

# The Status Of Women In Pakistan

... Pakistani women have faced an uphill task for the recognition of their basic human rights. Naturally it has been the educated elite amongst women who have struggled for the restoration of women's rights and due status, (p. 3)...

The persistent efforts of women have resulted in a number of constitutional and legal safeguards, but a corresponding and counter programme of eroding these rights has been launched by vested interests committed to status quo. The Constitution of 1973 guarantees women two fundamental safe-guards : (1) All citizens are equal under law, and (2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex. Quite a few things are however happening to denigrate their force and applicability but it is hoped that justice shall prevail. ... The objectives of most of the feminist organisations are education, vocational training and economic independence, but the women are today conscious of their

These are extracts from the Report of the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women, December 1984. The findings of the Commission reveal remarkable overall similarities between the socioeconomic status of Indian and of Pakistani women today, for instance, in the literacy, educational, health and employment conditions, particularly of rural and poor women in both countries. Readers will find many other specific similarities, such as, for example, the low nurse-doctor ratio.

The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1975, which still remains the most comprehensive tabulation of data on these issues in our country, highlights very similar problems and makes some recommendations similar to those of the Pakistani Commission. In a number of areas, the Pakistani Commission makes even more far reaching recommendations. Yet both governments, despite their many verbal and written expressions of concern for women's welfare, have failed to take any significant steps to change the situation for women in the most crucial areas that affect their survival and autonomy.



Part of the audience at the first Women's Action Forum function in Lahore, May 13, 1982



**Waiting at the well on the beach, Karachi**

rights, and it is only right and proper that injustice and inequity should cease (p. 3-4)...

Pakistani women are socially, educationally and politically far behind their male counterparts. The rate of female literacy is appallingly low particularly in the rural areas. As daughters, sisters, wives and often even as mothers, they have no real voice in the family set up and their usefulness depends largely on how efficiently they serve the family in the humblest possible manner.

... It is only as mothers of sons that they experience some fulfilment and the male child is often indulged, to the extent that he grows up with assumptions of his own superiority. (p. 29-30)...

... Pakistan's Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-1988) stresses the urgent need for women's participation in national development. No society, it rightly emphasizes, can progress half liberated and half shackled. The Plan also rejects the notion of separate but equal development for women and adopts an integrated approach for the participation of both men and women in national development. (p. 10)...

The Commission has found women, from all sectors of society including the most underprivileged, eager to participate in the endeavour to create a better world. (p. 11)...

### **Demographic Status**

... According to 1981 Census, the population of Pakistan was 84.35 million, of which the female population constituted 40.02 million. When compared with male population of 44.23 million, a proportion of 47.50 per cent females and 52.50 per cent males and a sex ratio of 100 females to 111 males is obtained. \* (p. 12) ...

The relatively much smaller number of females is an indicator of the neglect to which they are subjected. In the developed, more enlightened countries wherein female children are not discriminated against in nutrition, health-care etc., no such disparities in sex ratios exist. If anything, women in the older age-groups out-number men.

There exists a marked preference for sons and a general neglect of

\*As expressed in Indian Census terms, this is a sex ratio of about 901 females per 1000 males. The Indian sex ratio is about 933 females per 1000 males according to the 1981 Census.

female children in terms of food, schooling etc. Females are also restricted in terms of healthy outdoor activities which affects adversely their survival, well-being and ultimately their role and status. (p.13) ...

The total population of non-Muslims in Pakistan is about 28 lakhs, out of which 13 lakhs are Christians, Hindus approximately 12.76 lakhs, Ahmadis one lakh, Parsis 7,007, Sikhs 2,146, Buddhists 2,639. There are about one lakh others. The data about the female non-Muslim population is not available separately. (p.21) ...

### **Health Status**

Health has an extremely low priority in Pakistan as is evidenced by a meagre 3 to 4 per cent capital expenditure of the total development outlay and around 2 per cent of the revenue budget on health care system. ... The greatest difficulty facing the public health services is inadequate funds to meet recurring expenditure. Under such circumstances, even the existing highly inadequate infrastructure cannot be fully utilized because of shortage of funds for personnel, medicines, and maintenance. (p.49)

Due to low investment majority of the people of Pakistan, particularly women, continue to suffer from non-availability of health, facilities. There is at present one doctor for 4,600 persons, one dentist for 83,000 persons, one paramedic for 2,486 persons, one primary health care facility for 12,943 persons and one hospital bed for 1,790 persons. (p. 49)

As a result of insufficient health, cover, Pakistan has a high mortality rate of 6-8 per 1, 000 live births per year and infant mortality rate of 100-120 per 1,000 live births. We have been told that at the prevailing rate of mortality, the population of Pakistan loses 24,000 to 30,000 mothers annually and more than 4 lakh infants die before completing the first year of life. (p.49) ...

