

Women's Concern in Development Planning

REHMAN Sobhan needs no introduction to readers of development-related literature in Bangladesh and beyond. He has chosen to present his revised paper written for ESCAP meeting on Evaluation of Guidelines on Integrating Women's Concern in Development Planning to a broader public. Rehman has thus been required to ignore the influence of culture, values, historical experience and economic circumstances of a society and concentrate on the state intervention as such.

The basic hypothesis seems to be that women are treated by the state as a marginal element and the government's lack of commitment to transform their condition is manifest in its inability to deploy resources needed for such a transformation. To test the hypothesis one requires to separate gender neutral state interventions from gender-related interventions. The position of the feminist groups in the developing countries has been that there is a general absence of demonstrated commitment on the part of male-dominated society and the state to enunciate a positive set of policies to transform the conditions of women.

This position has been articulated by women who have themselves gained from a favourable family and social position and may thus lack the grassroots flavour. Any critique of the position would contend that women are a heterogeneous group as are men and simple state intervention would thus not benefit those who need to be transformed. The experiences of three decades of women in development seem to lend support to such a hypothesis. Further, current proponents of free-market system and small government have reservation even about so-called corrective intervention policies.

Rehman Sobhan seems to have limited his deliberation in a manner that does not deal with these issues. He has pointed out that in a minimalist state the impact of market forces and social inheritance, besides some legislative action, the state has little to do. It is difficult to measure the extent of intervention and its impact and the nature of intervention does vary from state to state. Rehman recognised the importance of social philosophy (I believe, also values and culture) in influencing allocation for women empowerment but is quick to recognise there exists a gap between rhetorical

BOOK REVIEW
Planning and Public Action for Asian Women
 by Rehman Sobhan
 University Press Limited, Dhaka 1992
 pp 118+viii, Price Tk. 150.00

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and realised commitment of the decision-makers who are dominantly male. The gap is largely due to failure of decision-makers to recognise that women are a distinct social under-class.

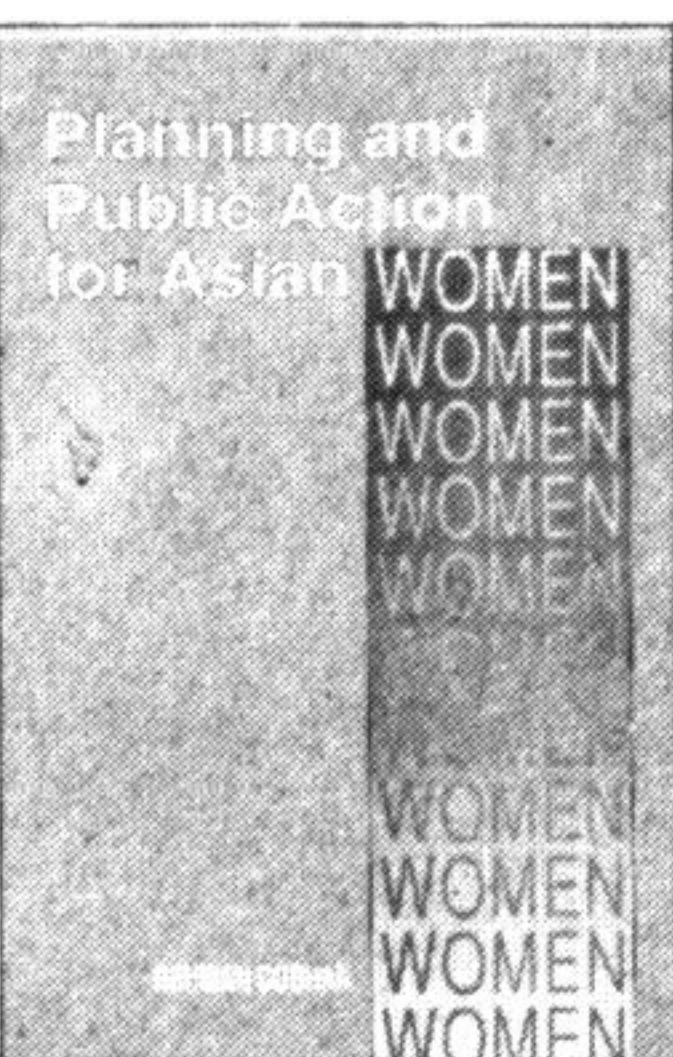
However even this general recognition suffers from the fact that women are not a homogeneous group by themselves. Rehman has rightly pointed out that the planning process has not yet been decomposed by social groups, except for some targeted action and further decomposing it by gender is indeed a formidable task, yet to be achieved anywhere. Rehman further notes that inadequacy of institutional arrangements has further complicated conceptualisation as well as execution of action plans for women. Rehman has pointed out that political economy of household which is a distinct social and economic unit continues to demonstrate subordinated position of women sanctified by law, custom and inheritance. Beyond the household, public institutions to conceptualise, formulate and implement programmes for women remain nominal or notional while the political institutions and processes have not enhanced such institutional capabilities either. In this broad sweep of issues Rehman notes the importance of total resource base of the government and priorities assigned by a male dominated decision making group in allocating resources in this regard.

