CHAPTER-II

STATUS OF THAI WOMEN

1. THAILAND IN BRIEF

Thailand has been known for centuries as the ancient kingdom of Siam. Only since 1939 this country has been known by its present name, Thailand. Thailand a constitutional monarchy has enjoyed its political freedom from the very beginning, it is perhaps in this context that Thai people are "Friends of all and enemies of none."

The early history of Siam has been buried in oblivion. According to Majumdar, Siam was colonized by the Hindus and a number of Hindu principalities flourished in various parts of Siam for at least one thousand years. To support his contention he has referred to a number of recent excavations which indicate the influence of Indian culture spreading into the interior of Siam (Majumdar, 1963: 252).

The Thai are a Mongolian tribe and are generally believed to be ethnically related to the Chinese. They lived in Hunan in the Southern and South-eastern part of the country now known as China. Long before the beginning of the Christian era, large groups of them migrated to the South and South-west and set up a number of independent principalities. The date and gradual stages of their advance cannot be determined with certainty, but by 5th C. A.D. they had advanced as far as the Upper Irravadi and the Salween Rivers in the west and the frontiers of Siam and Cambodia in the South.
Keeping in view this background it is significant to note that the Thai people, though ethnically closer to the Chinese and geographically living nearer to them were influenced by the Indian culture of that period, particularly with regard to religion and philosophy of life.

**Early history of Thailand**

The beginning of the modern Thai may be traced to the brief but highly prosperous and civilised kingdom of Sukhodaya founded in the 13th century by a chief named Indraditya, who founded an independent kingdom with his capital at Sukhothai. The date of Indraditya's rule cannot be determined with certainty but may be provisionally fixed at about the middle of the 13th century A.D. Indraditya spread his dominion in all directions by constant fights with his neighbours. He was succeeded by his second son who ruled a few years and after his death Ram Khamhaeng ascended the throne in 1280 A.D. During this period Siamese were divided into several States. The name Siam originally denoting Sukhodaya was afterwards applied to the whole country and this is to be attributed to the supremacy of Sukhodaya over other states in Siam, brought about by the victories of Ram Khamhaeng (Najmuddar, 1963: 263). The greatest boon that Ram Khamhaeng conferred upon his people was the introduction of Thai alphabet.

The capital was moved to Ayathaya in 1350 and remained there until it was sacked and burned by the Burmese in 1767. It was then moved to Thonburi where it remained for only 15 years.
In 1782 it was once again moved, this time to the area now known as "Bangkok". During this Bangkok or Rattanakosin period Western ideas of democracy were gradually introduced to the country through education and communication (National Identity Board, 1982, Costas, 1982).

**Thailand today**

Thailand is a Southeast Asian country comprising 73 provinces (Changwats). Geographically it was divided into four regions, the Central (excluding Bangkok metropolis), the Northeastern, the Northern and the Southern and Bangkok metropolis.

**Size and Location**

The country covers an area of about 512,115 square kilometres - that is about the size of France. Thailand measures 1,650 kilometres from the North to the South and 800 kilometres from the West to the East. It is situated in the Indochinese Peninsula. It is bounded by Burma and Laos in the north, Burma in the west and Malaysia in the south and Cambodia and Vietnam lie to the east of the country.

**Population**

In 1981, Thailand's population was 47.9 million. At least 80 per cent of the population is of Thai stock. The principal minority groups are an estimated three million ethnic Chinese located in the large urban areas, about 880,000 Malay speaking Muslims in the Southern most provinces, 800,000 Mon and Cambodians,
approximately 286,000 hill tribesmen in the north and 45,000
Vietnamese, mostly in the northeast. Westerners form a small
minority group of about 60,000. About 85 per cent of the people
live in rural areas with the remaining 15 per cent in urban
areas most of them are in Bangkok. The population density of
Thailand in 1980 was 87 persons per square kilometer. Bangkok
metropolis had the highest population density of about 3001
persons per square kilometer. (National Identity Board, 1982).

Climate

Tropical and with a high degree of humidity, average
temperature is 85°F in December to 96°F in April and May.
Thailand has three seasons - hot (March to May), rainy (June
to October) and cool (November to February).

Language

Thai is the national and official language. Chinese
and English are spoken as well.

Religion

Buddhism has been long the religion of the majority of
the Thai people, more than 94 per cent of them are Buddhists.
Four per cent are Muslims, most of them are concentrated in
the south of the country. 1.7 per cent are classed as confucians
and 0.6 per cent are Christians. His Majesty the King is
traditionally styled as the upholder of religions, meaning all
religions professed by Thai people. Buddhism is the state religion. (Levine, 1968).

2. WOMEN IN EARLY THAI HISTORY (1238-1280 A.D.)

Thai history before Sukhothai period is rather uncertain and for a glimpse of Thai women in pre-modern time, we can begin at best only at this period, that is from 1280 A.D. when Thailand had her first formal set of alphabets from documentation of history. Even then a little is known of women in this era and when an attempt was made for the study of the people, the culture and the general anthropology of the time, it was concluded that the lack of records came in the way of social historians to make any conclusive comment on the status of women. Nevertheless, they opined that the general status of women during this period was inferior to men because the period is marked by continuous struggle for supremacy and establishment of an independent state for the Thai people. Further, such beliefs were the consequential influence of China, India and Buddhism where philosophies saw the man as the superior creature.

From the stone inscriptions of the Sukhothai period, there was but one bare mention of a woman "Mang Suang" King Ramkhamhaeng's mother. The inscription reads;

"My Father was Sri Indraditya
My Mother was Mang Suang
My Brother was Den Munang
We were five in the family
Three boys and two girls ... etc"
In the records, however, not much was mentioned about Nang Suang. Historians have opined that she was a sister of Phokun Palseong who together with Phokun Bangkhangtow conquered Sakkhothai from the Khmer. The people, after which, with one accord crowned Phokun Bang Khangtow their king ruling the first Thai kingdom under the name of "Phokun Sri Indraditya". It was maintained that Nang Suang was his queen and the mother of King Ramkamhaeng, the Great, who introduced the Thai alphabet (Papineau 10, 1980).

