THE IMPACT OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON GOVERNANCE

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I.   Introduction

Acknowledging "gender" and its implications appears to have become formulaic in policy articulation and execution pertaining to a range of political, social and economic issues at local, regional and global levels. These include the arenas of governance and politics.[1] International and inter-governmental bodies concerned with governance have increasingly been compelled to address gender inequities in their various programmes and operations, and not confine such discussions only within bodies expressly dedicated to addressing gender concerns. In turn, individual states have been challenged to consider the views and needs of female citizens. However, activists, researchers and policy makers sensitive to the operations of various matrices of power, especially regarding gender, continue to point out that several issues pertaining to women and to the trajectories of gendered notions of power are still addressed only nominally in processes of governance. Further, in reality such issues tend to be either sidelined altogether, or mobilised to suit the particular interests of a ruling elite or

[1]Unless otherwise noted, the UNDP definition of governance is utilised in this paper as a working definition. "Governance [is] the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences." (UNDP, 2000).

bureaucracy within the workings of the state. As an immediate consequence, such marginalisation circumscribes women individually and severally in attaining the best possible quality of life for themselves, their families and communities. In the broader perspective, it compromises the promise of equal development for all citizens within a state and the possibility of meaningful governance undergirded by (gender) justice and peace.

All women do not experience or negotiate with the state in the same manner. Nor do they receive or lose its benefits and privileges in an equal way. The category of "woman" is a contested one. Locations such as those of class, ethnicity, religion, caste, sexual orientation, age, marital and parental status are enmeshed in assessing who qualifies for the status of most-favoured (female) citizen, how and under what circumstances. In turn, these multiplicities of location and difference inform how women engage with, access, define and deploy power at various sites within the state. Such considerations inform the nature of gender (in)equality, and in turn the specific and general implications for the quality of governance.

This paper reckons with the impact of gender inequality on governance by exploring four themes:

(i)   Politics and governance as "public" activities and the consequent implications for women;
(ii) The state-women interface: women's political participation;
(iii) Women's perceptions and experiences of formal and informal institutions of governance; and
(iv) The role of civil society in engendering governance.

The exploration relies on analyses, examples and experiences predominantly from South Asia,[2] with select illustrations from South East Asia (especially in the context of women's political participation). The state is not designated as inherently homogenous, and gender constructs and relations are not considered as invariably predictable in the state's domain. Rather the state "is not a unitary structure but a differentiated set of institutions and agencies, the product of a particular historical and

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[2]*Select analytical frameworks, examples and conclusions that follow, also appear in the introduction to Tambiah, Yasmin, ed. (2002).*

political conjuncture. [It is] a site of struggle, not lying outside of society or social processes, but having on the one hand, a degree of autonomy from these which varies under particular circumstances, and on the other, being permeated by them. Gender (and racial and class) inequalities are therefore buried within the state, but through part of the same dynamic process, gender relations are also partly constituted through the state." (Waylen, 1996:16).

In the delineations that follow, the choice of national examples reflects the differences in the varied developments of states, even if a corresponding discussion of the specific historical development of that respective state may not be explicitly made. Sometimes, a discussion of "the state" has been consciously generalised in the South Asian context to highlight a particular issue that resonates across the region. Broadly speaking, in South Asia the issues are raised against a backdrop of states that range from a democratic system newly emerging from a monarchy (Nepal), to longer-lived democratic systems grown out of a colonial experience and that have sometimes forestalled elections and resorted to lengthy periods of emergency rule (India and Sri Lanka), to military regimes with colonial pasts and interregnums of elected government (Pakistan and Bangladesh).

II. Politics and Governance as "Public" Activities - Implications for Women

Constructions of allegedly contrasting, exclusive and complementary spaces, associated actions and behaviours that constitute the "public" and the "private" are central to any discussion on gender, politics and governance. Whether politics is defined formally (as in political party- or voter-related activity, highly organised anti-systemic initiatives in contests for state power, or trade union movements) or informally (as in mobilisations intending to challenge the status quo in realms such as gender relations, caste, ethnicity and religion), its key elements are regularly characterised in terms that locate them within a "public" domain. That is to say, politics is generally understood to be constituted primarily through (and as) activity and association outside the "private" or "domestic" realm. Likewise, effective governance requires citizens of a particular state to interact with

agents of that state, institutions associated with the state, or participation in such institutions, all of which, too, are located outside the spaces designated as constituting "home".

In the states of South Asia, the public/private divide is constituted and operated in gendered terms: masculinity is associated with the public, worldly space, and femininity with the private, domestic realm. This appears to hold even when the classification of any given activity as feminine or masculine, private or public, varies by state, and within a state, depending on the nature of the activity. The idea of the dichotomy can be retained even as its meaning is constantly contested, transgressed and transformed, especially by women. Its retention in the assumptions that undergird recent developments and implementations of state policy, however, has direct implications for women, obstructing at critical moments their engagements with the state. The ramifications of such a division are simultaneously mediated by status premised on factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and the rural/urban location.

Implications of the Private and the Public for Women

For women, the split between the public and the private is pronouncedly informed by gendered notions of legitimate and illegitimate social behaviour. Where chastity and modesty are privileged as markers of "good" womanhood, to be a female public actor is a contradiction in terms. Complying with the prescriptions of good behaviour translates as confining oneself to the domestic realm, desisting from associations with men outside the prescribed kin group, and especially ensuring that one is not implicated in any activity that may be scripted as immodest and therefore immoral. This restriction has important consequences for women's material independence and access to education, both usually requiring entry into public spaces, and both essential to locating women as autonomous citizens complementary to their position within their families and communities. Its implications for women as political actors are debilitating. To expose oneself outside the domestic space may place one's "reputation" at risk, an argument that is also employed to blame women who are sexually harassed or assaulted while engaged in non-domestic activity, and to justify such violence.

However, even where women may have secured or been granted greater access to certain public domains, they may not have access to all public domains. For instance, Sri Lankan girls and young women face few family-imposed obstacles to education. Whether in rural or urban areas, a very high level of female literacy is reflected across most ethnic groups. Sri Lankan women do not face serious impediments to basic-level employment in the local and global marketplaces, the latter including the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) within Sri Lanka and migrant work in West Asia (Dabindu Collective, 1997). The marking of employment in the FTZs and West Asia as providing occasion for so-called immoral sexual activity and compromised chastity (insinuations that underscore the link between women's material independence and capacity for sexual autonomy) has not dissuaded women from seeking jobs in these sectors. Yet, such employment opportunities and associated struggles for the dignity and rights of female extra-domestic labour have not translated into a correspondingly high presence of women in public decision making or representative politics in Sri Lanka.

