

This weighed heavily on him. He was truly one of the last Great Sri Lankans, those few JUST men who epitomised our WHOLENESS, before our identity fragmented into ethnic loves and parochial hates. So I would like to end this tribute to Uncle Sam with what would have been his last prayer, not so much for himself but for us, those whom he had to leave behind; the prayer is from Rabindranath Tagore :

Where the mind is without fear and the head held high;  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards  
perfection; Where the clear stream of reason has not  
lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-  
widening thought and action  
Into that Heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country  
awake.

## Women in Struggle

By Sunila Abeysekera (Courtesy CENWOR)

PART II (Continued from the last issue)

### The Anti Water-Tax Campaign

The links that were built up between different progressive peasant groups and organisations in the process of organising a campaign in solidarity with the peasants of Moneragala paved the way for a successful campaign against the levying of a Water Tax on farmers.

In 1984, the state issued a decree saying that all farmers who were linked to any major irrigation scheme would have to pay Rs. 100.00 per acre of land for which they received water. This tax would increase at the rate of 20% per year and finally be frozen at an upper ceiling of Rs. 200.00 per acre.

When one looks at the process of pauperisation of small farmers in Sri Lanka in the recent past, created by scarcity of arable land, the low prices of agricultural produce in contrast to the high price of fertiliser, weedicides etc., the domination of the marketplace by middle-men and town-based entrepreneurs and regular droughts and water shortages, it becomes clear that the levying of such a tax would have been a fatal blow to these people.

From 1979 onwards, there had been a credit squeeze on farmers who had failed to re-pay agricultural loans; the state also took action to re-claim State Land by withdrawing all leasehold certificates issued to peasants who had originally been 'squatters' on state land. State-sponsored programmes for purchasing agricultural produce and guaranteeing producers a fair floor price were all in disarray. The free flow of imports of food stuffs into the country also had a negative impact on local producers. A people's Bank survey of 1986

showed that even a peasant family living in the Mahaweli 'H' area - which is the best services - was spending more than it earned, for sheer survival. It was also found that even in an area renowned for its prosperity, Polonnaruwa, the average monthly income of an ordinary farming family was not over Rs. 280.00.

The intervention of the international Institute of Irrigation Management in 1985, with its declaration that 'The planning, construction programming of water supply and distribution, fixing of rates of payment and formulating of policies related to the soil, the environment and the health and welfare of the relevant people' would be henceforth entrusted to the Donor Group of the IIRM, was seen as a major factor in the decision to levy a Water Tax in the above manner.

In the early stages after the decision, farmers did not pay their Water Tax due to sheer inability to do so. There were many occasions when even those farmers who received water from the major irrigation schemes did not receive sufficient water to enable them to cultivate two lots of crop per year as is the normal practise. Yet the Water Tax had to be paid, by 1985, the state began to formalise a system for the prosecution of all those farmers who were tax defaulters, and summons for Court were received by many of them. By this time, however, several peasants groups throughout the island had already commenced a campaign of conscientisation regarding the unjust nature of this Tax which was being levied from all who lived on the re-settlement schemes established in conjunction with the bigger irrigation schemes.

Anti-Water-Tax groups were formed in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kurunegala, Hambantota, Moneragala and Kandy Districts. There were fledgling groups in Ratnapura, Amparai and Trincomalee as well. The first major public meeting against the Water Tax was held in Hambantota on August 14, 1984. The agitation campaign in Hiriyala on October 8, 1984, and on February 23, 1985, served to gain wide publicity for this protest campaign. When legal action was instituted against farmers who had not paid their Water Taxes in the Primary Courts of Hambantota and Embilipitiya, and in Magistrate's Courts at Maho, Moneragala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kurunegala, thousands of farmers flocked to the Court Houses on the days of the hearings, in a gesture of support to those being prosecuted as well as in the form of a public protest against the injustice being done to them in this instance.

The participation of women in this campaign was minimal in the early instances. The progressive of Women's Front in Kurunegala, Hambantota and Moneragala, the Ruhumu Rural Women's Organisation in Hambantota and the Women's Wing of the Community Education Centre working at Okkampitiya in Moneragala, launched campaigns aimed at enlisting the co-operation and support of women farmers to the struggle against the Water Tax.