Given these limited conceptual framework, Rehman has gone on to discuss the scenario in the developing countries of Asia and the Pacific. The circumstances differ due to differences in historical experience, social inheritance and dialectics of development experience. One observation, made on the basis of public expenditure in relation to GDP, is that it has remained

high ranging between 52.4% (Malaysia) and 11.1% (Myanmar). These figures show that most market-oriented economies were also the most dominant public interventionist states in terms of public expenditure/GDP ratio. The classification adopted by Rehman is not helpful in developing a hypothesis. A casual observation is, higher resources have provided the state with higher capacity to intervene in general.

Rehman notes that not many Asian governments have incorporated women's specific developmental concerns into the plans for development, though chapters on women are now generally common in the plan documents. India initially incorporated programme for women in its social welfare-related plans and only recently changed the strategy from welfare to development. The current plan has conceptualised five principal categories of services needed by women i.e. employment, education, general awareness, legal support and support services. Then India proceeded to spell out ten specific areas of policy and programme interventions. Rehman has rightly pointed out that the suggestions related to women were not developed within a coherent framework. In Bangladesh, explicit programme for development of women was first incorporated in the Second Plan after setting up a Ministry of Women Affairs in the middle of the women's decade of development prompted by the UN. But the programme of action did not display any firm commitment, it was an outcome of donor dialectics and concessional politics. This rhetorical commitment to women development was heightened during the Third Plan and also Fourth Plan.

Similar is the case with planning in Pakistan though specific commitment to inte-



grate women in the development process has been made in its Seventh Plan. The Philippines has aimed to make development gender-responsive by changing legal system, creating greater employment opportunities for women and conscientising women about their worth. Thailand's 20 year plan for women's development has made specific suggestion for legal intervention and specific targets to be achieved in social and economic capacity building. Indonesia's development plan also pronounced strong intent to integrate women in development. The Republic of Korea, despite rapid economic development, requires specific targeted programmes to improve the status of women, integration of women in social development on an equitable basis and elimination of gender discrimination. Rehman contends that despite increasing recognition by policy-makers, they need much more to mitigate the marginalised position of women and proper conceptualisation of the planning mechanism to eradicate gender discrimination is yet to be achieved. One may ask has the gender discrimination been psycho-socially eliminated in more developed and so-called enlightened society of the West from which the inspiration is being derived in these countries? Culture and values are more basic than planning and public expenditure. Rehman's deliberations seem to overlook public action needed in this regard.

Rehman refers to the Vietnamese institutional framework built during the communist regime as an effective model. But would that survive the assault of a market regime or could it survive the milieu of a divisive society?

The review of planning experiences takes the author to the core of the women development issue i.e. socio-economic context and the political context. The socio-economic context defines the limits of capability on the part of women to avail of the results and opportunities created by infrastructural investment directed to create job, provide credit, and participate in social work etc. The hypothesis posited is that participation of women in wage economy liberates them from marginalised position dictated by tradition and custom. But Rehman has himself pointed out that in the Republic of Korea, despite rapid increase in female labour force participation, has not yet created conditions for liberated position of women. Thus wage economy and participation of women in labour and product market are necessary but not sufficient conditions.

