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**The Fourth M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture**

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# **THE IMPACT of NEW ECONOMIC Policy ON WOMEN IN INDIA AND FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES**

**Gabriele Dietrich**



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ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN CENTRE  
Whitefield, BANGALORE  
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**The Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas**  
**(1913—1993)**

The Rev. Dr. Madathethu Abraham Thomas was born on August 10, 1913 in Kerala. He graduated from Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram. As a student, he came under the influence of national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jayaprakash Narayan, and identified himself fully with the freedom movement. He entered public life as Secretary of the Inter-Religious Student Fellowship of which the late Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was the all-India President. During 1945-'47, he studied at Cambridge, England. In 1950, he was ordained a priest of the Mar Thoma Church.

In 1963, he founded the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Bangalore and developed it into a *meeting place of people of all religious and political views*. The story of ECC is also the story of his commendable efforts to *regard all people*, irrespective of caste or creed as the *children of one God*.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas served as the President of the Indian Section of Amnesty International and the Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concern in Asia (ACISCA). In 1977, he founded the Vigil India Movement, a human rights organization.

The Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas authored many books in English and Malayalam. Some of his works have been translated into German and Welsh. He passed away on June 25, 1993, and was buried at the ECC campus.

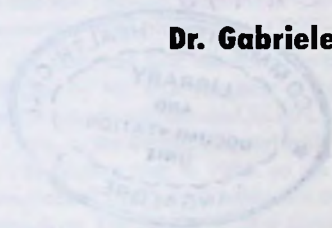
**The Fourth M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture**

**Foreword**

**The Impact of New Economic  
Policy (NEP) on Women in India  
and Feminist Alternatives**

**by**

**Dr. Gabriele Dietrich**



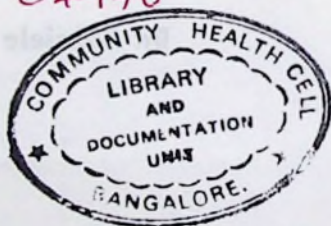
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## Foreword

The Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture has now become a part and parcel of the Annual pre-Council Meeting of the Ecumenical Christian Centre. This is to commemorate the memory of a person who had a vision for the humanity. The ECC would like to keep his vision alive in social relations. It also provides an opportunity for the ECC family to measure the distance between him and its siblings.

More than these, the memorial lecture has a special purpose. It is indeed a gathering of the friends of achen Thomas and of the ECC. The topics that are chosen for the memorial lectures bear a distinctive stamp of concerns the late Rev. Thomas, the founder-Director, had in his mind. They have also become the basic philosophy of ECC—the *unity of humankind*.

We have had four memorial lectures until now. The first lecture was delivered by Mr. B.G. Varghese in July 1994 on the topic, *Human Rights, Democracy, Secularism and Social Change*, the second by Prof. Ninan Koshy, in 1995, on the theme, *Religion and Politics*, and the third lecture by Justice Sri V.R. Krishna Iyer, in 1996, on the topic, *Human Rights—Their Spiritual Dimensions*. This booklet contains the fourth lecture by Dr. Ms. Gabriele Dietrich on *The Impact of New Economic Policy (NEP) on Women in India and Perspectives of a Feminist Alternative*.

The topic for this lecture too indeed has a spiritual dimension as it touches the lives of the ordinary and the marginalised. The market reforms in India have now taken different *shapes and shades* through its philosophy of *globalization*. There are many who sing songs of praise to the 'Market deity based on statistics'. But remember, as someone has humorously said, "a statistician is one who will tell you that if a man is standing with one foot on a hot oven and the other on a slab of ice, on the average, the man should be comfortable!" Yes, 'truth and falsehood go hand in hand as buttermilk and water exist harmoniously in a glass'.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) has exerted its pressure on women in a way that is not yet fully assessed. In general categories of thought, econo-



mists like Dr. C.T. Kurien have described Market forces as *vehicles of cultural brain drain*. It expands its empire of "neo-colonialism" through its ideology of a monoculture. Oh, it moves in the vast sea of Asia like an Octopus!

