



Population pressure, landlessness, environmental degradation and a host of other factors result in a sharp increase in female-headed households. — Photo Unicef

Women in Development: Why?

by Raana Haider

HOW have women who form fifty per cent of the population been well-being of people? Development has traditionally been measured by the monetary estimator — Gross National Product. Purely an economic assessment of people's well-being is not only limited in perspective but is also inaccurate since it excludes all social development indicators: longevity, neo-natal, infant and child mortality and maternal mortality as well as educational and nutritional intake levels. However, the Popular Quality of Life Indicators or Human Development Indicators offer a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the status of any population.

Development also centres on the assumption that through the 'trickle down' process of development, all men and women will be equally positively affected by the Forward March. A more detailed appraisal of the situation of women will reveal that certain aspects of Development have had an adverse impact on women. A process of Disbenefits and Selectivity against women have created a pattern of Maldevelopment for women and even the Feminization of Poverty. How? The unequal benefits of development result from Gender Disparities, particularly apparent in access to Health, Education and Employment opportunities and facilities and inequitable access to skills in Technical Training and Resources as in access to land, credit and capital.

There is much evidence to show that whether economic growth occurs or not,

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Woman's Control over her Body

The issue of woman's control over her body is one of the most emotive issues on the feminist agenda. The demand for reproductive rights is seen as an attack on all the icons — family, sexual morality, culture and religion. Permissiveness and promiscuity, the two are used synonymously, are seen to be the hidden agenda behind such demands. Yet, oddly enough, a man's control of his body is not seen as disruptive of social morality. And this despite the fact that a man can blithely respond with an insouciant 'not to my knowledge' to the question 'Have you any children?' No woman could every make such a rejoinder. And I use the word 'could' not 'would' advisedly. It is women who are denied control over their bodies. But is it because women are deemed to be irresponsible or because as the saying goes 'Maternity is a question of fact, paternity is a question of opinion'? In other words women must pay the price for the irresponsibility of men. They must be controlled not because men cannot be controlled but should not be.

License is a male prerogative. After all, runs the argument, does he not feed the mouths he engenders? Actually no. Social workers the world

over can confirm this. In Bangladesh, the female-headed household not only conforms nearly 19 per cent of all families, it is a rare polygamous



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WOMEN in this subcontinent constitute a great deal of what is called *unwritten history*. Of course, history-writing is a political act in that the race for power and space activates the very business of writing itself, accommodating space for one, while diminishing or deleting it for the other. It is not difficult to see that history — or for that matter, a narrative — may come up with its own politics of presences and absences. Women here, most of the time, have been victimised by narratives, histories, or by the politics of writing itself, to the extent that women remain as absences, silences, blank spaces, voids in the so-called 'grand narratives' dominated by an essentially androcentric culture. Marx was right when he maintained that the dominated and the dependent cannot write their own history.

True, Bengalees could not write their own history over a long period of time but, when attempts have been made, the space within history has been dominated by the politics of both class and gender. The poor, for example, cannot claim that they have got their own history written; and then, women, within the poor, are more absences and more silences than otherwise: for the possession of narratives and languages — or access to writing — has been the prerogative of the powerful, of the present, of the centre. If you take, for example, a look at most of the histories of our 'liberation', you can have a Mujib or a Zia, or the middle class, appropriating most of the spaces within narratives. In such narratives, the glory of an individual is celebrated, sometimes like that of a God; here, common people have lost the power of becoming heroes, let alone

YOU think you never suffer from the Pretzel Syndrome? Think again ... what about those occasional twinges you get from simultaneously aiming to please, holding your tongue, trying to fit in and bending over backwards?

You might say they are nothing. You certainly wouldn't describe yourself as an emotional contortionist whose psyche is occasionally as twisted as a pretzel. No way! You prefer to think of yourself as an accomodator — a natural peacemaker.

Peacemaking is certainly part of the syndrome, which takes four major forms: agreeing with, overlooking behaviour that actually fires your hide, saying yes to requests you'd rather refuse, and — the one you are most likely to acknowledge as painful since you often kick yourself for it — actually volunteering for tasks you'd rather avoid.