Another glance at Thai women in the Sakkhothai period is offered through "Nang Nopemas" a legend airing a class of Thai women closely related to the Sakkhothai court. So the legend went: Nang Nopemas was graced with a birth in a Brahmin family in Sakkhothai. Her father was a high ranking official of the court having every cause to be proud of his daughter who grew up to be a beautiful and able star radiating brightness, and more brilliant than any other woman of her contemporaries. From the age of 7, her education began and from then on sweet words, prose and poetry flowed from her in both Thai and Sanskrit, well wrapping the wisdom and the truth of life. Her mind grasped quickly the geometry of astrology and her hands were nonetheless second to her mind. With archful wrist she stroke the lines of an artist, and her nimble fingers graced beautiful stiches on many a garment (Nang Nopemas, 1970).

Such were her capabilities, together with the beauty of her youth, it was hard for a minstrel to resist describing these
heavenly gifts in sweet songs whose sounds touched His Majesty's ears causing much desire to behold this divine damsel. (Went she, therefore, to the court rendering her services to the king.

The title bestowed on her at the court was "Tew Sri Chulalaksana". The legend continues. Once at the royal "Loy Kratong" festival, on the full moon night of the twelfth month of the year, floating lanterns of varied sizes and forms twinkled everywhere lighting the whole city in a brilliant blaze. Tew Sri Chulalaksana made a lantern of the lotus flower so beautifully that His Majesty was overwhelmed. Since then it was his royal wish that every full moon night of the twelfth month of the year be a festival paying homage unto the great Lord Buddha, worshipping Him with lotus flower lanterns. The tradition lasts till this day" (Nang nopemas 1970). During "Loy Kratong" the revellers float an illuminated leaf bowl in which joss sticks and flowers, sometimes a small coin and betel nut and leaf are placed. Now-a-days a banana leaf has been replaced by wood, cardboard or plastic. Following another Brahminical practice the people offer thanks to the God of Water in whose bosom they "safely and pleasurably" bathe and swim. Thus, the festival can also be regarded as a form of annual thanks giving offered by the grateful farming population who depends on water for its economic well-being. As in India, the lotus is the country's most celebrated flower. Many Brahmin goddesses portrayed in Thai paintings hold lotus blooms in their hands, it is widely seen even in Buddhist monasteries. These practices and social customs, further strengthen the fact that the ties binding
Thailand and India are ancient. They are all pervading, particularly in Thai religious practices and the country's colourful festivals. (Costas 1982).

Though historians would agree with the general attitude of men's superiority in the Sukhothai period, a certain amount of recognition of women was obviously evident as in the case of Tow Si Chulalaksana indicating that there were no restrictions on women to get education. They became writers, poetesses, artists, astrologers in addition to acquiring expert knowledge of learning singing, embroidery and other household activities. Their knowledge, wisdom and intelligence was not only appreciated by the general folk but by the king also.

Though women of the commoners did not enjoy the privileges of women belonging to the aristocratic families and were generally treated as inferior to men. They were permitted to play their role fairly and fully ".... after the harvest, the women weave the cloth while the men labour away at smithery (Vajrasthira: 1976). The people did not idle their time away and as for the women folk, they definitely had a full hand in the development and progress of the society.

Therefore, the reason for not finding many records about Thai women is that they chose to play their part subtly without appearing more important than men in any way. It was probably again the way of Asian women in general.
The middle of the 14th century witnessed the growth of the kingdom of Ayuthaya in Siam. We do not have the recorded history of this period because the Kingdom of Ayuthaya was in constant war with Burma. In 1767 A.D. the Burmese not only overran the Thai Kingdom but also burnt everything including temples, monasteries and whatever literature the Thai people had. Whatever accounts we have, are based on the writings of the foreign ambassadors and travellers. According to Monsieur de La Bouverie’s records in his diaries when he was an Ambassador of France to Thailand during the year 1667: "... Thai men are very devoted to their wives and families and it seems that they get warm love and deep respect in return. During the six months that the men folk have to go on guard duty in service of their Lord of Life each year, their wives, mothers or daughters lovingly provide them with provision each day (La Loubère: 1668). The note clearly indicates that family life during this period was marked by mutual devotion and respect. It further, points out that when their menfolk fought the war the women-folk did not lag behind. They were actively engaged in the economic activities supporting their families and also helping the war efforts by maintaining regular food supply.

Monsieur Nicholas Gervaire, another French Ambassador to Ayuthaya during the reign of King Narai the Great observed: "The more well-to-do women work in their own homes caring for their husbands and children, seeing to it that meals are cooked either by the maids or by themselves, that clothings are ready for use and that everything is neat and clean pleasing to the
eyes. The remaining time is spent in artistic stitchery with gold, silver and silk threads not less beautiful in any way than similar works in Europe.

Women of less fortune spin cotton yarn and weave clothings for themselves and their families. For those without any cotton, they would weave for others and get paid for the labour. Apart from this some women also engage themselves with work in the rice fields and the orchards.... Thai women are somewhat similar to French women, they enjoy the company of their neighbours exchanging local gossips.... This account tells us that women belonging to higher classes devoted their full time to the care of the family whereas women of lower segments of society were actively engaged in gainful economic activities in addition to playing their traditional feminine role during this period.

From 1767 to 1782 there were wars and the situation in the country was not normal. We do not have much account about the Thai women in this period. In the same year at the fall of Ayuthaya (1767) a patriotic Thai general named Taksin succeeded in setting himself upon a king in a new capital down river at Thonburi. Fifteen years later the Chakri Dynasty was founded and the capital moved to the opposite bank of the Chao Phraya river and named the city Krung Rattanakosin. All sovereigns of the Royal House of Chakri are given the title Rama. The name of the city was altered to Krungtheep during the reign of Rama III but to foreigners the city has always been known as Bangkok.
4. THE WOMEN OF EARLY BANGKOK (Rattanakosin period 1782 - present)

The availability of the historical records in abundance belonging to Rattanakosin period helps us a lot in building up the true picture of the status of women. However, whatever records that we have of the women during the early period of that time are more about the women in the court rather than of the commoners. "Pooying Chow Wang" (Women of the court) has been an expression used since Ayuthaya, and when King Rama I (1782 A.D.) the founder of the Chakri Dynasty came to the throne, it was his royal wish that old customs and ways of life about the court be revived and practised even more formally.

Women in the court of the time were of three categories: those of the royal family as closely related to the King, those not related to the royal family but were from the families of or related to senior civil servants who wished to have their women folk educated in the palace and were therefore put under the charges of some of the royal households or of those serving closely in the court, thirdly, there were those who were just palace hands doing various household chores around the palace grounds.

