Identity, gender, and class : contributions from the Abhidhamma for self and social transformation, with a case study of a women's housing collective in Namibia.

Kanthie, Athukoralu

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1

Recommended Citation

https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/2328
IDENTITY, GENDER, AND CLASS: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE ABHIDHAMMA FOR SELF AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, WITH A CASE STUDY OF A WOMEN’S HOUSING COLLECTIVE IN NAMIBIA

A Dissertation Presented

by

KANTHIE ATHUKORALA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1999

School of Education
IDENTITY, GENDER, AND CLASS: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE ABHIDHAMMA FOR SELF AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, WITH A CASE STUDY OF A WOMEN'S HOUSING COLLECTIVE IN NAMIBIA

A Dissertation Presented

by

KANTHIE ATHUKORALA

Approved as to style and content by:

Robert J. Miltz, Chair
Barbara J. Love, Member
Julie A. Graham, Member
Sara J. Lennox, Member

Bailey W. Jackson, Dean
School of Education
DEDICATION

To my mother, Wimala Abeysekara, whose resolve it was that I become independent and who extends unconditional love, generosity, and compassion to all

To the loving memory of my father, Biel Abeysekara and

To my sons, Dhanika Kosala and Sumedha Rakshitha, for their understanding, generosity, and love
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation was made possible by many persons who provided me with advice, guidance, and support over a long period of time. With deepest appreciation and gratitude I acknowledge their generous contributions.

The Center for International Education has been a most open and welcoming community in which I was able to share and grow during my graduate student life. The professors and my fellow students, too numerous to mention individually, provided me with an atmosphere charged with excitement and shared learning. Two special persons among all who made the Center what it was for me were Anna Donovan and Barbara Gravin-Wilbur. My deepest appreciation and gratitude to all at the Center for enriching me with intellectual stimulus and the intensity of community.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Bob Miltz, my dissertation chairperson, who has helped me keep in perspective the practical application of academic theorizing, and for encouraging me throughout the process of dissertation. I would like to thank Julie Graham for her sensitivity to my project, intellectually stimulating support, and always taking time to motivate me to think about "after dissertation." I would like to thank Sara Lennox, for her incisive criticism, insightful questions, and warm support, which challenged me to write this dissertation better now and after. I would like to extend my special thanks to Barbara Love for generously agreeing to join my committee during the final phase of writing, her enthusiasm for the content of my dissertation, and her warm support and guidance which compelled me to think about the practical aspect of the theory. I am grateful for all of these persons’ time and energy, comments and reactions which enabled me to clarify the position I present here.
I am deeply appreciative of and grateful to the women of Saamstaan housing collective in Namibia, who generously gave their time for interviews to share their experience as vividly as they wished. The determination, courage, and purposefulness of their actions, as described by them, is testimony that there has to be more than focus only on material gains, in order to unoppressively gain materially. They contributed unconditionally and wholeheartedly to this study. I would like to express my thanks to numerous other individuals and institutions in Namibia who were instrumental in making this study possible. In particular, I would like to make special mention of the following institutions: Namibia Housing Action Group; Legal Assistance Services; Namibia Development Trust; Social Science Division, Multi Disciplinary Research Center, University of Namibia; and SWAPO Women’s Council for their generous contributions. One person with whose permission I make special mention is Doufi Namalambo without whose assistance I could not have completed research in Namibia. I owe much to these individuals and those who I have not mentioned, who generously shared their time with me.

I am greatly indebted to the staff at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS). Mu Soeng, the Director of the BCBS always took time to engage me in intellectual dialogue and direct me to resources which were extremely useful. It was rarely that I walked out of his office without either a book belonging to him or a name of a place where I could obtain a book for further reference. Dr. Andrew Olendzki, the Executive Director of the BCBS and visiting faculty at Harvard University, generously offered me his time and council, clarifying complex concepts, assisting me in reading relevant Pali (Theravada Buddhist Cannon) texts, and most importantly encouraging me
to use untranslatable Buddhist terms in their original Pali language. It was his council which helped me see the inadequacy of English translation of the Pali term Abhidhamma and subsequently my ability to use it as it is in the title of my dissertation.

Chris Philips, Deborah Pond, and Sumi Lundon were other key staff persons at the BCBS whose company I cherished. My deepest gratitude for their generosity.

I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to Josette Henschel for her love, affection, and presence, beside our failure to strike a balance between The Middle Path and radical materialism. With different historical specificities, different approaches to life, both of us walk similar paths, caught-up in webs of significance we spin for ourselves. My warm and deepest gratitude for her contributions to the process of developing this dissertation.

To my friends and colleagues: Frank and Mercia Schorn, for their continued friendship and support; Mark Lynd for his contribution in making my visit and research in Namibia a reality; Marla Solomon and Helen Fox for their warm friendship, intellectual dialogue, and presence; Marjolein van der Veen, who shared with me her intellectual and social time generously over the past eight years, I extend my appreciation and gratitude to all for your contributions in making this dissertation a completion.

Finally, I thank Peg Louraine for editing and formatting this dissertation.
ABSTRACT

IDENTITY, GENDER, AND CLASS: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE ABHIDHAMMA FOR SELF AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, WITH A CASE STUDY OF A WOMEN’S HOUSING COLLECTIVE IN NAMIBIA

KANTHIE ATHUKORALA, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO
M.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Robert J. Miltz

In this dissertation I argue that self and social transformation attempted by self-change in order to produce and change the material conditions of the human world and the changing of material circumstances, in mutual relations, eventuates only partial change/transformation. I have pointed out that this partial transformation, based on a materialist view of self and social activity, contributes to the continuation of self and social oppression. I have presented empirical evidence for this argument in the case study of Saamstaan women’s housing collective in Namibia. By "self-change" or "becoming" active and collective participants in changing material conditions of their lives, that is, securing houses for all members of the collective, they experience a sense of authentic self-change and changing material conditions. Simultaneously, they are faced with the disappointment, frustration, mental disharmony, and oppression both within and the social, when individual collective members choose not to abide by the ideals of sharing labor and paying off loans, once they acquire their houses.
Transformation/change is occurring but the process of full liberation from oppression is not.

I have pointed out that the contradiction between self and material changes which are assumed to be positive, good, and empowering and the accompanying pain and grief due to individuals' failings to abide by the ideals of the collective arise owing to the unchanged non-material, non-conceptual inner condition of possessive selves. If the self and social transformation is to be free of pain and grief, the approach needs to be one which provides for skills in ensuing material change and skills in letting go of possessive selves.

I have presented the Abhidhamma approach as an alternative for bringing about self and social transformation from liberatory space within and the social. While in this dissertation I have extensively discussed inner liberation, it does not privilege inner over social transformation. Rather, this is an approach which considers both inner and outer/social transformation as inseparable and interdependent processes. Thus, I take the position that letting go of possessive self, and self-change and changing of material conditions must occur simultaneously, with equal weight, to achieve full liberation from oppression.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter**

1. **INTRODUCTION** ................................. 1
   - The Problem .................................. 3
   - Purpose of the Study ....................... 6
   - Literature Review .......................... 8
   - Clarifications and Delimitations ........ 8
     - Assumptions ................................ 8
     - Limitations ................................ 10
   - Why Use the Term Abhidhamma and Not the Term Buddhism ................ 11
     - The Oriental Mind: Inferior and Retarded ........... 12
     - The Oriental Mind: Intellectually Inferior, Childlike, Lazy .... 13
     - Buddhism as a Religion ....................... 14
     - Buddhism as Social Reform: ................. 15
       - (Socialist, but Non-Socialist, and Non-Communist) .................. 15
     - Buddhist Doctrines .......................... 18
       - Pessimism .................................. 18
       - Rebirth ................................... 21
       - Cosmology .................................. 21
       - Religion, Spirituality, or Philosophy? .......... 22
       - Atheism .................................... 25
   - Buddhism and Morality ......................... 26
   - Buddhism and Catholicism ...................... 29
   - Buddhism and Christianity .................... 30
   - Buddhist Falsehood Versus Christian Truth ........ 31
   - Buddhism and Christianity: Human Truth and Divine Truth .......... 32
   - Buddhism: A Civilizing Influence ............. 32
   - Summary ...................................... 33
Definitions of Terms ........................................................................................................ 38
  Women ......................................................................................................................... 38
  Identity and Subjectivity ............................................................................................. 39
  Gender .......................................................................................................................... 40
  Class ............................................................................................................................. 40
  Self ................................................................................................................................. 41
  Oppression ................................................................................................................... 41
  Liberation ..................................................................................................................... 42

Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 42
The Structure of the Study ................................................................................................. 43

2. CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN, IDENTITY, GENDER, AND CLASS DECONSTRUCTED .............. 45

  Liberal Feminism .......................................................................................................... 46
  Marxist Feminism .......................................................................................................... 48
  Socialist Feminism ......................................................................................................... 51
  Phenomenological Feminism ......................................................................................... 54
  Cultural Feminism ......................................................................................................... 56
  Postmodern/Poststructuralist Feminism ........................................................................ 57
  Women in Third World Context .................................................................................... 59
  Observations .................................................................................................................. 61

  A Look at the Process of Feminist Discursive Practices from the Perspective of the Abhidhamma .......... 65
  Accomplishments and Gaps in Feminist Theory as Identified by Feminist Scholars ................. 69
  The Need ........................................................................................................................ 73

  The Abhidhamma Approach ......................................................................................... 79
  Analysis of Self .............................................................................................................. 85
  Self as Five Aggregates ................................................................................................. 86

  Form ............................................................................................................................... 86
  Feelings .......................................................................................................................... 87
  Perceptions ..................................................................................................................... 89
  Dispositions .................................................................................................................... 89
  Consciousness ............................................................................................................... 90

  Conditional Arising: Identity, Gender, Class .................................................................. 93

  Identity ............................................................................................................................ 93
  Identity at Collective Level ........................................................................................... 103
Gender........................................................................... 104
Class ........................................................................... 114
Summary ........................................................................... 121

3. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .......... 131

Contexts ........................................................................... 131
Geo-Political ..................................................................... 131
Socio-Economic ................................................................. 132
Cultural ........................................................................... 133

Construction of Gender in Namibia ...................................... 134
Gender Relations in Indigenous Namibia ................. 136
Division of Labor ................................................................. 136
Control of Resources and Labor ...................................... 137
Position of Influence ............................................................ 138
Sexuality ........................................................................... 139

Gender and the Colonial State ........................................... 139
Gender in the Current Context of Namibia ..................... 141

Women in Relation to Economy ........................................ 142
Women in Relation to Civil Marriage ............................. 143
Women in Relation to Customary Marriage ..................... 145
Women in Relation to Children .......................................... 146
Women in Relation to Contract Labor and Migrant Labor ...... 148

Contract Labor ................................................................ 148
Migrant Labor ................................................................. 150

Women in Relation to Land and Agriculture ..................... 151
Women in Relation to Head of Household Status .......... 153
Women in Relation to Occupational Categories of Domestic Worker and Farm Worker ............................. 154
Women in Relation to Development ................................ 156
Women in Relation to Political, Economic and Cultural Institutions .................................................. 157
Women in Relation to Housing ........................................... 158

Women, Oppression and Liberation in the Namibian Context 159
Women of Saamstaan ......................................................... 162
Organization as Agency of Change in Women as Individuals ........................................ 212
Affiliation and Membership .......................................................................................... 213
Affirming of Low-Income Women
(Kind of People it Serves) ............................................................................................. 214
Organization’s Influence on Personal and Skills Development of Individuals ........................ 216
Organization’s Role in the Growth and Development of Individuals and Community ............... 218
Conflicts Between Organization and Members .................................................................. 220

Experience Within the Group ....................................................................................... 223

Empowerment, Representation, and Responsibility ......................................................... 224
Group Norms and Rules ................................................................................................. 226
Collective Responsibility ............................................................................................... 228
Meetings ....................................................................................................................... 229
Decision Making ........................................................................................................... 230
Discipline and Process .................................................................................................. 231
Conflicts/Problems ....................................................................................................... 232
Conflict Resolution ....................................................................................................... 236
Responsibility to Group and Self .................................................................................. 236

Summary ....................................................................................................................... 237

5. TRANSFORMATION - SELF AND SOCIAL ................................................................ 240

Women’s Definition of Self Before and Now ................................................................... 240
Multiple Selves: Cycles of Change ................................................................................ 241
Multiple Gender Roles: Changing Gender Roles .......................................................... 245
Multiple Class Positions: Cycles of Change ................................................................... 249
Looking Through the Lenses ....................................................................................... 254
The Question ................................................................................................................ 259
The Perspective of the Abhidhamma .............................................................................. 259

Oppression .................................................................................................................... 261
Process of Oppression: Conditional Arising ................................................................. 264

Example 1: Subjectivity as Women with Children
and with No Husbands or Men ..................................................................................... 264
Example 2: Women As Owners of Houses .................................................................... 268

The Cause: Conditional Nexus of Oppression ............................................................... 272
Liberation/Freedom from Oppression ............................................................................ 274
The Way: The Path with No Goer .................................................................................. 278
Summary ................................................................. 281

6. CONCLUSION ................................................................. 282

Some Questions which Emerge from the Study ......................... 290
What Are Some Implications? ............................................. 301
Strategies for Sharing Abhidhamma with a Wider Global Community 302
Directions for Discourse and Practice ................................. 305
Final Reflection ............................................................. 309

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................. 310
Abhidhamma: (Literally "higher teaching"): A deep and a profound science of the constitution of a person and the workings of its organic processes. The constitution refers to the masses of mental and physical elements which makes up a person’s body and mind. The kind of questions investigated are: What is the nature of the constituent elements? How do they combine to form the various units of mind and matter? What are the conditions under which these units appear and disappear? What principle or natural laws govern them? The study of organic processes is the study of bodily and mental processes. Again, the questions considered are: What are these processes and how do they work individually and in combination, with what effects to the mind and body, and how can the unprofitable effects be interrupted, how can the profitable effects be developed and cultivated and with what effects.

Aggregates (Five):

The five aspects in which all mental and physical phenomena of existence are summed up, which appear to the unenlightened person as the person’s ego, or personality. They are: form/matter group; feelings group; perceptions group; mental-formation group; consciousness group. What is called "a person" or "an individual existence" is in reality nothing but a mere process of these mental and physical phenomena. These five groups however, neither singly, nor collectively constitute any self-dependent real ego entity, or personality, nor is there to be found any such entity apart from them. Hence, the belief in an ego-entity or personality, as real in a precise sense proves illusory. It is important to emphasize that these five groups of clingings are only classificatory groupings and they as such are not compact entities which have any real existence.

Base(s) synonymous with source (literally "sense spheres"): A designation for the realm of sense activity. There are twelve bases: six internal sense organs and six corresponding external sense objects. These sense spheres can only manifest in conjunction with six corresponding classes of consciousness. Each can then become a basis for the arising of thoughts and perceptions, the inner world of constructed subjective experience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense Base (Internal)</th>
<th>Sense Object (External)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye</td>
<td>Sight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongue</td>
<td>Taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>Tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>Thought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Becoming:

The Abhidhamma approach emphasizes "becoming" over "being." The unfolding of the mind, the person, the world is designated by the term "becoming." The unfoldings are actualized by volitional acts, that is, speech, bodily deeds, and thoughts, led by a learned sense of self. According to the Abhidhamma approach, this entire process mutually hinges on the condition "desire."

Birth:

The continuous "conception", "conceiving" or materialization that continually brings about the appearances or manifestations of the five aggregates of existence through the six senses.

Concept(s):

Names, signs, symbols, or referents of ordinary conceptual thought and conventional modes of expression (Bodhi, Bhikku, 1993, p. 325). For example, women, men, persons, animals, and apparently stable persisting objects that constitute our unanalyzed picture of the world. There are two kinds or concepts: concept-as-meanings, and concepts-as-names. For example, the notions of a two-legged partly hairy individual with certain physical features and traits is the concept-as-meaning of the term "person", the designation and idea "person" is the corresponding concept-as-name. Concepts exist as mental objects to discursive thoughts and are not temporal and have no "real" existence.
Conceptualization:

The process of identifying objects, naming, imposition of judgments, delineations of characteristics and functions of the identified object, assertion of externality of the objects, delegating authority/power to object for its existence and exertion of affects.

Condition/cause:

Condition/cause is that which must precede its effectivity and that which has the capacity to produce an effect (U Narada, 1969, p. xi). A condition, though used in singular form, imply the recognition of a group or a number of conditions/causes. A condition/cause, therefore, implies a harmony of conditions/causes that constitute one condition/causes having the capacity to produce an effect. The group of conditions/causes is *mutually interdependent*, and has no independent existence of any of the conditions/causes comprising the group.

Conditioning state:

Conditioning state is that which is the condition on which the effect is dependent. It is the condition which related to an effect and without which there can be no effect. Thus greed is a conditioning state of craving, and visible object-base is a conditioning state of object condition (U Narada, 1969, p. xii).

Conditioned state:

Conditioned state is that which is the effect that results from a condition (U Narada, 1969, p. xii).

Conditional Nexus:

Nexus of conditions (Govinda, 1969, p. 55) which are mutually interdependent in bringing about an effect. There are twelve conditions making up the nexus. They are: ignorance of reality; mental formations/dispositions; consciousness; psycho-physical complex; six sense bases; contact; feelings; craving; clinging; becoming; birth; dissolutions.
Conditional Arising:

An explanation of person-as-a-process (Nanamoli, 1991, pp. 525-578) without a beginning, without an end, and continuous in which only arising, duration, and dissolution is revealed on a moment to moment basis.

Continuous Re-cycling of Discursive Thought:

"Continuous going" of mental and physical existence marked by lack of rest, and by constant sense of uneasiness, pain, and discomfort.

Derived Elements:

Derived elements are dependent on the primary elements and like all elements have no intrinsic nature of their own. Twenty four derived elements of matter fall within two categories: concretely produced matter which are fourteen and non-concrete matter which are ten. Fourteen concretely produced matter further fall into seven categories: 1) sensitive elements or the receptors, that is, eye-sensitivity; ear-sensitivity; nose-sensitivity; tongue-sensitivity; and body-sensitivity, 2) objective or the stimulating elements, that is, color; sound; odor; taste, 3) sex element, that is, female; male, 4) mind base element, 5) life element, 6) nutritional phenomena. Ten non-concrete matter further fall into four categories: 1) limiting element, 2) communicating element, that is, bodily intimation, and vocal intimation, 3) mutable element, that is, lightness; malleability; and wieldiness, 4) characteristics of matter, that is, production; continuity; decay; and impermanence.

Designation:

The compound phenomenon of mental image, which becomes the mental object and support, together with name.

Desire:

First of the three roots of oppression, that is, mental grief and physical pain. Desire (attachment or craving) as a root cause of oppression involves desire for sensual pleasures; desire for rituals and wrong views; desire for eternal self; desire for no eternal self.

Direct experience:

See "Seeing reality as it is."
Discursive thinking/thought:

Discursive thinking is the "inner speech" or the process of roaming about and moving to and fro of the mind. Discursive thinking manifests itself as continued activity of mind by laying hold of a thought giving it attention or fixing the consciousness to the object and activating and continuing the "inner speech."

Discursive thinking in this sense is unexamined, uninvestigated, and unbridled thoughts of all kinds, whether names, images, or judgments. Discursive thinking/thought is the process which generates given things and names, that is, bases of imputations and imputations themselves. Therefore, owing to discursive thinking/thought there is: the presence of both the "given things," and the imputations, that is, meanings associated with the given things which characterize the "it-ness" of the given things (names, labels, characteristics, functions, judgments and so forth). In this sense, discursive thinking/thought arises in dependence of "form" which is the perceivable base; "reification" which is the base of reifying view which is the "it-ness" and "belonging to it-ness;" and the base of defilements, that is, desire, hatred, and delusion. There are eight kinds of discursive thinking/thought: 1) discursive thought concerning specific nature; 2) discursive thought concerning particularity; 3) discursive thought concerning grasping whole shapes; 4) discursive thought concerning "I" or "It"; 5) discursive thought concerning "belonging to me" or "belonging to it"; 6) discursive thought concerning the agreeable; 7) discursive thought concerning the disagreeable; 8) discursive thought concerning neither agreeable nor disagreeable.

Element(s):

Elements are the smallest units of phenomenological experience. Elements are abstract qualities and as such are empty and void of substance, self, soul, I, being, person, and life (U Narada, 1977, pp. xxii-xxix). Elements are the concise or precise constituents of all things which are, in the Abhidhamma, said to be animate and inanimate. When one has really grasped the nature of these elements in a practical way for oneself, these elements will be realized as oppression and be given up. That would be the liberation from oppression.

A person (an animate) consisting of material and mental elements comprising 28 material qualities (and 52 mental factors). Of the 28 material qualities four are primary elements and twenty four are derived elements.
Given Thing (synonymous with sign, designation):

Any mental object which is a necessary condition for consciousness to perform the activity of cognizing an object. Given thing is an object which consciousness "delight in" or which it (consciousness) "hang on to." As such, a given thing is any perceivable object/entity which serve as a base for cognition or imputations. Given thing is the base on to which various names, judgments, as well as "externality" are attached. Given thing as perceivable base and mental object and the naming process are two distinct but inseparably connected processes in discursive thinking. Correct understanding of both the process of cognizing a base of imputation and the process of imputation effect insight. (see "Base," p.1)

Ignorance:

Ignorance here does not refer to a lack of accumulated or acquired knowledge. A person can be with vastly accumulated knowledge and ignorant at the same time.

Ignorance (synonymous with delusion) here refers to the condition of "unknowing" the "reality as it is" or "reality as has come to be", that is, that reality is impermanent, liable to oppression, and void of I and Mine. Ignorance is also the condition of not knowing the reality of oppression, origin of oppression, possibility of ending oppression, and the way to end oppression. Ignorance is therefore the condition of attachment to sensual pleasures, attachment to wrong views, that is, there is an eternal self or there is no eternal self (life is an accident), and attachment to a possessive self. As such ignorance is one of the root causes of oppression. Ignorance is one of the root causes of oppression because it veils a persons mental eyes preventing her/him from seeing the constructed nature of things/reality.

Insight:

Synonymous with wisdom, insight is the form of knowledge with which one can see deeply into the "reality as it is." Insight consists of the power to penetrate the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (oppression), and impersonality of all mental and material phenomena of existence, by direct meditative experience. Three kinds of knowledge constitute insight: Knowledge based on thinking (through one's own thinking), knowledge based on learning (heard from others and thus acquired through learning), and knowledge based on mental development (through developing concentration).
Knowledge:

Conventional knowledge: knowledge accumulated through convention, conceptualization and discursive thinking/thought.

Precise knowledge: (synonymous with insight, and non-discursive-thought, wisdom). State of cognizing reality which is completely freed of the distortions of discursive thought. Direct seeing of reality as it really is; deep and profound knowledge of reality. "Insight of things as they really are." Insight is a product of training and effort which are causal factors in that production. When there is no training and effort in producing insight or precise knowledge this knowledge is absent.

Misconceptions:

Conceptions which engender oppression, that is, mental grief, and physical pain. These misconceptions are: 1) taking as permanent what is not permanent; 2) taking as self-possessing what is without self; 3) taking as pleasant what is really painful.

Power:

The power of insight and wisdom which guide a person to steer off of the course of oppression, that is, abandon unskillful mental states, prevent unskillful mental states from arising, develop skillful mental states which have not yet arisen, and cultivate skillful mental states which have already arisen.

Primary Elements:

The four primary material elements are the supporting, the binding, the maturing, and the motion elements. The properties of supporting element are hardness and softness. The properties of binding element are cohesion and flowing. The properties of maturing element are hotness and coldness. The properties of motions element are expansion and contraction.

These primary elements form the basis structure of all matter and are held together in mutual dependence. If one element is absent the other three would not be able to produce matter which they produce otherwise.
Proliferation of discursive thought:

Engendering the seemingly endless procession of names and concomitant things, that is, given things. The continuous "running on" of thought or 'spreading out," that is, names, discriminations, judgments, and so forth, such that reality is never experienced directly as it really is, freed of distorting superimpositions.

Reality:

According to the Abhidhamma perspective, reality is that there is no such thing as reality. Reality is nothing but the constructed views of self and world. As such, the Abhidhamma perspective holds that there is no single reality but are multiple realities. For explanatory purposes, reality is described as two kinds. One is conventional reality. The other is precise reality. Conventional realities are conceptual thoughts which are "commonly accepted realities." In our day-to-day experience when we refer to things as woman, man, person, car, or train these are valid only as concepts and conventional modes of expressions. In a precise sense, existence is a mere process of physical and mental phenomena within which or beyond which no real ego-entity nor any abiding substance can ever be found.

Reality as it is (reality as it has come to be):

A descriptive term which renders reality in its bareness, that is, reality from its own side, freed of all superimpositions or conceptual imputations. This term is also rendered as "reality as it really is," that is, in-itself.

Right (as in right view):

Right here denotes that which comes about because of "seeing things as they really are." "Right" in the Abhidhamma context does not refer to values as in right vs. wrong. Proper, whole, thorough, integral, complete, perfect, appropriate, skillful can be used as synonyms for the term "right."

Reifying View:

The view which posits a concrete, self-centered reality, base on the notion of "I" and "mine" or "it" and "belonging or pertaining to it."
Related condition:

Other conditions which are connected with a condition which has come to be (U Narada, 1969, p. xii).

"Seeing reality as it is":

"Seeing reality as it is" means non-conceptual knowing of reality (process of arising and passing away of, or the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-substantiality of mental and physical phenomena) through "insight."

Sex/Sexuality Element

Since one of the concepts this study discusses is gender, that is, assigning of roles, responsibilities, and material resources based of a sex system it would be appropriate to make note of sex/sexuality element. Sex elements, which are not the gross bodily sex organs but the derivative matter which are conditions for the appearance of female, male characteristics exist as separate elements in each individual and are spread throughout the body. According to the law of action and change, at times a particular sex element may cease, and an element of the opposite sex arise producing a sex change in an individual. In some cases a mixture of the two, that is, hermaphrodites appear. (Jayasuriya, 1976, p. 84; Rhys Davids, C. A. F. 1976, pp. 420-421).

Verbal designation:

The view which holds the existence of names.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the Abhidhamma approach to investigating and understanding personhood, oppression, and liberation. One of the conditions which gave me the impetus to explore this approach is the work, the accomplishments, and my exposure to the continued feminist theorizing and action on oppression and liberation of women during my graduate studies. Feminist discourses are instrumental in my coming-to-know of the various forms of oppression of women: socio-cultural, politico-economic, religious, individual, institutional, and global. Just 10 or so years ago, I was not concerned with understanding oppression of women. Now I have in my repertoire some concepts and language which describes oppression of women. This dissertation is an addition to feminist theory, which is ever in the making, attempting to grapple with the concerns of women, oppression, and liberation.

Another condition which gave me the impetus for this study is the close parallels between postmodern/poststructuralist theory and the Abhidhamma in analyzing personhood. Postmodern/poststructuralist theory decenters and deconstructs the singular self of the individual. In order to deconstruct the singularity of the individual, postmodern/poststructuralist theory posits the existence of fluid, changing, shifting and overlapping multiple selves in an individual at one time and over time. The Abhidhamma decenters and deconstructs the individual. In order to deconstruct the singular self in individuals, the Abhidhamma posits the non-existence of any selves, i.e., the no-selfness in self. In order to demonstrate the multiple-selves in an individual,
postmodern/poststructuralist theory analyses the mutual interaction between the individual and the social processes, i.e., culture, ideology, language, psychoanalysis, and the multiple individual as the effectivity of that mutual interaction. In order to demonstrate the non-existing, multiplicity of ever-moving processes which one calls an individual, the Abhidhamma deals directly with the object - self/individual. The Abhidhamma disassembles the individual into its minute components and processes to demonstrate that there is no independent existence of any of these components and processes or the combined process called the individual. The Abhidhamma presents an approach and a method by which the no-thingness in self can be direct-experientially accessed and known by a mind independent of mind’s conceptual processing of data in everyday life. The Abhidhamma approach in this sense is complementary to postmodern/poststructuralist theory.

Abhidhamma means a deep and a profound insight into the nature of conditioned phenomena of self in relation to the processes of oppression and liberation within. This is an approach developed in pre-Christian India, amidst a number of intellectual traditions engaged in investigating and understanding personhood at the time, and has been in practice up to today in the globe. I wish to explore this approach as a complementary contribution to feminist discourse. Feminist discourse, is a political project aiming to disclose and eliminate political, economic, social and cultural practices oppressive to women. Investigating the oppression within women is taken up by psychoanalytic and phenomenological feminist discourses with a view to identifying the social processes responsible for women’s internalization of oppression. The Abhidhamma approach presents another way to investigate oppression within and a
method for liberating one's self from oppression within. In this sense, I consider the Abhidhamma approach complementary to feminist discourse and its political endeavors.

The Abhidhamma approach is useful in grappling with two questions: how is liberation from oppression possible, and how is identities, genderless, and classless society possible?

To work with feminist discourses on this project, I will take a cursory glance at selected feminist discourses, exploring how they view personhood of women, oppression, and liberation; a brief look at what the process of feminist discursive practice entails from the perspective of the Abhidhamma; present from feminist discourses what they identify as a need which would be complementary to their project; and present the Abhidhamma approach as an alternative for meeting the identified need. I will then present some vignettes from the narratives of a group of women on how they construct their personhoods and analyze them from the perspective of the Abhidhamma. Following this analysis I will present the Abhidhamma method by which women can investigate, understand, and liberate themselves from oppression within.

The Problem

Cultures, religions, politics, and economies alike have had their part, for quite some time now, in the question of who "women" are, what oppression of women is, and what liberation means for women. Defining and stating who women are, as if those definitions are fixed, unchallengeable and unchangeable, has been the work of the founding fathers of society. Grappling with the question of who women are, how they are oppressed by those fixed definitions, the cultural, political, economic and other
social institutional practices, and what it means to be free of oppression is the work of feminists.

Since the 1960s in particular, feminist attempts to theorize who women are and what changes must take place, both in society and in women, in order for women to be free of oppression and how women and society must go about making these changes have increased in number. Since the 1970s, feminist attempts have expanded beyond the boundaries of the first world to the Third World. Feminists have pointed out the various economic, social, and political processes that both individually and in combination oppress women and what needs to change so that women are free from oppression.

The more feminists have worked to untangle the question of who women are and how they are oppressed, the more entangled and complicated the resolutions have become. Who are women? What commonalities do they share and yet how different are they, not only from each other but along the lines of race, religion, culture, politics, economics, sexuality, ability, and roles? Feminists are now faced with and fascinated by the complexity involved in defining who women are, let alone finding resolutions to women's oppression. Feminist ideas continue to multiply, forming alliances and divisions, converging and diverging, overlapping and shifting, and in tension being simultaneously pushed and pulled in many different directions.

The moment feminist thinking involves itself in focusing on who women are, it seems to find that women are not who they think they are. Moreover, feminists find that women's oppression is not what they think it is. Then they face the question of what it is that we should rally around to overcome: sexism? capitalism? imperialism? post-
colonialism? racism? The more knowledge generated, the more questions surface; and the more questions there are, the more convincing is the fact that the efforts and the products are distant from the question of women, oppression, and freedom. Feminist thinking generates knowledge by drawing from and in tension with the available theories in specific social contexts, screening what is acceptable, what is unacceptable, what is ignorable, and generating knowledge about how to preserve what is acceptable and how to reject what is unacceptable. These efforts, in the form of responses, reactions, or simply knowledge, have been directed at investigating the processes in the social context or the world external to the individual, i.e., political, economic, or social, and the reciprocal relationship of women and these processes in formulating concepts of who women are and what oppression and liberation are. The focus on the external process has resulted in distancing feminist thinking from exploring the possibilities for investigating the object of its focus: women, that is, the internal worlds of women with regard to who women are, what oppression of women is, what liberation is, and how it could be achieved.

While it is indisputable that feminist theorizing has generated and is generating unprecedented knowledge about how social processes define and oppress women, and how women internalize and project the very definitions in conformity, an exploration of the internal mechanisms of the process of internalizing, i.e., what are the elements in that inner experience of internalizing, what inner conditions condition these inner elements in that internalizing experience, what constitutes oppression, and what constitutes liberation from the inner conflict worlds of women, still remains a project uncompleted and yet complementary to the feminist project. The problem, then, is
finding an approach to investigating and understanding the inner world, or to use a term from Western vocabulary - the psychology - of women, in terms of their personhood, oppression, and liberation. The significance of such a project is to be open to enhancing the feminist project by exploring approaches from a multicultural arena, without limiting itself only to the Western ways of knowing. How the notions of women, notions of oppression, and liberation of women, are socially constructed is being investigated by feminist discourses, in an unprecedented manner. A search for an approach which investigates the personhood or subjectivity of women, from its own side, that is, in its own actualities, disassembling subjectivity into its minute component processes and its own realities, that is, the workings of these component processes individually and in combination producing the complex effectivity/subjectivity which we call the individual, is timely and may prove worthwhile to the feminist project. The actualities and realities are not objects which are things-in-themselves inaccessible to experience. They are the various components of experience. Even though the approach may not be found, a different approach which proves capable of investigating subjectivity from its own side may bring different outcomes to addressing the question of who women are and how women can free themselves from oppression.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to feminist discourse by responding to the need mentioned above. That is, to bring forth a different epistemological perspective, the Abhidhamma perspective, from a geo-cultural context other than the
West, which accomplishes the task of investigating personhood, oppression, and liberation. The importance is not so much in where it originates, but in its approach and method. The Abhidhamma is an approach which is uncompromising, relentless, and confident about taking the self as the object of investigation, when investigating personhood, oppression, and liberation. This is an approach which allows the individual to access the powers within, to take the self as the object of investigation in order to eradicate oppression within. This is an approach that allows individuals no dependency on any external mediator(s), i.e., social processes or a supernatural power, for the knowing of the processes within. The Abhidhamma is about individuals taking control over the knowing and the course of their mental events prior to the mind's conceptual processing of sense data, enabling the individual to steer its course out of oppression. Steering out of oppression means liberation. Whether acceptable or not, exposure to and coming into contact with this approach, I believe, may fruitfully add to the repertoire of feminist practice.

Rather than seeing women as victims of social, political, and economic processes, or dependent on these very processes for the liberation from victim position, this approach allows for women to see themselves as individuals who have agency in both understanding the objective actualities of their subjectivity and the nature of this subjectivity as conditioned and conditioning phenomena. This transformation of self, in turn, will be instrumental for women to see how the transformation of individual selves contributes to the transformation of society, that is, identityless, genderless, and classless society.
Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is (1) to take a cursory glance at a selected few feminist theoretical discourses pertinent to exploring the construction of identity, gender, and class as they relate to women, oppression of women, and liberation from oppression, and (2) to explore different ways of analyzing the construction of identity, gender, and class, oppression and liberation, and how this relates to the experience of women. In the field of feminist discourses, I will review literature formulated by both first world and Third World feminist theorists considering both first world and Third World women. In exploring a different way of analyzing the construction of identity, gender, and class, I will review literature from an ancient and profound science of phenomenal experience - the Abhidhamma approach. In ending this chapter, I will present a brief outline, in accord with the Abhidhamma perspective, which can be utilized in analyzing subjectivity.

Clarifications and Delimitations

Assumptions

This study assumes that terms such as women, identity, gender, class, oppression, and liberation are constructs, names, and labels. A basic assumption in this study is also that there are no designees or particular designations for these constructs. These terms are used only to the extent that they differentiate objects from one another. These concepts and the objects they refer to have no essences or things-in-themselves. In other words, they have not come to be by themselves, independent of other natural, social, political, and cultural processes and they are not permanent and fixed. It is
assumed that these concepts simultaneously arise as processes with other processes which are also not fixed or static but continually changing. It is also assumed that these constructs are not universal. What they refer to and what they mean varies according to conditions present in the places they are used and by whom they are used.

This study also assumes that the subjectivity of individuals can be analyzed internally. Subjectivity can be internally broken down into constitutive components, which themselves are in continual change and are constituting the individual. An analysis of how these components come to be, individually and in combination, and with what consequences, is not only possible but integral to an understanding of the experience of individuals. It is assumed that, through such an analysis, the individuals are able to direct their energy towards what makes their experiences profitable\(^1\) to themselves and their profitability in turn profitable to the society. Profitable in this study does not connote maximizing material gains and accumulation of material wealth. Profitable in this instance connotes a process which allows appeasement of dispositions and mental equilibrium, that is, harmony which allows balance between craving for sensual desires and craving for aversion and ill will. Understanding the arising of experience of individuals, the interdependent nature between the world within and world without, is key to individuals determining and engaging in profitable activities, for self and social transformation.

---

\(^1\) The term ‘profitable’ in this study does not connote accumulation of material wealth. ‘Profitable’ here means ‘that which allows for detachment from conditioned phenomena.’ See Nanamoli, Bhikku, (1991) *The Path to Purification*, XVI 32 - 104 (pp. 505-524)
This study assumes that theory arises in experience. The theory/knowledge arising in experience in turn becomes mental support or basis for further arising of theory/knowledge. Therefore, the study will focus on experience of individuals and individuals as experiences.

Limitations

This study limits itself to an investigation of the construction of identity, gender, and class in terms of understanding what oppression and liberation means for women. As such, I have reviewed selected literature from feminist discourses and I have interviewed a small number of women who conduct themselves in a cultural, political, and economic context specific to them. Neither the experience of individuals other than women has been dealt with in any detail, nor is the experience of the women interviewed meant to speak for all women. The stories shared by these women are their stories in their geo-political and socio-economic contexts. I acknowledge the fact that the selection of this group of women to interview was a choice I made because of my affinity to them and the choice of a small group was for the purpose of maintaining the manageability of research for this dissertation.
Why Use the Term Abhidhamma and Not the Term Buddhism

Abhidhamma refers to the science of person-as-process, taught by Siddhartha who is popularly known as the Buddha. "Buddhism" refers to a collection of views, opinions, arguments, evaluations, and judgments "condensed around the name of the Buddha" (Hallisey, 1987, p. 3), which have come into existence since the nineteenth century. Since the Western reader in particular, and the global reader today, is familiar with the term Buddhism and mostly (or fully) unfamiliar with the term Abhidhamma, the question posed above might arise. The term Abhidhamma is used in this dissertation because the two terms signify two different things. They cannot be used synonymously to present what each of these terms signifies.

The term Buddhism, as the suffix -ism designates, is a collection of ideas, an ideology, produced around anything anywhere where the term Buddha was seen to be in use. This collection of ideas began in the first half of the nineteenth century in Victorian England, along with European intellectuals who provided intra-scholarly references to the project. The participants of this discourse mainly were British

---

2 In this dissertation I will use the name Siddhartha in place of Buddha. I will use the name Buddha when presenting material where people refer to Siddhartha by the name Buddha.

3 There are a large number of Western Buddhist practitioners, for whom what the Buddha taught has become a way of life. The term "Western reader" in this dissertation does not refer to these persons.

4 My intention is not to delve into fully fledged research on this subject, but to provide some material to the reader to get the "flavor" of the term Buddhism. For this purpose I primarily use Almond (1988) The British Discovery of Buddhism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, since he provides an extensive collection of reading material primarily from the nineteenth century Victorian discourse with some German and French discourse about Buddhism, to inform the reader of what is to be found in the Victorian construction of the term. I will extract from the material he has presented.
soldiers, colonial and imperialist administrators, merchants, priests, missionaries, and travelers who narrated stories about the way of life of the people in the "Orient," and scholars who constructed "meaning" using these accounts. The term Buddhism made its first appearance in British journals in 1820s (Almond, 1988, pp. 7-14). Prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century Victorian discourse about Buddhism, produced with a network of intra-scholarly references to Buddhism from Germany and France, neither the term nor its content existed. The point, therefore, is that the term and the content of Buddhism arises from sociological and anthropological accounts, motivated by political and cultural hegemony of Western people about the people of the East. Therefore, it is a Western ideology, produced in the West, for the West, by the West, on their own terms according to how they saw it and what they wanted to say. In order to further clarify this point, I present below a few extracts from nineteenth century Western documents which produced the term and the content "Buddhism."

**The Oriental Mind: Inferior and Retarded**

With a belief that they (Victorians) had a "responsibility ordained by God ... bring about the conversion of the world to Christianity," in a statement on relations between British Government and Buddhism in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the London Quarterly (1854) declared that "[they] believe that [they] have been raised up to civilize and provide the bibliographic references as necessary. Almond's study is a useful starter for a person who is serious about knowing what s/he knows Buddhism to be.

5 The term "Orient" is a construct of the West, which condenses and reduces an overwhelming diversity of cultures of peoples in Asia. Most poignant study on the construction of this concept is provided by Said (1978) in his *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.
the savage, to colonize the uninhabited, but habitable, portions of the globe, and to diffuse the blessings of the Gospel amongst mankind." Samuel Baker, (1891) was fully convinced that it was the ''mighty will of the Omnipotence, which, choosing His instruments from the humbler ranks, has snatched England from her lowly state, and has exalted her to be the apostle of Christianity throughout the world." Almond (1988) quotes John Davy's opinion on Singhalese (people of Sri Lanka who live the Middle Way - taught by Siddhartha): "In intellectual acquirements, and proficiency in arts and sciences, they are not advanced beyond the darkest period of the middle ages. Their character, I believe, on the whole, is low, tame, and undecided: with few strong lights or shades in it, with few prominent virtues or vices ..." Barthelemy St Hilaire (1895) viewed that the Oriental mind "was not sufficiently developed to attain the source from which he himself, as well as the world, has emanated." (in Almond, 1988, pp. 42 - 43)

**The Oriental Mind: Intellectually Inferior, Childlike, Lazy**

In contrast to the assumed intellectual superior, adult, and industrious mind of Western people, the mind of Orientals was intellectually inferior, childlike, lazy and essentially primitive. Their mind was primitive because they had not attained the idea of God. Of the people of China, Walter Medhurst (1838) declared that "... little or no assistance has been derived from supernatural discoveries ... they fall short of even the children in Christianity." Barthelemy St Hilaire warned the Western intellectuals and the reader that Buddhist atheists were not to be considered on a par with those Europeans who professed not to believe in God, for the reason that, atheistic nations have not yet attained to the idea of God, to the great detriment of their organization,
dignity, and happiness. Barthelemy St Hilaire (1895) had assuredly declared that
"These nations neither deny not affirm God, they have never heard of him ... They are, in fact, children, and a child is neither an atheist nor a deist; he is nothing." (in Almond, 1988, p. 47).

Somewhat extraordinarily, Almond (1988) points out that George Bettany (1892) went on to claim that, unlike the Hebrews and Europeans, the Hindus and the Chinese failed to develop individuality. "Their civilization created types rather than individuals, accustomed continually to do the same thing, feel similarly, and think alike." (in Almond, 1988, p. 49)

Western optimism was contrasted with assumed Oriental pessimism. Oldenberg (1882), with no uncertainty about industriousness of people as promising a cheerful sturdiness remarked that, "Of this life, which promises to the cheerful sturdiness of an industrious struggling people, thousands of gifts and thousands of good things, the Indian merely scrapes the surface and turns away from it in weariness." Against the vivacious European who is active, vigorous, aggressive and progressive, the people of Asia was represented as indolent and unmanly. The static, unchanging, immovable, conservative, Orientals "remained relics of the past." As a consequent of Buddhism remaining unchanged for over two thousand years, the Singhalese people are "the living mummies of past ages" (Tennent, 1850). (in Almond, 1988, p. 49)

**Buddhism as a Religion**

Victorian/Western discourse about Buddhism constructed Buddhism as a religion. But, for the Western intellectual, it was not the content of what the Buddha
taught which made it a religion. It was the personality and character of the Buddha which resembled the personality and character of Jesus which made it a religion. David Armstrong (1870) said, "... that personality has endured this score of centuries and is as fresh and beautiful now when displayed to European eyes, as when Siddhartha himself breathed his dying breath in the shades of Kusinagara. As in Christianity, so in Buddhism, the personality of the founder has been the only thing unchanged in the whirl and struggle of the ages." For the Bishop of Calcutta, Reginald Copleston (1890) it was, "something in the personal gifts of Gautama; his charm, his tact, his tenderness, - the union of the sage with the friend, - not anything in his discovery or in his institutions, which gave him so vast and abiding an influence." And, in the view of Davenport Adams (1882), it was the pure morality taught by the Buddha, along with "the spirit of love, tenderness, gentleness, compassion, and toleration which he inspired." (in Almond, 1988, pp. 69 - 70)

Buddhism as Social Reform: (Socialist, but Non-Socialist, and Non-Communist)

Buddhism, even though heathenish, was a useful informer and a cultural tool to the political scheme and motives of the colonialist. To them, Buddhism, which they themselves constructed, informed them that the Oriental societies were not as stagnant as they thought them to be, and that these societies could be changed. Buddhism was a cultural tool that broke down the Brahmanical pretension of superiority which presented the possibility of "... dissemination of true religion and the subversion of error," to the religiously inspired and politically motivated colonialist. They saw Buddhism as an opponent to Hinduism, an attacker of the pretensions of Brahmanic hierarchy, an
attacker of the inequalities of the caste systems, and as having proclaimed the equality of all men. They constructed this Buddhism, interpreting it as what the Buddha did. In 1835, Neumann presented the idea that Buddha had aimed "at the entire subversion of the edifice of castes, and consequently at reforming the social systems of the Hindus." This idea was supported by Gogerly in 1847. For Alexander Cunningham (1854), Buddha was "a great social reformer who dared to preach the perfect equality of all mankind, and the consequent abolition of caste, in spite of the menaces of the most powerful and arrogant priesthood in the world." The Christian Remembrancer (1858), stated that Buddhism has proclaimed the entire equality of all mankind. Almond (1988) points out that Linus Brockett (1861), William Sargant (1864), The Intellectual Observer (1867), Otto Kistner (1869), and Richard Armstrong (1870) saw Buddhism "as a protest against a despotic, tyrannical, oppressive, and corrupt Brahmanical priesthood, and the institution of caste that is supported" (p. 72).

To the Victorian colonialist, Buddhism was a tool to promote and strengthen anti-Catholicism, promote Protestantism, and justify their imperialistic presence in the East. To some of them, Buddhism was the "Lutheranism of the Hindu Church."

Journal of Sacred Literature (1865) declared:

Gautama did for India what Luther and the Reformers did for Christiandom; Like Luther, he found religion in the hands of a class of men who claimed a monopoly of it, and doled it out in what manner and in what measure they chose; like Luther, he protested that religion is not the affair of the priest alone, but is the care and concern of every man who has a reasonable soul: both laboured to communicate to all the knowledge which had been exclusively reserved for the privileged class ... And as Europe bestirred herself at the voice of Luther, so India answered heartily to the call of Gautama. (in Almond, 1988, p. 73)
To Unitarian James Freeman Clarke (1869), "Buddhism in Asia, like Protestantism in Europe, is a revolt of nature against spirit, of humanity against caste, of individual freedom against the despotism of an order, of salvation by faith against salvation by sacraments." Chambers Encyclopaedia (1874) expressed the view that Buddhism was to Brahmanism as Christianity was to Judaism, for Buddhism was an attempt to make Brahmanism more catholic, "to throw off its intolerable burden of ceremonies" (Almond, 1988, p. 74)

There were other European intellectuals who educated the Victorians differently. German intellectual Herman Oldenberg (1882) awakened the Victorian intellectuals to the fact that:

to speak of Buddhism as opposed to Brahmanism, somewhat in the way it is allowable to speak of Lutheranism as an opponent of the papacy. But if they mean ... to picture to themselves a kind of Brahmanical Church, which is assailed by Buddha, which opposed its resistance to its operations like the resistance of the party in possession to an upstart, they are mistaken. (in Almond 1988, p. 75)

Politically opportunistic Victorians welcomed Oldenberg’s intellectual exercise to their advantage rather than scholarly investigation. Victorians were eager to recognize their Buddha and Buddhism insofar as it broke down social and religious hierarchies of Brahmanism and Hinduism. They were unable to openly recognize Buddha and Buddhism insofar as it would break down the hierarchy of the Victorian ruling class, within Britain and the then expanding British rule and domination of the globe.

Therefore, using Oldenberg’s contribution, the Victorians constructed a different version of their Buddha and Buddhism: Buddha - a democratic social reformer but not a communist and not a socialist.
The Victorian Buddha was not only their political ally, but also a model of Victorian manhood. Their Buddha - the democratic socialist reformer - who was: upright, self-assured, confident, self-reliant, intelligent, rigidly truthful, with deep and profound humanitarian spirit, gentle, and charming, was an ideal Victorian gentleman (Almond, 1988).

Buddhist Doctrines

Pessimism

With its roots in Judaeo-Christian theology what attracted most Western interpreters of Buddhism was the theme of "suffering." "Suffering" in English terminology means to undergo, subject to, or endure pain, distress, injury, loss, or anything unpleasant, in opposition to comfort, pleasure, and delight (Webster’s Dictionary, 1989). This word is severely inadequate for describing and understanding what Siddhartha taught. Siddhartha taught about dukkha. Dukkha is "unsatisfactoriness" in all conditioned phenomena due to impermanence, change, and mental constructions, which include both unpleasant (which is translated by Westerners as "suffering") and pleasant conditions. This, however, is not to be misunderstood as Siddhartha saying that life and living is dukkha. When teaching dukkha, what Siddhartha conveys is that life and living is pleasant and worthwhile because one can choose to live a wholesome life to walk out of dukkha, if one understands the truth about dukkha. By the use of the word "suffering," loaded with Judaeo-Christian innuendos to describe this phenomena, the Western intellectual community distorts
what the Buddha taught, and misleads its educated, nonetheless non-specialist reader on what the Buddha taught.

Based on a claim that they themselves made, that Buddhism is about "suffering," Western intellectuals held the view that it was essentially a system of pessimism. The majority of Western intellectuals were neither interested in, nor had the ability to gain a deeper understanding of what the Buddha taught which was not only about "suffering" but, most importantly, the way to free oneself from "suffering," on her/his own, without having to be at the mercy of, or depend on, an unseen, unheard Supreme Being. They interpreted the humans' non-dependence on a God to deal with human condition as characteristic of their primitiveness, and a result of their "world-weariness." One of those who are known to be well informed on Buddhism, for example Herman Oldenberg (1882), had the following to say:

(Of this life), which promises to the cheerful sturdiness of an industrious struggling people, thousands of gifts and thousands of good things, the Indian merely scrapes the surface and turns away from it in weariness ... The Buddhist propositions regarding the sorrow of all that is transitory are the sharp and trenchant expression, which these dispositions of the Indian people have framed fro themselves, an expression, the commentary to which is written not alone in the sermon at Benares and in the apothegms of the ‘Dhammapada’, but in indelible characters in the whole of the mournful history of this unhappy people. (in Almond, 1988, p. 81)

Not all Western intellectuals regarded Buddhism as a "morbid pessimism." In aspects of Buddhism that had daunted his contemporary Westerners, Dawsonne Strong (1899) found grounds for Buddhist optimism:

In place of dependence on intermediaries, each man was raised to the position of individual responsibility. Henceforward, he was to stand alone. No god, no priest, no mediator could save him. Herein lies the
superb optimism of the Buddhist, who believe that man can be his own saviour. (in Almond, 1988, p. 82)

Rhys Davids (1879) pointed out that Christianity was more pessimistic than Buddhism:

To the majority of average Christians, this world is a place of probation, a vale of tears, tho' its tears will be wiped away and its sorrows changed into unutterable joy in a better world beyond. To the Buddhist such hopes seem to be without foundation ... Here and now, according to the Buddhist, we are to seek salvation, and to seek it in "right views and high aims, kindly speech and upright behaviour, a harmless livelihood, perseverance, in well-doing, intellectual activity, and earnest thought".

While being accusatory of admiration of Buddhism as amounting to an admiration of pessimism, The London Quarterly Review (1886) presented Schopenhauer's view that, "pessimism can only be accepted as the result of an utterly one-sided and jaundiced view of the world ... But admit it, and Buddhism at least shows a plausible way of escape."

The Western intellectuals who took hastily to conventional theorizing about Buddhism without gaining a deeper understanding of it through direct experience constructed deficiencies which became the mental objects that in turn conditioned their view of what it was. This was, in part, a way to pacify themselves because pessimism "itself was a dark side of the general facade of optimism that the nineteenth century had erected in the West." Constructing "the other" as pessimism and pointing to "the other" as a "miserable melancholy" made it possible for them to elevate the West as a Promised-Land and Christianity as a religion of Optimism.
Rebirth

Conditioned by a sense of a qualitative uniqueness of the human species, rooted in the theology of Judaeo-Christian tradition, Western intellectuals erroneously interpreted "rebirth" as transmigration and viewed it with a little short of or as "horror," "a monstrous doctrine," and as "repugnant." Western intellectuals utilized this "monstrous doctrine," which was also viewed as one aspect of the Oriental mind, to construct Buddhism as the "totally other," which stood in opposition to Western and Christian tradition and which maintained a "very high conception of the dignity of human nature." According to one intellectual, "This is a fort at which Christianity must level its heaviest batteries" (Hampden Dubose, 1886). Spence Hardy (1881) knew that the Buddha did not know that: "man had received within himself, in the beginning, the breath of life; and that in creation he is alone, with an essential difference, and an impassable distance, between himself and the highest of the other creatures in his own world" (in Almond, 1988, p. 86). Western intellectuals, ignorantly of the Buddhist concept of rebirth, but self assuredly found a culprit worse than the Western scientist Charles Darwin (1859) who presented a scientific view that "man, far from being unique, is merely another beast of the field" (Almond, 1988, p. 86).