Dr. Gabriele, Professor at the Centre for Social Analysis, Madurai has many things to share with us from her own experience and erudition.

The speaker was given the freedom to caution us, frighten us, and even to give us a clarion call! Armed with statistics and stories of despair, I am sure, she could disturb us. I wonder whether she could make us cry! The speaker has succeeded in reminding us of the words of Esther: "I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

We do hope that the issues raised in the lecture will break the conspiracy of silence and create a few ripples in our thinking process.

Bangalore  
Oct. 2, 1997

Dr. M.J. Joseph  
Director, ECC

## **The Impact of New Economic Policy (NEP) on Women in India and Feminist Alternatives**

It is indeed a very emotional occasion for me to have been asked to deliver the M.A. Thomas Memorial Lecture at the ECC, coinciding with the 50th year of Independence of our country. In Tamil there is a saying which means: "At midnight we got (freedom) but still the dawn has not come."

I have to confess that from the point of view of my local situation from which I come, I have felt quite depressed about fifty years of Independence. The situation of slum dwellers and dalits in the present situation is very discouraging. But I also have to say that I just attended a workshop of the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) in Baroda in which we were looking at the first 30 years of Independence. It was extremely encouraging to hear the testimonies of women who had fought in the Telengana Movement in Andhra, the Thebaga Movement in Bengal and Old Adivasi freedom fighters from the *Sarvodaya* Movement in Gujarat. It is the continuity of such struggles which encourages us to forge ahead.

I am sure that any one of you who has come here would share with me this anguish that the dawn has not come for the masses of workers in the unorganized sector, small peasants, women, dalits, adivasis, tribal communities in the North-East and even for all the other living beings, the birds in the sky and the fishes in the sea. Our lands are once again invaded, if not by foreign rulers, then by global companies. Our rivers are dammed. We have to struggle to keep our seas free from foreign fishing vessels. We import obsolete technologies to build nuclear plants. We squander our own energy resources in oil scams and invite foreign companies with an abysmal ecological record like Enron for privatization of electricity production. All along the coast a massive struggle is waged these days against coastal industrial aquaculture. The veteran freedom fighter, S. Jaganathan and his wife Krishnammal of the Gram Swaraj Movement have launched vigorous *sathyagraha* from August 9 onwards. The government had to release Jaganathan as it was too embarrassing to keep an old freedom fighter in

custody on this particular occasion, but his co-workers have been kept in jail. People have to offer *sathyagraha* by the thousands and court arrest because the highest court of the land itself has stayed, under political pressure, the implementation of its own historical judgment of December 1996 on the closing down of prawn farms. This judgment was of historical importance not only in our own country but even more so for neighbouring countries like Bangladesh where the struggle against industrial aquaculture suffers from severe curtailments of democratic rights.

The rising masses of the poor are waging desperate battles against all these policies but their struggles get deflected in artificially created violence, be it caste or communal. After 50 years of Independence, people can be shot like rabbits, hacked to death in buses (as it happened in Madurai recently) in broad daylight. For every peaceful Dalit demonstrator in Chennai on 6th August there was an armed police man. And thousands of people were kept in preventive detention. Is there no decency, no shame, no integrity left in our political fabric after fifty years of independence? When a Gujarati friend from the United Kingdom sent my son a Greenpeace T-shirt with the endangered species of animals printed on it which need to be protected, I felt for a moment, the sarcastic impulse to add to these pictures the Dalits, the Adivasis, and the girl child.

