

GENDER AND GOVERNANCE: CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

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I. Introduction

The study of politics has been characterised by a divide between the many who study the state and the few who study social movements.¹ By contrast, the field of women's studies has been divided between the many who study popular culture, civil society and cultural politics, and the few who study the state. If scholars who study women's movements risk ignoring the ways the state shapes, promotes and circumscribes civil society activism, scholars who confine their attention to participation within the state risk construing politics so narrowly as to exclude important forms of civil society activism. The chasm between scholarship on the state and on social movements has prevented scholars from adequately exploring the vital effects of movements on institutions and of institutions on movements. In the process the contributions of activists to institutional change and the embeddedness of the state in civil society activism have been ignored.

With the growth of post modernism, feminist critiques of power and studies of women's resistance, many scholars have rejected monolithic conceptions of the state (Randall, 1998:186). They have explored the ways women "play the state" from within, as "femocrats", by acting subversively within dominant institutions and through their own individual creativity and resourcefulness.²

¹ *There are of course some exceptions to this rule. Two important examples are Charles Tilly (1998) and Marco Giugni, Douglas McAdams and Charles Tilly eds. (1999).*

² *For three very different examples of this general approach, see Hester Eisenstein (1996), Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (1998) and Kristin Bumiller (2000).*

A range of questions flow from this research. What are the conditions under which movements enter institutions without forsaking their oppositional character? How can we determine when movements have been co-opted? Are institutional gains necessarily movement losses? And what are the implications for democracy of movement activism both within and outside the state?

This paper explores the fuller, richer conception of governance that emerges when the implications of women's activism for women's participation in state institutions are considered.

II. Women's Activism

Within liberal democracies, women are most likely to use their power in transformative ways and avoid co-optation when they bring to the state a prior and ongoing connection to social movements that promote women's empowerment.³ One reason is that activism within social movements enables the forging of collective identities, consciousness raising and combativeness towards authorities that may continue to influence women's identities and interests within institutions.⁴ Conversely, a lack of connection to social movements greatly attenuates the transformative power women can exercise through institutions. The constraints that institutions impose upon women's exercise of power may fuel the activism of those who have already been politicised while further silencing those who have not.

Second, women's connection to movements provides a vital counter-weight to the pull of institutions towards moderation and

³This generalization does not extend to the Scandinavian countries, where the state has initiated and sustained far-reaching measures to achieve gender equality without pressure from movements.

⁴In this paper, social movements refer to collective struggles which attempt to bring about social transformation. This broad definition is adopted so that it can accommodate the enormous diversity among social movements in India. The activities of some, but not all, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are included in this definition of social movements. The term "women's movements" is used to refer to the range of movements which seek women's empowerment, including grass roots movements that are working for the poor or lower castes as well as for women, and urban feminist movements which focus primarily on issues of gender inequality.

centrism. A long standing tradition in the social sciences, with origins in Robert Michels, contends that parties of the Left and Right are de-radicalized by the exigencies of electoral politics in liberal democratic settings.⁵ However, political parties that have strong ties to movements may resist these centrifugal pressures. In India, for example, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has resisted the centrifugal pull of electoral politics as a result of its connection to the more militant social movement like Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.

However, feminist activism is only likely to have salutary consequences for women's institutional participation if several other conditions exist. First, since individuals are more susceptible to co-optation than groups, women are most apt to fruitfully work within the system, if they constitute a critical mass within the institutions they enter. Second, women who enter institutions must retain a connection to movements, or movements must place continuous pressure on institutions in order to keep them accountable to grass root constituencies. Third, the state, within which women become active, must be broadly sympathetic to the equity, social justice and democratic demands of movements.

The transformation of state systems from authoritarian to democratic, communist to capitalist and social democratic to neo-liberal, have had important implications for the success of women's movements in working within the state. Social democratic states have been most receptive to feminist agendas. It follows that the shift from social democracy to neo liberalism has often had detrimental consequences for feminist goals. As Sheila Rowbotham notes, "The attempt to democratise relations between the state and society which was a theme of the 1970s has been submerged by the attempt to hang on to what exists. If feminists in the early 1970s were inclined to complain of too much state intervention, by the mid 1990s they were likely to be protesting that there was too little". (Rowbotham, 1996:5).

Fourth, even when these conditions exist, women's movements are still more likely to influence institutions at the local and provincial level than at the national level, where they will be more vulnerable to shifting political/partisan alignments.

⁵See Robert Michels (1995).

Finally, while all movements may provide women access to institutional power, they are not all equally likely to contribute to women's empowerment. Clearly, the character of movements shapes and delimits the nature of women's institutional participation. Nationalist movements encourage women's activism in nationalist causes, which may claim priority over feminist ones. Class and caste based movements may gain the support of the most marginalized women, but subordinate gender to other social identities. Thus, while movements of all kinds are likely to encourage women's activism, tensions around the relationship between gender and nationalist, class, caste, and ideological identifications that exist within movements are likely to persist within institutions.

Women who are active in ethnic and religious movements often uphold and defend the family because it provides a bulwark against a repressive state (Jeffery and Basu, 1998). Women, who the Indian state claimed were abducted from India to Pakistan during Partition, sought to free themselves from the state to return to families of their own making (Menon, 1998). The Mothers' Front in Sri Lanka sought to recreate shattered families amidst the civil war and consistently appealed to maternal imagery to achieve peace (De Alwis, 1998). Women of the Hindutva movement in India, during its most militant phases in the late 80s and early 90s, sought to restore Hindu men to positions of dominance in the family and society.⁶

Women's activism in ethnic and religious nationalism is frequently inspired by notions of sexual asymmetry rather than sexual equality. Indeed women sometimes employ the very standards of proper conduct to which they are expected to conform to judge other groups and institutions. Thus, for example, where feminists have questioned the social conventions that demand self-sacrifice from women, Hindu women activists demanded self sacrifice of Hindu men. Where feminists have criticized notions of honour and shame for the double standards they subject women to, the Mothers' Front employed notions of honour and shame to question state authority.

⁶See Amrita Basu (1998) and Tanika Sarkar (1998).

Women's activism within religious movements often displays an affirmation of their traditional gendered identities.⁷ For example, the Muslim Sisters in Egypt justify their activism by reference to Islamic principles. Aisha Abd al-Rahman, a well known Koranic scholar, argues that "the right path is the one that combines modesty, responsibility and integration into public life with the Koranic and naturally enjoined distinctions between the sexes" (Hoffman-Ladd, 1987:37). Muslim women were active in the "turban movement" in Turkey, which opposed the legal prohibition of the Islamic head scarf for women students. This movement played a vital role in radicalising the Islamic cause (Toprak, 1994:301). A striking feature of women's participation in the activities of the BJP women's organization is women's re-enactment of conventional sex roles in the public arena.

