in 1991. Proportion of educated women is increasing; urban/rural/difference in female literacy rate is also declining. Nevertheless, female literacy rate is still half than that for men and proportion of women with higher education is minimal (Table 6) specially in rural areas. Proportion of female among the rural population with completed school education was only 17 percent even in 1991. Proportion of total male and female graduates among 20-24 age group of urban population has actually declined in 1991 as compared to 1981. The growth in rural areas is very slow. Moreover, the education system is still reproducing the old stereotypes— women in the private domain and men in the public domain. There is very little gender awareness even among the educated young. Media, a major channel influencing elite behaviour, is fastly commodityfying the female body (IIDS 1995, Asmita 1995).

In spite of their heavy involvement in agriculture, women have had very little opportunities for agricultural training so far. A Ministry of Agriculture publication (1993c) notes that of the 1600 Junior Technicians only 17 were women and of the 3000 agricultural assistants only 12 were women. There were a total of 35 women working with agricultural

research farms and stations but only two of them were working outside Kathmandu. Few women extension workers in the field such as Small Farmer Development and PCRW were trained in agriculture. Thus women are still outside the main stream of technical training.

At the grass root level agricultural training, women's participation is increasing. But the MOA study (1993c), after a review of three year training programmes of central Agricultural and Regional Training Centers and a few District Agricultural Development Offices, noted that women's participation in the farmer level training varied from a minimum of 2.14 percent in 1992/93 to a maximum of 27 percent in 1990/91. The report offers explanation of this decline in terms of inappropriate timing, busy season, of the training in 1990/91. This only proves the fact that the training centers pay little attention to women's needs in planning their programmes.

INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION AND WOMEN

Home based industries are progressively dying out due to competition from imported products or being replaced by organized formal units. The displacement of traditional crafts by light industries is causing the replacement of female workers by male labourers (Rana and Shah 1989). Women have been functioning as managers, supervisors, entrepreneurs and even skilled workers in home based crafts enterprise. As industrial activities become increasingly externalized, both male female workers lose control over the production process and become transformed into wage labour. In this process, women are affected more since newly emerging organized industries need not only more capital but also lay stress on more educated and mobile labourers. The managerial class in these industries, which is dominated by the Indo-Aryan and westernized conceptions of gender specialization, reinforce their own biases in hiring and firing and it may be recalled that both in education and capital, women are in a disadvantage position vis-a-vis their male counterparts.

A progressive concentration of women in the textile, carpet and garment industries has been observed to such biases. The work force in the carpet and cotton textile weaving industries have become overwhelmingly women and children dominated. According to a survey (Thacker 1992) the carpet industry in the Kathmandu valley had 66 percent women workers but nearly 97 percent of these women were below 22 years of age, illiterate and worked for reasons of poverty. Cheating by the employers on payments of salary and wages was rampant. Women benefited little from mechanization, as men progressively took the mechanized jobs.

Another survey, (Basnet 1992), indicated that almost 71 percent of these women employees in textile industries worked because of poverty. Almost 29 percent had no other bread winners in their household. About

52 percent of the women engaged in such industries was illiterate, about 15 percent had completed school and about 11 percent had college education. More than 60 percent was between 20 and 34 years of age. About 12 percent were child labour. Women working in such industries were not only married but often go to the work with their younger children in tow. Such children either work with their mother or play around the loom. The environmental conditions in such units are very unwholesome and ventilation in the work place is poor, hence harmful. Wool spinning is performed at home in such conditions that are not safe from a health point of view, harming both the mother and her children. Now with problems in carpet exports, a substantial proportion of women have lost jobs and gone back to their own villages. Thus an increasing number of women are entering the work force in the formal manufacturing sector because of economic need. However, they are mainly concentrated in low skill, menial and repetitive jobs and in the lower echelons of the industrial hierarchy which is virtually an extension of their household activities. Even in the carpet industry, where it is a highly skilled job, women are still treated as unskilled and intensely exploited by the factory owners. Additionally, as international competition in such industries is very keen, wages are kept down and gender desegregated wage data are not available for the industrial sector. Reported data tend to follow government fixed minimum rates which are defined according to the job and equal for men and women working on the similar job. Where discrimination exists in the industrial sector, it is in the nature of employment. While most men are employed as permanent workers and as skilled labourers, most women are employed at piece rates and thus debarred from regular salary and other benefits (Acharya 1994a)

