



INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES (IAWS)

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# NEWSLETTER

# Indian Association for Women's Studies

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# CONTENT

Editorial .....	01
Pre-Conference IAWS 2020: Women's Studies at New Crossroads.....	03
Inaugural Session.....	08
Presidential Address.....	11
South Asia Plenary	11
Special Plenary: Identity, Resources and Citizenship.....	14
Plenary on Women's Movement in Delhi .....	16
ISLE IAWS Panel Supported by Work in Freedom Programme,..... International Labour Organisation	17
Jharkhand Panel - Women's Issues in Jharkhand.....	20
Subthemes Summary.....	24
Cultural Evenings.....	31
Resolutions .....	33
Tributes.....	38
Photo Gallery.....	39

## EDITORIAL DESK



This issue of the IAWS Newsletter focuses on the IAWS Conference which was held in Delhi from 28th to 31st January 2020. Of course, this was followed by the nationwide Covid-19 lockdown in March. Elections for the new Executive Committee of the IAWS were held towards the end of the year. The new EC then chose the following office-bearers: Ishita Mukhopadhyay as President, Vibhuti Patel as Vice-President, Mini Sukumar as General Secretary, S. Suba as Treasurer, and Shadab Bano as Joint Secretary. Wandana Sonalkar was entrusted with the task of bringing out the Newsletter, together with Nupur Jain, the student member of the EC. The other members are Asha Hans, V.S. Elizabeth, Meera Velayudhan (Previous President) and Anagha Tambe (previous General Secretary). Nirmula Putul (Jharkhand) and Monisha Behal (North East Network) have accepted the invitation to be members of IAWS and Bharathidasan University nominated N. Manimekalai, as BDU representative in the EC.

One of the first actions of the new EC was to organise a National Convention in February 2021 to press the case for continuation of Women's Studies Centres in universities and colleges, and other urgent matters, with the University Grants Commission. So, while this issue of the IAWS Newsletter will focus on informing members about the January 2020 Conference, in the next we will briefly report on the Convention.

In another meeting of the IAWS, it was resolved that from now on, the Newsletter will be brought out in electronic form only, and will be sent to members via e-mail. This decision stems not just from the disruption of postal services during the pandemic, but also from the difficulties we have had in reaching postal copies to members even before this.

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The XVIth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies was inaugurated by Dr. Ranbir Singh, Vice-Chancellor, National Law University, Delhi. After that the Conference began its usual business. There were two Special Plenary Sessions, the Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture, and two special panels: one held jointly with the Indian Society for Labour Economics, and the other organised by the Jharkhand unit. As usual, parallel sessions were conducted on the 10 sub-themes for which papers had been invited. There was also a Pre-Conference session on January 27, 2020. We are carrying summaries of the most of the reports of these events, which were handed over to us by the earlier Newsletter team. It will be possible for those interested in the full reports to access them via the IAWS Website.

I would like to say here that, while I personally did not attend the Conference, the reports brought alive the spirited interactions that took place. The Plenaries were of course exciting. One echoed the main theme of the Conference, which was Constitutional Principles in 21st century India: Visions for Emancipation. It discussed the vexed issue of Identity, Resources and Citizenship; there was also a Sub-Theme on Identities and Citizenship. The other was the South Asia plenary with participants from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this year we could not have a speaker from Pakistan. The plenary brought out many questions on which women's organisations have been organising, fighting and negotiating, in countries with similar cultures and different political environments. Some of these have seen the impact of protracted military conflict on women and marginalised sections.

The panel discussions reflected different initiatives that the IAWS has taken up, going beyond the Women's Studies Centres in academic institutions. The collaboration with ISLE (Indian Society for Labour Economics) generated a most thought-provoking discussion attempting to theorise from recent data on gender aspects of labour, which overlap with the logic of neoliberal economics, caste, and the discounting of labour performed within the home. The other important IAWS initiative has been in Jharkhand, where a Women's Studies unit has been functioning since 2016 even though it is not formally within a college or university. The research being done by young scholars there reflects their close links with the grass roots, even as they apply the methods of feminist scholarship. They spoke of threats to livelihood and loss of land, but also about how customary laws and taboos affect tribal women trying to attain some independence and control over resources in changing circumstances. We expect more significant work from the Jharkhand unit in future. The sub-theme sessions covered a wide range of topics. We have included brief summaries in this newsletter. The fuller reports can be accessed via the website.

Between the January 2020 Conference and now, the world has changed. Some of us have contracted this disease, and come out of it, albeit with experiences of pain, fear and anxiety, for ourselves and for others. We have suffered many losses, during the earlier wave of Covid 19 and the more deadly second wave. But many of the issues we were talking about then –about employment and livelihoods, identity and recognition, violence and neglect –are still relevant now, and women and marginalized sections of society have felt the impact of the pandemic most intensely. We will of course talk about these things in subsequent issues of this Newsletter. So let this one just be a connecting link between the world before Covid 19 and the future we are facing, separated and distanced but together all the same.

## Pre-Conference IAWS 2020: Women's Studies at New Crossroads

Pre-Conference sessions have always had an important place in IAWS Conferences. Senior women's studies scholars and young students, faculty and activists interact in these sessions in a more informal and less structured manner. In this Conference too, we had a vibrant group of young scholars articulating their concerns. What follows is a summary account.

The first topic discussed was 'Teaching and Researching Gender at Diverse Institutional Sites'. The panel included senior scholars Kumkum Roy, Archana Dwivedi, Nandini Ghosh and Smita Patil. In the chair was Praveena Kodoth.

Here 'diverse' can be understood in two ways: the diverse kinds of educational institutions in which Women's Studies is now being taught and studied, and the diversity within the institutions themselves. In a sense, these two kinds of diversity mark the crossroads Women's Studies in India is facing. We have now been able to enter a wide variety of educational and other institutions, and are more aware of the need for diversity in each of these spaces. Also, we have now reached a point where the presence of scholars, professionals, journalists and activists from diverse social backgrounds is reaching the critical mass necessary to make real changes in our understanding and praxis.

**Prof. Kumkum Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru University** shared her experience from two different locations: in a mainstream history department in JNU and her role in developing teacher-training materials in the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). While in recent times classrooms have become diverse in terms of region, class, and caste, and the teacher has to respond to this heterogeneity, the trend towards privatization of higher education carries us towards a homogenization of classrooms. Any attempt to challenge the bias of content that favours upper class and upper caste women is viewed with suspicion. Instead of a 'one size fits all' approach, teachers and learners need flexibility as different sources of learning, such as family, community, and online resources, often pose contradictions.

At present, syllabi are framed from a heteronormative lens, with many instances where young girls' future is tied to marriage.

**Archana Dwivedi, from the NGO Nirantar** which has been working in the area of dissemination of knowledge in the community, said that this knowledge, which comes from the experiences of the community, is grounded in the reality of women. Therefore, the process of knowledge creation is not hierarchical, rather it is co-creation. She illustrated this by talking about a recent project undertaken by Nirantar, on child marriage. This was an issue taken up by global funders; but Nirantar found that child marriage did not have a singular cause rather it was a structural problem. The global idea of a 'right age' cannot be applied to all communities. The relationship between marriage of girls and the availability of savings, the nature of the labour market result in different situations which have to be dealt with differently. Dwivedi also noted that excessive media attention to the problem can result in the community being exposed to moral policing and surveillance. Nirantar developed methodological tools to study the question and to sensitise young people in this regard.

**Prof. Nandini Ghosh, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK)** talked about the dominance of economists and of male faculty and staff in her institute. Development studies is in fact an interdisciplinary field in which feminist scholarship can contribute substantially. But statistics and 'hard' data are privileged, the quantitative is valued more than the qualitative, and so are the students who work on them judged by the same standard. Disciplinary discriminations of such nature have resulted in a unique caste-based composition of students. Economics students form part of the 'general' category and students from marginalized locations who are majorly concentrated in fields such as geography are placed in the 'reserved' category. Prof. Nandini Ghosh has been fighting these biases on many levels.

**Smita M Patil, IGNOU** spoke about the challenges of being a professor of Gender and Development Studies at an institute of distance education. While distance education conceived as an inclusive measure catering to people from socially marginalized backgrounds, especially women who do not have the luxury of enrolling in regular courses. However, the speaker pointed out a paradox: the very technology which is supposed to bridge the gap between different socio-economic locations is not in fact accessible to many.

Dr. Patil also spoke about recent problems, such as increased state surveillance, pro-government biases in curriculum and impossible pressure on teachers in the hast to 'digitise'.

The second panel discussed the topic **Negotiating Inter-disciplinarity and Disciplinary Boundaries: Women's Studies from within and without'**. Bharati Harishankar, from the University of Madras, was in the chair. Other speakers were Mamta Singh, **Poonam Kakoti Bora**, Sayoni Das and **Shivangini Tandon**.

The Chair opened by remarking that Women's Studies has come a long way from being an idea to being a movement and finally becoming an academic discipline. The critical question to ask would be: 'what would its future course look like? Does inter-disciplinarity in the future mean erasing boundaries and moving on? It is possible to borrow from the idea of intersectionality to understand inter-disciplinarity better and respect difference and the myriad ways in which it plays out. This would help us understand that instead of an umbrella framework, inter-disciplinarity might take different forms in the interaction between different disciplines. Inter-disciplinarity has opened up new spaces as well as created new problems.

**Dr. Mamta Singh** reminded us of the history of Women's Studies as academic discipline: it aimed to correct the male-centric bias in the educational system by becoming more inclusive. Inter-disciplinarity is one of the salient characteristics of Women's Studies that can either become its distinguishing feature or a hurdle in the path of its development. It can become a hurdle because of certain lags in recognition of Women's Studies by the male-centred bureaucratic systems governing universities. Whereas candidates from any background can apply for a teaching post in the Women's Studies Centres, students with degrees in Women's Studies on the contrary are not allowed to apply for teaching posts in other departments. In many places, Women's Studies is being taught by people who do not have a gendered perspective.

Mamta Singh also spoke about personal locations and personal trajectories, which involved geographical, political, and familial, and highlighted the importance of negotiation as a tool in these trajectories. She then emphasized that Women Studies (WS) helped her learn the art of negotiation and negotiation is an important tool even while conceptualizing the relationship between WS and other disciplines. And intersectionality influences the place from which one starts to negotiate.

**Poonam Kakoti Bora** also began by saying that she too would like to reflect on the problem from her location as a scholar situated in the North East. The history of the establishment of Women's Studies departments in the North East is diverse. While the Women's Studies department at Tezpur University was established through UGC directives, the women's studies departments in Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University were established through the efforts of women's movements. The question of gender in the North East including Assam is in a vexed situation, more so in the present moment when the entire state has been gripped by anti-CAA protests. In these non-violent protests students who have been at the forefront have been harassed by the establishment.

Women's Studies courses do attract male students, but the numbers consistently dwindled, with the male students consistently dropping out. In such university spaces, the male hostels are still a den of toxic masculinity where people are harassed for belonging to Women's Studies department that are perceived as effeminate. Hence, the three-month certificate courses in the department have a better participation rate of male students as the degree is issued in the name of Gender Studies instead of Women's studies.

Poonam observed that lack of proper infrastructure has affected the discipline. The paucity of space due to shared classroom spaces with the Sociology department has prevented the expansion of the WS department through the recruitment of new faculty members.

**Sayoni Das** spoke about her disciplinary locations in Sociology, Women's Studies department and currently as a faculty member at a Business Studies department. She argued that being trained in Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) made her familiar with the contestations and co-operations between the discipline and Women's Studies.

From the 1970s, various feminist movements challenged the established status quo and brought out the importance of understanding women's experiences to create a better world for them. However, Women's Studies remained marginal within mainstream disciplines for a long time. Gender consequently has become unavoidable in Sociology and Gender Studies has helped to centre the works of some of the marginalized male theorists such as Simmel, Marx and Engels by highlighting their contributions to feminist theory. Sociology and Women's Studies are mutually inclusive, and argue for a reflexive knower of multiple sociological standpoints leading to social change. The relationship between Sociology and Women's Studies can best be illustrated by the example where C.W. Mills neatly folds into Dororthy Smith's standpoint theory of understanding the society.

**Shivangini Tandon** was trained in the discipline of History and is currently a permanent faculty at the Aligarh Muslim University. Her efforts to mainstream Women's Studies in History brought her close to Sylvia Walby's proposition that WS is aimed at crossing disciplinary boundaries, building connections and continuities on its way. She argued that porous boundaries make Women's Studies dynamic, disrupting orthodoxy and easy generalizations of other disciplines. This also helps the discipline treat power and powerlessness in all its nuances and understand ordinary people's contestations. The speaker noted that Women's Studies leaves room for traversing the spectrum from victimhood to subjectivity, giving full regard to people's contestations of socio-economic structures. The discipline pays attention to how women exploit silences in structures and restore agency to women that had so far been ignored.

Shivangini noted that Women's Studies revisited the silences in History and it is now important to focus on how much and how can history help Women's Studies. An example: The imagination of the harem as a site of excess, and the women of the harems as objects of male fantasy was questioned by historians trained in Women's Studies and they helped us see harems as political spaces. Conversations between History and Women's Studies not only recovered women as subjects in the past but also transformed the knowledge about politics and society of the past.

The third session **Hum Sab Anek Hain: 'Situated 'Knowledges' and Difference in Women Studies** was introduced as one that aims to understand how difference shapes classrooms and how other identity-based movements have impacted Women's Studies. The Chair, Shadab from AMU opened the session by observing that in a climate where there is fear of majoritarianism and a blatant display of majoritarianism, there is an immediate need to critically evaluate knowledge production in metropolitan centres.



**Riya Singh, AUD** stated that she has been associated with the discipline of Women's Studies for the past seven years and her experience within the discipline has led her to conclude that Women's Studies has failed terribly in carving out spaces for Dalit students and faculty. The discipline is dominated by savarna women and this has defined what is understood as women's issues. Dalit men are seen as controlling Dalit women and Dalit women's issues are often neglected. Upper caste women are often the oppressors or perpetrators of violence on Dalit women but such issues are often ignored and underplayed. In Women's Studies while the violence perpetrated by women from 'Hindutva' background are discussed at length, their status as upper caste women is not critically examined. Furthermore, Dalit women's contributions are often ignored.