Now let me stop describing the scenario of despair. Let me come back to the faith in our humaneness and the confidence that we *can* live together in *sovereignty* which has brought us together on this occasion. This is certainly the moment to remember with immense gratitude the late Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas who was both a visionary and a man of practical action. Let me say something personal here. When I came to India in the end of 1971 during the Bangladesh war of independence, I worked for three years under the leadership of Dr. M.M. Thomas at the CISRS. During that period I also was in frequent touch with the late Rev. M.A. Thomas and the ECC. I also travelled to Kerala at the time and met other people from the group of that young generation of the forties like the Rev. K.K. Chandy of Christavashram. I always felt that each of these friends stood for a somewhat different aspect. The Rev. Chandy had built up a Christian Sarvodaya Ashram to implement a local vision of social transformation. Dr. M.M. Thomas contributed a lot of his energies to the international ecumenical movement and later also to governance as well as to people's movements. Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas was a visionary who operated at intermediary levels. He created an institution like the ECC to offer a space for reflection on critical commitment to society for a whole variety of activists and thinkers. He also created an organizational structure like Vigil India which got its major impulse from resistance against the Emergency in 1975. This organized watchfulness over human rights as inspired by the J.P. movement in Bihar and many other



human rights struggles all over the country, is more urgently needed than ever at the present juncture in history.

Let me now come to the impact of NEP on Women and Feminist Alternatives which was given to me as the topic for today's lecture. When the NEP and SAP were fully embarked upon in the early nineties, I was one of the persons in the women's movement who came out publicly with a critical stand while many people felt we were lacking a statistical base to take a position. While I was aware of my limitations in terms of data base, I felt emboldened to take a stand because of what I saw with my own eyes. The slum dwellers in the women's movement I worked with, were facing rampant evictions. City beautification deprived them of housing and livelihood as vendors.

Going to the coast, I could see the women of the fishing community, who had been pushed out of net-making due to mechanization as early as 1980, being more and more marginalised from the marketing operations and having to undergo much longer journeys to vend the fish, facing stiffer competition from men and finding it more difficult to come by any reasonable quality of fish for consumption in their own households. In Kerala, *kappa* (tapioca) which had been a staple food, soon became a rare delicacy as everyone started to grow rubber and other cash crops. More and more, we could see young girls under increasing pressures of dowry demands being sent from villages in Kanyakumari and Kerala to far-flung places in Gujarat where they were working never-ending backbreaking hours, feet wet, hands injured in crowded prawn peeling sheds, only to be cooped up to a fitful sleep at night in cramped accommodations, to rise early and crowd up in batches of four and six in inadequate bathrooms, taking a hassled bath in order to get ready for the next round. In the meantime, their Dalit sisters who had been agricultural labourers in the Cauvery delta in East Thanjavur and Nagapattinam, lost their livelihood as workers in paddy production, as the Tamilnadu Government was vigorously promoting high incentives for prawn farms which destroyed rice production, polluted the drinking water and made our land and water subservient to foreign luxury consumer wants while production of staple food for domestic needs got disrupted.

There were of course also the apparent beneficiaries of NEP, girls who were "lucky" enough to be recruited into sweat shops of export garment industries or electronic goods, sports goods, or toys at a pittance of a wage on a piece rate until, within a very short time, their eyesight falters, their spines cave in, their "nimble fingers" become stiff or their jobs vanish due to bottlenecks in market demand and they end up spending their scant savings on a dowry to "settle down" in life to an uncertain future. If less lucky, they may find themselves eking out a living in prostitution, having been "socialized" into it by the sexual harassment of their contractors on the job. In places like

Goa large numbers of women have been recruited into the tourism industry which is often a concealed label for sex workers. The Goan women's organization Bailancho Saad in a newsletter of 1990 reported that they had been refused loans by Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) for employment generation programme for women in distress, as there was enough work available for bar maids and entertainers.

Other deeply problematic impacts of NEP can be found in the fields of education and health. With inputs gravitating towards higher education and natural sciences, the male elites are bound to reap benefits while women whose larger participation is at primary levels and in the humanities, bear the brunt. Cuts in the health sector, privatization of hospitals and free entry of multinationals in the pharmaceutical market drives health expenditures to dizzying heights and leaves women's health to growing neglect. Women are also subjected to hazardous contraceptives, often without their knowledge, as population control is part and parcel of NEP. For several years Indian women's movements have been fighting against dangerous hormonal contraceptives, injectables and implants like Net-En, Depo-Provera, Norplant. Recently, widespread misuse of the malaria drug Quinacrine for sterilization purposes has been documented. While women's health is thoroughly neglected, their child-bearing capacity is treated as a lethal liability. Obviously, clamouring for equity of access in a thoroughly profit-oriented and technocratic health system is not much use. The experiments in holistic health, nature cure and indigenous healing methods from the women's health movement must be focussed to make an impact at policy levels.