Why do we do it?

Because we are nice ... because we have been taught that's what nice girls do ... because if we disagree or refuse people get upset (now we are getting somewhere) ... or because someone might yell or leave us (sounds familiar)?

If we are candid, we must face that our 'niceness' isn't motivated by an altruism which rivals Mother Teresa's. Much of it is for our own protection or ever convenience. Confrontation is difficult, often painful, sometimes even terri-

fying: Peace is easy: Just say Yes.

But peace at what price?

It looks at first that the 'pretzel' shortchanges herself, at worse: everyone's needs get met but the Pretzel's. It's sad and true and bad. But in fact you happen to do more damage when you ignore your true feelings: accommodating when your natural inclination is to kick. My friend is a pretzel: she fails for everybody's lines and ends up in a mess. All because she doesn't have the heart to say No. In comparison to her angelic attitude I am 'cranky'.

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tying myself into knots trying to please others. In that case us cranky people, who say 'no' are actually nicer. For one thing, we tell the truth — to others and to ourselves. I may be labelled a lot of unkind things but who needs the kind of jerk with the audacity to walk into your life and tell you that you have an attitude problem? A pretzel would say 'Yes dear'. All a cranky person did was show him the door and told him the attitude was mine and the problem was his. Rude perhaps but self satisfying nonetheless. Pretzels have to fool themselves if they're going to fool others effectively.

Of course we all have to do things we don't want to, but at least when you grumble, even to yourself, you discharge your annoyance. Pretzels hide or pretend to hide their anger, forever. 'Of course I am not angry!' Yet those stored up emotions and resentment inevitably leak out in ugly ways. Perhaps they hide them well but it ultimately surfaces, in rare, uncharacteristic rages, or, more likely, in passive-aggressive shenanigans.

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Women: Colonialism and Postmodernism

by Azfar Hussain

Absences of women's power, language, mind, and even body are all sanctioned by this centre; in other words, by the combined activities of feudalism and colonialism: men are owners of the texts, interpreters of their texts; while, on the other hand, women do not have texts, though they are interpretable by the canons of the male texts including those of religious texts which, again, have doggedly remained male-centred.

women: they are mere absences constituting the bulk of unwritten history.

This burden of unwritten history that women in particular have been bearing for centuries is one of the consequences of colonialism, given our realities and context. The persistent dwarfing and marginalising and silencing of women, of their power and potentials and languages — which cultural thinkers like Vidyasagar and Rokeya noted well in their writings — could be attributed to feudalism accentuated by colonialism itself.

Be it noted, the history of colonialism in this subcontinent is one of splits and disintegrations finding expression not only in the politics of the colonial policy of divide-and-rule, but also in the social dynamics that encouraged oppression on, and suppression of, women. It was Vidyasagar who pointed out that women themselves reflect the state, or health of a society, and that if women's development can be arrested, the progress of a whole society can be impeded. This was no doubt clear to the colonials in India who, for the sake of their growth, expansion and consolidation, wanted to keep the colonized on the margin of power through further marginalizing women, among others. Here, colonialism also found its energy and inspiration from feudalism which was obviously ac-

centuated by the politics and culture of colonialism. It must be mentioned here clearly that at the advent of colonialism in this part of the world, feudalism was not at all threatened, but was only strengthened — particularly culturally.

One of the characteristics of feudalism is its stress on what may be called *textual authorities* whose another name is *androcentrism*. The centre, envisaged and activated here, is on of the male: the emergence of the *sastravallabis* celebrating their textual authorities is in fact the emergence of this centre.

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This dynamics of women, texts, colonialism and feudalism was not to be found during British colonial days only: this dynamics can be located even today.