Even the periodization of the women's movement in India is problematic because while it traces its history back to 1896, Savitribai Phule had started the first women's school in 1830, a milestone that is not accounted for in the official history of the movement. The narratives on women's movement also failed to account for the widespread participation of upper caste women in the protests against Mandal Commission. Furthermore, upper caste women continue to write about domestic workers, migrant workers, and so on without mentioning caste.

The lower caste and Dalit students in the Women's Studies departments have forced the faculty to take up issues pertaining to caste. However, the overall number of Dalit students in these departments remains very low. Dalit students' critical observations are often silenced with phrases such as, 'It might be true in your experience'. Dalit faculty members, who are often found to be struggling for permanent positions, are often seen as a form of vernacular support for students who are working in the vernacular languages.

**Arpita Anand, AUD** argued that Women's Studies degrees have emerged and it is the institution of degrees that has made Women's Studies an academic discipline. But, there are problems around inter-disciplinarity. Following Robin Wigman, she argued that just as in the alliance between gender and sexuality, race is lost similar processes can be located in the history of the discipline in the country as well. Arpita also spoke about employability of Women's Studies graduates.

The speaker touched on the much-debated question of Women's Studies or Gender Studies? The category of 'women' is often seen as restrictive in comparison to the expansive category of 'gender'. However, others argue that gender often becomes a developmental category blunting the political potential of feminism. She also echoed some of the concerns of the previous speaker when she said that when questions, such as 'How do we deal with diversity?' are raised, the question is still being posed from the point of view of the dominant. So, it is important that we reflect on what uniform composition of classrooms mean for the health of the discipline and what difference would it make to the production of knowledge in Women's Studies if teachers/scholars from marginalized backgrounds are themselves teaching/writing about marginalization.

These two speakers underlined the idea that we cannot have true inter-disciplinarity without intersectionality.

The Chair in her concluding remarks pointed out that the issues of identity had not been raised for long in Women's Studies, were for a long time considered divisive and the inclusion of concerns surrounding identity has been very late. However, with the recent targeting of Muslims we are once again reminded that it is important to reflect on questions like, 'How do we talk about marginality?', 'What language do we use?', 'When teachers from various positions in the power hierarchy talk about marginality how does it look?' This brings us to the question: even though the marginalized are speaking, how much of it is being heard and what have been the responses to these as without this accountability to respond to diversity, inclusion and difference would become empty signifiers.

The fourth session 'Thinking 'Women's Studies' through Contemporary Students' Movements' was chaired by Meera Velayudhan who pointed out that the speakers in this panel exemplified female leadership through their activism, thoughts and initiatives. She concluded at the end of the session that as stressed by the speakers the need of the hour was a more democratic space that can facilitate dialogue and pro-active engagement at a horizontal level and across diverse backgrounds comprising faculty, students and others.

### **Veena Mani, Stella Maris College, Chennai**

The speaker Veena Mani, who is an assistant professor at Stella Maris College for Women, spoke about her experience as a student activist at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Chennai where she pursued her PhD. She observed that state-funded institutions such as IITs, which take up a major chunk of public funds for education, do not have a history of student movements and activism. The students were expected to follow institutional dictum and were discouraged from mobilizing on issues that went against the interest of institutional authorities.

Due to enormous competition and workload, the dropout rates in these institutions are high. Students from social and economically disadvantaged families such as Dalit students not only face difficulties coping with but also face discrimination as those who entered IITs 'reservation' or quotas as opposed to 'merit'. Those who join social sciences and humanities disciplines are again considered 'less meritorious' as they have 'easily' gotten into IIT without cracking IIT-JEE. We must emphasize here that the contempt towards social sciences and humanities students is also matched by the lack of social awareness and sensitivity in scientific projects that seek social application. For instance, an approved project aimed to create a machine that made handmade khadi to lessen the manual labor invested in the creation of khadi clothes. Only when questions were raised about rendering weavers unemployed through the creation of such a machine did the students begin to think about the actual cost of its application.

Veena Mani along with a few others started a collective called Chinta Bar to create a discursive space for students to speak out on social, economic and political issues. This was especially beneficial to students who came from challenging backgrounds such as Dalit students who were among the most affected in the competitive environment fostered by the IITs. However, a number of instances showed that some sections of the student population and administration had concerns regarding these spaces on campus. They felt that student activism hindered the reputation of the institution and was an unwelcome distraction away from academic work.

In many educational institutions, student organizations and protests have become formidable forces, even spilling onto the streets when issues become heavily contested. In some of the state-funded institutions such as IITs such vibrant student groups and unions are lacking as the administration continues to stifle student mobilization and initiatives.

**Firdaus** is a senior PhD scholar at the Hyderabad Central University (HCU). She recalled her experience of being part of Gender Sensitization Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) at HCU. In the time she stood for GSCASH elections and was appointed as an elected member of the committee many changes has taken place within HCU including the institutional murder of Rohit Vemula and subsequent institutional interference in all matters concerning the university. This interference extended to the GSCASH affecting the autonomous nature and workings of the committee. Firdaus observes that due to the particular situation in which the university found itself after the death of Rohit Vemula, the activities of GSCASH were undermined by the HCU administration and the ensuing campus politics. These have come to limit the functioning of GSCASH at HCU.

Firdaus noted that a space for dialogue must be created for organizations such as GSCASH to function without interference from the administration or from the student politics in the general body elections. It is only when these committees have the autonomy to function pro-actively can they utilize their potential to resolve challenging cases concerning sexual harassment.

**Bhupali Magare** is a PhD scholar in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. She contested and won the elections to GSCASH at JNU in 2014-2015. Bhupali made several observations about her experiences at JNU. She spoke about the far-left politics of the campus as well as the unequal relationship that exists even between the 'progressive' faculties and the students from marginalized sections.

Echoing sentiments similar to Firdaus, the speaker noted that the election to GSCASH is hijacked by the political fervor of general elections on campus wherein GSCASH becomes yet another space for student unions and parties to conquer during elections. Such a move undermines feminist politics that inform the selection to and functioning of the committee.

Bhupali noted that within JNU's far left politics there is limited space to engage in dialogue and discussion with students or others who are not yet sensitized to progressive politics. She also noted the double standards of seemingly 'progressive' fractions among faculties and deep-seated biases that exists among them. She spoke about a Dalit student and a student from an OBC community who were graded poorly by their 'progressive' faculty advisors at JNU even when externals had given them better marks. These students struggled to access multiple arenas for justice, with one person ultimately giving up her dream to pursue higher studies.

Bhupali also observed that 'Progressive' faculty prefer to engage students who are already more articulate, and exhibit similar class/caste backgrounds as them. These students may merely be speaking the knowledge of progressive views they have learned or have acquired by being exposed to similar academic spaces. Bhupali noted that there might also be some students who are silent as they may not have the 'academic' language or skills to express their views. These students have crossed multiple barriers to reach where they are and hence creating a space for them to engage in a dialogue with others is an immediate and important necessity.

**Deepa E, Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS)** noted that women from marginalized sections including those from rural areas require a space of dialogue from where they can develop an understanding of the structures that continue to oppress them. This would be a crucial and initial step towards gaining the knowledge and awareness to enhance their activism and wage a struggle against patriarchal oppression.

## Inaugural Session: Date: 20th January 2020

The inaugural session began by an introduction by Prof. Bharti Kumar of National Law University Delhi (NLUD). Dr. Ranbir Singh, the Vice Chancellor (VC) of National Law University Delhi (NLUD, henceforth) and GS Bajpai, Registrar, NLUD were also present for the session.

In his inaugural address, Dr. Singh began by addressing our failure in realizing the potential of the Constitution, particularly with regard to women. He said that while 'we' as a people have the "beautiful edifice" of the constitution which starts with the preamble, we have continued to 'other' women who constitute half the population of the country, thus reflecting on our freedom merely as abstract in the context of nation, but lacking in terms of people's freedom. He stated, "India is free, Indians are not. In place of white masters, now we have "masters of our own"; a critique summed up by pointing out that the system under which we operate even today remains to same system oppression. He asked pertinent questions about how

far we have come since independence when it comes to questions of equality and freedom, retreating the need to use our constitution as a framework to tackle these issues. He stated how one needs to severely address the question of women and assured that NLUD will be contributing actively to this issue. Breaking down what 'Right to Equality' means, he said that "In its most perverse form, it has come to mean that everyone can sleep under the same bridge." He gestured towards the denial of political, social and economic justice to the marginalized of the country and stated that a country's worth can best be indicated by the condition of its women. In conclusion, he pointed out that India has a long road ahead when it comes to addressing women's safety. It is our responsibility to realize the constitution and its potential.

The second speaker, **Dr. G S Bajpai**, Registrar, NLUD, dwelled briefly on the history and academic record of NLUD and pointed out its excellent academic credentials, diverse composition of teachers and students, an impressive student-teacher ratio and its commitment to research. With its remarkably diverse profile, over 15 Research Centres, it is one of the highest ranked universities in India. He mentioned that the university is committed to work towards women's emancipation and the theme is very close to the mandate of the university. Focusing on the theme of the conference, he reminded everyone that the government of India had marked 2020 as 70 years of Indian Constitution. Fundamental duties of the citizens are as important as their rights. He also reiterated how one of the major Sustainable Development Goals, i.e., number 5 is Gender Equality; which gives a clear framework for action to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls. He pointed out that NLUD, in this context, is gearing itself to fulfil this goal.

Being a professor in Criminology and Criminal Law, he believes it is important to have a gender-based reading of criminal laws in India, highlighting women's issues. He maintained this is critical because NLUD was appointed to suggest required changes in the framework of criminal law by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Thus, there has to be support for informal activism, with an understanding of the necessary shifts needed in law and policy, with specific position on issues related to women's emancipation. Pointing out some cases as examples, he also mentioned there is need to study the jurisprudence that is emerging from the activism of the Supreme Court.

Further, focusing on empirical contexts, he pointed out three challenging aspects. First, report by World Economic Forum stated that the Global Gender Gap Index for India was 112. Second, in Women Peace and Security Index (2019), India ranked 133 out of 167 countries. The indicators for this were inclusion, justice, and security. Third, National Crime Record Bureau does not point towards any grave concerns in India, pointing towards a statistical negligence by the state authorities. Given the stark contrast between the government's statistics and the lived reality of women, it becomes the prime responsibility of the country's researchers and activists to generate reliable data on violence against women. Further, those invested in the women's question must work with the government in order to realize governmental mandates. He discussed the need for academicians and researchers to pay heed to the lacuna that exists in government data, as the state has a habit of hiding correct information from its people. Acknowledging the part played by Women's Studies centres in research and activism around women's issues, he underscored the potential that WS centres have in furthering the fight against discrimination towards women.

The third speaker, **Dr. AnaghaTambe**, General Secretary, IAWS, began her address with a warm welcome to all the attendees on behalf of IAWS, NLUD and CWDS and particularly thanked NLUD for their support and cooperation. Invoking the various protests and movements that many parts of the country are engaged in, she particularly thanked participants from Kashmir and the North East for being a part of the IAWS conference. With more than 500 delegates from across the country, she noted that this energy of the young people was the real spirit of the conference. Following a brief overview of the history of IAWS and the vibrant role

it continues to play in facilitating and furthering questions of academics and research, she pointed out how IAWS continues to defy the polarization of academia and activism. It also needs to be noted that the IAWS conference was taking place in the national capital, which is not just the centre of power but of resistance too, after 37 years of its inception which only underlined the organization's commitment to engage the region question and work with diverse publics who inhabited non- metropolis locations. She also recognized the contribution of diverse cultural groups, judicial platforms working on gender issues. She concluded with the urgent need to recognize the transformative potential of the Constitution especially in the light of the current political climate of the country, thus echoing the transformative promise of the constitution, for its potential to morally engage with people, women and movements. The four-day conference was critical to understand the various interconnections and macro contexts from different fields and sites for the development of what is being called the women's studies.

**Dr. Meera Velayudhan** President, EC, IAWS began by expressing gratitude to NLUD and CWDS for their support. Focusing on Delhi being a critical space in times of high political unrest, she specially mentioned the importance of IAWS's journey in its 38th year with constitutional principles as its core theme. She reminded that the idea of India is rooted in multiple and diverse contexts, movements, intellectual narratives, introspections as well as varied notions of justice. She also elaborated on the importance of constitutional morality and its transformative potential, especially in the context of the marginalized. Emphasizing the role of women in the fruition of the constitution, she recalled the Constituent Assembly debates and the manner in which Dakshayani, the youngest and Dalit woman member of the assembly asserted that her community did not want mere safeguards but a complete removal of their social disabilities. Linking the complexity of women's representation in the Assembly to questions of citizenship, she reiterated the transformative potential of the constitution, especially the directive principles. She further briefly discussed the impact of partition on constitution making process, stating that it is critical to understand the framework and negotiations made for articulating 'citizenship' in this context.

She also stressed on the key role played by the IAWS regional conferences which have recognized that all minorities and marginalized communities face violent discrimination today in newer forms. It has revealed various counter culture discourses, social movements, and a newer inquiry of methodologies and questions of agency. She stressed on the need for further interrogation in areas of labour broadly, and capital labour precisely.

Marking intersectionality has critical, she drew on the discourse of intersectionality to elaborate on Dalit histories, intersectional of caste class of burden, with religion and patriarchy coming up later as axes of oppression and intersections.

She also touched upon the theme of higher education in the context of the New Education Policy and Fundamental Rights, by historically tracing the discourse of education in India detailing out the complexities of the NEP 2019. She called for a greater scrutiny of the NEP, as democratic citizenship education is being taken over by curriculum of fear, ideas of national security and linked patriotism. She also pointed out that the NEP document severely misses the word constitution, also subsequently missing its significance. It also does not mention Women's Studies.