Constraints on women within the private domain have a direct impact on their capacity for public engagements. The reproductive aspects of the sexual division of labour, including maintenance of a household, birthing and caring for children, care for older kin and other temporary or permanent familial dependents, as well as working in the fields or engaging in other income-generating activity that benefits the family, have been noted by many women across South Asia as a key obstacle to political or other organisational engagement. This focus on domestication and a domesticated morality also means that women feel pressured to eschew any knowledge of "outside" matters, including politics. Men too invoke women's domestic responsibilities (which, as mentioned above, may allow for earning a wage outside the home, but no more) to discourage women's incursions into the public realm.[3] Additionally, in a bid to maintain the gendered division of space and associated norms of morality, male kin may use coercion or violence to prevent women from engaging in various types of public, social intercourse.

[3]*Shirkat Gah (2002:183) recounts an example where women in Pakistan who attended a Focus Group Discussion had to make up an excuse to their men-folk in order to participate. One woman was reminded by her husband that even being allowed to work was a privilege!*

The state and its agents may act, in conjunction with family and community, to maintain the domesticity of women in particular ways and at particular times, while also enabling spaces and opportunities for women to disrupt their domestication. The actual consequences of state action or inaction, and how women act in such situations, are mediated by women's class, caste, ethnic, and other status, as well as by the nature of the state. For example, in processes of governance, the state compounds private patriarchy and the domesticated feminine when it nominates or (mis)recognises men as heads of households in contexts such as land distribution, local resource management or displacement compensation, regardless of whether or not women too are land owners or heads of households. An example from Sri Lanka highlights this. Generally in Sri Lanka, women across ethnic groups have had significant rights to own land. These rights are reflected in bilateral and matrilineal patterns of inheritance, even if the gendered control of land, per se, varies by ethnic group and region.[4] The nineteen-year old ethnic civil war has caused tremendous internal displacement and community losses, which have increasingly catapulted women into roles previously unfamiliar to many of them, including as head of household and primary wage earner. The new roles have compelled women to reorganise their lives to cope with the changes while also providing for increased personal autonomy in certain contexts. In rehabilitating displaced persons, the state has taken to allocating land with little regard for local inheritance patterns and traditions of land ownership, or to changes in women's lived realities. Thus, women are ignored as potential title holders and land is given in men's names only, unless it can be proved that the male head of household is dead. State officers may refuse land grants to women deserted by their husbands or where a husband's whereabouts are unknown (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001:119). By privileging marriage in this context, as the gauge of who should and should not receive land, the state institutionalises hetero-normativity. Thus, the state acts as a moral guardian, and ties together sexual morality, material autonomy and (un)worthy citizenship. It rewards women who are "properly" appended to a man and penalises women who are

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[4]*See Bina Agarwal (1994).*

deemed inappropriately linked to a male, or not linked at all. Those thus penalised ostensibly include unmarried women who have male or female (sexual) partners, whether or not they live together in a domesticated relationship.

The tensions inhering in the sexual division of labour and the attendant demarcations of private and public may also be implicated in community-state relations. While devolving power to communities, the state could resist consideration that women are better placed than men to manage certain essential resources such as potable water. Women occupy this placement because they are most likely to need and utilise such resources in their daily labouring for the benefit of families and community. Because of the sexual division of labour, it can be argued, women are in fact primary mediators of the resource's consumption or utility, but the state continues to see women as unqualified. This resistance by the state is compounded where women themselves may take it for granted that they cannot possibly be engaged in resource management that is deemed a public/communal matter (Rafi Khan, 1996).

At another level, the sexual division of labour and accompanying gender-role stereotyping are implicated in how state functions are organised. In a militarised state, where membership in the armed forces is predominantly or exclusively reserved for men, and where the military has permeated state structures and operations in civilian contexts as well, corresponding gender constructs often valorise women in their reproductive and domestic roles. In contrast, where initiatives of the state, whether civilian or militarised, create or promote opportunities for women to participate in its bureaucracy, women are able to access public spaces through state employment. Middle-class, educated women may be best located to take advantage of such opportunity. Nevertheless, such spaces may also be gendered to contain them in a specific manner, so that these women are simultaneously prevailed upon to participate in sustaining a particular ideological definition of the state. An example from South East Asia reflects this. In the New Order in Indonesia (1966-1998), under the militarised regime of President Suharto, the state bureaucracy was organised in terms of the patriarchal family with its *pater familias* as head of state, and lesser "fathers" as heads of ministries,

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departments and other branches of the bureaucracy. Women's civic duties, especially if they were wives of civil servants, were defined so as to underscore their status as wives and mothers in subordination to men (Robinson, 2000). There was little formal recognition of women's role as productive workers, even though the regime's economic policies opened up new employment opportunities for women (Sen, 1998). This hegemonic state ideology of women's subordination overrode the diversity in practice of the status accorded to women in different ethnic communities of Indonesia.

Mobility is essential to participate effectively in activities that constitute citizenship. The capacity for mobility plays a key role in determining women's location in politics, because it determines access to resources and opportunities, and the actual ability to engage in mobilisation. For women, the meanings and valencies assigned to mobility are linked with the perimeters of domestication and other factors (such as caste and ethnicity) that are imbricated with gender. In Nepal, for instance, upper caste women, who have been able to take advantage of the mobility generated through access to the processes of modernisation, dominate the political arena. In contrast, Nepali women from other caste strata among ethnic and tribal groups of the hills, who are mobile for economic purposes and because of cultural permissions, are nonetheless discouraged from explicit political activity (Shtrii Shakti, 2002:48-49). Female mobility appears most permissible when the activity concerned is likely to benefit the family and carried out within its purview, even if the physical bounds per se are stretched, or when domesticity permeates an aspect of the activity requiring mobility. For example, in Pakistan women may travel away from their homes to participate in religious celebrations, bereavement or family celebrations such as births and weddings (Shirkat Gah, 2002:199-200). The forum of participation still fits within the bounds of the domestic and the reason falls within the parameters of acceptable female behaviour, such as extra-domestic movement for religious purposes or to maintain kin ties. Women, of course, may use such allowances to engage in socially subversive and/or political activity.

The accumulation of and access to material resources are also linked intimately with the demarcations of the private and public.

Gender-discriminatory inheritance laws across much of South Asia, usually falling under personal or religious legal systems and largely interpreted to grant women a lesser share than men, undermine women's capacity to maintain themselves independently outside marriage or other male-centred family formations. Stagnation in the interpretation and application of such laws often means that there is no provision to accommodate changing social and economic realities, including where women themselves are compelled to take on the responsibility for accumulating and redistributing essential material resources. In Bangladesh, for instance, Islamic law presumes that a son will look after his ageing mother and is therefore entitled to twice the inheritance of his sisters. However, social and economic changes mean that daughters rather than sons are now often solely responsible for taking care of aged parents, but they continue to inherit only half the share of a man (UNDP, 1999:26). Discriminatory allotments may apply even in situations of class privilege (where there are ample material resources to ensure equal inheritances regardless of gender) or where women's material and labour investments in family property would entitle them to a share commensurate with their investments. Such laws also compromise women in the context of political participation. Since women are, in general, less likely to be financially autonomous than men, they are less likely to have independent monetary resources for electioneering, and are further disadvantaged when inheritance laws deny them access to family capital to support their work.[5] In addition, the example of Sri Lanka given earlier contravenes any automatic positive correlation between more liberal inheritance laws and women's access to positions of public decision making.