Activists of the PWF recall how they went from house to house in several villages in and around Siyambalangamuwa on the day before a public meeting against the Water Tax was due to be held in the town. The peasant women told them: "We don't have enough water for our fields. We only receive water for one crop a year. Even so, our fields sometimes dry up for lack of water. What we harvest is not enough to feed us for two months. Then we are forced to seek work as hired labourers. We don't have enough money to survive, let alone pay taxes."

It was clear that the tax placed an additional burden on the shoulders of women who were fighting for the bare survival of their families under very adverse conditions. Yet, when invited to participate in the public meetings, a woman said: "Why should I come? The father of my children will be there." The backwardness of these women was in part due to the constraints placed on them by social practise and tradition; however, male farmers too played a role in keeping their wives and daughters confined to domestic interests and it is interesting that the leadership of the All Lanka Peasants' Congress acknowledged this fact: "It became clear that my continuing to keep the peasant woman within the four walls of her home, we were placing a heavy shackle on the anti-Water Tax movement. For example, we found that when a farmer was imprisoned for non-payment of Water Taxes, women would usually succumb to the pressure and pay up the Taxes, going to any lengths to obtain the money, in order to secure his release."

The PWF's view of the situation is expressed in a leaflet they distributed throughout the anti-Water Tax campaign, as follows: "We know that half the population of this country, and half the farming people, consist of women. Aren't the problems faced by the peasantry the problems of the women peasants as well? The peasant woman who shoulders more than half the burden of work in the fields and in the 'chena's (slash and burn cultivation) while also attending to domestic chores entirely on her own must be considered as an equal partner in this issue. What does it mean if women stay out of such a struggle as the anti-Water Tax Campaign? Doesn't it mean that half our strength is taken away from us? The creative contribution and participation of women is an essential part of any struggle we want to launch in this country. We should take the lead in this struggle equally with men."

It took many discussions and much urging for the women farmers themselves to gather the strength to come forward as more active participants in the anti-Water Tax campaign. Yet, once that first step was taken, women became very vocal and militant members of the campaign.

On the day that a case of non-payment of Water Tax was being heard at the Maho Court House, with 7 farmers from Siyambalangamuwa being the accused in the case, a crowd of over 200 persons, including many women, flocked to the premises of the Court House. While there were some men who proposed to plead

'guilty' and pay the Tax together with the fine, the women were the ones who most vociferously opposed such a 'surrender'; one of them was even heard to say that she for one would not pawn her jewellery to get her husband out of jail if he received a prison sentence for non-payment of Tax.

In Moneragala too there was a case brought against a group of farmers including two women. On the day the case was to be heard, a crowd of over 1000 persons from the United Peasants' Organisation of Okkampitiya came in to town and held a public demonstration, from the Court House to the Central bus stand in the heart of the town.

By the end of 1986, several more cases had been brought before the Courts in various parts of the island. However, the general situation was one of a stale-mate, with the cases being continuously postponed. It was clear that the state itself was not sure whether it wanted to proceed in these cases up to the point of securing prison sentences for defaulters. The growing unrest in the country meant that by 1987, many of these cases had been shelved pending further action.

Even though the anti-Water Tax Campaign has an inconclusive ending, the impact of the mobilisation and involvement of women in such a widespread and public protest campaign is irreversible.

#### The Industrial Sector:

A drive towards increased foreign investment in the industrial sector as well as concentration in the area of export-oriented industrial production formed a cornerstone of the economic policies of the state in the 1980s. The Greater Colombo Economic Commission (GCEC) was set up in 1978 with the objective of facilitating the in-flow of foreign investment into industry and many occasions, tax holidays and so on were worked out as a means of making the Sri Lankan offer more attractive and viable for foreign investors. A large industrial complex was set up in the Katunayake area, close to the air port, with many factories being set up there in collaboration with foreign capital.

One of the major areas of investment into which foreign capital flowed was the garment manufacturing industry. Other industries which were set up were concentrating on assembling of small electronic equipment, gem cutting and polishing and production of exclusive items such as sports equipment.

The garment industry was a sector favoured by foreign investors who were seeking to avoid the limitations imposed on the import of ready-made garments by the European Common Market, the USA and Canada. But another feature that made investing in garment manufacturing factories in the Sri Lankan Free Trade Zone attractive to foreign investors was the 'dexterity, intelligence and docility' of the young female workforce as promised by the propaganda bulletins put out by the GCEC.

