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CHAPTER THIRTEEN: CONCLUSION CAPITAL ACCUMULATION IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA

13.1 Introduction

In the preceding Chapters I have reviewed economic experiences of three Asian countries, Japan, Bangladesh and India, and I have taken the labouring activities of women in agriculture and in industry as my point of departure. In my investigation, I have on the one hand sought to assess the relevance of Marxist economic concepts, such as: the concept of the original accumulation of capital, Marx's theory of the working day, his analysis of the turn-over-time of capital, and his concept of the 'reserve army of labour'. In Marx' own days, the economies of Asia were marginal to the world economic system, and his theory was primarily anchored on the experience of Britain, then the centre of the system. My investigation shows that the process of capital accumulation in Asia has 'progressed' up to the point where Marx' tools of analysis have become highly applicable to the realities in this continent.

In reviewing the labour of women in Bangladesh, India and Japan, I have further tried to assess the significance of concepts which have been proposed by participants in the international feminist debate. Here I have concentrated, in particular, on the views of four distinct currents. First, I have drawn attention to authors belonging to the current of developmental feminism who, in researching about rural women's labour, have sought to support women's 'integration in development'. Further, I have contrasted their views with those of the ecofeminist author, Vandana Shiva, who questions the existing economic growth process as 'maldevelopment', leading to ecological destruction, loss of common property resources and the marginalisation of women. The third current of which I have reviewed books and article, is that of the German feminist School. The theses of Maria Mies and others on 'housewifisation' and 'subsistence labour' were especially relevant to my discussion, since they have precisely been devised for the analysis of women's work. Lastly, in my Chapters on 'Japanisation' and on women in the Japanese economy I have briefly referred to socialist-feminist analytical work.

13.2 Original Accumulation and the Economy of Bangladesh

The process of original or 'primitive' accumulation is one of the historical processes analysed by Karl Marx in the First Volume of his '*Capital*'. In a frequently quoted introductory statement to his Chapter on the 'secret of primitive accumulation', Marx argued that "capitalist production presupposes the pre-existence of considerable masses of capital and of labour-power in the hands of the producers of commodities. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn in a vicious circle, out of which we can only get by supposing a primitive accumulation (previous accumulation of Adam Smith) preceding capitalist accumulation; an accumulation **not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its starting point.**" (1)

How did Marx view this process for England, the environment from which he drew much of his investigative material? In subsequent Chapters, Marx described in detail the violent manner in which the English peasantry, from the 15th century onward, was driven from the soil. Capital was created by depriving the agricultural population of its means of production, primarily land. A key aspect of the process of dispossession, as analysed by Marx, was the enclosure of the commons to which reference has been made in my chapter on Bangladesh' agriculture: fields which in earlier centuries were held in common and used as pasture for the peasants' animals, were fenced off and were used for the grazing of sheep. These sheep were owned by capitalist farmers, interested in producing raw wool for England's growing wool industry. The enclosure of the commons was supported by 'bloody legislation' enacted by the British state.

Thus, Marx' analysis of the original accumulation that preceded the Industrial Revolution was very concrete. In his eyes, the road for capitalist accumulation proper was paved via dispossession of the agricultural producers: "The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, is the basis of the whole process." (2) This dispossession helps to pave the way for the formation both of the class of wage-labourers, and of the class of capitalist entrepreneurs. For Marx, the two developments were clearly interconnected. In one violent sweep, the social means of subsistence and of production previously held by the peasants, were transformed into capital, while the immediate producers were turned into wage-labourers. "The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production." (3)

In the Chapter on women's labour in Bangladeshi agriculture, I have sought to explain how the concept of original or 'primitive' accumulation is crucial to understanding the expropriation of the Bangladeshi peasantry under the impact of the so called 'modernisation', which has taken place in the last two decades in particular. Here I have pinpointed two key developments. On the one hand, millions of former, small peasant proprietors have been turned into landless peasants in consequence of the dominance of commercial traders, who 'skim off' the agricultural surplus through the method of buying cheap and selling dear. Underpayment of the producers of agricultural commodities, the spread of peasants' indebtedness, and the loss of arable land on a vast scale, have been consistent and interrelated features of the Bangladeshi rural economy throughout the period since the country's formal political independence, in 1971.