If women's activism within movements has a significant impact on institutions, what implications does it have for movements? The de-radicalization of social movements and the co-optation of activists is one important possibility. An important debate among social movement scholars is whether working within the state undermines or enhances women's power. The dominant tendency of social movement scholars in the past was captured by Frances Piven's and Richard Cloward's argument that states undermine protest when they concede to its demands, thereby reducing the longevity and radicalism of social movements. (Piven and Cloward,1979).

However, other scholars have argued that far from being domesticated, social movements have developed the capacity to circumvent state regulation. David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow speak of a "social movement society" in which more diverse constituencies employ protest tactics to make a wider range of claims than before at the same time that social movements are becoming professionalized and institutionalised (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998:4). Writing of women's participation within dominant institutions, Mary Katzenstein argues that women's activism has

There are many parallels between Hindu women's activism in "communal" mobilization and the activities of women in the Nazi movement in Germany. See Valentine M. Moghadam (1994), Claudia Koonz (1987), and Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman and Marion Kaplan (1984). There are also some striking parallels with women's participation in the Ku Klux Klan (see Blee, 1991) and right wing women in the U.S. (see Klatch, 1987).

not disappeared but moved into institutional spaces. (Katzenstein, 1998).

The concept of gendered institutions calls for attention to a constellation of institutional traits rather than simply the people who occupy them.⁸ An analysis of gender includes an account of men and masculinity as well as women and femininity. Normative beliefs are often gendered as are institutions. Thus it is impossible to understand women's access or lack of access to power without exploring the gendering of ideologies, states and power itself.

In general, the more powerful the institution, the less likely that women and women's interests will be well represented. Women have been disadvantaged in state institutions which have traditionally been associated with men and masculinity. It follows that the fewer women within dominant institutions, the more apt they are to behave like men when they get there. Nicos Poulantzas' argument that the more the working classes come to inhabit particular state agencies, the more power gravitates away from these agencies and the weaker they become, applies well to the gendering of institutions (Poulantzas, 1978). Each location of power (local, national and global) is differently gendered and thus calls for different strategies of change.

A subsidiary question that this section explores concerns the impact of women's participation in both movements and institutions on democratic processes. Although some scholars dismiss the importance of social movements when strong enough institutional channels exist, I contend that women's activism in social movements (including but not limited to feminist movements) is a vital ingredient of the strength and vitality of democracy. Women's movement activism seeks greater women's participation in governing institutions and women's increased access to those resources which are necessary to bringing about gender equality. Both objectives are vital to democratic processes.

However activists need not join institutions in order to

⁸*How an institution acquires a gendered character is a complicated question. Institutions are shaped by the character of the groups that inhabit them. The longer either men or women inhabit an institution, the smaller the proportion of people of the opposite sex, the more that institution is likely to reflect the values of the dominant group. The gendered character of institutions is also determined by their distributional policies which may have unequal consequences for women and men.*

influence them or society at large. Nor need they achieve their goals to be successful. Even unsuccessful movements influence discourses in ways that profoundly influence civil society and perhaps the state (Katzenstein,1987:16). As Carole Pateman has argued, participation in social movements also enhances participants' capacities as citizens (Pateman, 1970). Whatever the particular effects of movement on institutional participation, women's governance is a product of the conjoined and interacting influences of movements and institutions.

III. The Power of Movements

In many colonial contexts, nationalist movements entailed extensive women's mobilization followed by substantial institutional gains. In India, for example, the aftermath of Independence witnessed the drafting of a Constitution which ostensibly protected women from discrimination and directed the state to work towards gender equality. Women gained the right to vote without much of a struggle and became active in large numbers in public and professional life. Most strikingly, the number of South Asian women in women leadership positions —Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Srimavo Bandranaike, Khaleeda Zia and Hasina Wajed— is to a significant extent the result of women's nationalism.⁹

Women's participation in nationalist struggles continues to involve them in policy making in recently formed states. Following their active involvement in the Namibian independence struggle, the Namibian state drafted a constitution that forbids sex discrimination, authorizes affirmative action for women and denies recognition to customary law when it violates the Constitution. The South African Constitution similarly provides equal rights for women and prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Palestinian women have drafted a bill of rights and sought legislation protecting women from family violence. Similarly, women have achieved access to institutional power in

⁹However, this is not to deny that all of these women have been constrained by the conditions associated with their assumption of power, including their dynastic connection to male leaders, and the rules that govern the conduct of politics.

many of the countries in which they were active in democracy movements against authoritarian states.

Women's large scale involvement in democracy movements has yielded similar gains. Conversely, where women have been politically inactive during transitions, their situation has not improved with the creation of democratic systems. The contrasts between Latin America and Eastern Europe are instructive. Whereas women were active in a range of social movements against authoritarianism in Latin America and achieved some significant gains in its aftermath, women's movements were relatively inactive in the transition from communism to democracy in Eastern Europe and actually suffered reversals in post communist states.

Latin America

There are a number of explanations for the emergence of strong social movements in which women played leading roles against authoritarianism in Latin America in the 1980s. Poor urban women became active in protesting the extreme hardship they faced as a result of the debt crisis exacerbated by adjustment policies. Defence and preservation of embattled families constituted a key feature of their participation. More broadly, women actively resisted state infringement on their capacity to play responsible roles as mothers and wives. The struggles of the mothers of the disappeared best exemplify these concerns. Georgia Waylen comments: Clearly the attempts by military governments to abolish "politics" and repress such conventional political activities of the public sphere as political parties and trade unions moved the locus of much political activity from an institutional setting to community based action. This actually gave those women's activities occurring outside the traditional arena of politics a greater prominence and significance.(Waylen, 1994:47).

Thus while authoritarianism closed down certain forms of democratic participation, it elicited other ways of "doing politics" among groups which had previously been inactive. In a number of countries the Catholic Church and Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBs) supported women's struggles.

The most significant period of women's mobilization occurred

during the last stages of authoritarian rule and the early phases of democratic transition. Since women's groups played a vital role in encouraging the military to negotiate with civilian elites, political parties and newly elected governments felt indebted to women. In Argentina, Raul Alfonsin's 1983 election platform appealed to the Madres and criticized machismo. All political parties, particularly the Opposition in Brazil, adopted policies expected to appeal to women voters during the long period of transition. In Chile and Argentina, there were wide ranging discussions about altering discriminatory civil codes, such as the one which limits a woman's control over her children.

The Brazilian women's movement transformed the struggle against dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s by extending its focus from civil rights to include economic, reproductive and sexual rights. Feminists pushed the democracy movement beyond its concern with state violence to curbing domestic violence. They made opposition to discrimination of all kinds a key feature of the democratic struggle. One of the leaders of the Brazilian women's movement noted,

"Besides direct access to institutional power, one of the most powerful strategies used by women to influence the political sphere has been, and still is, changing the political agenda...in Brazil from the 70s till the 80s that was the main strategy of the women's movement...[to] give visibility to issues that had been considered non-existent, unimportant or even ridiculous by the establishment and forcing (them) into political platforms and executive organs ... in the 80s we have gone through a time of forging public policies." (Pitangray, 1995).

