

---

November 2002

## Who Will Empower The Better Half? Social Dynamics in Operation

Debabrata Lahiri

Santanu Mitra

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lahiri, Debabrata and Mitra, Santanu (2002). Who Will Empower The Better Half? Social Dynamics in Operation. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 4(1), 43-65.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss1/4>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

## WHO WILL EMPOWER THE BETTER HALF? Social Dynamics in Operation<sup>1</sup>

By Debabrata Lahiri<sup>2</sup> and Santanu Mitra<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

In a game theoretic framework it can be argued that a gender sensitive institution is an offshoot of certain social conditions, which in most cases need to be acted upon by some anti-establishment catalytic agent. Given the fact that among about half of the population there is a need for such an institution, the main function of a catalytic agent is to engineer a conversion of that need into an active demand. In a society characterized by gender exploitation, catalytic agent can only come exogenously. For a sub-society it is easier to come across such an exogenous catalytic agent. The specific community conditions prevailing in such a sub-society may also prove to be congenial for a catalytic agent to act upon, or even to emerge from. In a larger canvas, however, as the exogenous force transforms into mere endogenous entity, and the society takes on the general character of male-dominance, the space for exogenous agency shrinks. A democratic Government, insofar as it represents the society, cannot be looked upon as a prospective catalytic agent for the country as a whole. There are, however, three possible escape routes from this closure. Firstly, external effects of women's empowerment in one sub-society on another may snowball. Secondly, the awareness campaign presently underway on a global scale is itself a potent exogenous catalytic agent. Thirdly, general development programs undertaken within a patriarchal order may unwittingly create conditions conducive to feminist struggle.

*Key words:* empowerment, catalytic agent, patriarchy.

### Introduction

Likening women to nature is a practice of ancient origin. Practice of exploiting women like nature is also as old. Moreover, both are global features of human behavior down the centuries. As Yugoslavian feminist Rada Ivekovic says, the globalization of patriarchy is the first of all globalizations (Menon 2001, p.10). It can be argued that all primitive virtues and vices can be traced to a common ancestry. As Samuel Bowles (1998, p.79) reminds us, 'commonality of different traits of humans spread across different cultures may be explained by the predominance of the influence of the common ancestral social institution which lasted for ninety percent of the span of the biological modern human existence.' Primitive women were physically weak and biologically constrained, which seems to explain their subjugation of a primitive nature. They were mostly confined inside the house, engaged in household chores and rearing children. In modern days, however, importance of brawn has been replaced by the importance of brain. Advances in medical science, like measures of birth control and family planning, have also

considerably lessened the biological dependence of women. Availability of modern household gadgets has considerably eased the work of housekeeping and has thereby given women more time of their own. Television, films and other forms of popular mass media have given them an exposure to the outside world and they have started perceiving a different type of well-being, a different type of life. Women have proved their abilities in diverse fields as successful professionals. Their profession is no longer restricted to nursing, and they have become successful doctors, architects, pilots and so on. Many have even joined the army and some have led nations. Still, male dominance refuses to give way. We may call it the inertia of patriarchy. But this inertia is long, much longer than the Newtonian physical one. Incidental power relations that put the male in the driver's seat thousands of years ago took firm roots in social institutions<sup>4</sup>, which resist newer power relations even in the face of gender equating changes in objective situations. Despite the proven abilities of women, in most LDCs a male child is still preferred to a female child, the female members of the family get to eat what is left for them by the male members and among the poorer section of the population, expenditure on a male child is thought to be a better investment than on a female child. Even though she may have to forgo formal school education, she is 'educated' in the art of good house keeping, sacrificing everything for her husband and sons, in short, in making herself a glorious domestic. Thus the culture of patriarchy prepares the female mind to calmly accept discrimination and injustice. But as the objective situation tries to pull away from the social institution, a tension develops between the two. On the one hand, technological advances create an enabling condition for women in a technical sense, and development of democratic ethos fuel women's aspirations, and on the other, the patriarchal social order, because of its very nature, has all the mechanisms to suppress such aspirations. Feminist struggle is an outcome of this tension. Our effort in this paper is to investigate the possibility of such an outcome in terms of the contributing factors. Analysis is conducted in a simple game theoretic framework. The focus will be on LDCs, not only because conditions of women are worse there, but also because these countries need more of women's agency as an instrument of development. Examples are drawn from India. Since we do not claim that India is a good representative case for the LDCs, inferences that we have drawn from the examples should be contextualized.

### **A FEW RELEVANT ISSUES**

At the outset let us clarify a few issues. This will help conceptualize the gender game and the related discussion that will ensue. Firstly, we share the view that women's empowerment is the acquisition by an average woman of the capability to actively participate in decision making activities of her family and community. Her empowerment is complete when she participates on equal terms with her male counterpart. Clearly, empowerment is a positive concept, and should not be confused with a rise in women's happiness, which is a normative concept. Women's happiness is a state of mind, conditioned as it is by historically determined social and cultural norms. Thus, a woman, subjugated and exploited in every possible way, may still remain happy (Sen 1985, p.8). Not only that, she may even profess her brand of happiness to her daughter or daughter-in-law. Our proposition is that human action is shaped not by the objective condition of life, but by subjective evaluation of that condition. Our emphasis on awareness as the prime mover of social change is grounded on this premise.

Secondly, empowerment is a process, namely acquisition of capability. Hence, lack of empowerment does not imply a state of absolute powerlessness. It merely implies that the process of acquisition of power is not at work. In every society women do have certain capabilities. Such capabilities might not have been won by women. They might have simply resulted from the need of self-perpetuation of the patriarchal order. It is

found in most societies that routine household decisions are mostly taken by women though the strategic decisions are taken care of by male members.

Thirdly, patriarchy by its very nature is an antithesis of women's empowerment. Family is a seat of cooperative conflict (Dreze & Sen 1993, p.11), but the institution of patriarchy ensures that the breakdown position weighs so heavily against women in intra-family distribution that they have to cooperate more and get less. Dominance is bolstered by marriage and property norms and manifests itself through division of labor into paid and unpaid work. Unpaid work assigned to women underestimates their contribution and in the process makes them diffident to demand their fair share. In the end, they find themselves overworked but undernourished (Young 1993, p.20, Dreze and Sen 1996, pp.140-174, Haddad and Kanbur 1990, pp.866-881). Even when marriage and property laws are matrilineal, decision-making process is largely patriarchal. No wonder, economic and political discrimination against women is prevalent even in these matrilineal societies (Ramachandran 1996, pp.277, 318). As a large body of literature on the impact of women's empowerment on social, economic and political development has evidenced, society can gain immensely by way of better eco-system, better nourished children, more effective human capital, and a world largely devoid of bloodshed and torture of war if women have a say in the society (Sudarshan 2001, p.23, Manchanda 2001, Sen 2000, pp.195-202, World Development Report 2000, pp.118-19). According to the Eco-Feminist school there is an apparent "closeness" between nature and women. Moreover, since women are directly dependent on the forests for their own survival and that of their children it is only natural that they would make more judicious use of the forest resources (Shiva 2001, p.200). Since deforestation makes women travel a longer distance to collect fuel-wood and water, it is no wonder that there are several instances when women resistance groups have stood up against private contractors and saved forests from the latter's onslaught. The Adwani forest in the Garhwal Himalayas was auctioned in October 1977, and the trees were to be felled in the first week of December that year. Bachhni Devi, wife of the local village headman, led a large group of women to the forest and persuaded the forest laborers to refrain from tree felling and demonstrated against it. They tied sacred threads around each tree and vowed to protect them. The contractors, who arrived with a strong contingent of police force, were forced to make a hasty retreat.