On the other hand, the rural poor are increasingly being deprived of their access to common property resources, in a process which is broadly comparable to the historic enclosure of the commons in England. For the agenda underlying the drive to build embankments and polders throughout the country's fertile delta, is the desire on the part of the World Bank, Bangladesh' major 'donors', and the country's own rural and urban elite, to privatise natural resources which have always been held in common. Although this is never stated explicitly, and remains hidden under a barrage of propaganda about 'people's participation', - the very effect of the construction of embankments is to restrict the free access of peasant women and men to water and fishery resources. In order to create the basis for capitalist accumulation, the immediate producers in the countryside of Bangladesh have to be separated from their means of subsistence, and, as it seems, at any social or ecological costs.

Prominent Marxist theoreticians, such as André Gunder Frank, in the 1960s and 1970s have elaborated on the continued occurrence of original accumulation, long after capitalism has been established as a world economic system. Thus, in his 'Conclusions on So-Called Primitive

Accumulation' (4), Frank has argued that there surely was a long period of original accumulation that preceded "self-sustaining" capital accumulation through production of surplus value by wage labourers. He, however, disputes whether this process stopped after the Industrial Revolution. Moreover, the occurrence of 'primitive' accumulation has not been limited to the country of Great Britain. Peasant producers in the Third World in the colonial and post-colonial period have been, and continue to be robbed of part of their consumption fund in the interest of capital accumulation in the centres of the world economy. The dispossession of the immediate producers, the appropriation of their means of production, is a world-wide and persistent phenomenon.

The evidence gathered on Bangladesh, thus, broadly supports André Gunder Frank's conclusion that "the process of divorcing owners from their means of production and converting them into wage-labourers was not only primitive, original, or previous to the capitalist stage, but also continued during the capitalist stage, as it still does." (5) Though Bangladesh has been incorporated into the world economy, its agriculture continues to bear many features of the pre-capitalist mode of production, including the fact that peasant producers have access to natural resources which have not yet been turned into commodities for market sale. The evidence on the effects of embankment and polder-construction illustrates well that original accumulation is taking place full swing. Such accumulation is being promoted by the very institutions, such as the World Bank, which, also, staunchly defend surplus production in its 'proper', capitalist form.

13.3 Marx' Theory of the Working Day and the Bangladeshi Garments' Sector

Bangladesh's experiences, however, can not only be used to demonstrate the present-day occurrence of original accumulation, but also to illustrate the nature of capital accumulation proper. Marx' understanding regarding the basic character of capitalist production has been referred to repeatedly in this book (6), and I presume there is no need to restate his labour theory of value *in extenso*. The accumulation of industrial entrepreneurs is made possible through the appropriation of what Marx called surplus value, - of that value which the waged labourers produce on top of the value required for their subsistence. This distinction between surplus labour and subsistence or 'necessary' labour makes it possible to explain modern-day exploitation. It is the very cornerstone of Marx' system of economic thought.

Now, one of the two major ways in which the appropriation of surplus value by the owners of capital is achieved, is through the prolongation of the working day, - a method which was amply used by British factory-owners in the period during and after the Industrial Revolution. Marx calls this method that of the production of absolute surplus value: "the production of absolute surplus value turns exclusively upon the length of the working day" (7); he considers it "the groundwork of the capitalist system". Thus, Marx' definition of absolute surplus value is as follows: "The prolongation of the working day beyond the point at which the labourer would have produced just an equivalent for the value of his labour power, and the appropriation of that surplus-labour by capital, this is **production of absolute surplus value.**" (8)

Historically speaking, the proponents of the capitalist mode of production in England had to wage a protracted struggle in order to be able to enforce a gradual extension of the working day. As Marx indicates, up to the epoch of modern industry and machinery, capital in England had not succeeded in seizing for itself the whole week of the labourers, and the struggle

to compel them to toil the whole six days in the week continued throughout the greater part of the 18th century. It was only in the last third of that century that "all bounds of morals and nature, age and sex, day and night, were broken down" (8). Only then, only with the birth of modern industry, were all limitations to the length of the working day removed. The "boundless thirst for surplus value" of the entrepreneurs, Marx remarks in characteristic language, was reflected in an extension of the time wage-labourers had to work - beyond even what could physically be borne.