The political context is defined in terms of participation in decision-making institutions which are part of popularly elected bodies. Women have been under-represented in seats of power though in many Asian countries they were the heads of the government. While women's participation in political institutions and administration is important, mere participation does not by itself ensure greater focus on issues of concern to women.

The conclusion that Rehman through his study seems to draw is that public intervention in favour of women is important to eradicate discrimination and currently unfavourable position of women in the socio-economic structure of Asian countries. He confesses that we know very little about the mechanism of an effective intervention strategy due to inherent intricacy of the problem. To remedy this, he suggests certain beaten-track development approaches viz. building and appropriate macro model, restructuring national income accounting representing contribution by women, disaggregating public expenditure to show gender specific allocation, improving planning and programming functions etc. The more important task is to create a socio-economic environment and building political support base. But the question remains how to do this? Would the development with a woman bias etc lead us in that direction? Rehman seems to hope that these would do.

The Mother Who Went Away

A Short Story by Nurul Huq

THE boy took his little sister by the hand and went far into those fields of 'sleep'. Those shady shady rivers by the softly flowing river, where no man was seen, the very air was hushed and strange flowers spilled out everywhere.

"Have you seen our mother?", the boy asked the daffodils swaying in the breeze on the river bank.

And his sister clung to his hand, rubbed her legs together and looked from him to the flowers.

"Who is your mother, little boy?", said the flowers and danced some more.

"She's the sweetest mother in the world," he said. "She wears a long violet gown and has tiny pearls on her ears. And a large one on this finger". And he held up his ring — finger gravely.

"No little boy, we haven't seen her", said the flowers and tossed their heads together. "But ask the river for she goes a long long way".

The boy asked the river then. But she rippled and

murmured 'No', and went her way. The wind said 'No' too, and sighed and flew away.

The sun went down and the stars came out. For Night comes early in the Never Never Lands and the children had gone a long long way.

He asked the stars too. They whispered to each other low and high, and twinkled and sighed across the sky. But not one had seen the mother.

The children lay down under a huge oak tree, and clutching each other in fear. Fell asleep. But the moon gaped through the forest roof and smiled down kindly. The oak tree fanned them in their sleep and the breeze whispered sweet things in their ears.

So they had lovely dreams

and thought they were cuddling close to their mother and sitting before their fire-side again.

And there was a host of unseen beings who pitted the children and came crowding around. They knew where the mother was, for they had taken her away themselves. They told her about the children and she looked down from high above.

And when she saw that innocent pair lying in each other's arms in that dark gloomy forest— she wept and her tears fell on them like the dew from the sky.

But she didn't come down and clasp them to her heart. For she had gone to that place from where no one can come back again.

PAGE FROM DIARY

I'm Proud of Myself, am I?

by Shamsad Mortuza

THERE stood a man and a woman, face to face. And there stood a lamp post which for some mysterious reasons bears an imported faulty sodium light.

The time was around 10 o'clock in the night and the place was near the Government Drivers' Colony at Paribagh. As my rickshaw proceeded unveiling the foggy curtain of the night, I came across of the duo. If my eyes served me right, I saw the man extending some money to the woman.

I did not look back to see whether the woman had received the cash or not; rather I did not want to.

There could have been hundreds of causes for the man to offer the money to the ordinary looking woman in a plain saree in that cold night; but I was content with only one and thereby I let the crude smile hang on the corner of

my lips.

This is how it goes in this metropolitan life; one just concoct things from the images received and fiction becomes fact...

A minute before encountering the couple, I was stuck in the traffic signal at Paribagh where a parade of automobiles was being staged. I was wondering how my colours changed at the change of roads. In the neon-lit bylanes, I was pale but at the mouth of the VIP Road I looked yellow, rather jaundiced, under the bright sodium light. My 'colour-filled' thought was interrupted by a tender voice accompanied by a soft touch on my thigh. From the very touch I knew it was a tube rose (rajanigandha) stick and quite possibly it was stale.