Surely, these benefits cut across genders. But these benefits lying as they are in distant future are often not well perceived. On the other hand, the loss of power and privilege to dominate is immediate and acutely felt by men. This seems to account for the indifference of patriarchy, if not cruelty, to women. This patriarchal indifference, however, is not the only stumbling block to women. Patriarchy has within it a mechanism of self-sustenance. If girls are less valuable and resources are scarce in the family (which they are in LDCs), parents would invest in boys and neglect girls. This will in turn make girls less valuable. In a society where a girl is meant only to be married off and dowry is the essence of marital engagement, educating girls only adds to the cost of marriage. The reason is that an educated bride can only be married off to an even more educated bridegroom, and the dowry rate is directly proportionate to the level of education of the bridegroom. Given this social matrix, the rational decision of parents is not to educate the female child (PROBE, p.23).

Women's empowerment, under such circumstances, has to be a result of adversarial public action.<sup>5</sup> It is true that some enabling conditions are created as byproducts of social, economic and technological changes. But these conditions by themselves do not change the lot of women. They, however, contribute by way of making the environment more congenial for adversarial public action by women. To take an example, disintegration of joint family system in many developing countries has created a pressure on the male member of the family to share the burden of household chores and to allow his wife to seek outside job for reason of economic security. While there are some evidences to show that the workforce participation rate for women has been rising over the years<sup>6</sup>, outside work does not by itself indicate empowerment for women. If women take up employment only to support their families, and continue to suffer the same unequal distribution of household activities and consumption, their employment can hardly be considered a step to empowerment. It may instead be taken to reflect their increasing distress. However, women's employment raises their bargaining position in the intra-family distribution of decision making. This in turn makes conditions conducive for women to take move for emancipation. Our contention is that the act of emancipation must come from women themselves. It is not uncommon to come across instances where domestic violence is perpetrated on women who are educated and earning for the family, precisely because of that. As is revealed by a multi-sectoral survey done by the International Clinical Epidemiology Network (Rajan 2001, p.10), over ninety percent of Indian women who had reported experiencing domestic violence were involved in paid work. The survey also found out that this phenomenon cuts across social and educational status. This result reflects a conflict arising out of intra-family balance of power getting disturbed by the fact of women's employment. Intensity of opposition to women's adversarial public action, however, depends on the nature of women's project. As long as their demands are confined to practical gender needs, and do not extend to strategic ones<sup>7</sup>, opposition can be expected to be of a lower intensity and of a more localized nature.

Fourthly, social institution of gender, with all the political, economic and cultural gender norms that it embodies, is constantly in a process of change. In this process there exists a part, which is evolutionary. This works very slowly through time, mainly through the economy and culture. There is another part, which may build on the first, but is essentially engineered, and hence works much faster. The impetus comes from a catalytic agent of change. This catalytic agent can be thought of as of two kinds. Firstly, it might have already established its supremacy, and is merely forcing the speed of its entrenchment, like the Talibans in Afghanistan some five years back. We may call it pro-establishment catalytic agent. If in a world of unequal gender relation, there exists a pro-establishment catalytic agent of change, it spells doom for women, and makes recovery a that much dangerous project, as experiences of Afghan women indicated. Fortunately, a second kind of catalytic agent can be thought of. We can christen it anti-establishment catalytic agent of change, whose role is to engineer an adversarial public action to bring in gender justice. The anti-establishment catalytic agent may be indigenous, or it may come from outside the system. Its essential function is to create among women a demand for change. It will of course give them leadership in the collective action that will ensue. Its continued presence is also sometimes necessary to sustain the project (Chandra 1988, p.55, Husain 2001, pp.181-8).<sup>8</sup>

Fifthly, there are many sub-societies in a country. Each of them has its very own domain of gender norms. Yet, it is not an island. It has its outside world in its own country as well as abroad. Changes in one such sub-society have external effects on others. The combined strength of these external effects and internal dynamics of each sub-society constitutes the matrix of domestic effects on a society. To this we have to add the effects from abroad.

### **CAGED WOMEN ARE IN EQUILIBRIUM**

Let us begin with a truism. The process of empowerment of women must start from a point of relative powerlessness. The fact of women's subordination to men for a long period of time lends some justification to the view that their relative powerlessness is a state of equilibrium. We can view this equilibrium as the outcome of a game.

#### ***The Gender Game***

We start by assuming a closed society with patriarchal norms. Since the social order is patriarchal, the movement for women's empowerment must come from women themselves. It is, therefore, a question of collective action by them, determinants of which form the object of enquiry of this paper. Women's collective action materializes only when the average woman, say Ms. R, finds it to her advantage to join the project of empowerment. It is far from obvious that she will always and everywhere find it advantageous to join the project.

Firstly, she may live in a social space steeped in patriarchal values, and she may have internalized those values so much so that she is unable to see advantage in empowerment, and is happy to live with whatever capability the patriarchy allows her to have. She may even frown on them who are sympathetic to feminist cause, so high is her sympathy with the establishment. Since she is a representative woman of the society, the majority of women in that society will think in a like manner, and the collective action will not materialize. This situation can be termed 'siege of patriarchy'.

Secondly, even if the situation is not as prohibitive as in the above case, and allows the average woman to believe that empowerment is not only desirable but also has a chance to result from women's collective action, she may not in the end join the project. Going one step further it may be claimed that she may not join even if she thinks that collective action will result and the mission will be successful, in spite of being in favor of empowerment. Her decision to join or abstain from joining a project of empowerment in such situations is predicated on a number of factors, and we have decided to use a game theoretic framework to capture these factors. This theoretical structure can also incorporate the case termed above as siege of patriarchy, where the outcome follows trivially.

The reason why game theory can be useful to capture the determinants of collective action is as follows. As has been already mentioned, collective action materializes only when a representative woman decides to act in favor of collective action. Her decision, however, depends on her perceived advantage of joining vis-à-vis that of not joining a project of empowerment. However, the outcome of her decision is not a certainty to her. If she joins, but is not joined by other women, she cannot expect empowerment to result. If, on the other hand, others join, she can expect with some probability that empowerment will result. Therefore, perceived relative advantage of

joining hinges on action by other women. But she is far from sure that she will be joined by others in her action of revolt in the event of her choosing that. This uncertainty is generated by a communication failure, which results not primarily because women do not have a forum where they can meet and exchange ideas, but mainly because they are born into the dominant discourse of patriarchy, which keeps them unsure of the very legitimacy of their demands. Since there exists this absence of communication between Ms. R and other women, but Ms. R's decision to join a project of empowerment depends on what other women do, it becomes a matter of strategic choice for Ms. R. This strategic aspect of her choice makes the theory of game a useful tool of analysis. A more formal presentation of the game can be found in the Appendix.

Let us now describe the game structure. The question of Ms. R joining a project of empowerment pits her against other women whose action is a matter of conjecture to her. This means that Ms. R is playing a game against 'all other women', say O. Though Ms. R is a representative woman in the context of this analysis, she does not, however, consider herself to be a representative, because of communication gap among women mentioned in the previous paragraph. This, in fact, is the very basis of her playing the game. Had she known that the every other woman would do exactly what she would under a given situation, the structure would not have been one of game.