Cosmology

For Western intellectuals what was at issue was not so much whether Buddhist cosmology was wrong or right, but that the Buddhist cosmology is completely different from the Judaeo-Christian view of the universe. If the Orientals were to be made the subjects of the "empire," then, it was a necessary prerequisite that they accept the
Christian view of the universe. Western intellectuals were caught-up in two tasks: spread of empire and Christianity, and defending the imperial hegemony by defending its views of the universe, of "man" from any other religious or scientific views which posed a threat to its legitimacy. Buddhism not only presented a completely different cosmology, but an open field for scientific investigation of the universe, which made the unique nature of the Judaeo-Christian view of the universe just one universe among many. In order to prevail, Western intellectuals had to construct the knowledge that Buddhist cosmology was wrong, and unacceptable in matters of religion. Therefore, they declared that Buddhist astronomy and geography were false and, if the Buddhist texts were incorrect on natural science, they were not to be trusted on matters religious. Spence Hardy (1881) had the following to say: "The whole of his (Buddha’s) cosmogony, and of his astronomical revelations is erroneous; and there are statements in nearly every deliverance attributed to him upon these subjects which prove that his mind was beclouded by like ignorances with other men; consequently, he cannot be, as he is designated by his disciples, a sure guide to the city of peace." (in Almond, 1988, pp. 91 - 92)

Religion, Spirituality, or Philosophy?

In Webster’s Dictionary (1989), "religion" is defined as:

Concern over what exists beyond the visible world, differentiated from philosophy in that it operates through faith or intuition rather than reason, and generally including the idea of the existence of a single being, a group of beings, an eternal principle, or a transcendent spiritual entity that has created the world, that governs it, that controls its destinies, or that intervenes occasionally in the natural course of its history, as well as the idea that ritual, prayer, spiritual exercises, certain
principles of everyday conduct, etc., are expedient, due or spiritually rewarding, or arise naturally out of an inner need as a human to the belief in such a being, principle etc. (p. 1212)

It defines "spiritual" as:

Of or pertaining to, or consisting of spirit; incorporeal; of or pertaining to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature; ... of or pertaining to spirits or to spiritualists; supernatural or spiritualistic; characterized by or suggesting predominance of the spirit; ... of or pertaining to the spirit as the seat of the moral or religious nature; of or pertaining to sacred things or matters; religious; devotional; sacred; of or belonging to the church; ecclesiastical; of or pertaining to the conscious thoughts and emotions. (1372)

"Spirituality" is defined by Webster as "the quality or the fact of being spiritual; incorporeal or immaterial nature; predominantly spiritual character as shown in thought, life etc.; spiritual tendency or tone." (p. 1372)

The definition of philosophy, according to the same source, is:

The rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct; any one of the three branches, namely, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and metaphysical philosophy that are accepted as composing this study; a system or philosophical doctrine; the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, specially with a view to improving or reconstituting them; ... a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs. (p. 1082)

While the definitions above are from a twentieth century dictionary, it would be reasonable to state that these concepts and definitions have been part and parcel of the Western ideology for over centuries. These concepts and definitions had provided the nineteenth century Western people the foundation from which to view and judge the "world." They had no foundation and the ability to understand a world which did not "fit" into any or all of these categories. Therefore, they simply had to "fit" "Buddhism" into any or all of these categories in order to declare that they know what it was about.
Daniel Gogerly (1847), from what he saw of Buddhism in Sri Lanka had claimed that it was not so much a religion as a school of philosophy. Samuel Beal (1871) from what he saw in China\(^6\) claimed that, "on no ground can we accept the assertion that Buddhism is not a Religion but a school of philosophy." For Max Muller (1893): "If religion is meant to be a bridge between the visible and the invisible, between the temporal and the eternal, between the human and the divine, true Buddhism would be no religion at all; for it knows nothing invisible, nothing eternal; it knows no God in our sense of the word," and therefore, it is a philosophy. Other Western intellectuals, Monier-Williams (1889), Bishop Piers Claughton (1874), Joseph Edkin (1893), and Thomas Berry (1891) maintained that Buddhism was essentially a philosophy (Almond, 1988, p 94).

Buddha did not teach a religion, that is, about God, or about a first principle. Buddha did not teach about spirit, being spiritual, or spirituality. Buddha did not teach an abstractly constructed philosophy to rationally investigate the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct. Buddha taught a human truth about a human problem and a practical method by which to investigate and understand the human experience.

The nineteenth century Western intellectual who was conditioned to see the world through the prisms of religion, spirituality, or philosophy had no way to understand and

\(^6\) Almond (1988) rightly points out that, "without doubt, in a variety of ways, Mahayana Buddhism - the Buddhism of Tibet, Mongolia, China, Japan, (and Korea) has (more of) a theistic ambience than the Hinayana (Theravada), its counterpart - the Buddhism of the Pali cannon, of Sri Lanka and South East Asia." While theistic flavor is present in the methods of how different people practice, no tradition has changed or added to what the Buddha taught originally, and all traditions accept and follow the teachings of the Buddha: The four noble truths, the eight fold path, and the understanding of the three marks of all conditioned phenomena - impermanence, change, and no-soul/spirit/self/eternal existence.
classify what the Buddha taught. At the same time they could not afford either to admit or to appear to the "world" that they did not know about the Asian people's way of life because establishing power over Asian countries depended to an extent on how they established themselves as the "knowers" about the people in these countries. Therefore, they "fitted" "Buddhism" neatly into the categories of religion, spirituality, and/or a philosophy, despite the fact that what the Buddha taught did not even come close to what they interpreted it to be.

Atheism

Nineteenth century Western intellectuals argued whether or not Buddhism was atheist. Loubere (1693) remarked that he found no idea of divinity in Siamese Buddhism. Joseph Edkins and Horace Wilson (1856) had declared that belief in a Creator and ruler of the world was not part of Buddhism. Many other's asserted Buddhism was essentially atheistic.7

Contributing to the notion of godless Buddhism, Daniel Gogerly (1908) pointed out that "There are many who are called Buddhists who acknowledge the existence of a Creator, but they do this from ignorance of the teaching of Buddha. The Buddhist system does not acknowledge the possibility of such a being existing." Drawing an analogy between atheistic Buddhism and atheistic Darwinism, Ernest Eitel (1884) argued that both acknowledged a pre-existing spontaneous tendency to variation as the real cause of the origin of species; and both stopped short of "pointing out Him, who

7 See Almond, 1988, p. 97 for the names of individuals and journals expounding this view.
originated the first commencement of that so-called spontaneous tendency, and who laid into nature the law which regulates the whole process of natural selection, God, the creator and sustainer of the universe." He further suggested that most atheistic philosophy of the nineteenth century (Europe) was the immediate result of Buddhist endeavors in the West. He declared that Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, Comet, Emerson, and hosts of others, "have all imbibed more or less of this sweet poison and taken as kindly as any Asiatic to this Buddhist opiate" (in Almond, 1988, p. 98).

Accusing Buddha and Buddhism of not doing something which the accuser feels as primarily important for Buddha and Buddhism to have done, and labeling Buddha and Buddhism as one thing or other based on a distorted view, is like accusing the moon of not being the sun or vice-versa, for it is the accuser who is confused about which is which. By constructing a Buddha and Buddhism, projecting a view of what they should be, the nineteenth century Western intellectual produced a mental object which in turn further distorted their understanding of what Buddha and Buddhism was about. Further, they contributed to misinforming and misleading the educated, nonetheless non-specialist, European reader on Buddha and Buddhism.

Buddhism and Morality

In the Victorian age, Buddhism was primarily seen as an ethical system. It was, however, in the words of James Tennent (1850): "second only to Christianity itself, and superior to every heathen system that the world has ever seen, nor excepting that of Zoroaster." With its Christian overtone, the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1842) stated
that: "The doctrine and the law of Gautama consists chiefly in observing five
commandments, and abstaining from ten sins." With a similar overtone, Eduard Roer
(1845) declared that: 
[Buddhism] is essentially a religion, in which the highest object
is Dharmma, the realization of the moral law by a finite being, as the only means of
receiving true liberation ..." In Edgar Ware’s (1880) eyes, Buddhism, "seems to have
been purely ethical, and not to have touched on either theology or philosophy." In
Almond’s (1988) view, "its singularly individualistic character and its closeness to the
moral injunctions of the Jewish Decalogue were to appeal to the Victorians" (in
Almond, 1988, p. 112).

The striking verification made possible by Siddhartha for each person, to
cultivate a moral and a virtuous life without depending on God, was seen by some
nineteenth century Western intellectuals as an awakening for humans. Samuel Kellogg
(1885) stated that the Buddhist system of morals:

... is thought by some to settle at least this, that a high standard of
morals, and its actual attainment in life, is not inseparable from a belief
in God, since here we have a moral code of a high order recognized
where there is no belief in God at all ... [The Buddha] affords a living
testimony to show that not only theoretical but practical morality of a
high type may be realized without faith in the existence of God. (in
Almond, 1988, p. 115)

A professor of moral and metaphysical philosophy, Henry Chandler stated:

If Buddhism does teach that there may be - must be right and wrong,
even though there be no God - then I no longer wonder at its influence.
It is a strong thing to say, but it is, I believe, true, that we are all of us far
more certain that there is a binding right, a repellent wrong, than we are
that there is God, and that, had man no distinct sense of right and wrong
to begin with, he would never have dreamed of a God, or would have
soon awoke from it. (Quoted by Bishop Claughton, 1874, pp.138-166, in
Almond, 1988, p. 115)
Many others criticized Buddhist ethics as failing to have founded a morality on the existence of God, and for focusing on the individual which was interpreted as utmost selfishness. Asserting the final superiority of Christianity, Eugene Dunlap (1892) stated: "The two worlds which characterize Christianity and Buddhism are as unlike as light and darkness. Christianity - love, Buddhism -selfishness" (in Almond, 1988, p. 116).

Motivated by religious superiority as well as religious, economic, political, and cultural hegemony of the West over East, some Western intellectuals produced the knowledge that Buddhist ethics, however ideal they might be, in practice, could not but be unconducive to the maintenance of society. For Dyer Ball (1907), Buddhism is destructive of that most Victorian of all institutions - the family: "It was in some of its aspects a disintegrating force, as far as the family was concerned - monkery and monasteries, nuns and convents bear testimony to the abrogation of the divine command, and the throwing down of the family altar, set up under the aegis of the Creator himself at the beginning of human life on this world . . ." (in Almond, 1988, p. 117).

With an anti-Catholic bias, and rooted in the "gospel of work," Victorians attacked Buddhist monastic practice. The Victorian/Western attitude to work, as Walter Houghton (1957) passionately declares, is a call from God: "Parents and preachers, writers and lecturers, proclaimed as with a single voice that man was created to work, that everyone had his appointed calling in which he was to labour for God and man, that idleness was a moral and social sin." Passionately committed to this attitude of an injunction to work, William Sargant (1864) declared that the Buddhist monastic
practice was "filled with persons whom we Protestants have learned to regard as the drones of the human hive." As Almond (1988) characterized, James Dennis (n.d.) who was one of the most imperialist of all missionary writers, saw that Buddhism was a system of spiritual monasticism which aimed at a withdrawal from social responsibility: "Its social creed is the isolation or withdrawal of self for the benefit of self. It is a policy of scuttling, and leaving society to sink beneath the waves." Among other opinions, Buddhist monastic practice was seen as "productive of evil tendencies and selfish seclusion," and the monks took "little or no interest in the general good of, or in affectionate care for the morals of the people." (in Almond, 1988, p. 119)

Buddhism and Catholicism

Similarities of Mahayana Buddhism to Catholicism had been documented in English accounts of Buddhism in China and Tibet. John Stewart (1777) saw the air of Christian monks and features of St Francis in Tibetan lamas:

... their celibacy, their living in communities, their cloysters, their service in the choirs, their strings of beads, their fasts, and their penances, give them so much the air of Christian monks, that it is not surprising an illiterate capuchin should be ready to hail them as brothers, and think he can trace the features of St Francis in everything about them. (in Almond, 1988, p. 123)

Cranmer-Byng (1963) culls a statement from the journal of Macartney between 1793-1794 in China, about the paraphernalia of Buddhist religion:

The paraphernalia of religion displayed here - the altars, images, tabernacles, censers, lamps, candles and candlesticks - with the sanctimonious deportment of the priests and the solemnity used in the celebration of their mysteries, no small resemblance to the holy mummeries of the Romish Church... (in Almond, 1988, p. 123)
In the view of Catholic missionaries, the Buddhist resemblances to Catholicism were satanically inspired. According to the sentiments expressed by some Catholic missionaries, "there is not a piece of dress, not a sacerdotal function, not a ceremony of the court of Rome, which the Devil has not copied in this country (China);"; "the devil had practiced a trick to perplex his friends the Jesuits." (in Almond, 1988, p. 124)

The accounts of missionaries on Buddhist resemblance to Catholicism, and the Western intellectuals who referred to these accounts when constructing Buddhism, did produce this body of knowledge, on their own terms, despite the fact that they were aware, that Buddha did not teach any display of rituals or worship of idols as the practice of what he taught. They, the Western missionaries and intellectuals, were also aware that the Buddhists, Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajirayana, despite the appearance of worship, did not worship idols as the practice of what the Buddha taught. They engaged in producing and disseminating this knowledge anyway.

**Buddhism and Christianity**

Just as the nineteenth century Western missionaries and intellectuals were preoccupied describing and finding fault with the resemblances of Mahayana Buddhism to Catholicism, so were they engrossed and preoccupied with describing the similarities and differences between Buddhist ethics and Christian ethics. Max Muller (1891), who was a German counterpart for intra-scholarly reference for Victorian

---

8 See Almond (1988, p.124) for a list of names of Catholic missionaries who disseminated this view.

9 See Almond (1988, p.125) on this point.
intellectuals on Buddhism, viewed that there are two possibilities for the explanation of
similarities between these two religions: "Either, one of these two religions borrowed
from the other, or the similarities between them must be traced back to that common
foundation which underlies all religions" (in Almond, 1988, p. 126). Similarly, Rhys
Davids (1903) viewed that the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity were to
be explained by their shared status as religions.

Other views on this matter included that the similarities between the two were
due to the influence of Nestorian Christians on Buddhism. In their view, by the time
Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, Nestorian clergyman had settlements in the region.
Ernest Eitel (1884) considered that the parallels between the lives of Jesus and Buddha
are due to Buddhism’s familiarity with Christianity.

There was also the controversy that Buddhism had significantly influenced
Christianity. This argument was, in Almond’s (1988) view, prompted mainly by the
"anti-Catholic mill." Prinsepses (1851) claimed that from India:

Christianity derived its monastic institutions, its forms of ritual, and of
church service, its councils or convocations to settle schisms on points of
faith, its worship of relics, and working of miracles through them, and
much of the discipline, and of the dress of the clergy, even to the shaven
heads of the monks an friars. (in Almond, 1988, p. 126)

Buddhist Falsehood Versus Christian Truth

In contrast to Christian truth, Buddhist falsehood was established in the
nineteenth century West. Intellectuals who were considered to be most informed about
Buddhism, and who held this view were, Spence Hardy and Monier Monier-Williams,
and of all scholarly interpretations of Buddhism, Monier-Williams’ "were the most
scathing in their rejection of Buddhism’s claims to religious truth and value" (Almond, 1988, p.133). The Protestant missionaries in Sri Lanka had a harsh attitude toward Buddhist truth and value. For some, Buddhist truth and value was the "very doctrine of devils," a system of "dreams and delusions", and for others: "(Buddhists were) vain in their imaginations, that their foolish hearts were darkened, and that professing themselves to be wise they became fools." (in Almond, 1988, pp. 132-135)

**Buddhism and Christianity: Human Truth and Divine Truth**

Buddhism, even if there is no divine revelation within it, was seen as having human truth and value. Buddhism, considered the best of all non-Christian (and heathenish) religions, was viewed as lacking in the impress of divinity but: "in its ethics it is an embodiment of the spirit of Christianity" (Knighton, 1845). Michael Culberston (1857) declared that "this system of idolatry contains less that is revolting, and in its morality departs less from the truth, that any other of the false religions that have prevailed among the heathen." The Westminster Review (1858) stated that the Buddhists, "though they have worshiped no Creator and adored no Providence", in fact, without knowing that they do, "(have) confessed the Infinite God and its manifestations in the human heart." (in Almond, 1988, p. 136)

**Buddhism: A Civilizing Influence**

The one feature which marked Buddhism as superior to Christianity was its tolerance of other religions, and its non-violent methods of "evangelization." The Prospective Review (1850) advised the reader that: "[They] must not suppose that the
spread of Buddhism was accompanied with such wars as those of Mahomet, or the bloody persecutions of the Christians." The Journal of Sacred Literature (1865) declared that, though illogical and erroneous in many of its doctrines: "[Buddhism] has at least not disgraced itself by resorting to the machinery of inquisitorial torture to put down other forms of worship, or to establish its own." Some agreed that, in this respect, Buddhism could teach Christianity a lesson: "The Buddhists have found no inquisition; they have combined the zeal which converted kingdoms with a toleration almost inexplicable to our Western experience" (James Freeman Clarke, [n.d.], in Almond, 1988, p. 129). The Dublin University Review (1873) remarked that: "its doctrines have never been enforced by persecution; its records have no Torquemada; it has never lighted Smithfield fires for heretics, nor filled dungeons with its opponents. Its disciples ... have never condemned to everlasting torment those who refused to receive it."

Eduard Roer (1845) declared that it was undeniable that "a great part of mankind were humanized by it, and that for the civilization of central and western Asia it has done the same as Christianity has for the barbarians of Europe."

**Summary**

Through the glimpses presented above, I have attempted to show the historical, cultural, religious, and political context within which the term and the content of "Buddhism" was produced, disseminated, and maintained. "Buddhism" was an imaginative creation of the nineteenth century West, to define, delimit, and classify people's ways of life in Asia. In that, the Western discourse about Buddhism was a
discourse on what is "out there," "the Other," which is different from and alien to Western view of what the world is and ought to be.

This discourse about Buddhism was produced, first, by collecting the narratives of missionaries, soldiers, colonial administrators, traders, and travelers about what they "saw out there" as people's ways of living, that is, how they understood human existence and how they demonstrated this understanding in their actions; second, by possessive appropriation of textual material, translating them into English on their own terms, and presenting them to the world as the "true" content which is to be used to make judgments about "the other"; third, making the West the center of knowledge about Buddha and Buddhism, and Asia the periphery where Buddhism was practiced in various ways; fourth, classifying these various congeries of cultural phenomena as a religion of spirituality, and the religion of people of Asia, interpreting and representing it as a religion, a philosophy, a culture, and a civilization; fifth, by constructing a knowledge that this religion/spirituality, culture, philosophy, and civilization was inferior to Christianity and the culture of the West.

The discourse about Buddhism was a project of elevating one world view - Christian and Western - by degrading "the other" - Buddhist and Asian. In this process, Western discourse assimilated all that is similar or useful in elevating Christianity, for example, everything about the personality of Siddhartha and the morality\(^\text{10}\) he taught, while developing hatred and aversion to reject anything and everything that was

\(^{10}\) Also interpreted as destructive to the maintenance of society, based on the Victorian/Christian view and the gospel of "work," which they thought of as the standard for the entire world.
different, therefore ugly, repulsive, and distasteful. One important aspect of this process of developing dislike, hatred, and aversion to difference, in Western discourse about Buddhism was the extent to which they distorted what was presented and the extent to which they hid and excluded what they were ignorant of, and what should have been presented. The knowledge that there is another world view, which they took as a threat to the sustenance of their world view, and the knowledge that the number of people who lived by this other world view far exceeded, in millions, the number of people who lived by Christian world view made it all the more necessary for Western discourse about Buddhism to present it as a satanic or heathenish "religion."

Western discourse about Buddhism was a collection of opinions, views, guesses, interpretations, representations, speculations of Western men, with a few exceptions of women who nevertheless were products and the proponents of Western ideology, which became the texts of its own creation, which in turn became the reference points for the construction of Buddhism. Buddhism was an object, an entity created of discourse in the West, for the West, by the West. The Western discourse about Buddhism became materially owned by the West and, by virtue of this fact, ideologically controlled and regulated by the West. Western Buddhist scholarship was not only the cause but also the effect which it brought into being.

My purpose in this study is to present what Siddhartha taught, as he taught, by presenting it from the original\textsuperscript{11} sources in which his teaching is preserved. By now,

\textsuperscript{11} "Original" here does not connote "arising or proceeding independently of anything else" (Webster Dictionary, 1989). It means where what Siddhartha taught was written down for the first time, by the people who preserved his teaching through oral recitations, and who dedicated their entire lives to the preservation and practice of that
there cannot be any doubt in the reader’s mind that, I cannot present what Siddhartha taught, by using either the term or the content of "Buddhism" produced, maintained, and disseminated which has distorted the mind of well educated but novice Westerner today in grasping the Dhamma, that is, the teaching of Siddhartha. Abhidhamma is the original source where what Siddhartha taught has been presented in writing and in a concise manner, and preserved for over 2500 years. It is of great importance for the reader to be informed that Abhidhamma is not a collection of opinions, speculations, guesses, interpretation, or an ideology of what Siddhartha taught - Abhidhamma is what Siddhartha taught. He did not teach a religion, a dependency on a Supreme Being for the well-being of humans, spirituality, ritual practices by which to contemplate the behavior of a spirit which is a bridge between the body and soul, or a philosophy. He was not a social reformer, a political opponent of Hinduism, a political ally of British imperialism or Christian fundamentalism, nor was he the embodiment of the "perfect man" of the Victorians. He was a person who re-discovered the truth about human existence in a felt and a visible sense, here and now, and who taught this truth to his fellow humans. He taught an epistemology, its effects, and a way for his fellow humans to conduct themselves so as not to get caught up in oppression within, and a way to free themselves from the oppression of existence. In other words, Siddhartha taught a method to live a wholesome and pleasant life, which is a liberatory experience from a possessive self. "Buddhism" is what the Western community has to uneducate and teaching.

12 Concise here means Siddhartha’s teachings organized according to themes, but without any altering of the content of his teaching.
unfamiliarize themselves with and Abhidhamma is the term and the content which they (Western community) has to become familiar with, if interested in understanding what Siddhartha taught.

The term Buddhism is familiar to the global intellectual community because they have been familiarized with this term by the colonial and imperialist Western intellectuals of our immediate past, who had a specific agenda of excluding, displacing, and representing people’s ways of life. The term Abhidhamma is unfamiliar because it has been kept from the public, for the reasons that, that is the very thing that they did not want the educated mass to be familiar with, for the fear that an "awakened mass" would equate the collapse of the empire with the spread of Christianity. This study, in which I am attempting to familiarize the reader with a term which has been hidden from them, is at once a challenge and an invitation to the global intellectual community. On the eve of the twenty first century, the challenge is to reflect on to what extent nineteenth century Buddhism resonates with them, and to what extent do they consciously or unconsciously project this conditioning when engaging in discourses where what Siddhartha taught is discussed? The invitation is to reflect on to what extent are we bold enough to experience the world anew, the "local" knowledges, through "local" terminology for which there are no appropriate and adequate words in English? In other words, to reflect on how "post" are we, in a poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial time?
Definitions of Terms

Women

In this study, the term "women" refers to all individuals who identify with this term. The term, however, is only a name or a label used to differentiate one from another and does not carry any weight as a definitional term to indicate an intrinsic nature of these individuals called women. In other words, the term does not imply or indicate, directly or indirectly, a comparative worth, in terms of functional or rational abilities, dispositions, characteristics, or physicalities or a designee/referent based on conventional attributes. Further, this term is not used in a sense that the biology has determined the individuals referred to as women. Biology refers to the process by which different physical features come to be arranged and rearranged and not in any deterministic sense to imply that it is a process by which the individual is fixed. The term "women," therefore, in this study refers to individuals who have some biological features that can be differentiated from others, but which are not fixed and static, and may go through biological changes in their experience as humans. It is possible that women may have biological features that identify them as women, but may act and feel differently from the way women act and feel. Similarly, men may have biological features which identify them as men, but may act and feel differently from the way men act and feel. Biology, acting, and feeling in women, however, do not determine individuals "as women," for the reason that all these components, as conditioned phenomena, are subject to change. The term women in this study, therefore, should be understood as only a label or a name, a construct, and not as a term that denotes a female, feminine, essence.
Identity and Subjectivity

In this dissertation, identity and subjectivity are used synonymously to refer to a process of individuals constructing the notion of "I" and "mine" for themselves. The process of identity and subjectivity involves interdependence of the subjective sensuality (the desire for sense pleasures) and the objective sensuousness (external sense objects, i.e., sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches) of women as individuals and the process of appropriating the constitutive parts (aggregates) that make up the psycho-physical complexes of individuals as their possessions identifying with them.

Identity/subjectivity is the process by which women as individuals attach themselves to characteristics, dispositions, sexualities, roles, and responsibilities in economic, political, social, cultural, and personal spheres of life, and with which individuals identify themselves at one time and over time. These terms, in this study, do not refer to a unity or a fixed entity that exists independently. Neither are they used as signifiers to be fixed to signs, nor are they used to imply a result, a consequence of varied social discourses which constitute them. Identity and subjectivity refers to the process of "I" making of the individuals and the aspects associated with it.

---

13 I am drawing from a profound and ancient tradition, the Buddhist tradition, which will be referred to in this study as the theory of things, which analyses the experience of subjectivity. While the first time reader may be overwhelmed by a sense of background knowledge that is needed in order to comprehend how theory of things analyses the subjectivity, an excellent and useful introduction is provided by R. E. Iggleden in his introduction to the Book of Analysis translated from the original text by U Thittila (1969).

Gender

In this dissertation, gender refers to individuals’ process of identifying with socially constructed and socially assigned roles based on a two-sex system. These roles pertain to the aspects of sex of an individual, sexuality, parenting, family roles, for example, mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son, and so forth. It is recognized, however, that this process of individuals identifying with gender roles is only a mental construction which is manifested outwardly. According to the Abhidhamma, the materiality of sex, i.e., female/male, is considered only as materiality, but not as a condition which has the functions of producing, supporting, and maintaining the psycho-physical complex of an individual. While the materiality has the outward appearance to the psycho-physical complex as female, male etc., femininity faculty and masculinity faculty, as productive principles, are assumed to be present in an individual regardless of the outward female/male appearance. Therefore, from the Abhidhamma perspective, gender is only a mental construct and is non-existent as an actuality.

Class

Borrowing from Resnik and Wolff (1987) and modifying for the purpose of this study, the term class refers to the process of producing, using, and voluntary giving of labor. In this study, the interest is on the psychological attitude of individuals when involving themselves in class process. What makes it possible for individuals to voluntarily give labor to others in the community? Why do collective/co-operative communities collapse? What does voluntary giving of labor mean, what promise does it
hold in terms of sustaining a collective/co-operative society? Individuals' role in the class process will be discussed with a focus on the above.

Self

Self, in this dissertation, refers to a process. Self does not refer to a unit that possesses any or all attributes of an individual. Self is understood as a collection of components (aggregates) comprising consciousness, perceptions, feelings, formations (mental tendencies), and body - a psycho-physical complex. None of these components individually can claim to be a self because of its dependence on other components for its functioning, nor can all components together claim to be self because of the parts that the individual components play in composing what is called the self. Self, therefore, is understood as an agency of multiple components coming together, ever-occurring, and an ever-changing process with continuity only as in process and not in or of substance.

Oppression

In this dissertation, oppression refers to a condition of contractedness and limitation arising in the personal world of experience. The personal world, however,

---


does not presuppose or imply an existence of an impersonal and external world “out there” which is separate from and existing independently of the personal world of an individual. Rather, the personal world refers to one world in which both the personal or internal and the impersonal or external worlds are present. The personal world is the world of inward and outward experience.

Liberation

In this dissertation, liberation\(^\text{17}\) means freeing oneself from the ignorance of reality and the ignorance of understanding desire (i.e., seeing desire for sense pleasures as the driver of self), of desiring to hold on to dogmatic views, of desiring an ego-self, and of desiring a non-existence. Further, liberation refers to seeing the impermanence of conditioned phenomena, seeing the momentary and changing nature of phenomena, and seeing the egolessness of phenomena. Liberation thus refers to knowing that there is oppression, knowing that there is ending of oppression, knowing that there is a path to freedom from oppression, and knowing and utilizing the path to end oppression.

Significance of the Study

By exploring a different approach to self and social transformation that might be useful to the project of eliminating women's oppression, this study intends to contribute to and participate in the current feminist discourse in significant ways. While this approach concerns itself with the universal aspects of human experience, i.e., form, consciousness, feelings, perceptions, and formations, it does not universalize the

\(^{17}\) See footnote 5 for sources.
experience of individuals. The premise of this approach is that an arising of experience is based on interdependent arising of multiple conditions. The significance of this premise is the recognition that the experiences of each individual are based on conditions and circumstances particular to each experience and therefore no two experiences are similar. The experiences of individuals are different from each others in one place and in different places. This study is also significant in a sense that it exposes individuals to a way by which they can know the powers within without having to subject themselves to external processes, i.e., social processes or supernatural powers, for accessing the inner processes and freeing themselves from oppression. It will steer the feminist discourse in different directions: 1) a different way of looking at the concept of women, 2) a different way of looking at oppression, 3) a direction from a victim point of reference to a reference point which is neither victim nor perpetrator, neither aggressive nor passive but confident in its engagement in the investigation of subjectivity both individually and collectively, and 4) another way of understanding difference and no-difference and thereby have the ability to participate in the effort to free not only selves but other individuals from oppression. These significantly different ways of thinking and action in individuals will simultaneously have significant effects in social transformation as well.

The Structure of the Study

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with a statement of problem, purpose of the study, clarifications and delimitations, definitions of terms, significance of the study, and the structure of the study.
Chapter 2 presents the literature review. A cursory glance is taken at a few feminist discourses on their views on construction of identity, gender, and class and oppression and liberation of women, along with what they identify as a need to furthering this endeavor. Following this brief exposure to the views of feminist discourses, a review of the Abhidhamma approach is presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 presents contextual and background information on the women who narrated some episodes of their lives, demonstrating how they construct their identities. This chapter will contain a brief review of Namibia's history, the current socioeconomic and political environment, and the social construction of identity of women, as well as more specific historical and current background of the women interviewed and their collective.

Chapter 4 presents some information from the episodes of the lives of the women narrators, in their own words. Recognizing the fact that any systematic categorization of information in their individual stories distorts the complexity, forcing the disappearance of conditionality, and limiting it only to what the language can convey, for the purpose of writing a dissertation to communicate with an audience, I will present the information according to an imposed categorization.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of how these individuals construct their personhoods, and what that means in terms of oppression and liberation within, and collective community, from the perspective of the Abhidhamma.

Chapter 6 presents summary and conclusions to the study.
CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN, IDENTITY, GENDER, AND CLASS DECONSTRUCTED.

‘For there is suffering, but none who suffers;
Doing exists although there is no doer;
Extinction is but no extinguished person,
Although there is a path, there is no goer.’
(Path of Purification, p. 521)

In this chapter I will present a brief review of a few feminist discourses, following which I will present the Abhidhamma approach. The richness, vastness, and organic nature of feminist discourses both in its theoretical content and in number precludes the possibility of an all inclusive, neatly organized, full-blown study and presentation. The attempt I have made in this study to present brief reviews of only a few feminist discourses is not in any way suggestive of either an importance or a privilege I accord to them, or a more appropriate order in which to present a brief overview of feminist theory. Further, the limited material I have reviewed for presenting each feminist discourse in this study does not suggest that they are the core readings. My purpose here is to inform the reader briefly the process which gave me the impetus to bring an approach to understanding women, oppression, and liberation, from a non-Western geo-cultural context in contact with primarily Western feminist discourses, which would be complementary to the feminist project. For a detailed and a fuller understanding of feminist discourses one should consult the rich and vast material in the field.
First, I will present briefly how these feminist discourses view women, oppression, and liberation. Then I will present what some feminist theorists identify as a need for which they find no satisfactory approach to draw from. I then will present the Abhidhamma approach as a complementary to the need identified.

**Liberal Feminism**

The liberal feminist view of who women are is based on an acceptance of "the indisputable physical difference between women and men," (Jaggar, 1983, p. 37) and that the sex of individuals is irrelevant to either women's capability for reason or their rights as individuals. Liberal feminism takes the position that there is no female and male nature but human nature that has no sex, in individuals. In explaining this position, liberal feminism posits that the difference between women and men in society

---


2. Eisenstein, Zellha, (1986) points out that liberal feminism is a feminism which "reflects the broader and more general liberal bias of American politics." The term 'liberal' in this context, she explains, does not refer to the meaning this term gives to the everyday usage of it suggesting open-minded or receptive to change. Rather, the term liberal refers to a "set of ideas that developed with the bourgeois revolution asserting the importance and autonomy of the individual," which "originated in seventeenth century England, and took root in the eighteenth century, now the dominant political ideology of twentieth century Western society." She further points out that even though the values of independence, equality of opportunity, and individualism are predominant and accepted values of Western society, the initial liberal values have lost their particular identity and history for most members of liberal society. The initial values are accepted as the norm rather than as a specific ideology. (p. 4)
and in individuals is not owing to innate psychological differences as has been interpreted by traditional discourses (for example, Freud), but is due to sex-role conditioning, the denial of educational opportunities for women, and the institutional practices which grant women fewer rights than men. Further, in the liberal feminist view, sex-role conditioning, which is a social construct, is oppressive to both women and men in society. Elimination of sex-role conditioning is posited by the liberal feminist view,3 as liberating both women and men from the oppression caused by sex-role conditioning.

Liberal feminism approaches liberation from sex-role conditioned oppression by continued investigation of the effects of social influences on cognitive and emotional development on women,4 disclosing the male bias in production of knowledge on moral development in individuals and counter producing knowledge on women’s ways of knowing and moral development,5 and countering the laws that limit and/or prevent women from being able to actualize their potential.6

Oppression of women, in the liberal feminist view, is a condition resulting from a view of who women are and the restriction of human rights of women based on this

---

3 Authors I have reviewed inform us of the historical development of this liberal feminist idea: Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women, in the eighteenth century; John Stuart Mill, On the Subjection of Women. Harriet Taylor, Enfranchisement of Women, in the nineteenth century; Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, and the work of National Organization of Women (NOW) in the twentieth century.

4 Examples are Chodor, 1978; Dinnerstein 1977.

5 Examples are Gilligan 1982; Belenky 1986.

6 The work of NOW, Jaggar 1993, p. 159 has the NOW bill of rights.
particular view. The solution to oppression of women, as they see it, is in reconceptualizing women as rational agents like men and by elimination of laws and regulations that restrict women’s access to rights and privileges in terms of autonomy and self-fulfilment.

Marxist Feminism

Drawing on Marx’s view of human nature, that is, humans are historical products who change according to the way in which members of historical societies organize their productive activity, and who engage in praxis, that is, conscious physical labor directed towards transforming the material world in a way that would satisfy human needs, Marxist feminism views that what makes women’s conception of who they are is formed by the dialectical interrelation between women’s labor (praxis), their biological constitution, and their physical and social environments (Jaggar, 1988). The source of oppression of women, in the Marxist feminist views, is the exploitation of women’s labor by capitalists, both in public and private spheres of their lives, in capitalist industrial societies. The primary concern for Marxist feminism is women’s situation under capitalism in which productive activity of humans, that is, the transforming of the material world to satisfy human needs, is organized as relations between two classes, i.e., working class and capitalist class.

---

In distinguishing Marxist feminism amongst feminisms, i.e., liberal feminism, socialist feminism, postmodern/poststructuralist feminism, Sargent (1981) points out that what is important to Marxist feminism is women's "struggle against capital as 'workers' but not as 'women.'" Marx analyzed relations between workers and capital in the public sphere. Extending this analysis to include the work (labor) in the private sphere of women, Marxist feminism, "defines women's role in reproduction (domestic labor) in terms that gave women importance in Marxist analysis . . ." (p. xxi).

Recently, Ebert (1995, 1996) emphatically stressed this distinction pointing out that Marxist feminism "asserts the priority of the mode of production . . . the relation of base and superstructure, and consequently, the mode of explaining the social, cultural, and political" (1996, pp.146-147).

Jaggar (1983) points out that Marxist feminism approaches understanding women, oppression, and liberation of women by investigating the kinds of labor women perform in public as well as private spheres of life, the way in which labor is organized, and the social relations that women form with each other and with men as a result of their labor and its mode of organization.

Jaggar (1983) states that Marxism views human nature as being biologically sexed and as being necessarily male or female. However, Marxism does not imply that one can have a prior knowledge of women's nature. Rather, Marxism holds that women's nature, like men's, has changed and continues to change as a result of historical development, with the reservation that one cannot know anything specific about the extent or the direction of those changes.
As Nancy Holmstorm (1984) states:

There is ... a dialectical interaction between women's labor and their nature. The sexual/social division of labor is the cause of the distinctive cognitive/affective structure that constitutes women's nature and these structures are at least partial cause of a variety of personality traits and behavior distinctive of women, including the sort of labor they do. (p. 466)

What Holmstrom (1984) refers to in her statement as women's nature is some sociological and psychological generalizations that are distinctive of women recognizing the fact that it by no means imply that there is a nature distinct to women. However, she posits that:

Following Marx's approach, we should expect psychological differences to be connected to differences in the sorts of labor that women do in society and to the resulting differences in social relations. Universally there is and has always been a sexual division of labor. Although there are some variations as to what labor each sex does, men generally have primary responsibility for subsistence activities; women's contribution to this varies. What does not vary is that, what ever else they do, women have primary responsibility for child care and most of the everyday household work. Their contribution to subsistence depends on its compatibility with child care. (p. 463)

The implication of this view is that some generalizations can be drawn on the kind of labor women engage in, though there are differences in different women's subcultures, and these generalizations describe emotions and behaviors that reflect specific cognitive/affective structures more often found among women. While under different conditions these cognitive/affective structures generate different traits, the contention is that there is probably a core of psychological traits that define who women are.
Women’s oppression, Marxist feminists point out, is due to exploitation of labor at work and at home. The elimination of oppression of women or liberation of women, from this perspective, is the elimination of class society (Jaggar, 1988, p. 60).

Socialist Feminism*

Socialist feminism broadens its perspective to include multiple constituent aspects which contribute to human nature. As Tuana and Tong (1995) point out, for socialist feminism:

... although a Marxist class analysis offers an account of the exploitation of women and men as wage laborers, it does not recognize the oppression that results from woman’s roles in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy: mother mistress, domestic laborer, and consumer. Neither does a Marxist class analysis acknowledge the nature of racial oppression that interacts with both class exploitation and sexual oppression. The concern, then, was to develop an analysis that would look at the relations and mutual dependencies of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism since the industrial revolution. (p. 261)

Jaggar (1983) points out that the priority for socialist feminism is not so much the physical difference between women and men as the psychological differences produced by social construction of these character types. However, they do not see women as unchanging, ahistorical, and antisocial. Rather, they see women and their biology and psychology as changing in and over time. Women’s personhood, or the feminine characteristics of women, as they attempt to conceptualize them, are created

---

historically through the dialectical interrelation between human biology, human society, and the physical environment they live in. The encounter amongst these is established by human labor of praxis. This form of praxis specific within a given society creates distinctive physical and psychological human types characteristic of that society. The group of individuals called women in the current society is a group which has specific characteristics as women because of the activities they do, or their praxis which is historically specific to today. Drawing on psychoanalytic feminism, socialist feminism also recognizes that women's psychological character is a condition resulting from their early life experiences. According to how psychoanalytic feminists view women, they believe that once feminine character types are established during early life they become rigid in women's lives. Utilizing psychoanalytic theory, but not fully agreeing with it, socialist feminists view women's feminine character type not as "an inevitable response to a fixed and universal biological endowment" (Jaggar, 1988, p. 126). Rather, it is the acquisition of gender characteristic types from specific social practices, particularly procreative practices that shape the "inner" lives of women. These procreative practices, i.e., child-rearing practices and caring for sick and elders, are neither determined by biology nor are they "innate" in women. They are socially imposed and internalized characteristics of women. The external "reality" is internalized by women who then manifest as feminine character types.

Distinguishing socialist feminism from liberal and Marxist feminisms, Jaggar (1983) makes the following statement:

(Synthesizing insights drawn from a variety of sources) socialist feminism claims all of the following: that our "inner" lives, as well as
our bodies and behavior, are structured by gender; that this gender-structuring is not innate but is socially imposed; that the specific characteristics that are imposed are related systematically to the historically prevailing systems of organizing social production; that the gender-structuring of our "inner" lives occurs when we are very young and is reinforced throughout our lives in a variety of different spheres; and that these relatively rigid masculine and feminine character structures are a very important element in maintaining male dominance. Given this conception of human psychology, one of the major theoretical tasks that socialist feminism sets itself is to provide a historical materialist account of the relationship between our "inner" lives and our social praxis. It seeks to connect masculine and feminine psychology with the sexual division of labor. (p. 127)

Oppression of women, as socialist feminists see it, is the restriction of the social as opposed to autonomous potential for self fulfillment in women through socially generated realities based on sex, class, and other social variables instituted by social institutions and ways of organized social life. According to this view, by internalizing and conforming to social norms imposed on them, women continue their own oppression. Socialist feminists believe that women can free themselves from internalized oppression by reconstituting their relationships to social institutions and to individuals. To reconstitute women's relationship to these institutions also means the reconstitution of the relationships of these institutions to women. By these reciprocal methods of reconstituting relations, socialist feminism envisions liberation of women from oppression, so that they are able to participate fully in taking conscious social control of these changes.
Phenomenological Feminism

The phenomenological feminist perspective is that women, universally, are an oppressed group of individuals (Bartky, 1995). Bartky points out that women have two types of consciousness: women's consciousness and feminist consciousness. Women's consciousness is the type that apprehends their situation as natural, inevitable, and inescapable. At this level of consciousness, women may be aware of the insults and inferiority they endure as women, but, it is not at a level where women can make changes either in their lives or contribute to changes in society that would change oppressive conditions for women. Women's consciousness is a consciousness that informs women about what is natural about them as women and how they should manifest women's behavior. They see themselves as victims of an unjust system of social power. However, by continuing to conduct their lives as they have been defined by the oppressive conditions and accepting the conditions as inevitable and inescapable, women accept their victim status, perpetuating their own victimization and others'. Feminist consciousness "in large measure, is an anguished consciousness." Bartky describes the feminist consciousness as follows:

Feminist consciousness is consciousness of victimization. To apprehend oneself as victim is to be aware of an alien and hostile force outside of oneself which is responsible for the blatantly unjust treatment of women and which enforces a stifling and oppressive system of sex-role differentiation. For some feminists, this hostile power is "society" or "the system": for others, it is simply men. Victimization is impartial, even though its damage is done to each one of us personally. One is victimized as a woman, as one among many. In the realization that others are made to suffer in the same way I am made to suffer lies the

---

As I understand it, what Bartky (1995) means by women's situation is their social, economic, political, and religious situations in any given context.
beginning of a sense of solidarity with other victims. To come to see oneself as victim, to have such an altered perception of oneself and of one’s society is not to see things in the same old way while merely judging them differently or to superimpose new attitudes on things like frosting a cake. The consciousness of victimization is immediate and revelatory; it allows us to discover what social reality is really like.

The consciousness of victimization is a divided consciousness. To see myself as victim is to know that I have already sustained injury, that I live exposed to injury, that I have been at worst mutilated, at best diminished in my being. But at the same time, feminist consciousness is a joyous consciousness of one’s own power, of the possibility of unprecedented personal growth and the release of energy long suppressed. Thus, feminist consciousness is both consciousness of weakness and consciousness of strength. But this division in the way we apprehend ourselves has a positive effect, for it leads to the search both for ways of overcoming those weaknesses in ourselves which support the system and for direct forms of struggle against the system itself. (p. 400)

Feminist consciousness is, Bartky (1995) explains, a liberating consciousness. The experience of being a feminist with a feminist consciousness is to experience life with a profound personal transformation beyond what is ordinarily considered political. It is also a complex and a multifaceted experience in which there is radical change in behavior and a radically altered consciousness of oneself, of others, and of social the reality of women. Some ways in which women radically change their behavior are that they make new friends; respond differently to people and events; change habits of consumption; pursue careers; or commit themselves to political struggle. Radically altered consciousness is a radically altered way of perceiving. It is a consciousness, Bartky posits, that perceives "a genuine possibility for partial or total liberation of women" (p. 399).
Cultural Feminism

Alcoff (1995) points out that cultural feminism views women as having an identity specific to women which is different from that of men and which is different from the way it has been constructed by men. According to the cultural feminist view, women are naturally better than men, more maternal, cooperative, and peace-loving than men. As Alcoff perceives, cultural feminism considers women "who fail to manifest these traits are either the willing or unwilling victims of a patriarchal society that has to a greater and lesser extent, conditioned them (co-opted) them to do its bidding" (p. 432).

Oppression of women, as viewed by cultural feminists, is a condition generated by a "male supremacist" culture, a process in which women are defined to serve the interests of men who possibly have fear and hatred of women. Women freeing themselves from oppression of women constitutes, for cultural feminists, re-validating the undervalued female attributes. For Mary Daly (1978), these female attributes which must be re-claimed and freed from male parasitism are the "female energy" which she considers as "a natural essence" and "female biology" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 436). For Rich (1977), female biology is the basis for female consciousness: "... the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 436). The liberated female sees her attributes as her peacefulness, proclivity to nature, her advanced self-awareness as the defining essence of women, free of masculinist values of women.
Postmodern/Poststructuralist Feminism

The poststructuralist feminism views the personhood of a female individual "as a woman" as a fiction (Butler, 1990a,b). Influenced by French poststructuralist thinkers, poststructuralist feminists posit that cultural and ideological practices define and inculcate a notion of self-identity in individuals. What one may present as who one is is in itself a view of self, constructed and inscribed by culture. According to this view, there is no authentic core of traits and dispositions that identify individuals as selves, but performances which are regulated by cultural norms and practices. Evaluating the poststructuralist view of subjectivity/identity, Alcoff (1995) points out that:

... the idea here is that we individuals really have little choice in the matter of who we are for (as poststructuralists like to remind us) individual motivations and intentions count for nil or almost nil in the scheme of social reality. We are constructs, that is, our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond (way beyond) individual control. As Foucault puts it, we are bodies "totally imprinted by history." (p. 440)

The source of oppression of women, from the perspective of poststructuralist feminism, is the social construction of who women are and subjection of women into these socially constructed notions via regulatory social practices. Freedom from oppression would mean dismantling the constructed fictions by deconstructing the established notions of women. Deconstruction is not about constructing oppositional subjects but about describing how women are excluded in the established discourses by constructing the notions of who women are. Biddy Martin remarks on the Foucauldian deconstruction, which has had much influence in post structuralist feminism, as follows:
The point from which Foucault deconstructs is off-center, out of line, apparently unaligned. It is not the point of an imagined absolute otherness, but, an ‘alterity’ which understands itself as an internal exclusion. (In Alcoff, 1995, p. 441)

Postmodern feminists base their views of who women are on a notion of positionality of women. Positionality of gendered subjectivity of women is a way of discussing who women are without either essentializing them as constituted by innate characteristics as has been attempted by cultural feminism, or, by erasing gendered subjectivity altogether. Positionality does not take:

... gender (as) a point to start from in the sense of being a given thing but (takes gender) instead (as) a posit or construct, formalizable in a nonarbitrary way through a matrix of habits, practices, and discourses. Further, it is an interpretation of our history within a particular discursive constellation, a history in which we are both subjects of and subjected to social construction. (Alcoff, 1995, p. 450)

Internal characteristics of a person are not the basis from which the notion of woman is analyzed but the external context within which that individual is situated. Alcoff (1995) makes this clear as follows:

The positional definition ... makes her identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on. (p. 451)

Women can be identified through social critique and analysis and their position relative to an existing cultural and social network.

Lauretis (1986) posits that an individual’s consciousness is a historical process. Consciousness as a historical process, "is not fixed and not attained once and for all because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions" (Lauretis, as quoted in Alcoff, 1995, p. 446). The woman that emerges through this historical consciousness
"is multiple and shifting," neither "prefigured . . . in an unchangeable symbolic order"

nor merely "fragmented, or intermittent." The process of consciousness is a strategy of
the woman whose subjectivity is formulated within "particular discursive
configurations" (Alcoff, 1995, commenting on Lauretis).

**Women in Third World Context**

Women in Development (WID) feminists have identified Third World women as victims of sex-role conditioning (Boserup, 1970; Tinker, 1976; Rogers, 1980). In the view of WID practitioners, women’s oppression in the Third World results from unequal opportunities to participate in market activities. Boserup (1970) demonstrated that women are marginalized by existing traditions, social relations and farming systems which divide the roles of men and women in economic activities. Tinker (1976) pointed out that Third World women are marginalized by the Western male ideology of Western male and female development practitioners. Rogers (1980) pointed out that Third World women are a disadvantaged group because of male bias in development planning.

Oppression of women, according to WID feminists, is due to social and economic practices that marginalize women. Elimination of oppression of women, then, is understood as the elimination of male bias in social and economic practices, which, in turn, will grant women equal opportunities for education, skills development, and employment.

---

Feminist theorists influenced by Marxism identify Third World women as oppressed by class relations, a structural feature of capitalist development which is inextricably linked with oppressive and exploitative conditions of women (Berneria & Sen, 1981; ISIS, 1984; Nash & Safa, 1986; Nash & Fernandez-Kelly, 1983). Elimination of oppression of women, according to this perspective, is possible by elimination of class exploitation.

Socialist feminists consider that women’s subordination and oppression is a condition resulting from both patriarchy and capitalism (Meis, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1989). The ‘housewifization’ at all levels of society (i.e., bourgeois, working class, and peasantry) and capitalist production as a system oppress women by relegating them to the unpaid subsistence sector. Women perform labor as unpaid domestic workers as well as producing piece work for the market. This labor, however, is exploited labor of women by patriarchy and the capitalist system. The elimination of oppression of women from this perspective is to eliminate patriarchy, sexual division of labor, and capitalist class exploitation.

Other feminists identify gender relations as contributing to oppression of women (Kabeer, 1994; Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Rathgeber, 1995), while feminists of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DWAN) identify poverty and global inequalities (Sen & Grown, 1987). Structures of modernization and Westernization (Hirshman, 1995), and postcolonialism identified as the combination

---

I am using the term "postcolonial systems" to mean the politico-economic and cultural systems or the nation-states which have been evolving for more or less the last fifty years and are now in place after withdrawal of colonial systems from the "Third World." As the authors above point out, while colonialism withdrew the capitalist
of national states and capitalist imperialism (Rai & Lievesley, 1996; Alexander & Mohanty 1997) are identified as yet other systems of oppression of women in the Third World.

Observations

In the aforementioned feminist discourses, I make the following observations. Whether it is sex-role conditioning, class relations, sexual division of labor, or androcentric science that produce gendered identity of women, or the social practices or particular discursive configurations that break down the coherence of identity as women, what is clear is that there is agreement on what causes gender identity. With the exception of cultural feminists, all other feminist discourses agree that identity is socially constructed. Except cultural feminists, all other feminist theorists also seem to agree that biology is not a criterion for gendered identity. Female-male sex difference is a biological fact but no ground to assign either roles and responsibilities or allocate resources to human beings. In a mutual interaction with socially constructed norms and practices, women internalize their specific identities and continue to behave in ways that are true of women. Internalization appears to be the unavoidable and inevitable cause of gender identity/subjectivity which then is performed by the individuals as identities.
specific to sexes. Feminist theorists are also in agreement that strategies for combating
the issue of gendered identity and the social consequences that come along with it are
located in the social: equal rights for participation and access to economic, political,
social, and cultural processes and resources (liberal feminist view); reorganization of
relations of production (Marxist feminist view); elimination of both class exploitation
and gender oppression of women (socialist feminist view); validation, recognition, and
utilization of experience specific to women (feminist standpoint view), or destabilizing
of all existing notions of women by proliferating multiple profiles of individuals in
terms of their sexuality, class, gender, and all other identities (postmodern/
poststructuralist feminist view).

There is an open agreement amongst these feminist theorists that a gendered
identity\textsuperscript{12} of a woman is socially constructed and inscribed on her, based on her sex.
This imposed gender identity is not an acceptable criterion for determining the roles
women play in social, economic, and political processes and what access women must
have to social, economic, and political resources. The project, therefore, is that the
individual and the society, in a mutually interactive process, must re-define the identity
of women or de-construct the inscribed identity and the ways by which the inscribing
takes place. Proliferation of multiple identities of women according to the criterion of
women’s experience is considered to be important in exposing the limitations of gender

\textsuperscript{12} This does not mean that a gendered identity is inscribed only on women, but that the
primary interest of feminist theory is to discuss the identity of women. This
dissertation focuses on how feminist theory discusses the gender identity of women
and therefore will discuss women’s identity, acknowledging that a gendered identity is
also inscribed on men.
identity of women as it has up to now been constructed by society and individuals who support and maintain the established order. The route is (a) investigation of the process between the individual and the social processes to describe how that interaction produces identities/subjectivities of individuals, and (b) investigation of the social processes themselves to determine which components or which aspects of them are problematic and how they should be reorganized or, redesigned to effect the subjectivity/identity of women and social transformation.