In the Chapter on the export-oriented garments' sector in Bangladesh, we have seen how Marx' theory of the working day can be applied to industrial relations in a Third World economy today. This sector, as stated, is relatively new. It was founded only in 1977, and over a period of some fifteen years has grown into the principal industrial sector of Bangladesh's economy, employing more than triple the number of wage-workers in the second largest sector, that of jute. Like their British predecessors of the late 18th and early 19th century, the owners of Bangladeshi garment factories have waged a relentless struggle for the extension of the working day. Neither the traditionally strong jute sector nor the agrarian sector which still employs the vast majority of the country's producers, is characterized by similarly long hours of toil. It is only in the sector of readymade garments that the working day is exceedingly long. In some cases, working time is stretched up to 48 or 72 hours, i.e. beyond what is physically sustainable for the (mainly female) workforce of the factories.

The practice of limitless extension of the working day was illustrated via a minute description of violations of government laws, in particular of the Factory Act of 1965. The Factory Act and other regulations had sought to limit the exploitation of industrial workers, through prescriptions such as regarding: the normal length of the working day, the maximum length of overtime work, the number of hours that children may be set to work in factories and the working time of women. The practice of forced overwork for which the workers receive no pay, of prolongation of the probationers' period far beyond the legally fixed maximum, of children being obliged to do overtime work like adults, and many other illegal practices amply demonstrate the owners' drive to appropriate as much labour-time as possible, and increase the rate of workers' exploitation to the maximum.

Thus, Marx' view regarding the extraction of 'absolute' surplus value remains as relevant to understanding the conditions in Third World industries today as it was for the analysis of conditions in Britain in the nineteenth century. The existence of a labouring day of 14 to 16 hours; of overtime work of 70 hours or more per month, with pay-rates of 40 to 60 percent the normal, hourly rate; these, and other phenomena can best be analysed within the theoretical framework as devised by Marx. The distinction between necessary and surplus labour time, which is hidden from the eye of the workers because it is never made by the owners who buy their labour power, is the very key to laying bare, and quantifying, the exploitation the garment workers are subjected to. Without Marx' distinction, the causes of the 'medieval' slavery in the modern, world market oriented garments' sector, remain a mystery.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that there is one crucial difference between the economic position of contemporary Bangladeshi garment workers and that of the nineteenth century industrial workers in England. For contrary to the surplus value produced by the latter, the surplus value produced by Bangladeshi garment workers does not wholly accrue to the immediate owners: as the section on the international relations of subcontracting in my Chapter explained, the lion's share of profits from ready made garments is appropriated by retail trading

companies in countries of the industrial North. It is they who are partly responsible for the fact that the Bangladeshi workers are robbed of part of their consumption fund. A comprehensive assessment of the production relations in Bangladesh's garments' sector, in short, needs to take account of this double structure for the appropriation of surplus value, - of the 'skimming off' of value through unequal trade relations side-by-side with the appropriation of value by the immediate owners of the factories.

13.4 Japanisation and the Turn-Over Time of Capital

In the Chapter on Japanese methods of industrial management the relevance of Marx' analysis regarding the turn-over-time of capital has, amongst others, been discussed. The turn-over time, as defined by Marx, comprises both the time of the actual production of commodities, and the circulation time before and after production, i.e. the time needed to purchase raw materials and that needed for the sale of the produced goods. This turn-over time does play an important role in the calculations which the owners of capital make. "From the point of view of the capitalist", Marx explained, "the time of turn-over of his capital is the time for which he must advance his capital in order to create surplus value with it and receive it back in its original shape." (10)

In elaborating further on the importance of the theme of the turn-over time, Marx raised and answered two basic questions which retain all of their actuality today. The first is whether the length of the turn-over time does exert an independent influence on the amount of value that can be created. Does the duration of the production- and circulation time combined have an effect on the accumulation process, independent from the value-creating power of labour, which Marx considers **the** source of value? Marx argues that the answer should be 'yes', and proves it through precise calculations. The owner of a mass of capital which is four times smaller in size than the capital of another entrepreneur can nevertheless gather at least as much surplus value as the latter, if the turn-over time of his capital is one fourth in duration. (11) The greater velocity of his capital makes up for its relatively small size.