"Sir... one taka, sir...sir..." I felt the decrescendo of her voice. Without looking at her I conceptualised that her eyes

were moving on all the passengers at the same time. She knew she had only seconds to move and thereby she acted fast. But from my past experience I also knew one sympathetic look could have cost me one taka.

Maybe someday I will write something for these young children... and for the second time I engrossed in the bio-scopic that went before me. Whistles and beacons; my rickshaw-puller started padding. Even in that chilly night he was wearing a half-sleeve cotton shirt. "Don't you feel cold?" I asked while inserting my hands into the leather jacket's pocket.

"Padding keeps me warm... You see sir, it's very cold when you are waiting for a client..." and thereon the man went on talking, while I was only declaring my presence with simple gestures, every now and then. I smiled to myself. After such an interaction I will not have any problems in paying him off, and which I didn't have.

Being an inhabitant of the metropolitan city, I know where to smile, where to intervene and where to ignore. O I am proud of myself!

US Experts Offer Guidelines for Investigative Reporting

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six months for the reporter to do some real digging — sometimes as much as a year for a big story to break. Usually they work in pairs, sometimes threes, but beyond that, it is not feasible as it becomes cumbersome to co-ordinate.

One question fielded was: How long can you maintain a one-sided story if the other side refuses to speak? For daily newspapers, there is nothing much one can do about these one-sided allegations owing to the pressure of the daily deadline; but news magazines do have time to dig further.

An ever present conflict which exists for the investigative reporter is to choose how far he can push without incurring the annoyance of the source and risk being frozen out of information. In this scenario, a team of two reporters comes in handy as the second one can work quietly behind the scenes, scrutinising records and files. Remember Watergate?!

On the subject of "mud slinging" and "royalty basing", some newspapers go beyond the limits of professionalism

thus giving the trade an unsavoury image: what can be done about such undesirable practices? Much depends on what the editor is hoping to achieve — some papers try to stay alive by publishing exciting or flashy headlines. Unfortunately, Newmann thinks, there is nothing one can do about this.

There is a perception that the US press seems to toe the Washington line as in the case of the Nicaraguan incident which to most impartial observers was a violation of territorial integrity. The American press in general presented a strong case of justification. What did Dedman and Newmann have to say about this? They agreed that unfortunately that seems to be the case. They also concurred with the view that American newspapers do not give as much attention to international news as they should, and both regretted the lapse.

On the question of investigative reporting on long standing issues such as racial discrimination in extending credit to black Americans on the part of banks and savings and loans associations; Dedman regrets that not enough is being done. More often than not, investigative reporters tend to go for "new trends" thus ignoring more important issues which affect the daily lives of so many ordinary citizens — such as why someone less qualified gets a job over a more able candidate. These are subjects we are all aware of but do not investigate.

In a nutshell, the ethical guidelines offered by these two veteran investigative reporters are: 1) A reporter should never lie; 2) he must work hard and long on the topic; 3) he must go through public records carefully and thoroughly to build his case; 4) he should interview people and focus his story on anecdotes to exemplify a certain pattern, such as the failure of a particular safety in a consumer item.