However, it must not be forgotten that the garment manufacturing industry already existed in Sri Lanka prior to the establishment of the GCEC; in the 1950s, during the phase of export-substitution industrialisation, several garment manufacturing industries were set up in Ratmalana, a suburb south of Colombo, and in the 1960s the state sponsored the establishment of the Ekala Industrial Estate in Ja-ela, north of Colombo. There are several garment factories in commercial production in Ekala today, a few miles away from the border of the GCEC area,

The close proximity of the Ekala and Katunayake industrial areas has led to an inter-mingling of the work-force to some extent; in particular, the encounters between workers in the GCEC, who face a large number of obstacles in organising themselves at any level, and workers in the Ekala and Ja-ela areas who have experience of unionising and of labour activism, can lead to very interesting consequences.

#### The Strike at Polytex Garments:

Polytex Garments is a garment manufacturing industry in the Ekala industrial Estate, with investments coming in from a British national resident in Hong Kong and several Sri Lankan entrepreneurs.

At the inception, there were about 800 workers in the factory; apprentices were paid Rs. 8.60 per day, while skilled machine operators were paid Rs. 11.74. While 95% of the labour force in this factory was female, many of them hailed from the provinces, and were therefore forced to take up residence in hostels and rooming houses close to the factory.

From the very start, working conditions at this factory left much to be desired; workers were not entitled to paid holidays. The lunch break was only 30 minutes long. There were only 4 toilets for the use of the entire workforce. In short, workers were compelled to work long hours, under very adverse conditions.

In March 1980, the first work stoppage at Polytex took place when the workers discovered that the management had taken steps to recruit 100 new workers on a wage of Rs. 11.00 per day. The workers remained within the factory premises but refused to work, until the management was forced to call in the Police. At this stage, the women workers were merely responding to an obvious injustice in a spontaneous manner; not one of them had any previous work experience, and knew anything about workers' rights or about labour organising. Yet they remained by their machines until the Police physically dragged them out of the factory and locked the gates, declaring the factory out of bounds to the workers.

Faced with the prospect of losing their jobs, the workers sought the assistance of workers from neighbouring factories, and decided to form a branch of the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU) which was a union with major representation in the Ekala Industrial Estate at the time. The response of the management was to

suspend the ten workers who took the initiative to form the union, and the workers at Polytex then launched a strike demanding their reinstatement. Notwithstanding threats from the Police, as well as threats from prominent politicians and thugs in the area, the women stayed out on strike for 30 days, from the 28th March to the 28th April 1981. The management finally conceded many of the workers' demands - for a 60 minute lunch break, increased toilet facilities, an annual bonus, paid holidays and an enhanced festival advance; the workers who had been suspended were re-instated and the management was forced to acknowledge the existence of the union.

This strike also led to links being established between the women workers at Polytex and other women workers in the Ja-ela area; a Women's Study Circle was formed which included not only women from Ja-ela, Ekala and Bopitiya area but also from Ratmalana and Colombo.

In May 1982, there was another incident at Polytex, in which two women who had not been able to produce their daily 'quota' were suspended from work along with the Secretary of the Polytex branch union, and a strike was launched on May 24. The entire workforce of over 1000 persons came out on strike and on the third day the management ordered the re-instatement of the three suspended workers and the asked the workforce to report back to work.

This strike signalled a decisive split between the CMU and the branch union at Polytex, and saw the formation of the Polytex branch of the Industrial Transport and General Workers' Union. The ITGWU, which was a relatively new union, represented a new trend in the trade union movement in Sri Lanka, particularly because it was led by a young group of workers, and the involvement of the Polytex women workers in this union played a major role in their political development and in their growth of consciousness.

The links between the women at Polytex and women outside the factory also continued to grow. In August 1982, several of the Polytex women were also involved in the setting up of the Women's Liberation Movement of Sri Lanka, one of the first autonomous women's groups in the country. Through this organisations, they began to work with women in the area, raising awareness not only about their rights as workers but also bringing broader women's issues into the discussion.

In December 1982, seven workers who had refused to work over-time were suspended and once again there was a strike situation at Polytex. The strike decision was taken on December 13 and on the 14th the women decided to gather on an empty block of land near the factory; the Police too were on guard near the factory and at about 10 a.m. they launched an attack on the women, firing their guns into the air, lobbing tear-gas at the crowd and attacking the fleeing women with batons and with coconut branches. Several women had to be hospitalised as a result of this brutal attack, including one woman who was five months pregnant at

the time. Many others received minor injuries. The Secretary of the ITGWU and a member of the Union's Executive Committee, as well as the two women who were President and Secretary of the Polytex Union were taken into custody by the Ja-ela Police, and remanded until December 20.