**Dr. Kumud Sharma**, Chairperson, CWDS, emphasized the need to engage with constitutional morality at a time when it is under severe threat. She underlined that the very foundation of the constitution was under stress and needed defence. In this regard, she pointed out, there is a need to look into the wider framework in which rights are interpreted. She highlighted how the theme of the conference have relevance in the contemporary times. This relevance is signified further by marking of the year 2020 as 70th constitution year, and the statement of the president stating that we need to upheld our constitutional morality. According to her,

the liberal vision of the constitution is under severe threat. We have seen that recent developments indicate that the liberal framework is under a lot of stress, and reading of the preamble of constitution has become a sudden strong sign of protest. These moments call for a great deal of introspection, in the context of plurality, inclusivity, and diversity in Indian society. While the principles of constitution are reaffirmed several times through these acts and processes, it is essential to inquire into the wider contexts in which these issues are addressed and find place.

**Neetha N**, Acting Director, CWDS began her vote of thanks by first flagging the issue of the alarming decline in the number of women workers and the work participation rate. She noted that a conference of this scale could not have been possible without steady efforts and preparation on the part of many people. She particularly expressed gratitude towards the VC and Registrar at NLUD along with their entire team. She also thanked all the members of the Secretariat and emphasized IAWS as a space of immense value for the fruitful conversations including disagreements it allows for. She stated that she looked forward to a stimulating conference that would bring forth a range of issues and ways of engagement. She ended by stating that even though we sharply disagree with each other ideologically, we all need to be together in the struggle for unfolding constitutional values of democratic India.

## Presidential Address: Meera Velayudhan

In the IAWS Presidential Address, Dr Meera Velayudhan stated that in the 38- year old journey of the IAWS, holding the conference in Delhi was momentous in the context of this movement of women's studies. The focus of this national conference of the IAWS was **'India's Constitution, and its key principles: an attempt to locate IAWS'**. This concerns within the frame of the ongoing and newer constitutional conversation. This Conference, held in the 70th year of the Indian Constitution, is a broad-based platform where women's studies (now located in varied institutional sites) meets lived realities, with its idea of India rooted in diverse popular movements, intellectual contests and interactions and varied notions of justice, in different regions and moments, in the pre-independence era. It will look at constitutional morality as central to a new framework for life; for renewing a people on a new foundation; and as a real safeguard that gives protection to the marginalized. This is what distinguished the Constitution of India from social orders of the colonial and pre-colonial eras. It is this transformative potential of the Constitution that had, on the one hand, facilitated the long struggles for women's rights and engagements with the state for ensuring liberty, equality, non-discrimination; and on the other, brought to the fore the violation and lack of constitutionally entrenched rights for women across diverse social groups. In recent times, we have seen an erosion of some of the rights gained through sustained engagements, struggles, resistance and at varied levels.

## South Asia Plenary: Challenges before Women's Movements in South Asia

The South Asia plenary was revived after a lot of challenges including political issues, border-security concerns, international restrictions etc. Because of these interlinked complex hurdles, representatives from Pakistan could not be present at the plenary.

Dr. Syeda Hameed, who was the chair to this very important session, stated that it was important for the women's movement in South Asia to take this legacy forward, focusing on the revolutionary Shaheen Bagh where women are seen again at the forefront – marking the presence of emotions, politics, identity, and so on – all of which paves the way of something huge happening in India at this juncture. This was the first time she felt so intensely about her identity as a Kashmiri Muslim. She believes there is a role for IAWS to play in the

unravelling of the polity of this country. For the first time Muslim women are sitting down for issues which are not 'Muslim specific'.

The speaker from **Sri Lanka, Kishali Pinto Jaywardena**, began by stating that her entry into India is happening at an extra ordinary moment when India's constitution is out on the streets, which she also states is important for women in Sri Lanka. Throughout her talk, she discusses important themes like substantial equality, enforced disappearances (which is a major contemporary issue troubling the nation right now), women's movement in Sri Lanka, Saffronisation, and the RTI. She states how in the context of Sri Lanka, the constitution itself is a paradox and protects the state, instead of ensuring the rights of the citizens. The limitations of theory become apparent in her telling of the gaps between the movement and academia. Increase in saffronisation is also something she seems to be concerned about. The everyday resistance of women against the state, police and bureaucracy in the forms of protests is a pivotal moment in the history of Sri Lanka, according to her. Women in Sri Lanka, she points out, are using all and any tools available to oppose suppression by state mechanisms. She concluded by stating that Sri Lanka was going through difficult times and it would help to reflect on its history and revisit the struggles.

**The second speaker, Shireen Haq, from Bangladesh** began by addressing some major pointers in the context of Bangladesh's history and movement. As opposed to the women's movement, it was the Women's organizations in Bangladesh that initially embarked on large scale grassroots mobilizations of people. She also lauded the country's overall status, in terms of a balanced sex ratio, improved life expectancy, reduction in maternal mortality, increase in children's school enrolment, and women's work participation. She believes that in a country like Bangladesh, this is parallel to breaking structural barriers. She then spoke about her experiences and challenges as a member of the organization Naripokkho, a women's organisation, broadly categorized as internal, movement expanding, and external. She believes that the movement is caught in an age of cohort, with lack of young people in the movement, and their subsequent shift towards the virtual world. She calls for a dialogue with the young population, especially as the country faces pressures of employment, careers etc. She also seems exasperated by the ill-informed priorities of the young, who would rather party than join the movement, a reason she links to the shrinking volunteer labour. All in all, the goal of emancipation has somewhere evaporated. In regards to expansion and outreach, her organisation choose to build networks, instead of making more branches. She believes there is lack of ideological unity among organisations because of which fundamental rights have eroded. The organization also seems to be divided on their views about the death penalty. External challenges include political environment, thuggery, shrinking democratic spaces, etc. When Bangladesh was declared as an Islamic State, her organisation was among the first to protest against it. The patriarchal ideology that glorifies honour and chastity remains a challenge, for many legal decisions are made in order to protect this ideology. Increase in rape, and lack of reporting remains a severe problem as well. Of the other issues that she discussed, the instrumentalization of gender equality because of foreign funding, strong resurgence of conservatism and religious backing, increase in the construction of huge mosque complexes, the curriculum in Madrasas, were critical ones.

**The third speaker was Sarita Pariyar from Nepal.** Sarita is associated with the Samata Foundation in Nepal. Her speech focused on the issue of caste discrimination in Nepal. She began by stating how caste system in Nepal continues to undermine minorities and their rights, and how state is actively working against the abolishment of the caste system. Stressing on the urgency of addressing the intersection of gender and caste, she pointed out how the caste system her works against better prospects for women, Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims which constitute of 76% Nepalis. Weaving her own personal narrative, she expounded on the severe issue further. She recalls how she experienced untouchability, and how she resisted the caste system her in own way when she was young. She believes it is her lived experience as a Dalit girl child, woman, and a mother that fills her passion for working for equal dignity,

rights and opportunities for everyone. She was offended by the reality that people are divided into binary groups based on caste and superiority based on it. Her lived experience of being treated as an untouchable probed the question of her own identity into her mind at an early age. She also focused on how society is ruled by caste and patriarchy, and remembers how her mother was a victim of this system having to leave behind her life, and her identity as a touchable. She narrated the story of Ajit Mizar Dhakal who was killed because of inter caste marriage with his Brahmin lover, pointing to the fact that the larger Nepali society and the administration and state are a source of structural discrimination and exploitation. She recounted these and various other stories to put into perspective the long history of Nepal state, wherein between 1854 and 1963 – the national legal court divided society into varying categories of touchable and untouchable, a system that remains strengthened even today in different ways. She then moved her focus on the future that she seems to be worried about, i.e. about the passing of a new constitution by the dominant political forces in Nepal in 2015 as a federal, democratic, secular republic. Ironically, the primary drafters were all men from the high caste groups, which means that it is drafted to preserve the sanatan dharma, making the exploitation of the marginalized far worse.

She ended with what gives her hope, and why we must continue to rethink the caste questions and new transnational collaborations. In particular, she called for new ways of thinking and debating on the existing disconnections between constitutional principles and everyday lived experiences, especially of Dalits. She also calls for the interweaving of caste with cultural beliefs and legal jurisprudence.

She laid down 5 thoughts in this regard for the women's movement:

- 1) Recognize distinct histories and lived experiences of women because of caste, religion, ethnicity and geographical identities.
- 2) Examine and address unequal opportunities and capacities of individuals and organisations involved in the movement.
- 3) Rethink why the women's movement is dominated and controlled by upper caste women and groups.
- 4) Invest in supporting new generation of innovative and bold thinkers, especially those from marginalized groups.
- 5) Invest in creating and strengthening strategic partnerships and collaborations within and beyond south Asia.

Eventually, she shows a lot of trust in the young generation of Nepalis as change makers, especially women. Every time she gets the opportunity, she urges people to take the following two actions:

- 1) At the individual level, find time to learn, listen and engage with Dalits. But avoid doing it out of pity. This will help everyone to reclaim human dignity
- 2) Since the place is filled with reputed academic leaders, she urged them to find time to serve as mentors, friends, collaborators to young talented Dalits, especially Dalit women.



**The fourth speaker, Zulaikha Rafiq from Afghanistan,** began by locating herself as a South Asian – for the unique identity of hers. She is Indian by birth, and she is Afghan by marriage. She believes she can be an insider and outsider both in both places. Beginning with a historical retelling of Afghanistan, she recalls how the emergence of the women’s movement was a reaction to the Taliban oppression in the 90s. That is when women felt the need to take power into their own hands after the Taliban fell. The constitution of Afghanistan was written after that, which means that it is relatively a very young constitution. She also raised some affirmatives, like the increase in girls going to schools, the gradual reduction in the maternal mortality rate, increase of women’s representation in politics, the passing of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Act, and so on. She went on to address some major challenges that the movement faces. Politics and religion are both largely controlled and owned by men, leading to many patriarchal barriers. The western gaze is another crucial concern, that actually manifested the face of the burqa clad woman as the oppressed woman who needs saving. The face of the Burqa clad woman was used by foreign funders who took it upon themselves to ‘save’ these helpless women. She also addressed other key concerns. The fixation on 30% representation of women in politics seems to have become the target of all foreign funding, and that negates many sincere efforts to protect women’s rights beyond mere political representation. The country hangs in a ‘limbo’, where on one hand, there is a peace negotiation going on, where the USA wants to retreat their combat rule and negotiate with Taliban in Doha, and the irony is that Afghanistan has no say in this deal. This leaves the women of Afghanistan in a precarious position. Women’s education comes with a compromise that there should be Islamic sharia law implemented in the country. She also points out, and importantly so, that women’s freedom and progress should not be bartered for the sake of peace. The ongoing political vacuum is a thing of alarm in the country. The coming years, she believes are critical for the country. If or when Taliban comes back to power, the women’s movement will be tested and women will have to take back their power by fighting the Taliban. She ends by stating that the power will have to be fought back for because no matter what, it is theirs to have.

In her **concluding remarks, Sayeeda Hameed** stated that it is critical to look at the number of strains meeting at various junctures in all the four countries, and Pakistan.

The session ended with reciting of two poems from Pakistan, marking the absence yet presence of Pakistan in the South Asia Plenary.

## Special Plenary: Identity, Resources and Citizenship- 30th January 2020

When identity is in debate and the individuals’ rights, liberty, citizenship has been turned upside down in the name of citizenship, the constitution has come onto the streets. Thus, this panel according to Ishita Mukhopadhyay was extremely important in the present moment. The panellists included Prof. Asha Hans, activist Ruth Manorama, activist Jagmati Sangwan, journalist Anuradha Bhasin and advocate Arundhati Katju and this session was chaired by Prof. Upendra Baxi. Activist Soni Sori was unable to attend because of certain legal Proceedings.

Prof. Upendra Baxi before convening the session spoke about certain things that he entitled as “Baximorons”. First, the Constitution is not a story of consensus but it is an arena of contradiction and changes and in whole is in a constant struggle. These contradictions are on the ground of social and economic differences. Second, capitalists are rational fools, who have been taking risks. Most of the Constitutional rights only apply to this rational fool. Women’s movement has created rights that were not there earlier, they have struggled to have rights that were absent. Third, “Foolish of excellence” that is thinking about the rights and suffering of others and fighting for those. Fourth, we don't have a Liberal Constitution but the post-liberal Constitution. And, finally he also discussed the right to practice several identities, the

right to manage conflict of identities and thirdly, right to exit from identity. Identities are acquired not achieved, so understanding rights and acting upon them is very much necessary to act upon identities.

The panel started with **Anuradha Bhasin**, who shared that citizenship is linked to rights given by the Constitution, empowerment, dignity, consciousness and identity that is multi-layered. Citizenship also gives a sense of nationalism and sub-nationalism. She spoke of citizenship in the realm of Jammu & Kashmir, it has become 6 months of J&K being politically, geographically re-oriented and reshaped and in this sphere identity is a big question in the relationship with the state. The special rights that were enjoyed in some way by J&K are lost, Article 370 has been nullified, the State was divided in two, Article 35A pertaining to the land rights has also been altered. These rights being altered after 5th August, 2019 led forth to social, economic, political disempowerment. Moreover, adding to it, land rights enjoyed by individuals have also been a big factor for not practicing untouchability. There has been a major economic loss, civil liberties don't exist as well media is not allowed to function and therefore there has been a major gap and minimal known about the condition of the J&K. Fear has been inflicted. Ladakh had been enjoying the status provided to them as Union Territory but with time they are realising the mistake as their tribal status is at stake as well ecologically, they are in a fragile position with the kind of developments proposed in the area.

Kashmiris have been suffering for 7 decades on the basis of security and militarisation, and political manipulations. It has been happening since independence but the difference that remains now is that it is guided by contempt against Muslims and an attempt to change the demography.

Activist **Jagmati Sangwan** characterised the present situation as tense. Identity of some groups of citizens is in question in significant ways and thus it is a time to push to alter the constitution amendment decisions in a strong way.