— Nancy Wong

Women at the Forefront with a Decisive Purpose

by Fayza Haq

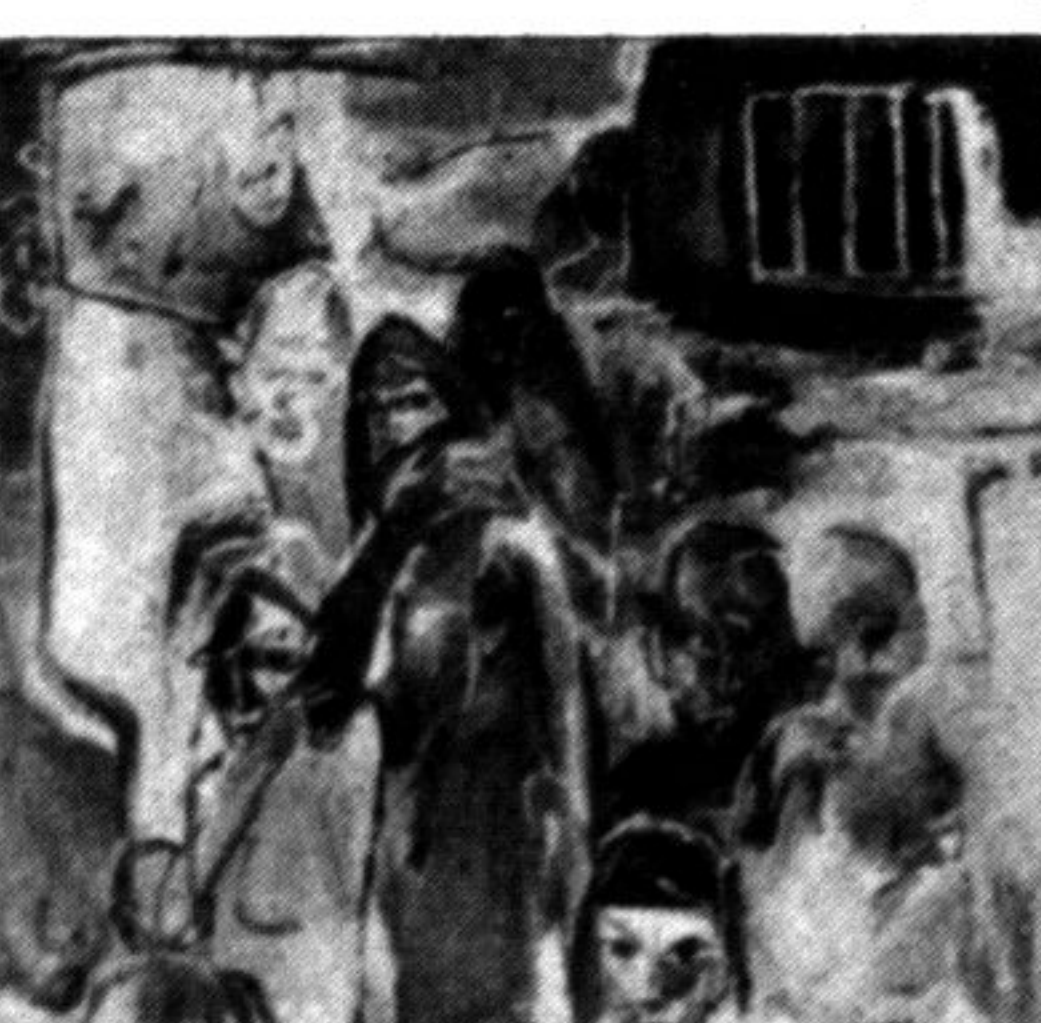
"TWELVE Plus one Female Artists Exhibition," held recently at the Goethe-Institut, Dhaka, perhaps surpassed all other combined displays of our local female visual art experts, that had been seen so far. One understands that this careful and selective display had two intelligent women behind the painstaking job, these being impeccable samples of the leading female artists of Bangladesh. There was, undoubtedly, considerable contemplation and choice of the centres.

Ms Hannelore Lechner, Director of the Goethe-Institut, Dhaka, and the programme co-ordinator at the same institution, Ms Ilse Hilpert, believed that "women were being discriminated against, all over the world. In order to be an artist of repute is not an easy matter. To be acknowledged in the male dominated society, found both in the east and the west, is a difficult matter."

Ms Ilse Hilpert added, "As the lives of women artists are different from that of the male ones, therefore, their visions differ. It is only if women play an equal role in culture, can they possibly ensure their effective participation in society". The exhibition had been named "Twelve Plus One Female Artists", as twelve of the artists were local ones while the last was Ms Ilse Hilpert herself. It was not an easy matter for the sponsors to assess the techniques, materials and sizes of the creations that had to be chosen with discretion. The twelve selected artists were meant to represent their colleagues as well. This was due to the limited space of the display gallery of the Goethe-Institut, Dhaka.