The second point to note about this game structure is the totally mysterious nature of the other player O. This amorphous body of other women cannot make any strategy choice in reality, yet its existence as a player is real and potent in the mind of Ms. R. Whenever Ms. R contemplates an action, she has to consider the possible 'action' of this ubiquitous O<sup>9</sup>. In this game, Ms. R can either join the mission of empowerment (in which case she is playing the strategy 'cooperate' or 'C'), or defect from this mission (in which case she is playing D). She knows that O also has the same options of strategies. She, however, does not know, as is wont in game theory, the strategy O will actually choose. Instead, she assigns subjective probabilities to O's choosing C and D. She chooses C or D depending on which one gives her a higher expected pay-off. Since she is representative of the collective, her choice turns out to be the choice of every woman. If Ms. R chooses C, everyone else also chooses C by symmetry, and collective action materializes. Similar logic implies that Ms. R's choosing D presages that collective action will not be launched.

It is, therefore, necessary to explore the pay-offs of Ms. R under different situations. In doing so, the first step is to conceptualize the outcomes of the gender game. The second step is to conceptualize the pay-offs from these outcomes. Once the pay-offs under different outcomes are clearly delineated, the prediction about Ms. R's decision becomes possible, given her conjecture about O's choice of strategy. The matrix of pay-offs together with Ms. R's conjecture about O's action defines the game environment for Ms. R.

### ***Outcomes of the Gender Game***

The different strategy pairs for Ms. R and O are: (i) both Ms. R and O defect, i.e., (D, D) (ii) Ms. R cooperates, but O defects, i.e., (C, D), (iii) Ms. R defects, but O cooperates, i.e., (D, C), and (iv) Ms. R cooperates, O cooperates, i.e., (C, C). For each combination of strategies, there is an outcome of the game, which is defined from the perspective of Ms. R's problem of choice. Hence, an outcome is as is perceived by Ms. R

at the point of choice, and not what will actually obtain in the end. The outcomes of different strategy combinations can be enumerated as follows.

- (i) Outcome of (D, D): Since everyone defects, the outcome is ‘no empowerment with (D, D)’.
- (ii) Outcome of (C, D): Since O defects, Ms. R being only an average and insignificant woman in the milieu, cannot expect to single handedly salvage empowerment. The outcome, therefore, can be legitimately called ‘no empowerment with (C, D)’.
- (iii) Outcome of (D, C): If Ms. R thinks that O is a potent force, this strategy combination yields the outcome ‘empowerment with (D, C)’. However, if she is not certain that O is powerful enough to overcome the coercive force of patriarchy, then the outcome of the strategy pair is not ‘empowerment with (D, C)’, but a randomized outcome lying somewhere between ‘empowerment with (D, C)’ and ‘no empowerment with (D, C)’. A higher degree of optimism about O’s ability takes the randomized outcome closer to ‘empowerment with (D, C)’. On the other hand, a higher degree of pessimism takes the outcome closer to ‘no empowerment with (D, C)’. We can, therefore, think of two pure outcomes, namely, ‘empowerment with (D, C)’ and ‘no empowerment with (D, C)’, and innumerable mixed outcomes corresponding to different degrees of optimism attached to O’s power to cooperatively bring about empowerment. Outcome of (D, C) should, therefore, be viewed as a mixed outcome, which is a randomization between the two pure outcomes, ‘empowerment with (D, C)’ and ‘no empowerment with (D, C)’.
- (iv) Outcome of (C, C): By the same logic as in (iii) above, the outcome of (C, C) should be viewed as a mixed outcome, which is a randomization between the two pure outcomes, ‘empowerment with (C, C)’ and ‘no empowerment with (C, C)’.

Two points in the above description of outcomes need special mention. Firstly, Ms. R finds herself too insignificant to have any perceptible contribution to the common cause of empowerment. Accordingly, she perceives that her effort is neither necessary nor sufficient for empowerment. Secondly, empowerment is a public good characterized by non-rivalry and non-excludability of consumption. As a result, Ms. R’s non-participation cannot be a cause of her being denied the fruits of empowerment. These two factors have far-reaching implications for the possibility of collective action.

### ***Pay-offs from Outcomes***

Each outcome has a different implication for Ms. R. Evaluation of an outcome is a subjective process, and hence depends on the mindset of Ms. R. Given a certain mindset, Ms. R evaluates different outcomes in a determinate way. The value that Ms. R assigns to each outcome is her pay-off from that outcome. Pay-offs from the six pure outcomes mentioned in the previous subsection can be analytically decomposed as follows.

### ***Pay-offs from Pure Outcomes***

- (i) ‘Empowerment with (C, C)’: This is one of the two pure outcomes of the strategy combination (C, C). It obtains when Ms. R believes in the potency of O. Now, it can be legitimately argued that when Ms. R cooperates in a project of empowerment, the very

fact of participation manifests a commitment value, say 'c', she derives from participating in the project, irrespective of what this project yields. In another part of her mind there may be a place for patriarchal values she was born into and inculcated with in course of her upbringing. When she cooperates in a project of empowerment, she severs her association with patriarchal values, and that constitutes a psychological cost to her, say 'v'. Therefore, whenever Ms. R cooperates, (c-v) is a component of her pay-off, irrespective of whether empowerment is won or not. If on top of this, empowerment is won, some value flows from that to Ms. R. This is the value, say 'b', that Ms. R assigns to empowerment per se. The pay-off from the outcome (a) can thus be expressed as (b+c-v).

(ii) 'Empowerment with (D, C)': This is one of the two pure outcomes of the strategy combination (D, C). It obtains when Ms. R believes in the potency of O. Here, since Ms. R does not cooperate, she not only saves the loss of 'v', but also enjoys 'v', and hence the latter forms a positive component of her pay-off. She, however, gets alienated from O, which constitutes a psychological cost, say 'h', to her. Since empowerment is a public good characterized by non-exclusion, she cannot be denied the fruits of empowerment even if she does not cooperate. Hence, she will enjoy 'b'. The pay-off from the outcome (b) is thus (b+v-h).

(iii) 'No empowerment with (C, D)': This is the only pure outcome corresponding to the strategy combination (C, D). As explained in (i) above in this subsection, (c-v) constitutes a part of the pay-off. However, since the project of empowerment is unsuccessful, an explicit penalty imposed by the patriarchy is to be borne, and let Ms. R deems it as 'x'. Moreover, since Ms. R is a lone crusader, there is a psychological cost of alienation from O, say 'm', which may be called the implicit cost of a lone crusade. There is, however, some utility, say 'e', to be derived from whatever capability is granted by unaffected patriarchy. The pay-off from the outcome (c) is thus (e+c-v-x-m).

(iv) 'No empowerment with (D, D)': This is the only pure outcome corresponding to the strategy combination (D, D). Since nobody cooperates, there is no empowerment to be won, and no penalty to be suffered as well. Nor can there be any cost of alienation since in this case strategy of Ms. R matches with that of O. Pay-off in this situation is the perceived benefit from whatever capability is available under patriarchal bondage, and the sense of security from blindly following the dominant discourse of patriarchy. In terms of our variables, it is (e+v).