The second question discussed by Marx is whether the impact of the turn-over time on value creation is positive or negative. In the notebooks of his '*Grundrisse*', which he wrote in preparation for the drafting of '*Capital*', Marx repeatedly states that the part of the turn-over time in which the owner is busy with the tasks of procuring raw materials and with getting his commodities sold, i.e. the circulation time, constitutes a time of devaluation. This time thus exerts a negative influence, it is in Marx words' a "natural barrier" to value creation. The longer the circulation time lasts, the costlier it is for the owners of capital. Consequently, they are engaged in a continuous battle to reduce the circulation time to the barest minimum, to bring this time as closely as possible down to zero.

The above explanation given by Marx in the middle of the 19th century is helpful to an analysis of key developments that have taken place in the world economy during the last decade, the 1980s. Let us look once again at the circulation time of capital, at the period before and after the time in which the industrial goods are actually produced. The length of these timings is influenced, amongst others, by the speed with which orders to and from the producing company can be transmitted. Whereas at the time of the Industrial Revolution, factory owners needed to rely on couriers to transmit messages to suppliers or buyers, they could later accelerate their communication via the postal and telegraph system. Since the introduction of computers and

faxes the transmission time has been brought down to nearly zero-time. Following Marx' explanation regarding the role of circulation time, it is easy to understand the interests which capitalist enterprises have in the development of (tele)communications.

In the Chapter on Japanisation, I have pointed out that the issue of the turn-over time of capital has been one of the factors influencing the devising of both Fordism (Americanism) and Toyotism (Japanisation), - the two management methods that have shaped industrial relations in the key sectors of the world economy in the twentieth century. In the devising of both, the desire to shorten the turn-over time of capital has been a key-element. In the case of Fordism, efforts have focused primarily on eliminating 'unproductive' time, intervals, between different stages of the production process. For one of the effects of the introduction of the assembly line was to reduce the time required for transportation eg. of component-parts of automobiles, in between the manual tasks performed by the workers to assemble the cars.

In the case of Toyotism, the desire to abbreviate the turn-over-time of capital has, perhaps, had an even more decisive impact. In Volume Two of '*Capital*', Marx discusses the 'Costs of Storage' in his Chapter on the 'Costs of Circulation'. One of the obstacles, barriers, to the circulation of capital, he explains, is that there must always be a greater accumulation of ready raw materials, etc., at the place of production than is used up, say, daily or weekly. Hence the demand "for a greater rapidity, regularity, and reliability in furnishing the necessary raw materials, so that no interruption will ever occur." (12) Capital's urge to restrict the time of storage has played a key role in the devising of Toyotism. The Japanese word which concisely expresses this urge is '*kanban*', meaning the demand that subcontracting companies deliver their components very strictly on time, so that the company or corporation does not need to keep stocks, and faces no interruption in its own production process.

Lastly, it may be objected that the principle of '*kanban*' is not the only one involved in Japanisation. As my own analysis has brought out, the differential manner in which Japanese companies treat workers' knowledge indeed is no less important to our understanding of Toyotism. The institution of 'quality control circles' was analysed as a 'correction' to Taylorism, - the management style which has held sway since the beginning of this century and in which the aim was to completely monopolise knowledge in a separate department of engineers. This aspect of Toyotism surely cannot be analysed on the basis of Marx' theory laid down in the nineteenth century. Still, Marx' elaborate discussion regarding the issue of the turn-over time, his view that entrepreneurs have an interest in removing all barriers to the speediest possible circulation of capital, is relevant to our analysis of the recent innovations in industrial management.

13.5 Marx' Thesis on the Industrial Reserve Army Applied to Japanese Women

In the Chapter on the position of women in the Japanese economy, I have tried to demonstrate how the employment policies pursued in relation to women in Japan can best be understood on the basis of Marx' theory regarding the 'relative surplus population' or 'reserve army of labour'. In Volume I of '*Capital*', Marx points at the fact that the capitalist mode of production does not only give birth to a new class, that of the collective workers, but also produces an excess population. He argued that "it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively

redundant population of labourers.." (13). Marx speaks in this context of a "a law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production." (14)

This relatively superfluous section of the working class, Marx further states, becomes "the lever of capitalist accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost." (15) The key function of the floating reserve, of people who are employed and dismissed by the owners at will, is to press down the general level of wages and hold the "pretensions" of regular wage-employees in check. Marx even believed that the general movement of wages is "exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army", which process corresponds to the periodic changes in the industrial cycle. (16)

Marx illustrates his views with extensive data on the situation in England just prior to the writing of his book. He calls England explicitly the "classical example" of capitalism, because of its leading position in the world economy, and because capitalist production "is here alone completely developed" (17). Thus, he records the undernourishment of the worst paid section of the British industrial working class; the deplorable health conditions of persons belonging to the "nomad population", i.e. of migrant workers whose origins lie in agriculture; and he also details the decreasing standard of living among agricultural workers. While the reserve army of labour can be divided into various categories, - they have a shared role for the process of capital accumulation, namely to keep the level of wages in society in check.

