

MISSING WOMEN

Devaki Jain

Amongst his many other gifts, Prof. Amartya Sen also has the gift of introducing new language, a new vocabulary for interpreting phenomena. One such term which has resonated, been interrogated and used, is the concept of 'missing women'. He had calculated the numbers of females that could have been present in the population if it were not for the very injurious discrimination against the female of the species. Here, I would bring in the concept to reveal the striking absence of women's presence in the intellectual and mind related engagements in the public space in India.

Take the most recent high profile event on 26th of March, convened by the CII in New Delhi– not a single female. Take any other space except film stars, ramp models, victims of violence – pictures of crowds or masses of women roped in for a political meeting or in the self help groups and panchayati raj gatherings. But they are not present in the mind tree.

Their absence denotes both, the failure of the women's movement to arrive on the big political economy screen as well as the stereo typical perception of where women belong by the 'other'. In this case, "other" is the whole world of the public space including media, in academic space, in the bureaucracy.

To elaborate on the failure of the women's movement – by and large one aspect of the presence of women in society and economy which has been justifiably highlighted though perhaps it has been responsible for the exclusion is that women are in many ways victims. Violated, discriminated against, overloaded with work, made totally responsible for reproduction and care, most hungry, most poor, most illiterate, most prone to death and disease.

This has naturally been responded to by social and health inputs whenever and a sense led to the perception that they are, to again use Prof. Amartya Sen's terminology, 'patients'.

'We need a vision of mankind not as patients whose interests have to be looked after, but as agents who can do effective things – both individually and jointly.'

'We also have to go beyond the role of human beings specifically as 'consumers' or as 'people with needs', and consider, more broadly, their general role as agents of change who can – given the opportunity – think, assess, evaluate, resolve, inspire, agitate, and through these means, reshape the world.'¹

Since the load, the physical load, the responsibility and the violations, is also a burning issue within the women's movement, the voice of the movement by and large has been to resonate this phenomena justifiably.

However, another space which has been present, but has also been growing in terms of professional collectivities and affirmations is not merely the fact that women are also brilliant doctors, scientists, corporate leaders, bankers, musicians, artists, writers, articulate politicians, but that women have developed a whole epistemology called feminist reinterpretations of theology or psychology, of economics, of what is justice and a hundred other such spaces of thought.

¹ At the keynote address at the International Meeting 'Transition to Sustainability in the 21st Century' organised by the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues (IAP). Tokyo 2000

Looking beyond the stereo typed visible, there are for example in India, as indeed in the rest of the world, extraordinary thinkers in this medium. This field or this layer is not visible except within the ghetto of those who belong to this layer. It is not exactly subaltern, but close to that. It is not the little tradition, but it is close to that.

Another aspect of why this has been so neglected also lies in the fact that many high profile women, whether scholars of geography, history or mathematics or physics, or musicians and writers, would not see themselves as feminists or as belonging to the feminist movement. They see their expertise in a gender neutral way. This is added to the neglect of this layer of knowledge creation.

The feminist agenda raises questions on what constitutes knowledge and how the disciplinary divisions are created. This questioning creates a “politics of disturbance”². It unsettles the given and starts to “plough up inherited turfs without planting the same old seeds in the field.”³ Bringing ‘women in’ means that the fields of study have to change in multiple ways. The change includes unpacking of assumptions. It leads to a realization of how central these assumptions are for the way any discipline is organized.

Amina Mama’s words, part of a speech at the Uganda World Congress on Women, 2002 captures, my argument of the “Missing Women”

“Even our most radical political scientists have failed when it comes to addressing the intellectual and political challenge posed by the problematic nature of gendered identity. Postcolonial feminist theory has a great deal to teach our leading lights in contemporary political analysis. ...Feminist theory also has much to contribute to our understanding of statecraft and politics. At the very least it alerts us to the partial and limited manifestations of individuality, sociality and politics in patriarchal societies. It leads us to ask interesting questions, such as whether there is a link between male domination of social and political life and the prevalence of war and militarism?”