The women's movement in Brazil developed a dual strategy in the early 1980s. Some worked within the system, particularly with the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB party) and a government sponsored council in Sao Paolo. Others remained active in the community from where they pressured the state to be responsive to a grass roots constituency. As a result of this two pronged strategy, feminists had a subversive impact on some state policies. For example, in 1983, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, the federal government formulated a comprehensive population control program. The Council on Women helped the women's movement gain access to the policy

implementation process and worked with the Ministry of Health to promote a safe, accessible, non coercive family planning policy. Sonia Alvarez argues that “[..] in supervising the implementation of family planning policy at the state level, the original council accomplished what the autonomous women’s movement could never have accomplished on its own due to its position outside the State power structure. (Alvarez, 1994: 40)

The Council, in collaboration with the women’s movement, persuaded the state to create a police precinct staffed entirely by specially trained female officers to prevent rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence. This ground breaking initiative was unique in Brazil and indeed anywhere else in the world at the time. Moreover with the installation of eleven opposition led state governments in March 1983, women secured positions within local level government structures throughout the country. When the civilian government headed by Jose Sarney took office in 1985, a National Council on women’s rights was created within the Ministry of Justice and women with long standing ties to Brazilian feminist groups and other movement organizations secured a majority of seats in it.

From the mid to the late 80s, the National Council for the Rights of Women (CNDM) and some state and municipal councils worked closely with the women’s movement, providing direct and indirect subsidies to independent women’s groups, coordinating national campaigns on women’s issues and providing independent women’s groups with access to state policy makers. Through intensive lobbying, petitions and demonstrations at the Congress, some key feminist concerns made their way into the new Constitution. It provides for formal equality between the sexes and extends new social rights and benefits to women, including increased maternity and paternity leaves, workers’ rights to women workers and domestic workers, and extensive childcare facilities. The collaboration between feminists active within and outside the state was vital to these achievements.

However, by the late 1980s, many women’s institutions fell prey to partisan manipulation and most lost their political clout. The PMDB administration that came to power in 1986 greatly reduced the Council’s resources and staff and ability to formulate policy. Women’s institutional ties to the executive branch proved especially

vulnerable to shifting partisan/political alignments and their influence and efficacy in the state apparatus declined.

In Chile, as in Brazil, women's vital roles in the last phases of the dictatorship made them a key force in its aftermath. Party women and feminists formed the National Coalition of Women for Democracy in Chile in 1988 to mobilize women to oppose the Pinochet dictatorship and influence election outcome the following year. As a result of its efforts, all national political parties took a stand on women's rights. Once Alwyn was elected to power, he presented parliament with legislation that would create the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM), a national government body of feminists from the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties that would oversee government policies concerning women.

By 1992, SERNAM had established offices in all twelve regions of Chile, published numerous documents and pamphlets, established formal links with other government agencies, facilitated proposals for legal reform, established a program for female heads of households, incorporated women into small business, established a network of women's information centres and created a national commission on domestic violence. The cost of its effectiveness in undertaking these initiatives was that it replaced the women's movement as the key interlocutor with the state on women's issues.

Central and Eastern Europe

Women's movements were largely absent during transition period in Central and Eastern Europe. Nor were they very active in democracy and human rights movements. Women played a relatively small role in the opposition movements that emerged in the late '80s, like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Solidarity in Poland. Although they constituted about half of Solidarity's rank-and-file members, they made up only 7 per cent of the delegates attending the first Solidarity conference in 1981. None of these women organized as feminists around gender issues. The few exceptional feminist organizations in the former Soviet Union were forced to disband.

One of the most important explanations for the absence of

women's movements in democracy struggles can be found in the legacies of communism. Both, for ideological and practical reasons, communists made women's labour force participation almost obligatory. In 1980, women in Central and Eastern Europe constituted about 50 per cent of the workforce, mainly in low-paid, low-status, gender-segregated occupations. Many women came to see the family as a haven from the demands of the marketplace and the state and, in the absence of a full fledged civil society, as a place of autonomy and creativity (Waylen, 1994). While the suppression of civil society constrained the emergence of women's movements, the fact that the rights women enjoyed were handed down to them rather than won through struggle meant that women tended to take them for granted.

Overall, the position of women in politics, society and the economy has declined since the collapse of communism. The elimination of quota systems has led to a huge decline in the number of women elected to representative bodies. In the first set of elections the decline was of about 13 per cent, moving from an average of 33 to about 10 per cent for the region as a whole. Subsequently, there have been even greater declines. In the mid 1990s, women constituted only 3.5 per cent of elected representatives in Romania, 8.6 per cent in Czechoslovakia, 7 per cent in Hungary, and 13.5 per cent in Poland. On the whole, men rather than women have moved from the dissident opposition groups into high-ranking offices in the public sphere in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Slovenia. Indeed, Peggy Watson argues that Eastern Europe is witnessing the rise of masculinism in the public sphere and civil society (Watson, 1996: 91). Political parties have not courted women voters by advocating policies to promote their gender interests. In fact, the opposite is true. Many male candidates in the 1989 Soviet elections campaigned for "a return of women to their maternal duties." The same has been true in Eastern Europe.

A comparison

There are two striking differences in the character of women's activism in Latin America and Eastern Europe during periods of

democratic transition. The first has to do with the very different roles of civil society based organizations in the two regions. State elites initiated opposition to the communist regimes of the Soviet bloc. Foreshadowing an economic and social crisis, Gorbachev launched perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union and put pressure on the Eastern bloc as a whole to liberalize. The state hoped that addressing "the woman question" would help solve social problems like rising rates of alcoholism, divorce, and abortion. The state's hegemonic role most likely discouraged women's groups from organizing independently. By contrast, civil society organizations initiated opposition to Latin American dictatorships. State's ban on political parties, trade unions and other such organizations encouraged women to organize informal networks which could defy state surveillance and repression. The fact that movements in which women were active played a significant role in the destruction of the old regimes in Latin America but not in Eastern Europe had important implications for the place of women's groups in the post transition period.

In Latin America, feminism became linked to human rights and was seen as a home grown product whereas in Eastern Europe it was seen as alien. Secondly, whereas feminism was associated with a discredited old order in Eastern Europe, it was considered integral to democratisation in Latin America. Relatedly, feminism was understood in very different ways in these two contexts.