Marx' theory, at least its essential traits, can well be applied to contemporary Japan, to explain the secondary economic position held by women waged labourers. Alongside the United States and the countries of the European Union, Japan today occupies centre-stage in the world economy. Of all the states of Asia, it is undoubtedly the country where the capitalist mode of production has most fully been developed. And although the rate of unemployment is low compared to other industrialized countries, the Japanese economy nevertheless harbours a large reserve army of labourers. Typically, the 8 million middle-aged women who toil as part-time workers, can be disposed off, dismissed, at any time the company owners employing them choose to do so.

Following what Marx did for England, I have looked at the different categories of Japanese women workers belonging to the labour reserve. The position of women recruited as temporary workers via so called 'manpower agencies' is highly insecure: they are "sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted", i.e. they clearly form a floating section of the labour reserve (18), The category of women home workers could be called a 'stagnant' section: while their numbers have decreased, they are definitely the lowest paid of all Japanese women performing waged labour. The most significant section, as we have seen is that of women 'part-time' workers. Although they work an almost equal number of hours as 'full-timers', their wage is only 2/3 that of regular women workers, and they are deprived of most extra payments which regular employees in Japan are entitled to.

The institutionalisation of 'part-time' workers in the Japanese economy, perhaps, most clearly shows that the existence of a labour reserve is a matter of life-and-death for the process of capital accumulation. As mentioned, the Japanese state played a very active role in promoting the employment of middle-aged women as 'part-timers'. It was a governmental body, the

Economic Council, which devised the so called 'M-curve' that helped to institutionalize the very idea of 'part-timers' in the 1960s. And although the government in name promotes 'equal opportunities' for women and men, - in practice it has facilitated the emergence of a new, female workforce in the Japanese economy which is characterized by its cheapness and disposability. Japanese women who are part-timers, in short, show the classical features of members of the reserve army of labour, as defined by Marx.

The idea that women in capitalist countries form part of the reserve army of labour is in no sense new. It has been put forward both by orthodox Marxist authors, such as August Bebel (19), and by contemporary feminist writers, such as for instance by Bennholdt-Thomsen (20), whose views have been criticised in the Chapter regarding the thesis on subsistence labour. What the example of part-time workers in Japan clearly brings out, is that women's role as part of the labour reserve is conditioned by patriarchy and the sexual division of labour it prescribes. For it is women's responsibility for the bearing and rearing of children, the fact that they are excluded from participation in wage-labour for a whole period of their lives, which has made it possible for the Japanese state to define middle-aged women as a readily available labour reserve. Thus, while Marx' concept of the 'industrial reserve army of labour' is relevant to our analysis of the position of women part-timers in contemporary Japan - the feminist analysis regarding the sexual division of labour in the family is its necessary correlative.

13.6 Non-waged Labour of Women and the Extension of Marx' Labour Theory of Value

Though many of Marx' ideas, as illustrated, have their relevance for the understanding of Asian economies today, his labour theory of value which formed the cornerstone of his economic thought cannot be uncritically accepted. Ever since the first wave of feminism, the non-inclusion of women's domestic chores and of other non-waged work performed by women in Marx' economic theory, has been questioned by leading, feminist spokeswomen. Just as Marx' own theory was anchored on the experience of the European proletariat in the nineteenth century, the debate about household labour for analogous historical reasons too tended to be 'eurocentric' in the beginning. Thus, it tended to largely ignore the productive activities of rural women in the Third World. Nevertheless, the debate has resulted in an important extension of Marx' labour theory of value, and with universal implications.