Another scholar, Ann Tinckner⁴ says “Feminists in all the disciplines have been acutely aware of the relationship between knowledge and power and the ways that traditional knowledge has been constructed in the interests of the powerful. Feminist scholarship has emerged from a deep skepticism about knowledge, which while it claims to be universal and objective, is not. In reality, such knowledge is usually partial, created by men and based on men’s lives. Sensitive to gendered differences in these regards, feminists see their scholarly responsibility as creating new knowledge that is less andocentric, more genuinely universal, and that produces research that is useful to women. “

Many attempts have been made to introduce this sphere of knowledge into the universe of knowledge but the very strong stratification of voice within the women’s movement has itself been an impediment or a bump over which the feminist movement has not been able to ride.

² William Connolly “Democracy and Territory” in M Ringrose and A.J. Lerner (eds) *reimagining the nation* (Open University Press 1993) 61

³ Christine Sylvester, (1998), "Homeless in International Relations? "Women's" Place in Canonical Texts and in Feminist Reimaginings," in Anne Phillips, ed., *Feminism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press):44-66

⁴. Ann Tickner, *On the Frontlines or Sidelines of Knowledge and Power? Feminist Practices of Responsible Scholarship*, Presidential address prepared for delivery at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, March 23, 2006]

There is also the outrage and the desire to be separated, as for example when one is engaged in advocacy to be included in the thought sphere, one is asked for names as if this kind of mining is required to find those 'intellectual gems'. Such responses are so offensive that feminists tend to backtrack.

However, the recent so called financial crisis, melt down, global recession, what I would like to term shock to the international free market system, has revealed that feminist thought, if accommodated could be transformative, healing, revitalizing.

From all corners of the world, North and South, data is pouring in to show that amongst the many who are affected in terms of job loss, income loss, loss of survival packages like food and water, women are the majority. For a range of reasons - such as from being the major labor force in export oriented industries like garments or electronics, to being the last person 'daridranarayani' to put a female suffix to Gandhiji's 'daridranarayan', the last person, the most hungry, the most deprived, to whom the burden of another unemployed person would be not hunger, but death.

While this information is emerging in strong waves of data, the responses to such phenomena by feminist thinkers, on how to salvage the globe from this menace, which surprisingly has a unity, has not been given the same visibility, to be conducted into what can be called the high level meetings. Gender is seen as one issue amongst many issues that need to be considered while redesigning the financial and regulatory architecture, to bandage the wounds that have been inflicted by the signal that came from New York on SeptemberBut feminist thought has not been seen as an actor in the very design of the whole.

This advice which is coming from the feminist thinkers located in the USA, in Cuba, in Japan, apart from Africa, south Asia and West Asia, converges. They are not only repeating what is now being said in the highest circles, i.e. use the crisis as an opportunity, but giving analysis which leads to how to do it. Here are some ten suggestions that have come which were voiced both at the Commission on Status of Women in New York, but were also voiced in the statements, speeches being made by feminist economists in different parts of the world, who are being invited by other groups of the women's movement to explain its impact.

Their suggestions make such good economic sense, as they come from the knowledge of the ground and the knowledge of what is doable. Their ideas are not polarized into either a pro or anti market attitude but might enable the world economy to go beyond Sarkozy and Stiglitz to get down to business. 1481

Extract from Mayra Buvinic

Women losing income and joining the work force

The experience of past crises suggests gender-specific first and second round impacts of the current crisis on women's income and their work choices. First round impacts include the fall in women's income in developing countries as result of employment losses in export oriented industries, tightening micro-finance lending, and/or drop in remittances. Second round impacts are part of households coping strategies and result in women joining the work force to help poor families weather drops in family income.

While some women in developing countries may be 'protected' from the short term impacts of the financial crisis because they do not have access to global markets (and are solely involved in subsistence or home production), other women who dominate employment in export

manufacturing (for instance, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, and the Philippines) and high value agriculture (for instance, Uganda, Thailand, Ecuador) are likely to suffer direct employment losses from the contraction in industrial countries' demand for developing country exports.