All feminist discourses discussed here seem to abandon the investigation of the protagonist - woman - and go after the antagonists - social, political, and economic processes in search of explanations and solutions to the question of oppression and liberation of women. The exploration of the protagonist - the woman-individual - has not been given sufficient consideration, other than to say that her subjectivity is a process in which she takes shifting and overlapping multiple subject positions which the individual performs. When investigating how women's subjectivity is a shifting, overlapping, and multiple subject positions, feminist discourses fall back on investigating the social processes. The exploration of the subjectivity from its own side, or how to explore the arising of subjectivity, that is, the components and processes in that arising of the subjectivity is an avenue one has to venture, to enhance the feminist theorists' efforts. Along with the investigations of the social processes which mutually interact producing the subject positions of the individual, the internal processes that are conditioned and conditioning these subject positions of the individual need to be investigated. Confining the investigation of the individual only as a social being, leaving out the investigation of the internal make-up and the processes of the individual
is an acceptance of a victim position, that is, the acceptance that once one is a human the humanness just happens and continues without the individual’s having any ability to intervene in the way it works. Once this position is consciously or unconsciously accepted, one forecloses the possibilities of understanding the powers within, delegates it-nesses and authority to external objects such as social, political, and cultural processes, convincing one’s self that the power to transform the self is in those processes, and by changing those processes one’s transformation will occur. The individual, therefore, is taken for granted as one who is always pushed and pulled by the sway of the social processes that are in tension, with no possibility for the individual to investigate the internal mechanisms or pull and push, and therefore with neither the power within nor the possibility of intervening internally to cease the conflicts within.

What are the constitutive components, the internal process, how do they individually and in combination work, and are there ways in which these processes can be interrupted and other processes can be generated for maintaining steadiness in the mind-body complex of the individual? Where would this kind of investigation lead us in investigating the subjectivity/identity? What possibilities would an investigation of perceptual processes as well as the non-perceptual components - the reals\textsuperscript{13} - of the individual provide in understanding the processes of individual, which in turn is a process of transformation of self, and social transformation of women? These are some as yet unexplored questions in feminist discourses in terms of describing women, oppression, and liberation.

\textsuperscript{13} See footnote 9 below.
A Look at the Process of Feminist Discursive Practices from the Perspective of the Abhidhamma

Though it is similar to putting the cart before the horse, for I am at this juncture using an approach - the Abhidhamma approach - which I present later in this chapter, I consider it important to present some observations now. I do recognize, however, that my putting the cart before the horse may put some strain on the reader. Nevertheless, in order for me to work my way into presenting the Abhidhamma approach, I consider it important to present some observations from this perspective. Briefly, in how the Abhidhamma perspective describes the discursive process which binds us to the world of existence, there are eight discursive thoughts/thoughts. They are: (1) discursive thought concerning essential nature; (2) discursive thought concerning particularity; (3) discursive thought concerning grasping whole shapes; (4) discursive thought concerning "I"; (5) discursive thought concerning "mine"; (6) discursive thought concerning the agreeable; (7) discursive thought concerning the disagreeable; and (8) discursive thought contrary to both of these. The discursive thoughts concerning essential nature, particularity, and whole shapes produce the base or the given thing or the referent, which is then named and becomes the foundation or the mental support for further discursive proliferation. The discursive thoughts about "I" and "mine" produce the "I" base which is the view of "self" and "what belongs to self," which then become the foundation and mental support for further discursive thinking. The discursive thought about what is agreeable, what is disagreeable, or what is neither produces desire,

---

14 Willis, Janice Dean. (1979). *On Knowing Reality*. 65
aversion, and delusion, which then become the foundation and mental supports for further discursive thinking.

Following this framework then, in the process of feminist discursive thinking, the following can be identified. First there is the designation of "form," the physical and tangible aspect to the given thing, "woman." Most feminist discourses habitually use the term woman. The term woman, however, is not a term which they have come up with but a term which has been generated in the past and which they have inherited through learning and passed on through habit and custom. In these instances, the repeated use of the term woman indicates that they know the thing to which this term refers. In other instances, for example, post modern/post structuralist feminist discourses, positing an inadequacy of the term woman/women to refer to the individuals who comprise multiple identities, multiple expressions or "deeds," and are unrecognized through regulatory practices, calls for not using the term.

Then they "think" that woman (the given thing) has "form." This thinking involves delineating the particularities of the "form" designated to "woman." The particularizing is used to distinguish the object they are thinking about from other objects. Then they construct discursive thoughts about woman as a "self," taking multiple phenomena together as a whole, and adding to the given designation nominal designations like class, gender, identity and so on. Then they construct a reifying view of woman concerning "her" and of "belonging to her." This is done by constructing discursive thoughts about desires of woman which for a long time have been familiar

---

15 I am using the Abhidhamma analysis of mental proliferations to make these observations. I have taken the framework from Willis (1979) On Knowing Reality.
and clung to and thought of as "her" and "herself" or what "belongs to her." Then there are the discursive thoughts concerning what is agreeable to woman. What is agreeable to woman are the things that are pleasant and captivating to the mind of woman. Then there are the discursive thoughts concerning what is not agreeable to woman which are the things that are unpleasant and revolting to the mind of woman.

This whole process of discursive thinking of feminist discourses about women is composed of two elements: discursive thought and the given thing, i.e., the term "woman/women" and its referent, or the "deeds" which has no referent, as the case may be, and the mental support and the foundation of the proponents of specific discursive thoughts which is mutually conditioned without beginning in time. A previous discursive thought concerning woman is the condition which has generated present feminist discursive thought. It is also indicative that the present feminist discursive thought will be the mental support for future discursive thought on woman.

The process of feminist discursive thought observed has served to manifest bases or referents, for example, sex, human nature, class, patriarchy, culture, discourses, etc., that serve as the mental objects/support for the construction of thoughts about woman. These bases are the perceivable base or the form which serves as the foundation of discursive thought and its proliferations, the base of the reifying view positing a concrete, self-centered reality based on a notion of "woman" and "belonging to woman," and the base of desire, revolt and delusion. The perceivable base, together with proliferations, supports the reifying views of "self" and "belonging to self." The perceivable base and the reifying view support the base of desire, aversion, and delusion.
The discursive thought of feminist discourses produced utilizing these bases as its mental support demonstrates that there is a lack of understanding of the following process. Just as the discursive thought of the past has generated the present discursive thought on the given thing - woman/women or deeds - the discursive thought of the present is the condition which generates the given thing in the future. The given thing in turn becomes the mental object/support of discursive thought in the future. When there is mental object/support, there is the inevitable generation of discursive thought in the future, having that thing as its foundation and its basis. It is therefore, the ceaseless proliferation before, proliferation now, and proliferation in the future. Further, it is also observable that feminist discourses consider that the name stands for a thing and that each thing has a name whether it is woman/women or expressions. Since feminist discourses assume that names accurately characterize the nature of the things to which these names are applied, what is perceived is believed to exist as perceived. By the search for a naturalness or traits unique to women as in cultural feminism, the social inscriptions of what it means to be women, the positionalities of women or the "expressions" of women, to discuss the concept and its referent or to point out the impossibility of a referent, feminist discourses foreclose the thought that the individuals can be investigated internally. The fixity on a given thing, particularizing, grasping the given thing as a whole shape, reifying, and delineating the affects, blocks the possibility of understanding the individual in its own actuality as opposed to the actualities presented from the perspective of the social processes. It blocks the true view of reality because the focus is on the appearance or the form of the object under investigation. The investigation of the given thing itself, the constitutive components and processes of
the given thing from their own side, does not happen. With the exception of
postmodern/poststructuralist feminist discourse, the possibility that there is no-singular-self is not given consideration. Postmodern/poststructuralist feminist discourses posit that there is no unitary, singular self/subject. But in positing a no-singular-subject they
posit multiple subjects in an individual. In describing or explaining the multiple
subjectivity of an individual, however, they also fall back on the mutual interaction
between the individual and social processes, elaborating on how the multiplicity of
selves is inscribed by these social, political, and economic processes on the individual.

Accomplishments and Gaps in Feminist Theory as Identified by Feminist Scholars

Feminist discourses are forcing themselves to produce discursive thinking in
order to account for what has been denied to women in social knowledge and to correct
the wrongdoings of socially legitimated knowledge which considered "men" as the
standard of knowledge. Harding (1991) points out that:

... from a variety of perspectives one could easily come to the
conclusion that the concepts of women and of knowledge - socially
legitimated knowledge - had been constructed in opposition to each other
in modern Western societies. Never had women been given a voice of
authority in stating their own condition or anyone else’s or in asserting
how such conditions should be changed. Never was what counts as
general social knowledge generated by asking questions from the
perspective of women’s lives. In attempting to account for and remedy
this situation, several competing feminist epistemologies have been
articulated. These theories of knowledge both borrow from and are in
tension with "prefeminist" epistemologies, so it requires some careful
work to sort out just what feminist epistemologies are claiming and not
claiming. (p. 106)
Marxist feminists posit that the sexual division of labor contributes to women’s nature (Holmstrom, 1984). Marx has stated that:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of (humans) that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (p. 182)

Holmstrom (1984) posits that:

There is . . . a dialectical interaction between women’s labor and their nature. The sexual/social division of labor is the cause of the distinctive cognitive/affective structures that constitute women’s nature, and these structures are at least a partial cause of a variety of personality traits and behaviors distinct of women, including the sorts of labor they do. (p. 466)

She admits, though, that:

Although our knowledge at this point is too meager to say much about these structures, an adequate explanation of the differences (between women and men’s personality traits) requires that we posit such structures. What we need is a psychological theory supplemented by social and historical considerations . . . (p. 465)

Stating a corollary to Nietzsche’s claim that "there is no being behind doing ... deed is everything," poststructuralist feminists (Butler, 1990a) reduces gender only to "deeds" or expressions: "There is no gender behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results." Disagreeing with the feminist position that assumes a univocal gender identity for women as females, Butler points out that there are multiple identities of gender which are shifting and overlapping at one moment and over time which manifest in multiple expressions. An investigation of the arising of these expressions, however, is not given consideration in her work. This lack is evident in her ambivalence about an analysis of a psyche:
The debate over the meaning or subversive possibilities of identifications so far has left unclear exactly where those identifications are to be found. The interior psychic space in which identifications are said to be preserved makes sense only if we can understand that interior space as a phantasized locale that serves yet another psychic function. (p. 76)

Psychoanalytic feminist discourse, which points out that "denial and repression of early infantile experience" shapes the consciousness of women as "mothers," calls forth the feminist epistemology to the task of:

Uncover(ing) how patriarchy has permeated both our concept of knowledge and the concrete content of bodies of knowledge, even that claiming to be emancipatory ... in preparation for and a central element of a more adequate theory of human nature and politics" to free women from being the "embodiments of the (patriarchal) unconscious. (Flax, 1983).

What feminist epistemologies must uncover are the philosophies that are inadequate in resolving and which maintain the dualisms of subject-object, mind-body, inner-outer, reason-sense, women-men, and all forms of social relations and knowledge which arise out of them, including the concept of liberation. Scheman (1983) points in a similar direction:

... our twinges, pangs, and so on are particular events no matter what our social situation, but it does not follow that the same is true for more complex psychological objects, such as emotion, beliefs, motives, and capacities. What we need to know in order to identify them is how to group together introspectible states and behavior and how to interpret it all. The question is one of meaning, not just at the level of what to call it, but at the level of there being an "it" at all. (p. 229)

Scheman is convinced that women's experience is distinct to women, but is not known by either women or men because it has been forcefully ignored in the social discourses constructed by men and the roles women play embodying the social values produced in these discourses. She explains thus that the nature of persons:
... have traditionally been discussed in Western culture by upper or middle class white males who have taken themselves to be speaking in a universal human voice. Our very varied experiences as women have been crucially different from theirs, in part because of the often limited and limiting social roles we have been constrained to fill (defined by our bodies' sexual appeal and reproductive capacity and by our immersion in the intimate social world) as well as by what we have chosen to do with our lives (in, for example, art and in the interconnectedness of experience and perception in consciousness-raising groups). We are less likely to speak naturally in voices at once abstractly disembodied and autonomously self-defining. (p. 242)

Her proposal for investigating these more complex psychological aspects of women is to not accept the traditional discourses of Western culture which are produced by upper middle class white males who have taken themselves to be speaking in a universal human voice, but for women to speak out of their experience which is distinctly women's:

Rather than claim our right to speak in such voices, to transcend our experience as women, I would urge us to speak out of that experience, in part as a way of changing it, but also out of a recognition of what there is to learn from the perspectives on human life that have been distinctively ours. (p. 242)

Surfacing the varied emotions (complex psychological aspects) and giving them the it-ness that have been denied to and repressed in women through producing specific knowledge about women and maintained by social relations in order to validate the selfhood of women is the proposal of psychoanalytic feminist discourse.

Phenomenological feminists articulate feminist consciousness of women as a "fully developed feminist consciousness" which demonstrates a "full global experience of liberation, involving as it does new ways of being as well as new ways of perceiving" (Bartky, 1995, p. 397). However, they shy away from undertaking an investigation of the "full global experience of liberation" and instead choose to construct "more
narrowly, those distinct ways of perceiving which characterize feminist consciousness" (p. 397).

One among diverse interpretations of Postmodern/poststructural feminist theory, weary of cultural feminism among other feminisms, had the following to say:

For many contemporary feminist theorists, the concept of woman is a problem. It is a problem of primary significance because the concept of woman is the central concept for feminist theory and yet it is a concept that is impossible to formulate precisely for feminists. It is the central concept for feminists because the concept and category of woman is the necessary point of departure for any feminist theory and feminist politics, predicated as these are on the transformation of women’s lived experience in contemporary culture and the reevaluation of social theory and practice from women’s point of view. But as a concept it is radically problematic precisely for feminists because it is crowded with the overdeterminations of male supremacy, invoking in every formulation the limit, contrasting Other, or mediated self-reflection of a culture built on the control of females. In attempting to speak for women, feminism often seems to presuppose that it knows what women truly are, but such an assumption is foolhardy given that every source of knowledge about women has been contaminated with misogyny and sexism. No matter where we turn-to historical documents, philosophical constructions, social scientific statistics, introspection, or daily practices-the mediation of female bodies into constructions of woman is dominated by misogynist discourse. For feminists, who must transcend this discourse, it appears we have nowhere to turn. (Alcoff, 1995, p. 434)

The Need

As has been pointed out by diverse group of feminist theorists, in order to understand the concept of women, oppression of women, and liberation from oppression of women, feminist discourses produce discursive thought borrowing from, in opposition to, and in tension with the very theories which are said to have constructed the concept of women, and which are misogynist, sexist, and oppressive to women. The more feminist discourses attempt to remedy the wrongdoings of "prefeminist"
endeavors of constructing the concept and their referent woman/women by
deconstructing the concept, the more they entangle themselves with supporting,
strengthening, and solidifying notions of women. Deconstructivist feminist discourses
find themselves deconstructing only the notions of women, whether prefeminist, non-
feminist, feminist, or post feminist, but not the given thing, "women." Since the very
deconstruction in itself has become the construction of the notion of woman/women, the
feminist discourses are entangled in the very oppression they look to liberate women
from because what they examine or investigate is not what they say they are
investigating but what is external to understanding the concept of women, oppression of
women, and liberation. The focus of feminism is on correcting, deconstructing,
dismantling, and disproving the socio-political and economic processes and institutions
that have constructed the notion of women. The very effort made to disprove what "is"
in the concept of women, by naming, particularizing, seeing wholeness, reifying and
describing affects, expending the energy to posit that it is not what it is said to be by
"prefeminist" theories, keeps the feminist discourse trapped within the necessity of
imagining a notion of woman/women and letting the imagination run rampant
constructing rapid and unbridled counter-discursive thought. The enterprise of
"countering" the existing discourses that are conceived to be constructing unacceptable
notions of what women are or ought to be, the battle with the external processes,
prevents it from understanding the concept itself and the concept as a phenomena, the
battle within. Feminist discursive thought has thrust itself forward in securing some
material conditions for women. But it seems no closer to understanding women,
identity, oppression of women, and liberation, for the discursive thoughts themselves as
they are being produced generate not only the desire to\n demolish existing views about women but also unpleasant feelings and emotions of anger, aversion, and despair and\n continuation of the confusion about the reality of the notions of women.

From how I see from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, which will be\n presented next, these observations point to the fact that feminist theorizing and\n discourses are caught-up in "the dominant drive of Western culture to organize itself\n under the demands of a theoretical system"\n16 (Jacobson, 1966, p. 45) which has posed\n the greatest barrier to understanding the object itself of its investigation, and the object\n as a conditioned and conditioning phenomena. From the Abhidhamma perspective,\n because of this practice of the need and attachment to theory, the competitiveness in the\n production of conventional knowledge, the need to prove or disprove existing notions\n about women, and the dependence on external relationships and accomplishments to\n resolve the questions of women, identity, oppression of women, and liberation, and\n because of the [illegitimacy of the central analytic structures of the theories\n17 they\n borrow form and are in tension with, feminist theorizing projects a deep inner\n uncertainty, an inner instability and dissatisfaction in the outcomes. What I mean by


deep inner uncertainty, inner instability, and dissatisfaction is the conflict and its
entourage that arise owing to the desire for pleasant feelings which arise when there is
the affirmation that the theories presented are valid, fully or partially, and acceptable,
and the unpleasant feelings which arise when opposing views are presented critiquing,
pointing out deficiencies and invalidating the theories presented. While feminist
theorists may convince themselves that the conflicts refuel the energies to produce and
reproduce theory, the very practice of identifying conflict as energy, giving conflict an
it-ness, taking conflict as a mental object delegating it the power and authority, taking
selves as in that conflict and the conflict as in selves, that is identifying selves with
conflict, is a condition of oppression as it is defined in the Abhidhamma. It is a
condition of oppression arising together with the conditions of ignorance (as ignorance
is described in the Abhidhamma) and the desire (craving) to hold on to the mental
object/factor of conflict. I believe that an exploration of an approach which provides a
practical method by which women can investigate and understand conflict in its precise
sense as described in the Abhidhamma, and a way to access inner realities by
themselves, to discover and develop power and confidence within to take "self" as the
object of investigation (without either taking self for granted with no power to
investigate it, or look elsewhere in order to understand it), is possible and useful for
feminist theory. Feminist discourses, however, have yet to find a method by which to
understand what attachment is, what conflict is, what anguish is; a method by which to
understand experientially the arising of these psycho-physical objects; and a method by
which women can let go of the attachment to abstract theory, let go of attachment to
conflict, and anguish. In my view, opening themselves up to exploring another
perspective which analyzes and understand the non-cognitive, non-discursive, and non-theoretical "realities" of the psycho-physical complex, and provides a scientific method by which can test these non-cognitive, non-discursive, and non-theoretical "realities" on their own without having to depend on any external factors or processes might be a novel and a beneficial experience to feminism.

I next explore such a discourse as contextually different from that of the West and that provides for investigating and understanding the subjectivity itself and the subjectivity as it exists phenomenally. My intention is not just to juxtapose a discourse from a different context other than the West to allow a forum for comparison in order to validate and promote the soundness of one by exhibiting flawedness and invalidating and dismissing the other as was Nietzsche's\textsuperscript{18} intention when he used Buddhism in late nineteenth century Europe. Nietzsche who engaged in "the creation of a new vision of [European] man and existence"\textsuperscript{19} at a time [late nineteenth century] Europe was losing its structure, foresaw the possibility of "nihilistic chaos" overrunning Europe and the possibility that the more educated and cultured community [i.e., European man] might accept an European Buddhism\textsuperscript{20} as a more civilized response to that chaos. Feared by

\textsuperscript{18} A presentation of Nietzsche on Buddhism is not within the scope of this study. However, it is important to mention that Nietzsche depended on secondary sources on Buddhism written by European scholars in late nineteenth century, misunderstood/misinterpreted the basic premise and passionately rejected Buddhism as acceptable to educated community [men] in Europe, but utilized some of its key principles in developing his thought on European "man," the phenomenon of "will." A detailed and an interesting presentation on Nietzsche and his ironic affinities to Buddhist philosophy is presented in Morrison, Robert, 1997, Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities.

\textsuperscript{19} Morrison, Roberts (1997), p.5

\textsuperscript{20} Nietzsche, 1967, Will to Power (WP) 55, p.36
these two possibilities and determined to accomplish his project of "a new vision of man" Nietzsche used Buddhism to serve an indispensable purpose, that is, to hold it in reserve as one of the "many types of philosophy which need to be taught: . . . as a hammer,\(^{21}\) a "weary nihilism that no longer attacks; . . . a passive nihilism, a sign of weakness."\(^{22}\) In order for Nietzsche to establish the soundness or flawlessness in his thought on "European man," he depended on an 'other' which in his view presented a danger, by constructing it as the 'other,' naming it as a "weary nihilism" and "a sign of weakness," and juxtaposing it with the European philosophy on European "man," and life as "will to power,"\(^{23}\) which he developed. Different to that of Nietzsche, my purpose here is to bring in the Abhidhamma [Buddhist philosophy of the Theravada tradition] which analyzes the subject (individual) fearlessly, uncompromisingly, and deeply, to understand how the subject arises, how it lasts, how it dissolves, what oppression and liberation is in relation to the subject. I want to bring in a theory which is not developed as abstract mental construction, but grounded in experience, and which provides for each individual to investigate experience on their own without depending on any external sources or processes. I want to contribute in a significant way by opening an avenue for feminist discourse to come in contact with another way other than the Western way of knowing reality and to consider how this discourse might shed some light on the understanding of the concept of women, oppression of women, and liberation. I want to utilize this discourse to understand women, identity, gender, class, class,

\(^{21}\) WP 132, p.80

\(^{22}\) WP 23, p.18

\(^{23}\) WP 55, p.37

78
in relation to oppression and liberation, and where the "power" for liberation is, without necessarily having to harbor anguish, be in perpetual tension with men, misogyny and sexism and the political, economic, and cultural theories developed by men, while working for liberation from oppression.

The Abhidhamma Approach

The Abhidhamma is a system of science (Jayasuriya, 1976) which investigates a person as process. As a science, the Abhidhamma is concerned with two questions: What is the constitution of an individual, that is, the psycho-physical complex? What are the workings of a person's organic processes both internal and external or, according to what natural law of action does this individual continue as a conditioned and conditioning phenomena, and with what consequences? Internal processes here mean the feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness of an individual which come to be on account of the continuity of that individual, which can also be termed as belonging to an individual or one's own. External here means two things: 1) the materiality or the form of an individual, and 2) the environment of an individual comprising ideas, discourses, and actions. The internal and external distinction however is not meant here in a dualistic sense of an individual as mind and body, but in a non-dualistic sense to describe them as distinct but interdependent processes constituting one occurrence which we designate as an individual. The Abhidhamma is a method of

---

24 Morrison, R. G. (1997), Chapter 8 on Nietzsche's 'Little Things,' the 'Body,' and the Buddhist Khandas (p103); The Path of Purification, IV 141; XI 32, n22; XIV 192, 198, 224, n75.
investigating and understanding one's own human experience as it is here and now; detecting what, where, and when mind-body or psycho-physical behavioral changes are to be made; and the techniques of how these changes can be made so that the experience of individuals is individually and socially profitable. Socially profitable here does not refer to maximized material gains which satisfy individuals' sensual preferences. Socially profitable here means that which contributes to the wholesomeness of the individual, which is a state of psycho-physical complex that comes to be from letting go of attachment to accruing of material wealth for satisfying sensual pleasures, attachment to a notion of an existence of a possessive self, and attachment to views associated with the solidification of an imaginary and fictional self. The Abhidhamma is not an abstract deliberation about what human experience is or ought to be or a revelation brought by an external source, an apparition of any sort, but what is psycho-physically, that is, inwardly and outwardly, experienced by a human being in a felt sense right here and now.

My purpose in exploring the Abhidhamma in this dissertation is to explore what it has to offer in terms of understanding what is in the concept woman, and the experience of women here and now. Inseparably from the project of understanding what is in the concept of woman, is the project of understanding oppression and liberation of women. I will discuss how this understanding can be utilized to discuss women and their experience in relation to identity, gender, and class.

Before delving into exploring what the Abhidhamma is, it is important to note the following. First, Abhidhamma does not lend itself to a rapid understanding (Inada, 1969). It requires patience and the understanding is gradual and slow. The
primary reason for this is that what Abhidhamma describes is not an intellectual and logical analysis of who an individual is, but a description or an analysis of the organic processes of the whole psycho-physical complex of an individual, as these processes are happening. Therefore, one cannot examine the Abhidhamma through mere intellectual and logical analysis as a theoretical tool which is separate from the object it investigates. In order to understand the Abhidhamma, therefore, one has to use it, as one is accessing and experiencing the inner world which is being looked at.

Secondarily, the reason for requiring a gradual and slow understanding of the Abhidhamma is that the many ways in which it explains the experience of individuals are interrelated and interpenetrative of one another. The complexity involved in this interrelatedness and interpenetrativeness cannot possibly be organized into a logical order. If logical ordering and intellectual analysis are superficially and artificially imposed on what the Abhidhamma describes, it will undo the very complexity it assumes, which must be preserved at all times when investigating and understanding human experience. Therefore, I admit that by attempting to present this approach in an academic arena where intellectual analysis and logical deliberations are primary in producing knowledge I run the risk of subjecting it to hastened intellectual and logical scrutiny.

Second is a linguistic and an ideological factor: That is, the use of a non-Eastern language (namely English) which bears ideological meanings and connotations akin to the context within which it developed, to present a theory which emerged and presented in another language which bears ideological meanings and connotations akin to that culture. While this is not to suggest the impossibility of presenting a theoretical (or
other) content of one culture in a language of another culture, the point must be made that the chances for misunderstanding the content are left wide open when one language is used to present a content from another cultural context. As Inada (1969) points out, the Abhidhamma has been variously known in English language as "dependent origination," "causal genesis," "co-dependent origination," "chain of causation," "principle of causation," or "principle of relativity." He further articulates that "causation" and "relativity" in the context of the Abhidhamma:

... are not what we otherwise assume them to be, for, although there can be a general understanding of the Buddhist concepts by way of Western philosophic and scientific notions, there is no specific one-to-one correspondence between the Buddhist and the Western ideas. Buddhism is concerned primarily with [person-as-process], and would be the last to submit [person-as-process] to a strict scientific or mechanistic analysis. (p. 116)

Some other English words which have no one-to-one correlation with what the Abhidhamma refers to are: self, individual, consciousness, knowledge, wisdom, ignorance, base, oppression, and liberation. The words "am," "is," and "are" are other terms which are equally problematic in presenting the Abhidhamma, which does not accord any substantiality to an individual or any other conditioned and conditioning phenomena. Therefore, when the reader comes across these terms in this study, it is imperative to keep in mind that they are used only as mode of speech, and are used with the meanings accorded in the Abhidhamma.

---

25 In reminding one "of the perennial efforts in the West to label someone a realist or an idealist when (s/he) claims neither," Inada describes in this article how the use of certain labels with reference to forms of Buddhism (such as monism, dualism, pluralism, monotheism, polytheism, agnosticism, atheism, and relativism are outmoded) are useless unless the terms are used with qualifications in the restricted narrow sense.
Third, the Abhidhamma is, by its nature, a process philosophy (Inada, 1991) which describes person-as-process. It is a process philosophy because one of the three marks it addresses is impermanence in all conditioned and conditioning phenomena about person. As a process philosophy, Abhidhamma investigates two aspects of any process pertaining to describing the person-as-process: the actualities of the elements themselves of a process, and the dynamics of the elements coming together producing an effect. Immediately one can notice what seems to be a contradiction in Abhidhamma as a process theory. This perceived contradiction is related to its investigation of seemingly static elements in their own nature while claiming to be an approach which investigates dynamics of processes. It is important therefore, a) to recognize from the onset that there seems to be a contradiction between what the Abhidhamma says it is doing and what it actually does in terms of describing and analyzing the human experience; and b) to cast out the apparent contradiction. When Abhidhamma describes elements in order to characterize how they in combination produce effects, it must be noted that the elements which imply a static nature in the common usage of the term are themselves viewed as non-static processes within the dynamic nature of things. To say it differently, as conditioned phenomena, the elements themselves are considered as having come to be through processes and are subjected to processes of change. No stasis or fixity is acknowledged by Abhidhamma when discussing elements to elaborate any process in investigating the individual. As Inada (1991) points out:

Methodologically speaking, although we can distinguish between dynamic and static aspects, in the (precise) analysis (speaking from the standpoint of concrete actuality), the seemingly static elements must be viewed within the dynamic nature of things. (p. 469)
This is how and where the interconnectedness, interdependence, and interpenetrativeness of conditioned phenomena present the complexity which one has to learn to work with gradually and slowly and over a long period of time.

Fourth, when Abhidhamma, for the purpose of elaboration, uses effects, concepts, names, or labels in singular, they always have to be understood as a harmony of concepts, names or labels mutually interdependent, producing these singular referents. The Abhidhamma does not posit a singular phenomena as either having been conditioned or caused singularly by itself or having an independent existence of its own.

In Abhidhamma:

A "cause" implies a "harmony of causes" that constitute one cause having the capacity to produce an effect. Thus, ... if there were a deficiency in any of the several causes that constitute a single cause, there would be no effect. The group of causes producing an effect would not be able to do so if they were mutually independent or if some of them were lacking. Therefore, through mutual dependence, equally and together, they produce the effect or the resultant states. (Kalupahana, 1975, p. 56)

The principle on which the Abhidhamma bases its analysis is that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent; all conditioned phenomena continue to change; and all conditioned phenomena are momentary and without independent existence. For theory of things, an individual is "a series of experiential moments, each one unique but each is so infinitesimally small that except by a method of abstraction and by hypostatization the ordinary mind is unable to conceive it" (Inanda, 1991, p. 469). What the Abhidhamma asserts is that reality or experience is of a compounding nature. Investigation of reality or experience reveals an arising, a duration, and a dissolution. The truth on which the Abhidhamma bases its investigation - the arising,
the duration, and the dissolution - is that there is oppression; there is cause of oppression; there is ending of oppression; and there is a way to ending of oppression.

The Abhidhamma is an epistemological undertaking, a method for deconstructing the notion of self and a behavioral method for understanding how one constructs an imaginary self, a fictional self, and its accompanying and associated consequences. The Abhidhamma is an analysis of individuals’ experience. The Abhidhamma is not an interpretation of life. It is a practical method to penetrate the imaginary and the fiction. The reality for the Abhidhamma is not something to be constructed out of the external world nor is it a matter of cognition. Reality is a thing individuals experience - it is a state of being.

**Analysis of Self**

In the view of the Abhidhamma, selfhood is an agency, a process ever changing, occurring, and evolving. The selfhood, however, has no referent, no self identical, unitary, persisting soul or substance to which a concept can conceivably refer. Most questions individuals ask about selfhood, however, revolve around a self - a fictional self. The Abhidhamma analyses not the questions or the answers about self but the fallacy of assuming a self, an imaginary and fictional self from which inquiry begins. The Abhidhamma is about the individual and how the individual constructs the notion of self. It is about the individual developing the ability to understand what is beneath the constructed notion of self and developing the ability to utilize that understanding to be free from oppression. The Abhidhamma is not about negation of self nor is it about developing the self. It is about understanding the notion of self and no-self. It is about
understanding the notion of self as no-self or no-singular/multiple-self in order to eliminate the notion of self as the determining factor in human development. The Abhidhamma concerns itself with understanding self in order to not be concerned with self.

Self as Five Aggregates

One of the ways in which the Abhidhamma analyses the experience of individual is the five aggregates method (Varela, 1991). "Aggregate" here means an assortment, a collection of things into one mass. The five aggregates of an individual are: form, feelings/sensations, perceptions, dispositional formations, and consciousness. The first of the five aggregates, "form," is the physical or material aspect and the latter four aggregates are the mental aspects of what we refer to as the individual.

Form

Form refers to the body of an individual. The body, however, does not refer to the gross external organs but the actual physical mechanism of perception. In this sense, the body means the eye base and visible objects, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touchables, and the mind and thoughts. Each of these six sensitivities, supported by their respective sense bases, is an amalgam of various material phenomena, which, taken individually, have their own characteristic nature, functions, manifestations and the way in which they are caused and, taken together, bear different characteristics, functions, manifestations, and causes. For example, what we customarily call the eye has the characteristic of sensitivity,
originated by volitional act or desire-to-see, which is equipped for the impact of visible information. Its function is to choose an item from among information that becomes visibly available to it. It displays itself as the bearer of eye-consciousness. Descriptively, the phenomena called the eye has around it the skin and the eye-lashes, a mass of white substance, and a mass of black substance within the white substance. The locale called the eye sensitivity, which receives and mentally (eye consciousness) processes the selected pieces from a plethora of information, is nested in these surroundings assisted by the four primary elements that function to uphold, maintain cohesiveness, transpire maturing, and equip with movement. Temperature, consciousness, and nutriment consolidate it and life faculty maintains it. It is provided with color, odor, flavor, smell, and tangibility. And this organ and sensitivity serves as a base/foundation and as an avenue for eye-consciousness. The phenomenon, which in simple terms is referred to as the eye, is a complex process conditioned by and conditioning other complex processes in the body of an individual. The other sense organs and the respective sensitivities are also similarly complex processes which are conditioned and conditioning other complex material processes both physical and mental.

Feelings

Feelings is the mental quality/factor of an individual, that which experiences the objects in a felt sense. Feelings is not about knowing the objects but about experiencing the flavor of objects as pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent (Jayasuriya, 1976, pp. 37-40). They are found in every thought unit. Characteristically, feelings is about being felt and
it functions by experiencing the objects. We as individuals may entertain pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant feelings associated with mind, relishing some and repelling others. Associated with the physical body, we experience feelings as pain and pleasure. There can be a myriad of ways in which feelings are experienced by an individual such as tenderness, disgust, anger, rage, love, elation, jollity, and the like, but only some are recognized by an individual while others are not noticed, most often not on purpose but because they are too many to be processed in too short a time. But, this does not mean that the unrecognized feelings were not there in an individual at any given mind moment. It is just that they were not recognized due to conditions existent at the time. The fact remains that feelings experience an object directly and fully, whereas other mental qualities, e.g., perceptions, dispositions, experience objects derivatively. What is also notable is that all experiences have a feeling tone, either pleasant, unpleasant, indifferent, or pleasure or pain, and the feelings become the objects of self-referencing. Our feelings are self-relevant, and at moments of strong feelings we take ourselves as our feelings. We identify with the feelings, taking the feelings as the self and the self as the feelings experienced. Feelings do not remain the same but the sense of self identified with them remains despite the fact that the feelings change. Feelings are conditioned by a number of relations: object relations, past action relations, presence relations, and domination relations are some of them. Feelings, in turn, are conditioning actions and other effects by exercising dominance relations in the arising of desire for happy feelings and in the arising of disgust for unhappy feelings or indifference to any. The question is which of the feelings does one identify with and where is the self that was identified with the
feelings before? And who is this self that identifies with newly emerging feelings? The same or different? Where is self found amongst feelings and who is this thing called self?

**Perceptions**

Perceptions as a constitutive group recognizes, identifies, and discerns objects. It functions taking a sign as a condition for perceiving again something that has been known before. It signifies objects by associating, illustrating, and interpreting the features that have already been noticed. The objects appearing before an individual, the perception, and the contact between the two cause the mental constructions about object. Perceptions arise in combination with the basic impulse for action towards the discerned objects. Whether it is with the passion or desire, aggression or anger, delusion or ignorance, an individual discerns objects - mental or physical - in relation to self with an automatic impulse to act in a relevant form. Which of the impulses amongst the three could one call the ego or the self of the individual is a question that cannot be answered.

**Dispositions**

Dispositions or the activities of the mind is about habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting. It produces acts that have the potency to produce results in the future. We certainly take our dispositions seriously. If there are favorable responses to our dispositions it gives us pleasant feelings; if the responses are unfavorable it gives us unpleasant feelings. When someone is responding to our habits
of behavior we feel that these responses are about ourselves; but the responses are about our habits, and dispositions and not about ourselves. Habitual patterns change over time. We, however, hang on to a sense of continuity as if there were a self distinct from these changing habits and personality. The concept of unchanging self is not congruent with the changing dispositions over time, similar to the other constituting components, which also go through change, as was discussed above.

Consciousness

The Abhidhamma considers consciousness to be the principle element in experience. The reference to consciousness as the principle element in experience, however, does not presuppose that it is an agent or an instrument possessing actual being in itself apart from the activity of cognizing (Bodhi, 1993, pp. 27-30). Consciousness is the process of knowing or being aware of an object. As a process and as an activity, consciousness functions as the ‘forerunner’ of the mental qualities. Consciousness is a conditioned phenomena which interdependently emerges from the mind and body. It appears in and to us as a continuity of processes. What is ordinarily thought of as consciousness is, in fact, a series of rapid momentary acts of consciousness, occurring in rapid succession, so rapid that one cannot catch or notice the disjunctive occasions which are a multiplicity of diverse types. What is caught and noticed by one is the one most impressionable to an individual at any given mind moment. The uncaught thoughts rise and fall the same way as the most responsive ones, with the difference that they are gone before being noticed, whether important or not. The immediate cause of thoughts is mind and matter or the psycho-physical
complex of an individual. Thoughts cannot arise alone independent of the other
components such as feelings, perceptions, dispositions, and matter.

Consciousness, even though it has the single characteristic of knowing or
cognizing an object, in reality, is a multiplicity of thoughts: consciousness of sight,
consciousness of sound, consciousness of smell, consciousness of taste, consciousness
of touch, and consciousness of mind are various classes of consciousness.
Consciousness can be volitional or non-volitional. One can never be assuredly
convinced about the thoughts of an individual because of the many groups or types they
fall into with many nuances and subtleties in them. In the same vein, one simply cannot
conclude that an individual has a consciousness, but multiple consciousnesses. Our
habitual practice, however, is to consider that we have a consciousness and to identify
ourselves with that consciousness, taking that consciousness as the self and the self as
that consciousness. The question is, given the complex nature of consciousness and the
impossibility of noticing many consciousnesses that arise at any particular time, and
given that consciousness does not remain the same but changes rapidly, how can we
determine that we have a consciousness, which consciousness does one identify with,
and what guarantee does one have that the consciousness one identifies with is the same
all the time?

What the five aggregate model of the Abhidhamma demonstrates is the
impossibility of finding a coherent self. When we take the aggregates one by one, we
can see that they have their own characteristics and functions, but none of them
individually presents to us as a self for the very reason that each aggregate exists in
mutual dependence on all others. All aggregates put together cannot present a coherent
self for the very reason that what we conventionally see as a coherence is an amalgam of multiple aggregates which have their separate characteristics and functions. The Abhidhamma demonstrates that what we conventionally call self is an agency of multiple components which, taken individually, have conditioned and conditioning characteristics and, taken together and in combination, have different conditioned and conditioning characteristics. In this sense, an individual is an ever-occurring, ever-changing multiplicity of experiences which has no-self. Nonetheless we always claim a self, selfhood, or an identity.

So, what the Abhidhamma informs us is that an individual is a self and a no-self at the same time. Self applies only to the extent that it is a group of conditioned and conditioning psycho-physical phenomena. No-self applies to the extent that there is no essence in that self which is apart from and independent of any group that comprises it. There is no self which performs the functions of producing, supporting, and maintaining of itself, independent of the functions of the multiple constitutive components, the causal relations, and the interdependent workings of the elements in the constitutive components (Jayasuriya, 1976, p. 124). Self is not an entity with unbroken continuity, a coherence or a bounded unity; and a self is neither an accident nor a given (Kalupahana, 1987, pp. 6-11).

A self is a conglomerate or an amalgam of psycho-physical processes that are simultaneous, different but not separate from each other, and complexly interdependent in their production, support, and maintenance. Self only appears as a continuance, a coherent whole, or a bounded unity. It appears to function as a rational being who knows the world and has control over it. It appears to have arrived by a cause of its
own, with all the mechanisms in place for it to actualize itself in the world. The thing called self is an appearance.

**Conditional Arising: Identity, Gender, Class**

A mere state that has got its conditions
Ushers in the ensuing existence;
While it does not migrate from the past,
With no cause in the past it is not.

An echo, or its like, supplies
The figures here; connectedness
By continuity denies
Identity and otherness

In continuity the fruit
Is neither of nor from another

(Path of Purification, pp. 567-568)

**Identity**

How do we claim a self, selfhood, a personality, or an identity where there is none to be claimed? The Abhidhamma posits that identity is a self-constructed notion. Identity is a notion by which individuals characterize themselves as to who they are in relation to sense objects they find union with. It is a process of how individuals organize their behavior, actions, and attention, fixing or positioning the sense of self in a particular state of experience. "Constructed notion," however, does not mean that it is a onetime and a completed project. What it means is that identity is always in the process of being constructed by individuals, on a moment-to-moment level of their lives.

Individuals construct their own identities multiple times and in multiple ways with the
outcome of multiple identities at one time and over time. According to the Abhidhamma, the construction of identity is a process in which a conditional nexus is at work. Multiple conditions in this conditional nexus come together and work mutually, equally, and interdependently in the arising of a notion of an identity. It is a process that has no beginning, no end, it is not linear, not progressive, not sequential, and, further, it allows the possibility of getting off of it at any of its links in its cycles. It is a process which is:

\[\ldots\] neither a purely temporal, nor yet a purely logical causality, but a living, organic relationship, a simultaneous correlation, juxtaposition and succession of all the links, in which each, so to say, represents the transverse summation of all the others, and bears in itself its whole past as well as all the possibilities of its future. And precisely on this account the entire chain at every moment and from every phase of it, is removable, and is neither tied to 'causes lying in an unreachable distant past,' not yet referred to a future beyond the limits of vision in which perhaps, some time, the effects of these causes will be exhausted. (Govinda, 1961, p. 56)

One of the conditions in a twelve-link conditional nexus is how we understand our desire for sensual lust, our desire for holding on to views, our desire for an existing self. We depend on these aspects, taking them as permanent, taking them as unchanging, and taking them as having their own independent existence. Seeing the reality as permanent, unchanging, and substantial and seeing the reality from a point of view of an ego-self, we seek for ourselves lasting pleasures, lasting worlds, and lasting selves. This misconceiving of reality pushes us to see that there is lasting pleasure, there are conditions (causes) for these pleasures, there are ways to ensure these pleasures for ourselves, and that we arrive at blissful conditions when these pleasures are ensured for ourselves. Reality conceived thus creates the conditions of perceiving
the world from an egocentric point of view. The reality of these aspects is that they are impermanent, changing, and have no existence of their own, but our ignorance of this reality hinders us from knowing this to be the fact. The ignorance referred to here is not the lack of acquired knowledge, but the blindness to the reality of what is moving us on a moment-to-moment level which keeps us held attached to the sense objects on an illusory level.

The lack of understanding or the ignorance of the nature of reality marked by impermanence, change, and no-self existence is a condition upon which the way we think about ourselves, the way we talk about ourselves, the way we act about ourselves, and our dispositions arise (Govinda, 1969). Our intentions and volitions, coached by that ignorance, make us think of ourselves as having exclusive characteristics only peculiar to us and with which we identify. These volitional impulses or the characteristics peculiar to us delineate the movement and generation of our thoughts, action, and speech. We base our thinking, actions, and discourses on these perceived characteristics taking them as true of ourselves. We act out these characteristics mentally, physically, and verbally, taking them as true of ourselves. We do not realize that we are misconstruing the real issue - the issue of no permanence, no stasis, and no independent existence which we can hang on to or claim as our true selves.

Our mental tendencies or dispositions, which are conditioned by our lack of understanding of reality, then prime our consciousness. Our seeing consciousness, hearing consciousness, smelling consciousness, tasting consciousness, touch consciousness, and consciousness (thoughts) of the mind demonstrate a wakefulness to the information provided by the dispositions. Each consciousness notes and
distinguishes sense objects that relate to and which are pleasant to the dispositions which are acceptable, unpleasant and unacceptable, and that which are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Thus, consciousness that is coached or primed by the dispositions is the basic climate of the mind at any particular moment which in turn shapes the conditions thereof.

Consciousness so conditioned gives rise to the psycho-physical complex of individuals which is primed according to the dispositions that have already arisen. Physical aspect is the materiality or the body of the individuals. Psychological aspect describes the feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness, the movement of mental aspects in relation to the materiality or the objective world of the psycho-physical complex, i.e., seeing sensation, hearing sensation, tasting sensation, smelling sensation, touch sensation, and the sensations arising from by thoughts. Our position in relationship to sense objects that we experience is shaped by our already shaped mental attitude toward them. The psycho-physical complex continues to move, being changed and changing according to what has gone on before.

We then proceed to process the information received through the sense mechanisms according to the signals given by our psycho-physical system. The processing of information is inextricably linked with contact between the psycho-physical complex and the sense data, both internal and external. The six sense bases, i.e., hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touch, and thinking, which comprise the information processing system based on the signals received by the mind-body complex are also now flavored by dispositions and are ready to sort these signals into pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant experiences. The sense bases receive
sense data and sense consciousness notes the data with bare attention, with no
imputations at the moment of its activity. Depending on the activities of the sense bases
and the sense consciousness, the contact between the two arises. That is the meeting of
or the encounter between the sense bases, the sense objects, and sense consciousness.
The process of contact contributes to isolation of sense objects in individuals’
experience which makes impressions or stands out according to the dispositions that
have been already formed.

The sense data, the psycho-physical complex, and the contact generate a process
from which transpires how we feel about what we experience. We either like what we
experience or dislike what we experience or we neither like nor dislike what we
experience. The feelings which emerge become instrumental in the arising of the next
condition of identity.

Because of feelings, the condition of craving comes to be. Craving is the
thirsting after things one does not have or possess.26 As Ledi (1997) explains, craving
involves "naturally worrying and pondering over things." Feelings begin to make their
imprints which, together with other existing conditions, condition craving for ideas,
views, contact, action, or speeches and discourses. We long for those feelings to be
with us, we hold on to them, and we fixate ourselves on them. If we dislike what we
experience, there arises the craving for rejecting them and we develop aversion toward
them. If we neither like nor dislike what we experience, then we remain indifferent to
them or we remain rather unaffected for the reason that they have made no impression

---

127-133 is valuable to the reader.
Craving is the movement of desire to sustain and seek out the pleasurable contacts and sense objects and to reject the unpleasant or that to which one has an aversion. It is the craving to have and get what one craves for; craving to be; craving to become identifying with the sense objects to which one is attracted. The craving pushes one toward sense objects that one wants to get hold of or get a grip on. Pushing toward them, craving allows for mental evaluations of and the development of specific attitudes toward specific sense objects generating thingness-in-themselves. It is a process of mentally separating of sense objects one desires to possess from the ones one desire to reject. With craving, the sense objects become the things-in-themselves that either hold a certain promise or a threat in the mind of individuals, which then is projected onto these objects. The outcome of craving either as a promise or a threat projected to sense objects is the interpretation that these objects have the "'power' to make me happy" or the "'power' to make me unhappy." As Feldman (1998) interprets:

What happens through craving is that we delegate authority to an object or to an experience or to a person. And, of course, in delegating authority or power to any of those, something else is happening at the same time. That is that we are depriving ourselves of that authority, so that, our sense of well being, our sense of contentment or freedom comes to be dependent upon what we get or don't get - or our success in being able to get or to get rid of it. . . . Through the projection of power into these sense objects through the sense doors we feel separate. . . . We feel that we are at the mercy of (the power of these objects) and yet it is a separation that never ends because the promise is not fulfilled.  

Feldman, Christina, (1998) interpreted the process of craving this way at her discourse on "Dependent Origination" given at Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.

Extracted from the discourse on "Dependent Origination" given by Christina Feldman, October 1998, at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.
Because of craving, grasping comes to be. Grasping here means the "adopting, laying a firm hold on" the sense objects one craves. The craving pushes one towards sense objects and the formations or the mental tendencies pull one toward the sense objects (Nanamoli, 1991, p. 567). The craving and clinging or the push and pull effects continue to play, making us unable to shake off of the very acts and the mental objects of craving and clinging. Through grasping, we then take very firm and fixed positions on the sense objects of our choices. The process of fixation on sense objects reinforces and solidifies values and beliefs we project onto these objects and our experiencing of them according to their perceived potential to satisfy our desires. According to this perceived potential, we cling to sensuality, we cling to ideas and dogmas, we cling to rites and rituals, and/or we cling to a notion of self: this is who I am, this is my body and these are my thoughts, this I know about myself, I believe in this idea, and I know about other ideas and views. By clinging to sense objects of our choice, we claim a notion of "I am" and we claim ownership of sense objects which we do not have in our possession. We cling to a notion of "self," making it difficult to acknowledge life according to its own conditional arising because that clinging makes us see life from the point of view of the self we have constructed for ourselves and because we organize the world according to how that organizing makes it possible to have the ideal self acceptable to us as individuals.

Upon clinging, arises the condition of becoming or "the attainment of individuality," the entire process of fixing or the positioning of the sense of self in a particular state of experience. Through this process of becoming, we give life (I use the term "give life" here in the conventional sense and not in a sense that denotes a "power
to give life" as such), so to speak. We organize our behavior: verbal, physical, and mental, in accordance with the notions we hold for ourselves and we express ourselves in a manner that demonstrates these notions about ourselves. We consider it our responsibility to make ourselves known to the world in the manifestations of who we are. We generate an entire process of behavior to serve our cravings and clingings - the process of becoming someone or something, experiencing a moment of arrival: I have arrived; I got it; I am; mine; and me. Thus we find union with the sense objects that we cling to and identify with.

From becoming, arises the birth\(^{29}\) of an identity. We take the sense objects which we mentally cling to as ourselves and ourselves as the sense objects and construct a notion of ourselves as the embodiment of these sense objects. We represent these sense objects as our identity, giving them a sense of permanence, giving them a sense of not changing, and giving them a sense of a thing-in-itself. The emergence of an identity, the sense of self - the feelings, perceptions, actions, consciousness, and the body one identifies with - rests upon identifying with a state of an experience or a mode of conduct - the doer, the seer, the intellect, the knower, the experiencer, and the one who has the responsibility of that identity.

---

\(^{29}\) The term 'birth' here "is not merely a particular single moment in each life, not only the physical process of being born or conception in the physiological sense, but the 'conception,' the 'conceiving' that is called forth continually through the senses, which effects the appearance of manifestations of the aggregates of existence, the seizing of the sense domains, the continuous materialization and new (action base) entanglement" (Govinda, 1961, p. 50).
Inextricably linked with the birth of an identity is the condition of death, the dissolution of that identity which is constructed. We construct multiple identities within one moment and over time. They arise and pass away; some we notice and most we don't notice because of the speed at which they occur and dissolve. We "hang on to" or "cling" to the ones we notice and the ones which makes impressions on us. After dissolution, the cycle of construction begins with generating identities anew.

The truth of the matter, however, is that what we consider to be our identity is, on the one hand, a constructed notion and, on the other, an after-the-fact of an event or a moment (Inanda, 1991, p. 470). All the ingredients for what gets represented as an identity have risen, persisted, and dissolved by the time we begin to mentally proliferate objectifying them as form, feelings, perceptions, actions, or consciousness we still have. What we represent as our identity then is not the current persons who we think we are but the "afterglows" of a moment of experience. But we continue to construct or deconstruct our identities with an assuredness that we "know" how our identities are produced and maintained, what is wrong with the way they are produced and maintained, and what must change so that we can construct identities which are different and acceptable to us. While we engage in generating new identities for ourselves, the process of change of our psycho-physical complex is at work incessantly beneath our work. The current perceptions of ourselves, our actions, and proliferations

---

30 Death here "is not only a certain definite moment, but an element of life. Death is the dissolution, the decay, the continual change of the physical, mental, and psychical elements or aggregates of existence, namely: of the aggregates of bodily form, of feeling, of perception, of subconscious formations, and of consciousness" (Govinda, 1961, p. 50).
are preparing the future perceptions of who we are and at the same time changing as we speak, think, and act, but we notice the changes (what we can notice) only after the fact. Our thoughts, discourses, or acts cannot arrest the incessant processes of change in the psycho-physical complex. What this process informs us is that there is no thing called identity, not one, not many, that one can package or that one can hang on to.

At tempting to construct and maintain an identity or identities is as futile as attempting to keep mercury in our fist, desiring it to stay as a shape we like. Identity is a conditioned phenomena. Identity as reality does not exist in the world. What exists is experience as reality and that reality is ever in motion.

A personality view, personhood, view of self, or an identity of self is a constructed view which is taken to be a concept in an absolute sense. As an experience, in reality, self or what is referred to as an identity is an emergence of multiple emergences, an event of multiple events, an occurrence of multiple occurrences ever emerging, ever happening, ever occurring as a complex phenomena. Concepts such as woman, man, lawyer, butcher, untouchable, American, or Chinese are all constructed notions of what they are. In actuality, there is no substance in any of these concepts.

While a self is a conglomerate of many processes constituted by the workings of many different elements, it is not an internally fragmented being. There are no fragments in an individual that could be held separate from any other, having their own ever-lasting identities. A self is an event comprising many different elements and processes, not fragmented from each other, but interdependent processes that occur ceaselessly. As such, one cannot talk about a self as having internally fragmented identities. Owing to the interdependence of processes and the impermanence of
phenomena, identities of a self one may have at any given moment in life may change and new identities will emerge, influenced by the immediately ceased identity, but not based on it. As such, identities of a self are not fragments but a series of events appearing and disappearing, continuous in pattern but as different not separate events.