The agricultural and construction wage labour market does show a clear gender discrimination. For example, in spite of the increasing work opportunities in carpets and garments for women in Kathmandu valley, the male/female wage differentials have increased in the agricultural and construction sectors except in 1987/88-1989/90 period, when there was a rapid rise in wages in general. Biratnagar in the east and Nepalgunj in the western terai also show similar trends. It seems that in general male/female wage differentials increase when generally wage rates fall, signifying a fall in the demand for labour. Acharya (1994) notes that:

"Female real agricultural wage have fallen by 35 percent between 1989/90-1992/93 in the Kathmandu valley. Reasons for this fall are not clear. One factor may be the fall in the demand in agricultural labour in general in the valley due to the shortage of agricultural land. Inflow of male labour from the neighbouring areas and foreign labour may also have depressed the female wage rates. Employment of girls at lower wages, as adult women move to industrial employment, may be a third cause of this labour market depression. All of the above, however, are

possibilities which could be rejected or accepted only after a field study."

"The patriarchal value and patrilineal inheritance systems pervade the psychology of policy makers - the majority of both men and women, either at the work place or at home (CERID 1986 a and b.). Physical work outside the household is viewed as degrading to the family status. In South Asia, women who work outside the home are looked down (Kemp 1986). In effect that extends their inferior status from the household to the work place. In other words, working women have to bear with inferior status in the factory, as well as with the double work-burden at home. Consequently, women generally opt for non-working status unless there is an urgent need for an additional bread earner for the family or if there is no alternatives source of household income. The economic activity rate for urban women is much lower than for rural women. On the other hand working outside their households enables women to have not only some control over the fruits of her own labour but also to create social space for herself. The net outcome for individual women's status, as a consequence of her increased power within the household on the one hand, and the decreased public status of the household on other, in such a shift from home based to market based work, is not clear. Discussion in other countries have tended to produce sound arguments both on the positive (Lim 1993) and on negative side (Benerjee 1991 Salaff 1981 Siegel 1983). In Nepal not much information is available on how these working women perceive their own status vis-a-vis non-working women, and how the community views such working women"

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND GENDER AWARENESS

Organization is vital to any political action. In Nepal between 1960-1990, no organization could take place without explicit government permission. Political parties were banned altogether. The new constitution, which came into effect in 1990 guarantees fundamental rights including the right go organize and form association. A multi party system with a constitutional monarch has been restored. Women working with underground parties played crucial role in bringing about this change (Acharya 1994). Available figures indicate that women are voting in large numbers (Table 8). All political parties have formed women's organizations aligned to themselves. But these organizations have only limited role in the political decision making process within the parent parties. In spite of their rhetoric no woman's organization has been able to put gender issue in the political agenda. It is very telling that inheritance rights to daughters figured prominently in the election manifesto of United Marxist-Leninist (UML) in 1991 election. In 1994 when it had a winning chance it was taken out of their manifesto. The

court, moved by a few women lawyers, has issued a directive to the government to eliminate all gender discrimination in laws and regulations in accordance with the Constitution within a year however, women candidates put up by various political parties have chosen to mute gender issues in their election campaigns by themselves. Raising gender issues in the political campaign is considered counterproductive. Attempts to form a multiparty forum for advancing women's cause such as women's pressure group has floundered in the quagmire of party politics. Professional organizations and various study groups have tried to come together on platforms such as *gender watch association of women's studies*, *180 days 180 ways group* etc.- but have little political clout