(v) 'No empowerment with (C, C)': This is another pure outcome associated with (C, C). While this outcome yields a value (c-v), which is always associated with the fact of Ms. R's cooperation, it fails to deliver 'b' since Ms. R does not believe that O is potent enough to overcome patriarchal resistance. Moreover, since the project of empowerment is expected to fall through and Ms. R has joined it, explicit cost of patriarchal sanction (x) must be borne by Ms. R. To this must be added the usual benefits from unaffected patriarchy, 'e'. Pay-off, therefore, comes to (e+c-v-x).

(vi) 'No empowerment with (D, C)': This is another pure outcome associated with (D, C). This obtains when Ms. R is certain that O will not be able to wrest any benefit from the patriarchy. Here Ms. R does not get 'b'. Instead, she gets 'e'. Since Ms. R has not joined other women in the struggle for empowerment she avoids the explicit patriarchal sanction, 'x', but in the bargain incurs the psychological cost of alienation from other

women, 'h'. She, however, enjoys upholding patriarchal values, 'v'. The pay-off is, therefore,  $(e+v-h)$ .

### ***Pay-offs from randomized outcomes***

As has been pointed out, outcome of a strategy pair involving O's cooperation is a mixed outcome, as empowerment is not a certainty in face of patriarchal resistance. Therefore, the corresponding pay-off is also a randomized value of pay-offs from corresponding pure outcomes. When Ms. R joins other women in a project of empowerment she has to take into account not only the benefits of empowerment that may accrue to her, but also the possible persecutions she may have to suffer as well as continuation of bondage in case the project fails. Similarly, when she defects from other women who are waging a struggle, she does not know which world she will live in after the struggle is over.

### **Ms. R's Belief About Other Women**

Ms. R weighs her two options – cooperation and defection – in terms of expected pay-off. While section 3.1.2 has built the pay-offs associated with different strategy pairs, Ms. R does not know which strategy pair will actually materialize, because she is never certain about the strategy O will end up choosing. Therefore, it is vital for her to form an idea about what O is likely to do. If she knows the likelihood of O's cooperation in addition to the pay-offs associated with different strategy pairs, she can be said to be in a position to weigh her two options and come to a decision about her choice.

If she believes that other women are bent on cooperating, we should expect her to focus on pay-offs corresponding to outcomes attached to others' united struggle. The corresponding prediction about her choice of strategy is much brighter than if she is pessimistic about others' cooperation, in which case she cannot harbor much expectation about empowerment, and hence her decision to defect is almost imminent.

### ***Ms. R's Decision and Equilibrium***

It is now possible to make some observations about the factors that influence Ms. R's choice of strategy. We can conceive of a society with patriarchal norms well entrenched in the psyche of the victims. If we take note of the fact that patriarchy is not merely a system of gender relation, but a well-entrenched culture, exploitative gender relation may not, after all, look that despicable to the victims. The culture with its preference changing norms (Basu 2000, p.72, Posner 1997, pp.365-9) may take such a heavy toll on them that they may even see their empowerment as a sin. Since to such an indoctrinated mind, patriarchy is the omnipotent system, any attempt to disturb it is only to be met with a heavy hand, and the isolation resulting from a lonely battle is extremely painful not only because of the fact of isolation, but also because of an extremely low level of commitment which is expected to characterize the battle. In comparison, psychological cost of isolation for not having cooperated with other women in the event of their revolting is not very high presumably because the idea of revolt is not at all attractive to an indoctrinated mind. Under such a scenario the pay-offs are so heavily tilted towards defection that Ms. R is sure to defect no matter what other women do. This is a trivial result when patriarchy holds the female mind in a state of siege.

The 'siege of patriarchy game' is of course an extreme example of patriarchy, where brainwashing is complete. Women here are so thoroughly steeped in the dominant discourse that they are unable to see merit in freedom (Lerner 1986, p.18, Sanday 1981, p.18). While such an extreme view on women's self-assessment is too harsh, this does bring into sharp relief the fact that traditional norms and customs, deeply rooted in people's mind, are among the hardest obstacles to development and change, even harder than the obstacles created by formal laws (North 1994, pp.359-68). The first step towards women's empowerment thus seems to be coming into existence awareness among women of their own bondage. This will create a desire for change, a demand for a new institution.

Awareness about her bondage is, however, not sufficient to drive Ms. R onto action of revolt. This is because Ms. R perceives that if other women cooperate and the mission is accomplished, then no one can be excluded from its benefits, empowerment being a public good. Similarly, if empowerment does not materialize, everybody has to share the resultant predicament. Moreover, she is also given to the perception that success or failure of others' cooperative move does not depend on her cooperation, because she is insignificant in the milieu. These two factors together constitute the basis of what is known in the parlance of economics as the problem of free riding. There are a number of factors, which make defection attractive to Ms. R. First, at the level of ethics there is a sense of security in siding with the dominant discourse of patriarchy. This sense of security is lost once she deviates from the beaten track. Secondly, there is the fear of persecution by patriarchy in case of an unsuccessful revolt, which can be avoided through defection. Thirdly, there is a psychological cost of isolation associated with struggle in case other women do not cooperate. However, the latter two incentives to defect are lower if other women are more likely to wage the battle, and the possibility of that battle being successful is also higher. There are two other factors that work to counteract the incentive to defect. First, Ms. R may be committed to the cause of emancipation. Secondly, sense of guilt associated with lone defection weighs on the mind of the defector. If these countervailing forces are strong enough Ms. R may end up choosing to fight. Anyone having some knowledge of the gruesome repression during the now disintegrated Taliban regime in Afghanistan will understand that the women involved with the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) were led to action by an extremely high commitment value.

But RAWA was a case of desperation. The abject debasement of the self made the game environment explosive. In most cases situations are less turbulent, and incentive to free ride dominates the mind. Since almost every woman tries to free ride like Ms. R, collective action does not materialize despite every woman wanting empowerment. Thus, like in the case of 'prisoners' dilemma', rational choice by each individual leads to collective irrationality. Ironically, collective action fails to materialize and women settle for a sub-optimal equilibrium by their own choice. This is not to claim that collective action would have ensured empowerment. This is just to claim that having not gone in for collective action, women have forgone any possibility of empowerment.

### **CATALYTIC AGENT OF CHANGE**

The equilibrium of bondage cannot be disturbed unless the pay-offs and belief about other women (i.e., the game environment) change for Ms. R. However repugnant

the game environment may seem to her, she is incapable of changing it. The game environment is set to her by the patriarchal social order. Discontinuous changes in that social order has the potential to make the game environment explosive, thereby disturbing the equilibrium of bondage within a short span of time. Obviously, the agent of such change cannot be found, unless accidentally and inadvertently as in the case of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, in the patriarchal order. The agent must come from an extra patriarchal space. The primary task of such an external agent is to elevate the game environment from a condition where free riding is lucrative to one where it is not. Let us call this agent of change a catalytic agent. The work of a catalytic agent is to undertake an awareness campaign among women so that they become aware of their bondage. As our analysis suggests, the campaign cannot stop there. It must instill in every woman a sense of commitment and responsibility. Presence of a catalytic agent can also considerably reduce the communication gap among women. As a result a situation can be created where Ms. R can expect that other women will come forward, and the project of empowerment will succeed.

What will then be the identity of a catalytic agent? Seen from the perspective of this game, any extra patriarchal agent Ms. R does not represent can be a catalytic agent. A catalytic agent does not play the game, but influences the game environment. Hence the name.