Leela Ferdinands, who was Secretary of the Polytex branch union at the time, was one of those arrested on this occasion. She said: "At a time when there was a state of Emergency declared in the country in general, there was no opportunity for us to even hold a meeting. Many forces were at work against us, to break the strike. Because this strike was carried out by women, we feel very proud of the fact that we were able to face up to the Police baton charges, arrest and detention, intimidation and all other obstacles placed in our path by the emergency regulations and carry our strike forward to a victorious conclusion."

The striking women did not waver in their decision, even when it seemed clear that they would have to forego their wages and year-end bonus. They continued to ensure that their struggle got maximum publicity; several public meetings were held, and a petition signed by over 5000 residents of the Ja-ela area was forwarded to the President. Discussions between the workers and the management commenced with the mediation of the GCEC, but it took quite a while for any agreement to be reached. In the meanwhile, the women workers had to put up with a lot of harassment on all sides. On one occasion, when the representatives of the trade union were leaving the Ja-ela Labour Office after a discussion, they were set upon by some thugs and badly assaulted. Finally, however, the management had to grant most of the workers' demands and take them back to work. The two major achievements of this strike were the acceptance, by the management, of the trade union as the legitimate representative of the workers' interests and the agreement that trade union dues would be deducted directly from the workers' salaries and sent to the trade union's headquarters. With the assurance of a salary increase in February 1983, the women workers went back to work triumph on the 13th January 1983.

In December 1982, an effective network of small and autonomous women's groups were built up in solidarity with the Polytex strikers; the Ja-ela Women's Centre, which was established by the Women's Liberation Movement, became an oasis to the women strikers during the days of the strike. Women met there, cooked there, ate there, and sometimes slept there, in a spirit of camaraderie that was quite a new experience to most of them. Another significant feature of this strike was the concert given by Nanda Malini, one of Sri Lanka's best-known female vocalists, at the Ramakrishna Hall in Colombo to celebrate the victory of the Polytex women workers.

The salary increase and 'productivity' bonus that had been promised to the workers in February 1983 did not materialise. While negotiations were going on between the union and the management in this regard. 7

workers were interdicted on the charge of 'low productivity'; from February 17th, 1984, the workers at Polytex were once again on strike.

The strike this time dragged on for a period of four months. Although 1300 women walked out to join the strike at the start, as days and weeks and even months went by, both the union and the workers had to face tremendous difficulties, financial and otherwise. The strikers, especially those who were marked out as the leaders of the union, were subject to assault, abuse and even detention on several occasions. There were also cases where boarding house owners refused to accommodate Polytex women because of their inability to pay the rent on time. The Union did its best to keep the women supplied with at least a mid-day meal, as well as provide each woman with an allowance of Rs. 100.00 for expenses during the New Year which fell at this time. Resources were stretched to the utmost.

Despite all these difficulties, the majority of the strikers stood firm in their support of the union's decision; only 280 of the 1318 who came out on strike went back to work; however, this time the management was determined to keep up with their production and recruited 500 new workers; in addition, the Polytex factory sub-contracted its orders to other garment factories. However, all attempts to break the strike failed and on June 18, the strikers were asked to return to work. This strike had been the longest one carried on by women workers in this country.

As the news bulletin titled 'Voice of the Polytex Workers' says: "The Management was helpless in the face of our unity and had no choice but to negotiate with the trade union. They had to agree to pay us the promised increase along with the arrears of back pay. They had to re-employ those of our sisters who had been dismissed. They had to give us three extra days as holidays. They had to set up a Medical Centre and agree to set up a wage system that would ensure the workers of a minimum wage of Rs. 30 per day."

The achievements of the women workers of Polytex GARMENTS become all the more significant when one considers the background against which they took place; it was a time when the trade union movement in general was facing a major setback; the situation in the country led to all types of repressive legislation and the curtailment of basic democratic rights of the people of Sri Lanka, with the result that normal channels of expressing dissent and protest were closed off; in its efforts to entice foreign investment into the country, the state too seemed to be prepared to spare no pains to 'control' labour in the GCEC and areas adjacent to the GCEC in particular.