The Liberation Movement, ideally intended to deconstruct this dynamics, has so far proved to be a momentary, androcentric political step find-

ing its expression in the shift of power from one centre to the other. True, British and Pakistani colonialism last their physical, political and geographical identities; but, the culture of colonialism has not ended, proving that political changes yielded so far are only superficial, and also that mere political changes in terms of the shift of the power from centre to centre do not suffice to bring about changes in the life of women. It needs noting here that the androcentric, feudal-colonial culture of dwarfing or deleting women finds its political, ideological and cultural nourishment from imperialism itself, which has not let colonialism die, but has kept it alive and active in the form of neocolonialism which, for its own sustenance, politics — rather evolves closed texts of — divisive, artificial signifiers such as race, colour, religion, and so on. These divisive signifiers most effectively enhance all shapes and shades of discriminations including discriminations against women.

For example, in the name of religion, women, today, are being most ruthlessly exploited and oppressed in this part of the world. The culture of *fatwabaji*, as it is re-emerging today with its colonial-feudal past, is one of textual politics and authorities which are predominantly male-centred. Any women movement, and for that matter, any liberation

movement, must aim at deconstructing such textual authorities, and such centres. The politics of postmodernism lies in this kind of deconstruction, among others.

The 'postmodernism debate', today, is riding a massive wave of concerns throughout the world. Postmodernism, as it has come to be known, has both its admirers and detractors. But, what is this postmodernism, after all? Given the bewildering variety of versions postmodernism has hitherto been able to generate and disseminate, it is indeed difficult to define what it is.

Indeed, it is possible to speak more viably of *postmodernisms* than postmodernism itself. However, given our colonial-feudal-imperial contexts, one can say that our postmodernism cannot be just an emulation of European postmodernism, and that postmodernism here may suggest a form of experience, a mode of articulation, a strategic sensibility, even a movement, aiming at deconstructing and unsettling all those stereotypes, conventions, commonplaces, textual authorities and centres which have hitherto been kept alive by Eurocentric, colonizing modernism to the detriment of man's freedom, creativity, openness and progress.

Of course, this postmodernism does not promote any narrow separations and nationalism, but it encourages free plays of imagination and action intended to achieve freedom and enhance creativity. The very complex issue of women's freedom in a society caught in the vicious cycle of feudalism, neocolonialism and imperialism can certainly derive its energy and inspiration from the spirit of postmodernism, from its politics not devoid of a context.

really rather have had a root canal instead of head a project for noisy brats from an orphanage. But she didn't want to spoil her reputation as a saint, so she agreed ... sort of. She 'forgot' the first meeting, misplaced documents for the second, got sick on the third, stalled so long that the group went elsewhere. Then she wondered why everyone was mad at her since she was just trying to be 'nice'.

Being nice out of fear is a sickening habit and please no one. Pretzeling can be especially disastrous in an affair, where it results in subtle sabotage, depression, lies, deceit and eventually a seemingly inexplicable blow-up, complete with tears and accusations. It leaves your puzzled and confused mate wondering what went wrong and why you changed the rules on him. He is angrier now than if you had confronted him in the first place.

You can fix all this (isn't that obvious)? It means working on self esteem (doesn't everyone do that?) and practicing surviving the displeasure of others. You'll get through it and they'll get over it. Not everyone in the world has to love you. In fact to have certain jerks dislike you is a pleasure and an honour.

Everyone is happier when the way we behave reflects the way we feel. When William Blake said, 'Listen to the fool's reproach' it is a kingly title, he meant business.

Sometimes Saying 'No' is Nicer

by Naheed Kamal



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clean delivery maintained?

• Is immediate mother-baby skin contact encouraged and is the baby put to the breast as soon as the mother is ready?

• Are care providers polite and considerate?

• Do staff set aside time to explain the process of labour and delivery?

• Do staff listen and respond to women's concerns?

• Are flexible routines followed during labour and in choice of birthing position?

• Are traditional practices that are not harmful respected

judgmental attitudes when dealing with women, especially in cases of abortion complications?

• Are staff welcoming and friendly to those accompanying the women, whether TBA or family?

• Do staff explain procedures to the woman and her family?

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