The women's movement has moved to a strong level where violence and assault against women have been recognised by the State on several levels. Taking forward her State-Haryana, she shared several facts about how the State has been denying several rights to women. The Ancestral Property rights have been still denied to women, their right to education taken away with closing down several schools for girls, Dalits have been denied their rights and there has been no justice, no social welfare funds provided against the atrocities impounded on them, MNREGA has been closed. In every aspect Right to individuals has been snatched away from individuals-women, children and Dalits are at stake. During this phase of time, the Citizenship Amendment Acts has been an add-on and thus when women have come to the streets to protest against all the injustices and if this is protest becomes successful it will actually open the several avenues that have been pressed down under the present Government.

Prominent LGBT rights lawyer **Arundhati Katju** spoke about how LGBT persons would be seen under the present Constitution rights. LGBT individuals have moved a long way from being criminals to be regarded as legitimate citizens. This has been a psychological relief, being regarded as citizens as well as bearing rights. This has been an inspirational moment when people across class, caste, creed, regions had come forward to discuss themselves. Legal security provided to them has been a big change when the police have been providing legal support to protect their rights.

The rights of religious minorities are not separate from sexual minorities; there are 144 Petition Acts against CAA across regions. This Act is a violation of democratic rights, this Petition when it will be forwarded to the Supreme Court, this should come under violation against Secularism, equal protection of religious groups and religious minorities. The fundamental question is about equality that is at stake and minorities' rights need to be addressed.

Thus, through a legal understanding, she brought about several layers of the Citizenship Act.

**Asha Hans**, an academic and an activist, shared her thoughts and stands here to talk about how we need to stand up. The issues of identity come across to everyone in various shapes and sizes. There are several issues that need to be looked at instead of bringing in Citizenship Act. Through the lens of disability, she tried to address the Citizenship Act. Issues of disability have still not been addressed, their Identity is still dwindling, there have not been any functionalities that are disability friendly, people are still fighting for better access in daily lives and Citizenship Bill will be another level to them, as firstly they are not recognised, secondly, how would those detention camps be able to cater their needs when basic facilities are still denied in everyday lives. Moreover, posing an example she discussed that in mental asylums women stay naked for two days after their bath as Government cannot provide them with two sets of clothes. How would this be addressed in this situation when they are not being recognised in the country, how would they be proving themselves now as citizens of this country, how would they be able to go every day to the offices to fulfil the basic criteria of proving themselves as citizens. When Rights have been provided with United Nations and even after so many recommendations still women are missing from the disability rights that had come up in 2016. How will marginalised sections be looked upon when they are still not recognised?

**Ruth Manorama**, a critical activist voice, highlighted how women have come out into the streets to protect the Constitution and B.R.Ambedkar has been looked upon and is much more visible in this crisis. Minorities like migrated Dalit women do not have anything to validate themselves. Most women in anyway do not possess any documents and most even do not possess any birth certificates. In Bangalore many migrant minorities even do not have the rights to possess their own identity cards as local political leaders confiscate them and only release it when elections are around. The poorer people, their identity is a big question as well as lower caste people. People have been denied rights for centuries - what would happen to them in this present scenario? Women's Studies should concentrate on the Indian social location, realities of minorities, tribal, lower caste much more; individual minorities are almost absent and the conditions of the lives are crucial, we need to bridge several divides. People will fight, come together and question the frameworks, and through theories of change by combining activism need to tackle the problems. There have been distinct gaps existing in every aspect of society. The government cannot silence the voices.

Concluding the panel, Prof. Baxi said that there is a contradiction between collective identity and individual identity, we need a social space and we will get that through struggle.

## Plenary on Women's Movement in Delhi

The plenary on women's movement in Delhi (1970s-1980s) was chaired by Dr Kumud Sharma (Chairperson, CWDS, Delhi), and the panel was Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Bhutalia (Editor, Zubaan), Gauri Choudhary (Action Aid), Indu Agnihotri (CWDS Delhi), and Kirti Singh, (lawyer, AIDWA). The speakers held that the women's movement in Delhi needed to be located in relation to the civil liberties movements of the mid-1970s and women's participation in varied struggles on their specific issues as well as on issues concerning all those facing curbs on freedoms of varied kinds. Many of the struggles of women, as also the history of several women's organizations that emerged in Delhi during the late 1970s-80s, are not broadly known. **Gauri Choudhary** detailed the history of Action India and the political context of eliminating violence against women. Action India's program for creating spaces, for grass-roots women was discussed, as sabala sanghs, choti sabala, and nanhi sabala; developing into a network to demand a new law to address Domestic Violence. **Urvashi** reflected on the journey of feminist publishing in India, within the context of the women's movement and the dilemma of taking a street level activity into an office space, and the question of contribution and action

rose and hence the need to create a business based on feminist principles. **Kamla Bhasin** energised and moved the audience as she spoke of her personal involvement in the women's movement which helped her survive personally and professionally. Some of the campaigns which she led and was involved in were: Campaign Against Rape, Protests and Street Plays against Dowry and Dowry Deaths, Non-Sexist Children's Rhymes, Creation of Feminist Songs, Slogans, Posters, Photographs Committee on the Portrayal of Women in the Media, 1984 Massacre of Sikhs and Women's Movement. **Kirti Singh** spoke on the widening concept of justice through struggles that engaged with the laws, the formation of the platform Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch by the national women's organizations initially. The campaign against dowry led to seeking an overhaul of the dowry laws and later resulted in a demand for the introduction of a new law for tackling domestic violence and dowry in the Indian Penal Code. The newly introduced Section 498A and the recognition of a special species of murder known as dowry death, the 1983 and 1986 amendments, all improved the criminal law except in certain areas. Indu's talk was an interesting recap of the involvement in campus politics, and women students in the beginning of the women's movement. From autonomous movements, to student politics, the movement has diverse roots, and strengths and we must look at these multiple histories.

## ISLE- IAWS Panel Supported by Work in Freedom Programme, International Labour Organization

**Chair: Alakh Sharma and Igor Bose**

The ISLE- IAWS joint Panel session is a product of the collaboration between the Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) and the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS). Ritu Dewan began the discussion by pointing out the importance for the IAWS of such linkages with professional bodies, with the need to integrate gender with other issues in Economics.

**Alakh Sharma** highlighted that the Indian Constitution guarantees equality among men and women in all aspects – including the workplace. Also, India is signatory to various conventions by the ILO on gender equality at the workplace. But several disparities still persist in the nature of employment and in wages. Women's participation in the workplace has been declining over the last few decades with India's average being much lower than other countries in South Asia.

**Ravi Srivastava** reminded the theme paper of the panel, “**Constitutional Rights and Women's Work in India – Some Broad Trends and Features**”, is dedicated to **Sudha Bharadwaj**, a pioneer in this area of work. He stated that it is incumbent on the State to make laws and to follow practices so that all groups and individuals, including women, can move to greater substantive equality through the rights enshrined in the constitution. He added that work is central to a person's existence, both because of its intrinsic value and its value in providing livelihoods and expanding capabilities. The main issue is whether women in India are able to exercise more choices over the work they do – paid and unpaid – over time. Even after more than seven decades, women's participation in paid and unpaid work remains highly gendered, with the burden of unpaid and total work falling significantly and unequally upon women. A look at the activity status of women in the age group 15 to 59 years shows that although a predictably higher percentage of women in this age group were studying over time, an increased percentage were also devoting their time to solely domestic work.

Although non-discrimination is a constitutional tenet, discrimination between men and women is a key feature of Indian labour markets. Discrimination may lead either to the exclusion of the individual from employment or lower wages. Other types of unfavourable treatment given to workers belonging to the discriminated group may be in the matter of promotions, job tenure etc. But, prejudice and cultural stereotypes start from birth; they influence access to

basic amenities such as food, housing, sanitation etc. as well as education. Besides pre-entry discrimination, we have different forms of unequal treatment after the individual enters the work place. Job segmentation, another form of discrimination, occurs when women are allocated less desirable jobs despite having similar qualifications and experience as men. The traditional Indian employment structure has been segmented along lines of sex and caste.

As far as women are concerned, the role of social norms governing the household division of labour is a key source of segmentation. Undoubtedly, these gendered impacts are mediated by the class, position, social identity, spatial location and educational attainment of women, and to a limited extent by affirmative action policies. While the percentage of women workers in well-placed jobs – as administrators, managers, and professionals – has been increasing over the last two decades, this is mirrored in the increase in the numbers of women working as domestic help.

Patriarchal and cultural norms and practices which restrict women's freedom and mobility, vary across space and socio-economic groups. These variations and intersectionalities provide the rights-based context within which changes in women's work need to be analysed in detail. Policies and programmes at the national level have failed to narrow the labour market gaps between men and women in India. The state's failure to socialize early childhood care and improve public health care has continued to push women into unpaid work. The increase in violence against women in the workplace in public places and in homes curtails the rights of women to practice professions of their own choice.

**Gopal Guru**, editor of the Economic and Political Weekly began his presentation by stating that the constitutional principles do not mention any intersectionalities explicitly. There are caveats but no intersectionalities. Discrimination is gendered and caste based, he said. In Indian society, spaces of employment and social location **converge**. The spaces designated for women are inferior places. He gave an example of the women hawaldars in Mumbai, who are sent to unknown places for duty.

He further questions our very conception of labour –that with which we attach the concepts of livelihood, wages, placements etc. and our conception of labour rights. The right to labour is seen to belong to physicality and talent – which is an understanding of labour that is based on the philosophy of liberalism. He explained that there is one more layer – the **moral** right to labour – which gives **dignity** to labour. For any kind of work, wherever there is competition, respect follows people who perform it, thereby dignity. When people are forced into certain kinds of work, is there competition and thereby dignity (for example with the disabled)? Gopal Guru ended his presentation by asserting the imperative need to answer questions regarding the universalisation of work and the connection between labour rights and human rights.

**Satyaki Roy** of Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID) elucidated the steady decline in women's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) over the last two decades. Women's work has been concentrated in garment, domestic, care work and unpaid family help. He attempted to explain this as a crisis originating in the regime of capital accumulation, but manifesting as a crisis of social reproduction. Social reproduction or reproductive labour is a process by which a society reproduces itself from one generation to another and also within generations. It consists of activities that nurture future workers, regenerate the current work force and maintain those who cannot work. He explained that today, global capital externalises social reproduction, and flouting labour laws has become the norm. It is a prevalent understanding that in order to obtain profits, flouting labour laws is necessary and can be done. There is a social sanction about it.

Roy goes on to explain that **depreciation of wages** results in the crisis of social reproduction. This crisis affects people in different sections of the society in different ways. Women from the

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upper classes who are not in the reproductive period of their lives are highly paid. In the middle class, both spouses engage in paid employment and can afford domestic help who are again women, who carry out all the tasks in the household, often paid at low rates below the minimum wage. The third class, which is the working class is the one which is most affected by the crisis of social reproduction, as they cannot afford paid help even when women from such families are willing to engage in paid work. The opportunity cost is higher and therefore women are excluded from paid work families. This is one of the reasons why the LFPR of women in India has been declining.

**Nalini Nayak** from **SEWA** stated that the usual discourse on labour speaks of typical wage work, work where there is an employer-employee relationship and home-based work. This excludes a large chunk of workers in the commons: forest dwellers, fish workers, etc., who do not fit this categorization. She made a plea to the ISLE to broaden the discourse about the Right to Life and the Right to Livelihood –which has to do with the regeneration of resources as the immediate need of people at the commons. We must come to terms with the fact that today everyone is living in a matrix of not only globalisation and appropriation, but also climate change and urges everyone to take action for the same.

**Kalpna Kannabiran** after summarizing the discussion and dwelling on some of its key points, asserted the need of keeping the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – Gender Equality and the Indian Constitution as frameworks of understanding to address the question of gender equality. She also mentioned some aspects that had not been covered: the status of women in conflict, such as Kashmir, where work has come into question due to the shutdown of the state. She also mentioned that need to focus on the dignity and right to life for queer and trans communities. She urged us to foreground work, not just wage work.

**Igor Bosc from the International Labour Organization (ILO)** congratulated all the panelists for bringing out complementary perspectives in the panel discussion. He asked: “How does the constitution see non-discrimination, equality for all, right to life and livelihood?”.

He continued to state that trends over the years show some regression and acknowledging the same is of importance in order to work towards the 1944 Philadelphia Declarations of the ILO. He brought out Gopal Guru’s point of deconstruction of work and its categorisation and discrimination associated with certain kinds of work in order to reconstruct the idea of work and place it in a more enabling framework that allows one to address these issues. He applauded Satyaki Roy’s approach towards the question of women’s work through capital accumulation and the trends that the world has seen from the inter-war to the neoliberal era. Bose further emphasised Nalini Nayak’s presentation with reference to the need for regeneration of natural ecosystems and resources in the commons. He noted the incisive comments of Kalpna Kannabiran and concluded the panel discussion thanking all the panelists and participants for engaging in the panel, which he sees as significant to ILO for understanding labour patterns across the world.

## Jharkhand Panel – Women’s Issues in Jharkhand: Date: 29th January 2020

The opening remarks following the invitation to all the esteemed panellists were made by Mamta Kumari who drew attention to the making of women’s studies curriculum in Jharkhand by aid of IAWS. She drew attention to the importance of the ‘indigenous’ knowledge which is inculcated into the language, culture and beliefs of the people living in Jharkhand and therefore the researchers from that state should be the flag bearers of projects concerning the region. The agency needs to be given to the locals and story of Jharkhand should be told by its own people. This session was chaired by Prof. Ranjana Srivastava.

The first speaker was **Vasavi Kiro, Social Activist and Independent Researcher**

**Title: Land, Livelihood, Forests, Customary Laws & Social Movements related with identity and tribal economy**

Vasavi Kiro's academic training had led her to study the reasons behind the major revolts in Jharkhand centred around questions of land, resource and territory, which are also linked with people's spiritual and social, psychological activity. She also focused on the previously unexplored area of women's participation in tribal revolts in Jharkhand. For the post-independence period, her work has been on the displacement movements led by tribals of Jharkhand as they have been fighting against loss of their own habitat for big dam projects and coal mining. She fought in the elections on the lines of questioning the model of development which has caused so much death and destruction in the state.