Life expectancy at birth in 1983 was estimated at 55 years for males and 54 years for females... After the first year of life mortality among females is higher than among males in age groups 1-4 years, 5-14 years and 15-44 years. (p. 18)

As many as ... 40 per cent of all deaths are caused by water borne diseases. Over 50 per cent of population live in areas where malaria vectors are prevalent. (p. 18) ...

The share of population in rural areas is 72 per cent but more than 4/5th of hospital beds and almost half of dispensaries, MCH centres, Basic Health Units are in the urban areas. The Commission noted that the women population in rural areas is served very inadequately in terms of health facilities. (p. 19) ...

Women like to be treated by lady doctors especially in rural areas. Many health problems of women remain unattended and become chronic and acute, because they would not like to be examined by male doctors especially for diseases of genito-urinary system. (p. 51) ...

Mal-nutrition is widespread amongst women. It is part of the overall problem of nutritional deficiency ... The female population suffers most because of the prevailing sociocultural milieu (p. 19) ...

The nutritional impact of the lower status of women in the family is disastrous. The male is considered to be the bread winner and is, therefore, served with food first and receives a larger share and best part of food. The male children come next. The females have to make do with left overs. Thus the food which the females get is both inadequate and devoid of protective items such as milk, meat, eggs, fruits etc. (p. 50) ...

Added to this is the drudgery of women's existence and long hours of work. Even the water needed by the family is carried from wells, springs and ponds miles away. It may take

hours to gather fuel for cooking. There are numerous stresses and strains associated with home management. (p. 50) ...

If special attention is not paid to women's nutritional requirements during pregnancy, lactation, menstruation and menopause, they develop serious problems such as anaemia, osteomalacia and other diseases arising out of vitamin deficiencies. We were informed that anaemia is the major killer of pregnant mothers. (p. 51) ...

Anaemia, gastrointestinal ailments, respiratory diseases, malnutrition, tuberculosis, parasitic infestation, malaria are the common diseases among women. (p. 49) ...

Prevalence of anaemia is twice as common among pregnant and lactating mothers as compared to the rest of female population. Prevalence of goitre is twice as high among this group of women against population as a whole. (p. 19) ...

Majority of the low income groups live in joint families. Usually the house is a one-room overcrowded dwelling, lacking water supply, sewerage or toilet facilities with poor and sometimes even no sanitation. (p. 51) ...

About 2/3rd (63 per cent) of all houses in the country are Katcha. Only 31 per cent houses have electricity. Access to piped water inside housing units is 13 per cent and to piped water outside housing unit is 8 per cent. Only 29 per cent houses have independent bath facilities. Housing conditions in terms of structure and facilities are deplorable in rural areas.

... We feel that these are the problems with which women, both in rural and in urban slums, are directly concerned. (p. 18) ...

The, proportion of female population in the total disabled population is 56 per cent, of which 19 per cent are in urban areas and 81 per cent in rural areas. Females form 66 per cent of the blind population...Sixty percent of deaf and dumb population is females. (p. 20)...

### **Educational Status**

The investment in education in Pakistan is amongst the lowest in the world. The allocations for female education are abysmally low and consequently the status of female education is particularly distressing. (p.81)...

The sex differentiation in enrolment of boys and girls in selected countries may be seen from the following :

	Boys	Girls
Pakistan	3	1
India	7	3
Indonesia	11	10
Philippines	1	1

...Pakistan is among those countries of the world which have the lowest literacy rate. The female literacy percentage in 1981 was 16 as against 35 for the male population. The literacy rate among rural women was as low as 7.3 per cent, (p. 66)...

...It is estimated that only 1 in every 6 male children and 1 in every 10 girls complete primary level. (p.67)...