Identity at Collective Level

The process of identity construction or deconstruction in the poststructuralist/postmodern sense is a process which not only happens at an individual consciousness level but also at collective levels, i.e., social, political, and cultural. Whether in saying that women as rational human beings are equal to men, or that women are as exploited as men, or women are exploited not only by an economic system but also by men, or that women are disadvantaged not only by patriarchy and capitalism but by many different ways, feminist discourses as subcultures are engaged in the endeavor of either defining women as victims, or dissolving women as they have been constructed, privileging them now as plurality of expressions or multiple identities. Based on notions of what reality is, each feminist discourse formulates thoughts on what is or what is not woman/women through shared views, opinions, perceptions, or shared conflicts and reactions. In light of conditional arising, feminist discourses forcefully engage in generating and proliferating intentional actions and formations about the notion and the ‘reality’ of women and conventional knowledge. However, an investigation of the concrete actualities that constitute women, and with what implications in relation to oppression and liberation, remains to be accomplished. Each day, each feminist discourse presents a new discourse on how to represent women, how
the existing social, political, and economic processes are oppressive to women, what changes in these processes are necessary for women's liberation from oppression. But, an exploration and an understanding of the "precise reality" of oppression and liberation of selves has yet to be begun. The conventional knowledge undoubtedly surfaces and add to it the dimensions of knowledge about women which have been suppressed, hidden, distorted, altered, and missing. The production of knowledge simultaneously alters previous knowledge and forces individuals to be aware of social, political, and economic costs they incur through their ignorance about how women are oppressed by social processes. But, in the "precise" sense, in how the Abhidhamma describes oppression and liberation, women continue to remain powerless to disentangle themselves from a victim position and a dependency on external sources for their liberation.

Gender

They (the expressions) are conditions when performed; They bear fruit once, but not again (Path of Purification, p. 569)

Gender, which in this dissertation refers to the material phenomena of sex, from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, is a condition derived from the four primary elements of matter and conditioned by the acts performed from the source of desire-to-be, in humans.31 As derivatives of the primary elements which happen at conceptions

and also any period in the lifetime of humans, gender is neither a fixed unchanging condition nor it is only limited to two sex configurations, that is, female or male, as most of us are conditioned to believe to be the reality of phenomena of human sexuality. The materiality of sex, according to the Abhidhamma, has various configurations.

Characteristically, the material phenomena of sex outwardly manifest their marks, that is, physical features demarcating the configurations. These demarcations function as illustrations various sexes. They manifest as the sexual structures of the body.

The materiality of the phenomena of sex is concretely produced matter, but they are not conditioning states, because they do not perform the functions of a conditioning state, i.e., producing, supporting, and maintaining phenomena. Rather, material phenomena of sex are produced, supported, and maintained by other conditioning states and relations, that is, past consciousness, present consciousness, and the functioning of physical life: volitional action, thoughts, energy (temperature), and mental and material nutriment elements. The nature of influence the phenomena of sex have on the psycho-physical complex is limited in that they control only the sexual structure, appearance, character, and outward dispositions, but have no influence in producing, supporting, or maintaining it (the psycho-physical system). It appears, though, that sex exercises control over the body, the body which made it possible for the sex to come into being as a material phenomena, as if it (sex) were giving the body orders to behave in particular ways. This superficial role of materiality of sex makes an impact over all other constituent components of the psycho-physical complex in such a way that they

perceive themselves to be in conformity with the sex and not out of conformity (Ledi, 1997, p. 55). Said in a different way, the body is produced, supported, and maintained not by the concretely produced sex components, rather, the sexual structure and outward appearances are produced, supported and maintained by the psycho-physical complex. Therefore, the sexual phenomena have no intrinsic nature of their own. However, as human beings we do attach ourselves to sexual identities as exemplified in the following passage:

... a woman marks femininity in herself, the feminine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is excited by that, delighted by that; and being so excited, delighted, she marks masculinity about her, the masculine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is excited by that; and being so excited, delighted, she desires a bond with those about her; and whatsoever happiness, well-being comes of this bond that she desires ... delighted by, attached to her own sex, she has gone into man's bondage and thus escapes not from her own sex.

So, too, a man marks femininity about him ... (Hare, E.M., The Book of the Gradual Sayings, IV.5.48, 1978, p. 32)

It is not anything about a woman which keeps her in a constructed world of her own. It is her construction of that very world, and her performance according to the world she constructs which makes her a woman and keeps her bound to that construct, identity, and the world she identifies with. The freedom from binding herself within a world which she constructs for herself comes not from any other but from her own power within to not-construct that very world of herself. Thus, a woman seeking freedom for herself:

... does not mark femininity in herself, the feminine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is not excited by that, not delighted by that; and not being so excited, not being so delighted, she does not mark masculinity about her, the masculine occupation, attire, prejudices, impulses, voice, charm. She is not excited by that, delighted by that; and being not so excited, delighted, she does not desire a bond
with those about her; and whatsoever happiness, well-being comes of this bond that she desires. . . . not delighted by, not attached to her own sex, she has not gone into man’s bondage and thus escapes from her own sex. (rendering mine).

What this informs us is that, from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, (a) sex elements have no existence of their own, and (b) what we perceive to be human sexuality is not a true state of reality. In other words, gender is not consciousness, mental factors, and matter. Gender is not a state of permanence. Gender is a condition-as-process which is in flux at birth and during life time. Further, gender is not limited to two sexes as is made clear in the Abhidhamma discourse:

Matter coming into being at conception fluctuates during procedure and changes its features; and matter coming into being during procedure does likewise; . . . At the time in a certain bhikku [male person in the Buddhist monastic living] the features of a woman were revealed; at that time in a certain female bhikku [female person in the Buddhist monastic living] the features of a man were revealed. (Rhys Davids, C. A. F., 1976 The Expositor, p. 420-421)

Any attempt to present any sexuality as a fixed mark of an individual and to construct an identity on that basis is a condition arising from an ignorance of this fact, and a condition of self-inflicted oppression.

This understanding throws some light on the question of gender identity. The understanding is that sex is within the body and mind, but not the body and mind complex itself. When the sex that is within the body and mind complex is taken to be the body and mind complex itself, the idea of sex/gender identity arises. The mind hangs on to the object of sex element which is within the body, feeling, perceiving, and formulating ideas based on these perceptions. The desire to identify with and to interpret the identity gives rise to perceiving and proliferations as to what sex is, how it
is experienced, how that notion must be supported and maintained, what one expects from this experience, and what others must expect from this experience and so on. This construction of gender identity, then, according to the theory of things, is based on a false view of sex elements as having a substantiability of their own. In a precise sense, sex elements have no role of their own and neither more nor less significance than any other constitutive component in an identity or a self. Thus such women cannot be assigned nor can they claim to have an identity based on sex.

How then is one to discern the sex element in a self? First of all, one needs to recognize the difference between the appearances displayed pertaining to different sex elements and the sex elements themselves. Sex elements are not the appearances and the appearances are not the sex elements. Sex structures, characteristics, and other qualities that come with them are neither more nor less significant than any other gross sense organ structures and characteristics of the body that come with it, for example, hands, legs, or the brain. These organs also have their own structures, characteristics, functions, and manifestations and are conditioned by but not conditioning the psycho-physical complex. Hanging on to the object of a gender identity based on a view that sex elements produce, support, and maintain the psycho-physical complex (all constituent components, i.e., consciousness, feelings, perceptions, dispositions and matter) is based on a false view of the workings of the psycho-physical complex. Such a view volitionally closes off the understanding of the dynamics of the law of change and the freedom to enjoy the openness of being which would make it possible for discerning a fuller self without conforming to an idea of a gendered identity.
So then, is there a use for a concept of woman, man, bi-gendered, man in a woman's body, woman in a man's body, or any other sex configurations? The answer is both yes and no. Such concepts are useful only to the extent that they assist us in knowing the marks of differentiation - not separation - for pragmatic purposes. But ignorance that these differentiations of gender are not identities that have their own essences leads to delusion and personal and social consequences that are unwarranted and hamper personal and social transformation.

The Abhidhamma agrees with the position that gendering, that is, assigning labels, roles, and resources to humans based on views of sex, is a social construct. The Abhidhamma departs, however, from the position that the sex differences are biological facts and that human nature has an essence, an existence of its own, independent of the workings of the psycho-physical complex as a whole. From the standpoint of the Abhidhamma, women's ability to reason does not come from a genderless human essence but from an essenceless agency and developed, cultivated, supported, and sustained insight into "seeing things as they have come to be," is known to have been demonstrated by women in the 6th century B.C. as was the case with Soma when delusion of self tested her ability:

Mara (delusion) tests Soma:

That vantage-ground the sages may attain
Is hard to win. With her two-finger wit
That may no woman ever hope to achieve.
Women, are thinking beings, and like any other human beings, are not the owners of their thinking and thoughts. That is, women do not have singular unified and possessive selves, but processes of form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness which are distinct from each other, and come to be and last in dependence on each other. There is thinking, but thinking does not mean it is the owner of all other processes. In actuality thinking is dependent on many other processes. As demonstrated by Soma in above poem, women can rise above the possessive claiming of ownership of thoughts through and see "reality" from an open and a powerful position through cultivated and developed insight. When armed with insight into reality, delusion only reveals itself and cannot induce helplessness or victim position in women. The Abhidhamma agrees with the position that historical acts have an influence on women’s identity as workers, owners of property, or rulers or ruled. But, the Abhidhamma departs from the position that these historical acts alone determine either the historical acts or the identity of women and others. The Abhidhamma agrees with the position that the internalized consciousness influences the idea formation of women and others of who they are. The Abhidhamma departs from the position that the
internalized consciousness has a nature of its own that influences individuals and that the individual has no control over her/his internalized consciousness. The Abhidhamma agrees with the position that women and others have differences in characteristics, functions, manifestations, and immediate causes, but departs from the position that these attributes in themselves have natures of their own that determine identities specific to them. The Abhidhamma agrees with the position that women do not have a pre-given, pre-determined, already fixed gendered identity as women and that there is no centered self, all-enduring coherence, totality, or unity as an individual. The Abhidhamma differs, however, from the position that, on the one hand, an individual is a plurality of selves and, on the other, in order to demonstrate this point one must deconstruct social theories which have constructed a coherent, centered identity and self or continue to proliferate multiple identities. According to theory of things, proliferating different and multiple identities would be to continue doing the very thing which feminist theory is attempting to refute. It is a continuance of the same project of social construction of identity with one difference, wherein, instead of one coherent identity, now there are multiple, non-coherent identities. The process of proliferating multiple identities is the same as constructing one identity - that is - a subject taking multiple objects, seeing the subject as in each of these objects and each of these objects as in the subject and constructing thoughts about the subject as having multiple identities. The difference here is that, instead of one object, there are many objects that the subject hangs on to as its own, and as being owned by, at any given time. According to the Abhidhamma, this process would be contradictory to the position that there is no centered self, so long as each of the multiple selves denotes a self-referent,
an identity, that grasps the objects. The Abhidhamma describes that the decenteredness of one is not an outcome of multiple objects decentering a subject, working as 'hangers on' luring a subject to hang on to them; it is the very process of how the phenomena are being put together by the dispositions of a human being, and the understanding of both the phenomena and dispositions that arise in this process that is the decenteredness. A demonstration of a decentered subject then, according to this theory, would not be to proliferate multiple identities based on grasping of subjectively constructed multiple objects but to penetrate into objective actualities, the "reals," independent of the mind's conceptual processing of the sense data to understand the impossibility of locating a single element that can be called the subject. Said differently, the project of understanding and describing a decentered subject is knowing the realities of the occurrence called self as they are and knowing this occurrence as in totality. According to the Abhidhamma, the multiple elements of what one calls a subject hang on to subjectively constructed multiple objects and construct multiple identities. It is the agency of the amalgam of elements but not the subject as an agent that would proliferate multiple identities. In this way, the mutual interaction of the subject with the objects is not limited to the performance commanded by the objects but open to the will-to-do, the intentions, of the psycho-physical complex. It is the psycho-physicality which is already a complex that makes one decentered and a non-coherence, a non-unity. The event called self is both internal and external as one, and not separate from each other. The discourse of the Abhidhamma on deconstruction of singularity of a subject is different from the discourse of feminist theory, with different outcomes for individual and social transformations. It departs from the view that identities are the consequences
of social inscriptions performed by individuals by default, or that multiple identities that will be known because of proliferations would destabilize the established identity norms, both in individuals and in society. The Abhidhamma adds to feminist theory that the deconstruction and destabilization of the constructed notions of identity must happen at their own source: the individual who, day in and day out, self-construct her/his identities through performing, resisting, or neither performing nor resisting. Deconstruction of identity must be sought from within with the power within, which arises when arising together with the rapturous joy of liberation, confidence, and wisdom to "see things as they really are." Deconstruction of identity from within, for women, is to lift themselves from a position of victims to a position of power within, which cannot be shaken, demolished, molded, or inscribed by ideologies, discourses, or other social practices, but is instrumental in transformation of self and the transformation of society.

The Abhidhamma enhances the feminist views of gender identity by offering an in-depth view of internal and external, yet not separate, mechanisms at work in the experience of reality of an individual and a framework that could be applied to investigating this experience of reality. It also offers different techniques as a path to individual and social transformation which is valuable to feminist projects.
There is no doer of a deed
Or one who reaps the deed's result;
Phenomena alone flow on

The stream of craving bears them on
Caught in the meshes of their views:
And as the stream thus bears them
They are not freed from (oppression).
(Path of Purification, p. 622)

Class in this dissertation denotes a process of producing, using, and voluntary giving of labor of individuals. My interest is in exploring the individual in a classless and collective society, that is, how do individuals become classless, so that the community of such individuals is also classless.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Marx conceptualized a higher form of communist society in which non-exploitative producing and appropriating of surplus labor takes place. A society is a "higher (form) of communist society":

... after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly ... (Marx in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, p. 324)

Furthering Marx's vision of a communist society with a different rendering of labor, Resnick and Wolff (1988) offer a description of a classless society. According to Resnick and Wolff, classless society is a society which has its particular conditions of existence:
Classlessness has its particular conditions of existence. Compared to any class-structured society, for example, a classless society would require very different kinds of allocation of work tasks (what and how to produce) and allocation of products (who gets what). Who does what kind of work for how long and in what way would depend on the needs and wants of all concerned, excluding any need or want to produce or procure a surplus. No person’s desire for profit, rent, interest, and so on, could be effective, could actually determine what work anyone performs or what products anyone gets. That is a condition for classlessness to continue.32

Both Marx and Resnick and Wolff present a description of a society in which there is no exploitative labor process. Both seem to suggest how that might be possible. There is, however, a significant difference between the two in the way they see labor as a condition in a classless society. That difference is between labor "as the prime want" (Marx in above quotation) and labor as one condition among many, with no rank accorded to it as "more important" or "more determinant" (Resnick & Wolff, 1987, p. 4).

In Marx’s view, labor in a co-operative society has to become not only a means of life but life’s prime want. Labor, in this instance becomes the sole purpose and the generative force of life of individuals. This is a psychological attitude toward labor, which the individuals must develop in their minds and stay committed to at all times. This psychological attitude toward labor, in Marx’s view, is an intense desire to take labor as the mental object of focus which then will be outwardly manifested in the act of producing. The intensity of desire for labor in one way seems to suggest an unchanging fixity in the life of individuals in that society. In another way, this intense desire, i.e., seems to be an injunction the individuals must issue for themselves and abide by at all times.

times. Inseparable from the idea of "desire for labor as life's prime want" is the uncertainty of the sustaining of the co-operative society which is dependent on individuals' regimented commitment to labor as the prime want. That is, if and when individuals fail to sustain the desire for labor as the prime want of life, then the co-operative society collapses.

For Resnick and Wolff, the desire for labor in a classless society does not denote that labor should be the prime want of life of individuals. Labor has to be a desire, but it is one desire among other desires which are equal in the life of an individual and the life of a society. In other words, labor as a desire exists in mutual dependence on other desires. If one other desire in this nexus of desires subsides, labor as a desire subsides too. What is important for Resnick and Wolff in conceptualizing labor in a classless society is the fact that labor should not originate from a source of desire-for-profit and other self interests. My rendering of this view is that labor should originate from an inner source which guide them to engage in socially profitable acts (as explained in the Abhidhamma), which makes it possible for individuals to produce, use, and voluntarily give to the community. Further, this view of labor allows the individuals the freedom to consider it as equal in importance among other wants of their lives without having to force themselves to rank order one want as a prime want and other wants as non-prime wants. Labor viewed in this sense also does not box itself into an unchanging fixity. Rather, labor as a concept and as a process, is accorded the fluidity and change.

The Abhidhamma perspective recognizes and complements the view of classless society conceived by Marx and further rendered by Resnick and Wolff. The Abhidhamma also recognizes some problems associated with both these view. The
Abhidhamma offers a perspective which might be complementary and useful in solving what it recognizes as some problems.

The problem associated with Marx’s view of labor in a classless society, from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, is related to how he conceptualizes it in relation to the individual. The source of origin of labor in individual is desire. However, according to Marx, this is not a desire like any other, but an intense desire to consider desire as the prime want of life. From the perspective of the Abhidhamma, intense desire or craving for anything is a root condition of oppression within, in that it holds an individual in a constant struggle to secure the accompanying pleasant feelings that arise and to develop an aversion toward and expend energy to forcefully reject anything that comes in the way of fulfilment of that craving. An intense desire, in other words, is never free of internal conflict and oppression. In this instance, the intense desire to consider labor as the prime want is a source of internal conflict. When there is internal conflict, it manifests outwardly as conflict in the social. Therefore, from the Abhidhamma perspective, a classless society is not possible so long as individuals comprising that society are internally conflict-ridden and oppressed.

For Resnick and Wolff, the originating source of labor in a classless society, as is different from Marx’s view, is desire. However, it is a different kind of desire: desire to produce with no desire to accumulate. This is a radical view of what labor should mean in a classless society and how a classless society is possible. As I interpret their view, what they are saying is that classless society is possible when the individuals in that society become classless within themselves, and this quality manifests outwardly as social and classless, i.e., classless society. Individuals in a classless society produce
classless labor not because labor is the prime want of life, but because labor is one among other necessary, but no more or less important, generative components of life. By generative, I mean the process of producing, supporting, and maintaining life. By producing, I mean the continuity of the vitality of human life which includes birth and life after birth.

How the Abhidhamma can complement Resnick and Wolff's notion of labor and classless society is by way of offering a way in which individuals can become classless within themselves. In other words, what is the psychological process by which an individual becomes a person with desire-to-produce-for-no-profit, that is, desire to produce for use and voluntary giving? How can individuals let go of desire to possess and accumulate?

The Abhidhamma begins its work by empowering the individual to see the "reality" of what is called the individual from its own side. It is about discovering the power within to become non-possessive of self. Becoming classless from within is to say that an individual is non-possessive of labor from within. Letting go of the possessiveness requires taking the self as the object of analysis without fearing to do so. The Abhidhamma gives the individuals the tool to do just that. As Abhidhamma analyses the individual, desire becomes only one component and a process among many other components and processes which constitutes that individual. Desire is analyzed from its rightful place of not having any more or any less importance in the nexus of processes and components that constitutes an individual. The Abhidhamma analyses desire in order for the individual to be not afraid of it. What is desire from its own side? What are its different characteristics, functions, and influences? Can an individual have
the power within to intervene desire? How and what interventions can be made?

Considering these and many other questions related to the process of an individual, the Abhidhamma approach proceeds to empower individuals to develop the ability to comprehend the reality (individual) as it comes to be, that is, impermanence, oppression, and non-substantiality or interdependence of phenomena. Through such an investigation, an individual can develop, cultivate, support, and maintain equanimity within one which will be manifested in the social contexts. When individuals can embrace equanimity, desire-to-produce-for-no-profit arises naturally and effortlessly. A society of like-minded individuals will also then be a society in which individuals produce labor for no profit and also for voluntary giving.

The Abhidhamma explains that individuals operate from some desires which are profitable and not from others. The desires which are unprofitable are greed for self-serving purposes, aversion, and confusion or delusion. The desires which are profitable to individuals are non-greed, non-aversion, and non-delusion. The path to cultivate these qualities or desires does not come from external sources, i.e., societal and political norms and expectations, but from a commitment to freeing themselves from desires that oppress themselves. A commitment of this nature depends on how individuals understand the reality: What are the concrete actualities of an individual? How do these actualities themselves arise? How do they exist as conditioned and conditioning phenomena and how do they dissolve? What is the power within that facilitates non-craving and non-attachment? What is agency and how should this agency be cultivated? These are the inquiries, according to the Abhidhamma, which will prepare individuals for co-operative societies.
The first step in the path to freeing selves from oppressive desires is developing the right view about reality. That is the knowledge or at least the recognition of the fact, that there is oppression, there is an origin of oppression, there is the possibility of the destruction of that origin, and the way to that destruction. In other words, the individuals who want ("want" meaning one of the desires individuals must maintain) to liberate themselves from oppression need to have the awareness of the imperfections of their present state of conditions of existence and the desire to overcome them, of the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena, of the continuity of change of all conditioned phenomena, and of the awareness of non-substantiality of self. Second, individuals must have the right intention, a conscious intention founded upon the first step, to counteract the mental tendencies based on ignorance of reality. Third, individuals must have the right formulation of thought (discursive thinking) and right speech which is the expression of right thinking. Fourth, individuals must have the right action, to exercise influence over one’s psycho-physical mechanisms, and act in a manner that does no harm to any but yields welfare of self and others. Fifth, individuals must maintain right livelihood. The external life we live must be a life that promotes the welfare of one’s own self and the welfare of others. Sixth, individuals must make the right effort to control the uncontrolled emotional impulses. This involves suppressing the harmful emotions which have already risen and restraining one’s emotions from yielding to harmful impulses, making the effort to maintain the non-harming emotions which have already arisen in one, and also cultivating non-harming emotions. Seventh, cultivate the right mindfulness which is opposed to craving and clinging to objects: and eighth, practice that state of concentration which influences the
process of not generating the idea of self, identity, and existence of one’s own. These qualities, as are clear, do not spring from maintaining prime want of material conditions, but from an attitude of consciousness of reality and a commitment of individuals to practicing a path to liberation. When the individuals are liberated from oppressions within, they can participate in maintaining a society that is free of oppression, which otherwise will be only an ideal with no concrete path to follow and arrive from.

Summary

What the Abhidhamma contributes to feminist discourses is the following: First, with regard to feminist endeavors that attempt to equalize women with a standard individual (man), this theory informs us that there is no such standard individual (a rational, unified, a core of an individual) with whom women must spend their life time energy attempting to equalize themselves. Further, this theory informs us of the multiple elements of an individual and how the arising of these together condition the individual. Said differently, this theory shows that there is no predetermined sex/gendered individual but multiple elements and processes that constitute and are constituted by each individual. Investigating how women are not any less than an alleged individual (man) who is the norm and standard is to join in with the upholding of a notion or a concept of an individual that is not there to begin with. The standard individual against which feminist discourses attempt to build the notion of women itself is either a constructed or an abstract notion which has not been experientially understood. Therefore, the more time and energy spent on how women are not less is, (a) unconsciously or consciously accepting a notion of an existence of an individual,
taking that individual for granted; (b) inadvertently working to solidify, maintain and perpetuate that notion of an individual; (c) work in opposition to and against competing with a non-existing individual; (d) consolidating all thinking in that effort of competing, juxtapositioning, and standing against; and (e) by that consolidation denying the possibilities of investigating different ways of understanding what an individual is in terms of understanding women as individuals. Once the discourse situates itself in the idea that there is ‘an individual,’ or a ‘self’ but woman is not, then the discourse revolves around this ‘individual,’ or ‘self,’ proliferating thoughts on how to ‘match up to’ this imaginary ‘self.’ The efforts deceptively distances the feminist efforts from engaging in the investigation of the actualities of what one refers to as an individual or preventing them from asking the questions how is this ‘individual, or ‘self’ constituted? What are the internal processes, what are the internal elements of these processes, what is the nature of these elements themselves, and how do they work in combination with one another as conditioned and conditioning phenomena, how do these internal and external elements of the individual come to be and how do they work together? How does the ‘working together’ or ‘coming together’ of these elements operate and with what consequences? Because feminist discourses are either a response or a reaction to or in conflict with what is conceived to be the ‘norm,’ they remain attached to the ‘norm’ themselves. The ‘attachment’ to the familiar ‘norm’ holds feminist thinking in the cycles of proliferations and prevents them breaking away from that cycle to investigate something ‘new’ altogether. The Abhidhamma presents a way, first of all, to analyze and understand an individual before cultural, biological, political, or social imputations; second of all, to break away from the attachment to or clinging to a project
of generating notions of imaginary individuals; third, another way of understanding women as individuals, the notion of oppression, and the notion of liberation.

Second, it provides feminist discourses a different way from which to understand the ‘fragmented, continually changing individual, with multiple selves or identities.’ According to this feminist view, there is no ‘core’ of an individual in any individual. Individuals are continually fragmented and constructed with changing multiple selves by multiple social processes, discursive and non-discursive practices, prohibitive and regulatory practices contextually, and these fragmented individuals in turn construct the very social processes that construct them. It is these social processes or various discourses that ‘push’ and ‘pull’ these individuals in different directions, producing at the same time these shifting, overlapping, fragmented, and multiple identities. The individual is a "site of influences" from all other social processes that push and pull it in all sorts of ways. The identities of individuals are constructed relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political

33 Social processes refer to cultural, social, political, economic, ideological, religious etc.

34 Discourse and discursive practices refer to the acts of speech and writing in which dialogue is the primary condition. Non-discursive practices refer to the institutions and economic processes which are material and which give existence to discourses (where discourses exist materially). Discourse is assumed to be one form of ideology. As some theorists assert, the material character of meaning in discourses does not lie in the linguistic elements but the struggles which are exterior to discourse and the positions of struggles. See Macdonell, Diane (1986) Theories of Discourses: An Introduction in which she discusses Hindess and Hirst, Pechoux, Althusser and Foucault, among other valuable discussions, on discourse.

institutions" (Alcoff, 1995, p. 451). Alcoff warns us of the potential implication that the individual is determined solely by external elements and that the individual him or herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by these forces. Rather, the individuals are a part of the historicized, fluid movement, and therefore active contributors to the context within which their positions are delineated. The individuals, however, are active contributors at the conventional arenas of social processes being pulled and pushed by those processes. Are these the only ways by which individuals are being pulled and pushed? Are there other processes that pull and push the individuals? What does ‘active contributors’ mean? Who is contributing? Understanding the social processes which push and pull an individuals is one process. What about the process of the individual from the side of that process? How can we understand this "active contributor" from the side of the arising of that ‘active contributing’? These are some of the questions unexamined in feminist discourses to which the Abhidhamma provides a method for exploring. The Abhidhamma method deconstructs the individuals from its own side into its smallest components/processes which cannot be further reduced, analyzes how these components/processes themselves come to be and how do they in various combinations produce different other processes, with what effects which are also processes, how do we put all these processes into one unit and construct the notion of an individual. By an analysis of the psycho-physical complex, the Abhidhamma presents a way to understand the processes within an individual that push and pull

---

36 Alcoff discusses the identity of women in her essay. I am here extending her discussion to individuals since in this dissertation I do not make distinction between ‘woman’ and ‘man’ in any definite senses other than to distinguish one from the other and use these labels only as a mode of speech.
her/himself and to see the power within to investigate, understand and stabilize the push and pull from within so that the individual is able to interact with the social processes with the power within.

Third, the insight of the feminist discourses that there is no gender behind the gender expressions which performatively construct that gender, need to further that insight without limiting it only to a declaration that there are only gender expressions, and falling back on discourses to deconstruct the no-gender behind the expressions. While there is no gender behind the gender "expressions," these expressions come to be because there is arising of those expressions. The expressions are not either random acts or accidents but deeds that arise owing to the coming together of many other conditions from within as these processes within coming into contact with sense objects. These expressions are the "after glows" of the experience from which they arise.

Counting the expressions as all there is to an individual, and inventorying and recording these expressions in order to put forth the new and multiple identities of an individual without understanding and investigating the conditions that when coming together prepare for the arising of these expressions, is: (a) to leave out a crucial part of understanding the process of an individual, (b) to assume that the individual has no power to investigate the arising of expressions, and (c) to put the blame on, delegate the responsibility and authority to the social processes on this matter. The individuals are a lot more than just "expressions." Investigating the arising of expressions from its own side, without either taking the process of arising for granted or shying away from it, is crucial to understanding what these expressions mean in individuals. The Abhidhamma provides a way to explore the dynamic components involved in the "expressing" of
these expressions: how these components themselves come to be, how these components come together, how they are interdependent in producing the "expressions" of individuals. What does an investigation of the arising of expressions hold for individuals in understanding who they are in terms of understanding oppression and liberation?

Fourth, the Abhidhamma provides for understanding human psychology free of cultural biases and social interpretations. As has been described by psycho-analytic feminist theorists, the prevailing theories of human nature and human psychology are replete with cultural biases that condition the understanding of human mind-body in specific ways serving specific political and social functions. As they emphasize, these culturally and historically specific theories of human nature and human psychology distort and condition the understanding of human nature, oppression, and liberation. The Abhidhamma offer a way of understanding human nature and psychology making it possible for each individual, regardless of culture and social practices, to access and understand the elements and the workings of these elements prior to any cultural imputations; and allows for examining them within specific cultural contexts.

Fifth, the Abhidhamma provide a way of understanding consciousness. Consciousness, in feminist discourse (see phenomenological feminist discourse) is described as the ability to apprehend certain features of social reality as intolerable, as to be rejected, and that which transforms the way women think of themselves in a new light with a genuine conviction of personal worth. Consciousness seen in this way is

---

37 See Scheman, Flax, Chowdor and Dinnerstien among others.
empowerment and a tool for apprehending the contradictions in the social order to negate the hidden and subtle ways in which they oppress women and transform themselves to have personal worth. This leaves us with the question of what is personal worth? Against which standard? And do these standards assure liberation from oppression? How does consciousness facilitate the understanding of oppression and liberation? The Abhidhamma offers a way of understanding consciousness in a different way. First, consciousness, which is a continual process, is only one condition of a nexus of conditions that come together for its arising. Second, consciousness as a process is a tool not only for cognizing the objects which in feminist theory are assumed to be inflicting oppression on women, but for investigating other mental phenomena, like anger and despair, that arise together with it. Consciousness is a tool with which one can notice, examine, and understand the process of internal contradictions that contribute to the arising of mental phenomena such as anger and despair. Consciousness is also a tool with which one can put an end not to the contradictions in the social order but to the contradictions arising in the inner self owing to the inner processes that contribute to their arising. Consciousness therefore, according to the Abhidhamma, is the power that each individual has within them which can be cultivated only by the individual alone, without seeking anyone’s permission or approval to do so any time, anywhere, and without being in antagonism with any external sources such as the social order. This profound understanding of what consciousness is contributes to an understanding of not what the personal worth is but of the tremendous power individuals have within themselves for the appeasement of mental dispositions.
Sixth, the Abhidhamma presents an approach that analyses self from any positionality, i.e., gender, race, religion, culture, class or ethnicity, among other variables, does not make sense. Taking a gendered position, for example, as in feminist standpoint theory, is accepting a position that women and men have two different human natures. According to theory of things, gender is a derivative of primary qualities or elements of human beings. Gender does not produce, nor does it maintain, human beings. Rather, humans utilize the derived attributes of gender for human purposes. Understanding humans this way defies any division based on gender. This is not to deny the fact that societies have utilized the derivatives of human nature to ends of their own. But, understanding the fact that societies have utilized such derivatives to the advantage of one group over another and accepting that these derivatives are true realities of humans and therefore different knowledge must be generated about them are two different processes with different individual and social consequences. If humans are not gendered at the primary level of their constitution then generating knowledge about human nature based on the derivative level is a misleading endeavor. The Abhidhamma provides a way to disentangle this confusion and for individuals to know themselves differently from the other ways of knowing.

Seventh, the Abhidhamma provides for individuals to be aware of a path in which self-reflectivity is the primary activity rather than the acquisition of accumulated knowledge. The Abhidhamma allows individuals knowing themselves, fully and deeply without blaming, accusing, or criticizing the self. The individual the Abhidhamma analyzes is a wholesome individual who already has the power within to investigate and understand its nature, with no dependence on any external agent or process. The
individual as a phenomena exists in dependence with many other processes, which means, that there is no individual that exists other than various and multiple processes. However, knowing the innermost actualities of self is a task of one's own with no aid from anywhere else and the individual has the capacity to do this. The individual, in the Abhidhamma, is neither a victim nor dependent on any external or internal process when it comes to knowing self. The individual is the one who can know self without either a mediator or affirmations from sources external to self.

According to the Abhidhamma, the transformation of self is a process that arises as one gets to know one's self. Transformation is not a goal that is accomplished by setting objectives and sticking to them. It is a process that evolves without one knowing its arising. This is the profound effect one experiences when the power within is accessed and activated while walking the path of knowing. Transformation of self, in turn, effects the transformation of society. The transformation of society is not a goal that needs to be set, holding individuals to specific rules and responsibilities. The transformation of society evolves as a process along with the transformation of individuals. When the individuals understand what pushes and pulls them in different directions and where and how to make the changes necessary to be wholesome and peaceful individuals, the society that is comprised by such individuals also understands what pushes and pulls individuals in different directions and what changes are necessary to prevent that from happening to individuals of that society. Without transformation of selves, a transformation of a society might not be possible. The Abhidhamma presents a way of understanding the dynamics of transformation and a path which can be walked in order to eventuate transformation both at individual and social levels.
I would next like to explore the discourses of a group of women utilizing the Abhidhamma approach to demonstrate how they construct their identities, how they benefit from what they construct for themselves, what these benefits mean in terms of their individual and social ideals they would like fulfilled, and what else would be beneficial in terms of oppression and liberation/empowerment, and sustaining a collective community. In Chapter 3, I will present the geo-political and social background in which these individuals live and some feminist discourses that construct the identities of these women. In Chapter 4, I will present some information from the discourses of women themselves on how they construct the notions of their identities. In Chapter 5, I will attempt to analyze these discursive experiences of these women from the perspective of the Abhidhamma. I will then present brief concluding remarks in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In this chapter, utilizing currently available literature I will provide an overview of the geo-political, socio-economic context, and the discourses on women and gender in general within this context. The purpose of this chapter is only to orient the reader to the general context within which the women I interviewed conduct their lives. Therefore, I do not intend an analysis of the information presented in this chapter. Here, I will also provide a background description of the Saamstaan co-operative and its members, where the research was conducted. In chapter four I will present information directly from the interviews of Saamstaan women. In chapter five I will analyze discourse of Saamstaan women from the perspective of the Abhidhamma.

Contexts

Geo-Political

The country where participants come from is Namibia. Covering a land mass of approximately 825,000 square kilometers, Namibia borders Angola on the north, Botswana on the east, and South Africa on the south. The narrow strip of Caprivi links Namibia with Zambia. Two major deserts, the Namib along the entire west coast and the Kalahari on the east and north east of the country, cover a considerable amount of land leaving less land for agriculture and human habitation. The perennial rivers are found only in the north and south of the country, bordering Angola and South Africa. Situated between both north and south of the tropic of Capricorn, Namibia is a
subtropical country with an arid climate. The potential for arable agriculture is limited to the north where there is water. Agricultural potential in the Central region is limited to livestock farming, and in the south, to sheep and goat farming (National Planning Commission [NPC], 1996).

Namibia (which was known as South West Africa for 100 years before independence) was appropriated by Germany as its protectorate in 1884. In 1915, Namibia was taken under South African rule. A policy of indigenous land expropriation and the establishment of "bantustans" (reserves to which indigenous people were restricted) were implemented during South African rule. After 23 years of armed struggle and resistance to South African rule, led by the South West African People’s Organization, Namibia became independent in 1990 (NPC, 1996).

Socio-Economic

Namibia’s population is about one and a half million (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 1996, p. 5) with a population growth rate of 3.16 percent per year. Namibia has one of the lowest population densities in Africa, at 1.7 persons per square kilometer. Sixty eight percent of the population lives in rural areas with a rural growth rate of 2.0%; 32% of the population live in the urban areas with an urban growth rate of 5.5%. Males per 100 females are 94.8. Population under 15 totals 41.7%. Population over 65 totals 4.8%. Fifty three percent of the population is "economically active" labor (NPC, 1996, p. 6). About 55 percent of the Namibian population aged 20 years and above has no secondary education. Only 4 percent of population aged 20 years or above have tertiary education. Eighty percent of this 4 percent is male.
Characteristically, the economy of Namibia is of two contrasting extremes: a sophisticated modern sector which employs only a minority of population and an undeveloped subsistence sector which is the mainstay of the majority of the population. The economy is dependent on a few natural resource-based sectors which are, to a large extent, capital intensive and which do not contribute to increasing employment and reducing income inequalities. There is vast disparity between a small minority who have ownership and access to the economic resources and a vast majority who live below the poverty line.\(^1\) A small group of whites, comprising only 5% of the total population, controls 72% of Gross Domestic Product while the poorest 55% of the population who are blacks living in the communal areas control only 3.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product (Social Science Division, 1995, p. 54).

**Cultural**

Namibian culture consists of a diversity of ethnic groups. These ethnic groups include Baster, Caprivian, Damara, Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Himba, Nama, Tswana, and San or "Bushman" groups; English, German and Afrikaans-speaking whites; and several groupings of mixed descent referred to as "coloureds" and Tswana groups (ADK, 1978 & 1980). While whites who comprise the English, German and Afrikaans-speaking group, amount to only 5 percent of the total population, the Owambo ethnic group, which is the largest, amounts to an approximate total of 700,000 of the total

---

1 Conceptual issues concerning poverty, as it relates to Namibia, have been addressed in "Namibia Poverty Profile", a report for SIDA compiled and submitted by Social Science Division of the University of Namibia, 1995.
population. The next largest ethnic group is Damara/Nama followed by Herero and Kavango. The San ethnic group is approximately two percent of the total population. In the five percent of the white ethnic group, the Afrikaans-speaking group is the largest, and while the English ethnic group is larger than the German ethnic group, both these ethnic groups are much lower in numbers than the Afrikaans-speaking group.

All ethnic groups in Namibia speak their own languages. Some Namibians are multilingual. During the German occupation of Namibia, the operational language was German. During South African rule, the operational language was Afrikaans. Since independence the administrative and commercial language is English. All ethnic groups, however, speak their own languages in their households (CSO, 1996).

Construction of Gender in Namibia

Exploring the construction of gender relations in Namibia is no easy task for many reasons (Becker, 1993, Chapter 3). First, although the current Namibia is less than ten years old, its socio-cultural context has been influenced by pre-colonial and indigenous cultural norms and practices; second, the imposition of colonial influence changed the existing culture; third, the diversity of ethnic group composition affects the make-up of the Namibian society of women and men and their roles and responsibilities; fourth, authentic documentation of the indigenous traditions and customs is unavailable; fifth, what the present society refers to as "traditional" and "customary" are the practices that emerged in and from the colonially imposed social practices, to mention just a few barriers to the exploration. What could be explored in the Namibian context as gender relations therefore is incomplete in the sense that there
may be an already distorted view of what gender relations are and much information which would be useful in a comprehensive and comparative research of gender relations could be missing. This is not to suggest or imply that a full-scale, complete study of gender relations authentic to Namibian context, or any context for that matter, is possible, for the reasons that, a) cultures are in perpetual change regardless of whether there are external influences or not, and b) gathering all necessary and relevant information on anything, for any exploration is impossible.

Before entering into an exploration of gender relations in the Namibian context, one fact must be born in mind, that is, what current Namibian discourses refer to as "tradition" are customary law and practices, corresponding gender roles, identities and relations being considered to have subordinated women to men" (Becker, 1993). This use of the term has little in common with the indigenous custom which refers to "norms and practices existing in the pre-colonial period." Another factor to bear in mind is the unreliability of the sources. Gender relations in pre-colonial Namibia have been documented by two groups of authors: missionaries and explorers. While missionaries stayed in the indigenous communities, learnt the languages, and had contact with the people on a more frequent basis in order to Christianize and civilize them, the explorers passed by the communities and had infrequent contact with the people. The missionaries and explorers were men and had their own historically and culturally

\[2\] Customary law with regard to marriage refers to the administrative regulations imposed by the Native Administration Proclamation of 1928 of the South African colonial rule which is still applicable to "any person who is a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa." While there are differences between the customs of different communities, in a traditional marriage according to customary law, the wife's legal position is similar to that of a minor as is the case with the wife under civil law. (NISER, 1991, Discussion Paper No. 3, pp. 9-12)
specific views of gender relations and judged the indigenous gender relations from their own reference points. Further, these writers had contact mainly with the men of the indigenous communities and, therefore, what they recorded were the views of indigenous men on gender relations. What this points to is the fact that what is recorded as gender relations by the missionaries and explorers, is doubly distorted and could be far from what could be considered an accurate description of gender relations.

**Gender Relations in Indigenous Namibia**

**Division of Labor**

Social organization and gender relations of indigenous Namibian communities were inextricably related to the relations of production and reproduction (Becker, 1993). Where mixed structures of production based on cultivating and cattle raising were practiced (Ovambo community, for example), women did much of the actual cultivating while men assisted them with hoeing the fields. Young men were responsible for herding cows and milking, while young girls and young women assisted their mothers with cultivation in addition to the bulk of the work in the homestead. Weaving baskets and manufacturing clay pots were done by women. Building houses, manufacturing wooden tools, manufacturing big storage bins, and marketing the baskets and clay pots made by women was the work of men. In the Herero community, which did not cultivate land, women built houses, performed the dairy work, and gathered wild roots and fuelwood. Herero men erected and maintained the enclosures, and did cattle herding and wood-carving. Both men and women participated in sewing. In the Nama community, all economic activities were undertaken and managed by women (Lau,
According to Becker (1993), the communities she investigated practiced "a strict gender division of labor by gender though these took different concrete shapes. . . . However, women were not confined to reproductive work but were either the main or at least important producers of subsistence."

**Control of Resources and Labor**

In the Ovambo community, women had access to land for cultivation through their husbands who were the heads of homesteads. In a polygynous family, the husband obtained the right to cultivate the land from either the king or the district headman and allocated small pieces of it to the wives for cultivation. The husband kept the biggest piece for himself. Women cultivated their own pieces of land and took turns cultivating the husband’s land. Women kept the produce from their land for themselves. If they ran out produce for consumption, they could ask for a portion from the husband's produce. The husband was the 'owner' of the land and of the labor of the women, even though the women were the direct producers of produce. The descent was strictly matrilineal. In the case of the death of a husband, the property of the husband was inherited by his brothers, sisters, his sister’s sons and daughters, as well as his mother. The wives did not inherit any property of the deceased husband. The widowed wives had to return to their families with their children. If the husband divorce his wife, he was expected to give her a small homestead of her own, in which case she became the head of the homestead. The women of the king’s family, i.e., the mother and sisters of the king, headed their own homesteads.
In the Herero community, men, women, and children could be owners of cattle. The ownership of cattle was mainly through inheritance. The means of labor and the products of labor were owned by the respective owners; and women could dispose their property without much male interference.

In the Nama community, the owners of cattle were the male heads of family. The direct producers of subsistence were men. In the pre-Christianized Nama community, there were no definite rules of inheritance. Indicators however, suggest that they followed patrilineal lines.

Position of Influence

Becker (1993) points out that according to available documentation of these three communities, it is clear that the positions of influence were held by men. However, she cautions us to the possibility that the authors overlooked the consideration of women being in influential positions because the fact that women being in positions of influence did not fit their frame of reference. The possibility that queens might have governed in the Ovambo area has been suggested in recent historical research on these indigenous communities (Williams, 1991, mentioned in Becker, 1993, p. 66). Women’s remarkable influence on important affairs is clear from the role of the mother of the king in Ovambo communities. The king sought her advice and acted according to her suggestions in all important affairs.
Sexuality

The research into the sexuality of the indigenous communities points out that the early sources are not generally informative, whether from women or men. What researchers constructed as knowledge about the sexuality of women and men came from reading between the lines of early sources (Becker, 1993). There seem to have been differences in the indigenous communities regarding premarital sex between women and men. In Herero and Ovambo communities, premarital sex was practiced with different standards of responsibilities for women and men. In Herero communities, women could have premarital sexual relations with men, but getting pregnant was not accepted. In Ovambo communities, premarital sex was accepted but, premarital pregnancy was not accepted. In Herero communities, however, premarital pregnancy was not considered as a major fault of women and the women were not punished in the case of a premarital pregnancy. The men involved had to pay a fine to the family of the premaritally pregnant women. In Ovambo communities, while premarital sex was practiced, sexual intercourse was prohibited and if women became pregnant premaritally, it was alleged that the pregnant women, along with the unborn children, were killed (Becker, 1993, p. 71). In Nama communities, premarital sex (presumably with or without premarital pregnancies) was punished.

Gender and the Colonial State

The German and South African colonial states in Namibia operated from a base they brought with them, and which divided the society into two independent spheres: private (reproduction) and public (production). This ideology had an impact on the
nature of interaction between the colonial officers and the colonized and subjugated people. The colonial officers, who were the salaried individuals of the state and the bread winners of their families, regarded their interactions with the indigenous people within this framework. Colonizers' interactions with the indigenous people, therefore, was a matter between man and man. Women were in the picture only as those who depended on and were under the 'rule' of males. The colonized men were the subjugated laborers of white settlers and the women of subjugated laborers were those who reproduced laborers. The point is that the indigenous women were not the concern of the rule of the colonizers; rather, they were the individuals whose needs were met via the men whose needs were met by the colonial state.

With the economic imperatives being the prime purpose of colonizing and the colonized men being the primary source of labor for the economic activities of the colonizers, both Germans and South Africans resolved the appropriation of labor of men and women by "native regulations" and "labor regulations" respectively. In each of these means of rule, the colonizers utilized the existing indigenous cultural norms and practices of gender relations adding to the power of men over women and stripping away from women even the little control they had as direct and main producers in their own social organization. Men were forced to leave home for 'wage work,' who brought 'cash' and/or modern products such as radios, bicycles, or flash lights, and, perhaps unknowingly, they assumed a breadwinner status. Women were forced to remain home, in the 'reserves' under the rule of chiefs appointed by colonial rule, depend on their husbands income, and continue to reproduce future laborers and care for the sick and old. A shift of roles and responsibilities for both indigenous men and
women took place which was to last to the present day in Namibia. From the primary ‘owner’ of a homestead, men’s role changed to that of a ‘ghost’ owner and from the primary producer and the owner of the fruits of her own labor, women’s role changed to that of dependents and secondary beneficiaries of men’s labor.

**Gender in the Current Context of Namibia**

In the current context of Namibia, the term gender is understood as and utilized to mean a social process by which women and men are categorized into feminine and masculine and the assigning of roles, responsibilities, and resources based on the difference of sex. In *Women and Men in Namibia* (CSO, 1996), the term gender is defined as follows:

The word gender may be defined as a social classification of people into feminine and masculine categories. The difference between gender and sex is that the latter is the biological difference at birth while the former is a social creation emanating from an exaggeration of differences and suppressions of similarities between women and men. Gender is an outcome of cultural and social norms and practices in which a society transforms the biological differences in sexuality into products of human activities out of which sexual needs are stratified. For example, sexual division of labor which classifies women and men into two distinct groups. (p. 1)

The Constitution of Namibia provides against any form of discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic origin, religion, creed, or social or economic status (DWA, 1996). The constitution emphasizes achieving gender equality and the National Development Plan 1 (NPC, 1996) provides for the full participation of women in the social, economic, and political life of the country (p. 495). While the recognition given to the issue of gender in the national constitution and the provisions made in the
National Development Plan are undoubtedly a start in taking important measures toward achieving gender equality. However, all parties interested agree that transforming deeply entrenched prejudices in the minds of a society and translating a transformed notion of gender into practices has its challenges and demand untiring commitment to continue the project.

Literature on gender in Namibia is limited and is beginning to emerge now. I will present some information gathered from recent research carried out primarily under the auspices of international development organization, most of which is still in the form of research papers and, I presume, in the process of being published as academic documents. The information, however, mainly pertains to women and their conditions of existence. The reader is cautioned not to construe from this that the terms women and gender are considered to be synonymous with each other. To explore and present information pertinent to women when discussing gender is a personal choice I have made, recognizing that women are only one component of what constitutes gender (gender meaning how societies assign roles, responsibilities, resources and so forth based on a two sex-gender system as men and women).

Women in Relation to Economy

According to the Census of 1991 (CSO, 1991), working women above the age of 15 numbered 170,879, or 44% percent of the total of employed population in the country. Of the women who were employed, a large number (49%) were involved in

---

3 This view was expressed by officials, researchers, and community members during my interviews in 1995 and 1996.
skilled agriculture and fishery work. The next largest category (16%) was elementary occupations, followed by (10.3%) service workers. Women legislators, managers, and senior officials were 1 percent of the total. Professional women were 3.3 percent. Other occupations women were involved in included technicians/associate professional (6%), clerks (6%), and crafts and related trade workers (6%).

The number of employed women in urban areas was 47,252. The total number of men employed in urban areas was 78,353. Of this number 31 percent engaged in elementary occupations. The next largest category (19.9%) was clerks followed by service workers (19%). In rural areas, the number of employed women was 123,627, compared with 138,782 employed men. The largest category of employed women were engaged in skilled agriculture and fishery work. Women engaged in elementary occupations in rural areas were 10 percent of the total followed by 6 percent of service workers. Engaged in other categories were considerably lower in numbers.

From these statistics, one can discern that fewer women are employed than men. Further, women are employed in sex-stereotyped occupations. For example, of the total number of individuals employed as legislators, managers, and senior officials only 20 percent of the total are women (170,879) compared with 79 percent of the total of employed men (217,135).

Women in Relation to Civil Marriage

What is currently practiced as civil marriage in Namibia is based on the common law, which was inherited from South Africa (Hubbard, 1991). With a few exceptions aside, women married under civil law are in a position similar to that of a minor. A
"minor" is any person female or male who is under the age of 21 and is under the guardianship\(^4\) of a parent for all matters concerning the minor's well being. However, a woman who is over 21 and married under civil law, and in community of property or out of community of property without an ante-nuptial agreement, which grants the husband the 'marital power,' is subject to the marital power of the husband (Hubbard, 1991, p. 8, fn 23). "Marital power gives the husband the final say in important decisions of the family, the capacity to represent his wife in court, and the authority to administer the joint estate, including assets which do not form part of the joint estate" (Women and Law Committee, 1996). This means that the husband is the legal head of the family and has the decision making power in all matters concerning common life of the wife, i.e., where and how to live, how to raise the children, what to do with or not do with the property, and so on.

In terms of property ownership, the woman's (wife's) capacity is somewhat enhanced if the marriage takes place with an ante-nuptial agreement. What this means is that the wife and husband each separately have their belongings and debts that existed before and after marriage. However, as mentioned before, if the marriage takes place without an ante-nuptial agreement, the husband has control over the belongings and property of the wife.

\(^4\) "Guardianship refers to the power and control that a parent has over the person and property of a minor child; this gives the parent the authority to, for example, administer property on behalf of the child or to represent the child in court" (Women and Law Committee, 1996).
Women in Relation to Customary Marriage

Under customary marriages, a woman is the direct owner of her own labor (the produce) in some instances (Ovambo community, for example) and, in other instances, a woman has the equal right to own property as well (Herero community, for example). While there are regional variations based on ethnic customs, in customary marriages there is no such thing as marital power and community of property. In instances where a woman is the direct owner of her labor, however, she does not have the direct access to property. A woman can get access to property through her husband who, by his sex-identity as male, gets access to property. In the case of the death of her husband, neither the woman nor her children inherit the property which her husband initially allocated to her. Simply, the woman with her children must return to her own family for support which is, in almost all cases, a traumatic experience in terms of material needs.

Another type of customary marriage is the polygynous marriage which is potentially relevant to all matrilineal communities in Namibia (Becker & Hinz, 1995, p. 62). In a polygynous marriage, "a man could marry an unrestricted number of women consecutively. The marriage agreement was, however, a separate one with each wife; each marriage being negotiated and concluded between the husband’s and the respective wife’s kin groups" (p. 63). Even though this form of polygynous marriages are low, falling between 2-6% (Namibia Development Trust - NDT, 1994. The percentage is relevant only to the total of subjects interviewed in NDT study), polygynous relationships are found to be much higher in numbers. In polygynous marriages, a clear ranking of co-wives is visible, with the first wife enjoying the highest rank with enhanced power and prestige, and each wife had her own place (p. 63). Though living
in one homestead with other women of similar "rank" in terms of marriage status might have its own advantages in terms of extended family support for women for productive as well as reproductive labor, the fact that it comes with material and emotional costs cannot be overlooked. The attitudinal survey conducted by NDT, in 1994 illustrates that all respondents who knew about polygynous marriages felt that there was jealousy, lack of husband support, arguments, disease, and divorce as special problems women experience in polygynous families.

Polygynous relationships are not marriages in terms of customary law or civil law (Becker & Hinz, 1995). One man (a polygynist husband) who is married under civil law can establish other households in other localities without legal or customary recognition. Women who are in such relationships with polygynist husbands have no legal or customary support or advantages, not to mention the emotional aspects of insecurity of the relationship.