Many avenues of education were pursued at that time and women especially of the first and second categories became competent at many skills ranging from the literary and arts together with domesticity right through to music and drama. Such education was not without use. Some rendered their services
to the enormous amount of work in the royal secretariat, others
did to the domestic affair of the royal household while many
took the responsibilities of teaching the younger generation.
These were indeed capable women executing important roles in
the palace life.

We have got quite a few glimpses of Thai women of various
periods in the history of Thailand. From what we have seen, it
can probably be concluded that though in general, Thai men
were regarded as the backbone of the Thai society and that the
social status of women had been one of inferiority, but one
must admit that Thai women did play a substantial part and had
fulfilled it with excellence. Women in general remained in
the background so far as the social, public, religious, economic
and political life were concerned. Women belonging to the low
economic status helped their menfolk in agriculture and family
business. On looking at matter more deeply right through history
when men had to make war, it must be assumed that the women
held fort at home, providing provision and supplies for the
fighting fronts, running the family and bringing up the children
single handed. Such responsibility on the shoulders of women
is not to be taken lightly.

After having reviewed the position and role of Thai women
through the history I shall now take up the position of the
women with regard to their family life, education, participation
in the labour force, their legal status and political awareness.
Before I take up the different facets of their lives I would
like to throw some light on the role of religion in affecting the status of Thai women because the impact of religion can be seen in every aspect of Thai culture.

5. **BUDDHISM AND WOMEN**

Thailand is known as the "Land of the Yellow Robes". This life-long attachment to the temple makes a Thai shun all extremes whether in personal life, politics or business. The earliest existing account about Thai culture may be found in King Ramkhamhaeng's inscriptions which clearly indicate that early Thai culture consisted of a three-fold mode of behaviour.

1. Filial gratitude and respect for family stability.
2. Devout faith in Buddhism leading to stability of society.
3. Show of respect to religion, sacred things and elders.

These general principles guided the life organisation of the Thai people. For the gratification of personal needs and kinship obligation the greatest importance was given to the stability of family life. To unite the whole society into a single cohesive unit faith in one religious philosophy (Buddhism) was considered very essential and for the continuation of the cultural heritage the younger generation was expected to respect the elder. Durkheim has used 'mechanical solidarity' for the said purpose.

We would be very much interested to know what role Buddhism played in uplifting or down grading the status of
Thai women. I shall briefly enumerate the sermons of Lord Buddha affecting women.

First, Buddha laid stress on the fact that a woman, like a man reaps the fruits of her past karma and that she must depend on her own acts for her future good or evil or salvation and in this none can help her not even her parents, teacher or spiritual preceptor. Thai struck at the root of the belief that a son was needed for the safe passage of an individual after death to heaven. Hence the futility of the invidious distinction made between a son and daughter in the pre-Buddhist period became obvious to the people and this ultimately raised the status of a daughter.

Secondly, Buddha discarded the Brahmanic rituals in which the wife played a secondary part and a barren woman or a widow had no place. This did away with the unwarranted stigma attached to these two categories of unfortunate women.

Thirdly, Buddha made no distinction between a woman and a man regarding the attainment of spiritual ends. He delivered discourses for the benefit of both the sexes and the moral code prescribed by him was to be observed by both. Hence the lower position of women in the sphere of spiritual culture was done away with and this has been amply corroborated by the several means attaining the highest goal "Nirvana".

Fourthly, the order of the nuns was open to married as well as unmarried women irrespective of the fact whether they
were barren or not as also to widows. There was no distinction between one category and another when they became nuns. Even a courtesan was admitted to the order of nuns, and after ordination no disrespect was shown to her because of her earlier career.

Fifthly, the education given to female novices and nuns was not different from that imparted to their male counterparts. The female devotees also received their training in the principles of Buddhism. The nuns were initiated into the deepest problems of philosophy and also into the subtle mystical experiences attainable through intense meditative exercises.

These dictates would help us to conclude that Buddhism tried to remove whatever discriminations were there against the women. We should not, however, jump to such hasty conclusions. If we look at the reality and functioning of monastic order we will find that nuns were accorded lower status in comparison to the monks. All important functionaries of Buddhist monasteries were male and there were a number of restrictions which were imposed on the nuns.

In the Anguttara Nikaya, one of the texts of the Buddhist canon, we come across the following passage which contains the advice of the Buddha to young girls of marriageable age:

"To whatever husband, your parents shall give you in marriage - anxious for your good, seeking your happiness - for them you will rise up early, be the last to retire, be willing workers, order all things sweetly and speak affectionately."
Train yourself thus girls.

And in this way also girls. You will however, revere, esteem and respect all whom your husband reveres, whether mother, father reclusse or Brahmin and on their arrival will offer seat and water. Train yourself thus girls.

And in this way also girls, you will be dext and nimble at your husband's home crafts, whether they be of wool or cotton, making it your business to understand the work so as to do it and get it done. Train yourselves thus girls.

And in this way also girls. Whatever your husband's household consists of - servants messengers or workmen - you will study the work of each one of them, and know of each, what has been done, and what not done, you will study the strength and weakness of the sick, you will portion out the solid food and the soft food, to each according to his need. Train yourselves thus girls.

And in this way also girls. The treasure, silver and the coin that your husband brings home, you will keep safe watch and not act as a robber, thief carouser or wastrel in respect of these. Train yourselves thus girls.

Indeed, girls possessed of these five qualities of women on the breaking up of the body, after dying will arise among nymphs of lovely form.
According to Buddha, these are seven kinds of wives:

"One resembles a murderer
the second a robber
the third a mistress
the fourth a mother
the fifth a sister
the sixth a friend
and the seventh a servant."  (P. Thomas 1964)

If we look at the desired qualities of women we will be able to draw some picture of their duties and status. The women were required to be submissive, domesticated and were expected to merge their individuality with that of their husbands. Out of the seven types of wives the last four were most valued.

In the recent past enactment of social legislation, equal opportunities for education, property rights and economic independence have helped a lot in elevating the position of women in Thailand. We must not, however, forget that religious dogmas do not change along with the changes in political life. It is perhaps for this reason that even today Monkhood is valued. It has been a tradition for a man to serve for a period of time as a monk. This experience makes a man learned and brings him to maturity. Monkhood also marks the male's entry into adult life and increases his prospects for a good marriage. There is no direct parallel of Monkhood in the life of the women (Das and Bardis, 1978).
In short it can be concluded that Buddhist religion has not helped in elevating the position of women in making them an equal partner in family and religious life.