Ilse Hilpert, herself had gone to Rwanda, East Africa, three years back. Being inspired by the African women, she used them as themes for her work, which resulted in a profitable sale and which, in turn, she used to promote the female artists of Bangladesh. At the end of her stay in Bangladesh, the artist wished to culminate her stay in the country by sponsoring and organizing a women's exhibition.

Ms Hannelore Lechner, had this to say about the exhibits, "It has taken mankind 4,000 years to realise the fundamental truth that women comprise



UNTITLED



FISHER WOMAN



VISION



WITHOUT TITLE

half of any human population in most parts of the world. It is not easy to project this in a short span of time and in the male dominated society of the world, it is not simple to bring home the truth. Women do not necessarily have 4,000 years ahead of them to assert themselves and make it amply clear that if women did not carry out their task adequately, the lust for power would progress and fin. This war, which ensues from the lust, results in the constant warfare, the victims of which always include women and children, which the men often fail to perceive."

She added that the exhibit was a venture to have the women's voices heard and their visions seen. The paintings, she continued, "told nothing of the sad state of affairs, despite marathon political talks which appear hollow, as no discernible action was being followed." She felt it was

high time women should have some recognition for their endless toil. Otherwise, she warned, "history would repeat itself, as one only knows too well."

Shamim Sikdar, in her untitled abstract piece, in vibrant orange and olive-green, which had a definite feminine vision, going by the tranquillity conveyed to the viewers, with its swirls and fine etchings, depicted a world of peace and harmony sought after by one and all.

Ms. Sikdar commented about her own work, "Most sculptures are masculine, stout, rigid and rugged. They follow the style of the academicians, while they protest against social institutions, conventions and iconoclasm."

Nilofer Chaman, despite being a young artist, has held up the mirror to women's position in society, with imagination and subtlety. Her piece at

the exhibition was a surrealist creation with dwarfed and distorted depiction in beige of a woman in the forefront of the composition. A grim and obese woman, another shrouded woman, with more female depictions in tiny dimensions, were done with pale strokes and flecks of blue grey and yellow. These were depicted with a mélange of an oversized crow, the beaks and eyes of yet another bird. The group was an overwhelming mound of orange and yellow, with a pale blue flying fish in the grey flecked sky, which completed the carefully thought out composition. This piece was labelled "When Negative Things are Happening".

Dilara Begum Jolly, in her entry "Dedication for What?" had presented women in three rectangles, using grey, blue and red hues. The economy of her colours, the powerful depiction of six women in her

composition, with simple expressionistic strokes, depicted the questionable purpose of women's endless agony, distress, anger and perpetual mental confusion. The depiction was subtle, truthful, bold and dramatic.

Naima Haq's entry depicted a woman in blue, in "Darkness and the Women." Despite the pessimistic label, it was a delectable composition of a Bangladeshi woman, with the crescent yellow moon behind her. The white "sari" delineated with yellow-ochre squares, with its burnt-sienna curtain add with its repeated semi-circle patterns. The painting spoke of maturity of strokes and a deep insight into the present position of women in our society.

Nasreen Begum's painting "The Door of New Life", with its depiction of an open door, apparently inspired by some scenario found in middle-class homes, had wooden doors with overhanging decorations. The brick steps had been done with care. A fine red ribbon formed a bar to the open doors. The artist had this message: "I have depicted the fears and failures of marriage in the lives of our women. A woman expects love, and waits patiently, despite fear and disappointments."

Rokeya Sultana brought in her "naive" style in her blue, grey and white composition termed "Love". It had cars in the backdrop, with a couple tranquillising in the privacy of their home. A sofa, a vase of flowers, a curtain with star spangled fabric, and a couple were included in the composition. Rokeya explained about her style, "Children often manage to express themselves via paintings with a considerable impact, and I want to use their style to present my thoughts."

The "Bird Image", a wooden sculpted piece by Ivy Zaman, showed a female bird, carefully carved and polished with its tails bearing soft dove-coloured hue on top, was again a proof of women's impressive activities. Its dark stand went well with the lines in the intrinsic texture of the media that had been used.

Fariha Zaman's black, yellow, ochre, orange and yellow ochre piece, with white and black strokes for the fish in the basket in the centre of the composition, depicted a work-