I have argued in this book that to understand the evolution, the strengths and weaknesses of feminism during its first and second waves, we need to be aware of a striking contrast: between the **organisational** achievements of the German proletarian women's movement in the beginning of this century - and the **theoretical** achievements of the women's movement which emerged in industrialized countries during the 1960s. The German proletarian women's movement showed at the practical level how to mobilise both female wage-workers and proletarian housewives, yet its theoretical achievements were meagre. From the experiences during the second feminist wave, on the contrary, few positive, organisational lessons can be drawn. Still, it is during this second wave that the 'riddle' regarding household labour was basically solved at the level of theory. Here one can speak of a typical case of uneven development between theory and practice, recurring twice in history.

The proletarian women's movement under the leadership of Clara Zetkin developed a remarkable, quantitative organisational strength. It was characterized by a significant degree of autonomy *vis-a-vis* the (male) leadership of the official, working class party, the Social

Democratic Party, and conditions of repression forced it to be very flexible in organisational methods. Given the need to ensure broad participation of women in all three 'departments' of women's labour (the formal sector, the informal sector, and the 'sector' of household labour), the movement learnt to rely on a combination of action forms, including strikes and political boycotts. Meanwhile, the investigations into the exploitation of working class women carried out at the time resulted in rich, perceptual knowledge, but they basically failed to enhance the conceptual understanding of the leaders of the proletarian women's movement, and of other prominent thinkers belonging to the Social Democratic Party's left wing.

The experiences gained during the second wave of feminism, as said, did not give rise to powerful, new organisational ideas. The movement was hampered because of the narrow focus on women performing domestic chores. The debates of the movement's participants tended to create a divide between housewives and women doing wage-labour in the formal and informal industrial sector. Yet a conceptual breakthrough was achieved with far reaching consequences, in particular when MariaRosa Dalla Costa put forward the view that household labour does not just create use-values, but exchange values in the form of the commodity labour power as well. Women at home produce, Dalla Costa argued, when they give birth to children and raise them (future labour power), and they produce when they restore the strength, the labouring capacity of living workers (present labour power). With this conceptual framework laid down, it is possible to visualise that women's labour under capitalism is more all-embracing than men's.

In this book I have applied this feminist extension of Marx' labour theory of value to women's labour in Asian economies. Marx stated that value is determined by labour-time, but in calculating labour time he only looked at the time which wage labourers spend producing commodities for capitalist entrepreneurs. In my investigation into the labour of women 'part-time' labourers in Japan, I have calculated both the time they toil in the factories, and the time they do domestic chores: their average working week turned out to be 90 hours or more. Again, when interviewing home workers stitching garments at piece-rates in West Bengal, equally dramatic results were obtained: women perform 15 hours of labour per day, out of which more than half is non-waged. Given the fact that women's reproductive work is necessary, essential, to the maintenance of their own working capacity and that of their family members, it needs to be included when calculating the degree of exploitation which women workers are subjected to.

Women's creation of both use- and exchange-values has also been brought out in various chapters of this book. The view that women labourers create both kinds of values was, for instance, powerfully demonstrated by Maria Mies in her investigation into the lace industry in Narsapur, India, recorded in the chapter on 'housewifisation'. While the work of Indian women cannot be equated with that of housewives in the West, many of the activities they perform - such as the production of cow dung cakes, of milk, etc. - clearly have a double, value-creating nature since they often are intended both for family consumption and for market-sale. Thus, in spite of sharp differences between the economic circumstance of Third World countries and those of the industrialized North, - the critique and extension of Marx' labour theory of value formulated during the second feminist wave, can well be applied to women's labour in the Third World. It provides a fruitful, basic framework for assessing women's contribution to the creation of values.

13.7 The Sexual Division of Labour and the Experience in Asian Economies

An interrelated theme which too calls for criticism of Marx's views is that of the sexual division of labour. Marx tended to dismiss the question of the division of labour between women and men as 'naturally given'. As explained in Chapter Two of this book, in his view, the division of labour between towns and villages was the first social division of labour in history. Participants in the contemporary debate on women's labour have judged otherwise. Except for the writings of the ecofeminist author Vandana Shiva, - the writings of women belonging to all other currents of international feminism accord much importance to the theme of the sexual division of labour and its varied manifestations. It is in fact now considered to have been the first division of labour established in human history.

For a concrete discussion of the given theme, a broad distinction can usefully be made between the 'social' and the 'sectoral' division of labour between the sexes (21). The '**social**' **division** of labour between women and men then refers to the fact that throughout society, women are held responsible for domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning and the raising of children, whereas men are exempted from such tasks. The '**sectoral**' **division** of labour, refers to the fact that within specific sectors of a given economy - whether it be the production of crops, i.e. sectors of agriculture, or industrial sectors -, a hierarchical division of labour between women and men also operates. Whereas the first-mentioned, sexual division is 'fixed' and is of a universal character, the latter changes over time, according to the need to preserve male power over women.