Despite all these factors, the women workers of Polytex, who were relatively inexperienced and 'apolitical' in the conventional sense, managed to stand up to the forces of both the factory management and the business interests as represented as well as to the business of the state as represented by the Police and by the local authorities and politicians. The women also posed a

very real challenge to the sense of depression and disillusionment that had set in, within the trade union movement and the opposition political parties as well as within the progressive movement in general, in the aftermath of the disastrous conclusion of the strike of July 1980.

As a tribute to the courage and militance of the women workers at Polytex Garments, many of the major trade unions came together at a public rally held at Hyde Park in Colombo on the 26th April 1984.

However, the situation of the workers and of the branch union began to deteriorate rapidly after July 1984, under the advice of the GCEC, the management set up a Joint Consultative Council, a mechanism evolved for use in the GCEC factories as a means of controlling labour unrest. This sowed the seeds of disunity among the workers and was clearly aimed at destroying the power base of the trade union within the factory. Management techniques from Hong Kong, which were obviously designed to maintain strict discipline at the workplace, were introduced on to the work floor and a foreign manager was employed to implement these changes; a second shift of work was started and the management recruited about 1500 women workers to operate this shift, thus effectively separating the new workers from the old group.

The facilities granted to the trade union by the management were taken away one by one and in late 1984 and throughout 1985 several workers were interdicted while the union proved to be helpless to protest. The strength of the union was reduced to the point that all it was capable of organising was several token strikes and work stoppages within the factory, which did not have any impact at all on the management.

Although the decline of the trade union at Polytex Garments is to be regretted, the experience of the women workers there provide many vital clues as to the whole nature of the work force in this type of export-oriented factories.

It is also perhaps interesting to note that in the wake of the series of strikes at Polytex, as well the victories won by the Polytex workers, there were reports of spontaneous work stoppages even in some of the factories within the FTZ, for instance at Star Garments and at Alexandra Garments. In Ratmalana too, in August-September 1984, workers at Magnum Garments, also a majority of women, carried on a successful strike in the face of severe repression by the Police and won their demands, while in October 1985, the dismissal of two women workers at Gunapala Wijemanna and Co, in Kandy led to a very broad public protest campaign in Kandy and other areas in the Central Province.

## The Specificity of the Female Labour Force in Export-oriented Factories and Its Impact on Organising Activities

The very specific nature of the labour force in the export-oriented garment manufacturing sector is in itself a very salient factor that one should take into consideration in looking at the agitation campaigns launched by women workers in factories such as Polytex Garments.

The majority of this workforce consists of young women; most of them are unmarried. A large number of them have received a formal education at least up to Grade 10 level, which is an indication that they come from lower middle-class homes, from mainly rural and suburban areas. For many of them this is their first job. They live in boarding houses close to their factory in very cramped and unsavoury conditions, and many of them send a part of their earnings home as a contribution towards the upkeep of their family.

Knowing little, or nothing, about working in a factory, about workers' rights or about labour organising, they do not perceive of themselves as workers ('kamkaruwo') in the classic sense; at the same time, the system of political patronage which operated at the time also makes the girls very susceptible to a lot of pressure from outside the workplace which compels them to 'toe the line'. In the face of such a situation, their main objective is to keep the job at no matter what cost to themselves or to their fellow-workers. At the same time, the practise of classifying jobs is something which also contains an element of sex-based discrimination; for example, in these garment factories, women are mainly restricted to the sewing and finishing sectors, which are classified as 'semi-skilled' and are therefore lower paid, while the men work in the 'skilled' sectors, as cutters and so on, with a better wage.

A large number of the women workers in this sector also do not consider this to be a 'life-time career'; for some, it is merely a means of accumulating some money for domestic or marriage expenses. As an activist in the Women's Centre pointed out, many of the women could make some financial contribution to the upkeep of their families in the villages; yet, in turn, many of the women are supported by their families in the villages in terms of regular supplies of rice, coconuts, vegetables and so on. Thus, their possibility to enter into 'strike' activities and be sustained while on strike and not receiving a wage may be greater than for workers in some other spheres.