Literacy's Worth

Women (and often men) at all social and economic levels have often identified literacy and education as critical prerequisites to any type of effective engagement in public or political space.[6] Poor

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[5]*For the example of Pakistan, see Shahla Zia and Farzana Bari (1999:88). This report draws on several sources, including prior studies on women's political participation by Shirkat Gah.*
[6]*All the country reports in Tambiah, ed. (2002) attest to this.*

levels of literacy often lead women to devalue themselves and therefore compromise their capacity for decisive interventions both within and outside the family. Women in certain political fora, such as those elected to panchayats in India, have recounted numerous instances where male counterparts used the women's illiteracy against them. The women faced derision when articulating their opinions, or their recommendations to the council were disqualified (Ekatra, 2002:307-308). Locally, even where provisions for schooling exist, being deprived of an education may be the consequence of patriarchal values that deem education unnecessary or even dangerous for girls and women.

It is important to note, however, that high levels of female literacy do not automatically correspond to a high presence of women in public decision-making positions, or increase their political participation. Sri Lanka provides a key example of such an instance, indicating thereby that education needs to be associated with other social transformations to be an effective factor in promoting women. The quality and content of education are as important. Women who acquire literacy and education through texts and instructors that reinforce gender stereotypes are unlikely to interrogate the premises of existing social relations, beginning in the household, and consequently less likely to deem themselves political actors in public.

III. State-Women Interface: Women's Political Participation

For women in South Asia, and in South East Asia, the challenges to engaging in politics are as complex as those faced in the bid to access and participate meaningfully in various other public fora where the decisions taken in such arenas have implications for larger groups of persons. The issues faced by women contesting elections through formal political processes foreground the nature of political culture in the region, as well as underscore, among others, the links between "private patriarchy" and "public patriarchy" (Kandyoti, 1997).

Dynastic and Kin-Group Politics

Political activity at the national and provincial levels in South Asia continues in large measure to maintain intact feudal hierarchies and associated dynamics of power and patronage, implicating men as well as women. Consequently, women in politics at these levels, similar to (or perhaps even more so than) their male counterparts, are likely to emerge from so-called political families, kin groups with a history of political engagement, often located at the top of the national class and/or caste ladder. In South East Asia too, women in national-level politics are mostly from elite formations, whether these are old, wealthy, landed families or more recent elites whose power derives from their cultivated capacities for patronage.[7] In either region, the availability and type of spaces for political engagement are closely linked with the respective histories of state formation, development of state bureaucracies, and the promotion or compromise of means to democratic politics.

Most women in positions of national- or provincial-level political leadership in South Asia and South East Asia are the daughters, wives, and frequently, widows of prominent male politicians. This, in turn, informs how women access a political arena where kinship networking overrides loyalties based on political ideology and non-kin affiliations. A woman in such circumstances is likely to be heavily dependent, at least at the outset of her political career, on the electoral support accorded to her family, and on the financial support of male kin. Women are thus both supported and constrained by their privileged locations. Women who lack such family connections may have a minimal chance of entering politics, unless they are elected through social capital acquired by their own community work, including social service, or through the support of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Such women may also obtain the opportunity for political involvement if there are provisions for parliamentary reservations,

[7]*In general, see Edwards and Roces eds. (2000). For a discussion on female candidates in the 1998 Philippines national elections, see Sagaral Reyes (1998).*

or where the avenues to representative government include capacities for nominating Members of Parliament from national party-based or merit lists.[8]

In contrast, women's representation at local government level, especially in the lower tiers, is less likely to be determined by dynastic politics, as borne out by studies on panchayati raj institutions in India. While kinship ties and local patterns of family or caste group influence and hierarchy may have bearing on which women are nominated to contest elections, including when there are reservations for women, there is also more space for those with personal initiative and their own social capital (acquired through participation in community-level groups and associated decision making engagements, for instance) to be active in representational politics (Jayal, 2000:24-27; Asmita, 2002). Family and/or community support, however, appears to be essential for a woman to enter politics, although the implications of its presence or absence varies by location. In India, for example, a representative from Karnal district in Haryana, who took a personal decision to be politically active, was physically and verbally abused by her husband and family. To the contrary, several women from Garhwal region in Uttar Pradesh asserted that the decision to participate had been their own and ostensibly were able to act on their decision without family or community opposition (Jayal, 2000:24).

Hurdling Through Politics: Being a Woman Representative

The terrain of electoral politics and representation is a trying one for many women. At the provincial and national levels, political parties are reluctant to nominate women as electoral candidates, even when policies are in place to encourage greater female representation at the level of candidacy. Women (if they are not from the political elite families) may need to cultivate the patronage of a senior male politician, and then feel they are permanently beholden to their patron (ICES, 2002:442). They are also likely to be compromised because of a lack of adequate personal financial resources to cultivate the electorate, or because their gender

[8]*Sri Lanka and Singapore have provisions for such lists. As an example for Singapore, see "A candid interview with Dr. Kanwaljit Soin," http://www.womenasia.com/eng/women_to_watch/articles/kanwaljit_soin.html*

indirectly disqualifies them from accessing party funds.

At the local level, where local elites dominate, even if the dynastic dynamic is less pronounced, both gender and caste may connive to block lower caste women from candidacy through harassment and intimidation, or sabotage the efforts of such women once they are elected (Vyasalu, P. and Vyasalu, V., 2000:45; Asmita, 2002:358-361). Again, the example of India provides valuable evidence for women's chequered experiences in local-level politics. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 enabled 33 per cent representation of women in panchayats and indeed empowered women to enter the domain of politics in unprecedented numbers. However, their participation has been full of challenges and obstructions. In the first instance, many women were compelled by male kin to contest elections. It was regardless of whether the women themselves were interested, or whether there would be obstacles to their effective involvement, which included illiteracy, ignorance of institutional procedures or the responsibilities of office and no alteration to women's multiple work burdens. After election, women have not always been allowed to carry out their mandates. There are several instances where women have been put in place as proxies of their husbands or other male kin.[9] The panchayati raj experiences, however, continue to be hopeful. Instead of passively accepting their lot, women have frequently asserted themselves against efforts by familial or community men to confine them.[10]

Once women are elected as representatives, they face other hurdles. Firstly, they are much more likely than their male counterparts to be objects of the "moralistic gaze", and become targets of character assassination. Since they have defied the bounds of domesticity to engage with the public (male) domain of politics, the verbal and physical attacks against them are often explicitly sexualised. (This echoes the nature of the violence they may face

[9]For instance, see Khurd (1998). This example is from 1992, the year in which the 73rd and 74th amendments were passed.

[10]Asmita (2002), Buch (1999), Datta (1998), Ekatra (2002) and Jayal (2000) all provide examples.