As the feminist demographer Dr. Malini Kakar has been pointing out, a major priority should be to raise the age of marriage and child bearing for women. This can only be achieved by giving access to education and work. In reality, even in the fully literate state of Kerala, the marriage age is going down because dowry is constantly going up. Are we prepared to take action on such problems?

However, the media do their best to make women themselves marketable commodities and status symbols. Beauty contests are used to bulldoze the road of access of cosmetics companies to the consumer desires of a small elite of privileged women. This happens in total disregard of the survival needs of crores of ordinary women.

Let me become a bit more systematic in describing some of the overall trends at macro-economic levels in order to locate women, especially women of the toiling classes, in this overall framework. It has been pointed out that the liberalization-cum-structural adjustment package brings about four different kinds of distributional shifts: from workers to capitalists, from petty producers and small capitalists to large capitalists, from domestic capitalists to foreign capitalists, from producing interests to financial interests,<sup>1</sup> i.e.,

from entrepreneurs to rentiers.

It is evident that such policies *per se* go against the interests of large numbers of women as the vast majority of women have been employed in the unorganized sector. High interest rates make access to credit, for self-employment more difficult. Women, who traditionally have been working as small producers, are losing out. With increasing privatization and computerization, jobs in the public sector like nationalized banks, LIC, railways are cut down. These were the fields where at least a small elite of educated women had some social security. Traditional women's jobs like typists, telephone operators and even nurses are cut down. Thus, despite growth of service sector *via-a-vis* productive activities, "rationalization" and "efficiency" take their toll of workplaces even here.

Another trap is the "elasticity" of female labour. Women are the last to be hired and first to be fired and the shift from subsistence crops like millet, rice, wheat and corn towards cash cropping of fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, flowers for export, affects women's jobs negatively. Many end up in the urban and rural reserve army of unemployed, gravitating in and out of jobs in electronics, garments, gem cutting, pharmaceuticals.

I feel there are three major trends which are outrightly alarming in the present situation and these are: The threat to food security, land alienation in the name of "development" and tremendous rise of violence against women and any other vulnerable sections.

While many of the above mentioned macro-economic trends have been going on throughout the eighties already, the "food first" policy promoted by the Government of India during the eighties had led to a rise in per capita food availability. At the same time, the PDS afforded access to basic food, though not to an adequate extent. This trend has been reverted since mid-1991 up to mid-1997. The "exports first" policy which started in 1991 under pressure of the debt crisis has led to a predictable decline in per capita food production.<sup>2</sup> The area under food grains has been falling and food output growth has sunk to below the rate of population growth. Since mid-1997 a new policy is embarked upon under pressure of WTO which will remove quantitative restrictions on imports. For the first time, the agricultural sector is open to imports from foreign countries. As so called advanced countries heavily subsidize agricultural production, it may become more difficult for Indian farmers to break even. This means, while rural women may be able to generate some income by growing strawberries or flowers for Western markets, staple foods may no longer be available to them and their families.

There are large exports in oil seeds, much of it going into oil cake for cattle feed to cater to the meat production for a wealthy elite in the country and abroad while basic food crops are dramatically declining. As conse-



quently the food prices have been going up, poverty has taken such a toll that there has been a prolonged phase of poverty induced lower offtake from PDS which only improved recently when food grains were made available for families below poverty line at special prices from February 1997. Another betrayal of the values of self-reliance upheld during freedom struggle is the rampant and mindless export of raw cotton which leads to de-industrialization at home and soaring garment prices.