Examples of women-friendly public works have included the Employment Guarantee Scheme in India, where up to 73 per cent of those employed in the scheme (1998-9) were women, public works programmes in Peru (PAIT) and in Chile (PEM) in the 1980s, where up to 84 per cent of the workers in the first case (1986) and 72 per cent in the second case (1987) were women and, more recently the Argentina Heads of household Programme where 70 per cent of the employed in 2005 were females.¹¹ These programmes variously targeted women explicitly; provided work close to home, flexible hours and options for child care; used women-based intermediaries and included a range of employment options, among them, home based production. (Other noted public works programmes have included design features, such as working through construction companies, which have largely excluded women.)

Extracts from Elizabeth A. Eilor

Many jobs in the developing world were created to take advantage of women's cheap labour, making these jobs particularly insecure. The example of the African textile industry illustrates this – the sector has provided for a great deal of new jobs for women in Africa - over 100,000 new jobs in the export apparel sector, including 45,000 jobs in Swaziland, 26,000 jobs in Lesotho, and 30,000 jobs in Kenya – 75 to 90 per cent of these jobs have gone to women living in the most dire poverty.

Extract from Sakiko

To quote Joseph Stiglitz, this recession bears a 'made in America' label, however it has clearly already had impacts far beyond the borders of the United States and addressing it will require concerted international efforts.^v

Another generalized impact, which is often neglected in economic analyses, is the impact on the unpaid care work that falls mostly on women. When people stop going to doctors for healthcare, they stay ill for longer, and have to be taken care of at home, invariably by women, adding to the workload of women who carry much of the burden of care work. This care work for 'social reproduction' is not part of the market economy and is not counted in the gross domestic product (GDP). If you try to estimate the monetary value of such care work - the work of social reproduction - it comes up to something like 2/3 of the market economy.^{xvi} There is an important relationship between the work of social reproduction and market work since there are only 24 hours a day. Demand for the unpaid work of social reproduction puts pressure on the time available for paid work in the market economy. Many studies of the impact of the 1990s Asian financial crisis and 1980s structural adjustment policies document consequences such as reduced incomes as women have to go out of work or take up less remunerative and part time work, or make compromises on time devoted to caring for children.

Lessons from Argentina 8 per cent from 2002, and moreover reducing poverty from 56 per cent to 20 per cent and unemployment from 30 per cent to 7 per cent. Their policies included among others, pro-poor public expenditure policies focusing on long-term development priorities such as building infrastructure and human investments. However, the recent slump in prices of major exports such as soya, which is down about 40 per cent from its historic peak last summer, are seriously impacting the government's tax revenues and may threaten its ability to continue such social investments.^{xviii}

The current system in fact shifts the burden of global financial risks from players in global markets to poor countries and poor households. As philosopher Thomas Pogge has argued, the international community has a duty not only to assist the poor but to reform/abolish/tackle the global social arrangements that contribute to the non-fulfillment of basic subsistence rights.xx

Extract from Shamika

In the developing Asia-Pacific region, women still constitute the majority of temporary, casual, seasonal and contract labourers, and low-skilled workers. The vulnerable contractual status of women seems to be a common denominator across Asia, though agriculture still remains the biggest employer of female workers in South Asia (60 per cent in 2007), whereas the majority of women workers in East Asia and South East Asia and the Pacific have moved onto industry and services (around 60 per cent in 2007).

These workers are the most vulnerable to job loss because they are unlikely to be covered by formal unemployment insurance or social protection schemes.

Men and women may be affected differently because of the gender-specific inequalities in the labour markets and prevailing norms about men and women's role in the economy and society (ILO, 2009; and UNESCAP, 2007):

- Because of the precarious labour market arrangements discussed above, women workers are considered as part of the "flexible" workforce that can be easily discarded during economic downturns.

Labour intensive sectors early casualties: Low-skilled labour intensive manufacturing exports (the female-dominated industries) have been hit hard.