All these factors mean that any attempts to organise these women within a traditional trade union framework would be doomed to fail. Their low level of consciousness as workers means that they do not, for the most part, see any utility value in long-term organising, negotiating and so on. At the most, their enthusiasm is directed to spontaneous and 'wild-cat' type of labour actions on very specific and immediate issues. For example, the fact that the women workers at Polytex did not move into any decision-making roles

within the trade union in any consistent way is a further pointer to the attitude of most of these women workers towards labour organising. Their lower middle-class origins also led to a need to preserve outward appearances; a stray look at the women as they pour out of their factories at closing time will confirm the view that they try to conform to 'peer pressure' in terms of dress, shoes and other accessories.

The nature of their work-day is also an effective obstacle in preventing the coming together of women working in this type of factory; they work on a shift basis usually with 2 to 4 hours of over-time work every day; they then have to shop, cook, wash and do their other domestic chores with minimum facilities, sometimes having to spend long hours in line waiting for access to water or to a toilet. Thus, their 'spare-time' is extremely limited.

Many of the girls, who were for the first time in their lives living away from home, fall prey to loneliness and emotional alienation. They then very easily move into forming a relationship with a young man, a co-worker or one of the many young men who haunt the factory gates waiting for exactly such an opening. Learning to handle one's new-found independence and the total lack of control over one's movements and associations by parents, elders and so on create very difficult and traumatic situations for these women; the number of reports of rape, sexual abuse, battering and abortion from the Ja-ela and Katunayake areas stand witness to this fact.

The forms of labour control exercised in these factories also deny the individuality of the workers; it is very regimented and intense, and any protest or dissent is usually dealt with extremely severely. The state and official labour authorities too are constrained by their need to provide 'stability' for the benefit of foreign investors, and do not intervene on behalf of the workers in these factories in the same way as they would for workers in other sectors.

The 'sexual' dynamic in this should also not be ignored. At the level of the parent union, there a majority of men in decision-making roles, and a few women representatives of the branch unions have nominal positions in the hierarchy; at the level of the branch unions, the membership is almost totally female. This leads to a great deal of 'sexual' undertones impinging on union matters and activities, with both men and women resorting to all types of sexual pressure in order to achieve aims and objectives within the union as well as outside it.

These factors, combined with all other social and economic constraints and influences on the women workers, effectively mean that any attempt to organise or work with this specific group should be based on entirely new and innovative modes of organising and consciousness-raising. This is the challenge that has been posed to us by the women workers in this sector.

However, if one looks at the situation in an overall sense and within the context of the general oppression and subordination of women in Sri Lankan society, one should also say that the opening up of these spheres of employment to young women has also had some positive impact, in particular in respect of their increase in self-estimation and awareness of broader social, political and economic issues.

The fact that these women contribute to their family's income means that within the family circle, they achieve a higher status and sometimes even decision-making power; their travelling and living away from the family also means that they come to be regarded as persons with a wider knowledge of the world and outside affairs. Because they have to face up to the challenges of living alone, they can, and do, go against the confines of tradition and custom. The independence of thought, the mobility and the maturity that they gain from the experience of working in these factories should certainly not be discounted.

At the same time, whenever there has been some labour agitation or protest campaign in these factories, the women have played a very visible and militant role, going out on the streets with their tills to collect donations for their Strike Fund, putting up posters, distributing leaflets, addressing meetings and speaking out for what they felt was their right. This activity provided the women with an opportunity of shedding their shyness and diffidence of participating in public demonstrations and also posed a real challenge to the male workers as well as to the trade union movement in general in terms of their courage and commitment.

## BOOK REVIEW

*by Dr Jane Russell*

'Feminist Legal Theory' by Brenda Crossman.  
Thatched Patio. Special Issue.  
Vol. 3. No. 4. ICES. Colombo.

This special issue represents an interesting departure for Thatched Patio. It concentrates on the novel and integral question of "what it is that feminists do when they do law". Feminists ask, it seems, "the woman question": which entails examining how the law "fails to take into account the experiences and values that seem more typical of women than men". p.3

In a recent review appearing in the L&ST Fortnightly Review (November 16th 1990), it was reported that two-thirds of married women in Papua New Guinea are regularly beaten by their husbands, that Malaysian women attempt suicide more frequently than men and that 5000 women died from illegal abortion attempts in Bangladesh in 1979. In an article in a later issue of the same journal (Jan. 1st 1991), Kamalini Wijayatilake examining case histories of rape in Sri Lanka, was led to conclude that "the rules of practice applied in actions