Writing on Eastern Europe, Maxine Molyneux argues: "Ironically it seemed that socialist state policy on women, which had not achieved their emancipation, succeeded instead in alienating the population from any serious commitment to a feminist programme." (Molyneux, 1996: 232). The language of feminism was tainted by its association with the old order. The search for new values to replace those associated with the discredited communist system led to a resurgence of "old values" of family, God and nationalism. The Roman Catholic church experienced a remarkable resurgence and abortion rights have come under attack, particularly in Poland, Hungary and Germany. The small group of active Russian feminists must find new language not tainted by the old order. This association of feminism with the old order, combined with state control over civil society, inhibited the growth of significant feminist movements and large-scale

women's movements organizing around practical gender interests.

By contrast in Latin America, women became associated with a wide range of movements, including human rights struggles, consumer movements, and women's movements. Many of these movements privileged women's identities as mothers while politicising notions of the responsibilities that accrued to mothers. It was much harder for post transition regimes to caricature and repudiate feminism.

However least we idealize the fruits of women's struggles in Latin America by setting them against the bleaker experiences of women in Eastern Europe, women's influence over policy processes steadily declined over time. It was greatest in the immediate aftermath of democratic transitions but gradually narrowed over time. As women's involvement in social movements declined, so did their capacity to influence the state. Furthermore, the reinstatement of political rights has not been accompanied by an expansion of women's economic and social rights. More broadly, as noted earlier, feminists can only influence state policy if the state is broadly sympathetic to their demands. With the unleashing of market forces and a diminished role for the state in both Latin America and Eastern Europe, poor women suffered reversals and diminished opportunities for redress.

IV. The Institutionalisation of Activism

Past two decades have witnessed a confluence of two trends in many democracies. On the one hand, the state's attempts to foster closer ties to social movements and non-governmental organizations, and on the other hand, the attempt by some women's movement activists to exercise power within the state.

Women's movements in their early years voiced serious misgivings about working with the state, political parties and other major institutions for fear that this would result in their dependence, co-optation and absorption. Indeed, one of the defining features of feminist movements was their insistence on their organizational and to some extent ideological autonomy from male dominated institutions. While these misgivings have by no means disappeared, women's movements have, today, increasingly come to work with

parties, states and institutions to advance or defend women's interests. Moreover, protest has increasingly been leaving the streets and entering institutions.

The United States best exemplifies the trend towards the institutionalisation of feminism and the emergence of a powerful feminist establishment in Washington DC, comprising legal groups, political action committees and research institutes. While feminists have always engaged in associational politics, Mary Katzenstein argues that

[...] What is clearly new is its development inside male dominant organizational environments—the media, law enforcement, the churches, universities, business, prisons, unions and engineering, to name just a few of these institutional locales. In these new environments, feminists have generated debates about hiring and promotion, rape and harassment, child care and workplace benefits (including coverage for lesbian and gay partners); they have sometimes engaged in intense contestation over how the quality of work and fairness and worth of what men and women do should be assessed." (Katzenstein, p. 12).

What explains this shift? And do the worries that feminists expressed now seem unwarranted or legitimised? First, with the demise of both right wing authoritarian and left wing socialist regimes and attempts to create democratic systems, women's movements have increasingly adopted liberal goals of achieving civil and political equality. Tensions between liberal, radical and socialist feminisms seem to be a thing of the past and liberal feminism has become hegemonic. The spread of certain universalist ideas, like women's rights and international human rights, has also brought about a closer collaboration between movements and institutions.

In France, for example, the dominant segment of the women's movement was distrustful of the state and wanted to have no relationship with it. By the 1980s, however, radical groups ceased to provide leadership to the movement and other feminist groups embraced a closer relationship with the state. Their main efforts centred on demanding the passage of legislation on sexual harassment and the protection of contraception and abortion rights. As a result of their efforts, France became the first country in the European Union to pass legislation codifying and punishing sexual

harassment. In 1992, the Penal Code was revised to make sexual harassment as a punishable crime (Jenson, 1996:101-102).

Second, globalization has had some important, largely positive implications for women's roles in governance. A number of foundations in the US and Western Europe have made women's empowerment one of their major goals and have sought ways to institutionalise women's movements.

Amidst globalization there has been a shift in many places from states seeing women's movements as a threat to seeing them as a resource. The Indian state, for example, viewed social movements as a threat and treated them as such in the early 1980s. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi set up Kudal commission with the clear intention of closing down a large number of NGOs and restricting the activities of others. After her assassination, her son Rajiv Gandhi took office and sought to cultivate a much better relationship with NGOs. The seventh five year plan (1985-90) identified the voluntary sector as a crucial part of the development process and allotted it five times the amount of money it had received earlier. Where his mother had seen social movements and NGOs as a threat, Rajiv Gandhi saw them as aiding development work, strengthening his image among the rural poor and their middle class supporters, and attracting Western funders. Although Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated before he could implement this recommendation, the state has since sought close ties with NGOs and social movements.

Third, since women's movements have become stronger, better organized and more skilled, state agencies are increasingly relying on them to develop and implement policies and programs pertaining to women. In general, women's organizations have become much more actively involved than in the past in drafting constitutions, budgets, and legislation in collaboration with party and elected officials. The reason for state support is primarily that states need movements at the grass roots level, to help them reach the poor.

Some women's movements which were previously committed to autonomy have come to see the value of working with the state. Historically, the Indian feminist movement was fiercely committed to retaining its autonomy from political parties and the state, to prevent the lure of resources, influence and power from blunting its radicalism. However while retaining its autonomy from political

parties—barring the collaboration of some groups with the communist parties—it stayed out of the domain of electoral politics.

The grass roots movements with which women were closely associated were those of the poorest and most marginal groups (tribals, landless poor, slum dwellers, subsistence agriculturalists) which generally had little electoral clout and no electoral aspirations.¹⁰ The urban feminist movement was primarily drawn to non-electoral issues like violence against women. VP Singh resigned from Congress and formed the Jan Morcha (Peoples' Front), an avowedly "non political" movement which brought new groups into politics and helped bring the National Front to power in 1989. Compared to the students' movement, farmers' movement and backward caste movement, the women's movement was less closely associated with opposition parties and less committed to regime change. It was during this period that the women's movement began to explore new ways of exerting its influence over the state. Today, a broad cross section of Indian activists have embraced the strategy of working more closely with the state. Many activists have expressed frustration that the protest tactics they had pursued for so long had not yielded better results.

Women's movements have created important political constituencies. They have often played key roles in determining whether or not candidates who will advance women's interests will be elected. In the Philippines, for example, support from the women's movement was critical to Corazon Aquino's election. While she was president, the number and influence of women in public office increased significantly. Women's groups took advantage of new democratic processes to push for reforms in public policy such as the Philippines Development Plan for Women. Similarly in the U.S., Bill Clinton's stance on abortion, education and health care reform won him women's electoral support in his first successful bid for the presidency in 1992. Clinton in turn appointed several women to key political posts and more women were elected to Congress in 1992 than in any previous election. But as Aquino and Clinton bowed to pressures from conservative political and religious groups, their commitment to reproductive rights and other women's issues declined.