6. THE THAI FAMILY

The study of basic institution like marriage and family of a country helps us in knowing the socially approved behaviour pattern and network of relationships. It also facilitates us to get glimpses of the cultural values religiously safe guarded, preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next through the process of socialisation.

In Thai society young girls were trained to master the expected role of / submissive wife and loving mother. Men and women did not play equal roles in the selection of their marriage partner. Old custom in Thailand expected a man to take the first step in finding wife. In practice, however, this was done by the parents or other elder relatives. Polygyny, though limited to rich persons, was an approved practice. The legal and social status of the wife was dependent upon the way her marriage was arranged. The young girls did not play any role, active or passive in the selection of their marriage partner. The young girls in the olden days were confined to the home learning different domestic duties. They did not have much contact with the members of opposite sex; whatever contact they had did not go beyond their male relatives. Many a time a couple had a chance to meet each other only after marriage.
In Thai society, arranged marriage was a normal pattern. Since the reign of King Rama IV, it became obligatory to get the consent of the girl to the marriage but in practice this was not done. A redeeming feature of the Thai marriage was that the parents of the girl were under no obligation to meet the marriage expenses. There was no dowry system. On the other hand, the boy and his family were expected to meet the marriage expenses. It should not however be interpreted as bride price. The amount of ornaments given to the girl at the time of marriage became her personal property called 'Sin Samrod'. The amount given to the parents was given back to the couple after the marriage. The father of the girl could give any amount on his own to the girl at the time of marriage. However, in actual practice this system was not strictly adhered to. Depending upon the economic conditions of the boy's and the girl's family, they could work out an understanding which was mutually acceptable to both the parties. Demanding some amount at the time of the daughter's marriage was a symbolic action to ensure proper upkeep of the girl.

The rule of residence in the Thai society was/is a mixture of bilocal, matrilocal and neolocal. After marriage the girl continues to stay with her parents and her husband joins her there. They continue to stay there till the girl gives birth to the first child or when the new couple is able to have a new home of their own. In some cases they continue to stay with the girl's parents till the younger girl in the
family is to get married. In some cases even after the second marriage in the girl's family, the first girl and her husband continue to stay there but the family makes a provision for them in the adjoining apartment. Das and Bardis (1978) have given the details regarding the different types of family composition in Thailand.

In spite of the above mentioned provision which leads to the extended family system at a given period of time we find that majority of the people live in nuclear households, this is supported by different studies made by Sharp (1963), Wijewardene (1967), Smith (1973) etc. In the modern Thai society and particularly in Bangkok metropolis the rule of residence is bilocal and neolocal. Parents of whichever spouse have better accommodation and if the place of residence is near to the place of work of husband and wife the couple would stay with those parents of either boy or girl. But a continued effort is made to move to one's own house after sometime. This rule of residence indicates that even though the wife assumes a submissive position, she is in a relatively better place because she continues to stay in the family of her orientation, though the husband is a provider and takes a leadership role. Wife has complete control over the family purse. She has a significant role to play in the family decisions.

In Thai society motherhood was highly valued. A married lady was expected to have as many children as she could. The greater the number of the children she had, the greater was the prestige
assigned to her. There was no discrimination with regard to
the sex of the children. However, the couple was expected to
have at least one male child who could continue the family
lineage and thus the family could contribute someone who would
follow and preserve the Buddhist traditions. Although the
rule of residence was matrilocal, limited to specific span of
married life, the rule of descent was patrilineal. It was for
this reason that importance was assigned to the male child.

The family had complete control over the children and
their socialisation took place in the family. The mother
played a very significant role in the processes of socialisation.
The Thai society was divided on the hierarchical system giving
importance to age. The old people were highly respected not
only in the family but in society at large also. The network
of relationships was determined according to the age of the
person. The juniors had to show respect to the elders and
obeyed their orders. The younger children in the family right
from the beginning were trained to inculcate the concept of
seniority and juniority. This tradition in the Thai culture
has been preserved and is followed even today. Even if the
economic status of an old person is low the young generation
has to address him with respect. A Thai young boy or girl
would address a taxi driver who is older in age as "uncle".
This pattern of behaviour is noticeable even at the work site.
A young executive would address an old subordinate with respect
and politeness. It does not, however, mean that Thai society
has not changed with regard to the criteria of social stratification. People who are Buddhist monks, educated, occupationally highly placed, rich and occupy political position are respected even though they are young in age. Since the introduction of compulsory education for both boys and girls the educational institutions are also contributing in the socialisation of the younger generation. But the familial training supersedes all other training. Family plays a very important role in the socialisation of the children, preservation and continuation of social norms.

The Thai society cannot, however, be treated as wholly tradition oriented. Boys and girls meet each other and have free interaction at the co-education-institutions or at social functions. The two sexes freely mix with each other and learn the personality types which help them in choosing their marriage partners. It does not, however, mean that the young persons do not seek the opinion of their parents and relatives. They still value their opinion. The present day Thai society depicts the mixture of traditionality and modernity. On the one hand the younger generation, both boys and girls, plays an active role in choosing their marriage partner but at the same time it seeks the approval of the parents and relatives.

A survey conducted in 1958 at Prasatmitr Teacher College regarding the preference for the right partner it was revealed that Thai women wanted to marry a man of character and prospect. Thai women are now emancipated and do not feel shy in discussing the question of love and marriage. Due to modern education and
economic opportunity women in Thailand are playing almost an
equal role in every sphere of life. It does not, however, mean
that family life is losing its importance. Women are taking
keen interest in family life as well as in the outside world.
The greater participation of the women in the work force has
helped them to some extent in moving towards equalitarian and
companionship concepts of family life.