[11]Election-related violence appears to be endemic in South Asia, and quite severe in Sri Lanka (see ICES, 2002). While both women and men are subjected to it, the violence directed at women, whether as candidates or party supporters, is almost inevitably sexualised, taking the form of stripping and threatened or actual sexual assault.

while on the electoral trail.[11]) Some women have sought to pre-empt such attacks by deploying respectability upon entering politics, articulated via an insistence on modesty and emphasis on prioritising home and family over political commitments.[12] They have also invoked the image of the mother who serves the people as she does her family. The latter blurs the boundary between an exclusive construction of the private and the public by bringing a usually domesticated labour role into the public arena, but does not interrogate an otherwise essentialist gender construction. In other instances, engagement with politics may provide women the opportunity to defy the restrictions of the gendered feminine by moving into a more androgynous location, or by adapting certain postures and modes of operation that are generally reflective of a masculinised political culture. An example from the Philippines highlights this at the national level. Miriam Defensor Santiago was a 1992 presidential candidate who campaigned as a redoubtable, moral crusader. As a Commissioner of Immigration and Deportation, she successfully tackled corruption and prosecuted criminals engaged in the prostitution of women and children. Her "Movement for Responsible Public Service" metamorphosed into the People's Reform Party. Santiago was a highly popular candidate who secured her position sans backing from the political machine, major funds or political families. At the elections she came a very close second to President Fidel Ramos, who was from the established elite and had the advantages of funds and infrastructural support in his campaigning. In her self-presentation, Santiago wore short hair, and practical, no-nonsense clothes in a culture where women in politics were expected to embody and reflect feminine beauty and religiosity as correlates of (female) power (Roces, 1998:295 & 303). At the level of local politics, there is the example of a Sri Lankan Municipal Councillor who, when asked about how she dealt with the endemic violence in electoral politics, exclaimed: "During election time the man in me has come to the fore. I have suppressed my femininity, tucked the fall of my sari around my waist and entered the fray"(ICES, 2002:452).

Secondly, the roles imposed on elected women representatives

[12]*For instance, see Malathi de Alwis (1995), which draws on examples of key Sri Lankan women politicians.*

by their (male) peers reflect the values ascribed to women's capabilities in the broader social context. Women may have greater responsibilities than male counterparts but fewer resources to fulfil these. Women's authority is compromised when their suggestions are rejected by male council presidents or co-members, and their efficacy brought under scrutiny simply because they are women (UNDP, 1999:23). Within elected bodies men may receive the more favoured positions and duties associated with greater social power, compared with women. Where women are proxies to male kin, they may be compelled to defer to the men, regardless of whether or not they (women) are competent in their own right (Asmita, 2002).

Thirdly, as mentioned above, women are also more likely to be illiterate or undereducated and hence subjected to ridicule. Furthermore, their minimal exposure to politics and little or no training in political duties may undermine their interventions as well. However, to the contrary, while their perception of politics may be limited by confinement to local bodies, several women representatives in panchayats have demonstrated a clear understanding of the functioning of local bodies. Many of them also see their election as an opportunity in empowerment, evident in the experience of representing their community at the panchayat, and in dealing with government officials on matters ranging from provision of development resources to countering gender and caste violence.[13]

Political Parties

South Asian politics continues to be determined largely by political parties, their alliances and duels. Where party loyalties, rather than the competence of individual candidates, tend to determine fortunes in the political arena, women as a constituency are likely to lose out. While the strength and maturity of political parties are linked with the history of representational politics in each state, there appear to be some common trends with regard to women.

[13]*For an example from Karnataka, which also addresses the positive ramifications of support by community-level women's groups for women representatives, see Srilatha Batliwala (1996). Also see examples given under the subheading, "Transforming women" by Jain (1996), and Asmita (2002).*

Women in political parties, unless they happen to be party leaders, are unlikely to fare well. Party women are usually confined to the lower echelons of power, with little chance of advancement. Further, their interventions are largely limited to activities connected with increasing the number of votes during elections or to social work efforts that promote the party's image.[14] Across the region, women's wings in political parties have provided a poor training ground for women interested in running for office, usually being activated to further party objectives rather than promote women's political empowerment.[15] This auxiliary status also means that the women's wing is unlikely to protest the party's failure to meet gender quota objectives. In the exceptional instances where a women's wing has been successful, this is often because of its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the party. For instance, the rural-based Sindhiani Tehrik in Sindh, Pakistan, was instituted by women of the Awami Tehrik explicitly to deal with women's issues that were insufficiently addressed under the auspices of the main party. Committed to raising the status of grassroots women but organising women across classes, it has espoused issues ranging from health and education to honour killings, and has worked collaboratively with women's groups on issues of women's representation in decision making bodies. It also plans to field women at local government elections. Sindhiani Tehrik is represented on the central executive of the Awami Tehrik, and owes allegiance to the party, but works with considerable autonomy (Zia and Bari, 1999:32).

Parties are also infamous for limiting the numbers of women, for party positions or electoral candidacy, to the quota recommended where such quotas exist, rather than using the quota as a minimum. In Nepal, for instance, while the three major political parties have a ten per cent quota for women's representation on their executive bodies, recent statistics indicate that the actual numbers of women on these bodies are less (Shtrii Shakti, 2002:53-54).

The de-prioritising of women's issues within the party and the discouragement of developing platforms on women's issues,

[14]*This is a common complaint across South Asia. For Sri Lanka, see Kamala Liyanage (1999:111).*
[15]*For the case of Pakistan, see Shahla Zia and Farzana Bari (1999:31-32, 91).*

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whether within or across parties, are echoed by elected women representatives as well. Women members of national and provincial assemblies, like their male counterparts, are more likely to vote along party lines on issues that affect women, rather than espouse a bipartisan or non-partisan approach. They can also use the argument of gender impartiality to justify their inactivity on gender-specific issues.[16]

The Vote

Casting a vote at an election assumes the status of a national duty for many women, regardless of the extent of their exposure to politics. Unless subjected to voter education, as in Bangladesh, few illiterate or undereducated women, compared with their educated counterparts, are likely to see voting as a political right rather than a duty, or to make an explicit connection between voting and the capacity to have an impact on a government (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002:124). Sometimes women cannot vote because of cultural prescriptions. Through the invocation of purdah, women in some regions of Pakistan are not allowed to get their ID cards (which are pre-requisites for casting one's ballot) or because of cultural sanctions, the IDs have no photograph (Zia and Bari, 1999:90). In other instances, arguments that allege to be rooted in religion have been deployed explicitly to forestall women from voting, as when sanctions were imposed on women in Pakistan and Bangladesh to prevent them from casting their ballots, or even from standing for election.[17] Here, the terrain of women's fundamental rights may become the site of other political contests, as when allowing or preventing women from voting is linked with which candidate is winning or losing (Zia and Bari, 1999:26-27). In either case, whether it is invoking gendered cultural prescriptions or manipulating religion to inhibit women in the interests of more conventional political requirements, this can be an instance of connivance between male citizens, their communities and the state to restrict the fundamental rights of women.