While the marriages and relationships last, the it seems women may materially benefit as one party in the arrangement. But, in every case, whether in civil, customary or non-civil and non-customary marriages or relationships, women are at a disadvantage for the reason that, in the end, a majority of women are responsible for the maintenance of children with or without the material support accruing to them as wives.

Women in Relation to Children

In the current social context in Namibia, women become mothers at an early age between 14-18 years (UNICEF/NISER report, 1991). It is a "custom" for women to have children at an early age "in order to prove fertility"; this appears to be a commonly
accepted norm in society (Becker, 1993, p.114; almost all individuals (women and men) I interviewed in 1995 and 1996 confirmed that this is a prevalent societal norm). There is positive social attitude toward women bearing children at an early age.

According to UNICEF report (1991), the fertility survey they reviewed indicated, that women in Namibia start bearing children at an early age and that more than 80 percent of the teenagers in the survey had already given birth; among the teenage group surveyed, the mean age at first birth was 16.3 years. The report also indicated that, regardless of ethnic identity, a large proportion of women prefer to have not one but a number of children, up to five on the average. A Household Health and Nutrition survey conducted by Unicef in 1990 indicate that in urban and peri-urban areas the average age women give birth is 20 while age at first marriage is, on average, 23.

Women become pregnant outside of marriage without any stigma attached and the rate of remarrying is high for all ages of women. Keulder (1994) reports that 57 percent of women of childbearing age (15-49 years) had never been married. On the average, by the time these women have reached the end of their childbearing years, they have given birth to five children. The average number of children borne by married women is six.

While a large number of women in Namibia are single mothers with 5-6 children, they receive very little or no support from the biological fathers of the children (Keulder, 1994). Where provisions are made for divorced mothers for child support, obtaining it is extremely difficult because of poor implementation practices. For the mothers who have never been married, the responsibility of supporting children falls into their hands, making them dependent on extended family support.
The material conditions under which women have to care for their children do not impact on their desire to have many children at early ages of their lives. What seems to important for the women is the social recognition that comes with having children, i.e., their proven fertility. More often, the young biological mothers do not spend time with their children, for the reason that they leave for wage work in urban areas. But, what is considered important by young women, is the fact that they have children. Material conditions aside, women in Namibia take pride in being mothers.

Women in Relation to Contract Labor and Migrant Labor

Contract Labor

While contract labor is no longer in operation as it was in pre-independent Namibia, the legacy it has left in society cannot be overlooked when studying gender relations\(^5\) in present independent Namibia. The contract labor system was the practice "whereby male laborers from the North, the Ovambo and Kavango areas, were contracted through an institutionalized recruiting system to work in the mines, for the railways and on farms in the Police Zone"\(^6\) (Becker, 1993, p. 94, fn 49). Although the contract labor system has been reformed since 1977, it has left social effects which can be attributed to this system.

---

\(^5\) I do not mean to either suggest that there were no other traumatic and lasting effects or to trivialize the socio-cultural effects this system has inflicted on indigenous communities in general. I am only confining myself to gender relations for the purpose of this study.

\(^6\) Police Zone refers to the area which was fenced off for white settlement and commercial activities of the colonizers. No Black Namibian including children were allowed to move about without a pass in this area.
Under the contract labor system, only men were recruited as laborers. Women were neither recruited as labor nor were they allowed to stay with their husbands in the places where they worked. This condition gave rise to many altered and still altering social organizations in the northern indigenous communities. The men's positions and roles changed from that of communal farmers and husbands or male family member to non-resident, wage earner, breadwinner, and modernized individuals who had access to modern material items. Women's positions, and roles changed from that of cultivator of land to plougher, cultivator, harvester, along with reproductive responsibilities with no help from the husbands. Even though some have concluded? that the absence of husbands enabled women to be decision makers in the day-to-day activities of the family, an opportunity which, according to those sources, was not available to them before the husbands left home as mine workers, the story is different from another perspective:

When the man went away for a long time, the woman had to assume full responsibility as the head of the household. She also had to work in the fields to produce food for the entire family, ... Another area of concern here is the difficult role that women had to play in family decision-making while their husbands were away. According to the customs, men made the decisions though in many cases they asked their wives' opinion. Under the contract labor system, when the husband was away for so long a period, he gave his orders to his wife through the mail or messengers. Anything the wife did at home would ultimately affect her husband. She therefore had to obey his orders though perhaps she did not adhere to them quite so strictly. ... As was pointed out earlier, the fact that women were landed with more work and responsibilities did not mean that they gained in terms of freedom and independence. No woman could ever challenge her husband for control of the family income and property. (Hishongwa 1992, 98-100, in Becker, 1993)

---

While men, by default, had access to cash and new status as workers or wage earners, women, in addition to the heavily increased work load and heavily increased responsibility of single-handedly managing the reproductive tasks, earned a new status, too. That status is that women came to be regarded as "not working," "just staying at home," and "housewives." Though it perhaps was the interpretation of the white masters of these men to consider these men "breadwinners," Becker (1993) mentions that the wives of contract labor workers did not think so. According to Becker, in her group discussions with them, women displayed anger and stated that "men do not support their families. Some wives stay and wait for the husband to come home after 12 months with maybe 20 Rands." Further, women had demanded that men should pay for children's school fees, hospital bills, and demanded that the government should provide for direct deduction from husbands wages to be sent to wives. While women lost their recognition as primary and direct producers of labor, men gained a degree of independence from family obligations, customary responsibilities, and became acculturated into "modern" social aspects of being "consumers" as the buyers of radios, bicycles, and utensils. Men's inability to support families, however, may not be entirely attributable to the fact that they became consumers. The low wages they received may not have left the husbands with funds sufficient to allocate for the families, after their personal expenses.

Migrant Labor

Though the contract labor system as an institution has been abolished, migrant labor is a live phenomenon in Namibia (NPC, 1993). Indigenous Namibians, men and
women alike, can now move about the country without being suspected of any illegality. In terms of labor, however, it is mostly all ages of economically active men who migrate into urban areas in search of wage work. Among women, however, it is mostly young women who migrate to urban areas in search of wage work, leaving the older women behind with children, grandchildren, the elderly and the sick to care for (SSD, 1995). Rural women’s situation is worsened by their young daughters leaving the children with older women of their families. It is evident that the men who are the fathers of these children, who themselves are migrant workers, do not provide for the children. Characteristically, extended families in rural areas have 8-10 or more people in a unit with older and younger children who are unable to be of help in field work and cultivation. There are also no opportunities for women to earn a cash income. Able-bodied women of the extended families, therefore, have to bear the brunt of migrant labor altogether, managing both productive and reproductive responsibilities.

Women in Relation to Land and Agriculture

Seventy percent of the total population lives in rural Namibia (CSO, 1996); 65 percent of all communal farmers are women. As primary and direct producers on the land, and the primary producers of labor for the consumption and the well-being of family members, rural women are closely linked to and maintain the closest ties to land and the human well-being. Producing nearly two thirds of total subsistence products, rural women are contributing to the economy of the country in a substantial manner and proportion.
Yet, rural women, most of whom are heads of households supporting three-generation extended families with any number between 8-12 members, do not have the ownership of or the authority over the land which they cultivate. The marital laws, customary laws, and inheritance practices systematically deprive rural women of the privilege to own, or have control over the land. Civil law subjects women to the 'marital power' of the husband who has the authority to make decisions on property. Customary law subjects women to the authority of the husband who by default has the right to ask for land from the village Chiefs. Inheritance practices subject women to the procedure, whereby, in the case of death of a husband, the wives and children have no claim over any property or the right to use property in most cases, but must return to their own families along with the children. Yet the men (husbands) who are drawn to market economy as low-wage workers continue to hold authority over the productive abilities of women, since, even in their absence, they make decisions over land allocation, sales if any, labor hiring, etc. (Girvan, 1994). They also hold authority over women's ability to acquire credit, seeds, and other related aspects of cultivation.

Further, research documents indicate that the rural women farmers are knowledgeable about the land and its temperaments, so to speak. Without invoking any romantic notions about rural women's knowledge about land as a "women specific knowledge," it is important to acknowledge that women who day in and day out work

---

8 This process was clearly explained to me by a Namibian associate with whom I had close contact with and who was working intensely with a network of institutions: family, people of influence in the specific communal setting, and legal assistance services in Windhoek, to find help for her recently widowed cousin with 6 children in northern Namibia. I am indebted to her for taking the interest and time to educate me on the "contradictions" in 'civil' law emanating from how it is used differently for different outcomes based on race.
with and on land through their entire lives, do know about the land they cultivate. Yet research publications indicate that, for the most part, rural development work designed in the capital and implemented in the villages, does not recognize this fact. Mostly, men design the development plans and men of the villages are consulted in the process.

The knowledge, presence, voices and participation of rural women, who are the primary cultivators of land for the subsistence of human beings in the Namibian context, seem once more to be lost in the shadow of men, just as they were lost during the time of the missionaries and explorers who consulted only men, to learn and write about gender relations. Instead of missionaries and explorers, this time, it is the development planners and workers of a new era.

Women in Relation to Head of Household Status

According to Census 1991, 40 percent of private households are headed by women in Namibia. The average economic standard of female-headed households is about half of, the average economic standard in male-headed households. Male-headed households own or have access to household durable and capital goods to a greater extent than the households headed by women, whether rural or urban. The female-headed households have a higher rate of food consumption that male headed households. The male-headed households have other consumption than female-headed households. The female-headed households are more dependent on consumption in
kind than male-headed house holds. A greater part of the total consumption of female-headed households is food consumption in kind.

Women in Relation to Occupational Categories of Domestic Worker and Farm Worker

In total there are 22,000 domestic workers and 33,000 farm workers in Namibia (CSO, 1991). Fifty-seven percent of the domestic workers live in urban areas and 43 percent in rural areas; 25 percent of all domestic workers in Namibia reside in the capital, Windhoek. Eighty-nine percent of the domestic workers in Windhoek are female and 11 percent male. Of the farm workers, 90 percent live in rural areas and only 10 percent live in urban areas. Eighty-five percent of domestic workers are women and 15 percent are men. Of the farm workers, 7 percent are women and 93 percent are men. Sixty-three percent of the domestic workers and 81 percent of farm workers have no secondary education; 24 percent of the domestic workers and 44 percent of the farm workers have no formal education at all. Tertiary education is very rare among both. While among domestic workers, female workers have somewhat more education than males, among farm workers males have somewhat more education.

---

9 Consumption in kind includes consumption of one’s own produce and consumption of items received by bartering, free of charge such as gifts and as payments in kind.

10 Domestic Worker is a paid employee belonging to one of the following occupations: housekeeping and restaurant service worker, personal care and related work, other personal service worker, protective service worker, domestic and related helper, cleaner, and launderer (CSO, 1991).

11 Farm worker is a paid employee belonging to one of the following occupations: market gardener and crop grower, market-oriented animal producer and related worker, market-oriented crop and animal producer, forestry and related work, fishery worker, hunter and trapper, subsistence agricultural and fishery worker, agricultural, fishery and related laborer (CSO, 1991).
than females. Interestingly enough, among farm workers, only women are recorded as having some tertiary education.

Among domestic workers, the most common language is Damara/Nama (41%), followed by Afrikaans (17%) and Oshivambo (17%). While 75 percent of the domestic workers speak Damara/Nama, Afrikaans and Oshivambo, 25 percent of the domestic workers are from the language groups of Caprivi, Otjiherero, Rukavango, San, Tswana and other.

Domestic workers engage in this occupation because it is the only job available to them. This sentiment was expressed by the majority of domestic workers surveyed in three regions of Namibia by the Legal Assistance Services (LAS,1996). It is important to note that no employee interviewed in this report has expressed good pay or benefits as reasons for choosing this occupation. Getting accommodation is another reason, for some, in choosing to be domestic workers. Limited or lack of education altogether is another major reason why individuals end up engaging in domestic work:

We are doing this because we are uneducated and cannot find other types of jobs. We have even tried to apply to the schools for cleaning, but we do not get the jobs. We would prefer another type of job, because we are tired of doing the same job every day. But this is all we have done. This is all we know. (Quoted in LAS draft report, 1996)

Financial and other related institutions categorize domestic workers and farm workers as low-income groups for the purpose of determining loan allocations for purchase of land and building material. The domestic workers have become aware of this practice.

---

12 The report of this research was in preparation in 1996. The draft of the report was made available to me by the Research Associate of the LAS who was primarily involved in this research.
through these institutional discourses and in turn identify themselves as low-income
group(s) or individuals. While "low-income" is a categorization imposed by various
institutional discourses adopted by domestic workers and farm workers the fact is that
the remuneration they receive is meager when compared with the remunerations of
other occupational categories. The average monthly wage of a domestic worker
reported is N$ 221 while the highest is N$ 1,150 and the lowest N$ 12.

Women in Relation to Development

Namibia as a nation recognizes the pivotal role women play in the development
of the country. The government of Namibia is committed to investigating neglect of
women and providing for the removal of barriers to women’s ability to participate in
development process. Research is under way to gather gender-specific information in
social and economic processes that hinder women from equal participation in the
development process of the country.

Eighty percent of the subsistence production in all of Africa is done by women
(Andima, NEPRU, date unavailable). In Namibia, 60 percent of all subsistence
production is done by women (Women and Men in Namibia, 1995). Yet, many
documents suggest that women’s production is not counted in economic activity data (FAO, 1995; Oppong, 1994; DWA, 1996). Further, resources for improving the
productivity and participation in the process of development are channeled to men,
leaving women unskilled and deepening their dependency on men for cultivation.
Outcomes of this development process for women take many forms: malnutrition, lack
of resources for educating women themselves and their children, and lack of resources
for subsistence production among many. Female-headed households, both rural and urban, are found to be worse off than men’s in terms of resources for maintaining their families.

Women in Relation to Political, Economic and Cultural Institutions

Prior to independence, women had been excluded from participation in senior positions in the government. After independence, with the commitment of the government toward empowerment of women at all levels of society, women are beginning take part in public office positions. Currently, women account for 6 of the 72 members of the National Assembly, 2 out of 20 government ministries, 1 out of 20 deputy ministers, 2 out of 18 permanent secretaries, 3 out of 22 under secretaries, 11 out of 70 directors, 16 out of 75 deputy directors, and 2 out of 7 public service commission positions.

In the private sector, not a single Namibian woman had been registered as an owner of company or a share-holder within a large establishment in 1994 (DWA, 1994). Some private companies have shown an increase in the number of women on staff. However, which positions women occupy in these companies is not clear.

According to the National Report on Women (1994), "the church is the biggest and best organized institution" in Namibia where women’s membership is higher. In northern regions, the active participation of women in churches, Catholic and

---

13 These statistics are drawn from the 1994 National Report to the 4th World Conference on women. 1995 FAO report indicated the loss of a woman in a senior position because she had to undertake a director position elsewhere. It is possible that now the situation may be changed.
Evangelical Lutheran churches in particular, amounts to 83.3% (NDT, 1994). However, while women remain the largest active group in churches, the number of women in religious leadership positions, including ordination as priests, is insignificant (DWA, 1994). The patriarchal attitude of some churches on marriage, pregnancy, and the role of women in religious leadership hinders the empowerment of women.

Other institutions where women's role in leadership is insignificant and which disempower women are the traditional institutions in communal areas. Traditional authorities are patriarchal in nature and are responsible for allocating land and adjudicating disputes. Based on this system of authority, women are entirely dependent on male members of their families to have access to land. Further, not considering some variations, generally, traditional institutions do not provide any inheritance rights to women.

**Women in Relation to Housing**

About 50 percent of all Namibian householders live in traditional houses. About 30-40 percent of householders live in "modern" housing. About 10 percent live in improvised ("squatter") housing. In the rural areas 75 percent of the householders live in traditional housing, with 25 percent living in "modern" housing. In urban areas, 80 percent households live in "modern" housing with only 3 percent living in traditional housing and 10 percent in "improvised" housing.

In rural areas "modern" housing is more common among male-headed households. In urban areas, 81% female-headed householders and 80% of male headed-householders live in "modern" housing, while 10 percent of female-headed
householders and 7 percent of male-headed householders live in "improvised" (squatter) housing.

In Windhoek, the majority of Black Namibians live in Katutura where all blacks were forced by political and economic means and circumstances to live prior to independence (Pendleton, 1994). Katutura has twice the population of the remainder of Windhoek and yet occupies a quarter of the land area, with a dwelling unit density 8 times higher than the rest. Sixty percent of all low-income households in Katutura, up to now, cannot afford the most rudimentary shelters available (UNICEF/NISER, 1991, p. 8). The majority of people in Katutura do not own property and are not protected by any form of eviction control legislation. "Thus they are open to the determinants of market forces, economics and the benevolence or otherwise of landlords" (NISER, 1991, Discussion Paper No. 10, p. 10).

Women, Oppression and Liberation in the Namibian Context

In pre-colonial Namibia women and men appear to have had shared responsibilities for production and reproduction. The division of labor which seem to have existed in pre-colonial Namibia defies the notions of sexual division of labor as currently perceived in feminist discourses. Women have been, and are up to now, producers as well as reproducers. Evidence make it clear that men have also been producers. Literature on the reproductive activities of men in pre-colonial Namibia is non-existent. The absence of information, however, is not suggestive of men's non-participation or insignificant participation in reproductive activities. Customary practices in pre-colonial Namibia are suggestive of and are interpreted as oppressive to
women. Looking at these practices with the insights of the 1990s they may appear to be so. However, while the social structures have evolved around men, whether the indigenous communities practiced these with intentions and motives of oppression of women is highly questionable. Further, if it were left to the indigenous communities in pre-colonial Namibia to describe their social practices and structures, what would have resulted is not something that any of us today can guess, for we would be hearing and seeing them through the lenses we wear, similar to the practice of the missionaries and explorers who documented these communities in the late 19th century.

In colonial Namibia, evidence clearly indicates that all indigenous people - women and men alike, were, in the eyes of the colonizers, the subjugated group, to be used for their economic (labor) and religious (Christianization) purposes. It is also clear that the genesis of a division of labor into production and reproduction and the division of social life into public and private spheres in the indigenous communities is traceable to the colonial state. Indigenous men were drawn to wage work in the public domain and women were left in the so-called private domain, "in charge" of the reproductive domain. Customary practices were altered by the superimposing of "legal" status via native proclamations entrusting indigenous men with the "power" over property and inheritance rights, depriving women of the position, status, functionalities, and recognitions they had had in their social fabric. Women became minors and the property of men and men became the legal guardians of everything. Yet, while men remained the legitimate owners of family and property and were away, women single handedly continued as direct and primary producers of subsistence, managers of their extended families, supporters as well as fighters of an armed liberation struggle of the
nation. To the women of pre-independent Namibia, oppression meant an interrelated oppression of colonial rule, apartheid, and oppression of women, which were not separate struggles. For Namibian women, Namibian men were as oppressed as women; liberation was a struggle they together had to fight to free themselves from the political and racial oppression of the colonial rule.

In independent Namibia, the image of women in the minds of people seemed to emanate from that of bipolar opposite spheres of production-public-male on the one hand and reproduction-domestic-female on the other of the colonial legacy (Becker, 1993). Namibian women are commonly thought of as "mothers" (DWA, 1995). What has been "traditionally" thought of as "good woman," who is "shy," "weak," "passive," and "doesn't speak up," as opposed to "strong" and "virile" man (Becker, 1993), has largely informed the notion of woman today. While there is a high incidence of single mothers and female-headed households nationally, owing to the indelible impression of housewife inculcated in the minds of people by the missionaries, women are caught up in the imagination of and the desire for being married and being a wife. Oppression of women is conceived of as a condition of existence arising from barriers imposed on women, hindering them from having equal access to political, economic, and societal resources and from participating in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself.
Women of Saamstaan

The Cooperative and its Members

The participants in this study are residents of the communities of Saamstaan cooperative in Katutura. All participants except one are women. All women except one are single. All with children, and all heads of households. One female participant had one female child aged 11. All other women participants had more than one child ranging from 2-7. All except one woman have had children from 2 or 3 biological fathers. With the exception of one participant who had only two household members including herself, all other participants had 8-11 household members living with them. The household members of these participants included themselves, their children, their grandchildren, and children of other relatives (nieces and nephews) and other relatives. In every household, participants were the only wage earners. All participants interviewed were within the age range of 26-45 years. With the exception of the male participant and one female participant interviewed, all other participants are employed as domestic workers. One participant identified Oshivambo as her language. All other participants identified Damara/Nama as their language. However, all participants were bilingual with Afrikaans as the common household language in some cases and the language of day-to-day activities in other cases. None of the participants mentioned English or German as either the language of their household or at work. All of the participants are members of the housing cooperative Saamstaan.

Saamstaan is an Afrikaans word meaning "stand together." Saamstaan is the name of the housing cooperative in which all participants in this study are members.
Background

Saamstaan Housing Cooperative is a self-help organization in established in 1987 to resolve the problem of housing of historically disadvantaged and low-income indigenous Namibians. Globally, 1987 had been declared the year of the homeless. In Namibia (which was then known as South West Africa), 1987 had been declared as "family year." Well aware of the housing situation in Namibia, Social Unit of the Roman Catholic Church, together with a social worker and two other volunteer professionals who were educated in South Africa, initiated activities which resulted in the establishment of the Saamstaan cooperative. Of 450 homeless people who responded to a call by the church and the volunteers for a meeting, twenty single household heads were chosen to be members of the self-help housing scheme. These individuals named their self-help housing organization Saamstaan.

At the time, site and service options and dwelling regulations imposed by the municipality prevented individuals from assembling squatter-type homes. Brick houses constructed in accordance with the standard municipal regulations were the only legal options for the members for Saamstaan at the onset. Under pressure to comply with the municipality rules, the members started their project by producing bricks for themselves while looking for plots where houses would be built.

The Members of the Organization

By 1996, Saamstaan’s membership amounted to 250 (Teklemariam, 1996). While 97 percent of the members are single parents, 95 percent are single mothers and heads of households. The majority of Saamstaan members are employed as domestic
workers. While according to one report, the highest level of education of the members is standard four (Teklemariam, 1996), according to another, the highest level is junior secondary level (Keulder 1994). Both these reports mention that a considerable number of individuals (33%) have had no formal education. The wages vary from N$150 to N$450 a month. Since their earning is less than N$450, members do not qualify for housing loans made available to low-income people by financial institutions. Virtually all single mothers received no financial support from the fathers of the children.

Keulder (1994) mentions that most often single women (female heads of households) in current shelters share the space with a live-in boyfriend who is generally unemployed and contributes nothing toward housing and other household expenditures. One differentiating characteristic of Saamstaan women is that they were either born in Katutura or had lived in the area for a long period of time.

The Groups of Saamstaan

In 1996 there were four groups within the umbrella organization of Saamstaan: the Old Group with a membership of 33, People's Square with a membership of 45, People's Force with a membership of 80, and People United with a membership of 92. The Old Group was the first to be established. Other groups were established in later years. Most of the Old Group members have their houses built. In 1996, 21 houses of the People's Square had been completed and occupied by members. Several other foundations had been completed already and the construction process was to begin shortly thereafter. People's Force and People United were paying for the land, since it is a requirement of the organization that the land must be paid off before commencing
the construction of houses. With the exception of the Old Group which had to comply with the municipality rule of "brick houses only," the members of the other three groups which started after 1991 were able to erect temporary houses with available materials, i.e., tin sheets on their plots, while paying for the plots.

Financial Resources

Initial financial support for the cooperative was donated by Inter Church organization for Development Corporation of the Netherlands and Freres Des Hommes of Luxembourg. The initial donation was to be used as a revolving fund where the members who benefit from the fund pay back in total so that the funds can be allocated to new members. Two other donor agencies have since assisted Saamstaan with financial resources: Oxfam Canada and Oxfam United Kingdom. The members have to generate their own financial resources through wage earning to pay back the loans for their plots as well as for building loans for their houses.

Administrative Structure

The Saamstaan cooperative has a small paid administrative staff who carry out some administrative support tasks. Its committee structure includes a Coordinating Committee, Financial Committee, Building Committee, Appeals Committee, Member Screening Committee, Fund-raising Committee and the Training Committee. The Coordinating Committee is formed every two years with 13 democratically elected members from each group. The other committees are formed by subdividing the Coordinating Committee. On the subcommittees, other people from the groups
participate as members. While the Coordinating Committee which is at times referred to as has the Management Committee, is responsible for the general activities of other committees and supervises the administrative staff, other committees have specific duties, as the names suggest. In addition to these committees, a Support Committee comprised of voluntary members from other organizations committed to assisting self-help organizations, i.e., the Catholic Church, Namibia Development Trust, Namibia Housing Action Group, Bricks Project, and others, provide moral and technical support to Saamstaan in an on-going basis.

Community Development Activities

Besides facilitating the individual members gaining their own plots and houses, Saamstaan co-operative is involved in the overall development of its members. Given the historical, political, social, and economic context within which Saamstaan emerged, its task is one of educating and training the members of the community on how to become and how to continue to be the owners of their houses - a responsibility for which the members have never in their life\(^{15}\) had the opportunity. Educating the individuals involves providing them with information on municipality rules and regulations on land tenure, building regulations, individuals’ responsibility in adhering to these rules and regulations, saving money and the procedures that go along with it,

\(^{15}\) This is based on the fact that (1) all members of Saamstaan were subjected to the property regime of colonial administration depriving them of any property rights and along with it depriving them of the know-how of owning and managing one’s own property; (2) in the communal settings they were used to communal sharing of property and not owning the property.
and payment procedures and related procedures. In addition, "team effort" being Saamstaan's primary strength in accomplishing the goal of building houses for all its members, education involves inculcating the idea of a co-operative and giving them the practical training on how to function in an organization as members of a collective. Saamstaan continues to ensure that members are provided with training in brick making, construction, and other related skills. The well-being of individuals plays a main role in maintaining the collective commitment to the co-operative's goal. Educating the members in literacy and health has been one of Saamstaan's recent goals. Community members are trained as community outreach workers to educate other members on HIV/AIDS and related health practices. Opportunities are made available to the members of the community to participate in national, regional, and international forums related to housing for the homeless and on issues related to gender. The community members are also encouraged, trained, and informed to be the advocates for establishing self-help organizations for low-income group housing. They are also encouraged to welcome any individuals or groups to visit and observe how the process of their co-operative works. All these activities encourage the Saamstaan members to be pioneers of the collective effort to improve the quality of their living conditions and to be exemplary leaders, achieving national recognition as a co-operative and as a community. Further, the members have the opportunity to participate in the definition of their community, and its norms and practices. The community members are, in general, most content with the development of themselves as responsible individuals at Saamstaan.
Conflicts

Even though the Saamstaan cooperative is based on the ideals of participatory development and commitment to a collective effort for all members to acquire a house of their own, it is not without conflicts. The conflicts are related to labor contribution, payment of loans; wanting bigger houses than the houses initially planned for, and interaction with other organizations16 (Teklemariam, 1996).

Once their own houses are completed and they have moved in, some members absolve themselves from contributing labor to build houses for the remaining members and the responsibilities of paying off the loans. Reasons given by the complacent members are many. Their refusal to contribute labor once they have moved into their own house derives from how these members comprehend the issue. According to their view, the requirement made of them is holding them obligatory beyond their capacity to contribute. Their capacity to freely contribute labor is nil because they have to produce that labor elsewhere earning wages to meet their own subsistence needs rather than freely contribute to build houses for the remainder of the members who have already contributed labor for them. With regard to paying back the loans, their view is that the primary reason why they were given the loans was because they were poor. While they now have houses of their own, financially they are not in any different position than the time they were accorded the loans, in order for them to be able to pay them back. On the one hand, the needs and wants of the family members have changed, and on the

16 This aspect was confirmed by the interviewers during my study 1995 and 1996. While the report of Teklemariam, 1996 refers to this instance occurring in the "Old Group" during my interviews this situation was mentioned as a problem in "People's Squire" as well.
other the cost of living has increased, but not the wages earn in proportion to increased cost of living. Therefore, their view is that they can not pay back the loans. The wages they earn are distributed, the complacent members insist, to different destinations that meet the families' needs with none left over for paying off the loan. While one group of members has reasons for their own conduct in terms of not contributing labor or paying back the loans, another group of members is left with feelings of betrayal, abandonment as well as the agonizing responsibility of finding ways to build their own houses. The initial agreement the individual members have made to the groups in terms of paying back the loans and labor contribution seem to have been made not because of an understanding of this "reality" from within, but as a response to an externally imposed set of criterion as requirements if the individuals want to acquire material conditions they wish to have. Once the expected material conditions are met, the members seem to direct their energy toward fulfilling other conditions of existence. The problem seem to emanate from a lack of a base for understanding sharing labor freely.

At the second phase of construction, after the first 21 houses with one room were completed, the rest of the members of the "People's Square" wanted two-room houses built for them. As the report states "This was a divisive issue that almost broke Saamstaan into two groups" (Teklemarium, 1996). Again, while some members seem to have committed themselves on the spur of the moment to conditions externally imposed on them because the conditions seem to be practical solutions to what seems like the impenetrable barriers of their life at one moment, they seem to lack a base for understanding the co-operative ideal. Practical issues involving these proposed extensions pose many problems including the altering of the loan amounts and other
logistics involved in clearing the concerns related to finances and labor of the individuals whose houses have been completed in the first phase.

The Coordinating Committee and the administrative staff of Saamstaan are in conflict with the role of Namibia Housing Action Group, which is a national umbrella organization for extending assistance in various forms to grassroots and self-help housing collectives. The conflict seems to arise from Saamstaan members feeling that their ability, skills, and leadership are not affirmed by the umbrella organization. This situation demonstrates the understanding of the Saamstaan group about their level of skills, abilities, and commitment in performing in their roles and the sense of affirmation they are looking for based on their view. The emerging of new identities of Saamstaan as a group and as individuals based on a sense of mastery of skills, and the unwillingness or the lack of ability of other well established organizations to recognize these new identities have given rise to a conflict.

Perceptions vs. Reality: Public Institutions vs. Members of Saamstaan

At the time Saamstaan was founded, which was in 1987, the only viable, legal option for housing was self-constructed brick houses in accordance with municipal standards (Keulder, 1994). No one was allowed to opt for a site according to their convenience, i.e., their ability to pay or to reside on sites which would not incur service or utility charges, e.g., water. What this meant for Saamstaan members was that, even though they were poor, they had to comply with the municipality regulations. They could not build houses with material they could afford nor could they build in places which would not incur service costs. Though these requirements have changed in post
independent Namibia which allows squatting in the periurban Windhoek, Saamstaan continues to plan for and construct brick houses as they did 10 years ago.

Frayne (1991) in a report written under the auspices of the European Economic Commission, states regarding Saamstaan, that "although the areas of need were correctly identified, the units under construction were of a high standard brick and mortar" (p. 45). The report further states "While the concept of a building cooperative is certainly a good and appropriate one, it appears that the present system of housing production is relatively ineffectual and inappropriate to the needs of the poorest and largest sectors of the population" (p. 45, emphasis mine). The ineffectiveness and the inappropriateness of the present system of housing of Saamstaan comes from, among others, the poor correspondence between action and need which, according to the report, appears to be the result of a lack professional input.

According to this report (Frayne, 1991), the expectations of the poor of Saamstaan "simply do not match" either their ability or that of the Government to pay for those expectations. The conflict between expectation of the poor and the affordability will therefore mean that the poor will not be able to procure houses in an expedient manner and perhaps they never will. The poor will not be able to acquire housing:

Until low income households . . . understand the reality of the economic and political situation of which they are a part, and understand that ability to pay underscores access to resources expectations will continue to exceed affordability. Moreover, as the population continues to grow, and ability to pay diminishes alongside a concomitant rise in delivery costs, formal housing will increasingly become something of the past. (p. 24)
Before independent Namibia, which was just seven years ago, the colonizers weighed the needs of the "natives" in urban areas and made absolutely sure to provide them with the subsistence "appropriate to their needs," that is, the minimally adequate housing with communal water supply. Since independence, urban planners are ascertaining the needs of the poor. Both are injunctions and circumscriptions of one kind or another on the poor, and the poor do not have a say in the matter, even though the matter pertains to them. According to the perception of the urban planners on the poor, being poor is not enough. The poor also must understand that they are poor and adjust their aspirations and material conditions to fit within the framework of being poor. This is important for the urban planners because it is only if the poor behave the way they should that the urban planners can do their work of city planning effectively. The poor on whom the "poor" is inscribed, has to be the "nobler" ones who has to groom their consciousness so that their thinking will be in tune with their condition of poorness, performatively manifest their "poorness" in speech and livelihood, and remain poor so that the public institutions can effectively plan urban areas.

Summary

The above is a sketch and a brief account of the geo-political, socio-economic and cultural context in which all individuals, i.e., young and old, socially gendered individuals, and a multiethnic community, in postindependent Namibia are attempting to map out their identities. The complexity of the mutual interdependence of multiple conditions involved in this process is enormous and, as one can see, any attempt to produce knowledge based on one social, political, or economic aspect and present
solutions to perceived problems contribute to minimizing that complexity. While the literature somewhat informs how identities of post-independent Namibian women have been and are being constructed, it would be a mistake for one to be conclusively convinced that this is how Namibian women themselves navigate through this labyrinth and construct their identities/personhood.

In the next chapter (Chapter 4), I will present discourses of a few women about their lives in a collective community. In Chapter 5, I will analyze these discourses from the Abhidhamma perspective to gain an understanding about their lives, i.e., construction of personhood/identity, gender, and collective labor process, in relation to oppression and liberation as conceived in the Abhidhamma.
CHAPTER 4

CONDITIONS AND INFLUENCES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF: VIGNETTES FROM MEMBERS OF SAAMSTAAN

In this chapter I will present how a group of women construct themselves by presenting vignettes from each of ten women who participated in narrating their own stories of the experience of themselves. Prior to presenting the stories, two things should be mentioned. One, each story is complex, and comprised of mutual and interdependent workings of past, present, future; psycho-physical complexes, feelings, perceptions, habits and consciousness; existences and dissolutions. Therefore, the vignettes I present are parts of wholes and not the wholes. No part is presented with a view of according a privilege to it over any other part. All parts of any story carry equal weight or importance in comprising that story. Two, given that the durations of mind moments can be so fast, and the humans are able to notice only some of them and not all, the participants themselves may not have been able to present either the details pertaining to specific moments in their stories, or other mind-moments that went by while they were describing one. Recognizing this fact, I must admit that any attempt to neatly organize what may be already partial contents of these stories into categories according to any logic will undoubtedly and artificially simplify the complexities and distort the experiences of the participants. If I am to not distort the contents, I must present these stories in full, as told by the participants. Such a project could not be accommodated within the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have arbitrarily organized the information into three categories, each with
The three categories are relationships, experience within the cooperative, and experience within their groups.

In presenting the stories of women within their groups, I have not specifically identified which group each individual belongs to. Rather, I have presented each individual’s experience within her group. While I believe that the descriptions of women’s experience within each group would unravel the conditions of existence which are specific to those experiences, my decision to present them in a more general form, i.e., as members of the cooperative, is based on three reasons:

1. Even though they are in geographically different groups, the women are primarily members of the cooperative. The division of members into groups is not based on a principle of establishing separate groups within the cooperative, but is solely based on conditions of existence which were present at the times these groups were established. Three of the many conditions are: the number of memberships, availability of funds by way of donor support and the sustained revolving fund, and the availability of land. In this sense, the divisions are based on the logistical aspects of the cooperative and bear no consequence on maintaining its continuation as one collective.

2. I am obligated to present information about these individuals in a manner that would not expose them to public scrutiny. Since the number of participants who participated in the interviews is extremely low, providing the details as to which group these individuals are from might jeopardize anonymity.
3. My purpose is not to conduct a comparative study of the experience of individuals between groups. The purpose of this study is to present the experience of individuals within the cooperative.

I will first provide a profile of the participants with general information. Then, I will provide the vignettes from each participant, as relevant, in the categories of relationships, experience within the cooperative, and experience within the groups, with brief commentaries. My observations as to what this information means, in terms of construction of selves and its relation to oppression and liberation will be presented in Chapter 5.

Who are these Women? Participant Profiles

The following individuals from Saamstaan cooperative tell their stories of who they are in this study. They are all mothers, domestic workers, and heads of households. Three of them are currently married and live with their husbands. Seven others are currently single parents. All but one have no contact with the biological fathers of their children, nor do they get any child support from them. In order to maintain anonymity, they are known in this study by names other than their own.

Marisa

Marisa is in her early thirties, mother of two children, domestic worker for thirteen years, and has been a member of Saamstaan for four years. One of her children is in early teens and the other below teens. She is now married for four years with no
children from her present marriage. She lives together with her husband and two children.

**Angela**

Angela is in her mid thirties, mother of five children, domestic worker for eighteen years, and has been a member of Saamstaan for three years. She has never been married. She lives with her children.

**Edwina**

Edwina is in her late forties, mother of seven children, domestic worker for six years, and has been a member of Saamstaan for four years. She is currently married and her husband, unemployed, and lives with her.

**Janice**

Janice is in her late thirties, a mother of four children, domestic worker for nearly five years, and has been a member of Saamstaan for two and a half years. She has never been married. She lives with her children.

**Lynette**

Lynette is in her early thirties, a mother of one child, domestic worker for nearly four years, and has been a Saamstaan member for half a year. She lives with her child.
Maggie

Maggie is in her late forties, a mother of seven children, long-term domestic worker, and has been a member of Saamstaan for seven years. She has never been married. She lives with her children.

Rendina

Rendina is in her late thirties, a mother of seven children, long-term domestic worker, and has been a member of Saamstaan for seven years. She has never been married. She lives with her children.

Theresa

Theresa is in her late twenties, a mother of two children, domestic worker for thirteen years, and has been a Saamstaan member for five years. She is married and lives with her children and husband.

Amber

Amber is in her late twenties, a mother of two children, long term domestic worker, and has been a member of Saamstaan for four years. She has never been married and lives with her children.
Marjorie

Marjorie is in her late thirties, a mother of seven children, long term domestic worker, and has been a member of Saamstaan for eight years. She has never been married. She lives with her children and grandchildren.

Relationships

Employer

Marisa recounts the experience between herself and her employer as follows. She was a single parent and working for an Afrikaaner family at the time she became a member of Saamstaan. She was sleeping-in at the employer’s place while she worked as a domestic worker.

Yes, I was unmarried, I was unmarried. I was actually alone. I got married in 1994. Since then I haven't yet slept in. In the beginning half of 1994 I met my husband and he was also very serious with the marriage story. And the people with whom I slept-in, I lived there for five years. And the people were not happy because I worked very long for them. I brought up their children for them. And then we came to a point when I talked to my family [people she worked for and slept-in with], they told me your work is your work, but may be your husband will give you a happy life someday. So, it is your decision.

Marisa sees herself as a member of her employer’s family. The length of time she has worked for them and the kind of work she did as a part of her job are conditions which make her perceive that she is a family member. Caring for her employer’s children for a length of time makes her feel that she belongs in that family. When it comes to aspects which are important in her life, such as marriage, Marisa wants to include her employers in discussions about it. However, that the employers chose to not involve themselves in her making decisions about her marriage and, further, that they
want to consider the two, work and marriage, as two separate components as far as they are concerned, makes Marisa feel unrecognized as a family member by her employers. It also makes her feel that she is left to make a decision about her marriage on her own.

And then from the day I decided to get married, the situation between me and my people, the people whom I worked for, did not become beautiful. They now everyday found fault with me and they always complained. Yes, they accepted the man. They accepted the man and the man lived there but they did not know that the man is with a marriage plan. But as soon as the man starts talking about his marriage plans then they did not want nothing. They wanted to hear nothing. [And when you got married did you go away?] No, no, the Friday evening. . . . I worked up till Wednesday. And they congratulated me very much and they gave me many gifts. They could not believe and Friday evening I wanted to, you know our tradition, us Damaras, we sit, us women do not move when we get married. And the Friday evening my husband came with his people to deliver things. That's how our tradition is. And these people for whom I worked, the man of the family I worked for, he came early about seven o'clock. He came out and told Salmon: "tell Martha, she must take her things and go on Sunday. We don't have place anymore for her."

Changing her status from a single person to a married person becomes a condition for changing relations between her and the employer from that of a pleasant one to an unpleasant one. On account of changing relations, Marisa experiences disappointment. Being ordered by her employer to leave the place where she has lived and worked for five years entertaining a thought of belongingness, Marisa finds herself as a person whose hopes are shattered and she is disappointed. She feels herself as a victim of betrayal of trust, a person frightened by her new responsibility, and her inability and helplessness in fulfilling her obligations. She considers herself to be a despondent person because of not knowing where to go. Lack of resources of her own to establish a dwelling, her husband not having the resources to establish a dwelling, the possibility that being expelled from the living space of the employer may mean losing
the employment as well are some noticeable conditions which contribute to her feeling of despondency.

Even though the relationship between employers and herself has now changed, Marisa is unable to let go of her attachment to them. She is emotionally drawn to the family of the employer, because, Marisa perceives that the employer’s family wants her to stay. This feeling in Marisa is strengthened when the employer’s family displays emotions, i.e., that they like her, they think of her, and they want her to come and work for them, toward her. Marisa’s perception itself becomes the object and condition which her attachment to them plays with, being pushed and pulled between wanting to hang on to them and aversion toward the feeling of betrayal. She vocalizes this play of her desire in the following manner:

Then I still wanted to tell you at the time when we went to fetch the things the people were very friendly, they didn't want me to go. They actually wanted me to stay. The children started crying. And I also cried and the children did not want me to go. The woman she also cried. And she just made it very hard on herself and she did not want me to go. And then the woman asked for me by the husband "Yes Salmon will you look after Martha like we were with her?" Then my husband he got upset and he said "So, is this what you think of me, if I won't look after her why would I get married to her?" And then he got upset and then he said "sit if you want to, I am just going to fetch my things, you can stay if you want to." And that time I couldn't stay and then we went. And the 2nd January, they looked for me again, the people for whom I worked. They didn't have anybody. Then they came to look for me again. Then they asked me to come iron for them. No . . . I didn't have work, but, I really didn't want to work at their place. Then I told them I got work. I didn't want these people to drop me again.

No, I wasn't scared of anything. But I was very sad. I also didn't know that they would do that to me. Then I actually said to myself, because you did that to me, yes, yes, I wanted to give them a lesson. I am ironing for them on Saturdays now. They really looked for me.
Over a period of time Marisa in her own mind had developed attachment towards her employers and also other material conditions within that context. Marisa seems to have clung on to these conditions as if these conditions would last as they are and would bring her lasting satisfaction and happiness. When everything changes and owing to these changes there arise in Marisa unpleasant feelings, Marisa begins anew to construct the world in a way that she could comprehend what is happening. Marisa now considers herself as a person who is betrayed by her employer, or the employer has done something to her which disrupts the trust she had with them and the hopes she had developed based on that imagined trust. She considers herself to have been a victim who is victimized by the employer. She laments the loss of the trusting and loving relationship she had with the employers. She rebels within herself, giving way to the arising of aversion toward the employer. The arising aversion in her simultaneously informs and preps her whole psycho-physical complex, equipping herself with actions she would take if her employer asks her to work for them. And when the employer comes to see her and extends an invitation for her to continue work at their place, Marisa readily declines that offer. The declining of the offer, as she describes, is not based on whether it would or would not serve her need of earning an income, but, on the unpleasant feeling of aversion toward the employer, wanting to reject, wanting to protect herself from being hurt by them. She constructs her thoughts not based on her need for wage work or a choice she is making between work opportunities, but her intention to demonstrate to the employer that she will not make herself available to them, and she will not be victimized by them again.
While Marisa is of the opinion that working for white people serves the individuals’ material and emotional conditions, such as accommodation, wages, and sometimes a sense of belongingness, it also serves to limit the freedom to have time to participate in other rewarding activities such as education and training, conferences, be they regional, national or international. Responding to a question about who in Saamstaan utilize the opportunities for such participation, she makes the following observation:

Those people who went there also work at Saamstaan as part time. They don't have these white people's work. They work at Saamstaan and that's why they are always free. [Since they don't work for white people and work at Saamstaan, they are given free time to go to conferences].

She sees herself as a wage worker who is held up by her work obligation to her white employer and does not get free time to participate in other personally rewarding activities.

Family

Marisa. For Marisa, family means different audiences. The people she works for, her kin family, her husband’s family, and Saamstaan, all serve the function of family at different times for different purposes for her. What follows outlines this terrain and how she identifies herself through this terrain.

Yes, they told me that on Sunday at 8 o'clock I must go and fetch my things. But I phoned them and told them I couldn't come at 8 because I want to go to church. And they said OK you can come any time. But after church there were still questions to be asked. That is our tradition when we marry. After we were asked all these questions, the grown ups sat and talked. They said look she worked all these years. She worked for these people all these years and we can really feel the people really loved her. That's what my family said to the people (relatives of both
sides). So, Salmon, it is because of you that Martha lost her job. It is because of you that we don't have a place for her any more. You must make a chance now. You must make a plan that Martha gets a roof over her head. And then Salmon's sister said we can go and live with her. Then we went to his sister's place with her. [For how long?] That was December and January. We finished living there for two months. Then the problems started. You know if you are married, the brother and the sister, if they love each other, then the problems just come its Marisa, its Marisa. Then there was a little bit of fighting, and that I also didn't have work, but I prayed very hard really. But I prayed very hard really. Because the weekend me and his sister nearly fought and that Monday I went to work. Oh no, I didn't go to work, I didn't have work. He went to work, but, I just went to the office (Saamstaan) and told the people and they congratulated me. And then we talked we are done now. And there I heard old Gerald, "please don't be upset. Your plot is nearly done. May be one of these days." Then I told him about the problem I have at that house. Then he said don't be upset. We will make a plan and we will also help you that as soon as you get your plot we will talk that the people will give you a place. But the plot is nearly done. Then I felt so happy that day.

Marisa is an individual who remains in the custody of one or the other family. From her own kin family she moved to the family of her employer, then to her own kin family, then to her husband's family (her husband's sister's family), then to Saamstaan. Marisa is a person who has ability and skill in communicating with others about her needs, what she can do and cannot do. For example, when she cannot meet the time lines imposed on her for moving her belongings out of the dwelling at the employer, she picks up the phone and informs the employer. At the same time, Marisa considers herself to be a person who is in custody of the audiences she perceives as her families, who would speak on her behalf, who would make decisions on her behalf, and make arrangements for her life. When she was thinking through the details of her getting married, Marisa wanted her employer to make some decisions for her. When the marriage as a condition gives rise to a condition of losing the possibility of living in the
same place where she has lived for five years, she depends on her kin family to be the
custodians who will resolve the issue by talking about it with her husband. She depends
on her kin family to validate her as a person who had a dwelling, but, loses that
dwelling owing to her marriage. When the grownups of her kin family make statements
about how long she had worked for her employer and that they know that the employers
loved her, she considers herself as a person who had the right beliefs and a person
whose beliefs are recognized, validated, and affirmed. The conversations between the
grownups also are conditions for her to see herself as a person who is absolved of any
wrongdoings for losing the love of her employer and the roof she had over her head.
This further solidifies a notion of herself as a person who should be provided for by her
husband. Since her husband does not have the material conditions to establish a
dwelling right away, Marisa accepts to be in custody of the sister of her husband who
offers temporary dwelling for her and the husband. When problems start there, Marisa
finds herself in the custody of Saamstaan, who would bring hopes for her future, in
terms of being able to establish a dwelling.

Husband/Man

Relations between self and husband or a man is a condition which influences
women’s notions of who they are. In the same vein, having no relations with either a
husband or a man is also a condition which influence women’s notions of who they are.

Marisa. Between herself and her husband, Marisa considers herself to be
subordinate, but she recognizes herself as the person who secures a plot of land and the
prospects of having a house for herself and the family, i.e., her two children and her
husband. Material conditions apart, in a spiritual sense, she sees herself as someone who should be protected by her husband who, according to her, is the head of the household. She separates one from the other, the legal owner of the plot and house, and the head of household. While she asserts a position and an identity as the owner of the plot and the house, she considers her husband as the head of household and herself as the person to be protected by the head of the household. She describes this position as follows:

Look how must I answer this? My husband is still the head of household. My husband is the head of the house. But actually I do everything. For example, men are also cut off from Saamstaan. And that's why most of the people in our group its just me and only another woman who is married. Everybody is unmarried. Yes we are only three. The three of us in our group and other women we are the heads of households. But in the other groups there are many people where the men understand that you are the head of household. And Saamstaan says that we have nothing to do with it because we don't pay for your houses. Even my husband said I will buy food but I won't pay for your house. It is your house. I won't pay for it. So that is actually the problem that we have got with the men.

We have this problem with men because the husbands don't want to help the wives, because they know that they will leave the house any time. On my side, I also had such a problem but I quickly called the Pastor and the Pastor told him about the problem. He told my husband what his duties are in the house. He is married and he must help me. Because you are married in the house even if Saamstaan says you are the owner of the house, your husband is the head of the house. Yes, that's what I am saying, my husband is the head of the household. I am not saying that it is his house. On the paper it is mine. But, we must always respect the men. So, if anything happens here he must answer. Because he is the one in the house who should protect us. Yes, the man in the house is the one, how shall I say, who should protect us from harm.

Here in Namibia, we men and women are equal in everything that we do. But the Bible says that woman must be below the man because by his duty he protects us. So that is what I am saying. We are equal when it comes to making decisions and doing things together. And I am the owner of the house. But, actually, my husband is the head of the household.
Look he must, say, for example, someone comes here. I am at home. And the man comes and he does what he does want to do in my house and it is just me alone and my husband isn't here and that man does what he wants to and if my husband comes I tell him listen Thomas was here and he went so on so on, then he will get up. Why we say he is the head of household is because he protects us. How must I say if a person comes here and does what he wants to and say for example someone comes here and you don't need protection.

Marisa sees women as maintaining continuity in the household and men as transitory. However, she sees herself as someone who is not entrusted with the responsibility of protector. Being in the role of the protector makes the person the head of the household. Even though she does "everything," she is not the head of the household. She is clear and quite comfortable about her position, which is that of the owner of the plot and the house, a position entrusted to her by the cooperative. For her, being the owner of the house does not equal being the head of the household.

**Edwina.** Edwina does not divide herself between a man and her ambition to have a house for her and the children. In addition to securing a house, she also gives guidance to her children. These two activities in combination make her the head of her household. She takes a pragmatic approach to ascertaining who she is within the relationship with her husband and within the household. She does not consider herself as a person secondary or subservient to the man/husband. She is clear about her position and identity within her household:

I don't know about whether it has to be the man or woman who has to be the head of household. But, for me, I will talk as a woman, as a head of household. It is important to have a head in the house to keep these children on the straight road. Because really, there has to be someone to guide the children. Whether it is a woman or a man, someone better be there in a house as a head.

I am head of this household because I stood to build this house, even though the man is there. (She is married and has the husband living
with her. He is unemployed. He is also not the biological father of her children). In the first place, as a woman with children I must see to it that I must get these children together. And teach them how to behave themselves. The second point is that I see all of these children must go to school, go to church. I must also teach them how they must be in the house and also outside. So that is this thing I must look after the children, I must teach them the right line, road.

As I get up from here to go to work I must make sure that I have something to give to my children. And I must also be able to buy cloths for them and see to it that they get a roof.

**Angela.** Angela, who is a single parent of five children, is ambivalent about her experience if she enters into relations with a man because she might have to be a little bit below the man.

As we first talked about the question of being the boss, then the man will want to be, he will want to be a little bit higher than me, then it will may be not for me nice because I am used to this, this step of living alone, walking alone. May be that will change?

Like these three first children of mine their father is married already and the two's father he comes and goes. He also asked me about that story of marriage already. Then I just got the idea, what about my other three children? Because I see with the other people how things change in this living of today, the thing goes smooth and smooth and if comes to the marriage then that man suddenly sees that child is not his. It is now that scaredness that, that man when he told me about the marriage then that thing just stood in my face but I haven't come to my decision yet.

Look for example, I am not married and I am the boss of my house and I know they are my children and I give to them like I want to and I am free with them. But if the man comes then the man is the boss. And they know that with us black people I am not married, but I see in the community, then the man sees they must also have a say in the house because they are the bosses. And these three children, all five they are used to it, to me. If I say this then it's that. And then maybe I don't say that it will happen like that but, I see in general. And then may- be it won't be go well with the three children of mine and the man.

As she perceives, the unpleasantness of the experience will be compounded by the condition that she is the biological mother of the children and the man will not be the biological father. The man being the head of household and the woman having to be
the subordinate person in the house is something that Angela learnt from her own
parents and from the community.

Look like certain men, they don't treat the children well, but not directly
like that, but you are a mother and you know how the things go a little bit
change.

Look I hear always when you are married then the man must be
the head of the household. I hear it in the community and I also heard it
from my mother. My father was higher and my mother must come under
and then comes us.

Just like, when was it at about ten o'clock on the Afrikaans radio,
there was one reverend who talked about the men because Sunday it's
like fathers day. Now, that pastor also said that the men have been
created first on earth. And they have been given the right to supervise
the world and the men even though they don't support the children their
duty is their families and their women to supervise them. That's why like
the Bible tell us men are the heads of the households. Because the Bible
says that I believe that but us people in the world things change. The
world's people change the things in the Bible as well. Now that where
the woman like me, look from the beginning I am the man is the head.
Now like my children, they don't have a father. Now where will these
children go? And so the men (brag), how shall I say, their duty, they
break it down themselves, but it is not God that meant it like that. God
made it that he must be head over everything. But God supervises. And
because they break down rules, now woman must be the head of
household.