In 1981... 74 per cent males and 26 per cent females had completed schooling, whereas the number of females from rural areas was only 18 per cent. (p. 17)...

The vast majority of primary school teachers are men whose rough handling often discourages tender children from attending school. If female teachers are employed at the primary schools not only will the care of young children be in more

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***Malnutrition is widespread amongst women. It is part of the overall problem of nutritional deficiency***

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sympathetic hands, parents will be less reluctant to send their tender age daughters to school. Both boys and girls could then study together and there will be no need for having separate schools for girls. (p. 70-71)...

Almost 99 per cent of men interviewed by the Commission, when inquired about co-education at primary level where women teachers were employed, had no objection to sending their daughters to such schools. (p. 71)...

The Commission is of the view that teachers at the primary education level should be women as is the case in most of the progressive countries of the world. This should be achieved in a planned manner during the next 10 years. To ensure the availability of female teachers, locally available girls who have passed middle or matriculation may be employed as teachers even if they have no teaching training certificate. They may be required to improve their qualification through in service training programmes. (p. 71)...

The Commission found the condition of primary schools, in particular girls' schools deplorable.

Insufficient and inadequate school buildings lead to pathetic standards of education and non-serious students. Most of the schools exist in one room only, where all the classes are taught. Primary schools in rural areas are generally housed in makeshift Kacha structures totally unfit as schools. They are usually composed of small dark rooms with little ventilation. ... There are no toilet facilities and no boundary walls. It has been reported that out of about 30,000 primary schools in Punjab, 18,000

awareness today of the value of education. (p. 72) ...

About 3 per cent of female students were enrolled in Home Economics at the intermediate level and 4 per cent at the degree level. The enrolment of women students in Law was 7 per cent. An overwhelming majority of women students at the intermediate, degree and post-graduate levels study arts subjects. (p. 75)

There is great demand for more degree colleges for girls. (P. 75)...

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have no building. It has also been brought to the notice of the Commission that a large number of primary schools exist only on paper yet the salaries of teachers of these 'Ghost' schools are being drawn regularly. (p. 71)...

Most of the people interviewed by the Commission pointed out that wherever facilities exist, women avail them fully as there is much greater

### **Economic Status**

...in 1981...The labour force participation rate for males was 50.6 per cent as against extremely low female participation rate of 2.1 per cent. (p. 19)...

In our opinion, the Census data give an extremely erroneous picture as far as female labour force participation is concerned. In the first instance, housekeeping which, engages women from dawn till dusk is not regarded as work. Secondly, majority of the rural women actively participate in most of the agricultural and farm operations which, if properly accounted for, can bring the female labour force participation rate to a substantially higher level. In addition, a large number of women are engaged in unorganized informal sectors about which no records are maintained. (p. 19-20)

The migration abroad of 1.7 million Pakistanis has also converted a number of women into heads of families and of family business/enterprise. (p. 20)...

Discrimination against women is rooted in the lower rates of wage for women farm labour, due to unorganized nature of employment,



**Roadside foodstall, Lahore**

the ease with which hired labour is substituted by family labour, seasonal nature of demand for labour and the traditional classification of certain jobs specific to women. Large proportion of women agricultural labourers come from the socially deprived classes such as the landless families who constitute nearly one third to one half the population of the rural areas. The introduction of modern methods of cultivation, the use of labour saving farm machinery, weedicides and other chemicals, are causing gradual displacement of women and shrinking their employment opportunities. The new jobs being created in modernized farming also render surplus women, because only men are being trained to handle mechanized operations. Traditionally feminine areas such as poultry keeping, dairying are becoming male occupations. The critical factor in improving their lot is of course the redistribution of land with an effective ceiling law which does not discriminate against women in providing the resource for self employment viz, land. (p. 98)

A large proportion of women in villages is involved as unpaid family workers in numerous agricultural activities such as cutting, binding sheaves, threshing, cotton picking, hoeing, sowing seeds, transplanting seedlings, cleaning and storing grain, caring and feeding of animals, ginning, spinning etc. This is in addition to her normal domestic activities of cooking, carrying food to fields, feeding children, house cleaning, washing, child care, milking and churning, making dung cakes for fuel, and gathering fuel wood, carrying water, food processing and crafts. The daily work-load of a working class village woman involves prolonged drudgery, often around 16 hours daily. Yet her work is neither computed in monetary terms nor her contribution to the economy is recognised and reflected



**Cotton picker, Jhang**

in any statistic. (p. 98)...