Impacts on migrant workers sector-specific: Overseas migrant workers are often hired as temporary workers, so they get dismissed first during economic downturns.

what more needs to be done

Large fiscal stimulus packages introduced in recent months across Asia and the Pacific carry specific measures to minimize unemployment, protect small enterprises, protect/encourage consumption spending, direct income support to low-income households, embark on rural development, and increase spending on health care.

Engender fiscal stimulus packages: Large public infrastructure and public work projects are a common feature in all stimulus packages. They are the most effective in reaching a wide range of unemployed workers without regarding their skill mix.

Protect social spending: Many stimulus packages, not only aim to protect spending in social sectors, especially on education and health, but also take steps to increase these. China, for example, introduced a \$123 billion package in January 2009 to improve its health care system.

Increase public spending and investments in agriculture: Agriculture is the main livelihood of the poor and still provides employment for 60 per cent of the working population in Asia and the Pacific—the majority of them women. ESCAP (2008) shows that unless decades of

neglect in agriculture is addressed, the persistent poverty and widening inequality in the region will continue. And the silent crisis in agriculture would continue with grave repercussions on food safety.

Turn crisis into an opportunity—Practice “smart economics”

ESCAP (2007) research finds that restricting women’s access to work, education and health services, so often considered as “social” issues, also comes at significant economic costs.

For example, if female work-force participation in India were on a par with that in the United States, it would add an additional 1.08 percentage points to India’s growth—an annual gain of \$19 billion. Significant gains could also be achieved in Malaysia and Indonesia, but less for China, where female labour-force participation is already high.

Extract from Stephanie

A central feature in the crisis and therefore key to its long term resolution is the growth of inequality within and between countries. One window into this problem is to consider the gap between wage and productivity growth. Productivity grew in most countries over the last three decades, and this should have led to rising wages and incomes. But instead, the share of national income going to workers has been falling in the United States, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.¹ The flip side of this trend is that profits have been rising, and inequality widening.

A second aspect of this problem relates to the rise in the share of income going to profits on financial activities and interest payments.³ In part, the widespread adoption of inflation targeting (the use of monetary policy to keep inflation low and close to zero) by central banks facilitated the rise of income going to wealth holders. High interest rates and low inflation raised the real rate of return on their financial investments.

The redistribution of global income to wealth holders and corporations suggests that a key feature of a policy to rectify the global economic crisis is one that first, focuses on full employment policies, and second, seeks to resolve the problem of unequal income distribution that has led to insufficient demand. To reiterate, global joblessness is one of the central problems that macroeconomists must deal with. The most effective policy response is one that stops the destruction of jobs and sets the stage for a resumption of employment growth.

Stimulus packages should ensure that spending is gender equitable in job creation. Concretely, that means Governments should not only spend on physical infrastructure to create jobs and stimulate demand. Jobs in that sector largely employ male workers, and women will have little benefit from such job creation.

Establishment of independent fiscal oversight bodies with a quota for equal representation of women could help monitor expenditures and provide policy advice to ensure stimulus expenditures have gender equitable effects and reduce the possibility of political bias. Women’s groups are likely to be able to develop a variety of proposals that will benefit women and children.

In the longer term, Governments in the list of Least Developed Countries can address the problem both of gender inequality and balance of payments stresses by directing government funding toward resources for women farmers. Examples include expanded access to credit (discussed in more detail below) and inputs, as well as technical assistance. This strategy has big payoffs. It is

estimated that agricultural productivity would rise between 10-15 per cent in a number of Sub-Saharan countries if women farmers' access to inputs, credit and technical assistance were equalized with men's.¹⁰

The current crisis provides an opportunity to reconsider the role of central banks.

Those are problems that can be best addressed by public investment, not tight money policy.

The reformulated role for central banks should be focused on job creation.

There are several tools of credit policy that could be used to attain the country's development goals. Government loan guarantees coupled with asset portfolio requirements would encourage banks to lend to targeted activities, such as labour intensive firms.

Reviving the global economy will require policies that focus heavily on job creation, putting money into the hands of low and middle income households. As that income is spent, rising sales will give businesses the incentive to hire workers and expand output further.