She talked of deconstructing and debating the idea of development, arguing that people were removed from the native land in the name of development and the parameters for development like literacy rate, health, and livelihood which should have increased, actually reversed for the region. Discussing her experience of Latma District, she introduced the 5Ds of Development: Development, Displacement, Deprivation, Disadvantage, and Disagreement. She discussed how development in the region has wiped out an entire civilization, language, health system, nature of land. She informed that the natives who had sacrificed their land as a contribution to nation are now suffering with Tuberculosis. She recited a poem on Displacement that has occurred in Latma region due to HMTP plant. She also informed the audience that her proposal to have Displacement and Affected Commission in the State of Jharkhand was taken well by the new Chief Minister. She concluded with discussing the need to deconstruct the Western notion of development and the need to deconstruct the dominant methodologies of development.

The second speaker was **Amita Kumari, Department of History, Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dhamka, Jharkhand**

**Title: The Gender Politics of the Plough: Asymmetrical Taboos and Santal Women**

Her ethnographic paper aims to unravel the gender politics behind the 'Forbidden' Plough and exploring the manner in which it disable Santal women. She has tried to discredit the general understanding of the term taboo which is associated with subconscious fears of the society and has rather tried to explore gendered politics behind it. The study is based in Dumka region of Jharkhand, wherein she studied accounts of Santhals and Customary laws along with folklore, folktales and folksongs combined with fieldwork of 5 villages in Dumka, Jharkhand. The paper looked at three broad sections, Asymmetrical taboos, the forbidden plough and everyday experiences of women living with the taboo.

Through her paper she argues that Taboos have a gendered meaning and are a symbol of power, beyond the conventional definitions and understanding of Taboos as being fears, mysteries and dangerous. The speaker emphasized that we need to understand gendered meaning of this taboo to uncover the gender politics. The central argument of the paper as discussed by the speaker is that these taboos don't have mere ritual significance but have material meaning and are based on Men's Real Fears of losing their exclusive control over power and resources. She also argued that these taboos are confined to key production areas of the society which are the basic elements for one's survival, while simultaneously ensuring women's dependence and secondary status, and control over her resources, thus leading to eviction of women from property if the men want. The speaker concluded that unfortunately women are oblivious to the gender politics around the taboos.



The third paper was presented by **Preeti Singh and Anjor Bhaskar**

**Title: Food for the footloose population: To understand the impact of the community kitchen program of Jharkhand – the Dal Bhat Yojana – upon the lives of women and other footloose workers’ livelihoods and their well being**

The objective of the paper is to understand the impact of the community kitchen program of Jharkhand, the Dal Bhat Yojana upon the lives of women and other footloose workers’ livelihoods and their wellbeing.

The speakers listed out the research questions like, what is the level and nature of involvement of women in running the community kitchen program. How does this involvement through their self-help groups impact their lives and wellbeing? What is the nature and profile of those who eat at the community kitchens? How do these community kitchen impact upon their level of food security and other concerns? What are the challenges of management and what is the impact of the change in management and governance structure? How does this change, impact the well-being of those involved in running the community kitchens? How does this change impact the customers?

Mixed Methodology was used by the researchers and methods such as Observation, Focus Group Discussions, Case Studies, In- Depth Interviews and Survey were used to collect data in the last one year. The speaker shared her research findings that women are the canteen coordinators and contract leaders but in actuality there are men who are related to these women who handle the canteen. Women will be seen in the canteen but most of the contract and tender negotiation with the government will be done by men.

In their key findings, they observed that there is a huge gap between the average expected customers and the actual customers of these canteens and the customers are generally construction workers, farmers and rickshaw pullers. Further, given the fact that the centre is run by women, it is surprising to find only 14.18 percent of the total customers at centre are women. The general outcome suggests that it is the empowered women who are really benefiting from the scheme. However, there are tales of women crossing boundaries that the presenter shares from her fieldwork.

They further observed that despite government subsidies, the centres were dependent on earnings for maintenance and subsidiary costs. The socio-economic profile of SHGs women was not always from marginalized backgrounds, and they were managed by men and women both. There were problems of infrastructure, hygiene as well.

The study also elaborated on the profile of the footloose population. Dwelling on women’s question, the speaker argued that the program does no women’s empowerment. Only the empowered women become coordinators of the Daal Bhaat kendras. The scheme is empowering that section of women who have already been empowered or women who are already part of some SHGs. The speaker also described the way in which this scheme outsources women’s labour. SHGs get contract but outsource it to other women who get paid very less wage. Despite all women staff that run the kitchen, percentage of female customers is very less, only 14.8 percent.

The speaker concluded that this kind of scheme serves women and other marginalized section of society. It also helps women to develop entrepreneur skills and negotiate with public space.

The next speaker was **Dr. Tanushree Kandu, Associate Fellow, Institute of Human Development, Ranchi**

**Title: A Girl in the City: Higher education related in-migration of young women in the Ranchi city**

The research aims to study the challenges faced by young women migrants in the city. She looked at 15 Case studies along with Focus Group Discussions to discuss the challenges of city life and positive and negative effect of living in the city. In the context of an increase in female literacy rate, enrolment of women in higher education, and education being cited as one of the main drivers for youth migration, the speakers argued that despite these favourable statistics, the problems of uneven spatial development where cities experience huge influx of migrants has deeply impacted the lives of young girls as they have to meet new challenges and are at risk of sexual and mental harassment like access to safe housing facilities. Since most colleges and universities are located in urban cities in Jharkhand, a polarization of education spaces is visible. There is rise in other capitalist ventures like coaching centres, thus leading to an influx of a huge young female population to these institutions. Challenges posed by city life, access to basic amenities both become a focal problem.

She observed that the primary cause for city-ward migration for attaining higher education was the availability of better institutions of higher and technical education as well as coaching centres, and library facilities. More than the pull factor of cities, it was the push factors of the native villages that led to the migration. The urge to get educated was a primary reason for it as well. In that sense, previously migrated young girls set an example for other girls to follow suit. The gender-selective restrictions imposed upon these girls at their homes and native places were the root of their motivation to break away from these barriers and lead an independent life in the city.

The restrictions and constraints experienced by the young women during this process can be broadly set in three themes. One, financial and security concerns, institutional and infra-structural challenges, social problems. The financial concerns were also linked with security concerns, given the persistent prejudice against the city life, which was imagined as 'vicious' and 'distractive'. Reasons also revolved around interactions with the opposite gender, directly associated with the character of the girl, especially in the context of villages and small towns. These personal moral codes, often imbibed as belief systems were hard to break away from. Institutional and infrastructural challenges included issues linked with local transportation, food and health concerns, private accommodation, and so on. Further, issues like finding a safe and private accommodation and college were also significant. Lack of a common counselling centres and delay in conducting classes added to their woes which meant they had to extend their stay without sufficient institutional support. Social problems such as 'eve teasing', low self-confidence, inability to travel alone in the city, fear of talking to strangers were also listed by the women. Environmental problems such as polluted air in the city were also cited as one of the problems.

Speaking of coping mechanisms undertaken by these women to deal with the challenges, the speaker highlighted forming comradeship, getting help from other women, reliance on technologies to find accommodation, routes, etc. The ramifications of migration were such that most women felt emancipated for being able to break away from the social taboos and experience freedom and self-confidence. The speaker concluded by suggesting that counselling centres should be setup in colleges to guide the women who are new to the city about economical accommodation, transport and food options and also to provide each student with women helpline numbers.

The next speaker was **Neha Prasad, Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Ranchi University, Jharkhand**

## **Title: The Gender Data-Base of Jharkhand and Government's Initiatives for Gender Equality**

Her research largely focused on three sectors- Social Sector, Political Sector, Economic and Employment Sector.

The speaker highlighted that gender Data Base in the area of Demography, Education, Health is collected and maintained by central level institutions with state offices in Jharkhand regularly, although district wise data is unavailable with community wise caste segregation beyond SCs and STs. Describing the challenges and issues in the social sector data, the speaker mentioned that there is a huge gap between routine and surveyed data. Due to complex methodologies, it is difficult to verify and cross examine data produced by central agencies. There is huge variation in the data produced at micro and macro levels. Another issue is that the data is not disseminated in public domain unless asked for.

Under political sector, the Jharkhand election commission maintains the most gender sensitive data in terms of data by constituency, social group and sex. There are two levels, the Chief Electoral Office for parliamentary and legislative assembly elections and Jharkhand Election Commission for State Elections. However, the data related to number or percentage of women contesting and winning in elections is not disseminated properly, despite being collected properly. Census and the NSSO are the only two options available for data collection. State level institutions are needed for specific collection and compilation of Economic and Employment profile of Jharkhand, in order to make sure that micro realities are not erased completely. Lack of human resources, coordination between departments, are some of the problems that need further attention. Some major highlights included lack of data on land owned by women and financial inclusion of women. Another is the problems that arise at the level of implementation of schemes, especially with insufficient budgetary allocations, restricted implementation to specific geographic zones, lack of awareness, and misuse of centres of preventions against violence to settle family disputes, instead of addressing the violence. It must also be noticed that the schemes themselves come with many regional, financial, political challenges. However, it was also highlighted that rehabilitation centres were started to help women who have been victims of violence. Jharkhand government policy document for women has incorporated women not only in the Child, Youth Education and Health sectors, but also in Industrial, Agriculture and Rehabilitation Policies, though it is still in its draft form. In concluding remarks the speaker reiterated that the focus should be on implementation of the policies, with promotion of micro level studies to meet the intra block level discrepancies that exist in Jharkhand. A call for quality research by strengthening women-based institutions can be a start.

## **SUB THEMES SUMMARY**

### **Subtheme 1 –Displacement Dispossession Alienation and Constitutional Framework**

**Coordinators: Smita Gupta** (Jawaharlal Nehru University), **Soma Kishore Parthasarathy**

The papers in this subtheme were divided into 3 categories, one, Livelihood, Commons and Forest Rights, and two categories under Development, Land Acquisition and Displacement. In addition, there was a panel of invited speakers on gender dimensions of the theme. The discussions were around changes in policy, legislation and governance that undermine constitutional safeguards for women's resource rights; identify processes leading to displacement and dispossession in rural and urban India and its gendered impact; forms of struggle and spaces within the struggles for gender articulations and women's voices as well as agency in positing the issues and negotiating for their interests.

The papers covered a number of issues. It was observed that the question of women and land has to be seen in conjunction with the issue of unpaid work, the collaboration between state and market and the interrogation of the patriarchy underlying communitarian/traditional practices in resource use were also interrogated. Gender based division of labour was also an important aspect that came up. A crucial theme pointed out how women's burden increases with depletion and annexation of public or common property resources, while also making their struggle for livelihood more difficult. There is an increased responsibility on women to take care of family's reproduction. Widespread eco-degradation increases women's labour and drudgery as access to resources and productivity reduce; it was also observed how the system of resource use in India is gendered and burdens women disproportionately compared to men, therefore dispossession and displacement both are gendered in nature. Question of land in the urban context is a complex terrain, and is linked to the rising agrarian distress and migration, shrinking commons. Another issue that came up was about the dilution and non-implementation of both old and new protective measures such as the Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule, Forest Rights Act, the amended Land Acquisition Act. The space for articulation of women's gendered experiences and voices and agency in positing the issues of their concerns were also discussed. Questions about women's role in leadership in movements was also taken up. There were two resolutions, on Women Farmers and Forest Rights that emerged from our discussions and were moved and adopted at the Conference.

### **Subtheme 2 – Identities and Citizenship**

Coordinators: **Anupama Roy** (Jawaharlal Nehru University), **Haripriya Soibam** (Ghent University), **Swati Dyahadroy** (Savitribai Phule Pune University)

This Panel was organized mainly around five themes i.e. The NRC and Gendered Citizenship; Citizenship and Belonging; Law, Contestation and Belonging; Participation and Active Citizenship; Gendered Citizenship and Intersectionality. The discussions that happened culminated into some broad themes and aspects of citizenship, namely, Citizenship and State formative practices, Intersectionality and contested categories of identity, and the Promise of citizenship: In search of solidarities and active citizenship. Sabiha Hussain (JMI, Delhi), Sadhna Arya (Delhi University) and Pooja Satyogi (AUD, Delhi) chaired the sessions over three days from 28th January 2020 to 30th January 2020. Eventually, at the end of the 3rd day, a resolution was passed and forwarded to the GBM for consideration.

### **Subtheme 3 – Women, Science, and Scientific Temper: Exploring Progressive Alternatives**

Coordinators: **Tejal Kanitkar** (National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru), **Aardra Surendran**, (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai)

Under this theme, four broad themes were visible. The first one dealt with questions of representation and inequality among women practitioners of science across institutional locations, the second one was regarding questions of the political economy of reproduction under contemporary capitalism, the third theme was about the relationship between technological change, labour process and mobilization, and the fourth one explored ideological framework surrounding reproduction. One of the key observations during the conference was that the bulk of papers did not acknowledge the urgent need to deliberate upon the mobilizational relevance of scientific temper for gender progressive causes. It was pointed out that there is a paucity of discussion on the possibilities available to us, and on ways to improve the climate of deliberation on this, within the movement and among academics. Lack of theorization around caste and patriarchy in the context of science was also acknowledged, while the need for political and academic work in the direction of science and movements was raised.

## Subtheme 4 – Migration, Labour and Constitutional Rights

Coordinators: Sreelekha Nair (Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment, Thiruvananthapuram), Ashmita Sharma (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai)

The focus of the subtheme was to understand various aspects and dimensions of migration and migration processes and patterns in the context of work. The idea was to capture the sectoral experiences of migrant workers in different sectors of the economy. For this purpose, sessions were classified as Sectoral experiences of migrant workers: Micro and Macro perspectives, Migration, Trafficking and Citizenship: Representation and Rights, and Migrants' Access to Health and Social Security.