A very large number of women are employed in services and unregulated industries which are widely scattered small establishments with low capital investment. These include traditional village and cottage industries, household and small scale industries and unregulated services like sweepers, washermen, domestic servants etc. They suffer from poor techniques, low productivity and inadequacy of institutional credit. Their main features are insecurity of employment, lack of standard minimum wages, excessive hours of work, absence of any welfare amenities, lack of organization, and failure of public regulatory services to protect them. (p. 100)

Rural women mostly work in handicrafts and cottage industries, but these women have little say in the marketing of their produce and have no idea of the worth of their skill. They are exploited by middle men who make large profits from the labour of these women. (p.100)...

Urban women piece workers work at home for meagre wages paid on the basis of the quantity of work they do regardless of time and labour put into the work. They make paper bags from waste paper, sew readymade clothes, put together trinkets, shell dry fruit

etc. Each woman is isolated in her separate household and makes her individual informal contract with the middle man who supplies her the work and pays her for it. Out of necessity women are forced to work and most of their earnings are spent on the household, the family members or the dowries. Very seldom do they spend on their own personal needs. Their condition of work is disadvantageous because they are unaware of the rates of similar kind of work elsewhere and end up being paid very meagre wages. Being isolated they cannot receive protection from any existing laws neither are they in a position to unionize and demand a minimum wage rate or better conditions. (p. 101)

Women employed in construction industry as unskilled labour face problems of wage discrimination, deferred and under payment. They are mostly drawn from rural poor who move from place to place, their earnings constituting the major share of the family income. It is interesting that in the husband and wife team, the husband soon becomes a skilled brick-layer and a mason, while the woman is kept on the backbreaking unskilled labour such as carrying bricks. No facilities are made available to women workers and their children including infants are also in and around the construction site, underfed and unprotected from heat, cold and other hazards. (p. 101)

Women working in brick-kilns face a multitude of problems which emanate from the complex system of the brick industry. The industry operates on the system of advancing money to the employees, as an incentive for them to come and work which is then returned on the basis of "Kaat". The debts are un-ending and result in binding the families and even the successive generations to working in the kilns. Most kilns are located outside big cities therefore, there are no medical facilities available

to the women workers close to their place of work during maternity and other health problems, (p. 101)

Women are being pushed back to low income, low skill, traditional technologies and relegated to tasks which are bound to be replaced by modern mechanized processes. ... Women are thus being inexorably elbowed out of all remunerative well-paid work. (p. 9)

The commercialization of production and marketing and the rise of intermediaries has caused great hardships to the self-employed women producers and retailers. Self-employment is successful only where women are in a position to market their own products institutionalized through women's markets. If dependence is on the intermediaries then the returns are very meagre. The efforts of welfare organizations to develop self-employment in production of processed food, handicrafts, and garments etc., fail through lack of control over marketing system. The major handicaps of women are illiteracy, lack of an organization and institutions, lack of resources, ignorance of modern marketing methods and techniques of sales promotion, and discrimination

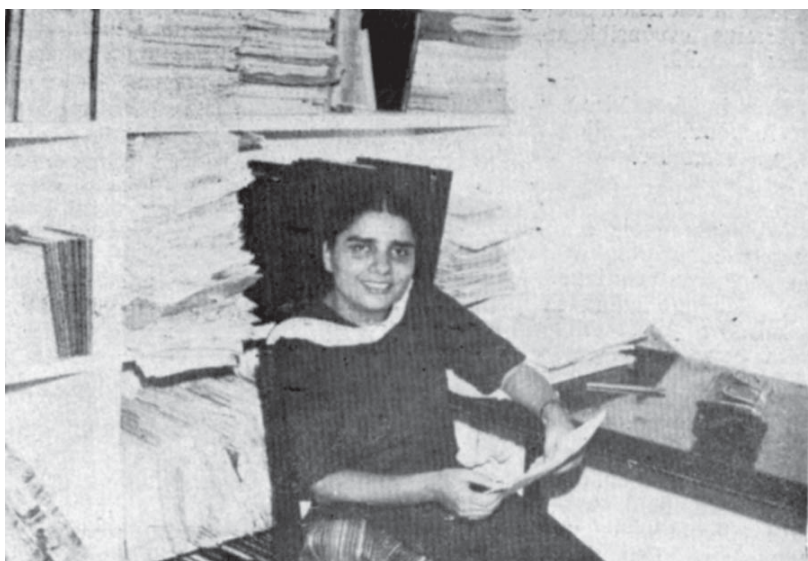
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***There is an increasing presence of women in nontraditional services and professions***