Sources of influence on women's voting patterns speak to

[16]*Several of the country studies in Tambiah, ed. (2002) reported this.*
[17]*For further details see Shahla Zia and Farzana Bari (1999:24) and UNDP Bangladesh (1999:22-23).*

another instance where restrictions and allowances within a domestic or communal space may spill out into a broader domain. In South Asia, a family-influenced voting pattern affecting both men and women reflects the enduring patron-client relationship between political candidate and voter. Women are more likely than men to concur that men influence their voting, but may deny that they felt pressured to vote for a particular candidate by male kin (Shirkat Gah, 2002:229). This influence is justified in terms of the perception that men are better informed on politics and what happens outside the home. It must be noted that patterns of pressure or its lack sometimes vary significantly within a state, where responses are informed by women's access to politics or political awareness within a particular province.[18]

Women Politicians and their Constituency

Women politicians and their female constituencies appear to have a testy relationship. While women voters want women politicians to be sensitive to gender concerns, they also expect that female politicians intervene in governance beyond the "soft" (feminised) portfolios such as education, health, social welfare and the Women's Affairs Ministry. In Nepal, female voters who supported key women politicians complained that their representatives had largely failed to deliver any women-specific actions after they were elected, even though these politicians had campaigned on platforms dedicated to women's concerns (Shtrii Shakti, 2002:76). In Pakistan, neither women nor men had illusions about the competence and honesty of female politicians but many felt that only women would improve the lot of other women. Women also were convinced that women councillors rather than men would be more sympathetic to women's concerns (Khattack, 1996:20-21; Shirkat Gah, 2002:223). A high proportion of both women and men interviewed by Shirkat Gah in Pakistan favoured women's electoral involvement, even though rural men were anxious about who would mind the home if women took to politics, and queried whether women could

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[18]*Shirkat Gah (2002). For instance, urban Sindhi women were less likely to be pressured than rural Baluch women, but women in rural and urban Sindh evinced higher level of interest in politics.*

competently negotiate on behalf of the state. Urban men did not have such reservations, but were reluctant to see their women kin enter politics (Shirkat Gah, 2002:239).

Affirmative Action: Pros and Cons

Affirmative action measures, such as reservations and quotas for women, have for some time, and in different fora, been advocated as a critically important strategy to rectify the imbalance of women in political life and other key decision-making public posts. Such measures may be especially necessary to pre-empt the pattern of only women from privileged families accessing such positions. But as the Indian debate on reservations in the Lok Sabha has indicated, mandating quotas for women is not a position endorsed by most men, and some women, in particular at the national level. In South Asia, concerns about reservations include fears that: (i) female kin of elite or upper-caste male politicians may dominate parliament rather than ensure a more equitable ethnic/caste/religious representation; (ii) "feminists" wielding political power might threaten the status quo and provoke a male backlash; (iii) women entering parliament via quotas may be inadequately qualified; or (iv) competent women candidates may be permanently discredited as persons who made it on the charity ballot rather than by their own efforts.[19]

Besides, the efficacy of affirmative actions depends on how quotas are filled. In Bangladesh, for instance, elected parliamentarians, largely male, nominate those who will fill the ten per cent women's quota at the national level. This means that occupants of those reserved seats are far more likely to help stabilise the party already in power rather than be well-qualified women, regardless of party affiliation, entering parliamentary politics. Some critics favour direct election to those reserved seats rather than nominations, while others prefer to strengthen those women already in government (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002:139-140). In spite of the argument that reservations are as likely to keep women disempowered as to give them a foothold through affirmative

[19]*For an earlier assessment in the Indian context see Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran (1997).*

action, several women, especially at the grassroots, have clearly favoured reservations at local government level as a means to empowerment in public and political space. This is especially striking when it is reckoned that women's political participation as a critical mass, as exemplified in the Indian panchayats, has helped implement plans that alleviate women's "private" burdens (childcare, potable water, sanitation etc.) and also enhanced their status in domestic space (Jayal, 2000:30-36; Asmita, 2002:362).

IV. Women's Perceptions and Experiences of Formal and Informal Institutions of Governance

How Gender Mediates Governance: Where are Women and Men Likely to Encounter the State?

Gendered encounters with the state in South Asia appear to be contingent upon certain key factors. The occasions for meetings between citizens and agents or officers of the state may already be "gendered" prior to such encounters. For example, given that women are expected to be more concerned about domestic matters than men, women are more likely to interact with state officials in education, health and welfare. These are domains that constitute a government's "soft" ministries compared with other areas. This is where women in the civil services of their countries are likely to be concentrated as well, with a minuscule number, if any, at the higher echelons of office even within these ministries and related departments.[20] Men may have greater occasion to interact with personnel in the areas of finance and taxation, law and order, urban

[20]*Taking Pakistan and Bangladesh as examples: In 1993 in Pakistan women were a little over five per cent of federal employees. According to a 1995 report, more than half of female federal employees were in the ministries of education and health. While women constituted 40 per cent of employees in the education sector, and over 20 per cent in health and social welfare, they were only 1.8 per cent in food and agriculture, and 3.9 per cent in planning and development. The lowest presence was in foreign affairs (Zia and Bari, 1999:61-64). In Bangladesh, according to a 1997-1998 report, women constitute a little over ten per cent of public sector employees. About 21 per cent of health sector employees and 18 per cent in education are female (Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 1999).*

and rural development, and trade, covered by the traditional "hard" ministerial portfolios. They are also likely to constitute the majority of officials in these areas, at all bureaucratic levels.

Women, already implicated in state and community systems that ascribe to women dependency on men, are therefore liable to be portrayed and dealt with as passive recipients of the state's services and resources, including as recipients of state initiatives on population control. This move also places women alongside children and others constructed as dependents upon the state. They thus merit the state's benevolent "protection" because of ascribed special vulnerability. At the same time, they risk being victimised by the state while moving in "gendered" domains for their own advancement. An example would be the women workers in the Free Trade Zones of Sri Lanka, who have the opportunity to subvert material dependency and thereby secure some autonomy in other areas of their lives, because of negotiations between the state and multinational companies that make their employment possible. Simultaneously, that employment is possible because these workers are marketed by the state to the multinationals through the invocation of feminised ascriptions – nimble, malleable, docile and unlikely to cause trouble.

Men and women are likely to encounter the state on somewhat less gender discriminatory terms when they challenge the state directly in anti-systemic encounters. For instance, in the context of the Chakma uprising in Bangladesh or the civil war in Sri Lanka, women and men who actively resisted the state, shared equal risk when confronted by the state's security forces. Gender is still an issue where the state deals with suspected or actual militants and with a civilian population in the context of a guerrilla war. Surveillance directed at women remains highly sexualised even if rape is not deployed systematically as a means of terror in the course of military operations.[21]

[21]In the Sri Lankan civil war, rape has not been used systematically as a weapon by either the LTTE or the state, compared with the rape of Bangladeshi women by Pakistani soldiers during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. But Tamil women in Sri Lanka are still at risk of rape by the state's armed forces. Some brutal examples compounded by murder have been highlighted in the last four years. The most notable is that of Krishanthy Kumaraswamy. Local and international outrage spurred the state to take serious measures to prosecute the perpetrators, exposing shortcomings in the legal system during the process (University Teachers for Human Rights, 1999).