7. THAI WOMEN AND THEIR EDUCATION

Education in the olden days was a rare commodity which
was meant for men only and no importance was attached to
educating women. It has been the tradition for every man to
enter monkhood when reaching twenty years of age, to be taught,
to read and write and to learn arithmetic, literature, morality,
manners and he was expected to translate the Pali and Sanskrit
pieces of literature. The monks acted as teachers and temples
as educational institutions. In the beginning, imparting of
education was confined to monasteries and was imparted by
the Buddhist monks who restricted it to the menfolk. The important
duties of a woman were the nurturing of the child, the cleaning
of the house and the satisfying of the husband. Therefore, any
education a girl had was from grown ups in her own household,
and should she be slightly more progressive than others, she
could acquire further knowledge from sermons at the temples or
from any available literature through listening. Not many,
however, could read and write, since being able to do so was
not approved of by many fearing that their young ladies would
be describing sweet thoughts to young men, which was regarded
as vulgar. For those of high ranks, as those closely attending their noble masters, their young girls were cultivated with the art of homemaking and various social graces in the palace which was regarded as the seat of education up till the time of the change from feudalism to democracy.

The principle held in the upbringing of the girls in those times was "subduedness". Subdued words and subdued ways, to appear just a little fragile was not detrimental, in fact it was feminine. Whether a girl be standing, walking, sitting or sleeping, it must be done with reservation. She should be heard only when called and to have her young mind straying towards the opposite sex was a shame.

During the Bangkok era, education for women progressed more systematically with much of the effort originating in the palace. To quote Prince Damrong Rajanupap, an eminent Thai historian and the brilliant scholar in King Rama V's period: "The princes and princesses alike start school at the age of three having to read and write Thai till seven. Then comes the "lower matayom", when a prince would learn from male teachers and a princess from female teachers for here the subjects studied are different. A prince now starts with Pali-Sanskrit, and a princess with home craft, through the Thai language. This lower matayom ends at thirteen for a prince and at eleven for a princess, after which higher studies consisting of Buddhist ethics and principles handicrafts and other preferred subjects, demand the regal children's time. The princesses also have an opportunity
to look into matters of the court gaining from this knowledge of history, royal culture and customs complete with all the social graces befitting young ladies of the time. Such education continues until they are well equipped to render services to various matters of the court" (Prince Damrong: 1963).

For those not of the direct royal family Prince Damrong recorded:

"It is customary for those who desire that their female offsprings be educated in the palace to put their girls at early ages under the charges of relatives as respected friends who are well versed in the ways of the court, either living on the palace grounds or serving the royal household. These guardians would themselves bring up their wards, training them in the expected feminine ways and manners in the art of domesticity and the capable of doing formal classes at the "pratum" and "matayom" levels" (Prince Damrong: 1963).

The palace was therefore the house of learning to them. It was the conservatoire of the arts, music, la cuisine, floral art, stitchery, weaving and perfumery, all being trained and practised with perfect precision. Women trained in the palace were therefore renowned for their abilities and most of them naturally were from families related to the court.

As for a formal school, records date back to 1874, when an American mission started the "Wang Lung Girls School" under the principalship of Mrs. Harriet M. House, wife of an American
doctor who was one of the well known missionaries in Thailand. Mrs. House was previously a director of the "Selected School for Young Ladies" in the United States, and during the holidays of 1871-1872, she raised U.S. $3000 and came back to Bangkok to start the "Harriet M. House School for Girls" known locally as the "Wang Lung Girls School" because the school was located where the "Wang Lung" palace used to be. The school started with six boarders and one day girl and was the first girls' school in Thailand.

Mrs. House was succeeded by Miss Fama S. Cole. During the latter's administration the school charged a fee including board and lodging. The school fee was causing some dissatisfaction among many parents because the school had always been free. However, the value of education overwhelmed the fee and the number of students increased constantly to include many daughters of various princes who recognized the importance of learning for their daughters as much as for their sons. Girls from all families learned and played, slept and ate together with no distinction made for any one, princes and commoners were treated alike. It was indeed a democratic upbringing under the moulding hands of Miss Cole (Vajrasthira, 1976).

The year 1880 saw further development in girls education. King Rama V (1868-1910) had a girl school built in memory of his wife, Her Royal Highness Princess Supanatha Edmarurat who was drowned bearing the king's child on a voyage up the Chao
Praya River. The Princess when alive was constantly concerned
with education and had spent both time and money especially for
making the young girls knowledgeable and competent. Therefore,
building of a school was the highest tribute, His Majesty could
pay to his dear wife, and the school was called after her
"Sumanthali school" which later in 1904 was changed to "Rajinee"
and was under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen. Many
more schools and colleges were started after that, indicating
that the importance of education for women was well recognised.

University education for women, however, started only
recently. In 1927 there were seven women students in the Faculty
of Arts and Science taking pre-medical courses in Chulalongkorn
University and this happened after the university had already
been running for 10 years. There were only four Faculties then
in the university - The Faculty of Medicine, The Faculty of Public
Administration, The Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of
Arts and Science. Then in 1926, Princess Poonarikasem Kasemari,
the first dean of the faculty of Arts and Science, started a
separate Arts Faculty encouraging many more women to the university
(Vajrasthira: 1976).

Initially, educating men and women together in the same
institute was considered a revolutionary thing and caused much
uncertainty among the conservatives. Many parents were hesitant
in allowing their daughters to venture into this university
co-education and for those girls whose parents braved the new
thing, it was an experience. However, it was only a short time
after that co-education ceased to be an ordeal, and there was a
marked change in the attitude towards Thai women. Now-a-days
the women have every opportunity to pursue any desired field of
study and many have been awarded the highest degree in subjects
which at one time were only "for men". We now have women becoming
excellent doctors, competent engineers, challenging architects
and capable lawyers including many more in other unexpected walks
of life. If we look at women's education concurrently with the
development of the country whether politically, economically or
socially, it would be evident that Thai women have had a substantive
hand in the development of all areas.

During the last one decade a number of universities have
started reporting specialised training in Business Management.
The entry to such courses is regulated by a unisex competitive
test. In addition to the above there are many privately managed
colleges who are not lagging behind in offering the new opportunities
so that women could occupy the top positions in the bureaucracy.

In 1921, the compulsory Education Act was passed requiring
both boys and girls from the age of seven upward to attend school
until completion of the compulsory course or upon reaching 14 years
of age. This Act was a major factor in reducing the illiteracy
rate among the Thai people.