It was observed that there is a need to define the various concepts related to labour migration and women, while at the same time address issues pertaining to migrant women in relation to men, marriage, livelihoods, health and so on. Migration is deeply linked to not just the sphere of economics, but also with social and cultural factors. There is also a need to see the reality of footloose labour in different sectors in macro consideration and then contextualise them within micro frameworks. Questions of law, its exclusionary structures also need to be given attention, while on a broader scale, it was felt that there should be more sustained and critical engagement with the labour codes and labour laws and its implications for migrant workers. Linked to these sessions, was a panel discussion to address some the major concerns, ideas and questions in the framework of migration and labour. Some resolutions were also presented, which were proposed and passed in the GB Meeting of IAWS on 30th January 2020.

1. Prof. Manimekalai - Considering the withdrawal of women or absenteeism from the labour market due to non-availability of sanitation facilities and integrating that with menstrual hygiene needs. There should be a resolve that every workplace, both organized and unorganized, and self-employed be ensured with the provision of sanitation facilities with menstrual hygiene needs to retain the women in labour market.

2. Ashmita Sharma - A careful reading of the labour codes that are highly unfair to the interests of the workers is warranted. It foregrounds the implementation of a neo-liberal agenda as far as labour law reforms are concerned. Workers across sectors have resisted the labour codes in different ways. It is particularly relevant for migrant workers for the newly framed codes have nothing to offer for them, including wages. It purports the segregation of women's issues from the larger issues of the working class. We need to chart out ways of questioning the fundamental basis of and resisting the labour codes, considering the difference in work arrangements for different categories of workers.

3. Dr. Maya John – The government should ratify ILO convention 189. In line with this, domestic workers need to be recognised as workers and brought into the ambit of statutory labour laws like the ID Act. They should be allowed to form and register their unions without hindrance from Registrars of Trade Unions, and the nature of this paid informal work has to be radically transformed by exploring the possibility of municipalising such work

4. Debanita Biswas – Slum dweller migrant women's multiple locations need to be acknowledged and to examine their rights and entitlements critically. Their status as women, migrants, slum dwellers, workers all are interlinked and interwoven within the intersectionalities. Hence, the data invisibility around gender and migration is an urgent need of the hour to address the associated challenges of their constitutional rights.

### **Subtheme 5: Caste and Constitution**

**Co-ordinator: Sujatha Surepally P.** (University College of Arts and Social Sciences, Satavahana University, Karimnagar)

It was observed that caste in the context of the Constitution was discussed less in academics and when caste as part of the Constitution is discussed, the focus is more on the laws and Courts. There were 26 researched papers on caste within the different contexts; gender, livelihoods, education, literature to mention a few. The papers included studies from different states. Caste and gender intersectionalities were clearly addressed in a few papers.

In the words of Ambedkar "Indians today are governed by two different ideologies: their political ideal set into the preamble of Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Their social ideal embodied in their religion which denies them". He also said, "What are we having this liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system which is full of inequality, discrimination and other things, which conflict with our fundamental rights".

The papers held that caste is intrinsic to the Indian social structure which is based on inequality, with its structural form of violence and never allows lower castes to move freely. Oppression, exclusion, violence became lived realities for the Dalits and caste continues to operate as a system of exclusion for them. Inequality, injustice, access to education, resources to certain sections of the society was thoroughly discussed in the context of constitutional provisions and where and how they failed. Papers also discussed the Brahmanical feminism and the violence against Dalit women. The discussions stressed that most often we assume as males as perpetrators but caste Hindu women do take part in the violence, as in case of Khairlanji.

Furthermore, the paper on 'girl's education in the context of caste identities: an enquiry into the educational inequality of contemporary urban India', highlighted the plight of girl child education and its caste underpinnings. The Right to Education Act is focussing on access without addressing classroom practices which nourish and make visible caste identities, and practices of the social inequalities among children.

The gender question was also discussed in the paper on manual scavenging. The paper found that while men have moved to other professions their women remain in the same profession. Which means the men failed to bring women out of this inhuman practice.

Dalit literature was also discussed in one of the papers focussing on Dalit autobiographies. Dalit, inter-caste marriages, and related problems were elaborated.

Over all, caste is central to all forms of injustices and unless we address this issue, we do not progress in any direction. As caste question focused on Dalits only, the violence part was discussed, leaving the Constitution as the base to solve it.

### **Subtheme 6 - Normalization of Violence and Subversion of Constitutional Values**

**Coordinators: Bindu K C** (Ambedkar University Delhi), **Saumya Uma** (Ambedkar University Delhi)

There was a wide range of topics covered, touching upon various aspects and contexts of gendered violence. These fell largely under categories and subthemes like Law, Conflict Areas, Gendered Violence through Cultural Texts, Digital Violence, Violence in the cyber space, Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence, Gender Discrimination through everyday practices, Intersections and gendered violence – caste-based violence, Communal violence,

Most papers were based on empirical and ethnographical research, while a few were based on conceptual analysis and experience sharing. All the papers as well as the discussion highlighted several nuances, and bridged conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and sometimes myths and prejudices with ground level realities based on women's lived experiences, which arose from multiple sites of marginalization. The inter-linkage between gendered violence and the subversion of constitutional values remained under-explored in a direct sense, although many papers touched upon the same. This is an area that has further potential for deliberations in other forums and spaces.

### **Subtheme 7 - New Media and Inequalities: Surveillance, Regulation and Resistance**

**Coordinators: Pamela Philipose** (Public Editor, The Wire), **Sheeba K. M.** (Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady)

The coordinators refer to Media as a part of the same continuum from the days of the printing press of Europe to the internet today, meaning, legacy media and social media are not opposite ends of a binary. They both impact and shape each other. While the main subject of scrutiny was new media, the session began with legacy media, their philosophical underpinnings, the persistence of patriarchy, the manner in which women journalists in small cities continue to face constrictions of all kinds. Representation was a major theme, and it was seen through papers and discussions how new media can be a double-edged sword that can empower and target women at the same time. New, contemporary dilemmas also presented themselves through queer dating apps, which on one hand allow for sociality and friendship, but on the other also reinforce certain stereotypes. Platforms like TikTok were examined in the context of spaces that are not only controlled by the state, but also allow for playing with the possibilities of self-representation. What was constant was the finding that in neoliberal India, markets continue to influence not just legacy but newer media. Rise of platforms like Instagram, OTT platforms, media consumption were also discussed. Another major trope that emerged was the rise of technology in areas like welfare, where access was a serious issue and how the state is now using technology, ostensibly to expand access with efficiency and ends up shrinking it. The rise of the panoptic state, and the emergence of data as a valuable tool for surveillance by state and private entities was also a point of discussion. A major aspect that emerged from several papers and which feminist scholars need to engage with more systematically, is the manner in which media technology expedites the sharing of experiences of sexual harassment anonymously. It was observed that there is a need to interrogate one's class privilege, a need to pause and take a step back, a need to search for intersectional spaces in online spaces.

### **Subtheme 8 - Citizens /People, Laws and Right to Life**

**Coordinators: Sarojini N.** (SAMA, New Delhi), **Sneha Gole** (Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune)

Right to life and right to life with dignity are immersed within politico-moral discourse of the constitution. Complex questions about rights and justice have emerged through the convergence of histories of marginalisation. The question of identities and the need to build conversations across different movements came up in the subtheme. Before seeking for answers, it was felt that there is a need to reflect on the nature of the inquiries, and how we need to articulate/reframe our questions differently in way that they are inclusive of concerns being raised from diverse marginalized identities and locations.

There is a clear need to challenge the narrative of bureaucratization of people's lives, especially in the context of gender and citizenship. The pragmatic and performative nature of citizenship needs to be considered; and while geographical territories emerge as essential borders of

people's lives, social, economic, cultural, are also simultaneous multiple borders that they embody in different ways.

Several papers were speaking about questions of citizenship and women, survivors of violence, trans persons, conflict regions, etc; flagging the location of 'citizenship' within the continuum and layers of marginalization in each instance. Any legal determinism of 'defining' people that alienates from the realities of marginalisations need to be opposed. The discussions also included the aspects of dignity related to deaths/dignity after death as well (for instance denial of burial grounds on the basis of caste was raised) within the right to life framework.

### **Subtheme 9 – Displacement, Dispossession, Alienation and the Constitutional framework**

**Coordinators: Sona Mitra (Krea University), N. A. Arivukkarasi (Madras School of Social Work, Chennai)**

This subtheme accepted 28 papers, of which 22 were presented at the Conference. The papers were divided into three themes: Livelihood, Commons and Forest Rights, Development, Land Acquisition and Displacement 1, Development, Land Acquisition and Displacement 2.

In addition, there was a Panel of invited speakers on gender dimension of displacement, dispossession, alienation and the constitutional framework. This was chaired by Navsharan Singh, IDRC. Speakers were Chittarooma Palit, Narmada Bachao Andolan; Adv. Roma Mallik: Dy. Gen Sec, All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP) /Secretary, New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI); Adv. Shomona Khanna Advocate, Supreme Court of India. The co-ordinators of the sub-theme i.e., Soma KP: MAKAAAM NFT/ CFR LA/ Water Conflict Forum and Smita Gupta: Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch spoke at the Panel discussion. The discussion helped analyse changes in policy, legislation and governance that undermine constitutional safeguards for women's resource rights; identify processes leading to displacement and dispossession in rural and urban India and its gendered impact; forms of struggle and spaces within the struggles for gender articulations and women's voices as well as agency in positing the issues and negotiating for their interests.

The quality of papers for the Sub Theme was very good, with interesting topics and a great deal of focus on fieldwork-based research. Most authors were young research students. At least half the Papers could be published with some work. The sessions were extremely rich with lively discussion that followed each presentation. A number of states were covered by the researchers – Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttarakhand, and so on.

The issues covered by the Papers are the following:

- How the land question for women has to be seen in light of women's unpaid work, the collaboration between state and market and the interrogation of the patriarchy underlying communitarian/traditional practices in resource use in many instances.
- The use, collection and processing of land-based resources (critical for household subsistence), becoming an extension of women's unpaid household work through the gender-based division of labour
- Depletion and annexation of public or common property resources increases women's burden, unpaid work and struggle for livelihoods.



- Lands of large number of small landholder households is shifting away from such households through land acquisition and takeover, placing an increasing burden on women responsible for family reproduction
- Widespread eco-degradation increases women's labour and drudgery as access to resources and productivity reduce
- The system of resource use in India is gendered such that environmental degradation affects women more than men. The annexation and diversion of natural resources and CPRs affects women disproportionately
- Agricultural and rural distress has resulted in gendered experiences of dispossession and displacement.
- As urban populations increase and migration due to the agrarian distress rises, urban commons and public spaces shrink, with growing conflict and contestation. The question of urban land is even more crucial for women, dependent as they are on shrinking commons for various uses like residence, fuel and defecation.
- Analysis of the changes in policy, legislation and governance that undermine constitutional safeguards for women's resource rights
- Identification of processes leading to displacement and dispossession in rural and urban India and its gendered impact
- Dilution and non-implementation of both old and new protective measures such as the Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule, Forest Rights Act, the amended Land Acquisition Act
- Gender dimensions of the processes and impacts of development induced dispossession and displacement
- Documentation and assessment of the forms of struggle and spaces within the struggles for gender articulations and women's voices as well as agency in positing the issues and negotiating for their interests.
- Role of women in leadership of movements that are resisting resource dispossession, when they are visible at the frontlines: is it strategy or equality? Does greater participation by women influence the nature of demands?

There were also two resolutions, on Women Farmers and Forest Rights, that emerged from our discussions and were moved and adopted at the Conference.

### **Subtheme 10 – Contested Contours of Cultures/ Cultural Texts**

**Coordinators: Sandali Thakur** (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai), **Deepa Srinivas** (University of Hyderabad)

The broad idea was to find linkages between power and knowledge and how the nexus creates and sustains hegemonic forms of control of cultures of some groups over others, and how that

culture assumes a representative status. Ideas that interrogated the notions of purity of cultural texts, ideas that inquired about the institutional practices and policies that work to erase or consolidate cultures were discussed. The various contestations, resistances and subversions with respect to representation were a pivotal theme. Finally, thinking of the constitution as a cultural text, allowed for it to be framed not just as an embodiment equality but also as a symbol of the revolutionary Ambedkarite cultural politics.

The larger themes were around oral, written, performative, visual, digital, sartorial and gastronomical texts/cultures. Some papers dwelt on the religious/spiritual practices of select communities like the Bauls of West Bengal, Doudinis of Assam, Jatras of Malegaon, Maharashtra and a local cult of Kullu. The issue of repugnant and marginalized identity also came up, while issues of sexuality, desire, and violence were also examined in the context of Adivasis.

Some papers dealt with the question of caste from Ambedkarite perspective and looked at aspects of both Dalit and non-Dalit lifeworlds, while folk forms of Tamasha and other traditional forms of caste-based entertainment and sexual labour were also discussed. Issues of identity and possibility of emancipation for the neo-Buddhist women in Maharashtra were raised. Questions around lack of recognition of gastronomic practices of Dalits were raised, while a paper on the culture of food in the Jain community spoke to the larger question of inclusivity, recognition, and representation in India with regard to food practices and the moves towards vegetarianism. Likewise, how the spatial coding of caste-based segregation in the Agraharas of Triplicane, Chennai- the bastion of Brahminical power and authority- continues in insidious ways in modernity through the discourses of urban planning.

Another paper aimed at recovering agency and subjectivity in the lives of the widows of Vrindavan. Papers on the question of Muslim women's citizenship were raised from different points of entry. There were also a set of papers that examined the exclusionary practices in the campuses of higher education, supposedly the bastions of democracy and modernity. Several presentations brought out the overt and covert discrimination that penetrated institutional/cultural spaces and practices, while it was also noted that the resistances to these hegemonic practices were thriving and important.