A third group of activist is constituted by non-government organizations established with the objectives of conducting WID related activities in various fields. One study (Didi Bahini 1994) lists 71 such women's organization in Kathmandu valley alone. There are many district based women's organizations on with no complete information is available. Besides, many mother's clubs and youth groups are also functioning at various levels. Many of these NGO's have organized women's group at the grass root level and these grass root level organizations are formal and mostly function as user groups. User groups are organized for various purpose such as community forestry, saving credit and income generation, health services, drinking water facilities. etc. These groups start as receiving mechanisms

Nevertheless, with concerted efforts by sponsoring NGOs to raise their gender conscious about the local problems, adult literacy classes, and access to some channels of generating private income, such groups at various places have shown willingness and solidarity to fight with their immediate problems such as alcohol drinking and gambling, wife beating etc.(Sharma and Acharya 1995). Yet, such events are still scattered and sporadic. WID NGOs have initiated activities mostly on donor funding and no evaluation of such activities has been conducted so far. Although in specific localities, the influence of NGO activities might be important, at the national level their influence is unknown as yet.

Women's alternative media has been able to play limited role in the process of awareness generation - both because of the low level of female literacy as also immaturity of women focused publication. Excepting *Asmita* most women's magazine are consumer oriented and lack clear vision of women's issues. Total effect of all these channels of information generation and awareness raising have been limited. Mainstream media pays little attention to gender issues. Even when issues are covered the writings lack a clear vision. Moreover main stream media tends to be dominated by negative pictures of women, commercializing her today.

Table 8 features a few indicators of gender awareness. The proportion of rural women who know about women's organizations has

more than trebled between 1978 and 1992 but still only 14.0 percent of rural women know about women's organizations and less than one percent participate in them. Slightly more than 20 percent know about the new constitution, but only 6.2 percent are aware of its discriminatory features. Slightly more women are willing to participate in local government bodies in 1992 compared to 1978.

Table 8
Selected Indicators of Gender Awareness
(In Percent)

SN	Indicators	Rural/ Urban	Rural	Urban
		1978	1992	1992
1	Women who know a Women's Organization	4.7	14.9	32.4
2	Women who participate in a women's Organization	—	0.7	6.8
3	Women who are aware about the New Constitution	—	20.4	41.2
4	Women who are aware of constitutional discrimination against women	—	6.2	13.2
5	Women who are aware of divorce rights ¹	—	58.6	68.0
6	Women who are aware of fundamental rights	—	8.9	23.2
7	Women willing to participate as local representative	15.0	17.6	29.2
8	Women who know boys should go to school	96.4	100.0	99.2
9	Women who know girls should go to school	29.3	93.4	98.2
10	Women willing to give education to daughter as much as she desires	16.5	23.7	44.9
11	Women willing to give education to boy as much as he desires	—	24.5	53.5
12	Women who give reasons for less education to girls than boys/ ²	12.2	—	—
	- Farm work		6.5	50.0 ³
	- Marriage related reasons	21.4	71.0	

1. Knows at least one cause for which she can have divorce.
2. Include two reasons (a) they get married off and (b) difficult to find husband for educated girls.
3. Sample, however, consists of only 6 people.

Source : As of Table 2

Awareness in urban areas is much higher but unfortunately no comparative figures are available for urban areas to discuss progress through time. About 41.2 percent of urban women interviewed knew

about the new constitution, 13 percent knew about its discriminatory features regarding gender and 23.2 percent knew about the fundamental rights. More than 32 percent women knew about woman's organizations, but only 6.8 percent participated in their work. slightly more than 29 percent women were willing to participate in local politics.