There are quite a few who would like to see the State in the role of a catalytic agent. Our contention is if the society is patriarchal, the State is no different. By its very construction the political institution of a country cannot be at odds with its social counterpart. Those who have innocent faith in democracy should be reminded that the Law under democracy reflects rather than changes the society. There may, however, be a disjuncture of the government with the State at times. We have seen in history instances of pro-active government trying to bring in sea change in social institution. But we must not delude ourselves into believing that the government is a benevolent despot or a neutral umpire. It is rather a self-interested player with a mission of its own (Altaf 1983, p.177), and there is no reason to believe that its mission is the mission of the underprivileged. As a matter of fact, those at the helm of affairs do quite frequently represent the dominant discourse, and are interested in maneuvering the system further in their favor. The gender-regressive Brahminical regime into which the Indian civilization relapsed during the Gupta era, or the more dramatic and cruel repression the Afghan women went through in recent times are reminders of atrocities a pro-establishment catalytic agent can unleash on women from a position of institutional power.

The above appears to give us a picture of closure. Since State is internal to the patriarchal social structure, the impetus of any positive change cannot come from it in any direct way. There are, however, three considerations that help dispel this specter of closure.

Firstly, since in our framework catalytic agent is an analytical category, it can be argued that education and economic development can act as potent catalytic agents by changing consciousness of women. One may at this point argue that educational and economic progress too cannot escape the long arms of patriarchy. A district-wise analysis of 2001 census of India reveals that while decline in child sex ratio is all-pervading in India, it is higher for 'front-ranking' states like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and part of Himachal Pradesh, and the decline is also higher for the urban areas than it is for the rural

ones. Those familiar with the field situation in these advanced provinces and cities have found that increased access to pre-natal sex detection techniques and abortion facilities has helped affluent, urban and 'educated' people to do away with female births (Agnihotri 2000, pp.302-3, Bose 2001, pp.3428-9). Economic and educational progress have evidently failed to make people more humane to unborn daughters.<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest that education and economic progress are of no consequence. This is just to highlight the difficulty of the task at hand when it comes to strategic gender needs. In this particular example, the culture of patriarchy is so firmly entrenched in the mind of even formally educated women that they fail to realize that saving a female fetus is a strategic gender need. However, as has been evidenced later on in this section, women's awareness about their practical gender needs is greatly facilitated by educational progress. Secondly, a nation is not a closed entity. Changes in the outside world impact on it through transmission of information and through the channel of diplomacy. These impacts have historically changed the game environment and have made it more congenial to women's collective action.

Thirdly, a nation is not also a monolith. A society has within it a number of sub-societies, each having its very own gender norms. While at the macro level the sway of patriarchy may be overarching, there can be considerable leeway within a sub-society. Moreover, since the sphere of outside with respect to a smaller (sub)society is correspondingly larger, it is now easier to conceive of an outside agent of change. A voluntary organization, which is a strong outside force with respect to a given sub-society, may turn out to be not only weak, but also internal with respect to a larger social sphere. However, the impact it creates on the game environment of a sub-society, may generate a force of its own, and snowball into other contiguous sub-societies through a chain of external effects.

Women in each sub-society play their own game defined by the specific game environment of that sub-society. Sub-societies vary in their patriarchal intensities. For example, matrilineal sub-societies can be expected to have a lower intensity of patriarchy than patrilineal sub-societies. Lower the intensity of patriarchy easier is the task of external anti-establishment catalytic agents to make inroads into the game environment. Sometimes, the degree of patriarchy may be so low that no catalytic agent is needed. This may explain why women in Kerala have been important participants in trade union movements, peasant and agricultural labor movements, movements for land reform and movements for food (Ramachandran 1996, pp.317-8). The same factor explains why Naga Mothers' Association could rise against insurgency, albeit in the informal space of politics, in the troubled North-eastern India. These are instances of adversarial collective action of women to empower themselves. As a matter of fact, actively participating in the public space is itself a constituent of empowerment (section 2, para 2).

However, most sub-societies are not as fortunate. For them, a catalytic agent of change is essential. It should be quite clear by now that the identity of catalytic agent can take on many forms, from an abstract one of education to concrete organizations or lone mavericks. Persons involved may even be men. The only requirement is that in order to be a catalytic agent, the latter must be de-linked from patriarchal values, and reasonably powerful to affect the pay-off matrix and the belief system of women. Let us now take note of a few cases of women's adversarial public action in India to highlight the key role played by anti-establishment catalytic agents.

Lalita Pulavarti (1998, p.137) has this to say about the role of Sumangali Seva Ashram, a voluntary organization working for women's empowerment in the Bangalore district in South India:

Many of the member Mahila Mandals had originally been set up by the government under the non-institutional welfare schemes. However, most of them were inactive when SSA entered the scene... By setting up the federation, SSA revived the Mahila Mandals, increased their membership, and re-energized them by providing the necessary leadership.

Evidently SSA was an outside force in each single Mahila Mandal area where local male resistance was not potent enough. The frustration betrayed by the sarcastic question put to a Mahila Mandal member by a local self-appointed leader "What has your Mahila Mandal done for our neighbourhood?" (Pulavarti 1998, pp.141-2) reflects this impotence before an autonomous outside force.

Vanangana, a women's group working in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh, not only organized women in effective self-help groups and broke their silence on the issue of chilling incidences of domestic violence, they were also successful beyond their own expectation in impressing upon many of the men, many of whom were themselves wife beaters, to do away with domestic violence. The relentless campaign through street plays followed by discussions in 30 villages generated a public debate and, as Vanangana organizers say, "the police and the bureaucracy will have to take notice" (Srivastava 1999, p.454).

Another interesting example can be found in the work of Disha, a voluntary organization, in Pather village of Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. It has been working in the village for several years particularly to mobilize women and it had set up a Mahila Jagriti Sangh or women's awakening committee in the village. This had a remarkable effect on the women who spearheaded a brave, uncompromising anti-liquor movement against heavy odds from the administration. Here also they could rally the male villagers around them, such was the moral force created by the movement (Dogra 1998, p.3185).

In Andhra Pradesh a series of struggles against government-backed sales of arrack took place during 1980s and early 1990s. While in Telengana region and in a few other districts the catalytic agent could be found in CPI (M-L) groups, in the coastal districts the spurt came mainly from the adult literacy program (Tharu and Niranjana 1994, p.109). It is interesting to note that the adult literacy program was not devised as a catalytic agent, but it had this unintended consequence. History, fortunately, cannot be entirely designed. Moreover, adult literacy programs are themselves results of catalytic agents of change on a broader social plane, and the source can be located, *inter alia*, in the relentless campaign by international development agencies and globalized communication.

Apart from the triggering and nurturing role of a catalytic agent, there is another feature common to almost all the above movements. It is their tendency to spread. The anti-arrack movement spread like wildfire and forced the Andhra- government to ban arrack in the entire state from 1 October, 1993 (Tharu and Niranjana 1994, p.109). After the success in Pather, Disha started getting request from neighboring villages to help them get rid of their liquor shops (Dogra 1998, p.3185). Similarly, activities of Sumangali Seva Ashram picked up rapidly later on as the success stories came pouring

into adjoining Mahila Mandals (Pulavarti 1998, p.138). SAWERA, acronym for Sustainable Agriculture and Women's Empowerment through Rural Approach, a new UNDP supported on-going sub-program in UP, is premised precisely on this external effect of women's movement in one region on another (Singh 2001, p.65). Needless to say, this has far-reaching consequences. This is the route the march to gender equality may successfully take even in a country of overarching patriarchy — a case of sub-nations overwhelming the nation. In the present era of Information Technology, pace of this development can only be expected to speed up.