The flexibility of the 'sectoral' sexual division of labour has figured in several chapters of this book. For instance, in the Chapter on rural women's labour in Bangladeshi agriculture, I have shown how the traditional division of labour between women and men is changing under the impact of 'modernisation'. Whereas patriarchy in the past prescribed that women's work should be limited to processing tasks, which can be implemented within the courtyard and the home, such as paddy parboiling and husking, - pauperisation since the 1970s has forced women from landless and land poor peasant families to increasingly seek outside employment, including employment as field labourers. This development has not led to the emancipation of village women, as is evidenced amongst others by the persistence of wage-discrimination against women. Yet women's employment is a landslide social change, evoking highly contrasting responses (22).

Another striking example of the flexible, 'sectoral' division of labour between the sexes has been described in the chapter on women home workers involved in producing *punjabis*, trousers, frocks and other readymade garments in West-Bengal. Here the issue is not primarily one of an evolving gender-division of work, - but one marked by territorial contrasts. In one area, that of Moheshtola/Santoshpur, men monopolise all machine operations, including recently mechanised work which formerly, as manual operations, used to be women's 'domain'. In Dumdum/Paikpara, on the contrary, the main task requiring the use of machines, i.e. the stitching of garments, is performed by women. As stated, the difference between male and female wage-workers in this geographic area is that men do the tasks located at the owner's residence, while all women producers are home-based. Here, the spheres of men's and women's waged work coincide with the dividing lines set by the 'social' sexual division of labour.

Nevertheless, men's monopoly over the instruments of technology is frequently and justly identified by feminist authors as a means to enforce male dominance. Highly significant in this respect is the account given by Maria Mies of the sexual division of labour in the production of three field crops - millet, paddy and tobacco - in Andhra Pradesh, India. As she shows,

women's work in agriculture hardly involves the use of any tools or equipment, whereas most of the labouring activities of men are performed with the help of agricultural implements and draught animals. Mies' factual account further makes clear that, unlike what is implied by the ecofeminist author Vandana Shiva, men do play an active role in the maintenance of the ecological cycle in agriculture. However, the sexual division of labour is structured in such a way that the ecological role of men is generally well differentiated from women's role.

Aside from the divide between home-based/outside labouring tasks, and the divide between manual operations and those involving the use of major tools/equipment, - a third 'structuring principle' for the sexual division of labour has been identified in this book: that between 'skilled' and 'semi-skilled' or 'unskilled' tasks. The divide between male jobs that are termed 'skilled' and female ones termed less skilled has been referred to in the chapter on garment production in Bangladeshi factories. Neither the work of male employees, such as of cutters and ironers, nor that of female employees, i.e. of operators of sewing machines, is purely manual; the tasks of each gender require the mediation of some tools or mechanical equipment. And yet factory management in its wage-scales invariably evaluates men's contribution to garments' production as far higher than women's. As feminist research on the issue of skill has brought out, the manipulation of skill definitions is yet another method by which a hierarchical division of labour between the sexes is maintained. (23)

In short, my investigation into the economies of Asian countries confirms that one cannot ignore the sexual division of tasks when trying to assess women's oppression and exploitation. For a systematic analysis, both the 'social' and the 'sectoral' division of labour between women and men have to be looked at. The experiences of women also confirm that the sexual division of labour varies - see the striking contrast between the traditional allocation of paddy-transplantation tasks in Andhra Pradesh and Bangladesh - , and it also changes over time. While the sexual division of labour is not determined by nature, but by social circumstances, there are identifiable methods - such as skill definitions and men's monopoly over machines - by which the subordinate position of women is maintained.

13.8 Strengths and Limitations of the Theses Put Forward by the German Feminist School

The mission of Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof, the three members of the German feminist School, has been to transcend the limits of the household labour debate of the second feminist wave, and make it relevant to the analysis of women's labour in the Third World. In this, they have drawn inspiration from Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism which held that capitalism cannot survive without a non-capitalist milieu, i.e. that capitalist accumulation thrives on the existence of non-capitalist forms of production and exploitation. Though Luxemburg's theory did not focus on the productive activities of women specifically, the members of the German feminist School argue that it can and should be used to explain the importance of women's household work and other non-waged work for the ceaseless growth of the capitalist world system.