Angela is reinterpreting what the relationship between a woman and man is,
based on her experience and a reinterpretation of the relationship between God and man.

She is quite comfortable with her being an equal with a man, and, further, assuming a
position of a head of household, while in a marital relations with a man.

Janice. Janice, a single parent of four children, who clearly considers herself to
be the head of her household, finds it difficult to figure out how this notion of herself
might be affected if she enters into marital relations with a man. The difficulty arises
from how she understands the marriage to be dictating the ownership of property.
That's a very difficult question for me. But at that time maybe life would change. I don't know. (Emphasizing with the tone of her voice) But, as long as it is still my house, as long as the house is on my name, I can still be the head. But if a man comes and gets married to me, in that case, then I must give everything to him. Look if you get married, then everything is on the man's name.

Once she is informed that marriage does not necessarily means her having to give up the right to own her property, she is swift to assert herself:

Isn't there such a thing? OK, OK... OK, OK, OK, OK Oh... ho. OK, now it's a different case. OK, now if he comes and gets married to me, then the house is still on my name, then I will be the one who must say this and this and that. Then I will be the one who gives out orders.

Janice is clear that the person who owns the house is the head of the household. Being the head of household is not something that which is entrusted to anyone based on a sex/gender system.

If the person, for example if I get a husband, and the house is his, then I understand, he has got everything. But as long as the house is on my name and he came, he came, and its not me that went, and he came, I will still be the head of household because it's me who give out the duties. Because if I go to his house then I must follow his rules. Because each person has his own law in his own house. I also got my laws in my house.

**Maggie.** Maggie thinks that a man should be the head of household because that is what she learnt growing up. But, in her reality, she is the head of household. That is because she does not depend on anybody for securing a place for her to live and bring up the children. She does it all by herself, on her own.

I think that a man should be the head of household. I don't know why. I actually grew up like that. The man has always been the boss. But, now I look at myself, I struggle on my own in the house. And the woman also can be head of household. I am already a head of household. Even if a man comes to the house I am going to be the head of household. I do everything, like I found a plot myself and I paid for it, and I am on my
own plot and struggle on my own with my children. So, I am the head of my household.

**Rendina.** Rendina, a single parent, is the person who pays for the house, provides for the family, and makes all decisions around the development and welfare of the family members. She is aware of this fact and is proud of herself for being able to manage the family independent of the involvement of a man or a husband. The status or the title head of household, however, is something she entertains with novelty and curiosity rather than a description or an identity of herself. She perceives that her present status of being the owner of the house might get in the way of equal relations between a man and herself, because she believes that her being the owner of the house does not determine who is the head of the household, as she has learnt in church. While she is the owner of the house, a man, in another way is the boss of the house. Where man is the boss of the house, she considers herself a subordinate person.

(When asked the question whether she considers herself as the head of household she responds with spells of laughter, long and short intermittent.) Yes . . . I consider myself as the head of household . . . laughter . . . laughter . . . Oh . . . ho . . . When I am alone like this I am the head of household. But, if the man (father of the children, or another man into her life) comes then I have to ask him first what can we do in such cases when there is a problem, if we need money and things like that. We need to talk about and see. (Laughter . . . Oh . . . ho . . . laughter . . .) Because I am the owner of the house the man may not want to talk with me about such things . . . or I don’t know . . . or I can wait until he asks me about the problems we have about money and things like that . . . or I don’t know what is the order . . . All the payments for the house is made by me. So the man is not the owner of the house. So, I think in this matter he might be afraid to say anything he wants or what. I don’t know (laughter . . .). Because he might feel I want to kick him out or what I don’t know. (Laughter . . . Laughter . . .).

Man and woman in the house must work together in the house. They must cook together, do the washing together, think about things we need to do for children together, talk about things together and so on. One should not boss the other one around (laughs . . . Yo . . . ho . . .)
But, man sometimes is difficult. ... They don’t understand. And when
the woman is the owner of the house the man doesn’t want to have to do
anything with it. That is the thing.
I pay for the house, I pay for my children’s school, clothes and
for water. So I am the one who makes all the decisions about all these
things. But, man is also the boss in other ways (laughs ... Yo ... he
... ) That is what we learn in church. He is the boss of the house.
So ... I don’t know these things ... (laughs ... ).

Lynette. Lynette, a single parent, sees herself as a person who is securing a plot
and a house for herself and her child. She recognizes that the organization recognizes
her as a head of household. But, when it comes to relations between a husband and
herself, she is quite certain that she will assume a subordinate position. The material
conditions she personally secures for her and the child do not necessarily make her an
independent person in the realm of relations between a husband and herself. Lynette is
a willing person to accept being dependent and a subordinate in the property of a
husband. Equality and independence are not the qualities she wants to identify with, in
relations between a husband and herself.

I am not married now. I pay for the plot and the house. Therefore I am
the head of this household. This is something that they (Saamstaan)
named. But this doesn't mean that one day I will not meet someone. Say
for instance the place is mine, and the husband, if I get married to a man,
then the man doesn't have anything to say about that. He can't say
anything, he doesn't have anything to say here. I so much enjoy it when
we talked to the mothers and hear that the men does not stand on their
heads and say it is the man’s place. That I can't talk in the house and say
something because I am not with a man now. But, the man is the boss at
home. By us Brown people it is like this. You must have respect for the
man. Even if he is not the owner of the house, I don’t know how. Such
talks were also here last time.

The staff said that Saamstaan is actually for women. That’s why
this organization is instituted. The divorced women who lives and stays
alone, who struggles and sometimes the husbands left the women or
chase the women out of the houses and lived with their other wives.
From there, Saamstaan was developed, to help women have their own
places and to bring up their children. Saamstaan don't let the men come
say anything there. That's what they said. But, there is a problem there, do you see?

Look people like me, I will also, maybe, one day find a husband. OK, if I say so our country is now like this, you both have equality, to talk in the house or so, understand? I cannot say that to him because I am married. When I am married to a man then it is done and he is the head of household. I am the owner of the house, but the man is the authority in the house, that’s that. One has to know that - that is what the Bible says and what I also know.

Lynette is concerned about the prospects of relations between herself and a husband, and is already developing coping mechanisms:

That is true, that is what I always tell other people if we got these groups then we talk about it. Then I tell them if the man comes, and the man comes and gets married to me, I am going to tell him this house is Isobella’s house. Isobella is my daughter. I won't put this house in the man's name. I will tell him that this house is my child's house. I will tell him to look for a house and then we go out. But this house is my child's and everything is on her name. It is better if he dominates in his own house and not in my house.

Even though she would be a subordinate in her husband’s house, she also believes that the man and the woman must work together within the household. Working together, however, she limits to the matters relating to money.

Yes I think so even if it is his own house we must work together. Everything that's done we must know that if the money comes in we must know how to work with the money. It mustn't be one that bosses over the money.

Marjorie. Past relations between men and herself have conditioned Marjorie's perception of herself as a person who wants to, and who is, managing the affairs of her life independently. She has let go of the old view of relations between man and woman within a household and assumed a new view and a new personality for herself.

However, the new personality of herself seems to be operational only within her household. Like others, Marjorie is willing to be bossed by a man in his own house.
In my house I am a mother who looks after my children and sees that everything is OK. If a man comes into this house he must take over all the responsibilities of looking after the affairs of the house. That was what the man is supposed to do in the olden days. But now if a man comes into my house he can’t be the one who takes over things in the house. I won’t allow it. He must rather go look for a house for us to live because this house that I am building is my children’s not his. If a man comes into my life and wants to live in this house as the boss I don’t think we can have an understanding. If he wants to be the boss, then he must have his house where he can be the boss, even if it is just a shack. Managing my business of my children and myself, I want to do it myself without the interference from a man. This is a choice I have made for myself because I have experienced this before. As I have learnt now, I have seven children, if I take another man again that must come live with me under one roof then I will sit with another child. Everything changes all the time. Four of my children are from one father, two are from another and one is from another. I was never married. But the men just want to be with me and I have to just be making babies for them. After children come men just leave.

Amber. In Amber’s view, there are several considerations which she takes into account in terms of maintaining relations with a man. The marital status, what a woman and a man want for himself and for herself from the relationship, the inevitable consequences for the woman in a relationship with a man, the liberty that a woman and a man have in making choices and decisions concerning reproductive activities are among those considerations. She describes herself:

My boyfriend, the father of the two children, lives in town with his family. He works for the Telecommunication and Transportation in town. I cannot go and live with him because it is a fundamental principle that I have to be married to him before I can live with him. A woman does not live with a man unless she is married to that man. We are not married. So I don’t want to live with him. If I live with him I will have more children and I will also still not be married. Now that I don’t live with him I can choose not to have more children. If I live with him he will not understand and will insist on having more children and I have no way of stopping that. So I like to live alone with my children. That way I can make sure that I don’t have more children.
While Amber knows that if she chooses to live together with a man without being married she will end up having children and being abandoned, she does not identify herself as a victim of this process. She considers herself as an individual who has and can make choices about how she wants to conduct herself in relationships with men.

People from Whom They Rented Rooms

Relations with people from whom women have to rent rooms is a condition upon which women experience unpleasantness, and helplessness. Having to leave the children in the compound on their own and the attitude of the owner of the house or the compound toward the children’s behavior are causes for this unpleasantness and helplessness. While Edwina vocalize this experience, most other participants interviewed agree with this fact.

Edwina.

The whole problem with me was the housing because I don't have a house and I always lived through lodging (renting) and it was very expensive. And these lodgings, the treatment was also very bad because if you got children then you must go and lodge again. Then there is the communication between you and the owner of the house. It is not that good. So for example, you come from work and anything that happens, then you are being told by your children they (the other people/children in the compound) did this and that. In that way, I didn't know where to go.

Cooperative

Relations with Saamstaan Cooperative is a condition which boosts up a sense of recognition, belongingness, independence, and ability to command securing of material conditions in the lives of its members. Women in the cooperative see themselves as
individuals who can execute planned actions to better their livelihoods. All participants interviewed expressed that they were in hopeless and despondent situations regarding housing when they heard about Saamstaan. The conditions contributing to their hopelessness were that they were living with their children in crowded dwellings, children were being subjected to ill-treatment from others, women were not recognized as low-income earners by even the institutions which served low-income earners to be able to obtain housing loans, and women had no other avenues they could consider for establishing houses for themselves to bring up their children.

**Marisa.** Marisa has had no place of her own ever before she became a Saamstaan member. She had been moving from one place to another, what amounts to being forced out each time she had to move. Saamstaan, finally had presented a solace for her when her sister-in-law was unhappy with Marisa when she was staying at her place.

**Edwina.** Edwina had been living with her seven children in rented places, which was an expensive affair. Most of all, Edwina found it extremely unpleasant when the owners of the rented places complained about the behavior of her children. Saamstaan offered her solace when:

[She] didn't know where to go. But then, someone came and told me that may be I must go to the Catholic [church] because they always heard that there are people who work with the people from the low income groups and may be they could help to build houses for themselves. Then I went to Saamstaan to become a member.
Angela. Angela and her five children were living at her mother’s place, with no way for her to establish her own place to bring up her children. She heard about Saamstaan over the radio and was encouraged by someone who knew that Saamstaan would provide her with an option for establishing her own place.

I struggled a lot to find a house for myself. I also applied at Nasbukor [an institution which gave housing loans to low income earners, and which is now obsolete. At the time Angela went to ask for a loan, her income was considered too low for this organization to give her a loan]. But I haven't been accepted because I don't earn a lot of money. That's why I felt that I must go to the low income, that I must join that group. I decided that I have my own children and I must get out of my mother's house. Then I must live on my own and look after my children. I must bring up my children on my own.

I have got five children. The three's father is married, but he pays maintenance for the children. And the last two, we are together, he works, sometimes he comes. He also helps a bit with the children. I actually first heard over the radio. When the people talked. And afterwards I heard from my friend. When I told her about the house problem I have got, then she told me that I must go to the office of Saamstaan, that I must go talk to those people.

Janice. Janice also has five children and has lived around other people having no place of her own to bring them up. She did not want her children to grow up as street children and she was desperate to find a place of her own when she found Saamstaan.

Janice not only wants to bring up her children in her own place, to protect them from growing up as street children, but also to leave a legacy with the children that she as a parent had a place for them to live in.

The problem actually is, we lived around other people. And later as my children grew up I can't just live around other people with them. And I felt I must get a place for myself. I want to live with my children at my own place so that one day if I die that they can know that my parent had such and such a place.
Janice was informed and educated about Saamstaan by a friend who is knowledgeable about Saamstaan.

Actually, while I was renting places I heard about Saamstaan that gave houses, from the old group. And there was a friend of mine in that group and she asked me why I don't join Saamstaan. Then I told her that I don't have any experience of Saamstaan, I don't know what Saamstaan means. Then she said no, you just go to the office, and you fill in a form, you tell the people about your problems and then they will see if you, they will look at your salary and make you a member so that you can get a place and then you can go into Saamstaan's plot.

The experience of her friend who already had become a Saamstaan member was a condition which made it possible for Janice to believe that becoming a Saamstaan member and working on a plan of action to acquire a house for herself are tangible possibilities for her as well.

Me and this friend we lived next to each other and while we lived next to each other I left to work in the mines. And while I was working in the mine she found out about Saamstaan and she got a place at Saamstaan and then she became a member of Saamstaan. She joined the old group and when I came back, she asked me, she visited me one day and she asked me why I just don't go and get a place at Saamstaan. Then I asked her how does the Saamstaan story work? There we sat where I lodged. She heard about Saamstaan and when I came back she already had become a member of Saamstaan. They were from people square. They gave their deposits and then they live there.

Maggie. Maggie also found living with seven children in rented rooms was cause for grief and physical discomfort. She became one of the pioneering members who started Saamstaan in 1989.

Look, I had a problem with housing and I always lived with other people. Then in 1989 I heard about Saamstaan. Then I thought no, I must also go there. Because I must look for my own place to stay. Dofi: How did you hear about them? I actually heard about Saamstaan from Mr. Tuseb. Gerald Tuseb. I heard over the radio about Saamstaan. Then in 1989 we always going to meetings.
I always lived with other people and it wasn't good for me. We were many people who lived there and if other children did something then people say its my child. I had only one room and I had 7 children. I had a husband and at that time I left him. Then I struggled on my own. Sometimes if other children does something they blamed my children. And we always fought.

Rendina. Rendina also is a pioneering member of Saamstaan who started the cooperative in 1989. She is a mother of seven children from four different biological fathers. She was not married to any of them, nor did any of them continue relations with her in a way that is helpful in bringing up the children.

Marjorie. Marjorie is also a member of Saamstaan who joined the cooperative in 1989. She too has seven children, from three different biological fathers, who did not get married to her.

Because I have children and because you cannot live with your children from year to year and because children grow up and that one room is not enough for all of you therefore I look for refuge with Saamstaan. I had a boyfriend and I parted with him eight years ago.

I heard from the people that something like Saamstaan exists. I was in a room I rented. Then I went to the old Catholic church. Then we started there. I heard about it from a woman [one of the three initial organizers of the cooperative]. Actually, it was people by word of mouth we told each other about the meeting. Then we met her there.

Children

Women's relationship to their children is a condition which generates thoughts about women's sense of self as mothers. Women feel responsible for protecting the children from assaults of any kind; providing food, clothing, and shelter; providing for their education; providing love and care. Angela said, "The house is the first thing in the world. Now I am happy because I know if I die, then, my children have this house."
Then, they can be proud and say that it is my mother’s house.” Janice shared Angela’s sentiment: "I want to live with my children at my own place, so that one day, if I die, they can know that my parents had such and such a place.” Relationship as mother to children seems to be a condition which give women a sense of worth, a sense of being anchored, a sense of having a direction on which they must expend their energies, and a sense of being accomplished. The relationship also seem to give women the impetus to secure material conditions for their children now and after their death. Having children also is a condition which gives the women a sense of social wealth, for example, in terms of support and representation of family in meeting their community obligations in their absences, and in terms of providing labor for community work in their absence.

Other Women

Women see themselves as individuals who are considerate of and helpful to other women in the community. Other women are not judged according to their behavior within their households and in the community, but as persons. Women see themselves as compassionate towards other women and reaching out to them as individuals.

Marisa. Marisa relates to a woman through her compassion:

Yes, if two people, husband and wife for example, if they fight at home, we talk to them, the committee, yes, we are very helpful. If there is a problem we don't stand back. I see the people we must love each other. For example, we yesterday, it was last year, this Meme (mother in Ovambo tradition) had a daughter and she hit her until she was dead. In that time we also, we talked very much to her. And now she is sitting in jail. But the other day we thought that we should go visit her. The people who want to come, look that's not us. That's God's punishment. She will have to take the hard punishment.
And she also has a plot, and she doesn't pay. And we were going to talk to her yesterday. And we told her that we Saamstaan still goes on. Maybe, God will help her to come out safely one day. Then we will just have to move her to the back but we will see to it that the money she has paid so far will help her to get out of jail. That she later on won't lose out.

And she is also being later brought by the police. And at that time when she returned I got the idea that we must gather some money for her so that she mustn’t feel so bad, because I heard she always fought with people. If we just tell her Meme then she started fighting. She also fought with me.... But she always paid for her plot. Even when she didn't work, she collected empties (bottles) and sold and collected money and paid for the plot. A person is a person.

Women seem to have a view of who a person is, why a person behaves the way s/he behaves and who s/he is accountable to in terms of consequences for her/his behavior. This view seems to be instrumental in absolving women from judging a person according to her/his behavior, and in relating to a person on the basis of compassion.

Religion/God

Relationships with religion and God are conditions which determine women’s sense of self. Whether they are happy or unhappy people depends on how intensely they are connected to their religious life. As with Marisa, when women find themselves in situations which are physically and mentally tormenting, they fall back on prayer to find ease and comfort. When individuals do not have wage work, when individuals have no place to live, no place to build shelters, or when individuals fight or are in conflict with one another, women seem to use their relationship to religion, God, or the Bible to resolve the issues.
Marisa. Marisa describes the extent of the relationship between herself and religion/Bible:

We fight a lot. And we talk to those who have conflicts. We punish them. We have grown up people [who she means here is the pastor] and we tell them that they must listen to them. But we are also most of the time we are also very religious. And we got this plot only through the mercy of God. We can't stand here and fight here everyday. So, we also punish with the Bible and so on until we reach a conclusion.

Women are also individuals with an awareness of the hierarchies and the roles and responsibilities accompanying these hierarchies in the society. Religion provides the knowledge, training, and skills for assuming, upholding, and adhering to these roles and responsibilities. When Marisa was in a situation where her newly emerging conditions of life, i.e., her being a member of the cooperative which accords her certain privileges such as the ownership of the house and the plot, and her husband being a beneficiary in this regard, she was faced with a situation which disrupts the hierarchical order of events is the household, i.e., her husband's unwillingness to be the provider of the household. At this instance, she quickly resorted to the service of the pastor who redefined the relationship between herself and her husband to restore that hierarchical order in the house. In Marisa's words:

Here in Namibia, we men and women are equal in everything that we do. But the Bible says that woman must be below the man because by his duty he protects us. So, that is what I am saying. We are equal when it comes to making decisions and doing things together. And, I am the owner of the house. But, actually, my husband is the head of the household.

Janice. For Janice, her relationship to God provides a hierarchy that does not include any other person between her and God:
I see myself as head of my household. Except for God who is my head, in my house, I am the head myself - except for God. But God is everywhere around us.

**Rendina.** Rendina learns in church that even though she does everything for the house, the man is the boss of the house:

I pay for the house, I pay for my children’s school, cloths and for water. So I am the one who makes all the decisions about all these things. But, man is also the boss in other ways (laughs . . . Yo . . . ho . . .) That is what we learn in church. He is the boss of the house. So . . . I don’t know these things . . . (laughs . . .).

**Lynette.** Lynette learns all her roles and responsibilities befitting a woman from the Bible and she is adamant on the need to adhere to these roles and responsibilities:

Look woman in the community, a woman is something important. And I am very proud that I am a woman. A woman gives the education from home. She educates the child at home - you mustn’t drink, you mustn’t swear at people, look in Namibia there are many things which are not right for the children and I. At home I must educate my child. And if I go from home people must expect from me, they must know what kind of person I am, what kind of woman I am. Then I mustn’t say the husband is so drunk and he swears so ugly, I mustn’t push him and say you are whore or you are drunk. I must talk to him with respect, doesn’t matter if he swears. OK if he hits me I can run away I am a woman. He is a man and I don’t have that power. I will hit him back or go to the police. Look, many times these people are drunk. People feel depressed. They say I don’t work I am not good enough, then he feels he is an outsider. Then he thinks I am not a person and people don’t listen to me. But there is sometime that you must try, me as a woman must try to get him near to me. I must give him the good words. [Why is it that woman must always be the good one?] Look, I agree because the Bible says that a woman must be honored and respected, a woman must be an example towards the house and outside also. And as the Bible also says the man can do what he wants. [No, the Bible doesn’t say that]. Look, God is the head and then comes the man. and you must have respect for the man. First comes God, then comes the man. Woman is below the man. If I am married I must honor my husband because he is above me. This is the work of woman - bring good reputation to the family.
Work and Wages

Through the relationship between them and paid work women identify themselves as wage workers. The government, traditions, apartheid, economic conditions, and marriage and divorce laws, are all conditions which have conditioned their status as wage workers. They work in other households as paid domestic workers. Unlike in the past, these women are the owners of their income. As owners of income, women distribute the money into different destinations as they see necessary. Their ability to be the owners of the wages they earn gives them the ability to provide for their children and execute plans for securing necessary material conditions for their families.

Marisa. Marisa describes below, her position as a wage worker, how it is different from the domestic work women did in "those" days, i.e., the work women did at their own homes for no wages, and what conditions were instrumental in changing the definition and the rewards of domestic work - the work she does for a living.

In those days the government pushed women such a lot. The government and traditions. Those days the old people said the woman must sit at home and do domestic work. And she may not go out and work for her own salary. But those days things were also very cheap. But now I can't sit here and do nothing because my husband only work for N$400.00. I can't just sit here because we have to pay for the plot. We must eat. Life is very expensive nowadays. I am very happy now because women used to lose a lot. Say for instance I married and we get divorced. Then I also lost the house those days. Because I didn't work it is only the husband who worked. But now I know I can never lose my house.

During the time of apartheid, there were women who did domestic work. But it was for a very little salary. Yes, the husbands always earned more money. Now, for example, my sister, she is working for 16 years for those people and she gets N$900.00. If I consider what my husband gets, he gets N$800.00 monthly. So she gets more. At the moment I work in three different places and with it comes N$700.00. I
can point to myself and say even if he is not here I will be able to make a living. Because the times have changed and I learned, I learned to look after myself. Excuse me, like my mother for example. She worked for 30 years for those people but she earned N$60.00 a month. And in those days we also didn't know what is money. But as we grew up we always laughed at my mother about that sixty dollars that she got every month, working for years and years.

When I go to work for new employers, they always ask what has previous people being paying me for a day. These people pay me 25 dollars a day, with extra money for the bus and taxi. I can say that I worked for my people. And the other people are from Holland and Germany. They are good people and the other people are Damara and the woman is Oshiambo. Then I am proud of being able to help them very much. I am happy with my work. Some end of the months I not only get my salary I get extra money.

Theresa. Theresa, who works in two places as a domestic worker and works as a construction worker at her cooperative community describes how she manages her wages:

At my domestic work job I get R 450.00 a month. I work in two places. Basically, I do the same kind of work in both places and I get paid about the same. At one place I get my money at the end of the month - R 250.00. At the other place I get my money every day I work - R 25.00 per day. From my building work I cannot say how much I get every month because we get money when we finish jobs. For example, when we finish to throw foundation we get R 300.00. The five of us divide it amongst ourselves. I spend my money to buy food. My husband gives me R 200.00. He gets R 900.00. I spend my money to buy food, cloths, pay water bill, pay for the plot and also to buy cement to make brick. Also I bought this wardrobe. I pay for my daughter's school also. It is just a one time payment at the beginning of the year. I pay R 50.00 there. I don't spend any money for myself. I spend money for my family and I am one of the family. I also use whatever I get for the family. I give R 100.00 every month to a friend woman also. She gets money from a few of us like that every month. Then she gives all that money to one of us every month. So who ever gets the money that month she can do what she wants with the money.

With the money she gets, she pays for a plot and a house, pays for children's education and needs, and saves some money.
Marriage

Marriage is a condition which, according to some women, makes them happy individuals. One reason is the belief that marriage will ensure men staying with the family, so that, the women are not left with children to care for all by themselves. Among other reasons, marriage is considered to be a means by which a husband will provide a roof for the woman and children and provide protection for the family.

Marisa. For Marisa, marriage is a chance she takes in the hope that, once married, the man will continue to stay in the marriage. Marriage is a way, as she envisions it, to avoid having to struggle to bring up the children all by herself.

Lynette. Lynette perceives that the newly emerging political conditions which accord gender equality is a threat to the institution of marriage as she knows it, and would like to uphold:

Look people like me, I will also maybe one day find a husband. OK, if I say so our country is now like this, you both have equality, to talk in the house or so, understand? I cannot say that when I am married. When I am married to a man then it is done and he is the head of household, I am the owner of the house, that’s that.

For Lynette, marriage is a condition which provides an already established hierarchical place for her which she is quite comfortable with and looks forward to subscribing to. Her ownership of the house does not interfere with the conditions established by marriage in terms of gender specific roles.

Janice. For Janice, marriage is an act between a man and herself, but is not something which places her in a hierarchical relationship where she will be a
subordinate. However, if the marriage means that she has to live in her husband’s house, it is her knowledge that she has to accept his rules within the house.

... if he comes and gets married to me then the house is still on my name then I will be the one who must say this and this and that. Then I will be the one who gives out orders. ... If the person, for example if I get a husband, and the house is his, then I understand, he has got everything. But as long as the house is on my name and he came, he came, and its not me that went, and he came, I will still be the head of household because its me who give out the duties. ... Because if I go to his house then I must follow his rules. Because each person has his own law in his own house. I also got my laws in my house.

Angela. For Angela, marriage is a condition which limits her freedom to make her own decisions and conduct her affairs without being imposed upon.

I feel good on my own I lived a little bit long in this free time. The time that I lived with the mother I didn't live with a man. So, I really don't know how is the life together with men. No, I can't say that I will never do it. This life that I am in now, it suits me because, I know this life, but I don't know with a man.

She speculates on the possibility of hierarchical relations in which she may lose the freedom she enjoys as a person who is independent of such obligations:

As we first talked about the question of being the boss, then the man will want to be, he will want to be a little bit higher than me, then it will may be not for me nice because I am used to this, this step of living alone, walking alone.

Amber. In Amber’s view, marriage is a condition that permits a woman and a man to live and be in relations with each other under the same roof owned by the husband. In a marriage, the woman must be provided for by the husband. It appears that Amber perceives the relations between a woman and a man in a marriage as primarily revolving around reproductive aspects in which the woman assumes a subordinate role with regard to command of the activities of the household. A woman
and a man, as she perceives, do not live together if they are not married. Being married is a fundamental principle she would not violate when she decides whether she would live with a man or not.

My boyfriend, the father of the two children, lives in town with his family. He works for the Telecommunication and Transportation in town. I cannot go and live with him because it is a fundamental principle that I have to be married to him before I can live with him. A woman does not live with a man unless she is married to that man. We are not married. So I don’t want to live with him. If I live with him I will have more children and I will also still not be married. Now that I don’t live with him I can choose not to have more children. If I live with him he will not understand and will insist on having more children and I have no way of stopping that. So I like to live alone with my children. That way I can make sure that I don’t have more children.

**Women, Men: Changing Roles, Changing Responsibilities**

Changing political conditions, economic conditions, and social conditions are contributive to changing views on gender, and changing views of women about themselves. What used to be the roles and responsibilities of women and men within social structure while these women were growing up, and what these roles and responsibilities are now, are quite different in the view of these women. Women see themselves as providers of material conditions and moral guidance for their children, bread-winners, and individuals who no longer wait for men to do certain tasks for them. Women are wage workers, wage earners, construction workers, heads of households, owners of property, i.e., plots and houses.

**Edwina.** According to Edwina, as she reflects on the difference between what her mother did in her day and what Edwina does today, women’s roles and work are shockingly different.
In the olden days, woman's work has just been to look after the children, and the house and so forth, do you understand? But it is not that any more. It's many different things that woman participate in, which we thought has been men's work. But now, that same work, its like for example, the building of the houses of today, like digging and the making of bricks, to work with the picks and the spades, that was men's work.

I would say if I look at myself, the men of today are not the men who care about the children so very much. They don't think about the women and children and such type of things. Especially if you look at the problem of housing, men have got no problems. Maybe if a man is chased out today from the place he lives he can go and sleep under a tree. But a woman has got children and can't try that thing. That's why, today woman stands up and works hard for the future of their children.

If my mother saw what I do today, I think she will be shocked because she didn't do that work. But, at the same time, maybe, she would have said: "my child, it is the right road you are taking. It will also teach your children something that you mustn't wait for somebody, that you can also do things for yourself."

**Angela.** In Angela’s view:

Women's work, the way I see it, those who have children are responsible for their education, and they must look after their homes and also work out [wage work outside of home] for other people so that they can earn money to bring the children up. Like here at Saamstaan, we also build, we also make the bricks, and also we build the houses.

**Janice.** Janice also has a similar view on women’s role and work. In her view, one reason for these changes is that the living conditions have become expensive. The other reason is that men do not do things for women any longer. Therefore, women have to do things for themselves now.

Today, you find many women that build their houses, you get some women that must go on their own and look for wood, something that the man could have done, that chops wood, that fetches water herself. These types of work were men’s work in the earlier days. But now women do it for themselves.

[The roles of women and men have changed because] life became expensive. For example, if you are without a man then you have got the experience to build your house. To chop your wood yourself and fetch your water yourself. But in those days men just did everything for
women. And the women did nothing, not those hard work. But today, it differs a lot that women must do it today. It's actually a learning process for a woman. From there it came that women are without men. There comes a day that your man died and there comes a day that your children are alone then you know I must make my house myself I must buy food myself in my house, I must chop wood myself, I must fetch water myself, I must do this and that myself. There is nobody that helps you.

Marjorie. Marjorie sees that the changing political and economic conditions which change circumstances of women are reasons for women being able to do things now which they did not do for themselves in the past.

In those times we thought this building of houses is the work of just men. But after independence we saw women can also do everything what a man can do. That is how we decided to start building our houses. Saamstaan is not for men it is just for women because we just started there as women. In the past, it was men who must do all the hard work and women's job was just soft work inside houses, cleaning the houses, wash and iron, and men must work outside and around and must do hard work like construction work and making engines and cars and things like that. But today women also must work outside of house and do hard jobs as well as on their own. If women can be taught they can do these hard work. But for women with their weak backs they cannot do it. But, if a woman is a single parent with many children and you cannot find soft work then through your children you can throw yourself to do the hard work. Yes, it can only be the circumstances that will force the women to do hard work.

... In the old days life was a little bit cheaper. Everything was cheap. And we didn't think of these times when life is not cheap. This time when people came from over there if you talk with these people (people who returned from exile after independence) then you hear how hard they work there. Now the women of these days can also do that work.

Amber. For Amber, the political independence of her country as a nation has also brought independence for women. Women now have the opportunity to choose roles and responsibilities which have been traditionally set aside for men.

In the past it was said the woman must just work at home doing work in the house. Woman must not some jobs like construction work. In our organization Saamstaan there isn't anything like that, anything that says
one couldn’t make decisions. Now we became independent and we also have something to do. As a country we now are independent and we must make decisions and do things for ourselves. We (women) also thought and we had ideas but we have been trapped and we couldn’t go ahead with the things. But now we have women’s rights. We got something like that. The former government always made decisions for people, the woman. Also the church and the Bible, look they also are saying things about women. It is also stated in the Bible that woman must do this and that in the house and the men must do all the hard work. But because males are very weak they are not man enough for the work we also feel to do that work. Like for example, this construction work, if we always look up to the men and see then we are left behind. We would not, for ourselves as women, build up houses for ourselves.

Lynette. Lynette also views that the role of women is changing at present time. For example, women did not do construction work in the past. But, she has seen a video tape of women building houses in China. And she is now desiring, given the opportunity, to learn, develop skills and participate in building houses, and becoming the owner of a house. However, for Lynette, there is an aspect of women, a specific role as she has known women to be playing, which does not change: the importance of subservience of woman to man and the vital role the woman plays in propping up the reputation of the family and of himself that the man demolishes. This role, a woman plays in surrender, and in reverence.

Organization

The cooperative is a condition which is instrumental primarily in facilitating the process of women obtaining houses for themselves. In the process of this activity, Saamstaan also functions as an agency of change in the individuals it serves. While affiliating themselves with the organization, women change themselves from passive recipients of services and benefits to active doers in the generating of benefits they
accrue for themselves. Women change themselves from passive individuals for whom decisions are made by others to individuals who make decisions for themselves as individuals and as communities. Women change themselves from non-property owners to property owners. Women change themselves from non-active members to active participants in the processes of defining the political, economic and social aspects of their community. Women find a group identity, as low-income earners, single parents in the majority of cases, and as domestic workers. And women find individuals identities as providers, guardians, wage workers, wage earners, and heads of households.

Organization as Agency of Change in Women as Individuals

Organization as the facilitator of a process whereby women, of their own volition, undertake the responsibility for executing a plan of action, for securing a plot and a house, is a condition for women volitionally changing gender roles. Women find out that some gender roles which have been considered to be exclusively for men, are not given realities but only social norms. Women come to know that, in all practicality, they can do things for themselves without having to either depend on men or wait for men to do these thing for them, for example, being the owner of a house and building one’s own house. Edwina describes how she got used to the fact that she can do what previously had been thought of as the work of men and how affirming it is for her to be able to do this work:

And when I came there, because, I thought maybe according to what my colleagues asked me who told me to go there, I thought, maybe, if I get there I just write my name in and then my house will be built.
Unfortunately when I got there then I got one of the people from Saamstaan personnel who explained to me that Saamstaan doesn't build people houses. But all that Saamstaan will do is to support you until you can get a house. To build the houses people must start with making the bricks and the digging out and that was very difficult for me.

I found it very funny and at that time I didn't believe that it would happen. But, when we started working, then I saw really because in my mind I thought women are not, how must I say, they are not made to make bricks and to work with the picks and shovels. But I accepted it because when we started working I got used to it.

And at the same time I saw now it's really our children's future. And we learnt a lot to do our own thing. It's better than to wait for someone to do things for you.

The organization is a condition that triggered Lynette's desire to do, or her will, on things which she has been denied thus far by gender role specifications. She comes to know that the gender roles that she is used to does not make sense, and she now awaits her opportunity to assume a role in the building of houses:

Yes, at Saamstaan at the last meeting we had, they showed us a book that comes from China, where the women make the bricks, and build the houses. And that is still my desire to do that together with the men.

At Saamstaan the women themselves build the houses. If you can't go there yourself then you can bring your brother and so on. Now for me I can also build I can also help build. They can also teach me.

**Affiliation and Membership**

In times of helplessness and desperation, the organization provides the affiliation and membership for women, on the one hand recognizing their economic and social status and on the other setting them on a course of action to move themselves from their current situation to a different situation. Women find a sense of belongingness, group support, and the possibility of acquiring the material conditions necessary for living, through their affiliation with and the membership in the organization. As members of
the organization, women assume the position of individuals who have the ability, freedom, and volition to appropriate the necessary material conditions, and further, who contribute as trained personnel to the well-being of community members. Rendina is happy that, as an affiliated member of Saamstaaan, she is able to do just that:

I am very happy to be a Saamstaaan member. First of all by being a Saamstaaan member I got a house. And when I was a domestic worker and I heard about this AIDS program and Saamstaaan is looking for people two people to be sent to be trained to be trainers of other people I thought I must leave this domestic worker job and then I joined that program because the income will be better than the domestic worker job. And then I learnt many things ... this English I speak now ... it is not so well ... but I learnt it in Saamstaaan when I began with this AIDS program and now I can talk with other people ... and before I was very shy, I can’t speak anything with other people in English. But now I am so free to speak with anybody. So that is why I say I am happy to be a Saamstaaan member and I am very happy. (Laughter ...).

Affirming of Low-Income Women (Kind of People it Serves)

The organization recognizes women as low-income earners. There are other organizations within the country that recognize low-income earners, e.g., Nasbukor, for housing loans. But, the income which is recognized by such institutions as low income is much higher than the income of the members of the cooperative. Further, there are other requirements, for example, the regularity of income, which count when individuals are recognized as low-income earners who qualify for housing loans by these organizations. By recognizing women who neither earn amounts of money which qualify them as low income earners, nor have regularity of income, the cooperative as a
condition provides conditions which affirm the worth, the ability, and the desires of its members.

**Angela.** Angela’s income is not recognized by some institutions for housing loans, but affirmed by Saamstaan which makes it possible for her to establish her own place to bring up her children:

> I struggled a lot to find a house for myself. I also applied at Nasbukor. But I haven't been accepted because I don't earn a lot of money. That's why I felt that I must go to the low income, that I must join that group [Saamstaan]. I decided that I have my own children and I must get out of my mother's house. Then I must live on my own and look after my children. I must bring up my children on my own.

**Edwina.** Edwina, like Angela, had been turned down by other housing loan institutions, but is affirmed by Saamstaan:

> And I also think I have tried a lot already. I went to the municipality, to ask for a loan to get a house, and Nasbukor to get a house and two people and those are the people who work with low income people. It has always being said to us - OK if people could pay such a deposit we will consider you for a loan. And I couldn't. The one that does house work [a domestic worker]! I couldn't so far. I couldn't come to that [she could not upgrade her income to fit into the category of low income which is recognized by these organizations]. That's why I went to Saamstaan.

**Lynette.** Lynette knows why Saamstaan is there and who it serves. She, as a person whose income would not be recognized by other organizations as low income, is happy about Saamstaan:

> The staff said that Saamstaan is actually for low income women. That's why this organization is instituted. The divorced women who lives and stays alone, who struggles and sometimes the husbands left the women or chase the women out of the houses and lived with their other wives. From there Saamstaan developed, to help women have their own places to bring up their children. Saamstaan don't let the men come say anything there. That's what they said . . .

215
Organization’s Influence on Personal and Skills Development of Individuals

Being a part of the cooperative is a condition which is contributive to women’s development as individuals, to feel a sense of worth, to know that they have the ability to be more than domestic workers, e.g., personal resource management, community resource management, community educators, field workers, and trainers of trainers. As members of the organization, women receive training in skills areas pertinent to the roles they play in the day-to-day management of resources and the well-being of the community.

Rendina.

At the time I joined Saamstaan I was a domestic worker and my income was R 150.00. And I was paying rent R 80.00 as rent for a room. It was very expensive. Then I had to pay my plot and I had to buy food and this time I was living with my son who was at school. I had 7 children altogether. But, the others were at hostels and with my mother and like that.

I am so proud to be a Saamstaan member in this stage because I am very different now and the time I joined Saamstaan . . . yes, there is a big difference in me now. Because, up until 1993 I was a domestic worker. But from 93 to now I am doing other job now. I am a trainer. Yes, I am a trainer of trainers. This thing, training of trainers has become very big in Namibia now because of AIDS. So, I can say that I am a field worker. So, I help at Saamstaan office, if they need me they call me. So, I am very happy to be a Saamstaan member.

Today, the number of people with AIDS is very high. Then, the people need to be trained if they have someone with AIDS, about how to take care of that person. Because these days people in Saamstaan are very busy with work, building houses, looking for land and this kind of thing we have to have committees also to be working with them. So we need trainers to work with the people to train them about AIDS.

Edwina. Edwina demonstrates the knowledge she has gained about the concept of loan, what training is needed for individuals and community members in order to manage the loans, the availability and the usefulness of support services that provide
technical support [provide training and skills development of self-help housing groups and individuals], historical perspective of such organizations, and aspects of group and community development:

The second loan, for the 23 houses, because we are busy with the 23 houses now, some of the members got accounting training from NHAG [Namibia Housing Action Group]. Its them who gave them the training for the accounting. We work with the books ourselves, so we do the books ourselves. The money that's paid to us is deposited in the bank account and we buy the things ourselves.

Maybe I should explain a little bit as well this NHAG I am talking about. Maybe you will be a little bit confused otherwise. I think after Saamstaan has been established the members saw that the housing problem gets more and more and the problem of the plots is also there because the plots are too expensive. So they decided, no, a supporting service must be established. That supporting service is this NHAG I am talking about today. And NHAG is an abbreviation. The full name is Namibia Housing Action Group. And this is the organization which was established by members in 1992. So, this is an umbrella body of all the low income housing groups in Namibia.

I think during that time the groups that were there, about eight to ten groups of Namibia who established NHAG. After they first had a workshop to identify their problems they decided to establish NHAG. I think as NHAG progresses its twenty groups today that are members of NHAG.

Lynette. Lynette is happy to have had the opportunity to see a book on how women in China work in construction and looks forward to get the training for herself.

Yes, at Saamstaan at the last meeting we had, they showed us a book that comes from China, where the women make the bricks, and build the houses. And that is still my desire to do that together with the men.

At Saamstaan the women themselves build the houses. If you can't go there yourself then you can bring your brother and so on. Now for me I can also build I can also help build. They can also teach me.
Organization's Role in the Growth and Development of Individuals and Community

The organization has a committee structure, an administrative staff, and linkages with development agencies that organize and provide opportunities for its members and communities to grow and develop. Women get the opportunity to grow by being in on-the-job training while serving on committees, participating in national and international conferences and workshops, and disseminating information obtained to the community members. Angela describes below the opportunity she has had in serving as a committee member, what her learning experience has been, and how she utilizes her experience to develop the community. She begins by describing how individuals are selected from the community, who would participate in international conferences related to housing:

This year I am in that Coordinating Committee. As I saw, its not only that group, that group's people [members of the Coordinating Committee] who goes. We are being asked. Maybe it's being asked, from the staff one person goes and from the members one or two must go, go and show across (to other countries) how we live and how we do. OK, so some people are a bit scared. And they just sit behind and then its just the same people who go. But we are also given the choice that we go. We are being called together and a general meeting is held and there we choose, like for example this trip to Oshakathi. People from every group were asked to select individuals who can go on this trip. Every group must delegate one person that must go. That's how we choose. Sometimes it's just the staff that goes there. Like now some people are also gone.

Like, for example this week end NHAG (Namibia Housing Action Group) had a workshop. And the Coordinating Committee was called, we discussed it there, and we decided that four people from every group must go to that workshop. Then we came to our groups and asked them to select people for that workshop. But, I left the group meeting a bit early. So, I don't know whether the people went there or not.

These participants must bring us feedback, what they learned there, and what they did there. Maybe the improvements of the books or what or may be something extra that learnt additionally, they must come back and tell us, then we must react upon that thing. [How do you do
that? The person who goes there writes down what's being said there, then if he comes back then we have a meeting... the person himself or through the Chair Person we arrange a meeting, and then the person says at the meeting: "today I want to give this report." Then we are told about what they have learnt or did. Then if we have any questions we ask, then those questions are also written down. But, when there is always such workshops then we are told if we don't understand then we must call the people again. So that they will come and explain again...

Sometimes people don't bring feed back. Some times it doesn't happen. But, when the people from the Saamstaan office come and tell things that we have not heard, then they tell us "why we told your representatives to come and tell you these things, haven't they done that?" So, we get to know if they haven't given us feedback. So, people tend to give feedback. But some times it doesn't happen.

On-the-job training also provides women with the opportunity to learn how to be effective community members in their own communities. The women are able to identify what some of the problems are, in terms of sharing power and communication, and also to learn how to address these issues. Angela uses these opportunities to solve problems within her community:

It's just something we had yesterday. At the moment we haven't had a fight. But, here it seemed to me that it is often a certain Chair Person who speaks. Other people do not talk much, or not at all. I thought it was me who saw this as a problem the whole time. But, it turns out that the other people in our group also were talking about it. And now, I felt we need to get more knowledge, and we must take this case back to the office. And there, they explained to us about this committee that we operate in our group, the purpose of it, who can and must speak, so on and so on? Sometimes it seems to me that we sit in our group meetings expecting one person (Chair) to say something. But I think it is unfair. Therefore, I asked the staff at the office yesterday, that they must organize a workshop to educate our group about these group committees and what that means for each of us in the group. So, the workshop is happening next week.

As women serve on committees in the umbrella organization, they learn about their roles and responsibilities and rules and regulations which come along with responsibilities. Amongst the responsibilities is the obligation to hear concerns and
problems from the groups and to assist the groups in solving these problems. Another responsibility is the consolidation of reports from individuals who participate in national or international conferences and then disseminate the information to the group communities. Women learn these roles as their duty to the people they serve.

Marisa, who also has the opportunity to serve and learn as a committee member of the Coordinating Committee at the umbrella organizational level, describes her view, and the importance of reciprocal relations between the roles of committee member and group member, in the development of her cooperative community.

We are there if people have got problems at the plot. Then we talk about it here at the plot and then we write down the necessary points and then we take it to the Coordinating Committee. At the Coordinating Committee, we discuss the various problems of the groups, then we take it up to the staff. And if they can solve the problems for us they do. And if they cannot, they come back to us and talk to the groups.

When they (the individuals who participate in conferences) come back and inform us we bring them back to the group. But when they report if I am not there then I can bring nothing back. But with me, it is our responsibility, to bring information back, so that our group people know what those people hear or did over there. We must give feedback. For example, those two women who went to Istanbul, when they come back they have to share the information with the Coordinating Committee, then we bring that information to our groups. So, it is our duty to give feedback to the people.

Conflicts Between Organization and Members

Other women notice discrepancies and flaws in the functioning of the committees in terms of fulfilling their responsibilities. They reflect on actions to be taken, so as to avoid such flaws and to increase the growth of committee members as responsible individuals and the efficacy of the functioning of the committees. They reflect on why these discrepancies and flaws come to be. They experience
disappointment and frustration while serving in the committees. Women also find themselves in conflict between themselves and the organization at times. These conflicts arise because of the demands made on them and the differences in their willingness and material ability to meet these demands.

**Lynette.** Lynette is unhappy with the way she has to pay for the communal tap water:

For water, we have to pay according to the number of households, not according to the number of people in the households. It is unfair but that is how the municipality charges. Sometimes we call these people, Saamstaan people, and we talk about that. But they don't take the thing seriously. If you talk about it they say you want to be clever, if you ask many questions.

Lynette is also in conflict with the values the organization upholds and her personal values she subscribes to and wants to uphold. For her, women and men have their roles and "places" in the social structure. The cooperative undermines the established social norms. As she learns, the cooperative primarily serves single mothers who are in need of support to acquire material conditions necessary for living and reproductive roles. In Lynette’s view, this practice is divisive for women and men, and undermines and diminishes the roles entrusted to men as the protectors and heads of households.

**Angela.** Angela speculates about the control they can have as a group over how they can organize to make the payments for the plots, and the control the organization has over this process:

We talked about it at our last meeting. We talked about that very seriously last month. And this man next door, he is the Chair Person of the Ground Committee and he also works at Saamstaan as a staff person. He called us a meeting and told us this thing that the people stay away
and they don't pay for the plots. But we don't know this because the office does not tell us. We only know that our group is still behind in payment for the plot. Being behind in paying for the plot means that we cannot start building our houses. So, it is a problem. Then we must all, even if one is in Katutura, that person must bring the money to him (the Chair Person of the Ground Committee of the group), here in the plot. So for example, if you brought your money, like Kathleen, she paid and he can write it down. So that he can take the money and give it at the office and the slips and the numbers as well, so that he can write everything down and also in this way he sees as the Chair Person, how many people have paid each month, who is not paying and so on. That's what we, in our group, decided. But on the side of Saamstaan, they told us that we signed a contract saying that we will directly pay the money at the office. Then Saamstaan pays the bank. Because Saamstaan is the guarantee for the loan, and supplements the money every month, people have to pay at the office. And that's maybe why Saamstaan doesn't want us to collect money in the group. But the office has the problem that people don't pay and Saamstaan must supplement the payment every month from the money that is set aside for the workshops. So, we have this problem.

Janice. For Janice, the conflicts arise because of several reasons. One is the lack of obligation on the part of the outgoing committee members to appropriately give hands-on training when new members are transitioning into their committee positions. Two is her having to choose between the obligation to her family, the obligation as a serving member of the Coordinating Committee of the organization, and the response and attitude of the organization towards her dilemma:

Yes, we have rules and regulations about our roles and responsibilities as committee members. And how we must be examples for the groups’ people. Actually we have got pamphlets. But we haven't sat down and read it out. And we haven't been told this rule means this, and that rule means that and that. Because the other Coordinating Committee (the previous committee) didn’t do their work, we don’t know what we are doing. And the two years they have worked have expired. So they haven't told us about the process or the steps. They haven’t given us a report saying OK, we worked up till here and from here you must work. We didn't get something like that. As we come together we try to do things ourselves with the staff of the office.
I am the one who asked about that already. We just come
together to meetings and meetings, but I don't have any clue why I
come to meetings. I have been told that I am in the Coordinating
Committee, but, I don't know what I am supposed to do. I asked them
already. Why can't we get a report that says the old committees have
worked up till this step and from here the new committee must take over.
And we also don't sit with the old committee. We don't sit together with
them. The problems are, look, the old committee members just chose to
leave when they wanted. And the old committee members are mostly
from the old group. And the old group people after they got their houses
they just kept quiet. They don't pay back the money, they don't want to
come and work with others to build their houses, nothing. They just
don't come to meetings. They are just on their own. That's why we don't
have contact with them.

I don't have any other ideas. But as I felt, on Thursday I also had
a conflict with the people when we had a Coordinating Committee
meeting. Why we had a fight is, I should have gone to my child's school
for a meeting on Thursday and at the same time we had a Coordinating
Committee meeting. So I said, because I must go to my child's school,
because it is the only day the meeting is taking place, I have to go to that
meeting. But then the people, maybe they thought that I just want to stay
behind. They said, why can't I get into the lorry and that they could drop
me there. OK then I agreed then I went. Then I heard that the Chair
Person said that I must pay the lorry. Then I got upset. Then I came
back. And also I didn't go to the meeting. So I felt like getting out of
the Coordinating Committee.

**Experience Within the Group**

As an evolving cooperative, Saamstaaan, which is the umbrella cooperative, has
four subgroups. These groups, established in different years, and located geographically
distant from each other, continue to evolve and manage social formations, with the
primary goal being the acquiring of houses for each of their members. Each group
learns from the umbrella organization about the structure and processes which facilitate
the evolution of the groups and promote the growth of the groups by replicating these
structures and processes at each group. Individuals in groups, as members, actively
participate in the formation of their groups, in the processes that define the political, economic, and social aspects of the groups, and in the processes that define who they are as individuals.

**Empowerment, Representation, and Responsibility**

For Saamstaan women, their involvement in the defining of the political, social, and economic aspects of their groups and themselves is both a responsibility and empowerment at the same time. Traditionally, this is a role that had been assigned only to men. Women internalized the role of non-involvement and remained silent, for the fear that no one would listen to them if they did speak about the political, social, or economic aspects of their communities. But now, women are directly involved in these processes.

*Amber.* Amber recounts her personal experience within the group and within the cooperative as follows:

*We are 80 in our group - People's Force. The majority are women. Because Saamstaan is a women’s organization. Saamstaan has been established to take care of women who suffered under men’s control and domination; for women who want to get away from the control of men to do things for themselves. That is why the majority of our group is women. Men who are members are about 8 in our group. These men are also low income people. When we have meetings and so on we don’t feel that we are being dominated by what these men think what our group must do. Because we are many. They sit and listen. They also have a say because they are members. But they are not the only ones who can say things. We also can say what we think we must do about certain things, for example, how to plan for building houses in our group. They don’t push us in the way they think, they cooperate with us. We women determine things for ourselves at meetings. We do not wait until these men tell us what we must do. We feel that we are in control of determining what steps we must take and how we must take responsibility to do things. At least these men cannot chase the women*
out of the houses because the house belongs to the woman. So, the men are there in our group as members so long as their wives are the owners of the plot and houses but they can help their wives to pay for the plot and the houses. So, in this way Saamstaan makes sure that women are not completely helpless when it comes to having a place to live. That is why Saamstaan is a women's organization. It takes care of women's needs. If not for Saamstaan, for us women who have children, life is difficult.