¹⁰One important exception to this generalization is the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a caste based party of dalits (scheduled castes) which appeals to the landless poor.

On the one hand, a long standing bias in feminist circles against women's movements that are closely associated with state institutions has prevented feminists from recognizing some of the benefits that can come of working with the state. For example, one of the major problems that has confronted the autonomous women's movement in India has been of extending its reach to the rural poor. The All China Women's Federation which is affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party and the state has not confronted this problem. With 98,000 full time cadres on its pay roll, it commands the resources, personnel and authority to have established a strong base among rural women.

On the other hand there are innumerable examples of state sponsored initiatives co-opting women's movements in virtually every political setting. In Russia and Eastern Europe, extensive legislation designed to improve the position of women thwarted possibilities for women to organize independently around their own interests. Most women were so alienated from the Soviet Women's Committee, the official women's organization, during the communist period, that they were unresponsive to feminist appeals even after the demise of communism. Authoritarian states in Nigeria and Kenya have undermined feminist movements by taking over successful women's programs, and making them dependent on state funding while reorienting them from their, more radical goals.

Quite frequently, the advances that women achieve as a result of a close relationship with the state are double edged. In Mexico, for example, the government headed by president Salinas de Gortari that was elected to power in 1988, introduced a number of programs that were designed to assuage opposition to the previous regime's austerity programs. One of these was the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL or Solidarity) which created new channels for social involvement, while also enabling the central government to achieve greater control over grass roots movements. Women's groups were confronted with the need to relinquish their autonomy in exchange for access to state resources.

The same double edged character of movement and state collaboration is evident in Australia. A number of groups that were active in the women's movement formed the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), a non partisan organization that included women

from all political parties. WEL provided women with training to enable them to move into important government positions. It also sought to influence government policy on social legislation pertaining to women. It then worked closely with femocrats, feminists recruited to fill women's policy positions in government, to monitor and influence government policy concerning women. While this lobby has been extremely effective in bringing women into policy making positions and monitoring the impact on women of all government policies, the bureaucratisation of feminism has also entailed certain costs. As older feminists have been absorbed into government positions, the women's movement has not inspired a younger generation of women. As a result, some of the more radical goals of the early women's movement have died out. (Sawer 89).

What then makes for the difference between situations in which feminists can advance their interests through institutions as opposed to finding them co-opted and subverted?

First, the character of the state itself is of vital importance. Simply put, the more democratic the state, the more responsive it is likely to be to feminist goals. Thus, women achieved the greatest gains in the immediate aftermath of independence from colonial rule and the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Within Europe, feminism has become most institutionalised in countries with social democratic governments in power in the 1970s and 80s. With the advent of the Thatcherite Conservative government in 1979, British feminism, unlike its French and Spanish counterparts, did not become institutionalised. The Tory government's cutbacks of social legislation had particularly damaging implications for women (Rowbotham, 1996:8).

In contrast to Britain, feminists in Spain have been extremely successful in working with the state since 1983 when a social democratic power was elected — and re-elected four times. The government took far-reaching measures to ensure the representation of women's movement demands. First, it put in place an administrative apparatus for women's rights and equal opportunities. The Instituto de la Mujer (Institute of Women), set up in 1983, was designed to ensure that women's issues were regularly accorded high priority. Second, to assuage worries about co-optation, the institutes devoted a proportion of their budget to

funding self managed women's groups all over the country. Encouraging women's organisations is in fact one of the objectives of the administration. Third, the government has pursued equal opportunity action plans which commit various branches of the central administration to sex equality policies (Threlfall, 1996:124-126).

Feminists have had much more success in working with local than with national institutions for local institutions are often controlled by opposition political parties which are more sympathetic to feminist goals. Recall that in Brazil, feminists recorded some of their most significant achievements while working in Sao Paulo to police precincts to hire female officers and to revise family planning policy. In Britain, feminists worked closely with Left Labour local governments to secure the survival of nurseries, women's aid centres for battered women and rape crisis centres. Feminists in local government drew a wide group of women into contact with the state. Lavatory attendants, hospital ancillary workers, pensioners defending a community laundry, Asian homeworkers setting up a coop and sex workers demanding legalization all formed part of its constituency. Alongside such democratic participatory politics, feminists also worked to ensure equal opportunities through the Greater London Council and other metropolitan councils.

V. Movement-State Linkages: the Panchayats

In India, one of the most important forms of women's activism in the state is their participation in elections to the three tier panchayats (units of local self government). Attempts to revitalize the panchayats have come from state governments and the center. Some states revived the long moribund panchayats on their own initiative. In 1978, the communist government of West Bengal overhauled the panchayat system by providing for direct elections and giving them additional resources and responsibilities but making no provisions for women's representation. Andhra Pradesh revived its panchayats in 1986, and reserved 22-25 per cent of seats for women. Karnataka reserved 25 per cent of panchayat seats for women in 1983, although it did not hold elections till 1987.

However it was only with the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments in 1992 that panchayat elections (to be held every five years) were mandated throughout the country. The reforms called for reservations of 33 per cent of the seats for women and for scheduled castes and tribes proportional to their population. Elections across the country brought over 700,000 women to power once the panchayat reforms were implemented in April 1993. With a few exceptions, most states met and some exceeded the 33 per cent women's reservations at all three levels.

Given the fact that the panchayat reforms were the product of government fiat, the extent to which women benefited from these reforms depended upon their prior history of activism.

The most successful women panchayat members contested the elections and won as a result of prior political activism, sometimes well before the government reforms. In 1989, men and women, who had been active in the Shetkari Sangathana farmers' movement in Maharashtra, nominated seven all women panels to contest the gram panchayat elections. Five panels were elected. Women were also a majority of those elected to the two other panchayats.

In Vitner, one of the villages in Jalgaon district, Maharashtra, a nine-woman panel stood for the elections from three wards, defeating a male dominated Shiv Sena backed alternative. One of the panchayat's early decisions was to instruct women to let their cattle graze on 52 acres of property that outsiders from the village had encroached upon. It then turned the reclaimed land into a community orchard and kept proceeds in a panchayat fund. The panchayat subsequently organized villagers to fight for women's land rights and persuaded 127 of the 271 families in the village to make women co-owners of the family property, ranging from one to six acres.

The case of the Vitner panchayat is especially impressive for the measures it took to improve the well being of the community, and particularly of women, far exceeded the powers that the state had delegated it. The Vitner women's panchayat built seven rooms in the tribal quarters of the village and added two school rooms to the existing structure. Before women came to power, the village school taught only until the sixth grade. It now provides an additional year of education. The panchayat got installed 29 electricity poles to the existing thirty. It also acquired a water tank,

bus service and public toilets for men and women in the village square. Achievements of other women's panchayats, though less audacious, were also impressive. Compared to most male dominated panchayats, they placed greater emphasis on the construction of wells, playgrounds, roads, public toilets and non-polluting stoves. They also closed down illicit liquor vending, fought for more effective schools and installed pipes and pumps for drinking water.