There is, however, one caveat regarding the fruitfulness of a catalytic agent. The most vital factor behind the success of an empowerment project is sustained effort. The consonance of the interests of a catalytic agent and that of its target group of women is a crucial determinant of sustained effort. Husain (2001, pp.181-8) has shown in the context of common property resources that a catalytic agent may have some covert agenda which may benefit from its leading role in the community action, but once that benefit is exhausted, it will lose interest in the project, which will then have to fend for itself, most of the time unsuccessfully. It is pretty much the same thing in a project of women's empowerment. NGOs, funded and encouraged by the government and foreign agencies, are not all equally motivated. People having first-hand knowledge of ground realities have related to the authors that many of the so-called success stories of self-help women's groups have their disheartening inner stories. Often, helpless women are used by some NGOs to get access to institutional finance, which are then spent on hidden business. But this downright dishonesty is not the only caveat. It is not very uncommon to come across bored housewives of affluent husbands forming women's organizations of social work, interested more in socialite meetings and press conferences than actually helping the cause of women of another social and economic class. In the success stories that we have considered in this section, women in the voluntary organizations were dedicated to the cause of women's empowerment, coming as they did from backgrounds of similar victimization.

### **DOES NOT GOVERNMENT HAVE ANY ROLE?**

As argued in the last section, there is no reason why a government, or for that matter, the opposition on their own should be particularly sympathetic to women. The way the Indian legislators are dragging their feet on the bill on Women's Reservation in Indian Parliament is just one of many instances of patriarchy structured in administration and politics. Still, the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 provides for reservation for women of no less than one-third of total number of posts of members and chairpersons at all three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions. The National Nutritional Policy, National Policy on Education, National health Policy, National Population Policy — all have components for women aimed at their empowerment. The Ministry of Rural Development has components for women in all poverty alleviation programs.<sup>11</sup> All these are pointers to the constant pressure on the government, past or present, to sensitize itself to gender issues.

One source of pressure is in the cumulative external effects of women's empowerment in various sub-societies of the nation, as discussed in the previous section. We have noted there that Andhra government had to bow to the statewide anti-arrack

movement. This kind of victory changes the game environment dramatically for further movements in future.

There is a second source of pressure on the government – the pressure from the international community. It should be borne in mind that India is a signatory to the UN “Convention on Elimination of all forms of discriminations Against Women” (CEDAW) adopted on 18 December, 1979. International community can be a very strong catalytic agent, not only through its pressure on national governments, but also through its impact on the milieu through the media and other lightning forms of communication devices in an IT-enabled age.

### **A FEW CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper we tried to evolve an analytical framework to analyze the emergence or otherwise of women’s struggle. We do acknowledge that struggle for practical gender needs invites less resistance from the patriarchy than would a struggle for strategic gender needs. As a matter of fact, all the women’s movements described here dealt with only practical gender needs – more family income, less domestic violence, family peace and better health for everyone in the family. None of these threatens to destabilize status quo of power relation within a family. Radical left feminists consider this an unacceptable compromise that only help prolong the patriarchy. We beg to differ. We believe that small gains accumulate and prepare the ground for the final war. Revolution, so dear to the radicals, is not easily comprehensible to ordinary women. Radical thoughts involve abstract categories and distant foes. Women in the common walks of life are more concerned with drinking habit of their husbands, domestic violence, dowry related ignominy and torture, and other directly visible kinds of problems they have to put up with. They can grapple with radical concepts only after attaining some degree of empowerment and awareness. Our difference with the radical feminists is not with respect to the goal, but in sequencing the project to reach that goal.

Secondly, this paper does not have any policy prescription, precisely because it is our contention that there does not exist any policy-maker, which on its own is willing to follow that prescription. A government can only become gender-sensitive under public pressure. While situating government in such an unenviable position we do not, however, suggest that it has no positive role to play in the project of women’s emancipation. When a government makes a policy choice or legislators promulgate a law in favor of women, that by itself makes the game environment better for feminist struggle, firstly by changing the pay-offs, and secondly, by raising the subjective probability of others’ cooperation. But, certainly, the government does not hold the key.

The key is in the hands of catalytic agents committed to the cause of women, working in scattered pockets where they can be reckoned as powerful enough to influence the local level game environment for women. Their stance must be proactive rather than bureaucratic. They must reach out to the local community through informal interactions and participatory practices. The time is now as conducive to them as it has never been before.

This is a prescription no doubt, but certainly not directed towards policy makers.

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions. However, the authors remain responsible for any remaining errors

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Bidhannagar College, EB-2, Salt Lake, Kolkata 700064, India, e-mail: lahiri\_d@yahoo.co.in

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, Dept. of Science & Humanities, Jnan Chandra Ghosh Polytechnic, 7 Mayurbhanj Road, Kolkata 700023, India, e-mail: santanuprathama@vsnl.net.

<sup>4</sup> The history of such gendering can be traced back to ancient times. In India it dates back to the days of *puranas*, *smrities* and *samkhyas*. The Puranic literature grounds itself on a premise of hierarchy in favor of the masculine. The *Samkhya* sees *prakriti* (the female) as evolving for the sake of *purusha* (the male). In *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, sexuality of women turns out to be the most crucial criterion in classifying them into three categories - sexuality well guarded by males is the best category, while women seeking sexual pleasures belong to the mediocre category, and totally licentious and independent women belong to the worst category. The *Smrities*, however, did not leave anything to chances, and codified gender relations into strict, patriarchal gender norms (Natarajan, 2001). The unreciprocated, absolute, and primordial 'otherness' accorded to women is symbolized also in Genesis where 'Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called "a supernumerary bone" of Adam'. Women could thus be seen in relation to men as what St. Thomas pronounced "imperfect man", or what Aristotle considered lacking in qualities. (Beauvoir 1989, p.xxii)

<sup>5</sup> Dreze & Sen(1993) treated adversarial public action as a movement by one or more non-state people's organization against the establishment to win some public right. Here establishment trivially includes the state, but not necessarily the government. In our context, establishment is equated with patriarchy.

<sup>6</sup> Census of India 1991 and [genderstats.worldbank.org/SummaryGender.asp?WhichRpt=labor&Ctry=IND,India](http://genderstats.worldbank.org/SummaryGender.asp?WhichRpt=labor&Ctry=IND,India), (accessed : 2002, July 29)

<sup>7</sup> Caroline O.N. Moser (1989, pp.1799-1825) makes a distinction between strategic gender needs and practical gender needs. The former challenges the very structure of subordination in gender relation, while the latter accepts the structured subordination, but raises demands within that parameter.

<sup>8</sup> Chandra (1988, p.55) in a different context of Indian national movement, asserts that 'leaders have not only to respond to the people, not only to reflect mass consciousness, they have also to politically arouse, educate and guide it.' Husain (2001, pp.181-8) in a still different context of preservation of renewable resources, has shown the vital role played by catalytic agents in initiating and sustaining community effort.

<sup>9</sup> This should not be construed as an irrational supposition on her part. A person has an immediate surrounding. She sees her female relatives and neighbors taking actions and reacting to an individual woman's actions in a more or less homogenous manner. This practical experience conjures up a picture of O as she grows up.

<sup>10</sup> Here we find a scenario akin to the one of environmental degradation. Human myopia has resulted in mindless exploitation of nature. We may also envisage a day when all the women are 'missing'!