I am the person representing our group in the Coordinating Committee. First there was a man, representing us, the Pastor who is a member of our group. But he was not doing his job well. He used to go to the Coordinating Committee meeting without any information from us. He never checked with us to see what problems we have, what we think of this and that about our plot or planning for building houses, or anything. He used just go to meetings and didn't represent us. Sometimes he used to get up in the middle of meetings and go. When they ask why he is leaving he used to say "I have another congregation waiting for me. I have no time to sit here." Last year four women went to Istanbul to participate in a housing meeting (conference). But we did not know anything about it so no one from our group went. Pastor did not tell us that Saamstaan is looking for people from all groups to send there. He did not arrange for us to choose someone who we would like to send there. He also did not tell us that some women went there and these women can tell us about that conference and what they learnt there so that we also could learn something. He complains that some people chose themselves to go and other people are not given the opportunity to go to these things. This thing, it is not we ourselves who heard about this. The people from the Saamstaan office felt, they came here one day when People's Force and United People had a joint community meeting and the Pastor was there and we ask things from the Saamstaan staff who were there and the staff asked us "why do you people always ask us things. Doesn't the Pastor, your group's representative in the Coordinating Committee, give you people the feedback if we talk about things at the Coordinating Committee meetings. Doesn't the Pastor have meetings with the people?" They said that every two months the Coordinating committee meets, but, the Coordinating Committee get behind because all the Coordinating Committee members do not give reports from their groups. They didn't report on behalf of the group and that is why we decided to come to each groups to find out how your representatives are doing. How many times do you have community meetings, how many times did they attend meetings without any excuses? Look, your excuses aren't pushed away if you have excuses. But if you don't have excuses and you stay behind, the group doesn't get the information. And now we in our group decided, OK, now the Pastor
does everything himself. If the group comes together and people ask things, and he doesn’t tell us anything, then we don’t know anything. So my group took him out and chose me to represent the group. I have a big responsibility. I like it. I find out what are the problems people have about paying the plot, find out from them what they think might be the ways in which we can sort out these problems, what might be ways to begin building houses and so on. Also, if Saamstaan is looking for women to go to other workshops here in the country or in other countries, I ask our group who they would like to send. I also arrange for these women to come and tell us what they learnt. There is a lot of responsibility about things. But I like it. I can speak at meetings and everybody listens when I speak. I listen to people’s ideas and I report on behalf of the group. This is a very new experience for me.

According to Amber’s logic, similar to most other women interviewees, women fall prey to domineering and controlling men. This situation is compounded by having no access to the material conditions needed for maintaining a living independent of men’s control. If the material conditions are not a barrier, women can make independent choices about their reproductive and productive activities. Amber speaks to the fact that, provided that the material conditions are available, she is an individual who plans and implements a course of action in order to be able to manage her family independent of a man. Additionally, Amber is a person who has ideas and skills she wants to contribute to the development of her community. But, contribution is possible, as she describes, when men do not take over speaking at community meetings. Her association with the cooperative, which recognizes this fact and supports women, is instrumental in the actualizing of Amber’s wants, intentions, and abilities.

Group Norms and Rules

How a group functions, what rules members agree to adhere to regarding self-help work of the group, how absences from work and meetings are accounted for,
leisure time, all these are important aspects in the evolution and maintenance of their groups. Edwina takes a leading role in developing the definition of what their group is, what "work" means within the group, and the rules and responsibilities that the group members agree to adhere to in accomplishing the goal of the group.

Edwina. Edwina describes her leadership in her community as follows:

OK in the first place I want to say the time when we got the land before we started doing anything we tried to get the rules of the group, whether we should stay in the group, what activities we must have. I mean any activity that the people must participate in who live on these plots.

To work on this plot, in the first instance, we just worked together. But, then I saw that it doesn't work out because there are people who don't want to work. So other people work and other people do sit at their houses. So we also took this problem to NHAG. We discussed it with NHAG personnel. This problem and that problem and NHAG came with a proposal - is it not better if we divide ourselves into groups so that we work now this week this group and other week another group. And now we have four groups with 11 people to a group. And each person must work six days in a month.

So we have got forms whereby we tick off the persons' names. In that form each person's name is there in specific blocks for the mornings and for the afternoons. So if a person works in the morning then it's being ticked off in the block of the morning and if the person works in the afternoon then the name is ticked off in the afternoon. But if the person isn't there in the morning then it is only being marked in the afternoon. But in our rules it is if you are not there if you can't work then my child must go help with the work. Or if my child is not there, for a half a day then I must pay three dollars. And for a whole day they must pay five dollars. All that we want is that everybody must participate in the work we do.

And it also happens at the meetings. If I am not there then my child must go and listen at the meetings. So that he can inform me about what is being discussed at the meetings.

So if the week is over then we all get together so that this group that worked can give us a report how many people worked and how many didn't work and then we can with these who didn't work talk to them and give them the first warning and remind them of what is written in our rules.
Relations between women and their children is an important aspect in their life within the group. Children are surrogates of women at meetings and at work.

**Collective Responsibility**

Women associate themselves with collective responsibility. In preparation for building houses they collectively produce bricks. They divide themselves into work groups, draw up rules, commit to agreements, and participate in producing bricks.

*Rendina.* Rendina describes their collective brick-making process, which involves each member of the community on a rotating basis:

About 12 months before we started building we started making bricks. We got training on how to make bricks. Mostly women. We don’t have many men in this group who are members. Only five out of 45. We have divided ourselves into four work groups. Each group has 11 members. And each group is responsible for working one whole week - Monday till Saturday. During the work week if anyone is not present to work we charge R 5.00 per day. Or, if my group is working that week and I cannot work because I have something else to do, then, I have to look for someone to work in my place and then I have to pay that someone for the whole week, R 30.00, or if I cannot find someone to work for me I pay the R 30.00 to the group. That is our agreement.

We work with some people from another school. And young men who are not working in our group to lay the bricks for houses. Four young men who don’t have jobs in our group and one woman were trained as brick layers.

NHAG is our support group. They have technical people who are trained. We got help from them.

*Marjorie.* Marjorie describes below what, in fact, was the motivating factor for making bricks. The activity was proposed by the donors as a share that the women must contribute, in order for them to receive money from them (the donors) to build their houses.
Before we started with houses we organized meetings and we planned to make bricks. Because the donors told us that we must build up something for ourselves. If we made bricks then we wrote our names down. If we are not there then we are absent. So that is how we started. We got the money from the donors for building the houses because we built bricks. When one house gets started then we made that house with the bricks we made. And we continue making bricks. So, what ever the bricks we make, they were used to build the house that has been started. It is not that each person made bricks for self. If your name is good in the books, if you have made the payments/savings in a good way then your house will be built first.

Amber. Amber counts on the rules of the cooperative about collective responsibility. Once her group completes the payments for their plot, it is her expectation that the other groups whose houses would have been built by then, would collectively work on building houses of the members of her group:

In Saamstaan there are rules. One rule is that the groups who are already finished paying the plots and building houses must help other groups finish paying the plots and building. Other groups must help other groups to raise funds, get themselves trained in brick making and building and so on. The plots are not just one group’s plot too. The plots are all people’s plots. Groups who have built houses must help the other groups to build houses. We are the last group who got a plot last year. Now that other groups who got the plots before us and have finished paying the plots must start building. And then it depends on how soon we can finish paying for the plot until we can start building, that is what the rule we have in Saamstaan.

Meetings

Each group conduct meetings to discuss the progress of payments for the plots, and other incidentals. They discuss the collective aspect of the goal of each group, to sustain the interest and ability to continue payments on the one hand and have patience on the other.
Marisa. Marisa describes how they utilize community meetings to discuss issues, concerns, and accomplishments, in order to attempt to maintain the momentum of the collective:

At our meetings we talk about things like the use of water, payment for water, and payment for the plots, specially those who are getting behind in payment. Because we all have to finish paying before we start building. Because the plot is a communal plot that's being bought on one amount. If one is behind we are all behind. On the other hand, if there may be 20 people or some people who have paid the full amount for their plots (N$3600.00 each), they must also wait for us. Because we must at least be thirty who have fully paid for the plots before we start building. Then Saamstaan can make a plan for us. So that we can start building.

Decision Making

Decisions are made through a democratic process. In making decisions, all individuals have the opportunity to contribute their views. The groups collectively discuss items brought up by individuals and decide on what is best for the entire group.

Edwina. Edwina, who is open to learning how groups develop, solve problems, and make decisions, and committed to using what she learns, describes the process of decision making in her group:

I think of the beginning when I said, to start things are always difficult. But I can really say with the help of NHAG we learnt many things. Especially, the communication. So I will say the communication is very good. And the committees of this group, they sit every Tuesday of the week. And before we have the group meeting, the committee sits first. Then we identify all the problems that we see. Then we see what solution we can find for the problems. But if we get to the group we don't come with the final decision. If we come to the group we only give the problems and then we give it to the members so that they can may be say how we can solve the problem and such type or things. Then if we come to them with these that we discussed already that we thought may be this can help the solution, then we come with a suggestion. Then the
group sees this is really now the best solution that we brought. After that
the group decides themselves, OK we take this suggestion, then we see
may be we will get it right.

Discipline and Process

The groups are aware of the possibility that individuals within the collective
may fail to meet their responsibilities as outlined in the group agreement. In such a
case, the group is prepared with content and process for taking action. For example, in
Edwina’s group, they keep records of who participates in collective work, i.e., making
bricks and construction work, and if individuals do not contribute their share, the group
takes disciplinary measures, even if it means the removal of a person who is intentional
about her or his negligence.

Edwina. The following is how Edwina describes this process:

We just warn them once. And we remind them of what is written in the
rules. Because these rules we say each person received a paper of the
rules and after each person got a paper we signed that we agree with the
rules. So we warn the person once, then the second time we say OK, if
you don't want to work, then we go stand in front of the person how is it
that you don't come to work? Why is it that you don't come to meetings?
How is it that you don't participate in our activities anymore? Then we
got the right to fire that person.

This we did to a man who had a house here already. OK we gave
him time and told him OK we give you this much time to leave the place.
So he showed us that he is really willing because after we have been to
his house he came to me again then he told me that he really wants to see
the committee and then we said OK we will quickly organize the
committee meeting then he came and then we had a meeting and then he
asked to be excused and said from now on he wouldn't again do it (be
aloof from participating in the work the community does) and that he
will work with us.

We already fired one really. In the first instance, if he is fired he
loses his plot. And here at the plot because the plot is being so cheap we
paid tax N$10.70. We still pay now 10.70. Then we send the letter to
the office. Then we tell the office staff, OK we have got such a problem
with this man. We warned him how many times and now the group decided that the man must just go then we look for someone else for the place. And what the people of Saamstaan do is just to calculate the money to see if the man doesn't owe that tax. If the man owes that tax from that money we paid for the plot then he must pay the whole of the tax then he gets the rest of the money. Further, the other fund (the fund which is used to buy cement and sand to build bricks) that we make on the plot he doesn't get a cent of that.

Conflicts/Problems

Even though the individuals in groups agree to group norms, rules, and responsibilities, their day-to-day life presents situations which demand their attention, redistribution of resources, and foregoing of the monthly payments for the plot. If a personal crisis prevents an individual from paying an instalment, s/he finds it extremely difficult to catch-up with the payments because s/he is unable to take double the amount of instalment from the already inadequate monthly wages. When some individuals get behind in payments, the whole group is held back from being able to begin building houses. Owing to this, conflicts and problems arise within the groups. Other instances of conflicts arise from individuals not paying for communal water, not living on the plots, not participating in meetings, and not sharing work.

Angela. Angela presents her view on group conflicts in the following manner:

Yes we also have a problem of all 58 people not living here. Some people live in Katutura. And we also have a lot of problems here. People don't want to pay for their plots regularly. And the fact is that if all 58 of us are done with the paying then only we can start building the houses. And that thing gives each meeting high blood pressure. We talk and people say no I can't afford it. Then we tell the people OK if you can't pay the N$65.00 what must we do because we want the houses built. And the other say that no we can't pay that money. Now we also talked about that last week. Must we also give the people who can't pay or what must we do? Must we have Braais (Bar-B-Que) of sell some
things to help the people, because through these people, all of us we will all be without houses. And the mosquito's bite and this cold is also very dangerous, and the problem of the toilet in the evening is very serious with us because the toilet is situated over there. If you for example have a running stomach and you walk from here, maybe you also get cut with a knife. Because the Ovambo's are everywhere. Because this Lorry was also broken into twice. So it is also very dangerous.

I can't say why people don't pay. But, it is a big problem. The person himself must say his problem. Some say no I don't have money this month and then in the other month no I don't have work. Some work and some don't work. And so in our group there isn't a person who doesn't have any work. We struggle. The domestic work doesn't last for years. Some people move away and if some people come you get a little bit. But the people mourn about the payment.

They say they have always got reasons. Some say they have to get school clothes for the children because it is winter, and some say my miss has moved. So it goes. And some also say, no they can't afford, they must first start buying zins (corrugated iron sheets) again to make the houses a little bit bigger and so on. Each person has his own excuses.

There is also a problem of people not living here. Some people don't come here, they also don't come to the meetings. And sometimes you think maybe this person who lives there on the other side if he pays or doesn't pay you also don't know that because the money is being paid at the office and at the end we hear yes. Then you get a person and the person says, no, I am not a part of your group anymore. Such things people talk about. And there also last week we pulled the list and those people who live there we are going to look for them and ask them whether they are still part of the group or not because if those people, look for example we got three people were also in the group who decided that they are not part of the group. And they also didn't tell us previously. When we got them we asked them and then they told, no we are out. Then we asked how is your payment. That person only paid the deposit N$300.00. And we are about a year busy. In addition to the N$300.00 deposit we, those of us who live here, have been paying N$65.00 every month now for about a year.

Amber. Amber agrees with Angela's view on members not living on the plots and what that means with regard to the goal, i.e., each member acquiring a plot and a house within a projected ten year period, of the entire group. Amber is frustrated, and is working continuously at individual, organizational, and group level to generate a
practical solution to eliminate the problem. She is convinced that there must be stricter
rule about living on the plot:

We don't have everybody in the group living here. Some of them have no material to put up a shack in here so they don't come. So about 35 members of our group are not here. And that is why we fight now [fight here means working within their group and working with the Coordinating Committee of the umbrella organization, and working with the office staff of the umbrella organization, to generate a policy on the implications of membership in a group - that implication being living on the plot once one is a member and continuation of payment for the plot]. If everybody is here and pay their plot, then, it is one thing. We then can finish paying for the plot faster and after we can make plans to build. But now it is a problem. We must have rules about living in the plots. If they are members then they must live here and begin to pay. We cannot have any rules because everybody is not here and if we draw up rules then those who are not here at the time will not agree with these rules that we put in here. We want all the 80 people so that we can draw up the rules.

Janice. Janice brings up another issue related to the condition of members not living on the plot. The issue is about payment for water:

I can't say precisely what kind of problems we get if you have the meeting and you talk about those things. Look for example, the payment for the water. If we tell the people who live in the location that they must pay for the water, then they don't want to because they live in the location and they don't live in the plot, (even though they are members of our group) and they don't use the water here, it's there that we have a conflict. And then we also come to the payment, we ask them why they can't pay for the land, because there are some who pay and some who don't, then you hear things like: "I suffer," "I don't have work," and this and that, but then the people don't come themselves and tell us about their problems. Then you just hear about this person that person said that and that and its there where people don't understand each other in all these things.

Because the land has been divided in all of us 58 and its just one water meter that comes here and if the water comes up at the municipality to three hundred dollars, then that three hundred dollars is taken and divided among that 58. So every person that became a member of Saamstaan knows that our group got a plot, she is a member of this group, and must pay for the water.
Marjorie. Marjorie brings up another issue which she is frustrated and disappointed about. That is the attitude and behavior of the individuals, toward the group goal of housing for each member, once their houses are built and they have moved in. Marjorie’s frustration, the mental affliction, is so intense that she herself is contemplating not being a part of Saamstaan community, once her house is built and she is able to move in. Below is how she describes her frustration and the position she takes on this issue:

Look as we have built already after two people, like you know, if I get the house then I must pay for it so that the next person’s house can be built. Now if the previous people didn’t pay the money for the house that was built for them then there is no money to build houses for the others in the group. The ones whose houses were built earlier stopped paying back and there was no other money left. So some of us from the old group which was the first group of Saamstaan are still struggling to get our houses built. Some other groups which started much later than us have built houses for many of their members. Only recently we got money from Saamstaan. With that money I got the foundation dug. Now I am still waiting for Saamstaan to start building.

As the other people started moving into the houses we stumbled because they did not want to pay. They keep saying that they don’t have money because of this and that. Others having no houses for themselves is not a priority for them because they have other priorities. People don’t go to meetings. Sometimes when it is cold they don’t get there. Sometimes, like me, I am also not interested sometimes, then I just feel meetings, meetings but I don’t even have a house yet and I won’t go before you build my house. That is what I say sometimes. It is me and my neighbor alternately sometimes who go to Saamstaan meetings. All the other people who have houses in our group keep themselves busy in their houses. As long as I don’t have a roof I will go to these meetings. When I get my house built maybe I will also put brakes on. And then their will not be an old group as it has been.
Conflict Resolution

Resolving conflicts is first a group effort, then an administrative effort. There are a variety of ways utilized for resolving conflicts: discussions at meetings, punishments, committees, and administrative rules.

Janice. Janice explains a process of conflict resolutions:

It’s actually not easy to solve a problem, or to say something, or to make decisions. We sit [meet] two or three times to talk about that thing that we can come to a point. We throw each other with words. Maybe I think this and maybe another person thinks that. Then it doesn’t fit together. Then that thing is postponed for the next Coordinating Committee meeting and for the next time we first discuss that thing again and then we come to a point.

Responsibility to Group and Self

Marisa now describes how group members as individuals are encouraged and provided for to take responsibility for themselves, and by doing so how they as individuals can maintain responsibility toward the group. Individuals in groups are educated on advance saving. The office staff of Saamstaan assist individuals by depositing their money in savings accounts and keeping records of their savings. When individuals are unable to utilize their wages toward the payment for the plot at a given time, they then can utilize their savings to keep to their commitment. Marisa is in favor of advance savings, in order to be responsible to one’s self and to the group:

If a person doesn't work and cannot pay we always understand. But that's why we have been told that we must always save in advance at the Saamstaan office. It just lies there but it must be at least N$1200.00. That's now our advancement savings that's later going to help me. If I am without a job then I go to the office then my N$1200 is there and maybe I am three months behind then that advancement savings, three
months payments is taken from that money. We pay at the office by Gerald. We also are given books. He always write in what we pay.

People who work and don't pay, because they pay for other things, we make them pay N$150.00 the following month, so that they are up to speed and do not make us get behind. Yes, these people think they don't want to pay two months. It's very difficult for them to pay double the amount at one time. That's why the people pay regularly.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented some conditions and influences which contribute to the construction of notions of selves, as described by Saamstaan women interviewed. The conditions of past, present, future, existences, i.e., appearances, and dissolutions, i.e., disappearances working in mutual dependence with political, economic, social, cultural conditions continue to construct women's notions of who they are on a moment to moment level.

Relationships between women and individuals, be they children, husbands, men, employers, or social workers, as conditioned phenomena, seem to condition and are in turn conditioned by women's sense of who they are. Relationships between women and economic institutions, i.e., banks, housing institutions, wage work, and collective work, contribute to women's sense of who they are. Relationships between women and social and cultural institutions, i.e., religion, marriage, motherhood, and single parenthood, contribute to women's sense of who they are.

Experience within Saamstaan, the umbrella organization, contributes to women's sense of who they are. Political participation, economic planning and distribution of personal financial resources to various destinations, organizing for
collective community, taking actions to obtain material necessities, and education, training and skills development for being self-reliant, are all conditions within Saamstaan which contribute to women's sense of who they are.

Experience within their own groups is a condition which functions as another platform on which women carry out some of the things they learn as members of Saamstaan. For example, they generate the political, social, and economic processes, which are conditions, for the functioning of their groups. Their participation in these processes in turn becomes the empowerment they have not had before, for feeling, perceiving, and developing habits and consciousness that match their sense of who they are.

Women identify themselves as domestic workers, wage workers, low-income group, employees. They identify themselves as owners of houses, cooperative members, single parents (in most cases), mothers with pride in them. They identify themselves as individuals who perform roles which have been assigned to men, and roles which men fail to perform. Along with all these identities, women demonstrate identities as feudal ladies, collective workers, and employees of enterprises.

Saamstaan women's stories demonstrate the impossibility of considering individuals as having unchanging selves in terms of either identities, gender, or class. Their stories also present the appearance that oppression is a condition externally imposed on them and that liberation from oppression means freeing themselves from these external conditions by changing them, i.e., external conditions.
In the next chapter, I will explore women’s experience from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, with a view to understanding what oppression means and what liberation means.
CHAPTER 5

TRANSFORMATION - SELF AND SOCIAL

In this chapter I attempt to chart the cycles of change in the participants, as these cycles relate to their notions of self/identity, gender, and class, and as they relate to oppression and liberation. First I will present how women's sense of self has changed from before to now. Then I will present how women construct their sense of who they are at present, by presenting their attitude toward women's gender roles learnt and the gender roles they are performing now, and attitude towards their changing class participation. Then, using the format of the Conditional Arising, and drawing examples from the experiences of women, I will attempt to map out the cycles of oppression as they relate to freedom or liberation as expounded in the Abhidhamma.

Women's Definition of Self Before and Now

According to how the women in this study perceive themselves, who they are now and who they were before are very different. From their view, before they were dependents, children, obedient, weak, incapable of doing things for themselves, ignorant, women with fertility, living under others' roofs, unable to provide for children, not belonging anywhere, living in an unpredictable world, subordinates of men with whom they enter into relations, and "suffer" crisis as they arise rather than actively resolve them. Now they are independent, self reliant, mothers and wage earners, decision makers, strong, capable of doing things for themselves, knowledgeable, with reproductive responsibilities, potential owners of houses, or already owners of houses,
providers for the children, members of an organization, participants in formulating and upholding rules and responsibilities of the social groups they live in, and proactive planners for their own future. In the process of defining who they are now, from who they were before, several characteristics can be observed. What follows is an attempt to present some of these characteristics.

Multiple Selves: Cycles of Change

In the process of construction of self, women first identify themselves with their families. They are the children in the family and belong to the family. In the early part of their lives, within the family, they move through the experience of subservience and adolescence. Following these cycles, women enter into being young mothers, during which they continue dependency on their parents, living in the household of the parents.

In the event they live with the father of their children, they consider themselves to be dependents and subservient to men with whom they share life. At the same time, women find wage work as domestic workers, and some women are able to find lodging/shelter at the employers' place. In their next episode, they affiliate themselves with the cooperative, subscribe to membership, begin to pay for obtaining a plot and a house, and assert a new definition of themselves.

Their roles have changed from that of dependent daughter-child with no responsibilities for self or others, to adult woman with the responsibilities for their children. In between, they have had roles of employees, female companions subservient to men with whom they shared life, and as members of the self-help organization. As they move in these different moments or episodes of their lives, different players define
who they are. In the beginning, parents define who they are, taking into consideration that their parents' definition of who their daughters are is conditioned by a multitude of conditions existing at that time. Then, the employers and other economic and political institutions define them as domestic workers, part-time workers, and low-income earners. At the same time, cultural institutions, for example, the religion prevalent at the time, marriage laws, and the society define them as female, women, and wives, outlining what is expected of them in these roles and what the women can expect from others. Women are also defined by societal values which are contrary to the religious commands that define who women are. An example of these contrasting definitions about women is motherhood of women. Religion commands that women give birth to children in marriage and not before or "out of wedlock." Society seems to expect women to "prove fertility" prior to marriage, while in adolescence or soon thereafter, and become mothers early in their lives. Women in turn "fit" themselves within the societal definition of who they are by becoming mothers in their teens or soon thereafter, even though they know that it is contrary to the religious norms. In another cycle of their lives, the cooperative defines them as members, participants, owners of houses, and heads of households. In this cycle of their lives, as members of the cooperative, women themselves take ownership of defining who they are.

During this process, women's expectations of others and of themselves change. In the beginning, as children, women expect little from their parents, receive material and emotional provisions given to them by parents with no value judgments, and follow in obedience instructions and guidance given by parents. As they move to a different moment in their lives, they assume the role of wage workers. Women also begin to
entertain the thought of material and financial security. At the same time, they hang on to the idea of men being the providers for their families, and in turn see themselves as recipients of subsistence. As they experience men being in the habit of leaving them and the children, the women change the expectations they have of men, in terms of being providers for their families, which in turn changes their expectations of themselves as the individuals who alone have to bear the responsibilities for their young and themselves. At this moment, women change themselves to individuals who have to do things for themselves, accepting, asserting a role of doer, and redefining themselves as providers.

In terms of decision making, several cycles of moments can be observed. At first, as daughter child, women do not participate in decision making about social, political, economic, or cultural aspects of either themselves or the family. They are in the custody of their parents and under absolute obedience. In the cycle of young adulthood, they are subservient to the family and existing political, economic, social, and religious practices that make decisions for them. As they move to motherhood, they begin to have some role in making some decisions related to domestic affairs, still being subservient mostly to other processes. When they move to the cooperative, they already have taken part in a decision-making process for themselves. While in the cooperative they participate considerably in the political, social, and economic processes, contributing to making decisions. Within their own households, women are independent and self-reliant, making decisions about the affairs pertaining to the household, by themselves, and about themselves.
The process of establishing a place of living has taken each woman through many cycles in her life and her definition of self. During the cycle of childhood, women were living in the house of their parents, which continued on to the cycle of their young adulthood. It is also possible that these women became young mothers, needed to earn money to support their children, in which case they may have had to consider living in two places interchangeably, i.e., in their parents’ place and their employers’ house or lodging in friends’/relatives’ places while employed. One among many conditions which would force them into this situation is the need to have economic means to support the children. Some women move in with men who have dwellings, enter into relations and have neither any entitlement nor control over the place of living. During the cycle of their cooperative membership, women establish squatter shelters for themselves and their children, which they now consider their own. While squatting, women work out plans to build durable houses for themselves, and to be the legal owner of the property. They then consider themselves independent, happy, and individuals with pride because they now are doing things for themselves.

During these episodes of their lives, both past and present, women experience unpleasant feelings, or "struggles" to use their own words. As women perceive, the struggles arise owing to lack of material conditions, economic hardships, misunderstandings and squabbles arising because of living in overcrowded households (in parents’ houses with siblings, the children of the siblings, their own children, and possibly other relatives), having to leave children unsupervised in places where they lodge, abandonment by men leaving them with children, being forced out of living spaces by employers, and many other unspecified but complicated situations. While
they are affiliated with the cooperative and living in their own communities, along with pleasant feelings, they experience unpleasant feelings. When their responsibility to the cooperative interferes with their responsibility to the family (children), they experience unpleasantness. When the staff of the cooperative does not resolve problems arising from payment for communal water use, community members not living on the plots, not paying for the plots, and thereby holding back the rest of the community members from being able to move on to the stage of building houses for themselves, they experience unpleasant feelings. They experience pain and grief, anger, despair, anguish, anxiety, sorrow and lamentation, among many other unpleasant feelings. Their perceptions are colored by the pleasant and unpleasant feelings they experience. In turn their intentions and actions, i.e., speech, thoughts, and bodily actions, continue to be shaped by the unpleasant feelings they experience.

**Multiple Gender Roles: Changing Gender Roles**

Several cycles of gender roles, changes, and processes which contributed to change can be observed. During their childhood cycle, women learnt and performed household chores. As women have said, work outside home, the work which gave money, was exclusively for men. This they learnt from how the work was divided between their mothers and fathers. The mothers stayed home and did work within the household, for the well-being of the family. Mothers’ work did not yield money from any source either within or outside of the house. The fathers went out of the house to work, and that work was paid by the people for whom they worked. The types of work their father did, was the productive work, such as farm work or construction work. The
type of work their mothers did was reproductive work. Through this process, women learnt the division of labor based on sex difference, and the expectations that were developed of individuals based on sex difference. And they learnt their roles based on their sex, from how these roles were organized and carried out by their mothers and fathers. Mothers and fathers were also the sources of information regarding the division of roles and responsibilities in decision making within and outside of family, participation in the political processes of the community and society, and the sex-differentiated roles for men and women in the religious sphere of life. Women did not make decisions within or outside of the house. Women did not participate in the designing of political, economic, or social processes of the community or the society. Women did not participate in the roles related to religion, above and beyond being the followers of a belief and church goers. All these roles were assigned to men and women were resigned to the domestic sphere of life.

In these women’s young adulthood, they had been assigned the roles of child bearing and rearing activities, and women had participated in this role. Men’s gender role in this process seem to have been limited to the related sexual activities. Once women were pregnant, men seem to have left them either for work, to establish other sexual relations, or simply not involving themselves in the reproductive responsibilities. "Proving fertility" seems to have been assigned to women as a gender role they should play in the early years of their lives.

For the most part, women remained dependent on the support of their families while they were to played this gender role. They had no role in the designing of the political, economic, and social spheres of lives in the immediate family, or in their own
communities. Performing of roles specific to their gender, according to the rules, norms, traditions, and customs established by others, and without any questioning, had been the practice they were engaged in. Adherence to the gender specific role of child bearing, however, had caused women to be torn between two value systems, i.e., the religious values of not bearing children out of wedlock, and the social values of proving fertility with or without being married. In each individual case in this study, the women have performed their assigned gender roles according to societal value.

While young mothers, women entered another gender role: the role of wage-earning domestic worker, working outside of their homes. Men, too, work as domestic workers for employers, but the chores they do are different from what women do as domestic workers. As domestic workers, men work in the gardens of the employers. Women work in the house of the employers, which includes cleaning, laundry, ironing, dishwashing, etc. While assuming a role of income earner, women continue in the role of dependent on their families for emotional and kin support until they enter in to a cycle of combining their roles as wage earner and the manager or the primary caretaker of the reproductive responsibilities of their own children. In this cycle of experience, women seem to be open to consider roles and responsibilities which do not "fit" in the frameworks they have so far been operating from. As conditions present the opportunities, women begin to affiliate themselves with organizations that support them, learn new responsibilities such as planning, saving, and producing the necessary materials for acquiring houses for themselves, undertake the ownership of their property, i.e., plots and houses, and participate in the defining of political, economic, and social processes of the organization and the communities they belong to. In the
post-entry cycle, women engage in activities such as construction work, which is exclusively set aside for men. Women identify themselves as owners of their houses, heads of households, sole providers for their families, and responsible community members who determine courses of action for their communities to acquire the necessary material conditions for living.

In the process of transformation of themselves in relation to gender roles, women do experience pleasant, unpleasant, or at times indifferent feelings. During the episodes of performing female gender-specific tasks, women experienced feeling trapped in a gender specific framework, disappointment in not being able to do things for themselves, not because they do not have the ability, but because the society prevents them from doing things for themselves. They experience disappointment in having to be dependent on men for their subsistence and well being, pleasant feelings in proving fertility, and, at the same time, disappointment in having to bear responsibility for children all by themselves. Through affiliation with the cooperative, women experience pleasant feelings about being independent actors in ensuring the well-being of themselves and the children. At the same time, women also experience a split personality - one being independent and in control of the logistics related to ensuring the acquisition of a house of their own, and the other worrisome personality of being the subordinate to a husband if and when married. Women have broken free from one kind of entrapment which held them economically and materially dependent on men, and yet they continue to be entrapped in unpleasant feelings of subservience to men. They are in oppression of a psycho-physical system primed by views about what a woman is and
what a man is. They suffer anger, anguish, despair, sorrow, lamentation, and other unpleasant feelings and the perceptions that arise along with those feelings.

**Multiple Class Positions: Cycles of Change**

As demonstrated by the participants in this study, the profiles of their lives unravel not only through several cycles of class, but several cycles within one cycle. In their childhood, women participate in household activities under the direction of their parents who assign specific duties to them. As children, they do not earn income for producing labor as assigned. In this cycle, their labor is similar to that which is performed by individuals in a feudal mode of production: the parents as feudal individuals who assign duties to children performing labor. In exchange, they receive shelter, food, and other basic amenities from the parents. This cycle of labor continues through their adolescent life with perhaps added responsibilities which demand more labor, based on the physical ability to perform. As they are passing through adolescence and in the transitional cycle of their lives, women enter into wage work, as domestic workers. While they are income earners, they continue ties with their parents for emotional support and, in some instances, share the income they earn with the family they belong to. This dynamic is most important to women, particularly in the case where they have left their infants under the care of their parents. In terms of performing labor, however, women seem to be engaged primarily in wage labor, and not involved in producing labor in a feudal arrangement. The reason for this separation is the distance between their families and where the women find employment. As they transition to wage work, women sometimes have to leave their parents’ home and move...
to urban areas. Unavailability of a transport system which would take them back and forth within a short amount of time and for an affordable cost might be a contributing condition for the separation of women who are wage workers from their feudal families. In the event that the conditions of distance and the lack of an effective transport system were absent, it is conceivable that the women would participate in both class processes at the same time.

In another cycle of class participation, women perform labor as wage workers, collective workers, and as feudal householders themselves. As women continue to bear sole responsibility for their own families, which include their own children, away from their rural kin families, they continue to perform wage labor, affiliate themselves with cooperatives or collectives, and perform in the role of feudal householders who assign household duties to their children who perform labor for no financial remuneration. In some instances, women have not only their own children, but either the children of their relatives or the relatives themselves in the household. Whatever the configuration of their household, women assign household duties to the household members, performing in the role of feudal householders. They assign children as surrogates to participate in community meetings when women have to be absent. They assign the children the duties of performing labor in making bricks or other labor relating to construction of houses in their community. The same may be true with other relatives who may be living in their household. In whichever configuration, women as the primary individuals responsible for the household perform in a variety of class processes, for example, as wage workers in a capitalist class process, as feudal householder in a feudal class process, and as a collective worker sharing labor performed for no financial
remuneration but for attaining a common goal for each in the collective, i.e., acquiring houses for each.

As wage workers, women perform labor as expected and assigned by the employers. Employers determine the number of hours for a day or a week they want women to work, the tasks women must perform, the wages they would pay to women, which days women do not have to work, the length of time women can be absent from work at any given period, and any other details pertaining to the performance of labor. While women are at liberty not to accept the conditions on which the performance of labor is to be based, which would mean not accepting a position offered by employers, they are not at liberty to either negotiate the conditions or collectively develop the conditions of labor to be performed. As feudal householders, women determine the conditions of labor their children or the other household members are to perform. Women determine the rules and regulations, how the performance is monitored, the consequences of performance or lack of performance, and the extent to which the children and the household members will be remunerated in kind, vis-a-vis, emotional and material support for their growth, development and existence. As members of a collective, women participate in collective processes such as determining the group goals toward which the labor performed will contribute, nature of labor performed, rules and regulations that govern the performance of labor, and rewards and punishments for performance and non-performance of labor. As a collective, it is not the individual goals on which the sharing of labor will be based: it is the goal of the collective, which is the houses for each member of the collective, on which the sharing of labor is based. According to this principle, as houses are built and individuals move into them, these
individuals who acquire the houses must continue to share their labor until houses are built for all members. The sharing of labor within the collective is designed to accomplish the collective goal of houses for all members within the collective.

With regard to the process of labor of these participants, one can observe an array of feelings and perceptions involved. When they were producing labor at their parents' homes, women produced what they were expected to produce, whether they wanted to or not. At times, it is possible that they had not wanted to produce labor but did so against their wishes. In such instances, unpleasant feelings arise because of having to do what they do not want to do, or being unclear about what they want to do. As women engage in wage work, the wages they earn perhaps give them pleasant feelings, since they are able to distribute these wages to different destinations which are instrumental to their survival. However, in terms of the work they do for the employers, the women have no participation and control over what and how they perform. While some women associate themselves with the work they do for the employers, identify themselves with and take pride in that work, for others it was a means to a survival. Perhaps all women experienced some unpleasantness due to having had no part in the designing of the work they do. Job security is always a doubtful experience for all participants. The doubt, in relation to wage labor, influences all other aspects of their lives and is, in turn, a condition for arising of unpleasant feelings. It (doubt) influences women's intentions, compulsive impulses, speech, actions, and thought. The doubt influences their desire, grasping, and becoming. The doubt influences the construction of their sense of who they are as individuals and as cooperative and community members.
The performing of labor in the collective, while guided by conventionally agreed upon values of sharing, is at times an unpleasant experience for women. The unpleasant feelings arise when individuals do not share the labor as is expected of them and as they have agreed to, leaving those who do perform to do it all by themselves.

The value of sharing labor is an injunction of the collective, by the collective, and for the collective, to serve the interests of the individuals in the collective. The sharing of labor, for the participants, is not a quality that comes from within themselves, but an obligation imposed by the collective. The sharing is not based on insight on "reality," i.e., there is incessant change in all conditioned phenomena, human experience is oppression, and no phenomenon has an independent existence and there is no possessive self in any individual, but on a view that a permanent and a lasting experience is possible, acquisition of material conditions means freedom from oppression, and that there is an individual in each of them who takes control and possession of the conditions of existence. Once the desire, i.e., the acquisition of a house, is fulfilled, individuals cling to pleasant feelings arising therefrom, and block-off anything that gets in the way of the continuation of those pleasant feelings, which is, in this instance, giving or sharing of labor. The foundation upon which individuals enter into the agreement of sharing labor or collective labor is self-interest. Once self interest is fulfilled, individuals have no other foundation upon which they would base the sharing of labor. This lack of foundation, lack of insight into the "reality" of things, is a condition upon which arises dissolution of the identity individuals thus far held, as members of a collective. As this identity in individuals dissolves, they already have begun the process of new existences. For those who are still in agreement with the
obligations of the collective, clinging on to the idea that all members must contribute labor until each individual gets a house, the dissolution of this agreement and the dissolution of identifying with the collective by others, becomes a condition which generates conflict in their desire, i.e., mental afflictions, and bodily pain. When the desire is in conflict, i.e., wanting the fulfillment of lasting pleasures and obstructions that get in the way of this fulfillment, they begin to intensely identify with and continue to hang on to the idea of the collective and develop an intense disliking or aversion toward the obstacles, in this instance the individuals who do not share or contribute labor. The collective labor is, at one and the same time, both an apparent solution and a problem, because the foundation upon which the ideal is based is self-interest. The individuals within the collective do not have a way to investigate, understand, and sustain a practice of sharing without self-interest.

Looking Through the Lenses

What can we learn about the conditions of existence of these women, if we look through the liberal, Marxist, socialist, postmodern/poststructuralist feminist lenses, and what do they mean in terms of oppression and liberation? How would these feminist schools of thoughts analyze the experience of these women? What would be the proposals for changing the conditions of existence of these women and with what consequences? Would these women be able to adequately prepare themselves for dealing with oppression? What might be some possible advantages and disadvantages women will experience owing to actions they take based on these views? And what other questions might there be which cannot be adequately analyzed through these
Below, I attempt a cursory glance at these questions, as preparation for analyzing them from the perspective of the Abhidhamma.

From the liberal feminist perspective, these women could be seen as the victims of oppression instituted by an archaic and patriarchal social system which prevents them from having equal opportunity with men, and from having access to and benefitting from economic, political, and social resources in society. If the existing economic, political, and social systems are reformed in such a way that women, based on their sex difference, are not deprived of opportunities to participate in and benefit from these systems, according to this view, women will be liberated from oppression. For the most part, the existing social, political, and economic systems in the context of these women do indeed prevent women from participating in defining these processes and having access to resources in society. However, whether the reformed systems will guarantee equality between men and women in terms of having access to resources remains a question for several reasons. One reason is that it is not only women who have no equal access to these resources. Men in their society also have been, and are up to this day, prevented from having equal access to these resources, just as women have been and still are. How men are prevented from having equal opportunity in society, in this context, speaks not only to patriarchy, of which these men are thought of as the beneficiaries and the culprits at the same time, but also to colonial and post-colonial processes. Another reason is the question of what is meant by equality? Equal to whom and what? For example, all individuals cannot be doctors or lawyers. Neither can all individuals be teachers, farmers, or fishermen. Nor do all individuals have equal desires. How can equality be defined and how can equality be ensured so that women
are not oppressed? Yet another reason is that, even though the existing systems are reformed and mechanisms are established for women and men to be able to have access to resources on an equal footing, will the benefit of resources solve the question of individual and social oppression? For this question, liberal feminist thought has no viable response.

From the Marxist feminist perspective, these women are exploited by employers. They do not receive adequate remuneration for the work they do. They do not have the social, political, and economic means by which to change the relations between themselves and their employers. Neither do they have social, economic, and political means for surviving independent of the wages they earn. From this perspective, these women are oppressed by the relations between them and their employers. To free themselves from oppression, they have to change the existing relations between themselves and the employers. The question is, however, while it might yield some economic, social, and political benefits, will the change of relations between the employers and themselves as exploited workers eliminate oppression within?

Socialist feminist perspective would present these women as oppressed by patriarchy and exploitation both. There is ample evidence in the stories of the participants to support this view. In order for women to be free from this oppression, and to conduct their lives actualizing their potential as human beings, one socialist feminist proposal would be that the sexual division of labor and exploitation of women by employers supported by economic, political, and social systems need to be changed. The expectation is that the change in the social, economic, and political processes would yield changes in women, making it possible for them to develop their abilities to
participate in the economic, political, and social processes. The assumption is that, when there is access to material resources unhindered by sexual division of labor and exploitation, there is also freedom from oppression.

The postmodern/poststructuralist feminist thoughts would observe how the existing socio-cultural, political, and economic processes and these individuals interactively construct the notions of who they are and how they must behave; what are the implications of this kind of construction of self on individuals; how and what changes are possible and needed to recognize the subjectivity of individuals who are not recognized by status-quo, or find no space for themselves in the established social, economic order? The deconstruction of the "individual," as has been known before postmodern/poststructuralist feminist discourses, immensely contributes to an understanding of the women of the collective in a different light altogether. Through a postmodern/poststructuralist feminist analysis of the women in the collective, one would be able to understand that these women do not have singular identities as women, but multiple identities as mothers, wage workers, feudal individuals, community members, community leaders, community out-reach workers, and the like. One would also come to know that each of these women is an individual with multiple identities, who occupy different spaces in existing social discourses, they are not "victims" as they have been so far thought of, and that they are individuals who have their own multiple identities that continually construct who they are. In order for these women to free themselves from the construction of their identities as "victims" or in any other way that would be disadvantageous to them as individuals, postmodern/poststructuralist feminist perspectives would propose rewriting and reproducing the discourses from within these
individuals, asserting non-victim positions, denying the existing socio-cultural, economic, and political discourses the power over them, and exploring the ways in which the power of those discourses can be undermined. The process of destabilizing the existing discourses which construct who these women are is also, from this perspective, the process of rejecting what these discourses construct and asserting the power of the individuals constructing anew of their multiple identities, multiple spaces in the social contexts. In place of individuals existing as singular entities, postmodern/poststructural feminist perspectives posit individuals existing as multiple identities, changing at one time and over time.

The stories of the participants amply demonstrate this perspective. As they were narrating their stories, they constructed themselves not as "victims," but as individuals who have the power to maneuver their energy in positive ways to conduct their lives. They demonstrated multiple identities. They denied the existing discourses to define them as "victims." However, even though women are jubilant about their newfound selves, in terms of their identities, gender roles and class positions, in another significant way they demonstrated oppression of selves. They were fraught with mental afflictions and accompanying pain. The newly emerging notions of selves in themselves seem to entangle them in cycles of oppression of selves. The postmodern/poststructuralist feminist thoughts, which undeniably contribute to understanding the subjectivity or self in ways not known before, do not seem to offer a convincing method to investigate, understand, liberate individuals from the oppression within.
The Question

The underlying concept of the above discourses is the notion of oppression of women. Explicit agreement is that society and subjectivity are inseparable and, further, emancipation from oppression is possible when the individuals change themselves and the very social processes that contribute to the construction of oppressive notions of individuals. The changes in these two processes, the individual and the social processes, in mutually influential ways change the conditions of oppression of individuals. While it is conceivable that, along with the changes as mentioned, the conditions of oppression of individuals may change, none of the approaches above has presented a satisfactory way to investigate, understand, eliminate the arising of oppression within the individuals. What is oppression in individuals? How does this condition, i.e., oppression, within individuals arise? How can the arising of oppression be eliminated? How can individuals understand that they are not victims of social processes and that they are not victims of themselves, meaning, that they do not deceive themselves through the attempts to reject the established constructions of who they are? How can we investigate self, without constructing a self? In other words, how can we liberate self from self?

The Perspective of the Abhidhamma

The material circumstances of the participating women are different from the circumstances of many individuals locally and globally. These circumstances contribute to the quality of life of these individuals in ways different from the quality of life of individuals who have different material circumstances. The women are however,
no happier or unhappier than any other, and no more or less oppressed than any other. As human beings like any other, these women continue as processes of matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. As processes they continue incessantly producing mental formations, notions about themselves, taking pleasant feelings as liberating experiences and unpleasant experiences as oppressive experiences on a moment-to-moment level. As processes these moment-to-moment level experiences arise, persist, and dissolve with past, present, and future within these experiences. As processes, these women like any other, continue grasping on to their experiences, as if they are the possessive and permanent owners who experience and look forward to experiencing happiness/satisfaction.

The women who told their stories presented themselves as happy individuals who either have accomplished individual goals of securing houses or have mapped out practical plans, and are operationalizing these plans for securing houses. All women participants presented themselves as assertive, involved, and active members in their cooperative, who are happy that they have the potential in themselves and the support they needed in order to acquire the material needs to lead a respectful life. They also vocalized many obstacles which constituted hindrances to the fulfilment of their ambitions. The focus on material conditions of existence, however, while contributing to the material security needed for maintaining the living of their families, is itself a condition of oppression. From the perspective of the Abhidhamma: (1) The happiness and unhappiness women experience is not permanent. The happiness and unhappiness women experience is subject to change. Women as individuals do not experience happiness and unhappiness: women are conglomerates of multiple processes, and
happiness/unhappiness is one of these many processes. (2) The experiences of these women, like any other persons', constitute oppression. (3) Oppression has a cause. (4) Oppression can be ended. (5) There is a way/method by which to end oppression.

**Oppression**

Oppression is bodily pains and mental grief arising together with other conditions of existence. In this sense, oppression is a process that manifests as a conflict between the desire of want and the desire to reject, or a struggle to grasp on to conditions that are pleasant and to reject conditions that are unpleasant. Women identified several aspects as struggles. Being left by the fathers of the children is identified as a struggle. Having to support and provide for the children alone is identified as a struggle. Having no material conditions to bring up children is identified as a struggle. Having to see children grow up on the streets is identified as a struggle. Having to subject children to the criticism of neighbors and the owners of lodgings was identified as a struggle. Having to send children to hostels, so as to free themselves up to work as domestic workers for employers was identified as a struggle. Having to live with the children in their parents' houses with other siblings and their children was identified as a struggle. Being subjected to the domination of men was identified as a struggle. Having to subject themselves to the sexual desires of men with no other commitment from them was identified as a struggle. Men not assisting financially in their efforts on establishing houses was identified as a struggle. Men expecting them to live with them in their houses without marrying was identified as a struggle. Having low income was identified as a struggle. Having to be rejected by the existing
institutions which grant loans for housing to individuals with low income was identified as a struggle. Having no job security was identified as a struggle. Having no sanitary facilities was identified as a struggle. Having to accommodate others' inability to pay the loans, and as a result, having to wait a long time to start building houses for themselves was identified as a struggle. Some members choosing to not pay the loans, and choosing to not contribute labor to build houses for other members once their houses are built was identified as a struggle. Having to distribute the meager income among various destinations and having to prioritize and forego some in order to accommodate others was recognized as a struggle. While these were some of the struggles mentioned, it is conceivable that there might be other struggles which were not noticed or mentioned by the participants.

How are we to comprehend what struggle means in these instances? Who is struggling with what or with whom, and with what emotional and material consequences? Investigation of these aspects is key to understanding oppression as experienced by these individuals.

One way to conceive these struggles is to see them as struggles between the women, the experiencers, and the social processes, institutions, and individuals who recognize, affirm, support, reject, abandon, marginalize, and exploit them. If the discourse is on the struggle as a process between the individual/subject and the objects, i.e., other social, political, and economic processes, institutions, individuals, then one way of investigating the struggles of the individuals could be to analyze how the perceived needs - material or emotional - of the individuals and the social processes which cater to, prevent, or do neither, interact with each other, and in what combination,
to generate the very struggles. By such an investigation one might be able to identify which of these processes must change, what behaviors of the individuals must change, and how these changes in both, will in turn, change the composition, i.e., extent, types, forms and conditions of struggles, and the workings of the struggles, which will be beneficial to the subjects/subjectivity of the struggles. Struggle in this sense is a mutually interactive process between the individuals and social processes which constitute and are constituted by both. And the object of investigation is the struggle, i.e., its composition, how it works, how it affects individuals (i.e., the extent to which it has an impact on the emotional components of the individuals), and how the struggle is affected by individuals and the social processes. Another way to comprehend what these women articulate as struggle is to understand it as an arising inner experience of the individuals, owing to the presence of inner and outer conditions of the individuals and the interdependent workings of these conditions. If the struggle is observed as an inner experience, then the investigation and the discourse would be on the conditioned and conditioning components of the struggle within the individuals, interdependent processes within the individuals which generate the arising of struggles, and the combinations of the workings of these components and processes. The struggle, in this instance, is an interdependent arising within the individual - an inner experience, which is the object of focus or investigation. The Abhidhamma engages in the latter, which is the investigation of the arising of struggle/oppression within the individuals. From the Abhidhamma perspective, the experience as a whole is oppression in the body and mind - the psycho-physical complex of the individuals. The condition of oppression is subjectivity, and subjectivity, in turn, is oppression. What is the process of subjectivity
and oppression? Here, I intend to investigate/explore the process of subjectivity as process of oppression by elaborating two examples from the participants’ experience.

Process of Oppression: Conditional Arising

Example 1: Subjectivity as Women with Children and with No Husbands or Men

All but three of the participating women identified themselves as individuals with children, with no husbands or men. As mothers, women identify themselves as individuals who have certain needs, requirements, wants, and likes or dislikes. They express themselves as "I am a mother of five children, and I bring them up all by myself"; "I pay for their education, food and clothing"; "the fathers of the children left a long time ago." In this process women are separating themselves from other individuals by delineating specifics which characterize them as having distinct existences. For example, they are different from the men who left them, other women who have not been left by men, and other women who have not yet been in a situation where they can be left by men. By identifying themselves as a specific category of individuals who are different and separate from others, women continuously generate a heightened sense of who they are and in turn become those individuals identifying with that constructed notion. They believe that they as individuals of that identity exist. Existence of themselves as mothers is given validity and continuously heightened by expressions such as "I gave birth to children and he/they/men left me"; "I did not think that I will be left by myself to bring up the children"; "I stay home with the children and men just leave." The very process of marking their difference from others by construction
mechanisms becomes a condition which solidifies an identity and an intensified sense of them existing as women-with-children with no husbands or men.

Along with the process of identifying themselves, there arise the mental tendencies, habits, or dispositions. The women formulate thoughts, words, and actions based on the notion of who they are. These formations not only further solidify the notions women already have of themselves, but become the "blueprints" from which they would act, think, and speak: "I am this; I am that; I will not trust men again; I will, may be, trust one more man just one more time; I will not tell this; I will only speak of that ..." The formations continue to arise.

Along with the formations, there arises consciousness which is already primed, coached, and groomed by their sense of who they are, i.e., women-with-children, and how they would respond to their environment. Being so groomed, consciousness now stands guard to cognize the sense objects that appear before the sense bases of these women. The visuals, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and thoughts, all these sense objects are cognized and noted by consciousness according to the cues from the formations that have arisen.

As conditioned consciousness arises, it arises together with the psycho-physical complex flavored by that consciousness. This psycho-physical complex is the mode or the apparatus through which women give expression to feelings, responses, reactions they have when interacting with the environment. The psycho-physical complex arises together with the six sense bases, which are also coached by the formations in these women. The six sense bases become the information processing system according to the formations or the mental tendencies. The processing of information is made
possible by the arising of contact as a condition between the sense bases, sense objects, and sense consciousness. For example, the eye which is a sense base, a man which is a sense object, and the eye consciousness which cognizes the object are three distinct processes/conditions. Contact is another distinct process/condition. When the sense base, the sense object, and the sense consciousness arise together with the arising of contact, the interaction or the encounter amongst all these conditions arise. Women see men or women, cognize men or women as men or women, notice them as men or women, and perception and construction based on the blueprints begins: "I don't trust this man"; "I trust this man"; "I don't trust this woman"; "I dislike him or her," and the proliferation of construction continues in cycles. They hear discourses, for example, the Bible saying who women and men are in terms of their roles; the discourse (the sound which is the sense object), the conditions of hearing, the hearing consciousness, and the condition of contact amongst the three produce the "blueprint" in the mind of women. And the constructions of thoughts about themselves and about men begins from these "blueprints" as well as from women's experience: "men are to protect us but, we do all the providing," "that is what the Bible says about men, but this is what I say about men in my own house," and so forth.

Inseparably, with the arising of hearing, sound of discourse, hearing consciousness and contact, as individual processes and interdependent processes, arise feelings, i.e., pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant feelings. Pleasant conversations, pleasant demeanor, pleasant thoughts arise when women feel affirmed, recognized, respected, and adored. Unpleasant feelings arise when they are not valued, or are demeaned, disrespected, unrecognized, or hated. On
some occasions, women may feel neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Together with
feelings arise craving or desire: desire of wanting the pleasant feelings to last, desire of
rejecting, and aversion toward the objects which are the conditions for unpleasant
feelings, and toward the unpleasant feelings themselves: "I don’t want this, I want this."
"I want this to happen to me and I don’t want that to happen to me." When craving is
satisfied, women continue to grasp and hold on to objects that bring satisfaction. For
example, when they earn the money and pay for their plots without interference from a
man, they are satisfied and because that process satisfies them they cling on to that
process, identifying with it: "I pay for the plot and the house from the money that I
earn." When their cravings are not satisfied, there arises in them an intense longing for
obtaining what is thought of as having the power to satisfy them, and a heightened
disliking and aversion toward obstructions to the obtaining of the objects intensely
wanted. This condition is demonstrated in their expressions: "I don’t want any man to
come and boss me around in my house"; "I don’t want to be, I hate to be without
work"; "I didn’t think my employer would do that to me"; "I did not want to work for
them any more, I wanted to teach them a lesson." Whether it is desire of want or desire
of aversion, the desires of women push them towards sense objects, and the mental
formations/perceptions about the objects pull them towards the sense objects they long
for, arising thereof the process of intense clinging to objects.