There are numerous other accounts of women's activism in social movements translating into their activism in the panchayats. The movement of the fishing community against the introduction of large scale mechanized trawling has been active now for over two decades. Some women activists from this movement of the fishing community found the panchayats an excellent platform from which to fight the destruction of their old jobs and demand the creation of new ones in Thumba, near Thiruanantapuram, Kerala. Similarly, women have been very active in a movement demanding government prohibition of the production and sale of arrack (a home brewed liquor) which they associated with men's unemployment, impoverishment and domestic violence. A number of anti arrack activists in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have been elected to the panchayats as a result of their activism and have continued to fight state policies from within local government.¹¹

Many of the stories of women using the panchayats to fight for social justice concern poor, lower caste women. These accounts suggest that caste and class oppression can actually heighten women's consciousness of their own interests. For if social movements politicise women by alerting them to the injustices that confront the community as a whole, they may also reveal how threatened men of their community can be by women's power. Election to the panchayats may provide women with certain institutional resources that enable them to defend themselves and extend their struggles.

The shift from participation in movements to participation in institutions need not result in co-optation. Structurally, the panchayat reforms require reserved seats to be rotated among constituencies so that nobody occupying a reserved seat can win

¹¹See Revathi Narayanan (1996:395) and Poornima Vyasulu and Vinod Vyasulu (2000).

for a second term, except on electoral merit. Moreover those women, who serve on the panchayats with a prior history of participation in movements, often become increasingly apt to criticize the state. Many of the women who were elected to the panchayats in Tamil Nadu blamed the courts and the police for either complicity or the failure to act decisively against rape, dowry deaths and illicit liquor production. Many were politicised by the struggles they had to wage for basic needs and services.

However more typical than the examples cited above is for women to join panchayats without a prior history of activism. These women often become token or mere figureheads who are silenced, marginalized and, in extreme situations, subject to harassment and violence. In a study of recently elected women panchayat members in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, Sudha Pai found that they had been largely unable to use their new institutional locations to fight for further improvements either in their own conditions or in those of other women (Pai, 1998). Most of the newly elected women reported that they ran for the elections because of family and community pressure, not of their own volition. Many of them displayed ignorance about the functions of the panchayats and said they relied on their husbands for this information.

Other studies of north India conform to this general pattern.¹² Family responsibilities and constraints on their mobility prevented women who had been elected to the panchayats from attending the meetings. Those who attended were inhibited from expressing themselves. Some of these women had been backed by men who formed the real power behind the scenes. In places where women threatened male candidates, they were often accused of sexual immorality. Even more grave, women were the objects of violence in some constituencies in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. These are areas in which movements of under privileged groups are relatively weak and indicators of women's general well being are low.

Clearly, election to the panchayats, in and by itself, is not a panacea for women's subordination.¹³ Many women regretted that

¹²See for example Ekatra (1999), Sharma, Kumud (1998) and Mishra, Anil Datta (1999).

¹³In her 1998 study of Uttar Pradesh, Sudha Pai demonstrates that the panchayats only improve women's situation in those regions in which the social status of women has already improved independently of the panchayats and they are able to take advantage of this.

the panchayats were not mandated to address problems such as dowry, frequent child birth, female education, men's alcoholism, spousal abuse and women's unemployment. While women from activist backgrounds were able to enlarge the agendas of the panchayats to address some of these issues, women who were newcomers to politics could not. An even bigger problem is that the resources and the planning capabilities of the panchayats are relatively limited. State legislatures determine how much power and authority the panchayats will wield. Very few states have engaged in a serious devolution of the panchayats' development functions. Most panchayats are responsible for implementing rural development schemes rather than devising them. The village level panchayats, in which women are especially apt to be active, work under particularly severe constraints.

VI. The Absence of Movements: Women at the Top

Women's movements have vigorously debated the implications of reservations for women to elected office at the national and regional levels. When states have vacillated in their commitment to gender equality, the role of strong women's movements in demanding reservations and overseeing their implementation seems vital. In France, the initiative for radical legislation requiring all elected bodies to be composed of equal numbers of men and women was proposed by Francoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber and Anne Le Gall, feminists who had long been active in the women's movement.

In South Africa, the women's movement, under the leadership of the Women's National Coalition (WNC), was committed to ensuring women's representation in parliament when South Africa became a democratic state in 1994. It persuaded the African National Congress (ANC) to reserve a 30 per cent quota of women on electoral lists. Once large numbers of women were elected, women's groups, NGOs and other civil society organizations called on them to channel women's demands into the policy process. As a result, the first democratic parliament passed three important pieces of legislation: (i) the Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1996,

which provides women with access to abortion on broader and more favourable terms than in the past; (ii) the Domestic Violence Act of 1998, which provides protection against abuse for people who are in domestic relationships of various kinds; and (iii) the Maintenance Act of 1998, which substantially improves the position of women dependent on maintenance from former partners.

In India, there has been a great deal of debate within both the women's movement and political parties about the desirability of quotas or reservations for women in the legislative assembly and parliament. The urban feminist movement largely supports reservations while political parties do not, despite their claims to the contrary. The weakness of women's voices within political parties and of alliances between party women and the women's movement could either lead to the recurrent defeat of the Reservations Bill, which has been debated in parliament for the past six years, or to its ineffectiveness if it is passed. Social movements, in which women have been active, are much stronger at the local than the national level. The urban feminist movement may be national in appearance but it is highly localized in practice. Different segments of the women's movement in Mumbai, New Delhi, Calcutta and Madras do not coordinate their activities and do not attempt to formulate a common approach on the Bill. Thus, while segments of the women's movement might support the passage of the Bill, they do not rival the influence of political parties over the form it should assume or the effects it will have.

The recent history of the Reservations Bill dates back to 1996. Three successive governments have supported the 81st Amendment Bill guaranteeing at least 33 per cent reserved seats for women in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies. Although most political parties have endorsed the Bill in their election manifestos, they have not actually supported its passage. It was defeated most recently in December 2000 when a range of parties expressed either ambivalence or opposition to it. As a compromise measure, Home Minister LK Advani supported the Chief Election Commissioner's proposal to require all political parties to reserve 33 per cent of seats for women contestants. However, critics fear that political parties would nominate women in unwinnable constituencies. Thus far parties' records in nominating women candidates have been poor. In the 1996 parliamentary elections,

for example, political parties allotted less than 15 per cent of the total number of tickets to women. In fact women constitute only 10-12 per cent of the membership of political parties (Rai, 1997:105).