Land alienation is another factor which affects women's lives in detrimental ways. Oftentimes women have been holding on to the land while men migrate. This is the reason for the large number of women-headed households in our country. However, at present land is taken over in the name of development all over the place. In Rathnagiri district in Maharashtra where the American multinational Enron has taken over vast expanses of fertile land for electricity production, it is the women of the agricultural and fishing communities who are in the forefront of the struggle. Likewise, in the struggle against industrial aquaculture it is the women who stake their lives to recapture the use of the land for food cropping. Vast acres of land are today taken over for car production which again affects land and water resources. This is part of the process of privatization of transport and need for broadening of roads which further contributes to land alienation.

In the cities, land speculation runs havoc which contributes to communal riots. It is today acknowledged that in the Bombay riots following the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992-'93, the interests of the builders played an important role in the systematic destruction of bakery shops and timber depots. At the same time it was the local women and women's groups like "Majlis" who intervened successfully in strife-stricken localities like Behrampada.<sup>3</sup>

At present, hundreds of pavement dwellers and vendors of Chennai are fighting a desperate struggle for their survival after having been evicted from Parry's corner after over forty years of tenancy, nearly the entire period since Independence. There is no place for such people in the schemes for relocation of markets in the city planning under World Bank guidance. Chennai is also under the impact of an Agreement of Understanding with the Japanese government offering to clean the waterways like Couth and Buckingham Canal in the name of ecology. The idea is to build five-star hotels along the waterways and at present the slum dwellers along the canal banks are experiencing an inexplicable chain of "accidental" fires which help to clear them out of the locality to pave the path towards development. There again it is the women who are in the forefront of the struggle as they also have to protect their livelihood as construction workers, vendors, domestic workers and recyclers of waste materials.

Coming from the southern districts of Tamilnadu, I am obviously at

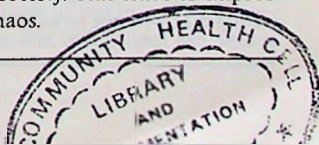


present under the impact of protracted caste clashes. Human life has become incredibly cheap and normal life is disrupted much of the time. While all the different incidents need separate enquiries and analysis, there are certain overriding features. It is agreed upon that many of the clashes are in retaliation of Dalits claiming their very humanhood. Likewise, the murder of municipal councillor Ms. P. Leelavathi in Madurai in April 1997 was clearly in retaliation for the audacity of a woman not only claiming her rightful place in local politics but also tackling corruption, illicit liquor and pilfering of rations. In the two months after her murder, eleven cases of murder of women, some connected with gang rapes, were reported in Madurai city and even in the women's movement many women felt terror and helplessness. This, of course, is exactly the purpose of such happenings. Violent clashes and murders deviate and deflect people's energies from their will towards sovereignty. As long as we understand ourselves as victims, we cannot take charge of the situation and come together to solve it. Only as we transcend our fears and rise up to take responsibility for our own lives, the alternative can come into being. The frightening thing in the present situation is that the government virtually tries to promote violence in the way of self-fulfilling prophecy as in the case of the Dalit march in Chennai on August 6, 1997. The amazing and heartening thing is that despite the attempt from on high to create a riot, the event went on peacefully and disciplined.

Implicitly, we have already entered into the discussion of the feminist alternative by pointing to women's leading role in all of the ongoing people's struggles for social transformation. While women per definition among the most severely affected under NEP, the alternative is already gestating in the belly of the beast of aggressively profiteering global capitalism. However, it is important to conceptualize and organize the alternative, if women should not once again be used as the dispensable reserve army of the revolution while the mechanisms of power remain untransformed.

I have to make a clarification here. When I speak of feminist alternatives to the hegemonic development concept, we are dealing with problems which reach far back beyond the beginning of NEP in the eighties and nineties. The Nehruvian concept of growth which was inspired by heavy industrialism promoted in the Soviet Union, was in substance not different from the capitalist model, even though it laid more emphasis on distributive justice and welfare measures. It relied on centralized planning and subjugation of nature through mega-projects. It contributed to a lot of displacement in the name of development. In many ways, NEP is quite a logical conclusion of this historical legacy. The weakening of the State under expansion of corporate interests has led to a situation where accountability is difficult to enforce. Corporations are buying over the civil society. This leads to unprecedented new forms of inequality and social chaos.