Along with the process of clinging, arises becoming. The internal clinging
flavors and shapes the thinking, speaking, and acting of women. Women outwardly
display in their actions, in the way they dress, in the way they talk, in the way they
choose activities, the way they participate in these activities, and in any other way that
makes it possible to demonstrate who they are: "I am this, I am that, this is me, that is not me, I like to be this, I don't like to be that . . ."

Through the process of becoming, and that becoming as a condition, new identities of who they (the participants) are emerge. These are new moments of life, with new thoughts of who they are, and the beginnings of cycles of constructions of new identities. They may identify themselves as victims of people or relationships, or they may continue in the clinging and becoming in other ways, for example, actively entertaining the thoughts and feelings of befriending men and how to convince men to stay with them. When this happens, it is a process of restimulating the conditional arising in cycle after cycle, finding themselves in agonizing experiences. In either way, women continue their clinging, becoming, and being newly born in each moment, simultaneously experiencing satisfaction (i.e., feeling happy that some conditions will give them lasting happiness), low self-esteem, doubting themselves, disappointment, frustration, disgust and aversion, which is oppression in selves.

Example 2: Women As Owners of Houses

All participants identified themselves as the owners of their houses. As a newly found identity, women spoke of themselves as proud, assertive, confident, and goal-oriented individuals. They are no longer dependent on men to provide them with houses. They view themselves as low-income earners, domestic workers, single mothers, and the ones who guarantee a roof for their children. They identify themselves as members of their cooperative which is instrumental for them to become owners of
their houses. They identify themselves as cooperative members who collectively produce and share labor in the acquiring of houses for all the members.

Along with the arising of the notions of who they are, arise volitional impulses which are informed by those notions. The volitional impulses are their intentions, mental dispositions, habits, and tendencies from which to view and interact with the environment. They think of ways in which to earn income, and the ways in which they will disburse portions of these incomes to different destinations. They formulate thoughts on what they want to speak of when they speak of themselves as the owners of houses, and when and with whom they will speak. They think of their actions, again, as owners of their houses: collectively producing and sharing labor, collectively paying off the loans for purchase of land and building houses. They think of not allowing men to trample them and dispossess them of their houses. They think of the ways in which they will secure the houses so that when they die their children will have a roof for themselves. All these and many other formations arise.

When formations arise they arise together with consciousness, the psycho-physical complex, the six sense bases, all of which are primed, coached, and groomed by the conditions of women's sense of selves and the formations that have arisen in accord with their sense of selves. Consciousness so arisen recognizes sense objects in accord with the way it has been conditioned. It remains awake to the fact that they are low-income earners, providers for their families, members of the cooperative, and loan payers. All sense objects that come in view of these women are cognized through the lenses or the formations that have already arisen and are informing the consciousness. Their psycho-physical complexes arise in accord with their habits and mental
tendencies. They partake in activities that support and affirm their position as owners of houses. For example, they participate in community meetings, community committees, the collective labor process, and sharing activities such as brick making, digging foundations, and construction work. At every opportunity, they speak about the process of becoming the owners of houses. The six sense mechanisms process sense information in accord with the conditioning they have received from the formations of the women. They hear, smell, taste, touch, see, and think from the point of view of owners of houses.

All of the above activities are made possible by the arising of contact along with the conditions of women's sense of who they are, their formations, consciousness, psycho-physical complex, and the six senses. Women come in contact with different discourses from different sources, material conditions resulting from their affiliation to the cooperative, conditions imposed by other institutions, and organizations such as the banks, donors, and municipality. There are also the conditions imposed by community members, for example, the condition of individuals not paying back the loans and not sharing labor. Contact between these objects individually or in any combination gives rise to feelings.

When arising, women experience feelings either pleasant, or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. They experience pride, joy, confidence, control, and hopes as owners of houses. At the same time they experience disappointment, frustration, aversion, despair, and anxiety when they are being held up by members who do not pay back loans and do not share their labor once they move into their houses.
Uncertainty of jobs, income, the mood of the employers, children’s needs, and the like give rise to the feelings of despair and lamentation.

Upon arising feelings, women experience craving. They want the continuation of what brings them pleasant feelings. For example, they want to grasp on to membership at Saamstaan, live on the plot, grasp on to their ability to pay for the plots and houses, grasp on to the plots and the houses. They want discontinuation of, or to reject what gives them unpleasant feelings, e.g., reject individuals who do not pay for the plot and houses, reject individuals who do not share labor, reject individuals who do not live on the plots, reject men in their lives who pose a barrier between them and the paying for the plots and the houses. They cling to the objects that gives them pleasant feelings. And they intensely long for the objects that give them pleasant feelings but are unobtainable. Toward the objects which present obstructions to their obtaining the things that give them pleasant feelings, they develop aversion. Women’s clinging to objects, either by desire to have or by desire to eliminate, gives rise to becoming or existence.

When the arising of existence or becoming is present, women inwardly experience and outwardly display their sense of selves as owners of houses. They take the objects of house and the ownership as them, and themselves as the house and the owners of houses. They display this identity in all their activities, speech, and thinking. They experience oneness between the objects and themselves.

The arising of this oneness with the objects gives rise in women to the birth of new moments, identities, new selves, and new lives. They begin to formulate thoughts about their new identities, in new cycles, new formations. They continue to give
expressions to these new identities and formations in their speech, thinking, and activities. The cycles of constructing themselves incessantly continues as moments and episodes, arising and dissolving.

These examples show that oppression is a process, and furthermore, oppression is an internal process. This internal oppression is the bodily pains and mental affliction individuals experience. With no primary cause, a beginning, or an ending, oppression manifests cyclically on a moment-to-moment basis. Oppression as a process arises dependent on many conditions and processes coming together. What is observed as oppression is a moment in a continuous series of moments, each moment with only an arising, a duration, and a dissolution, and each moment with no independent existence of its own. Acquisition of material conditions will alleviate or eliminate the problems which arise owing to the lack of material conditions. But, material conditions alone do not afflict oppression on individuals, and elimination of material conditions that are thought of as afflicting oppression on these individuals does not eliminate oppression either. Further, as is seen, elimination of material conditions, in this instance removing the condition of having no houses, while removing the discomforts associated with having no houses, is itself a condition of oppression in an infinite sense.

The Cause: Conditional Nexus of Oppression

As can be seen in the experience of the participants, the cause of oppression has no one referent. They, as individuals or psycho-physical complexes, are neither the cause nor are they causing the condition oppression. In the same manner, their environment or the material conditions are not the cause or causing their oppression.
Oppression is a condition arising within, because of coming together of several conditions that come to be, from within, from without, and the environment of these individuals. Conditions from within are the five aggregates: form, feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness. Conditions of the outer of the individuals are the sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch, and consciousness. The environment of the individuals is the sense objects: visuals or sights, sound, smells, tastes, tangibles, and thoughts or ideas. Contact between sense bases, sense objects and sense consciousness sets the interdependent and interactive motion of the process of oppression. During the process of contact between these three conditions, women regard the states of existence from a standpoint of possessive selves who are separate from the objects to be possessed. When possession is not possible, they end up experiencing mental grief and bodily pain, i.e., oppression: dispossession, disempowerment, marginalization, victimization, anger, aversion, disappointment, frustration, helplessness, and confusion or delusion of selves.

As oppression arises, it becomes a foundation for developing specific attitudes and values toward oppression itself as an object and the sense objects which become things-in-themselves. Oppression becomes something which is done to them by others, be they individuals, institutions of any kind, or the lack of material conditions. These objects become somethings-in-themselves in a sense that the participants project a certain promise or a threat onto them, as if these objects have the power either to make them happy or unhappy. In this process of projecting, they delegate the authority and power of making them happy or unhappy to these objects, making a separation between themselves and these objects, and most importantly, depriving themselves of the power
to terminate the arising of oppression. In this sense, the participants feel that oppression can be removed if the external conditions that impose this condition on them are removed. Together with this feeling, perceiving, construction and proliferation arise. The participants give expressions to these proliferations through their speech, thoughts, and actions. In this process, the participants assume that they are at the mercy of or at the service of external persons or institutions for their sense of well-being, sense of contentment, or freedom.

To summarize the foregoing description of the cause of oppression within then, it is not caused by one condition but many conditions coming together at the same time. Ignorance of the view of self, craving and clinging to sense objects arising along with many other conditions and processes generate the condition of oppression within the individuals. What this investigation informs us is that the condition of oppression is neither a thing-in-itself that has the power to persist nor it is permanent. Oppression, therefore, can be terminated. The power which can terminate oppression is a condition and a process within the individual which arises interdependently together with many conditions.

Liberation/Freedom from Oppression

Liberation or freedom from oppression is possible, here and now, on a moment-to-moment basis in individuals’ experience. It is possible for the participants, too. However, fixing the material conditions in the environment of the participants does not fix their liberation from oppression, be it access to houses, ownership of houses, committed men, child support, or blocking off irresponsible men from their lives.
Fixing of the material conditions will fix the material conditions and will provide material comfort. Material comforts will bring associated mental comforts. For example, having ownership of houses will bring mental comfort knowing that they have their own place to bring up their children, without themselves being "chased out" of the houses by anyone. Another associated mental comfort is knowing that their children will not be subjected to the scrutiny of others, as was the case when renting rooms from other individuals. Not allowing irresponsible men to force women into unwanted relations and unwanted children will bring mental comfort in not having unwanted children and not being abandoned with the responsibility for more children. These conditions might have an effect on changing the extent, types, and forms of the material components and the associated mental and emotional components of day-to-day life of the participants. But none of these material conditions and the associated mental comforts will liberate the participants from oppression within. Further, craving and clinging to these material conditions and mental comforts, as if these conditions have the power to end or alleviate oppression of selves, will continue to keep them continuously attached to the experience of oppression. Craving and clinging to the view that changes in material conditions and the associated mental and emotional comforts have the power to end, minimize, or alleviate the conditions of oppression, inculcates in the mind of the participants and continues to solidify and strengthen the notion that they as individuals have no power within them to get a grip on the condition of oppression. Craving and clinging to this view and the conditions hold the participants in dependence of, at the benevolence of the external conditions (political, socio-cultural, economic or otherwise), which are thought of as having the power to free them from oppression.
Craving and clinging to this view solidifies the separation of the participants as individuals from the external conditions, instills a belief that the individual in each of them is an unfathomable given, cannot be or should not be investigated, therefore there is nothing one can do from within to change it from what it is, and it continues as it is. Further, individuals then resign themselves to the position that when they find themselves with mental and physical afflictions, they have to look to the external sources which contribute to their conditions and to the external sources which will free them from the situations. Craving and clinging to a view of the individuals as an inexplicable phenomena pushes the individuals to view external objects as the perpetrators, sources of benevolence, or neither. Mental associations about these external objects pull the participants toward them. This process solidifies in the mind of the participants the idea that they must identify, investigate, understand, change, or remove the external conditions to make the individuals in them happy. Such a process lends itself to deepening the fears of knowing about the selves, and leaves the individuals powerless to understand, know, and interrupt the processes which are destructive and unwholesome; understand, know and cultivate the processes which are powerful and wholesome within their psycho-physical complexes which are perceived to be existing, which otherwise are non-existing. Since the individuals cannot be understood, according to their view, they then begin to accept selves as they are and begin to investigate and take control over the environment, not oppression.

From the Abhidhamma perspective, human experience consists of wholesomeness, happiness, non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion, and greed, aversion/hatred, and delusion. The wholesomeness and happiness in individuals,
however, are veiled by the "blueprints," the conditioning or the habits from which the individuals operate. Therefore, individuals have to first of all recognize that these qualities are in them. They have to know this without doubt. And individuals have to know that these qualities in them can be accessed, investigated, cultivated by themselves with their own direct experience, and without the benevolence of any external source. What individuals experience as oppression is hampered wholesomeness, due to fighting against the obstacles they have created by their own tendency of separation and limitation. Liberation or freedom from oppression means freeing oneself from hampered wholesomeness and sustaining, developing, and cultivating the unhampered wholesomeness. It would thus mean freeing oneself from attachment to sense objects, i.e., attachment to sensual pleasures, attachment to an existence of self, and attachment to dogmatic views. Non-attachment to any of these conditions allows a positive and a powerful equilibrium of the psycho-physical system. This equilibrium of the mind-body is the freedom from oppression within the selves. This freedom is of a universal character not subject to the sway of self-serving interests, material or mental, but to insight into the laws of human experience. The sense objects will appear as just sense objects. The arising of feelings can be noted as just arising of feelings. The feelings as they arise can be investigated, whether they are pleasant, or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. With the power of insight into reality of human experience, women will know that the sense objects are only one condition of the experience and that there is the power of the processes within to not let the tension between pleasant and unpleasant feelings arise when there is contact with objects, and not to let themselves be pushed and pulled by craving and clinging. They will be able
to know that there is agency over cravings and clingings and that craving and clinging do not reign supreme. They will develop trust, power of insight within, confidence in their ability to cultivate insight and develop the power of insight to manage their human experience and be wholesome with appeased dispositions. They will be able to free themselves from the oppression of becoming, grooming themselves to be someone or something. And they will be able to experience equanimity, let go of attachment, and be free of oppression.

The Way: The Path with No Goer

The way to liberation from oppression is a path consisting of several components working together interdependently at all times. The first component is the view of oppression and the intentions that follow. Oppression of women, as has been seen in feminist discourses, is a condition which results from certain views of who women and men are and the institutionalization of these views through political, socio-cultural, and economic processes in society. The intentions that follow this view are to either remove or redefine the existing views about women and the institutional means which give expression to these views, in an effort to remove or minimize the material and emotional components of oppression. Oppression of women from the perspective of the Abhidhamma is a condition of human experience, an experience arising within the psycho-physical complex on a moment-to-moment level, owing to clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to wrong views, clinging to the notion of an existence of possessive selves. Oppression, from this perspective, is of a universal nature which encompasses the human experience in its entirety, i.e., happiness, unhappiness,
satisfaction, dissatisfaction, success, failure, sensual pleasure, sensual displeasure, and
mental grief or bodily pain. Oppression does not discriminate between happiness or
unhappiness, rich or poor, or powerful or powerless. What one perceives as happiness
is inseparably accompanied by unhappiness because the perceived happiness has neither
an independent existence, nor permanence. To exist, which means to cling to the
psycho-physical complex or the five aggregates, is to be trapped in the experiencing of
oppression. The intention, from the perspective of the Abhidhamma, in terms of
freedom from oppression, is to be free from existence, which means, to be free from
clinging to the five aggregates. Freeing one’s self from clinging to the five aggregates
means freeing one’s self from greed, aversion, and self-delusion. Being free from these
properties would mean replacing them with giving or generosity, love, and insight.
When there is no-self for whom the giving will ensue and ensure gains in a material or
affective sense, giving freely without expecting a return is possible. When there is
insight into the reality of human experience, i.e., there is no existence of a self, non-
greed, non-aversion, and non-delusion arise together with generosity, love, and insight.

The second component is the practice of the above intentions. The practice
involves giving expression to the inner qualities that arise on account of the view and
insight into human experience, through speech, action, and livelihood. This practice,
based on a view of non-existence of reality as perceived, and insight with which to see
the non-existence of reality, will not yield to becoming and re-orbiting the process of
constructing, craving and clinging to identities/selves, aversion, and self-delusion on a
moment-to-moment level. The practice of these qualities is inseparable from the other
two components, just as those components are inseparable from the practice.
The third component is concentration. This component involves effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Participants can make efforts to destroy the bodily pain and mental grief that have already arisen. They can make efforts to prevent any grief or pain from arising. They can make efforts to generate pleasantness that has not yet arisen. And they can cultivate the pleasantness that has already arisen. In this instance pleasantness means the energy, tranquility, and the rapturous bliss that arise when discerning the human experience "as it really is" or "seeing reality as it comes to be." Mindfulness here means the focus in the body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects. This fourfold mindfulness, is the psycho-analysis concerning these aspects of human experience. The psycho-analysis, however, should not be confined only to analysis and the control of consciousness, but proceed to the synthesis of consciousness through concentration. Synthesis of consciousness is the transformation of consciousness - the insight which "sees the reality as it comes to be." The transformed consciousness will not be affected by the tension between subject and object or the creation of such a conceptual division through the synthesizing energy of that transformed consciousness. Transformed consciousness is free from preconceived views of self, and therefore free from greed, aversion, and attachment/rejection or dejection. It is this transformed consciousness which will permeate and comprehend the preconceived ideas, mental dispositions, and habits from which one views the human experience, and thereby free/liberate one from being ever trapped within those views and practices. This transformed consciousness will strengthen the participants' confidence, and remove them from being powerless or from the misconceptions of seeing themselves as victims of either the external processes or their cravings and
clingings. Consciousness so transformed will be the forerunner of their intentions and actions on account of which will arise the transformed, co-operative society, which is not based on identities, gender, or class (production based on self interest).

Summary

I have presented in this chapter how participants' notions about themselves, notions about their gender roles, and notions about their class participation continue to change/transform, and what that means for understanding their experiences in terms of oppression and liberation. Transformation of women's experiences is happening in two ways. One way is the transformations that happen along with the socio-cultural, political, and economic changes. Another way is the transformations that happen along the life continuum regardless of the socio-cultural, political, and economic changes, i.e., from young, to adulthood, to dissolution. However, in terms of liberation from oppression within, developing and cultivating of insight which "sees reality as it comes to be," that is, transforming self/consciousness as described by the Abhidhamma is yet to begin.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation is a response to a puzzle: changing material conditions and human her/himself, that is praxis,\(^1\) generally seen as transpiring different, good, positive, and improvements does not, in "reality," effectuate full liberation of persons from oppression both as individuals and as social members/processes. The goal of actions and the results seem to be in contradiction with each other and yet, discourses

---

\(^1\) Webster's dictionary (1988) defines praxis as: 1. "practices, as distinguished from theory; application or use, as of knowledge or skills. 2. convention, habit, or custom. 3. a set of examples for practice" (p. 1129). Bottomore (1983) points out that Marx and Marxist tradition use the term praxis in many ways. In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (1978), Marx refers to human practical production as praxis which is of two forms: positive, good form of praxis and negative, bad form of praxis. Negative form of praxis is human self-alienation - human practical production performed under the compulsion of direct physical need. Positive form of praxis is human practical production performed as "free conscious activity [which] is the species character of human being," and "the practical construction of an objective world, the work upon inorganic nature, [which] is the confirmation of man as a conscious species-being." In the same text, Marx uses "praxis" synonymously with "labour" which is "the act of alienation of practical human activity." In the Theses on Feuerbach (1978), Marx uses "praxis" as "revolutionary praxis." He declares: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice" (in Bottomore, 1983, p. 386). In German Ideology (1978), Marx refers to "praxis" as "self-activity." According to Bottomore (1983), despite the changes in terminology, Marx's fundamental ideal which remained in the same in his writings is "the transformation of labour into self-activity." (in Bottomore, 1983, p. 387).

Others in Marxist tradition view praxis as: experiment and industry; ultimate criterion of truth; unity of knowing and doing; social activity of historical action ... the theory of proletarian revolution and the revolutionary critique of bourgeois society; praxis as doing; the very human existence as praxis, but praxis in the realm of freedom as the realization of the form and fullness of existence which has its goal and end in itself; praxis as political action. Those who make a distinction between praxis as political action and praxis as revolutionary action maintain that praxis as revolutionary action is neither a kind of political activity, nor radical social change. Revolution is conceived as a radical change of both man and society. Its aim is to abolish self-alienation by creating a truly human person and a human society. (See Bottomore, [1983] pp. 384 - 389 for an account of theorists in Marxist tradition who discuss praxis).
geared toward individual/self and social change/transformation, which either directly or indirectly speak to the condition/question about oppression and liberation, continue to focus on further changing human and material conditions with an explicit or implicit agenda of liberation from oppression. There is a piece crucial to solving this puzzle missing.

My purpose in writing this dissertation is to provide a piece which might fill this gap. First, I want to affirm that changing material conditions and changing selves in order to change the material conditions, in mutual relations, is necessary to ensure humans living free of oppression. Second, I maintain that the practice of self and social change based on a foundation of materialistic view of the world and individuals is inadequate for attaining full liberation from oppression. Third, I maintain that the non-material and inner world of selves is an equal part of the whole in self and social transformation; and that the "inner" can be and has to be investigated and understood from its own side, in order to comprehend how it contributes as an equal part in the whole of self and social transformation. Fourth, I maintain that attempts made at self and social transformation from a foundation of only a materialistic view of the world and self, to the neglect of the non-material, non-conceptual and "inner" world of persons, contribute only partially, with partial and therefore inadequate results in self and social transformation, and full liberation from oppression.

The missing piece of the puzzle is: what do we do to understand the "person?" The current discourses on self and social transformation take the desiring individual for granted, assume to be a design, and assume to be a unit which does not have to be or cannot be investigated, understood, or changed from its own side. The individual "is"
and the desire "is." The individual is a victim of both the desire of her/himself and the social processes, and dependent on the very authorities/perpetrators, that is, desire and social processes, to change both her/himself and society. The authority of self and social transformation is delegated to desire, social processes and material conditions. The individual is stripped off of its own authority to effectuate change in her/himself, the ability to work mutually with the social processes with authority/power within, and to not be fully dependent on material conditions for her/his well-being. Self and social transformation is approached from a foundation of power imbalance between the desire of individual and the social/material conditions. What is called change in individual, according to these approaches, is a combined effect of sharpening of "want," aggressiveness by which to secure the wants, anger and aversion towards the social apparatus which are assumed to deny the individuals of objects they want, and a sensation that the individual is satisfied and/or in the process of being satisfied. What escapes is the "truth/reality" that the sensation of satisfaction one experiences is an "after-glow" of a moment which has already passed. While one remains attached to the sensation which already has passed, the "desire" of the individual is at work craving for other/more sense objects to satisfy her/himself. The "truth/reality" is that the desire/craving is in control while the person who is under the control of "desire/craving" is remains attached to the temporary, transient sensation of satisfaction. The "desire/craving" holds the person trapped in the unending cycles of oppression, that is, pain and grief owing to the passing of the satisfying experience and the "want" of sense objects which are yet to be obtained for re-stimulating the sensation of satisfaction. The possibility of approaching self and social transformation from a foundation of the
"person" who is in control of the process and not the desire/craving for sensual objects is already closed off in and by these discourses.

Abhidhamma opens up this possibility. Abhidhamma does not take the "desire/craving" for granted. Abhidhamma does not take the "person" as merely an organism "driven" by 'desire/craving." The "person" of Abhidhamma is an active, alert, confident, conscious process which takes control of the uncontrolled, driving desire/craving and changes it into power within to manifest detachment from sense objects that is assumed to have "power" to drive "the person" crazy.

In presenting the Abhidhamma approach to understanding oppression and liberation, I have pointed out that:

a) The condition of contradiction does not "exist" on its own; the source of contradiction is not only the external, that is, society or the changing human persons due to mutual relations between the individuals and the society; the source of contradiction is the "person-as-process," and the contradiction we conceptualize as a condition between the human and the society is only the manifestation of contradictions which arise in the "inner" of the persons; understanding the internal (inner) source of contradiction is a crucial component in understanding the condition we construct and name as contradiction that exists; we should not accept that the condition called contradiction "exists" on its own or that it is a "given"; we should investigate the condition of contradiction both in the inner and outer as distinct and different processes, yet not separate from each other, inseparably and interdependently connected with each other;
the condition called inner contradiction can be investigated from its own side; and, along with investigating these two processes from their own sides, we need to investigate how these two processes, the inner and outer, in combination work and with what consequences; and how this condition called contradiction can be "let-go-of."

b) Changing material conditions, that is both the act (praxis) and its outcomes - the accompanying mental and material conditions which are generally considered to be good, positive, meaningful, improved, emancipatory, alleviating oppression, do not equal liberation from oppression. In other words improving conditions of oppression is not the same as being liberated from oppression.

c) Current discourses on social change for improving the conditions of oppression of individuals are "stuck" with a materialist approach. There is a seeming belief that changing material conditions is all that needs to be done, all that can be done for changing the conditions of oppression, and that liberation or the improved mental/emotional conditions (the inner conditions) are a derivation from the changed/improved material conditions. Current discourses do not show the ability to consider that the inner oppression and liberation also is, while not separate from the external processes, a distinct and a different process that can be and has to be investigated and understood from its own side, in order to understand the whole of what oppression and liberation is. While acknowledging a mutual interaction and mutual conditioning between
the individual and the social, the changing or transformation of the human is explained as a result of dialectical relations between her/him and her/his volition or intention to change the material conditions of her/his environment - the world.

d) In current discourses of self and social change, change in the individual means change from a passive or indifferent individual to an "active agent," to a "doer" in changing social processes to secure material "wants." There is a privileging of the materialist approach, to the neglect of an in-depth investigation and an understanding the process which is already assumed as "an active agent" and a "doer," and the condition of "want," how this condition works in the inner processes of the human, whether any change in this condition is possible, if so, by what method can one effectuate this change. Because of this disconnection between the two processes, the solutions they propose address only one part of an inextricably linked and interdependent process that generates oppression, thereby continuing to be caught up in reproducing the cycles of oppression they claim to eliminate/alleviate, while sensing the illusive alleviation, improvement, good, and the positive.

e) The actions and thoughts these discourses propose are based on the assumption that humans "exist" either as singular, unchanging, all abiding entities or as individuals with plural selves. How to go about "existing" is the one and only focus in the Western discourses on self and social transformation/change. There is no potential within these
discourses for exploring other possibilities of what is human. For example, human as non-abiding, non-existing, non-self, and non-desiring cannot be explored within these theoretical frameworks or discourses. In this sense, Western self and social change discourses are a continuation of what has been known to them all along, that is, individuals "exist," in a new guise, that is poststructuralist/postmodern. As such, these discourses have not made either a radical discovery or a radical shift in knowing, understanding, and investigating what is referred to as the human existence, oppression, and liberation.

f) Oppression is defined through a materialist view of the world which, in turn, defines what is called liberation in materialistic terms, to the neglect of the inner oppression and liberation of the human. Therefore, the materialistic definition of oppression and liberation is partial and not adequate for comprehending and freeing from the human condition oppression.

g) "Praxis" as defined in Western discourses, Marxist or non-Marxist, addresses only one side of human activity, and is inadequate in addressing the whole of oppression and liberation. The one side is the activity of changing the human and material conditions. The other side of human activity, inner-praxis is the changing of the non-material, non-conceptual conditions of the human. But, this side of "praxis" is absent in the definition and practice in the Western discourses. Oppression is a condition due to the interconnectedness and the interdependence of both
these processes, that is the non-material and non-conceptual processes and the material processes of the humans. Therefore, these two processes, the inner and the outer of the human, have to be investigated and understood both from their own sides and as interconnected and interdependent processes. The inner-praxis and the outer-praxis must simultaneously be carried out without privileging one to the neglect of the other, in order to understand the oppression and liberation of humans.

h) The case study of the lives of the Namibian women's housing collective is a living and an awakening example of the complexity that is involved in grappling with the condition of oppression and liberation. On the one hand, their "praxis" as defined in the Western discourses, presents to be effectuating results which can be evaluated through the prisms of these discourses as positive, good, meaningful, and improvements in their lives. On the other hand, and inseparably from what is considered positive and good, it shows that in their day-to-day lives, they are internally oppressed, and are experiencing anger, aversion, and hatred, at times pushing them to act in speech, bodily deeds, and thoughts, violently towards one another. The "praxis" they practice is serving only one side of their lives, that is the material side and the changes it accompanies in them, as assertive, ambitious, self-determined individuals. At the same time, it further reproduces desire and "wants" which "push" and "pull" them to be dependent on improved material
conditions to alleviate or eliminate all aspects that contribute to their human condition oppression.

i) The Abhidhamma is an approach which considers the whole of the human condition oppression and liberation. It is not a theory. It is a practice with practical method which each human has access to, which investigates both sides of the human activity/praxis - the inner and the outer as distinct processes and are interconnected and interdependent processes which contribute to the transformation of humans and society.

**Some Questions** which Emerge from the Study

1. If inner transformation provides liberation from oppression, that is pain and grief, why would one pursue social transformation? From what ground would one pursue social transformation?

2. This study shows that these women are transformed by praxis. If they conceived oppression to be internal and they were internally at peace, why would they go through that process that is so transformatory?

3. Something is responsible for putting these women in a situation where men aren’t doing there share of the work, there is colonialism, there is racism, there is imperialism, there is capitalism. Now, would they still find the same need, necessity to struggle against these larger forces, if they had inner peace?

---

2 I am thankful to my committee for forcefully rasing these questions and allowing me to provide brief comments on them in the dissertation.
As one attains liberation from within, what one holds to be "reality" will no longer have its original meaning and significance, because one's understanding of what "reality" is and what must be done to change it, will be radically altered. The question is, how can one not get there, that is, see "reality" the way one sees it, in the first place? How can one not end up blaming one's self for being in a place where one is being oppressed, for example, saying "I am poor because of who I am?"

Human needs such as food and shelter and the oppression that arise within, that is, not having access to food, anger, need, aversion, hatred, and turning that oppression towards self, blaming self for being who one is - how does one get there?

Abhidhamma is an approach which was discovered by a person in India. It is practiced widely in Asia and now in the West. You are applying this approach to a community in Namibia, which has its own approach to life. Is this another imperialist imposition? Is it not just what the imperialist Christian missionaries did?

As a person practicing Abhidhamma, is it possible to express one's opinions? For example, can one take the position that some changes are positive and some changes are negative? It sounds as if one cannot.

Is this an esoteric practice?

If one feels strongly that sharing this knowledge with others is a contribution one makes to the process of personal and social transformation, what are some
strategies and ways one could work with people so that they could get exposure to this knowledge and practice?

All of the above questions and many others that may arise call for deeper understanding of the questions themselves and well thought out responses, which this chapter of this study does not allow space for. However, a few comments could be attempted, so long as the reader understands that, taken literally, as they appear, these brief comments present the risk of losing the grist of what this study is attempting to convey with regard to self and social transformation. This study focuses on the condition of oppression within, how it manifests, and how one can liberate oneself from that oppression. The reason for this focus, as I have mentioned before, is that this aspect, that is, investigating oppression within, from its own side, is what is missing in the social, political, cultural, and economic discourses of self and social transformation. Considerations of transformation of self have been left to the field of "religion/spirituality." There has been no practical discourse\(^3\), which looks at transformation of self as a practical activity, with a practical method for engaging in the

\(^3\) Praxis as an approach to self and social transformation are provide by Marx (see p. 281, FN 1), and Freire (1987). These discourses analyze individuals' praxis between political, economic process and selves. Transformation of self and society is assumed when people are engaged in praxis. They explain/describe transformation by analyzing the social, political, economic, and material conditions and proposing social, political, and economic action to instance the transformation of material and human conditions. They do not concern themselves with transformation of self within, from its own side, and do not describe or explain that which is transformation of self within, which from the Abhidhamma approach is "praxis within." Therefore, the resultant transformation of persons, according to praxis as they define and utilize this concept and activity, is partial and allow the continuation of oppression within while under the illusion that the material changes and the accompanying sense of "changed personality," that is, persons with abilities and resources which they did not have before, in themselves constitute liberation from oppression.
activity of transformation of self, which is different from "religious/spiritual" activity, in the sense the Abhidhamma presents. This, however, is not to suggest that addressing personal transformation from its side is sufficient to ensure collective community living, in which interaction and interdependence of persons is a necessary feature. When individuals are liberated within, the qualities of liberated persons will manifest in their actions. The society in which these actions manifest, in turn, further condition the liberation of persons. Liberation of self and liberation of society from manifesting oppressive acts is an interdependent process where one does not take priority over other. They both, however, are processes which are different from each other; have components, elements, processes within each, but they are also interdependent. Therefore, analyzing only the social, political, economic, cultural, religious conditions, through analyzing praxis or discourse, to observe oppression and transformation of self and social, is not sufficient. Analysis of these processes and the understanding of how persons change, from its own side, must be concurrent if one is to effectuate simultaneous self and social transformation because the transformed society is possible when there is synchrony or fusion between the way self and society understand and value "reality." That is, how do we understand what we call self, and how do we understand what we call society? If there is no understanding of what we call self, and self is only assumed, then the social change these persons effectuate has no legitimate recipient, for the reason that the changes effectuated do not provide all that is necessary for liberation from oppression.

By way of brief comments to the questions, some grounds but not limited to, which I take to be the manifestations of unliberated desire/cravings of humans, which
must be changed, are racism, sexism, national or international exploitation, processes that deprive people of their habitats, political and cultural impositions. With what understanding of reality and from which motivational basis should activities of self and social transformation be carried out? The outcome of self and social transformation, that is, the transformed selves and society, depends on the motivational basis from which that transformed society arises. If egoism, greed, aversion, and/or hatred are the motivational bases for changing social conditions and their institutions then the society after transformation is bound to be filled with egoism, greed, aversion, and hatred. So, in effect, the social transformation so generated is not really a transformation but change of previous conditions to new conditions which will be the beginning of new cycles of oppression. If both processes occur, that is, the process of transforming egoism, greed, aversion, and hatred to non-egoism, non-greed, non-aversion, non-hatred, and the processes of changing social processes from that of recognizing, validating, promoting, and maintaining greed, hatred, and aversion to that which recognizes, validates, promotes, and cultivate non-greed, non-hatred, and non-aversion, then the changes that will come about both in personal selves and in social conditions will be radically different from what it is now. Therefore, the grounds which are in the society and the inner processes of self need to change/transform simultaneously, in order to effectuate a harmonious society. Persons have to work individually to find the collective selves within. The society as a collection of collective selves and as an organic process has to work on ways to sustain the collectivity of the collective selves. Improvements made in one only make a partial impact on the other. The Abhidhamma provides a way - the
Conditional Arising - to understand the interdependence of conditioned phenomena both in personal worlds and societal worlds.

How we blame ourselves for the oppressive conditions we are in is related to the process of "self-as-reality." In other words, it is about seeing a self, I, or I as a doer existing, who is blaming the very self. This is also the process of seeing "reality" from a victim position, surrendering one's own confidence, or delegating the authority of one's well being to something else - to a doer conceived as existing separate from the self that receives the blame. The blaming and the poorness are conditions which cannot affect each other without the participation of the "self." If we understand the process we call self, and the non-existence of a self as we perceive it to be, that is, self not as an all-abiding unity, or a singularity, but as mental and physical phenomena which come to be dependent on many elements and conditions, and are in constant flux and undergoing changes on a moment-to-moment level, then we will know that there is no self who can do the blaming of the self. Abhidhamma provides a method of deconstructing the self.

Whether a person who practices Abhidhamma can take a position, that is, whether some social change is positive or negative, calls for a good amount of attention. For one, we can at once see us falling into a dualistic way of seeing and hearing the world, judging the world through a prism of dualism, and labeling any other view as not "sounding like" a position. For another, we have to ask the question, what does taking a position mean? Does it mean taking an either or position only, for example, yes/no, good/bad, black/white, strong/weak, passive/aggressive, indolent/intelligent, lazy/active, backward/forward, developed/underdeveloped and so on and so forth? If yes, then, we are reducing the complexities in the world only to a narrow dualistic way of
seeing/hearing the world and, most importantly, projecting this value on to the world, expecting the world to mirror what one only knows. This exercise of either/or positionality closes off all other possibilities of a myriad of ways in which people can demonstrate what it means to be taking a position, by establishing that anything which does not fit the dualistic way of seeing the world is not a position.

A person practicing Abhidhamma does take a position, and, in fact, a strong position. This study itself, for example, demonstrates a strong position, by presenting a different way of understanding "reality" both in the personal lives and societal lives of persons, differing from a reactive materialist way of understanding the world. The position I take in this study is that there is no one way, the Western way, which is the one/only/universal way to understand the world. If I were to satisfy the Western intellectual community by joining with them to see the world the way they do, that is, seeing the world from the Western positions, I will not be doing anything different from what the nineteenth century colonialists, imperialists, and Christian missionaries did when they encountered "the other." As a practicing Abhidhamma person, I have taken the position that seeing reality from a reactive materialist positions is too simplistic, reductionist, and does not lead to an understanding of the conditionality, interconnectedness and complexity in which the "reality/world" works. Further, taking a position or positions is an act of clinging to a possessive self or selves, believed to be operating from a gusto of its/their own. I have taken a position to painstakingly illuminate that this egoistic way of acting in the world is about strengthening the "I," "me," and "mine," an act which in appearance satisfies, but in "reality" removes individuals from "knowing the reality as it comes to be", leading further into confusion,
ignorance, and craving which are the root causes of inner oppression which then spills out to the society through speech, thoughts, and bodily deeds. I have not only taken a strong position but have presented an approach which also provides a method, unparalleled by any available approach, (that is, modern science, philosophy, or epistemology), by which each individual can put this approach to test, without depending on any external element/condition, material or spiritual.

Further, practicing Abhidhamma means taking a position. The position is that self and social transformation must be effectuated by means of or from the motivational basis of non-violence, non-hate, non-aversion, and non-greed. This is a strong position, which makes a person break free from a prison/oppression of possessiveness, hate, aversion, and egoism, the volitional impulses which condition bodily, verbal/discursive, and mental/thinking actions, which are the expressions of unwholesome mental formations or "mental blue-prints" generated while in that prison. This position also means that seeing and understanding the "reality" is not limited to a dualistic way of seeing. Reality comes to be because of a nexus of multiple conditions coming together on a moment-to-moment level. To conclude that such a complexity as positive or negative in universal terms is not possible. Now, if one says this is not a position, then, the problem is not whether a person practicing Abhidhamma can take a position or not but, the person who sees and hears the Abhidhamma position as a no-position because s/he is 1) operating from a dualistic and a reductionist view of the world, and 2) takes this dualistic world view as the universal measure by which to judge the world. A person practicing Abhidhamma takes the position to fully and strongly reject the reductionist, simplistic way of seeing and operating in the world, and to cultivate the
ability and practice "seeing reality as it comes to be, dependent upon the working
together of a nexus of relations."

Is this another imperialistic imposition, just like that of the Christian
missionaries? Certainly not. Christian missionaries imposed on the world because, for
one, they believed that they were honoring a call from God. For another, serving the
call from God for them also was securing economic and political gains for the West, all
the more reason for the civilizing mission. I am not under a call from Siddhartha (no
practitioner of Abhidhamma is under any call from anybody), and most importantly,
Siddhartha who discovered Abhidhamma was not under any call from anybody, that is,
God or a spirit, or anybody from the human realm, to "convert" anyone to the practice
of Abhidhamma, or to impose the "truth" of Abhidhamma as one and the only truth
which is superior to any other. Further, neither Siddhartha, nor I or any other
Abhidhamma practitioner, will accrue any political or material gains by sharing the
Dhamma with fellow humans in the planet. Sharing the Dhamma is not the same as
hegemonic imposition, and Abhidhamma is not a political or a religious instrument to
establish political, economic, religious, and cultural hegemony in the world. Sharing
the practice of Abhidhamma, which is a study and practice of wholesome universal
human qualities, but which allows for an understanding of how these universal human
qualities arise and manifest differently, in different places, under different and
historically specific conditions, with fellow human beings is an act of compassion
(which, ironically, was the way in which the Christian missionaries qualified their act,
too) without that very compassion being an injunction and an imposition (and Christian
missionaries' compassion was a brutal injunction and an imposition). The
Abhidhamma is not shared with others with a command that if individuals fail to accept this truth as their truth, they will endure total discomfort.

Abhidhamma is also not an esoteric practice. This has been and is the practice of millions of people in Asia, and now (in historical terms) in the West. This fact that the number of people who practice Abhidhamma outnumbered the number of people who were Christian became known to the West as early as the nineteenth century, which, was a daunting experience for the Victorian colonialists/imperialists/Christian missionaries pushing them to the atrocities they committed in Asia. Further, it is the practice of millions of people not because it was imposed by anyone but because it was sought by those who practice it. The people who practice Abhidhamma are not only practicing it to find inner peace or liberation, but to live harmoniously with their fellow humans in society, in other words, to cultivate a "Dhammic" society in which giving/sharing and receiving is a liberatory act which demonstrates freedom from oppression generated by possessiveness and possessive self. Practice of Abhidhamma has been and remains a foundation for people of Asia to cultivate and develop social movements which launched unsurpassable and undefeatable non-violent protests against a mighty colonial empire, and imperialism after colonialism. The Sarvodaya (Awakening of All) Social Movement of Mahatma Gandhi⁴ which incorporated Abhidhammic principles into Hindu practice, one of them being equality of all, brought the heroic British colonial empire to an end by mid-twentieth century. The Sarvodaya

Shramadana (sharing of labor)\(^5\) Movement\(^6\) in Sri Lanka, the oldest, most determined, and courageously sustained Buddhist social activist/movement up to today, began in 1958 with twenty villages, as a direct response rejecting the re-colonization of Sri Lanka through modernization by international development agencies, such as World Bank.

This movement now has grown to 8000 villages, and is serving as a model for people’s development in many other parts of the globe. The Ambedkar Movement (Buddhist) in India in mid twentieth century dismantled the social oppression of the Hindu caste system which had been continuing for thousands of years. Bhikku Buddhadasa in Thailand, who renounced worldly life to live and practice the Dhamma, launched social activism in 1960s and the 1970s, through Dhammic Socialism, an interpretation of socialism based on Dhamma, for restoration of the well-being of people which was being destroyed by war and the presence of US military personnel which promoted sex and the tourist industry. Bhikku Thich Nhat Hanh started social activism from Viet Nam around the same time in a response to the horrors of war and it is now a world-wide social movement to promote non-violence and cultivate the well-being of all.

What this study did not address is the aspect of strategies for sharing the knowledge of Abhidhamma and how it is useful not only for personal development, but for the development of collective society, distinct but not separable processes in the

---

5 Sharing of labor here means any physical or mental energy shared by way of thoughts, deeds, and speech, for "the awakening of all" for personal and social transformation.

ensuing of welfare of all. Before presenting some strategies, I present some implications below.

What Are Some Implications?

1. Conventional knowledge and material conditions are useful but not by themselves sufficient conditions for understanding and ending oppression.

2. There are multiple ways to understand oppression and liberation. Political, social, and economic oppression and liberation is one way of understanding this condition. Understanding oppression and liberation within is another way of understanding this condition.

3. There can be radical changes in political, social, and economic processes that deliver radical changes in how these processes affect persons lives. But, the persons may remain "traditional" in terms of experiencing oppression within.

4. Social transformation, that is, changing a society from oppressive to non-oppressive, has to naturally follow the transformation of persons. This process, however, should not be understood as suggestive of the personal transformation as prior to the transformation of society, or that they are two separate processes which have independent existences. Rather, both these processes have equal significance and are interdependent in the transformation of self and society which must be developed and cultivated simultaneously. One is the personal transformation or "praxis" within the self, and the other social transformation "praxis" in the social. One process must not take priority over the other or be
considered as the one to be completed before getting to the other. If the persons
who take action to transform the society are themselves not transformed, then
the transformed society they eventuate will reflect the character, that is, the craze
for comfort, for multiplication and proliferation of wants, and self indulgence, of
the untransformed persons who generate it. Such a society will have to be
replete with rules and regulations which find expression in institutional practices
securing the interests, meaning cravings and attachment to material things and
possessiveness, of the persons who generate that society.

If persons are transformed within and are confident that they will not be
shaken by gains or losses, or pulled and pushed in multiple directions owing to
cravings and ignorance, then the society which is made of like-minded persons
is automatically a transformed society which is not based on personal interests,
gender divisions, or selfish motives governing the sharing of labor, that is,
mental and physical energy, by way of thoughts, speech, and deeds.

Strategies for Sharing Abhidhamma with a Wider Global Community

One of the strategies for sharing the Abhidhamma with a wider global
community is the re-orientation of the global community about the practice of
Abhidhamma. As I have presented earlier, Victorian discourse on Buddhism has
oriented the global community to the view it as a religion; spirituality; a philosophy
which is abstract having very little or no practical bearing on the development of
persons or societies; atheistic and therefore heathenish; and while superior to any other
heathenish religion, it is inferior to Christianity. It would not be untrue to say that this
sentiment, though in a different language, is disseminated today in the West via school curriculums under "world religions."\(^7\) Abhidhamma, as what Siddhartha taught, is not any of the above, but a practical approach to practical concerns of humans which can be utilized by each person, poor or rich, female or male, Asian or non-Asian, Third World or First World, regardless of color, creed, or religion, to free themselves from unnecessary entanglements which inflict pain and grief, thereby disabling them.

Abhidhamma is a psychology and a way of life. It is also important to inform the global community of the possibility of overlays, that is, practicing Abhidhamma only as a technique to strengthen the views of possessive selves, or self as existing as a coherence or a unity in this life or after, slipping into the practice of Abhidhamma. If this happens, they will be practicing approaches and methods they already are used to under the guise of Abhidhamma. The problem with conflating the Abhidhamma approach with another is the outcome of the effort. Instead of freeing one’s self from adhering to and clinging to views, one may be clinging to something which oppresses and controls one’s efforts.

Another strategy is to inform the global community about social movements and community/village development efforts that have been established with the

---

7 This point was made by a university professor, an American, now a Buddhist practitioner for twenty-two years, referring to how Buddhism was introduced to his class while he was a highschool student about 25 to 30 years ago. He was addressing a group of people at a five-day seminar he taught on Vajirayana Buddhism, in June of 1999, where I was a participant. He mentioned that it was literally about 5-10 minutes on Buddhism where the teacher mentioned that, Buddhism is the religion of people of Asia. This is a religion which basically focuses on suffering. They talk about ‘suffering’ because there is so much ‘suffering’ in those countries, and for one that is all they can talk about and for another, there is so much ‘suffering’ there and they no longer care whether it is suffering or not, which makes it easier for them to talk about nothing else, but suffering. (Note that this is not a direct transcription but the gist of what he said).
Abhidhamma approach as foundational. Information should be provided about the historical specifics of each of these movements: what were the political, cultural, economic, and religious contexts of these movements? What were they attempting to accomplish? Who were the people involved? What were the designs? How were they implemented? With what success? And many other pertinent facts need to be documented and disseminated to the global community which is looking for alternative methods for social activism and social transformation. An aspect which is crucially important is research and publications on these movements.

An effort should also be made to facilitate interaction and on-site observations between groups of people and social movements and collectives which are based on the principles of Abhidhamma, and groups of people who are looking for alternative ways to begin or improve their movements or collectives. The purpose of such an effort is to make it possible for those who are seeking alternative ways for establishing social movements and collectives to come and see for themselves, in the contexts where these movements and collectives are in process. This is important for two reasons: one, Abhidhamma is not an approach to be imposed exogenously, and two, spending time on site allows people to see it for themselves and make their decisions after being informed by themselves. If it could be called a human injunction, one of the primary injunctions of Siddhartha was that no one should impose the Abhidhamma on anyone; people must be free to choose this approach and they should choose it for themselves only after having tested it for themselves.

Opening up the possibilities means providing material resources, for example, financial resources, for travel and board for individuals going to sites. Researching the
funding organizations who would be willing to provide funding and making such information available to the communities that might be interested in seeing it for themselves is another strategy for sharing this knowledge.

As a part of providing resources, there should be pools of trained resource persons from the social movements and collectives who, when invited, will go to other collectives to be present and to lend their skills both about the practice and about developing and implementing designs to establish social movements and collectives based on Abhidhamma principles. Exchange of presences of people, both ways, during and after the beginning of work should be continued.

**Directions for Discourse and Practice**

1. I think the Abhidhamma approach would be a useful discourse and a practice to be included in feminist discourse. The discourse of the Abhidhamma would provide an alternative way of understanding the conditions of oppression and liberation, and would provide for engaging in the pursuit of liberation or happiness from an expansive, powerful, and a confident space of consciousness. The inquiry would not be from constructed opposite notions of the world but from an understanding of the way we construct those opposites and what that means in terms of understanding oppression. And, more importantly, from knowing how to end oppression within.

2. I think it is important for practitioners of Women and Development projects to incorporate the Abhidhamma way of knowing as a core component of their curriculum when planning and implementing training and education projects. It
is one thing to train women on how to generate income, how to maintain transactional records, how to become economically independent, how to be assertive, how to take control of the material conditions of their lives, how to be equal. It is another thing to know that none of these material gains can assure or guarantee them liberation, or freedom from oppression within. It is even more depressing to know that the changed material conditions, in fact, generate oppression in many other new ways causing pain and grief which were expected to have been alleviated by that change. Along with developing the abilities to change the course of their lives, I think it is important for women to be aware of this fact and to be skillful in working along with the reality of change, rather than to develop unrealistic expectations which when not met can eventuate a devastating experience. Women do not have to take oppression within as a given, but can become aware of how to walk out of oppression within.

3. In order for women or development practitioners to be able to incorporate the Abhidhamma as a core-component in their curriculums, they would have to know it first. I think it is important to bring the Abhidhamma discourse and practice into the discourse on women and development, to train individuals in the method in order for them to see if it holds usefulness, and to support them with the necessary means to incorporate this knowledge and practice in their curriculums.

4. Research is needed in the communities where Abhidhamma approach is practiced as a way of life, not to test our constructed views based on assumptions about them (they are so slow, passive, unmotivated, inefficient, no-
ego sense, so on and so forth) or to make a radical discovery on the extent to which these persons are slow, passive and so on, but to learn about how these persons, communities/societies work. What is the psychological attitude of these persons/communities toward ego-self, and producing for accumulation for profit? How and why do they sustain their ability to be slow and passive? How do they keep persons unmotivated? What effects do these qualities have in their subjectivities? How can they voluntarily give, share labor, and be happy? How do they sustain the collective mentality, in persons and in communities/societies in the face of political, social, and economic control, imposed by development agencies like IMF and World Bank? Is it possible that what we call slow and passive in them are qualities of psychological training and attitudes which are developed and cultivated intentionally, carefully, and over a period of a lifetime, which are beneficial to a healthy way of living? Is it possible that what we consider to be "unmotivated" is a skillful means by which they keep themselves from being pushed and pulled in many different directions by craving and attachment to bombarding sense objects. Is it possible that what we consider as no-ego-self in them is a healthy psychological attitude toward and freedom from the attachment to impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-substantial, non-abiding, and non-eternal psycho-physical complexes? What is beneficial about these psychological attitudes when imagining identity-less, genderless, and classless societies, in other words, transformed societies? What of these aspects can be utilized for individual and social transformation in other contexts?
I think it is important to introduce the Abhidhamma approach in university classrooms such as the Center for International Education to provide students the opportunity to learn and practice other ways of knowing self. It is important for students who are preparing themselves as trained educators, who would go out there to do their work as development experts, to know that what they might be looking for in these persons and communities might just be the things or qualities that these persons and communities have abandoned, suppressed, or are guarding against through skillful means, developed over a long period of time, and to know it not only through acquired knowledge, but by direct experience.

An opportunity for students to get to know this way of knowing could, in theory, empower them to lift their veils (conditioned habits, views) from their eyes and prepare them to think radically and act differently, by first making that radical shift from being the expert who looks at the world out there to the expert who looks within. It would provide them with the skills necessary to reflect on the meaning of education, training, and development, as we know them and in relation to these communities.

This would provide the students the opportunity to question themselves, to question whether they have the ability to make a radical shift from the position of the knower to the position of the known, not by anyone else, but by themselves, looking deeply into the arising of mental phenomena within, as it is happening, without fearing a loss of identity, that sense of security they hold so dear to them.
It would provide a method, not to judge the world but to develop and cultivate insight to see within, to liberate themselves from the boundaries they have built for themselves, and to be able to experience unbounded space, skillfully and mindfully.

It would provide a method which, in itself, is also its result - Insight and Wisdom, the inner character, which will naturally be reflected in the societies they develop.

**Final Reflection**

Material changes and accompanying human changes alone cannot fully liberate humans from oppression. Neither can the society alone liberate humans from oppression. Full liberation from oppression, for both individuals and society, is possible when the changes induced both in individuals and society by the dialectical process between individual and material conditions and the inner components and processes that contribute to inner changes of individuals are simultaneously, and with equal weight, studied, understood, and put into practice. Liberation from oppression, both in the social and in the individual, is possible when both these components of human society are able to let go of craving and clinging to views or positions of identities, gender, and class and are able to take a firm, confident position to operate at personal and societal levels from no-position, no-identity, no-gender, and no-possessive-selves.


Andima, J. (N.D.). Women's role in the development process with special reference to factors of production. Windhoek: NEPRU.


Ball, J. D. Is Buddhism a Preparation or Hindrance to Christianity in China? (1907). Hong Kong: St. Paul's College.


Berry, T.S. *Christianity and Buddhism* (1891). London: S.P.C.K.


Prinsep, H. T., & Prinsep, J. (1851). Tibet, Tartary, and Mongolia: Their social and political condition and the religion of Boodh, as there existing. London: W. H. Allen.


Tennent, J. E. (1850). Christianity in Ceylon; Its introduction and progress under the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and American missions; With an historical sketch of the Brahmanical and Buddhist superstitions. London: John Murray.


Ware, E. J. (1879-80). The Development of Buddhism in India. The Fortnightly Review, 33, 801-21.