<sup>11</sup> In the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) women are assisted through Revolving fund, bank credit and subsidy, thus providing them opportunity for self-employment. The Jawahar gram Samriddhi Yojana has 30% of employment opportunities reserved for women. In Indira Awas Yojana houses are allotted in the name of women members of the households or in the joint names of husband and wife.

## APPENDIX

### Game Environment

In a textbook analysis of game, we concentrate on the players' strategies to find out which ones are the equilibrium combinations. But what often escapes us is that this finding out is a mere formality. The equilibrium/equilibria of the game was (were) already there, inscribed in the pay-off matrix, which enumerates the player's subjective evaluation of different outcomes of a game. Preparing a pay-off matrix is thus a crucial part of a game theoretic analysis. A pay-off matrix reflects a game environment. But there is more to a game environment than a pay-off matrix. In case a pay-off matrix admits more than one equilibrium, the game environment will privilege one particular equilibrium over others by its inclusion within itself a belief system to guide the players. Therefore, when we build a game, the main job is to construct a pay-off matrix and to describe a belief system, which will guide each player in her act of anticipating other player's strategies. That in effect will ensure a unique equilibrium for the game.

### The Gender Game

In this simultaneous-move game, Ms R can either cooperate with the mission of empowerment (in which case she is playing C), or defect from this mission (in which case she is playing D). She knows that O also has the same options of strategies. She, however, does not know, as is wont in game theory, the strategy O will actually choose. Instead, she assigns subjective probabilities  $p$  and  $q (=1-p)$  to O's choosing C and D respectively. She chooses C or D depending on which one gives her a higher expected pay-off. Since she is representative of the collective, her choice turns out to be the choice of everybody. If Ms R chooses C, everyone else also chooses C by symmetry, and collective action materializes. Similar logic implies that Ms R's choosing D presages that collective action will not be launched.

Let a von Neumann-Morgenstern utility function  $U(s_i, s_j)$  for  $i, j=1, 2$ , denote the pay-off to Ms. R corresponding to the strategy combination  $(s_i, s_j)$ , where  $s_i$  is the  $i^{\text{th}}$  strategy of Ms. R and  $s_j$  is the  $j^{\text{th}}$  strategy of O.

Now, let  $U(C, C) = p_s(b+c-v) + (1-p_s)(e+c-v-x)$ ;  $U(C, D) = e+c-v-x-m$ ;

$U(D, C) = p_s(b+v-h) + (1-p_s)(e+v-h)$ ;  $U(D, D) = e+v$ ; where

$p_s$ : subjective probability that empowerment will result from collective action;

b: pay-off (perceived benefit) from empowerment per se;  
 x: perceived explicit penalty imposed by the patriarchy on a crusader in the event of failure;  
 m: cost of alienation associated with a lonely revolt;  
 c: commitment value accruing to Ms R when she cooperates;  
 h: cost of alienation to a lone defector;  
 v: pay-off from holding on to patriarchal values; it is lost when Ms. R goes against them;  
 e: pay-off from whatever capability an average woman is entitled to in patriarchal bondage.

By construction, all the above variables are nonnegative. The pay-off matrix is given by table1, which by incorporating the variable p (and q) gives a complete description of the game environment.

O

|   |   |                                 |             |
|---|---|---------------------------------|-------------|
|   |   | C, p                            | D, q        |
| R | C | $p_s(b+c-v) + (1-p_s)(e+c-v-x)$ | $e+c-v-x-m$ |
|   | D | $p_s(b+v-h) + (1-p_s)(e+v-h)$   | $e+v$       |

Table1

The following terms used in the pay-off matrix can be explained as follows:

( b+c-v) : pay-off from (C, C) when the empowerment project is successful,

(e+c-v-x): pay-off from (C, C) when the empowerment project is defeated,

(e+c-v-x-m): pay-off from (C, D),

(b+v-h): pay-off from (D, C) when the empowerment project is successful,

(e+v-h): pay-off from (D, C) when the empowerment project is defeated.

In this generalized set-up, condition of a cooperative outcome is

Expected pay-off from cooperation > Expected pay-off from defection

$$\Rightarrow p. \{p_s(b+c-v)+(1-p_s)(e+c-v-x)\} + q.(e+c-v-x-m) > p. \{p_s(b+v-h)+(1-p_s)(e+v-h)\}$$

$$+q.(e + v)$$

$$\Rightarrow c + p.h - 2v - (1-p.p_s)x - (1-p).m > 0 \tag{1}$$

---

Here, the LHS denotes the expected net gain from cooperation, say  $G$ .

Thus, lack of empowerment does not automatically lead to feminist struggle. The latter crucially hinges on the fulfillment of inequality (1). Whenever this condition is not met, and in most cases it is not met, the equilibrium of the game perpetuates gender exploitation.

Evidently,  $c$ ,  $h$ ,  $p_s$ , and  $p$  (cluster-I variables) are positive influences on prospect of cooperation, since  $\partial G / \partial c, \partial G / \partial h, \partial G / \partial p_s, \partial G / \partial p > 0$  while  $v$ ,  $x$ , and  $m$  (cluster-II variables) are negative influences, as  $\partial G / \partial v, \partial G / \partial x, \partial G / \partial m < 0$ .

However, Max.  $G = c + h - 2v$ , and corresponding values of  $p$  and  $p_s$  are  $p^* = p_s^* = 1$ .

$p, p_s$

Therefore, necessary condition of collective action is

$$c + h - 2v > 0 \quad (2)$$

A few observations are now in order:

- (a) There is a web of relations among the variables mentioned above, and the relative values of these variables are exogenously set to Ms. R by the game environment. The very structuring of the game environment ensures that values of variables in the cluster  $(b, c, h, p, p_s)$  move in tandem and in opposite direction to that of the variables in the cluster  $(e, v, x, m)$ . For example, if the game environment reflects a lower degree of patriarchy, women can be expected to have a higher degree of awareness. This makes empowerment dear (high  $b$ ) and personal loss from lone defection costly (high  $h$ ). This also makes women despise a state of bondage (low  $e$ ), belittle the value of upholding patriarchal principles (low  $v$ ), and brave sanctions by patriarchy (high  $c$ , low  $x$  and  $m$ ). Again, this perceived evaluation of the objective situation by Ms. R instills a belief that there is a high chance that others will cooperate (high  $p$ ) and the mission will succeed with united effort (high  $p_s$ ). Since Ms. R is controlled by, and not a controller of, the game environment, fulfillment or otherwise of condition (2) is a *fait accompli* to her. If the game environment is such that the condition is not fulfilled, it is not within her power to take the initiative to change the game environment so that the condition is fulfilled. The initiative to change the game environment must come from an extra-patriarchal power Ms. R does not represent. We call that power a catalytic agent of change.