Addressing the economic crisis also requires a direct focus on women's well-being. Women are likely to be targeted first for jobs layoffs, but have the fewest reserves with which to shield themselves and their children from the drop in income. Targeting public sector spending in activities that employ women benefits not only them but also their children. It is also an investment in long run growth.

Devaki jains proposals:

1.that we move attention from salvaging the stock markets , bailing out industries like the motor industry which is environmentally hazardous to using these spaces , fuelling them with credit organised marketing even if circular and build up skills and rights to assets.

Support the traditional market places with land , infrastructure etc as we do for tech parks . Remember the Liberian economy? It survived for a long time on these markets..during a visit to Liberia in 1999 , the national bank had only one employee and that was the chairman who said this himself !

Another aspect of the south, is that there is no unemployment benefit in the south, and when we lose jobs the fall is deadly literally There is now recognition that by dismantling labour laws and unions, in the name of competition, basically riding on cheapening labour, retrenchment has become again deadly.

2 so we can propose a revival of labour legislation, revive and lead the union movement Remember all women in the lower end of the economy are workers, of one kind or another, workers, tillers in agriculture, workers in construction, in artisan and so on . Space can be given, dignity by identifying them and paying attention to worker orgns and the labour market , not only the capital market

3 We can propose that our aim should be to land securities, on the ground,- food, water wage apart from political and social security WE can introduce the language of security , into our proposals .Security of my deposit, of my home, of my livelihood , my land or

my fuel source .This can lead to bringing in the language of human rights.. the right to individual economic security

Last week the H C for HR , Judge Navaneetham Pillai called a meeting of the HR council in Geneva to discuss the crisis ..this was on the request of 23 countries , and it would interest you to know that they were all south countries .. posed. *I quote from her opening statement*

International responses to the economic downturn should be undertaken in a way that serves the interest of human rights to this effect regenerating the flow of productive rather than speculative credit is of paramount importance

Private actors including financial institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their operations do not violate human rights

Recession might give rise to xenophobic passions discriminatory practices and even attacks against migrant workers and families

4 We need to strengthen the interdependence of supply and demand in lower and lower spaces, areas regions, similar product consortiums of the south, regional buying and selling ... any no of ways of decongesting the wires of economic power , which through over load sent shocks across the world ,

Through such decongestion of trade of financial services of banking networks we can safeguard the interests of the majority

5 Each of our countries and our regions have such inner strength which was overwhelmed by the over the top attachment to the global financial engine, and the play on stocks, ;... it is we women who can recall those strengths foster the home economy without losing out on growth and also find regional associations to keep the doors open amongst similar countries and similar products

I believe that we have strapped or trapped ourselves in ideas such as mainstreaming gender, gender equality, mdg goal achievement – sometimes it appears to me that we are fiddling while rome burns, since there is such vicious immiserisation of sections of the poor, our attention, I believe should be to the causes of that, and not only to our selves .our collective effort should be to correct the causes. From asking for more funds for women, we have to move to giving advice on global ideas and policies drawn from our wisdom and ground reality experiences

6. Therefore, my last submission , is that we should demand or set up a women's commission on revitalizing the global and local economies. We have to give ourselves Agency, which means that the women's commission will draft our take on the crisis and draw attention on where we are located , and what we can do ... We need to highlight where women are located in the economy how we are the growth agents , as such are the engines of progress , the justice brigade We should not be satisfied by having gender pockets in the other commissions, like Stiglitz or Sarkozy ..

To follow this consultation and harvest and move forward we need our own think tank ,, some of us have started one in partnership with UNDP, called the Casablanca group , web site www.casablanca_dream.net I have brought a few pull outs of our group and our quest .

This can be expanded, regional consultations held here is an idea for the women focused agencies here at the UN or may for the NAM group to mobilise women's intelligence to break thru the Gordian knot

I hope in your responses you will support such a mechanism , and that we will mobilize our strength, draw on the potential of the spaces occupied by the less privileged , develop new ideas on the engines of growth