There has been far more resistance to state and national level reservations for women by political parties than by the general public. A survey by India Today indicates that 75 per cent of women and 79 per cent of men favour the active participation of women in politics and 75 per cent of men and women favour reservations in legislative bodies (Rai and Sharma, 2000:159). Opposition from parties has been both gendered and caste based. The Janata Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal (Laloo Prashad Yadav), Samajwadi Janata Party and Bahujan Samajwadi Party have all opposed the Bill because it makes no provision for reservations on a caste basis for other backward classes (OBCs). Among women MPs, a few have opposed it for this reason but a number of prominent, independent minded women have strongly supported it.

The women's movement largely supports the Bill. Indeed it has more actively and directly intervened in the debate concerning the 81st Amendment than about the panchayat reforms. Vasantha and Kalpana Kannabiran, two prominent women's movement activists, argue that it is important to look beyond the actions of the elites who have supported the 81st Amendment. "[...] At a deeper level, the reason why this negligible group is able to speak out so loud and clear is because masses of underprivileged women have a far more important political presence that overruns and refuses to be contained by the vote bank politics of mainstream parties" (Kannabiran V. and Kannabiran K., 1997:197).

Opposition to the 81st Amendment from segments of the women's movement partly reflects a distrust of political parties. One worry is that quotas could form a ceiling rather than a minimum to be improved upon. Another worry is that women candidates might be pliable because of their dependence on male party leaders (Kishwar, 1996:2867-2874). An even more significant worry is that reservations will treat women like a homogeneous group, which increases the likelihood that the "biwi brigade" of educated, upper class, upper caste women will be elected, particularly because the Bill does not provide for sub quotas of OBCs.¹⁴

¹⁴See Nivedita Menon (2000) and Vasanthi Raman (1995).

Women who have been elected to parliament without the support of an organized constituency, have been few in number and relatively ineffective in challenging gender inequality. The representation of women in parliament has not increased much from the 4.7 per cent (or 22 women) in the first parliament (1952-57). The largest number ever was 8.1 per cent (44 women) who were elected in the 1984 elections. Forty-nine women were elected to parliament between 1991-96 (5.2 per cent). Women occupied 4.1 per cent of the 22 per cent of parliamentary seats that were reserved for scheduled castes. Two women MPs were from Scheduled Tribes. Most of them were upper caste. Most women MPs are middle class professionals (Rai, 1997:110).

Women MPs are expected to support party policy rather than formulate their own agendas. None of them in fact placed questions concerning women high on their agendas (Rai, 1997:116). This is especially true of an even smaller and more exceptional group of female party leaders. They include: (i) the Italian born Sonia Gandhi, who many see as the major hope for reviving the moribund, faction ridden Congress party; (ii) Jayalalitha Jayaram, who heads the regionally based All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) from the southern state of Tamil Nadu; (iii) Mamata Bannerjee, the head of the Trinamul Congress party of West Bengal; (iv) Mayawati, twice chief minister of Uttar Pradesh; and (v) Rabri Devi, the chief minister of Bihar. Three of these women, Gandhi, Jayalalitha and Mayawati, were directly responsible for the downfall of the Bharatiya Janata Party government. At Gandhi's prompting, Jayalalitha withdrew her party's support from the central government. Mayawati hammered the last nail in the coffin by voting against the government in a critical parliamentary vote, thereby necessitating new elections. Yet, although these women brought down the government, they were unable to agree upon what should take its place.

All these women, with the possible exception of Mayawati, rose to power as appendages to men rather than through movements or institutional channels. Rabri Devi emerged from her role as housewife and mother of nine children. When her husband was imprisoned, she replaced him as chief minister of Bihar. Jayalalitha had a long-term relationship with actor-turned-politician

M G Ramachandran whom she succeeded as chief minister of Tamil Nadu. Sonia Gandhi's rise to power rests on her marriage to the former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and to being the daughter-in-law of prime minister Indira Gandhi. In highlighting her close relationship to Indira, Sonia not only takes on the very Indian role of the good daughter-in-law, she also displaces her sister-in-law Maneka Gandhi, wife of Sanjay Gandhi and a politician in her own right, whose relationship with Indira was extremely conflictual.

India's women leaders may be important symbols of the nation, but lacking the support of movements, they have not become powerful in their own right. In the absence of such support, their connections to male family members assume paramount importance. Nor do these women share common values, ideas or agendas. Their role in bringing down the BJP government may be as close as they will ever come to collaborating. Their deepest commitments are to their parties and to themselves, not to the collective interests of women.

And yet, there is also enormous opportunity in a possible alliance between the women's movement, as it seeks out a national presence and a role in the state, and the small number of party women who are staking out independent positions. It is precisely such an alliance that is needed to address the problem that Gail Omvedt identifies when she describes the women's movement as anti-political (Omvedt, 1993:310). One might quarrel with Omvedt's terminology and identify the ways in which the women's movement has extended the meaning of the political. One might also acknowledge that engaging in elections often moderates the goals of social movements. However there is no question that the farmers' movement, caste based, ethnic and religious nationalist movements have all had a much bigger impact than the women's movement on electoral politics. The question of how to engage in elections selectively and creatively poses an important challenge for women activists.

VII. Conclusion

Women are likely to engage more fully in democratic processes and achieve power collectively when the women's movement both challenges and participates in state institutions. One important

example of this potential is the pro-choice movement in the US and elsewhere. The question of women's rights to safe, affordable abortion has become sufficiently important that the fate of many electoral candidates hinge on what stance they adopt on this issue. And yet the issue has not died on the streets as it has been taken up by politicians, the courts, and legislatures.

However the occasions when this has happened are much less common than those in which it has not. One broad reason is that both institutions and movements are hierarchically organized, with power concentrated at the apex. In general, the more powerful the institution, the less power women wield within it. Thus women are less apt to influence the workings of parliament than of local administrative bodies. Similarly, women are more apt to become active in movements and institutions at the local than at the national level. Women tend to be elected in relatively large numbers to school boards, town councils and civic associations. Similarly, women have been at the forefront of community campaigns which highlight their responsibilities as mothers (opposing the dumping of toxic waste in their communities, deforestation, and violence in their communities). Indeed, the very distinction between movements and institutions, clearly drawn at the national level, is less clear-cut locally. It is difficult to know whether the work of women who are elected to the panchayats after having been active in social movements, should be termed activism or institutional participation. The conclusion that follows is that women's movements must apply greater pressure at higher levels to bring about change.

There are several possible explanations for this. The sheer question of scale may be important. People who live in close proximity to one another in the adjoining villages that constitute a gram panchayat may be more likely than urban residents to create informal, open arenas of participation. Although it is important to take heed of Ambedkar's recognition that the panchayats are deeply hierarchical institutions and we should not romanticize them, panchayats are more easily democratized than national bodies. Many women who have been active in political parties speak of the immorality of politics as deterring them from running for national office. This kind of complaint is less often made about the panchayats.