All the papers together challenged the binary of high and low culture, looking closely at practices of consumption, circulation and non-mainstream, transgressive pleasures. Questions of power, citizenship, subjectivity were raised throughout the theme. Self-reflexivity and the desire to work on a topic, the stakes of the presenters were also discussed in some cases. Not even one abstract on disability, which is a significant axis of stratification, was submitted, and so that remained a neglected area. Ambedkarite perspective informed many papers, including the ones on Dalit lifeworld and those that interrogated privileges and power of the upper caste.

## Cultural Evenings

### **1st Cultural Evening: Music**

**Date: 28th January 2020**

Cultural tools offer significant approaches to move beyond the mainstream cultures to reckon with those voices that are often marginalized. This panel centered on the idea of looking at diversity amongst us and the culture of production in the early part of the women's movement. The aim was to look at the nature of protest, dissent or resistance through folk cultures

in the present times when diversity is much more pronounced and is at threat. Uma Chakravarti introduced the theme of the cultural evening as celebrating diversity more vociferously than ever before and welcomed the performers who are engaging with current movements in critical ways.

She first introduced Asiya Zahoor and Farah Naqvi, young poets from Kashmir. Asiya Zahoor a Kashmiri poet, filmmaker and academic, recited her first poem 'Chinar Chinar' which rests in between nostalgia and the present sentiments of Kashmir. Her second poem was Hawa Mahal, which she called a concrete poem as it is based on a structure in a Jaipur through which she narrates her 'experience of experiencing'. The second poet, Farah, read her poetry saluting the women of Shaheen Bagh who are sitting down in protest. Her poem written in Urdu and Hindi was staggering reminder of women who have resisted.

After these readings, came the first performance by Bindhumalini, trained singer in the Hindustani and Carnatic schools, composer and winner of the National Award for folk languages music. She started by showcasing excerpts from her play Panchhamvad directed by Mangai in which she participated as a 14 year old. This play attempted to open spaces in the rural society to build a discourse on female infanticide. She sang a song from this play. She then performed a song on women by mystic poet Bonta Devi from the Vachna movement from the 11th and 12th century, which questions the spaces occupied by Brahmins the singer asks if there is Brahma space inside the town and Hollaya space outside the town. Isn't the space same wherever you are? This was followed by another song by Amir Khusro on longing and then finally a powerful rendition of the song Hum Dekhenge in Kannada.

Sumangala Damodaran (With Mark Rana on guitar), another Carnatic music expert, then lent her beautiful voice and first sang a melody by Preeti Sarkar, composed in the 1940s, talking of the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, urging people and generations after to remember them. Her second song was in Punjabi, written in Lahore; it tells the story of a girl who lost everything in the famine, to invoke solidarity and an intervention into British politics at that time. The third star performance of the day was by Navyaan Maha Jalsa led by Sheetal Sathe and her colleagues Aniket, Avanti, Namrata, Sachin, Ekta and Vishal calling for revolt against patriarchal brahminical structures, an ode to Savitrimai Phule, an ode to Rohith Vemula and then finally, a rendition of Faiz's glorious Hum Dekhenge. The performance was received with intense enthusiasm and had the entire auditorium enthralled throughout.

## **2nd Cultural Evening: Theatre**

**Date: 29th January 2020**

The cultural evening held on 29th January 2020 was coordinated by Uma Chakravarti and saw participation from some eminent figures in theatre. Both the events consisted of performance of plays that have been significant in movements as well as sharing the historical journeys of their 'Sanghathan'.

Deepthi Priya Mehrotra and Shanti were the first to perform. Taking us through their historical journey, they shared that there were 40 women and a few men in 1960 who had come along to start the play and then in the mid-1960s, along with the Theatre Union, there were socially relevant theatre works that began to emerge as a form of protest towards several social evils; they also flagged the women's movement. Several clippings of their performance were shown and then they narrated several excerpts from those plays. Singing the song, "tod tod ke bandhano", on the dowry deaths in Delhi from one of the feminist plays in the period. Om Swaha was staged in late 1979 as powerful work to rouse public outrage against dowry killings. They narrated excerpts from this play. The next play they spoke about was "Ehsas" which evolved by sharing feelings of every actor, these feelings were shaped into a play during a workshop

conducted in Miranda House. This play was enacted in Miranda College as well in the several homes of refugee women who were moved by this play and wondered how their lives were so well written about and enacted. This story of every woman was narrated sharing a few instances.

The second event was performed by Moloysee Hashmi and her theatre group. The struggle of workers working in a factory, working without any security and worker's union was reflected in the play. Giving a brief background of their theatre group they enacted "Ansune Afsane", the story of working-class that has been suppressed and denied their rights. Further, the performance highlighted how the new legislations have narrowed down labour laws. The story of workers, their lives, and the group's standpoint was highlighted through the play.

## RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE

### I. RESOLUTION ON DEGRADING OCCUPATION OF SAFAI KARMACHARIS IN INDIA

As members of the Women's Studies community and as activists in the women's movements, we resolve in the 16th National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies to condemn the continuing horrific and inhuman practice of manual cleaning of shit, both by men but specifically by women Safai Karmacharis, a practice that continues in many parts of the India.

This practice continues despite legal reforms, introduction of robots and machines, and state intention to eliminate this. It only indicates the apathy and indifference to address this structural violence that pushes those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy to remain within this unsafe and danger-filled "caste-based occupation." Many of those in manual cleaning of shit are widows and single earners, and on contract who are situated within the most degrading of occupations within the formal economy. The state ought to treat sanitation and its working class as a priority when we call ourselves a global power.

**Proposed by Prof. Meena Gopal**

**Seconded by: Dr. Sujata Chavan**

### II. RESOLUTION – NO TO DEATH PENALTY FOR SEXUAL CRIMES

As members of the academic community and activists in the women's movement, we resolve in the XVIth National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, have over the years, in addressing violence against women, consistently worked to understand and seek ways to ameliorate the entrenched systemic violence, discrimination and inequality that women live with – in homes, families, communities, in workplaces, in public spaces, in law and practice as citizens.

Yet today the rampant sexual violence against women, children, trans-persons and gender non-conforming persons, especially those belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, Dalit, Adivasi and nomadic communities – continues unabated with the state responding with the knee-jerk reaction of death penalty for sexual crimes. Death penalty is no solution, as research has indicated that it does not work as a deterrent. It is only a responsive criminal justice system, which while being accessible to those seeking justice, is open and rigorous in investigation, prosecution and implementation of the law. State should enforce law against the powerful perpetrators who get away with impunity that remains a ground for increasing sexual crimes.

### III. RESOLUTION ON LABOUR CODES

IAWS expresses deep concern at the manner in which the rights of workers and women workers, are being subverted by the 4 Labour Codes that are simultaneously repealing 44 labour laws.

The enacted Code on Wages effectively excludes domestic workers and homebased workers from coverage by not including private households in its definition of establishments with employees or workers, reversing the advances made by domestic workers who had achieved inclusion in the schedules of employment covered by the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 in several states, and similarly depriving home workers in beedi of minimum wage entitlements that they had access to under the laws for beedi workers that are being repealed. The non-inclusion of the stipulation that the wages of inter-state migrants should not be lower than the prevailing rates for local workers is yet another example of existing rights of workers being annihilated by the Labour Codes.

It is universally accepted that legal entitlements of workers, particularly with regard to minimum wages and equal remuneration are flouted by a majority of employers including the Government, which continues to deny such entitlements to aanganwadis workers, ASHA workers, midday meal workers and other scheme workers. It is therefore shocking that the Code on Wages has given permanent sanction of law to restrictions on inspection processes, and procedural subordination of the labour law enforcement machinery to the interests of employers, including reduced punishment in cases of violation.

IAWS holds that it is an unacceptably regressive step for the definition of the normal working day to be stretched to 9 hours from the existing 8 hours. And it is unacceptable that the doors to super-exploitation have been opened by extending the permissible hours of overtime at the discretion of employers and government.

IAWS is deeply concerned that the Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Bill that is currently before Parliament, has not included prevention of sexual harassment as a matter of safety, health or working conditions, and that once again female intensive categories of workers such as domestic workers and homebased workers have been implicitly left out of the purview of its regulatory provisions.

While we welcome their inclusion in the Code on Social Security Bill, we are concerned at the absence of an adequate conception of minimum standards of social security benefits. IAWS opposes the discriminatory nature of allowing maternity leave of up to 26 weeks for only two children, and the absence of maternity allowance that is equivalent to 26 weeks at minimum wage rates for women working in the unorganized sector.

IAWS condemns the backdoor insertion of fixed term employment in the Industrial Employment Standing Order, and then giving it permanency in law through the Codes. This effectively rolls back the right to regularization with security of service of a range of contract workers in perennial forms of work (including Sumangali workers), and vests employers in even large establishments with the legal right to hire and fire at will.

At a time when women workers have been asserting their place in trade unions, the Code on Industrial Relations Bill is introducing impediments to unionization and provisions that will make almost all strikes illegal. IAWS strongly opposes such attempts to curtail trade union rights and illegalize industrial action by workers.

**Proposed by: Dr. Indrani Majumdar**

## IV. RESOLUTION ON WOMEN, AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RIGHTS

### **Women farmers**

IAWS demands recognition and support for women farmers; we support women farmers' struggles for recognition and rights to land, resources, agricultural inputs and public services.

With deep concern on the conditions of women from farmer suicide households, IAWS demands a package for support to such women headed households including integrated farming and livelihoods support, legal and social counselling and support for their children's education from the government at the centre and the states.

### **Data**

IAWS demands gender disaggregated data to enable deeper analysis of the status and condition of women's work, particularly in light of the fact that women's care work and unpaid work related to fuel, fodder, food and water collection has increased with the takeover and degradation of the commons and consequent work burden, and the decline in paid work.

### **Forest Rights**

The written orders issued by the Supreme Court made public on February 20, 2019 to evict all adivasis and traditional forest dwellers from forest land whose claims have not been accepted is dangerous since of the 42.19 lakh claims made only 18.89 lakh claims have been accepted.

IAWS demands that the Government urgently issue an ordinance to protect all adivasis and traditional forest dwellers from eviction and that the ministry of Tribal Affairs as the nodal agency for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act be giving the responsibility to vigorously defend the Act in Court instead of the Ministry of Environment which has been ACTING totally against the Forest Rights Act. We also resolve to demand that the authority of the gram sabha as the body to recognise claims be upheld.

We also call upon the governments to recognize Community Forest Rights and refrain from diverting land occupied by adivasis or handing them to companies for various projects and for mining. We call for women's names be recorded jointly for CFR claims.

We demand that the Government set up an impartial representative and gender inclusive body to reexamine those claims of adivasis which have been rejected and not leave it to the Ministries alone.

We demand that the government reverse all dilutions of the Forest Rights Act that have occurred under amendments passed to the Mining Act, the Compensatory Afforestation Act and several notifications from the MOEF, which dilute the FRA as well as amendments which dilute the provisions of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013.

**Proposed: Shoma KP**

**Seconded: Smita Gupta**

## V. RESOLUTION ON SOLIDARITY WITH KASHMIR

The Conference Theme Plenary of the 16th National Conference on Women's Studies expresses solidarity with the people of Kashmir and their struggle for their rights and urge the Government of India to immediately

1. Respect the terms of the treaty of accession and restore statehood and autonomy of the region by reintroducing Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution of India
2. Restore all basic services including telephones, internet, travel etc.
3. Demilitarize Kashmir
4. Release all prisoners
5. Repeal Armed Forces Special Forces Act
6. Investigate all forms of violence against civilians by the police and armed forces and prosecute the perpetrators
7. Recognise the impact on the physical and mental health of the people; allow patients to access health care without any delay or obstacles by removing all the restrictions on communications and transport and ensure immediate access to health care facilities- medicines, diagnostics and other medical supplies, ambulance service; including access to psychosocial care.

## VI. RESOLUTION ON DOMESTIC WORKERS

The Government should ratify ILO Convention 189. In line with this, domestic workers need to be recognized as workers and brought into the ambit of statutory labour laws like ID Act. They should be allowed to form and register their unions without hindrance from Registrars of Trade Unions, and the nature of this paid informal work must be radically transformed by exploring the possibility of mechanising such work.

**Proposed by: Dr. Maya John**

## VII. RESOLUTION ON WOMEN IN SLUMS

Slum dweller migrant women's multiple locations need to be acknowledged and to examine their rights and entitlements critically. Their status as women, migrants, slum dwellers, workers all are interlinked and interwoven within the intersectionalities. Hence the data visibility around gender and migration is an urgent need of the hour to address the associated challenges of their constitutional rights. Emancipation is a journey not measurable outcome.

IAWS demands visibility of migrant women in statistics and indicators.

**Proposed by: Ms. Debanita**

**Seconded by: Prof. Vibhuti Patel**

## VIII. RESOLUTION IN WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Women with disabilities are marginalized within the broad parameters of social, political, and legal discriminations. The Constitution provides equal rights, but citizenship is diluted in practice. They face severe violence in the form of forced abortion, sterilization, and forced institutionalization. They have little access to voting rights. With already problems of accessing ID cards, the stigma and triple jeopardy have played an important role in excluding them from any political process.

IAWS demands for women with disabilities access to their constitutional rights.

## IX. RESOLUTION AGAINST ENFORCED IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF CITIZENS BY THE STATE

Compulsory citizen registration practices pushed through the force of law have exacerbated the marginalization of disadvantaged groups. The process has generated fear among citizens, and mistrust of state machinery. Women, children, transgender communities, persons with disabilities and the poor have been impacted disproportionately. The exorbitant expenditure and use of government resources is wasteful and does not serve national interest. IAWS resolves that identification regimes that are suspect and burden citizens with providing documentary evidence of citizenship are an affront to their dignity and vitiate the ethical basis of citizenship in a constitutional democracy.

IAWS supports the ongoing women's struggles against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, National Population Register and National Register for Citizenship.