Conventional Notions of Citizenship and Gendered Implications

Citizenship, in its most basic understanding, connotes the relationship between citizen and their state. The state is expected to respect, safeguard and promote the rights of its citizen, while the latter discharge their responsibilities to a state that, they hope, represents them equally without favouring any select group. However, it appears that unequal gendered notions of citizenship are central to discourses of the state, regardless of assertions of equality.

Historically, women's entitlement to citizenship has been determined by their relationships to men and subordinated to masculinity, class, caste and other community locations, giving women therefore an "auxiliary" status vis-à-vis the state.[22] Besides enacting unequal citizenship status premised on gender, rather than disavow sectarian or ethno-nationalist policies South Asian states (as much as ethno-religious communities) have also selectively mobilised ethnic or religious identities for political and economic ends, thereby further complicating the relationship between gender and citizenship.[23]

Women rights activists have responded to the state's failure to promote gender equality in two ways: they have either held the state accountable for abuses of power regarding gender[24] and have pressured it to meet its commitments to women's welfare, or they have eschewed reliance on the state. As much as other movements for social transformation, women's movements at various levels have pressured the state, through non-party political mobilisation and advocacy, to re-define the state's responsibilities towards them. To press for good governance reforms, such as anti-liquor laws and state initiatives to safeguard the environment, it has used the

[22]*As articulated by Shirkat Gah (2002:180).*
[23]*See Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu eds. (1999) for examples from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.*
[24]*An example of the state's abuse of power regarding gender is on the matter of population control. While women proposed the need to be able to control their reproductive lives, policies articulated as population control have had the capacity to become coercive in the state's hands.*
[25]*Examples from India include the Chipko movement (Ekatra, 2002), and many anti-liquor initiatives country-wide (Ekatra, 2002, and Asmita, 2002).*

discourse of basic needs and fundamental rights.[25] Significantly, women citizens may also seek to establish what their responsibilities are, along with their rights, in re-articulating their relationship with the state. This is perhaps because women have overwhelmingly had the demand to act responsibly thrust upon them by family, community and state, compared with their male counterparts.

Women in various formations have, through their activism, also contested the conventional definitions of citizenship and consequent relationship with the state, seeking to re-negotiate the meanings of citizenship through encounters with the state and its officers. For instance, while continuing to regard the state as the source of laws that protect them, women are sometimes compelled to confront the state's officers as compromisers of that same law. Encounters with the police and issues of custodial rape are an illustrative instance that is applicable across the region.

Mediated Perceptions of the State

Women's perceptions and experiences of the state and therefore their definitions of a state's responsibilities are, in large measure, mediated by an array of social, economic and ethno-religious factors. For women who have minimal exposure to the public realm, politics and processes of the state may be equated almost exclusively with electoral politics and voting. Others who have greater mobility and cause to challenge the state and its policies, whether by accident or design, including politically active students and workers, may see politics as an expression of the competitive tendency and contests for power that permeate all levels of government (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002). Proportionately few women are likely to define politics as a matrix of power processes informing the assertion of fundamental rights and negotiation of various entitlements from the state, and therefore value women's direct representation in democratic process in a particular way. Women from depressed castes or classes, and from ethnic minorities that are under siege from the state, may see political engagement as a means to retain or regain their identity and self-dignity simultaneously as women and as members of a minority or

depressed group (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002:162).

To glimpse how women and men in South Asia may understand concepts such as "governance", "state" and "government", it may be useful to compare field research evidence[26] with some definitions generally used in a social science context. In the latter instance, notions of governance may include ideas about (i) the legitimacy of government, which is linked with participatory processes and the consent of those who are governed; (ii) the accountability of government officials for their actions and the existence of mechanisms by which individuals and institutions can be held accountable; (iii) the competence of a government to formulate appropriate policies, make timely decisions, implement them effectively and deliver services; and (iv) the respect for human rights and the rule of law to guarantee individual and group rights and security in order to provide a framework for political, economic and social activity (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002:105).

Few women and men surveyed or interviewed in South Asia demonstrated an understanding of the difference between the concepts of government and state, even if there were different words in local languages to distinguish between the two. Among those who identified a difference, some said that they felt a sense of entitlement as citizens within the state, regardless of the government in power, whereas any particular government could represent the interests of select persons or communities rather than all components of the body politic (ICES, 2002:490).

Understandings of governance were also mediated by the social and political locations of persons in relation to the state, which in turn inform their expectations of what constitutes good governance. In some situations of political contest where citizens experience the armed presence of, and heightened surveillance by, the state, many women continue to feel represented by the state.[27] Such a view would be unlikely in other, but similar, situations where the presence of the state is experienced mainly as oppressive and illegitimate. Women's location vis-à-vis the state, as perceived by

[26]*This again draws primarily from the country studies in Tambiah, ed. (2002).*
[27]*Ekatra (2002:340) indicates that even in a troubled region such as the Punjab, in India, only about 25 per cent of the women surveyed felt that they were not represented by the state.*

minority women (such as the Chakma in Bangladesh) sometimes hinged on the nature of the minority community's relationship with the majority, especially with the majority-dominated state at any given historical moment (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002).

The capacity to re-imagine the state in South Asia is both influenced and limited by the fact that women and men have rarely, if ever, experienced, or been encouraged to imagine, a viable alternative to the organising principles and functioning of an overarching state, even if, as an institution, it is inefficient and frequently corrupt and repressive. Hence, women and men continue to perceive themselves as located within and in relationship to the existing state, and in large measure expect the state to continue in its many roles as intervener and mediator rather than reduce its capacities. However, women in general are very clear that the state falls considerably short of what it could do to alleviate the lives of its citizens. Most women envision a democratic, participatory, accountable, non-discriminatory and gender sensitive state that is committed to the transparency of processes of governing. Many also see the state as a provider of law, order and peace as women are disproportionately victimised by violence of all types (Ekatra, 2002). They also desired a state where religious or ethnic differences would not be deployed for political gain. Others, especially if they were from disenfranchised minority communities, emphasised the need for a state to guarantee physical and economic security, and to maintain the rule of law, including respect for fundamental rights (Asmita, 2002, and Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002). It was felt that a decentralised state was more likely than a centralised one to address effectively everyday, local concerns (Ekatra, 2002). In short, women are interested in seeing the welfare state persist and strengthened, acting as a provider of resources and employment, a site of adjudication, and as the owner and maintainer of essential services. This takes on added urgency in a context where structural adjustment and economic reform programmes threaten to curtail state-provided facilities that are vital to women's capacities to continue discharging their responsibilities to their families and communities.