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However, despite the widening gap between rich and poor globally and nationally, I am firmly convinced that we have a much better potential for organized social transformation than most other countries. The history of the freedom struggle has provided us with a precious treasure of experiences which lead into the present struggles of people's movements in different parts of the country. Not only that, the proud history of anti-brahmin movements has left us with a legacy of organized efforts to break down caste and to overthrow patriarchy. The Sarvodaya movement has given us impulses for environmental struggles and alternative economics along the lines of D. Kumarappa. In all these historical struggles the vigorous participation of women has prepared the way for another wave of women's movement which took shape since the early seventies. However, I do not think that the feminist alternative to the present destructive development paradigm can come out of the women's movement on its own. It has to be culled out of the experience of unions in the organized sector, dalit movements, environment movements as well as autonomous women's groups.

I would like to mention here one of the impacts of NEP on the discourse of the women's movement itself. I think one important impact has been to co-opt women into the hegemonic development discourse, to take globalization, privatization, liberalization, monetization as a given and to make women to demand a greater share of the cake, shrouded in the magic word "empowerment." This was achieved by a vast array of gender trainings for NGOs which were preparing women for equity and efficiency. Women were also taught to distinguish between "practical" and "strategic" gender needs<sup>4</sup> and we were then told that it was only "practical" to access water and fuel while it was considered "strategic" to get access to funds and to the keys of the NGO vehicle.

I think it is very important not to miss the wood for the trees. We know from feminist research that the fuel crisis is one of the most serious problems to await us at the beginning of the new century.<sup>5</sup> Many analysts believe that water would become more precious than oil and a bone of contention to cause wars within rather short time. It is therefore strategic not only for women but for the survival of humankind as a whole to plan for fuel, to come up with a sustainable energy policy and to preserve water as a perennially renewable resource. Thus, what was considered women's private and practical responsibility, fetching water and fuel, providing and sustaining life itself, has to be put at the centre of the alternative paradigm: Production of Life and Livelihood vs. Production for Profit. This can only be attempted if women are enabled to participate in decision making at all levels which in turn means that household labour needs to be shared and violence as a form of control must become totally unacceptable. In terms of social structures, it means that we have to work hard to overcome caste as well as nuclear fami-

lies. Consumerist individualism is as unviable as collective egoism based on caste or community.

A production process must be developed which lays emphasis on the right to work, energy conservation, substitution of non-renewable by renewable resources, food first policy, together with conservation and regeneration of soil and water and enhanced production of biomass. At the same time a permanent cultural revolution is required to safeguard equal access to resources for women, dalits and other disempowered sections.

We need to form vigilance groups not only against abuse of human rights in the conventional political sense but movements which protect the land, the water, the forest, the rights to life and livelihood, the right to work, the right to a living wage and to occupational safety. This is by no means easy. The unorganized sector is steadily expanding. By now, 92.7% of workers are employed in the unorganized sector. Work participation of women in India has been low throughout this century. Not that our women don't work, their labour remains invisible even now. Even today official work participation is only around 22%. Many of the opportunities we are offered under NEP are very precarious due to international competition. Today, in the name of liberalization, the state abdicates its responsibility and the total market takes over people's lives. It is not even possible to open anything as innocuous as a tailoring unit in a village without being sucked into the tentacles of globalization as the panchayat president will promise a bright future through garment exports.

Of course, none of this is sustainable as the money markets are bound to crash. In the long run, globalization will run out of fuel because of the finiteness of fossil fuels. Even before that, with expanding industrialism global warming will create climatic convulsions and land will have to produce the biomass for sustainable energy use. Solar and wind energy will gain in importance.