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of credit agencies like banks against women who are considered poor risks, (p. 101)

...women are being increasingly employed although wage differentials are still practised by direct or indirect methods. Women are restricted to certain jobs for which lower wage rates are prescribed. There is a concentration of women at lower levels of the production process which involves mostly unskilled or



**Office worker, Lahore**

semi-skilled work. Women are engaged at skilled levels only in a few industries such as pharmaceuticals, and electronics. Very few women can be found at the supervisory level in either the public or the private sector, (p.91)...

There is an increasing presence of women in non-traditional services and professions. Partly this has been facilitated by constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity in matters of employment. Progress in women's education has also helped their entry into areas which were previously monopolized by men. A gradual change in social values relating to women's paid employment is also taking place among the urban middle class due to growing economic pressures. There is, however, still a concentration of women in the professions of teaching and medicine. Certain low prestige jobs in clerical services are regarded as particularly suited to women, (p. 91)

Women constitute 31.9% of the primary school teachers, 30.7% of middle school teachers, 29.8% of high school teachers, 35.9% of the Inter College teachers and 38.2% of the

degree college teachers. Although the largest concentration of working women is in the teaching profession we were repeatedly informed that they were not represented in the policy making positions and at the higher administrative posts, (p.91)...

Medical profession has also a relatively high participation rate of women workers. There are about 25 qualified women doctors against 100 men doctors. As the majority of their clients are women, most women doctors specialize in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Women doctors with other specializations such as Surgery, Pathology etc., are few in number. As in the field of education, women doctors also face great discrimination in appointment to policy making and higher administrative jobs. ...(p-92)

.Almost all the nurses are women. There is, however, great shortage of nurses and the ratio of nurse to doctor is 1 to 4. This places extremely heavy demands on the available stock of nurses. To ease the situation somewhat, student-nurses are given nursing assignment in hospitals with the result that they cannot devote full attention to their studies. Like all other working women, nurses also



face problems in promotion, salary scales, transport, accommodation, maternity benefits, paid leave, working hours and non-availability of day care centres, (p.92)

Other categories of health personnel with preponderance of female workers are lady health visitors, family welfare workers and traditional birth attendants. Their number in relation to total needs of the country is still very small with the result that they work under all sorts of social and cultural constraints and non-supportive working conditions, (p. 92)

Mass communication media are attracting increasing number of women. In the press, publication and information sector they work as journalists, feature writers, reporters and also as editors. The Pakistani newspaper woman has progressed from traditional topics of fashion, cookery, home care to cover subjects as diverse as politics, economy, sports/ entertainment, social issues etc. Women are also working in television and radio and performing responsible and onerous duties. ... (p.92)

Even in Mass Media women are not included in policy making or taking administrative decisions... (p.93)

Women workers face the greatest opposition in moving to top executive positions. It seems that deliberate effort is made to stop them from becoming administrators or managers, (p.93)...

Contrary to the popular belief that women in managerial or administrative jobs are less efficient as compared to men, few opportunities in this field that have been made available to women, have demonstrated that they have comparable attributes in administration and managerial capacities, (p.93)...

The number of women lawyers has steadily increased in the country.

However, opportunities for them in judiciary are still scant.

**The following are some of the recommendations made by the Commission.**

**[On Health]**

Multipurpose centres at mohallah or village levels should be established

***Only female teachers be employed at primary level to avoid the need for separate schools for boys and girls***

by the local government for women to provide information on primary health care. ... (P-59)...

Nutrient deficiency diseases among women such as anaemia, goitre, rickets, osteomalacia and avitaminosis etc. be prevented through nutritional supplement



**Shopkeeper selling costume jewellery**

programmes, (p. 60)...