There is also hesitation by communities to take on full responsibility for managing resources that could be utilised by citizens. While communities may profess to have a shared

investment with the state in regard to resource ownership, with the state holding resources in trust for the people, they still expect that the state, whether acting in its centralised or de-centralised capacities, would administer such resources and their distribution (ICES, 2002:483). However, existing degrees of, or increased, intervention by the state notwithstanding, a considerable proportion want NGOs and civil society groups or "the community" to take on service delivery. For women, education and health are the two areas where they are open to considering interventions by the private sector, especially if these women are of urban, middle class backgrounds (as they are the group who could access such service alternatives to the state). In comparison men, especially if they are from the urban upper and middle classes, favour private sector interventions in areas such as health, education and banking.

The State and Law Reform

In South Asia, the women's movement has frequently focussed on law as the favoured site for confronting the gender biases of the state. However, the capacity for transformation in that arena has been compromised as much by the endemic sexism of the legal system as by the limitations of impact resulting from inadequate related institutional change and public awareness raising. The law continues as a site that offers an important blueprint of the nature of relationships between the state and (female) citizens. For instance, the law valorises women as wives and mothers in certain contexts, but simultaneously discriminates against married women in others. In Sri Lanka, for example, wives cannot prosecute their husbands for marital rape (except in instances of judicial separation). The law may also manifest perverse bids at gender equality, as in the move in Sri Lankan law to criminalise homosexual acts between women.[28] The law has also frequently been the site where contests between ethno-religious communities for stakes in the state have been articulated, with gender frequently becoming

[28]*Until the 1995 Penal Code amendments, section 365A of the Sri Lanka Penal Code criminalised "gross indecency" between "male persons". The 1995 amendments removed "male" so that the statute now reads (gender-neutrally) "persons".*

a terrain for legal battles that ignore minority women's needs, especially pronounced in contexts of ethnic polarisation and the fragile political alliances within governments.[29]

Most citizens, both women and men, experience constraints in accessing the state's justice system, marked by chronic delays in judicial processes. There is a general perception that justice is available only for the privileged class. Some women may also reject the state as a site of justice, seeing it as acting in collusion with other formations repressive of women, such as family and religious hierarchies. Others prefer to keep the state out of family matters, or turn to the courts only as a last resort (Shirkat Gah, 2002). Few South Asians consider the police in favourable terms. These experiences notwithstanding, the expectation prevails that the state's institutions should provide justice, even if many persons are compelled, or prefer, to take their problems elsewhere to more accessible institutions, such as to the local political elite and traditional, community-based fora, for dispute resolution.

The general distrust of state institutions, such as the police and legal courts and their perceived condoning of gendered violence may also push women and men to seek justice through panchayats or other local decision-making bodies. Local sites of arbitration may be preferred for their familiarity, accessibility and relative speed of dispute resolution rather than unfamiliar, time consuming and inaccessible mechanisms of the central state. This may be true even if such local bodies traditionally have no women functionaries, or are rarely accessed directly by women themselves, as in Bangladesh and Pakistan (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002, and Shirkat Gah, 2002). In fact, in some instances such as in Pakistan, the state might actually rely on local arbitration bodies for problem resolution within the local context rather than bring a matter to court. It is so especially when it is felt that the existing state mechanisms will not be able to address a situation competently or adequately, thereby bearing testimony to the imperfect reach of the state and its mechanisms (Shirkat Gah, 2002). However, both women and men are keenly aware that such local fora are not "neutral", being also sites for power play and exertion of influence by the local elites.

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[29]*See, for instance, Nivedita Menon (1998) and Yasmin Tambiah (1998).*

The State and Women Workers

The relationship between the state and its female citizens has become increasingly tentative, mistrustful and fractious in the context of globalised movements of capital and labour. Globalisation has entrenched gendered hierarchies in the labour force as well as increased the percentages of women living below the poverty line. As discussed above, the state has been instrumental in ensuring the docility of labour to ensure foreign investment, such as by banning strikes in Free Trade/Export Processing Zones, and has been party to the exploitation of labour by multinational corporations through its role in projecting an image of the passive female worker. It has also taken inadequate measures to ensure the personal and occupational safety of female garment workers and migrant women workers whose income swells the gross national product. In addition, given that the (already relatively weak) welfarist role of the South Asian state has been increasingly compromised through its compliance with structural adjustment programmes or their equivalents imposed by international monetary institutions, women are being forced to shoulder increased responsibilities in care-taking and other reproductive labour sloughed off on to them by the state.[30]

The gender biases of the state also emerge in instances where resource allocation becomes an issue. The state appears as cooperative and supportive when income generation is the focus. Income generation can, in fact, be justified as alleviating the situation of the entire community through socialising of the private care-taking function of women. But it may turn hostile when resource allocation requires enactment of the norms of "equal" citizenship, recognising women as landholders, primary wage-earners or heads of households, independent of or equal to men (ICES, 2002:455-460).

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[30]*See for instance Kerry Rittich (2001). While Rittich focuses on the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the issues she raises are pertinent to South Asia.*

V. The Role of Civil Society in Engendering Governance

Women's Movements and the State

In South Asia, the history of women's movements is closely linked with the history and fortunes of the post-colonial state. Political and institutional mobilisations to promote women's education, interrogate repressive social practices and revoke or reform certain oppressive laws were an important aspect of reform and independence movements from the late 19th century into the 20th. Women in contemporary political movements have continued to emphasise that advancing women's rights cannot occur independent of other movements for democracy and social justice, including equality for ethnic minorities and depressed castes and classes, and demilitarisation and cessation of armed conflict. While women's mobilisation has catalysed the state to alter some of its policies to accommodate women's needs, women's movements have often suffered major setbacks when the democratic capacities of the state are compromised through military regimes or other authoritarian governments.[31] Further, given that the South Asian state tends to favour the maintenance of a gendered inequality, rarely interrogating gender relations in a fundamental way, it is likely to support those women's organisations and initiatives that it perceives as non-confrontational and/or promoting the state's policies.[32]

Some women's organisations associated with development have striven to function independently of any political party, and to cultivate support from the state through such 'neutral' positioning. While this strategy has enabled women to secure more access to public space and decision-making, the confinement of such organisations to 'community development' level has also compromised their capacity to assert themselves in more conventional politicised fora. In fact, the state can now easily ignore

[31]*Exceptions to this do exist, however, as in spaces opened up for women during the Ayub military regime in Pakistan, most notably the introduction of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (Zia and Bari, 1999:7).*
[32]*For examples of such organisations and the consequences once they engaged in electoral politics, see ICES (2002:456-462).*

or dismiss them as being concerned primarily with (non-politicised) development. At the same time, most states in South Asia have been compelled to recognise the value of NGOs, especially in the context of globalisation and economic restructuring. They may acknowledge, even if reluctantly, that in some instances NGOs are positioned to provide services that the state cannot deliver to its citizens, even as in many more instances the state, by the far greater magnitude of its outreach capacity, cannot have its functions replaced by those of NGOs. In the former instances, NGOs are implicated in state maintenance and reformation, even if explicit joint ventures between NGOs and local government bodies are rare.