There are indications that globalization from below can bring sanity. The recent award for Tom Kocherry of the National Fishworkers Forum from an environmental organization close to the UN is an unexpected acknowledgement that the alternative policies of people's movements do represent an alternative. The ongoing struggles against big dams spread the insight that mega projects of this kind are indeed unviable. The struggles of adivasis and tribals are translating into mechanisms of local self rule as documented by the Bhuria Committee report which are relevant for self rule in other areas as well. However, such sovereignty can only be implemented if we are serious in breaking down patriarchy and untouchability. The second freedom struggle has begun since years even as benighted politicians under the impact of hawala money and scams are still selling us out to foreign interests. The formation of broad national initiatives like NAPM and Jan Shakti



Abhiyan spurn our imagination to transcend our paralysis and helplessness.

I am sure you have heard the fairy tale of the Emperor's new clothes in which a cunning pair of cheats promise a gullible and vain emperor marvellous materials which will be visible only to wise men and invisible to fools. In their fear, neither the Emperor nor his ministers are prepared to admit that they can't see anything. There are numerous new development projects which promise more prosperity and it would require the courage of the child which shouts "the Emperor is naked" in order to expose what this kind of progress holds in store for the majority of people.

It is not easy to arrive at a new paradigm. I would like to give a sketch of the feminist alternative in the form of a poem:

The trouble between you and us  
said the woman to the forest official  
is simply this:  
you want the trees dead  
they are timber and money to you  
we want to live with them  
they gives us fodder for our cattle  
and fruits for the children  
and shade to rest in  
even air to breathe and fuel to cook on  
if we cut  
it is like killing a child.

The trouble between you and us  
said the woman to the development worker  
is simply this:  
you rape Mother Earth  
she is money to you  
you rip it off  
you poison her  
you make her bear three crops in a year  
Can I bear three children in a year?  
Will she not die?  
Does she not need rest?  
Can we sell our mother  
when she is destitute?  
Do we not feed her,  
clothe her nakedness?

The trouble between you and us  
said the fisherwoman to the fisherman



is simply this:  
you rape Kadalamma  
with your technology  
you think fish is money  
and you want to fish more  
to make more  
But the children cannot eat money  
the money eats us our debts  
sucks the marrow from our bones  
you drink  
you beat us  
you make the sea go empty.

The trouble with ourselves  
said the women among each other  
is simply this:  
We do not rely on ourselves  
we do not know that we know  
we only cook and give suck  
and rock the cradle and toil  
from morning to night  
and cry our hearts out  
amidst violence  
When will we take our hearts  
into our hands  
and quietly learn  
to run the world  
ever so gently?

It might be the right thing to close here. However, since I am talking to an audience which is, to a large extent, Christian, let me reflect for a moment what all this means theologically. It is important to remember that those of us who have come together here are not the primary victims of NEP. Many of us may take advantage of the new developments. So it requires a political will to shift to a new development paradigm. It is good to think of resurrection and uprising in this context. It is our responsibility to hasten the coming of God's reign. At the same time the burden is not entirely on our shoulder. Even as we think: Who will roll away the stone, we can be reminded of the angel. It must be possible not to be victims of the system and not to victimize others. It is possible to leave victimhood behind and to strive for sovereignty. It is possible to be with the people in resurrection and uprising.

The dawn has not come, as I quoted in the beginning. But to put it into the line of another song of hope: *The Dawn is Very Near to Hand*.

### Notes

1. Prabhat Patnaik, "Macro-Economic Policy and Income Distribution," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. XXXII, Nos. 20-21, May 17-24, 1997.
2. These trends have been extensively documented by Utsa Patnaik. See her articles: "Political Economy of State Intervention in Food Economy," *EPW* Vol. XXXII, Nos. 20-21, and "Export Oriented Agriculture and Food Security in Developing Countries and India," *EPW* Vol. XXXI, Nos. 35-37 Spl. No. 1996.
3. See the video documentation, "I Live in Behrampada," as well as Flavia Agnes's article in *Manushi*.
4. Carolyn Moser, "Gender Planning in the Third World, Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs," *World Development*, Vol. 17, No. 11, pp. 1799-1825.
5. Bina Agarwal, *Cold Hearth and Barren Slopes: The Wood-fuel Crisis in the Third World* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1981).



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