As previously stated, compulsory education, first introduced
in 1921, and stressed by the government since 1932, was further
reinforced by the First National Economic and Social Plan launched
in 1961 resulting in a satisfactorily lowering of the illiteracy rate
as shown in the table 2.1. It is interesting to note that the
**Table 2.1**  
Illiteracy Rates among persons  
of 6 years of age and above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Illiteracy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>12,327,386</td>
<td>6,143,460</td>
<td>6,183,926</td>
<td>46.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>18,025,404</td>
<td>9,004,412</td>
<td>9,021,992</td>
<td>29.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>23,483,313</td>
<td>11,581,756</td>
<td>11,871,557</td>
<td>18.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Thailand National Education Council
female illiteracy rate declined more rapidly than that of males.
By the end of the Fifth National Economic and Social Development
Plan (1981-1986) it is projected that the number of the illiterate
among school-age population will be zero for both sexes. The
latest available data for the population of 10 years and above
indicate that literacy rate in 1980 for the males was 92.45
per cent and 85.26 per cent for females (Population and Housing
Census, 1980).

6. THAI WOMEN IN POLITICS

Traditionally speaking, women in Thailand have always
enjoyed a significant place in the Thai society. The Thai
customs and traditions do not prohibit women from working
outside their homes, or participating in public activities,
even after marriage. Thai women, especially in the rural
areas, have always been a source of labour in the family and
in the community, participating in the farm work, charitable
activities, as well as being responsible for the household
work and the upbringing of children.

Thai political culture from the past till recently
has not given women any opportunity to take part in politics
as men do. Most Thai women, therefore, have no direct experience
with politics resulting in the lack of interest in the subject.
It is considered a man's world and political responsibility is
therefore his. This viewpoint has been deeply rooted for centuries
causing Thai women, though as much subjects of the land as men are, to remain unaffected by political views or movements and lacked enthusiasm to participate in the running of the country. The gallant acts of Somdej pra Srimaityothai disguised as a man fighting with the Burmese on an elephant in Ayuthaya period. Tao Suranare, Tao Thepsatri and Tao Srisunthorn in keeping the enemies away from the city walls in Bangkok period, are some exceptions. They really do not exemplify the role Thai women played in politics, but rather were courageous acts of Thai women who were even ready to give their lives for their country in the time of distress. As much as has been recorded in History, it appears that her Majesty the Queen in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) Somdej Pra SriPathararin, had more political awareness than other women of that time. She also had an opportunity to play a part in the political field when His Majesty made the royal tour to Europe.

However, in 1932 when Thailand became a democratic country with her first constitution on December 10, 1932 together with the first election bill passed in 1933, Thai men and women were given equal legal rights which allowed them both to stand for election and to elect. It was indeed an advance measure because at the time women in many other countries were yet to enjoy such privilege. Though still not enough political interest was taken, Thailand saw an increasing number of women standing for election ever since, beginning with Mrs. Orapin Chayakhal being elected to parliament in 1949.
Since then more and more women stood in the following elections and in January 1975 elections three women were elected to the lower house of the Parliament. The upper house of Parliament in 1975 too had, among its one hundred members, eight lady members, which brought a standing credit to Thai women; for, the members of this house are selected from qualified and experienced people from various spheres of life by His Majesty the King.

At present one can visualize women being active in politics at two levels, the "politician" level and the "interested in politics". Women politicians would assume positions directly involving the running of the country, being members of parliament, holding ministerial portfolios and controlling various official jobs. Those interested in politics would concern themselves with influencing and keeping a keen observation on the management of the country whether it be for personal or public interest. Ladies' groups of various forms are examples of such women bodies which are far-sighted enough to recognise how the country should be developed, improved and modified.

Thailand until now, has very few women politicians as these 'interested in politics'. When compared with the number of male representatives, their number is fairly low. However, the ratio of successful women candidates in all elections held in Thailand is, as a rule, much higher than
that of male candidates. If in future, we have more women candidates for the seats in Parliament, there is every reason to believe that women will have a much stronger voice in the governing of Thailand.

After October 14, 1973 (the day the students uprising successfully overthrew the military dictatorship which had ruled over Thailand for the past decade) there appeared many more women's groups with political objectives, the right of the free expression having been suppressed for a long time during the previous military regime. University women's groups are very active but those outside the university play their roles not with any less vigour. A better status for women is the echoing cry of the moment.

Women were accepted for important national work, in 1973, regarded as a major turning point in political and administrative development, out of 2,307 appointed members to the National Convention elected among themselves members of National Legislative Assembly which for fifteen months performed the tasks of the Parliament and the drafting of a new national constitution. Of the 209 members elected, 16 were women. In early 1975, three women were elected members of the National Assembly. Although this number is of a smaller proportion than that of a previous election in 1969 when 8 women were elected out of 219 members, nevertheless, 8 women were also at this time
nominated as Senators. During 1976-1977, two women became Cabinet Ministers, a remarkable change in Thai history marking since no women had ever been a minister before. This was regarded as major event in terms of women's participation in politics.

In addition to this, there was some rectification of various regulations thus permitting women to have, for the first time, a chance to assume high level administrative posts such as diplomatic posts to foreign countries, the posts of director-general and prosecutor as well as other senior administrative posts in private business and in international agencies.

**LEGAL STATUS OF THAI WOMEN**

Though evidence on Thai laws during the Sakhothenai period have not been located, it could probably be assumed without much error that the social and legal status of Thai women at the time was much influenced by Indian laws, customs and religions, both directly and indirectly: directly through business dealing with India and indirectly through the contact with Men and Khmers. Such influence was to be found in the three renowned writings of Mama Dharmastra Utthamastra and Buddhism, which bestowed superiority to men. Wives were to be considered as the respected mothers of the children and had no part in any affairs other than those of the household.
With the decline of Sukhothai and the rise of Ayutthaya, status of women became more established, for during the reign of King Uthong, in 1361, the Law of Husband and Wife was enacted. The law was many times amended but in its essence still gave more rights to men than women.

Polygyny was by this law permissible but was not popularly practised except in the more well-to-do sections of the society. Of this fact La Bourbule recorded that "A Thai man can have more than one wife, and sometimes this was for the purpose of showing his prosperity". Nevertheless, the bond of marriage could also be dissolved by divorce with mutual consent or by a judicial decree on one of the grounds specified by this Law of Husband and Wife.