How significant are the views of the German feminist School for our understanding of Asian economies? One of the two theses of the School concerns the social definition of (Western and increasingly also Third World) women as housewives. By defining women in census reports and statistical accounts as housewives, and by propagating the ideology that the man is the 'breadwinner' and that the work of women as 'non-earners' is of little importance, - proponents of the capitalist system make much of women's productive work in the Third World invisible, and facilitate the ruthless exploitation of women's labouring capacities. The social definition of women as housewives thus is an important ideological device, it helps to perpetuate and strengthen the subordinate position of women within the hierarchical structure of production relations.

In the chapter on the lace industry in Narsapur, India, I have highlighted Maria Mies' application of this thesis to a specific case, i.e. that of women home workers producing for the world market. The women crotcheters are at the bottom end of a whole hierarchy of subcontract-relations, stretching via small agents and export traders to retail trading companies in countries of the industrialized North. By defining the home-based wage labourers as housewives whose lace-making is just an activity to 'pass time', and by denying the necessity of their waged and non-waged work, the owners of capital are able to enforce an extremely high level of economic exploitation. I have argued that, although one should guard against over-interpretation, Maria Mies' investigation into the exploitation of lace workers has established well the importance of the housewife-ideology. By masking women's real identity as wage-workers, rich profits can be reaped from their labour.

Much more critical than my assessment of the thesis on 'housewifisation' has been my assessment of the second thesis of the German feminist School, that on 'subsistence labour'. According to this thesis - which, by the way, is close to the view propounded by Margaret Benston at the very onset of the household labour debate, in 1969 (24) - women worldwide are basically producers of 'use-value', more broadly the 'producers of life'. In this context, Maria Mies has spoken of a continuum between 'subsistence production and reproduction'. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen has elaborated the thesis by arguing that the capitalist system should be understood as a two-tier structure. It is composed of, what Marx called, 'extended reproduction' - and of 'subsistence reproduction', i.e. a second sphere occupied by women worldwide.

In trying to assess the validity of this thesis I have, once again, taken a concrete investigation of Maria Mies as my starting point, i.e. the fieldwork which, in the late 1970s, she undertook about female agricultural labourers in India's state of Andhra Pradesh. The facts cited by Mies - such as those on the production of millet, on fuel collection and on the gathering of grass for the feeding of buffaloes - show that village women in India today continue to engage in the production of use-values, and that these are very time-consuming. Yet her evidence also brings out that women do perform numerous market-oriented production activities. The growth in the number of rural women employed as *coolies*, as day-labourers, in commercial agriculture in fact shows that women's participation in the production of exchange-values has been expanding steadily.

In questioning the thesis on subsistence labour, I have raised two fundamental objections. On the one hand I have argued that this thesis bears the risk of making part of women's productive work invisible. In reality, the work performed by women worldwide has since the dawn of class societies not been limited to production for their family's immediate use, but has for thousands of years included surplus labour for the benefit of slave-owners, feudal

landlords and other exploiting classes. On the other hand, I do not believe that the capitalist system is simply leaving the sphere of non-capitalist production relations untouched. The policies pursued by the World Bank and by other international institutions leads, amongst others, to the further erosion of common property resources in Third World countries. And the consequences are not only that the bourgeois system of private property relations is everywhere being imposed, but also that the area of exchange value production is ever growing.

In conclusion, I believe that, in order to understand women's labour under contemporary capitalism, it is necessary to uphold Rosa Luxemburg's evaluation that the capitalist system is self-contradictory by nature. As she stated some 80 years ago, the expansion of the system, the process of accumulation, requires the existence of non-capitalist spheres of production. Yet the inevitable outcome of the self-expansion of aggregate capital is that, like an octopus, it grasps and incorporates ever greater parts of non-European, pre-capitalist economies. The factual material presented in this book on the economies of Bangladesh, India and Japan - economies which in Marx' days were largely outside the purview of the world capitalist system - sufficiently proves the point. Thus, the assessment of women's labouring activities, whether in Asia or elsewhere, ultimately cannot be complete without taking stock of the self-contradictory process of capitalist expansion.