Adequate water facilities for clean drinking and washing needs be provided within easy reach of clusters of households, particularly in rural areas; (p. 60)

An MCH Centre be established in each rural and urban community as the base-line health service for women and children. ... (p. 60)

The MCH Centres be staffed with lady health visitors, family welfare workers and dais; (p. 60).—

A network of mobile teams for ante-natal care and supervision of Basic Health Units should be formed consisting of a trained obstetric registrar, trained technician and nurse midwife, (p. 61)...

Ratio of female beds in Tehsil and all other hospitals be increased to a minimum of 60 per cent to accommodate female patients suffering from general diseases and also maternity cases; (p. 61)...

Poor patients should receive medicines and rehabilitation assistance from the Zakat Fund: (p. 61)...

... equal number of seats should be reserved for girls in postgraduate courses of studies and 50 per cent allocation of stipends and scholarships by Government of Pakistan or any other Foreign Agency like W.H.O. etc. should go to women; (p. 62)...

Facilities for training of nurses should be created at each District hospital to remove the existing shortage of qualified nurses; (p. 62)...

Facilities should be provided at centres closer to rural areas for early detection and assessment of ... deficiencies which hamper the normal growth of children;

Diagnostic treatment, training and rehabilitation centres for handicapped children and women of rural areas be established. ... (p. 64).—

**[On Education]**

Literacy programmes for women should be offered at specially established community centres. ... (p. 84)...

At primary level, there should be coeducation for children of age group 5-10 years, in each village/ urban

community.

Only female teachers be employed at primary level to avoid the need for separate schools for boys and girls and to affect substantial economy in expenditure.

Interests of the present male incumbents should be fully safeguarded by shifting them to boys middle schools and all new recruits should be women, (p. 84)...

As girls are entrusted with the care of youngsters in the family, day care centre/nurseries be set up to improve the enrolment and retention rates of girls in the primary schools, (p. 85)...

Until the base of female education is broadened through co-education at the primary level, at least one middle school for girls at each Union Council level should be provided, (p. 85)...

A high school for girls should be provided at each Tehsil head-quarter, in a phased manner, keeping in view the number of students, (p. 85)...

Vocational training for women should become an integral part of female literacy programme at each centre, (p. 86)...

Degree Colleges for girls be established at each district headquarter with adequate hostel facilities, (p. 86)...

At least 40 per cent of the scholarships and stipends should be given to girl students and teachers for higher studies both within and outside the country, (p. 87)...

Curriculum and syllabi at all levels of education should be designed as

(j) to help girls and women to imbibe self confidence and a sense of value and

(ii) enable men to change pre-sent attitude of super ordination and to give woman her rightful place, role and function in Pakistan, (p. 87-88)...

#### **[On Employment]**

... Research studies and survey assignments on women's conditions and problems should be given to qualified women ;

### ***Women's contriButionto the national economy.... should be recognised and... indicated in national statistics***

Women's contribution to the national economy and development through their work in the house, agriculture and other sectors should be recognized and clearly indicated in national statistics; (p. 103)...

To extend women's range of economic roles, cooperatives and small scale industries should be developed by NGOS... (p. 104)...

All banks and other credit agencies should be required to launch special credit programmes for women without the requirement of collateral security; (p. 106)...

Reduction of household drudgery for rural women should be brought about through the development and extension of appropriate technology for food processing and preservation, rice husking, grinding of grain, oil pressing, potable water, biogas plants, improved methods of plastering of houses etc. (p. 105)...

At least a 25 per cent quota should be reserved for women in all services until they attain parity with men after which everyone should be able to compete on merit, regardless of any special consideration; (p. 106)...

Age for recruitment should be relaxed and raised to 33 years for

women and selection should be on non-discriminatory basis. Rules should be framed for easy re-entry into service with benefits of continued service for women, who leave jobs for a decade or so, to establish families and look after young children; (p. 107)...

Special buses for women should be arranged during rush hours. Harassment of women in public transport should be effectively curbed; (p. 107)...

Women workers must be given priority in allotment of government houses and some bigger houses may be turned into small hostels for working women; unmarried (p.107)...

Various checks and a closer inspection of factories hiring women should be enforced so that labour laws are not evaded and women engaged in cheap, unorganized labour are not exploited; (p. 108)...

Legal measures should be instituted to protect from overwork and exploitation the domestic servants, who constitute a very large group of women workers. Careful studies should be made to investigate the conditions under which they work; (p. 108). □