On the whole therefore, women in the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods only had responsibilities and duties rather than status and rights. Marriages were arranged until recently. A woman was then under the husband's supervision and authority. The wife was expected to rear children, remain faithful and devoted to the care of the home. Failure in any of these duties merited social disapproval and justified divorce. The husband also had the right to inflict corporal chastisement on the wife though such practice had long ceased to exist. Unmarried women must hold virginity supreme; and, by law, prostitutes entertainers and beggars were among the outcast and no one could marry them.
When King Rama I (1782-1808) came to rule Rattanakosin (Bangkok), it was his royal wish that the Ayuthaya Law Code be gathered and edited to make it up to date. However the status of women did not rise much higher than before. Until 1938 with the change from absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy, a further revision in the Law Code was made which finally resulted in the present Civil and Commercial Code.

In order to understand the legal status of women in Thai society today, it is important to look at their position in a historical perspective. Two landmark cases during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) mark the advancement of legal rights for Thai women. The first concerned a woman, An Doug Nuan, who refused to marry a man selected for her by her parents. In 1886, she petitioned the King who agreed to give the woman the freedom of choosing her own spouse, changing the law for all women. The second case in 1888, involved a woman, An Doug Chan, who refused to be sold by her husband. Before 1888, slave wives could be sold or mortgaged. King Rama IV again gave a favourable reply by enacting a law prohibiting a husband from selling his wife without her consent.

Prior to October 1, 1938 polygyny was legally accepted in Thailand. Registration of marriage was not required. Thai law recognised the right of all wives and classified them into three categories, according the way they became a wife.
1) "Mia Glang Naeng" the official wife that a man's parents acquired for him.

ii) "Mia Glang Naeng" minor wife that the man acquired by himself after official wife.

iii) "Mia Glang Tasae = slave wives which the husband bought from the slave markets or from their owners.

In 1936, with the enactment of the Civil and Commercial Code, Thailand legally adopted monogamy, though it was not accepted in practice. The Civil and Commercial Code of 1936 gave single women additional rights but restricted the rights of married women. The husband legally became the head of the household. A woman acquired the domicile of her husband and could only claim a separate domicile if he went abroad. A married woman could not set up a business or profession without her husband's consent. If she had a career before marrying she was allowed to keep it. Thai women needed the written permission of their husband in order to carry out business agreement or even procure a passport. In 1969 therefore, the Women Lawyers Association of Thailand appealed to the Juridical Council Office to revise the present family law under the Civil and Commercial Code to improve the legal status of women. The outcome of the appeal has not been formalized, but the most recent Constitution of October 1974, states that "a man and a woman shall have equal rights" (Art. 28 paragraph 2).
In 1976, the new constitution approved by the members of the Parliament guaranteed equal rights for women and men. A committee including three women lawyers, was appointed to draft an amended family law. On October 5, 1976 the new Civil and Commercial Amendment Act eliminated the highly discriminatory laws against women with regard to the right to petition for divorce, to buy and sell property and to complete business transactions. Women are now legally eligible for all positions in all occupations, including high government positions, some of which were formerly denied to them (Rubin, 1979).

The following are some of the specifics of the 1976 Civil and Commercial Amendment Act.

**Female Property Rights**

1. An adult woman can purchase property in her own name and hold it as sole owner if the property was bought before marriage and a special contract signed by the man and woman before marriage states that the property is owned by the woman and will not be a joint property. This contract cannot be signed retroactively. The married woman is the sole owner of the aforementioned property or any exchange made with this property and of any inheritance as gift specifically designed for her.

2. A married woman can sell property that she owns as specified above without her husband's signature. Any property
purchased after marriage by either husband or wife (except property bought with assets solely owned by the woman or man) is considered jointly owned and must be sold with the written consent of both husband and wife.

3. An unmarried woman can sell property that she owns without any other consenting signature.

4. Daughters and sons can inherit land and share inheritance equally.

5. A woman can pass any property she owns to her daughter or son without the consent of her husband.

Now, at the national level, there is a complete reorganization of Civil and Commercial Code permitting women to have equal rights in any legal procedure concerning property after marriage, in divorce cases, in guardianship of children, in choosing a career or residence.

The Thai women are comparatively better placed in case of property rights. In Thailand under the code, matrimonial property is divided into four categories, let us now give a brief description of them:

1) Sin Demo i.e. property belonging to either spouse before marriage or property subsequently acquired and declared by a will or gift to be so (see. 1463).
ii) Sin Duan Tua i.e. separate property. This includes property set aside for the purpose by an ante-nuptial agreement, property subsequently acquired and declared by a will or gift to be so, personal property and an engagement ring (sec. 1964).

iii) Sin Somrod, i.e. marriage property. This consists of all property acquired by either spouse during marriage (Sec. 1466).

iv) Sin Serikom i.e. community property. This consists of Sin Daur and Sin Somrod (Sec. 1466) (Dharmamukt, 1972).

Marriage

1. Both men and women must complete their seventeen years before marrying.

2. Men and women between the ages of seventeen and twenty must have their parents' consent. If there are no parents or they refuse to give their permission they may request permission directly from the court.

3. After twenty years, the age of majority men and women may marry without their parents' consent.

4. Suit for divorce may be filed by either man or woman, and is treated as equally valid by the court.

Marriage, divorce and succession are now regulated by the Civil and Commercial Code. A man may now have only one legitimate wife. A woman who is a widow or a divorcee, is
not allowed to remarry until after an interval of 310 days from the dissolution of her previous marriage, unless she either gives birth to a child, or remarries her divorced husband, or the court gives an order allowing her to marry again during that period (Sec. 1448). No marriage contracted in Thailand, whether with or without religious rites or ceremonies, is valid unless it is duly registered at a District Office by or before a marriage officer (Sec. 1449). The contract of marriage confers a new legal status on the contracting parties. The husband becomes the head of the family. It is the duty of both husband and wife to maintain and support each other (Sec. 1483).

**Other Business and Professional Rights**

1. There are no legal constraints against Thai women entering any profession.

2. There are no legal restrictions on the dissemination of information on family planning devices.

3. Women and men have the right to possess a bank account in their own name.

4. Women and men have equal access to credit.

5. According to the labour law men and women should receive equal pay for equal work.
THAI WOMEN IN LABOUR FORCE

Thailand, like India, is a traditional society. Although Thailand has its own independent history yet it was very much influenced by the Indian culture particularly with the reference to its beliefs in socio-economic and religious life patterns. Women in Thailand were considered as inferior to men. The man was the bread winner, the head of the family, the ruler and the protector of the country. The women looked after the home, the children, and the menfolk and managed the family budget. This type of division of labour based on sex was common in most countries of the world at a time when population was small and natural resources still plentiful.