On the probability of educating girls, a qualitative change has occurred as 93 percent rural parents think that their daughters should also go to school, while in 1978 less than 1/3 respondents were willing to send their daughters to school. However, still only 23.7 percent of parents are ready to allow girls to have as much education as she would want. This low percent is explained primarily in terms of two causes : (a) girls will get married and go to their husband's house; and (b) it is preconceived that it will be difficult to find suitable husband for girls with higher education. Difficulty of marrying off educated girls seems to have increased substantially, probably due to higher dowry demanded by higher educated bridegrooms. Surprisingly, it is seen that rural parents discriminate less between the boys and girls, regarding level of education than urban. This may be a statistical fluke or more conservative attitudes of the middle class urban elite.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is an issue of sharing power. There has been little improvement in women's access to positions of power during the eighties. A few indicators of power sharing within the household were discussed in economic participation to economic empowerment section. Some indicators of power sharing in the public spheres are given in Table 9. In the public sphere, proportion of women in the elected local government institutions has declined to 0.54 percent in 1992 from 0.58 percent 1987. On the other hand an overwhelming majority of women are exercising their voting rights. At the national level, proportion of women in the parliament (Lower and Upper House combined) has declined as compared to mid-eighties. It has been difficult for women to penetrate the political power groups. For example total number of executive members in the five nationally recognized political parties (Nepali Congress, United Marxist- Leninist, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Sadbhabhana and Samyukta Jana Morcha), number 154 in July 1995. Of these only 12 (7.8 percent) are women.

Table 9
Women's Political Participation and Access to Positions of Power

Particulars	(In Percent)	
	1986/87	1991/92
1. Women in Parliament	5.70	3.80
2. Women in High Government Position - First Class ¹	1.10	2.46
3. Women Voting :		
Regularly	21.5	84.6
Once or Twice	52.9	0.90
4. Women in Executive committees of the Political Parties ²	-	7.8
5. Women in Local Government. Bodies	0.58	0.54

1/Figures relate to 1978 and 1993. There are no women at highest level which is categorized as special class.

2/ Five nationally recognized parties, NC., UML., RPP., S., and SJM.

Source : Acharya 1994 ,p. 110.

The picture has slightly improved as far a bureaucracy is concerned. Compared to 1987, the proportion of women at second highest government positions has more than doubled. Nevertheless even in 1992, there were no women at highest level of bureaucracy - secretaries. The proportion of women even among the professional and technical group in the occupational classification has declined in 1991 to 15.1 percent of the total as compared to 1981 figure of 16.6 percent (Acharya 1994). The proportion of women among graduates is also increasing very slowly. This proportion is only about 9 percent in rural areas compared to 24 percent urban areas (Table 6).

CONCLUION

Rural women have participated extensively in Nepal's economy. Traditionally, they have contributed substantially to household income and participated substantially in the household decision making process. But with commercialization of the rural economy they may be loosing grounds relative to men because they are less equipped to cope with the commercialized economy. They have lesser access to avenues of education and modern knowledge and less mobility. Majority of the rural households are fastly losing access to community resources such as land and forest. Without adequate avenues of alternative employment they are loosing access to food as more and more land gets under commercial agriculture. Rural women are the greatest losers with increasing work burden and reduced access to resources.

The slow industrial transformation, which is pushing women to the manufacturing sector has both positive and negative implications for

women. Women are being ceased out of managerial and propriotrial positions associated with household and cottage level industries and are being converted into industrial wage labour dependent on exports. In this process women have gained mobility and access to income, but only within the limits set by the dominant patriarchal culture and the feudal value system denigrating physical labour and people associated with it. Moreover, with urbanization women's reported economic activity rate is declining. This may be a result of reporting bias or loss of work opportunities as work place shifted from farm houses to factories. As middle class women, who work at home, consider themselves as not working WID programme started by various government and non-government agencies during the last twenty years, these programmes have made little tangible dent into the process which is displacing women from traditional avenues of employment and resource ownership. These programmes have not helped women much in getting access to positions of power. They have been, however, effective in generating awareness among the population about the gender issues. If empowerment is viewed in terms of awareness and willingness to fight about gender issues, both rural and urban women are gaining self confidence raising their voices and sometimes acting to bring about the desired change in their own interest.

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