- (b) Neither the term 'b' nor the term 'e' appears in condition (1) or (2). This implies that neither the perceived benefit from empowerment nor the perception of current bondage determines the decision in favor or against joining a project of empowerment. The reason is that both the terms get cancelled out in the calculation of expected net benefit from cooperation. This occurs because Ms. R perceives that if others cooperate and the mission is accomplished, then no one can be excluded from its benefits, empowerment being a public good. Similarly, if empowerment does not materialize, everybody has to share the predicament of the relative lack of empowerment. Moreover, she is also given to the perception that success or failure of others' cooperative move does not depend on her cooperation, because she is insignificant in the milieu. These two perceptions together render both 'b' and 'e' inconsequential so far as the decision making of Ms. R is concerned.
- (c) The necessary condition (2) implies that  $(c+h-2v)$  should be larger than zero. It should be recalled that this condition was arrived at by assuming  $p = p_s = 1$ , which implies that we are considering only the case when Ms. R thinks that others will cooperate and that their mission will definitely be successful. Under such condition, the net gain from cooperation turns out to be  $(c+h-2v)$ . Negative value for this term means that there is a positive net gain from defecting when others are cooperating. Therefore, (C,C) cannot be an equilibrium. Thus, even if the pay-off from (C,C), i.e.,  $(b+c-v)$  in his case, is greater than the pay-off from (D,D), i.e.,  $(e+v)$ , the latter becomes an equilibrium, and the outcome (C,C) does not materialize. This is a classic case of prisoners' dilemma, and the collective irrationality stems from the existence of an incentive to defect, captured by a negative value of  $(c+h-2v)$ . However, if  $(b+c-v) < (e+v)$ , there is no perceived gain from empowerment, and the question of 'dilemma' does not arise.
- (d) One extreme case where there is absolutely no dilemma can be characterized by:  $(b+v-h) > (b+c-v)$ , i.e.,  $(c+h-2v) < 0$ ; and  $(e+v) > (e+c-v-x-m)$ . This is a situation where strategy D dominates strategy C, irrespective of values of 'p' and 'p<sub>s</sub>'. This is the 'siege of patriarchy'. Here values of variables in the cluster (v,x,m)

dominates the values in the cluster of variables (c,h). This is the expected result when  $e \gg b$ .

- (e) Since the necessary condition for collective action pertains to the most conducive case when both 'p' and 'p<sub>s</sub>' are unity, fulfillment of this condition does not ensure cooperative outcome, as is expected of any necessary condition which is not sufficient. Even if the necessary condition is fulfilled, i.e.,  $(c+h-2v) > 0$ , and Ms. R not only values empowerment, i.e.,  $(b+c-v) > (e+v)$ , but her pay-off from (C,C), i.e.,  $p_s(b+c-v) + (1-p_s)(e+c-v-x)$  is also higher than her pay-off from (D,D), i.e.,  $(e+v)$ , she may chose to defect if 'p' is too low, and a case of prisoners' dilemma arises even when the necessary condition of collective action is satisfied. Another case may arise when  $(c+h-2v) > 0$  and  $(b+c-v) > (e+v)$ , but  $p_s(b+c-v) + (1-p_s)(e+c-v-x) < (e+v)$ , and  $G < 0$ . This is also a case when collective action does not materialize even when Ms. R values empowerment, but this is not a case of prisoners' dilemma as pay-off from (C,C) is lower than the pay-off from (D,D) because of a very low value attached to 'p<sub>s</sub>'.

#### REFERENCES :

1. Agnihotri, Satish Balram. (2000), *Sex Ratio Patterns in the Indian Population; A fresh Exploration*, Sage Publications, New Delhi
2. Altaf, Mir A. (1983), *The Strategic Implications of Varying Environments, Aspects of Decision-making under Instability*, Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, processed, cited in The World Bank. (2000), *World Development Report 1999/2000: Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Oxford University Press, New York
3. Basu, Kaushik. (2000), *Prelude to Political Economy*, Oxford University Press, New York
4. Beauvoir, Simone De. (1989), *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, New York
5. Bose, Ashis. (2001), "Fighting Female Foeticide: Growing Greed and Shrinking Child Sex Ratio", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXVI, No.36, September 8-14, pp. 3427-29

6. Bowels, Samuel. (1998), "Endogenous Preferences: The Cultural Consequences of Markets and other Economic Institutions", *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol.XXXVI, March 1998, pp. 75-111
7. Chandra, Bipan. (1988), *Indian National Movement: The Long-Term Dynamics*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
8. Dogra, Bharat. (1998), "Pather: A Symbol of Anti-Liquor Movement", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXIII, No. 50, December 12-18, pp. 3185
9. Dreze, Jean., and Sen, Amartya. (1993), *Hunger and Public Action*, First Indian Edition, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India
10. Dreze, Jean., and Sen, Amartya. (1996), *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India
11. Haddad, L. and Kanbur, R. (1990), "How serious is the neglect of intra-household inequality?", *Economic Journal*, No.100, pp. 866-881
12. Husain, Zakir. (2001), *Attitudes and Institutions: Sustaining the Commons*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Calcutta University
13. Lerner, G. (1986), *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, New York, cited in Naiman, Joanne. (1996), "Left Feminism and the Return to Class", *Monthly Review*, Vol.48, No.2, June, pp.12-28
14. Manchanda, Rita. (2001), "Redefining and Feminising Security: Making a Difference in Security Policies", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XXXVI, No.43, October 27, Available: <http://www.epw.org.in> (Accessed: 2002, January12).
15. Menon, Ritu. (2001), "Band of Brothers", *The Times of India*, Kolkata, Vol.II, No. 341, November 8, 2001, p.10
16. Moser, Caroline O.N. (1989), "Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Needs", *World Development*, Vol.17, No.11, pp. 1799-1825
17. Natarajan, Kanchana. (2001), "Gendering of Early Indian Philosophy: A Study of Samkhyakarika", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April28, Available: <http://www.epw.org.in> (Accessed: 2002, January12).
18. Posner, R.A.(1997), "Social Norms and the Law: An Economic Approach", *American Economic Review*, No. 87, pp.365-9
19. Pulavarti, Lalita. (1998), Sumangali Seva Ashram:Contribution of a Local NGO in Urban Bangalore, in: Dantawala, M.L.Sethi, Harsh., and Visaria, Pravin.(eds) *Social change through voluntary action*, Sage Publications, New Delhi
20. Rajan, Anuradha. (2001), "Domestic Violence when Women become Bread-winners", *The Times of India*, Kolkata, Vol.II, No. 207, June 6, 2001, p. 10
21. Ramachandran, V.K., (1996), On Kerala's Development Achievements, in: Dreze, Jean. and Sen, Amartya. (eds) *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, OUP, New Delhi
22. Sanday, P. Reeves. (1981), *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, cited in Naiman, Joanne. (1996), "Left Feminism and the Return to Class", *Monthly Review*, Vol.48, No.2, June, pp.12-28

23. Sen, Amartya. (1986), *The Standard of Living*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Great Britain
24. Sen, Amartya. (2000), *Development As Freedom*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
25. Shiva, V. (2001), Environment for women's Empowerment, in: Kapur, Promilla. (ed) *Empowering The Indian Women*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India
26. Singh, Seema. (2001), "Human Development and Food Security", *Yojana*, Vol.45, August, pp. 61-66
27. Srivastava, Nisha. (1999), "Exposing Violence Against Women – A Campaign in Uttar Pradesh", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 8, February 20-26, pp. 453-4
28. Sudarshan, Ratna M. (2001), "The Economic Role", *Yojana*, Vol. 45, August, pp. 21-24
29. Tharu, Susie, and Niranjana, Tejaswini. (1994), "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, No. 3-4, March-April, pp. 93-117
30. The World Bank. (2001), *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*, Oxford University Press, New York
31. The PROBE Team in association with Centre for Development Economics. (1999), *Public Report on Basic Education in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
32. Young, Kate. (1993), *Planning Development with Women*, Macmillan, London