Women seem more apt to exercise leadership collectively than individually and more opportunity for this exists in community based than national movements. Quotas provide one means of ensuring a critical mass of women in office to enable them to effectively voice their concerns. Women are also most apt to become active in movements and institutions that address the interface between their private and public roles. This often happens when public policies hinder their capacity to fulfil their domestic responsibilities. The greater informality of community than national arenas may also help explain women's greater participation at the local level. Similarly, the more open and democratic forums are, the more likely women are to be represented. The creation of democratic deliberative bodies of the kind that sometimes exist at the local level and rarely at the national level, are vital ingredients of women's participation

The different ways in which politics is understood locally and nationally is also extremely significant. The kinds of decisions that the gram panchayats make are often simultaneously economic, social and political. They have to do with questions of land ownership, municipal facilities, marital disputes and the distribution of power. This convergence of issues between public and private spheres encourages the panchayats to further expand the definition of the political to include issues that are normally considered private rather than public, social rather than political and collective rather than individual. The boundaries that are traditionally drawn between politics and other domains narrow at the upper reaches of power. Of the hundreds of issues that come before MPs, few directly bear upon the situation of women.

The importance of defining governance in broader and more far-reaching ways than it has traditionally been understood, emerges from the myriad forms that women's political participation assumes at the local level — both private and public, economic, social and political.

Another challenge is to consider how some of the models of women's political engagement that have emerged at the local level can be reproduced nationally. This is one of the central questions that confronts both states and women's movements. The ideal way would be the large scale devolution of power to the local level. However what makes this so desirable is also what makes it so

unlikely, namely the highly centralized character of the Indian state. Another way would be to strengthen the links between women's movements and institutions. Although this has happened in particular cases, it has not happened on a broad scale. Some attempts at building linkages between the panchayats and women's movements took place during the preparatory meetings in India leading to the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing. However these deliberations were not sufficiently reflected in the final Platform for Action (Narayanan, 1996:389).

There are some issues and contexts in which women's activism at the local level has provided a building block for their activism at the regional, national and ultimately transnational level. The Self Employed Women's Association in Gujarat has been extremely active in urban politics in Ahmedabad, established strong links with politicians at the state and national levels and forged ties with Home Net, an international network of home based workers. In other instances, however, it has proved more difficult for activists to work equally effectively at the local and transnational levels. The human rights movements, for example, is arguably more successful transnationally than in the Middle East and South Asia. Although both local and global approaches have their critics and detractors, clearly the most successful social movements are those that combine activism at all three levels.

The worry that institutional participation will co-opt women and thwart their activism presents a more serious challenge at the national than at the local level. One reason has to do with simple class dynamics. A larger proportion of poor women are elected to office at the local than at the national level. It is primarily landless, lower caste women panchayat members who have made the most far reaching efforts at social change. A study of 843 women panchayat members in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh found that 40 per cent had family incomes below the poverty line (Buch, 1999). These findings challenge the commonly expressed concern that reserved seats will benefit economically privileged individuals. By contrast, most women who are elected to Parliament come from elite backgrounds which carry considerable material and symbolic rewards.

Another important determinant of whether or not women's movements will have an impact on the state has to do with their

relationship to political parties and electoral processes. The closer the ties the women's movement forges with mainstream parties, the more likely it is to have an impact on state policies. However this gain may come with the cost of its radicalism. The contrasts between India and the US are instructive. Although women's movements in both countries eschewed the state during their zenith, certain segments of the US women's movement have forged ties with women in Congress. As a result, female legislators tend to focus more than male legislators on such issues as unemployment, housing, poverty, health care and child care. Women legislators have also come up with the most effective analyses of the costs and consequences of decreased social services.

By contrast, as we have seen, the Indian women's movement has not forged comparable links with women in office at the national level. Virtually no women MPs, but for a few from communist parties, have ties to the women's movement or commitments to women's empowerment. However at the local level, where women panchayat members have been active in grass roots movements, they have often raised issues pertaining to the well being of the community and family by striving to increase literacy rates, improve preventive health care, engage in forest conservation, strengthen pension schemes and maintain roads and tanks. Some have focused on issues concerning women such as girls' education, creation of income generating schemes and small scale industries for women, counselling abusive husbands, and providing women with land deeds.

As we have seen in numerous instances, women's movements are most likely to influence state policies when a commitment to certain feminist objectives exist both within and outside the state. In France, for example, women's groups worked closely with women in state institutions, particularly with Veronique Neiertz, secretary for women's rights, to address sexual harassment (Jenson, 1996:104). State actors needed public mobilization and pressure from outside in order to convince other sections of society and their government colleagues to take action. In 1992, they succeeded in extending birth control.

What is the rationale for supporting reservations at the national level if they are not backed by the power of movements? Why bring more women into power if the result is either the entry of yet more

elite women into the corridors of power to the detriment of the poor or the demobilization of activist women? There is no simple response to this question. While it is most likely true that elite women are likely to outnumber poor women, it is unlikely that more poor women would be elected in the absence of reservations. While it is true that exclusion and marginalization can be radicalising forces and women may be conservatized by gaining entry into institutions, some of these women may be radicalised by the marginalization they experience within institutions. Thus the risks of co-optation must be set against the risks of marginality. Social movements which do not turn to the courts, the legislature or elections to promote their interests are unlikely to have the same impact on national politics as those that do. Without denying the dangers of co-optation, its alternative must always be kept in mind.

One important reason for supporting reservations in parliament, for all its inadequacies, stems from a recognition both of the state's importance to determining women's life chances and yet the dangers of becoming excessively dependent on the state. As one scholar argues, women cannot easily give up on the state because it will not give up on women (Randall, 1998:204). Reservations provide a way for the women's movement to engage the state while diversifying its focus from the courts and legislature to the electoral system. Working through several branches of the state simultaneously rather than focussing exclusively on one reveals the advantages and disadvantages of each.

However, ultimately, reservations can be a temporary strategic necessity rather than a path to women's empowerment. Unless movements can use reservations subversively to point to the limitations of prevailing structures of power, they become another instance of what Charlotte Bunch has termed the "add women and stir" approach to "fixing" gender inequality (Bunch, 1985). A focus on the state must be accompanied by a vigorous commitment to activism within civil society which has always been the source of the most creative ways of thinking about women's political participation. For activism within civil society, with all its limitations, has provided the most enduring bulwark against authoritarianism in India.

Beyond the short and medium term goals of achieving more equitable male and female representation in office and leadership,

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thinking of women's governance should always take us back to the initial goals of women's movements. Beyond the goals of enlarging women's access to power and exercise of leadership is the far more precious goal of undermining the force of gender in politics and thereby rethinking the nature of power itself.

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