**Proposed by: Dr. Anupama Roy**

## X. RESOLUTION ON THE MUSLIM WOMEN (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS ON MARRIAGE) ACT, 2019

We the members of IAWS, resolve to oppose the The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 that selectively criminalises the practice of instant triple talaq. This law renders Muslim women more vulnerable without space for negotiation within the matrimonial house. It also has no provisions for the maintenance of the woman and her children. We believe that this law was passed for targeting Muslim men as the Supreme Court judgement in Shayara Bano's case already held the practice of talaq-e-biddat as void.

**Proposed by: Geeta Thatra**

## XI. RESOLUTION ON FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

We, members of the IAWS, support the Bohra women's struggle against the practice of female genital cutting in the community. We urge the state to engage in consultations with women activists leading the movement towards forming a legislation.

**Proposed by: Dr. Nandini Manjrekar**

## XII. RESOLUTION ON RESERVATION FOR MUSLIMS IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

We the members of IAWS, resolve to demand reservation for Muslims in the educational institutions and government services. The Sachar Committee Report and several studies have shown the negligible presence of Muslims and particularly Muslim women in higher education and services.

**Proposed by Ms. Sangita Thoser**



### XIII. RESOLUTION ON SANITATION FACILITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Considering the women's withdrawal or absenteeism from the labour market due to non-availability of sanitation facilities and integrating it with menstrual hygiene needs, IAWS resolves that every workplace, both, organized and unorganized, and self-employed be ensured with the provision of sanitation facilities with menstrual hygiene needs to safeguard their dignity.

**Proposed by: Prof. Manimekalai**

### XVI National Conference of IAWS Round Table on WSCs Issues – Held on 28.01.2020

The Roundtable of Women's Studies was held on 28th January 2020 at the IAWS National XVI National Conference held at National Law University Delhi. The broader idea was to discuss the problems Women's Studies Centres have been facing and and prepare a Memorandum to submit to UGC . Dr. N.Manimekaai, Joint Secretary IAWS Chaired and Co-ordinated the Round Table. Dr. Manjeet Bhatia welcomed the participants. This was followed by an introduction to the session by Dr. Manimekalai, Joint Secretary of the IAWS. She discussed that in the context of the recent guidelines of the UGC, the purpose of this session was to acquire feedback from all the WSCs and figure out how IAWS could extend support and help by representing to UGC.

Some persistent issues of the Centres emerged with the closing of the Planning Commission and the end of the Plan period in March 2017. In the absence of extension letters, there has been widespread retrenchment of staff in the WSCs. Some WSCs have survived with a few activities, while others have been merged with other centres. Some centres have had to shut down teaching programs, while some centres have been closed down entirely.

The National Convention of Women's Studies in New Delhi in 2017 and a memorandum was sent to the UGC, in response to which the UGC issued a public notice in March 2017; however there is no clarity on the future of the WSCs after March 2020. She also highlighted the concerns of students - employability, jobs in the public sector, priority in recruitment in WSCs. Further, the salaries in WSCs have not been aligned with the 7th Pay Commission as yet. Given the uncertainty of the future of WSCs after March 2020, the roundtable was intended to arrive at resolutions which could be developed into a memorandum to UGC.

#### **Broad Suggestions emerged in the round table:**

- Strong demand that all WSCs should be given Department status with full time faculty appointment
- When WSCs get extension, there should be absorption of older staff, instead of re-advertising the posts.
- The UGC must spell out clear guidelines on the role of Research Assistants, whether they are academic staff or administrative staff.
- The reimbursement mode of funding by UGC must be discontinued and funds should be provided in advance.  
Demand for adjustment of backlog in funding, salaries to be paid according to 7th Pay Commission

- Demand for a compulsory Gender Studies/Women's Studies in the UG Programmes as a sensitization topic in every educational institution should be introduced.
- TISS Centre emphasized that WSCs in Deemed Universities should get clarity in status and IAWS should put pressure in places where there is no institutional backing.
- The IAWS National Convention 2017 helped as UGC took notice of external pressure. Thus pressure should be built on the UGC to convert planned posts into non-planned posts.
- The AMU Centre has demanded that WS should be offered at the B.Ed level but the AMU EC resisted this demand. They requested that this should be included in the IAWS memorandum.
- Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Youth appealed to IAWS for support to continue to run the Department as it is under threat of shutting down the teaching Programmes due to minimum number of students.

#### **Resolutions for the WSCs:**

- Have a Preamble that these recommendations be addressed at the ambit of UGC guidelines as per the UGC and University norms
- To prepare a Status Report on WSCs in India, it can be presented in Excel Sheet to readily accessible to everyone
- WSCs a Small entity in the University system and hence need to associate with other democratic structures say teachers associations to get the positions regularized
- Whatever the ideological differences, approaches, the constitutional procedures must be encompassed while sorting out the issues within the system, and need to have solidarity
- Converting the Women's Studies into Vocational Programme cannot be encouraged and more critical thought is required with focus on more balanced approach. The training can be on Gender Budgeting, Gender Auditing, SPSS, Computer digital skills. Women's Studies Refresher Courses, NET/SET Coaching etc instead of vocational and skill training.
- Create programmes and courses with Women's Studies input to various disciplines to enhance the scope of employment to Women's Studies
- Through Advisory Committee, the WSCs should push through the demands for infrastructure, government take over
- Work also focusing on NAAC requirement with regular documentation and undertaking gender sensitization at various levels as a strategy to sustain and making WSCs and Departments as an important in the Academia.
- In Media representation the WSC need to present the potentials, and the capabilities of the Centre and threat of funding to continue such activities.
- Permanent Committee to look after the Status of WSCs and attend the issues periodically

Prof Indu Agnihotri wrapped up the session with some suggestions and observations. She recommended a permanent committee for this issue and reiterated the need for WS status reports. She pointed out that women's studies is a small entity within the university and thus we need to build structures with other democratic structures of the university. She highlighted the diverse institutional structures of WSCs which have evolved from 1986 to present and have been shaped by the shifting structures of higher education. The ideological approaches of WSCs are also diverse but IAWS cannot intervene in intra-institutional matters. Finally highlighting the importance of enhancing employability of WS, she emphasized an open approach where training in marketable skills such as gender budgeting could be offered. She also suggested supplying data in NAAC reports that can enhance the visibility of WSCs in their respective universities.

## IAWS Tributes

In the XVI Annual General Body meeting of IAWS held on 31-1-2020 at National Law University, Delhi; members offered tributes to the following life members and sympathizers of IAWS who passed away in the recent past and remembered them as friends of IAWS and for their valuable contributions towards academia and society at large.

1. Renowned litterateur and Padmashree Awardee Prof. Nabanita Dev Sen, Retired Professor of Comparative Literature at JadHAVpur University, Kolkata.
2. Visionary educationist Prof. Mushir-ul-Haq, Ex. VC of Jamia Milia Islamia, Delhi
3. Veteran journalist Vidya Bal and editor of feminist journal in Marathi, recipient of Laadli Media Award for Lifetime Achievement
4. Pioneer Women's Studies Scholar of Tamilnadu, Prof. Regina Papa, Director and Head, Department of Women's Studies, Alagappa University, Tamilnadu.
5. Dr. Syeda Sakira Sahin, Executive Committee member of IAWS (2014-17) and Associate professor of Gauhati University, Assam

## Tribute to Dr. K. Saradamoni (1928-2021)

In passing of Dr. K. Sardamoni on 25-5-2021, IAWS and women's studies movement in general has lost a fearless stalwart in women's studies. She was a torchbearer on many feminist issues such as women's contribution in the economy, engendering science and technology, caste patriarchy and women's oppression, women's labour and household strategies. Trained in economics, Saradamoni had been active in IAWS from 1981 when the 1st conference of women's Studies was organised and when IAWS was formed she became IAWS life member and played crucial role in its deliberations.

In 1984, she was one of the mainstays of the International Conference for South Asia and Southeast Asian countries which interrogated 'the household' and 'family' through the lens of women's studies. Prof. Saradamoni was pioneer too in Dalit studies in Kerala through her study on 'Emergence of a Slave Caste- the Pulayas' as well as the study on women and land reforms in Kerala. A social critique, Prof Saradamoni was a steadfast supporter of the Left in Kerala, even if it was critical support. She always stood by young and upcoming scholars and researchers in gender studies. She was warm hearted, grounded in her thinking and writing. She inspired younger generation in the gender studies network, and of course the Dalit related research and activist network. She lived a full life and contributed so much. We will always cherish her memory and her amazing work.

Dr. Sardamoni was so resolute in her feminist positions. Back in the 80s she spoke about women's unpaid family and production work, pushed for gender and technology program to be initiated in the Department of Science and Technology. Saradamoni's Ph. D. was from Sorbonne (Paris) on Emergence of Slave Caste : Pulayas. While away in Paris, her two small daughters, Asha and Arunima were taken care in India by Prof Saradamoni's late husband, N Gopinathan who was highly respected journalist. Sardamoni's study: Divided Poor: Study of a village in Kerala was very insightful. Her important and pioneering studies were: Emergence of slave Caste in Kerala: the Pulayas; Women in Rice Cultivation with Dr Joan Mencher; Matriliney Transformed: Family , Law, Ideology in 20th century Travancore; Women's Status in Changing Agrarian Relations in Kerala: A Case Study of Palghat; Education, Employment and Land Ownership: Role of Caste and Economic Factors and Matriliney.

During 1980s, Dr. Sardamoni actively participated in 4 National Level technical workshops on women and work, women and poverty, Occupation Changes and Women's work participation, women and technology by Economists Interested in Women's Issues Group initiated by Prof. Devaki Jain and International Conference on Visibility of Women in Statistics and Indicators by UN INSTRAW under leadership of RCWS Director, Prof. Maithreyi Krishnaraj. Her sharp interventions as a professor at Indian Statistical Institute got her a title of fire-brand feminist. Her landmark contribution to bring our labour processes and labour relations of women in rural areas as well as enumeration of women paid, and unpaid work was very important to engender economics. During 1990s, she played pivotal role in initiation of gender training for department of agriculture and sericulture and dairy. Her interventions in the planning commission meetings were taken seriously by policy makers and activists.

Sardamoni will always be remembered as a pioneer feminist economist. And for her commitment to women's studies scholarship by generations of women's studies scholars in India. IAWS extends heartfelt condolences to her daughters Asha and Arunima. IAWS pays warm and glorious tribute to the valuable life member Dr. K. Sardamoni

## 1. IAWS SALUTES DR. GAIL OMVEDT (2-8-1941 to 25-8-2021)

Dr. Gail Omvedt was a veteran Member of IAWS and played an intellectually active role in IAWS national conferences right from the first Conference in 1981. She highlighted crucial concerns of rural, tribal and Dalit women in rural India. For 4 decades, she made academic contributions on women headed households, land rights of rural women, exploitation of working-class women by applying ethnographic methodologies and field-based findings done by herself by travelling in the most neglected parts of rural and tribal hinterlands under extremely harsh circumstances. She exercised great self-discipline and never missed her deadline for the submission of her paper, statement ad orations.

As a free-lance writer, an accessible public intellectual and strongly-grounded philosopher, she reached out to 4 generations of social scientists and social activists. Her ideas travelled with her 25 authored books and her physical presence in study-circles of youth organisations, seminars, conferences, conventions and gatherings of social movements. Most path-breaking contribution of Dr. Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash This Prison-Indian Women in Struggle*, brought her close to, first of all, women's rights movement and later on to the women's studies movement. Her books *Cultural Revolt In a Colonial Society- The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India*, *Buddhism in India*, *Understanding Caste, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* and her book on *New Social Movements, Reinventing Revolution*, are included in the syllabi of social sciences course universities in India and abroad. *Seeking Begampura* profiles vision of classless, casteless, caring and egalitarian society in Bhakti poets such as Ravidas, Kabir, Chokhamela, Janabai, Tukaram, the Kartabhajas and social reformers of the 19th century such as Jyotiba Phule, Iyothee Thass, Pandita Ramabai, Periyar, and Ambedkar.

She actively took part in the deliberations of IAWS conferences during 1980s and 1990s and contributed papers in the IAWS National Conferences on challenges faced by feminist movements, women headed households, institutionalised untouchability, caste-class-gender with Phule-Ambedkarite lens. She mentored hundreds of Dalit/OB-C/Tribal/Bahujan students as head of Phule-Ambedkar Chair in Savitribai Phule Pune University, as a Professor of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (Delhi), Savitribai Phule Chair of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU-Delhi), Institute of Asian Studies (Copenhagen).

The IAWS salutes Dr. Gail Omvedt for her commitment to socioeconomic justice and conveys heartfelt condolence to her bereaved husband Dr. Bharat Patankar, daughter Prachi, son-in-law Tejaswi and granddaughter Nia.

## Dr. Avabai Wadia and Dr. Khurshedji Wadia Archives for Women

Dr. Avabai Wadia Archives for Women at the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University invites proposals for three research fellowships of Rs 50000/- each for a period of six months beginning in December 2021.

The proposals should aim at retrieving and /or generating archival material in the following areas:-

- Lives of Twentieth century pioneering women who have contributed to Gender Justice, Health, Liberal Arts, Women's Education, Women's Empowerment, Women's Entrepreneurs
- Women's organizations, campaigns and emancipator struggles of women
- Women's contribution in any other field

The proposal should specify the methodology and time frame of the project. It should indicate the kind of historical materials that will be collected.

The proposals will be scrutinized by a selection committee of academics and professionals. The decision of the committee would be final. Terms and conditions would apply.

Proposals along with copy of the CV of the applicant should reach the following address latest by **30th November 2021**.

### **Research Centre for Women's Studies**

SNDT Women's University  
Sir Vithaldas Vidyavihar,  
Juhu Road, Santacruz (West)  
Mumbai 400 049  
For further details

Contact – **Dr. Putul Sathe**

Website - **rcwssndt.org**

Email - **rcws@sndt.ac.in**

CC: **office@rcws.sndt.ac.in**

Tel. **91-022 26610751**

# Photo Gallery



# Photo Gallery





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## Photo Gallery