For centuries, Thai women accepted their traditional role of home maker, although a number of women managed now and then to stand on an equal footing with the men especially in the economic field. While most women did not receive any formal schooling, the men in the lower income group were also mostly illiterate. Furthermore, while men were responsible for local and national affairs, most women were the decision-makers in the family and very likely influenced their men in the conduct of the local affairs. Economically, Thai women had always been given equal responsibility, especially in the lower income groups of the rural Thailand. They worked side by side with their men in the fields and had to take care of household duties as well. As a rule, women held the purse
strings in the family, and when more often than not, the purse was empty, they had to supplement the family income.

As society changed and technology progressed, Thai women also changed their roles to take a more active part in the development of the society. This change has, however, been gradual and affected without much pressure or struggle. After the Second World War, the changes in the roles of Thai women have become more rapid and more wide-spread. A growing number of women received formal education and university degrees. A few competed on equal terms with men and obtained scholarships to study abroad. They became civil servants and took part in the administration of the country.

The government policy for economic growth helped in the creation of new job opportunities for the women. The change was brought about largely by the Industrial Investment Act, under which special privileges were granted to foreign investors including exemption from import duties, income taxes and business taxes on raw material for five years, freedom to bring in foreign technicians and remit profits abroad and the right to own land. Certificates have been granted to the enterprises engaged in construction, the textile industry, hotels and restaurants, automobile and bicycle assembling and manufacture of various types of machinery equipment and electrical appliances.
Over the past a few decades there has been an increasing number of firms producing construction materials, iron and steel, electrical goods, petroleum, chemicals, plastics and canned fruit and assembling automobiles. The industrial growth, both local and foreign, opened up new job opportunities for women not only as workers but also at the top management. One significant change since 1972 must, nonetheless be noticed. The labour force participation rate for women of every age group has definitely shown an increasing trend while that for men it has been almost static.

Table 3.2  Trend in Labour Force Participation (1972-1978)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Labour Force Participation</th>
<th>Percent of Female in total labour force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>16,216.0</td>
<td>7,222.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>17,716.6</td>
<td>7,620.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>17,931.6</td>
<td>7,682.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>18,255.2</td>
<td>8,339.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>18,565.5</td>
<td>8,776.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>20,476.8</td>
<td>9,368.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>21,894.8</td>
<td>10,279.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National statistical office
The table shows, the proportion of women in the work force between the period 1972-1978 whose strength in the labour force has increased from 44.5 per cent to 47.0 per cent. Despite the fact that women's participation in the labour force has increased we do find that Thai society has not accorded them equal status. To probe the reasons for this demands an independent inquiry.

Recent studies have shown that Thai women have taken up the role of provider in the family. Although most of the women work because of economic necessity yet we find that quite a good number of them who work because they like to make use of their education and would like to be equal partner in the growth of the national economy. A survey made by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in 1968 concluded that approximately 86 per cent of women working in Bangkok had to provide for the families. Another survey conducted by the Labour Department in 1971 revealed that more than 90 per cent of women workers work because of economic necessity and the rest work because they like to work. It is the later category of women who are highly educated and compete in the unisex competition to occupy position of authority. All these indicate that women do take quite a responsibility in the economic welfare of the family. Furthermore, the influence of education, the change in concepts and the recognition of the new status for women have also made them feel that even more
important than money is the important and the satisfaction in being able "to help with national economy", the feeling of having done something worthwhile and at the same time gaining experience and knowledge. We see now women of all ages diverting towards various avenues of life apart from continuing with the normal domestic routines.

The female labour forces have been directed into many channels depending on the geography, a national resources, education, training and ways and customs of different areas. Agriculture seems to dominate the scene of outdoor working life of the women in the country. Out of the total number of women workers, 75.38 per cent were engaged in agriculture (National Statistical Office, 1980). In the cities, however, industry absorbs the female labour in weaving, packaging, stitchery work, fine jewelry, art and other skilled labour. Commerce and servicing business such as cooks, waiters, domestic helpers and salon hands utilise more of the female labour force, while other professional fields such as administration, teaching, engineering, medicine, pharmacy, nursing including show business, claim the rest. Many statistical surveys, however, show a marked tendency towards a drift from agriculture to other professions among which teaching, nursing, stenography and civil service are the more popular choices.

We see women playing bigger and more important roles in the family economy day by day, whether they be the wives...
doing all the household chores without pay or those working outside to increase the family income, those in business or in industry, and not a small number of unmarried women whose work is to keep themselves busy and also help the family finance, all contributing fairly and substantially to the security of the family. To say the least, the women now do not have to be completely dependent on their husbands as before, and at best the source of their labour has been more than useful for the family and the society as a whole.

Statistics from the National Statistical Office reveal that in 1980 there were 22.49 million women and about 50.9 per cent of the entire female population were in the labour force. From the labour survey conducted by the National statistical Office in the same year, it was discovered that the number of women who entered the labour force and who were employed amounted to 10,257,600 (employed here mean both fully and partially employed judging from working hours and income) of the number of employed women 6,706,000 were fully employed.

In the metropolis Bangkok, there are many women's organizations now-a-days which protect the interests of their members. Besides the National Council of Women of Thailand, we also have the Women Doctors Association, The Women Lawyers Association, The Pan Pacific Women Association, etc. These organizations are also rendering social services for the needy
persons. We thus, see how women have travelled a long way to attain economic independence and are entering into professions which were once the domain of men.

The role of women received some consideration during the Fourth National Development Plan (1977-1981). It has been agreed that women are important human resources essential to national development which should not be overlooked and wasted. Since the female population makes up about 50 per cent of the entire population active participation of this rather hidden resources would greatly benefit social and economic development at the national level.

One may wonder why in Sociological research I have traced out the Thai history? There were two reasons. When different theoretical explanations, regarding women role performance, were reviewed it was contended that traits, performance and situations have to viewed from a specific cultural setting. The second reason is made explicit by Tamara K. Erevan, historian-cum-sociologist, who maintained that an understanding of the interaction between family development and historical changes provide an insight into the dynamics of social change as well as a deeper understanding of the major transitions that have taken place in the history of the family (Erevan, 1978a: 1-2).