Women's NGOs, Informal and Formal Politics

NGOs play a key role in providing space for women to cultivate political awareness and actively participate in politics, or challenge the status quo and various systems of discrimination from outside party-dominated spaces.[33] While NGOs may have a limited impact on society compared with the apparatus of the state, they can still play an important role by supporting women's interventions and providing opportunities for developing leadership (Asmita, 2002, and Shirkat Gah, 2002).

Nationally and regionally, NGO networks form effective pressure groups to keep women's issues, such as inheritance rights, violence against women, and equal access to education and employment, at the fore. The particular strength of such formations is that they provide the opportunity for women to cultivate a collective social power to confront and negotiate with the state for the causes important to women (Shtrii Shakti, 2002). In particular, if their interventions are rooted in a feminist perspective that underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to challenging gender inequality, by simultaneous consideration of concerns such as poverty, caste privilege and sectarianism, then they also afford the opportunity for women to understand the interconnections between, say, income generation and the merits of women's material autonomy. For instance, in Bangladesh, access to micro-credit

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[33] *All country studies in Tambiah, ed. (2002) attest to this.*

systems empowered poor women to be less dependent on class-privileged people for work and resources (Ain O Salish Kendra, 2002:146).

NGOs have also made decisive interventions in shoring up elected women representatives. Examples from India establish that, where women's NGOs are active, elected women representatives are more likely to be aware of provisions in the formal political process (Asmita, 2002, and Ekatra, 2002). Some NGOs have undertaken training programmes to strengthen the efficacy of women representatives, thereby underscoring the potential in links between women in civil society and those in formal politics.[34] To the contrary, others have desisted from such activity in order to distance themselves from mainstream politics (Shtrii Shakti, 2002, and ICES, 2002). The most noteworthy alliances between women's groups and other civil society institutions have emerged in the context of either resisting or contesting an authoritarian state, as in working on human rights initiatives or protesting press censorship. On the other hand, women's formations have also cultivated alliances with groups that promote sectarian impulses, a reminder that civil society does not simply mean pro-democratic, pro-feminist forces, but also conservative, anti-feminist, religious extremist formations.[35]

Gendering the Governance Agenda in Civil Society

The growing emphasis on promoting good governance through an alliance between funders and concerned civil society organisations has necessitated a focus on gender, its implications and deployments. NGOs that are primarily women's organisations, and which therefore focus all their resources, personnel and material, on women's issues have engaged in a number of projects in relation to assessing the nature and requirements of effective governance in specified locations. Such projects include research for action, training of elected women representatives, gender-sensitising government officials, building institutional capacity to provide and sustain support for local governance initiatives, etc.

[34] *As in states such as Karnataka. See Srilatha Batliwala (1996).*
[35] *See for instance Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu, eds. (1999).*

There are also organisations that are not women's NGOs, but which are concerned with ensuring that gender sensitivities are reflected in their governance programmes. The strategies they employ to ensure this appear to place them in two main, though not always exclusive, categories.

In the first type, there is a distinct gender unit within the institution. This unit deals with a range of programmes that address concerns focussing on women, of which governance may be one area, alongside violence against women, micro-credit opportunities, women's health, female literacy, etc. Governance concerns may include gender-sensitising the judiciary, and providing support and training for women candidates and elected representatives in local government.[36] Governance programmes that fall outside the gender unit may be gender-blind, gender-neutral, or regard gender as irrelevant. Alternatively, while there may not be a distinct gender unit per se, there would be research projects or training programmes that focus exclusively or primarily on women, with governance again being one of many areas addressed.[37]

In the second type, there may not be a separate gender unit, per se, but gender is addressed within each or most projects undertaken by the institution, including those on governance. Women and gender concerns are therefore integrated into programmes or projects so that a critical awareness of gender informs research (both content and research team composition), analyses or training.[38] This type of institution appears to be more rare, as it requires that its staff be gender sensitised so that project design and implementation reflect gender awareness more widely. Assessing the merits of each type of institution in the cause of promoting women's interventions in politics and governance would require more extensive research and analysis.

[36]For example, ProPublic in Kathmandu.
[37]The International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, which has governance as part of its programmatic mandate, has recently had a regional project on women and governance, as well as a Sri Lanka-specific project looking at domestic violence.
[38]The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad strives to approach this model. While some of its governance research focuses primarily on women (such as studies on local government, and nuclearization, by Saba Gul Khattack), others (such as studies done by Shahrukh Rafi Khan, et. al. on controlling water resources) attempt to integrate gender into analysis.

VI. Conclusion

The impact of gender inequality on governance is as debilitating as it is widespread. Complicated by other intersecting hierarchies, such as class, caste, ethnicity and religion, the differences ascribed to women and men on the basis of sex are recreated, maintained and manipulated in contests for state power and resource allocation. Women (and whatever is designated as "feminine") unless they are already located in a network of privilege tend to lose out in such contests. Not only does this translate into at least half of a state's population being deprived of benefits and opportunities for advancement, but it also indicates that the growth of a state, in terms of economic and infrastructural development, and a better quality of life for all its citizens, is seriously compromised.

Women's attempts to engage more effectively in the public and political life of their countries, and to negotiate the meanings of citizenship, necessitate engaging with issues that range from access to education, mobility, financial capacity, and the sexual division of labour on the one hand, to political parties, systems and processes on the other. The state's willingness to intervene on women's behalf, or create an environment and opportunities that promote women's participation, is, in turn, determined by the interests of state and political actors in securing or maintaining power. In South Asia, and frequently in South East Asia, this has often taken the form of manipulating ethnic and religious sentiments of citizens, protecting existing social hierarchies and incumbent political elites, and using gender as the terrain for negotiating the maintenance or reformulation of political alliances regardless of the interests of women themselves.

The results of such operations are seriously compounded by tensions besieging global south states in the contemporary international arena. In 2003, globalisation includes contending with the possibility of a world-scale war; the designation of particular communities as local and international security risks; and restrictions on migration and travel for a range of purposes, including employment, prompted by fears of border penetrations by so-called "terrorists". These are aggravated by ongoing, vigorous contests for the control and regulation of capital and labour by multinational corporations, and demands for infrastructural

adjustments in the states of the global south by international financial institutions.

In many of these scenarios, as states contend with internal and external pressures, it is women who are facing the primary risks and debilitations of shifts and failures in state commitments. Women are still largely dependent on the state for resources and services that make it possible for them, at least minimally, to cope with the discriminatory sexual division of labour, an inequality that in itself compromises any bid at material autonomy and accompanying freedoms. Withdrawal of the state from its welfare functions will burden women still further. While the root causes of the under-development or uneven development of a state may be complex, it is pressingly clear that attempts to devise solutions at any level of policy making within a state, or on issues concerning its borders, cannot hope to be effective unless the lives and concerns of women are given serious consideration, and they are drawn in as public decision makers and political actors to articulate their anxieties and aspirations, as well as voice the concerns of the communities with which they are linked.

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