



Indian  
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## XVII NATIONAL CONFERENCE

7-10 September 2023 • Thiruvananthapuram • Kerala

Women's  
Studies and  
Women's  
Movements:  
Challenges and  
Resilience



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Thiruvananthapuram  
Kerala

Women's  
Studies and  
Women's  
Movements:  
Challenges and  
Resilience

Organised by  
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for Women's Studies

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## Women's studies and Women's movements: Challenges and Resilience

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## Concept Note of the National Conference

### Women's studies and Women's movements: Challenges and Resilience



*“There are three ingredients I see in an Indian perspective for women studies: (a) acceptance and recognition of Indian society as a plural society so that we do not speak only for a particular class (b) recognition that women must fight not only for their future but in the very shaping of the future of the society of which they are a part, which means women must be involved in all political, social, economic process and at all levels and (c) that research and policy have to be pro-woman ideological commitment to change the position of women in society for the better.” (Vina Majumdar, 1986) Speaking at the first Women's Studies Conference in India (1981), she described women's studies as having a critical perspective which “made participants feel that they were taking part in a movement and not just a conference” (Vina Mazumdar, Presidential Address, Xth National Conference, IAWS, 2000).*

Women's Studies as a critical discipline of the women's movement have over the years foregrounded women's visibility and engendered the lived realities of women, offering theories and perspectives to recognize multiple patriarchies at work, and strategies for empowerment and resistance. Women's Studies and women's movement since its inception stood for marginalised





section of women in particular and pluralism was part of its understanding. To keep it sharp as the tool for change, regular review of pedagogical practices retained the needed connection between theory and politics, academic rigour and activism, and the essential criticality in the discipline. Women's Studies has generated knowledge facilitating greater inclusion of women in the higher education system, confronting the conservative/reactionary forces for greater space and claim within institutions. Through challenging patriarchal structures and epistemological processes, the discipline has been opening up spaces and enabled processes for making claims to constitutional rights. However challenges have come in the way. The learning from women's movement as well as the broader social and political movements of the country and the world particularly of the Asian countries has loosened to some extent over time. The institutionalized discipline now faces the challenges of depoliticization, women looked upon as beneficiary approach, and professionalization that limits the subversive potential of women's studies. There is a growing binary between activism and theory, and women studies is fast losing its original connect with the women's movement. rather has been more connected to state policies in the recent past. This connection is also a fallout of women's movement seeking to policies.

Women are continued to be looked upon as beneficiaries in development and initial efforts were focused on separate targeted activities for women in the path of affirmative actions. While many of these efforts

produced positive results, the potential for bringing about the types of structural changes required for achieving gender equality was therefore reduced. In the 1980s a new approach evolved, the gender mainstreaming strategy, which aimed to make the goal of gender equality central to all activities. The term mainstreaming came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the mainstream of all activities. Mainstreaming involves taking up gender equality perspectives as relevant in analysis, visibility of gender in indicators and data collection, particularly with respect to work, and other knowledge construction and dissemination activities, to ensure that all processes take into account the contributions, priorities and needs of the entire stakeholder group, women, men and sexual minorities. Attention to the goal of gender equality needs to be mainstreamed into research, analysis, policies and programmes academia as well as operational activities. With a country as large as India, one is bound to witness plural and diverse social movements which are often impacted and influenced by local histories and folklore. From Jammu and Kashmir through the forest heartlands of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to the north east region of India women's movement went through various historical backgrounds, different strains of oral traditions but never ever in a homogeneous manner. Past histories of struggles by women - or for women, are evident when we sieve through narratives by women belonging to traditional women's societies/ associations and collectives. New forms of women's movement have become prominent in farming activities and different sectors of working women. New changes have also come in the lives of women where women are breaking stereotypes, particularly in science, technology, engineering and



management (STEM). The experiences of breaking stereotypes are also to be understood, analysed and to be taken forward. Women's movement was never isolated from the broader call for humanity, peace, and basic rights of people in general. This is the richness of women's movement and women's studies in India.

Over the last decade and more, especially since the adoption of neo-liberal policies, gender mainstreaming threw more challenges than solutions. Trends with regard to women's employment have posed serious questions to scholars seeking to study the complex interconnections between economic growth, development policies, and women's status. There has been a visible decline in women's work participation rates over the last decade and more. The sectors in which women find work, as also the conditions in which such work is available have on the one hand underscored the need for deeper analysis. Furthermore, these trends have triggered both organized and sporadic struggles on the ground. In the face of the contemporary crisis of dispossession, loss of access and control to livelihood options, and a visible impoverishment in the face of the economic slowdown, the shrinking opportunities of work have hit women in specific ways. The violation of existing legal frameworks governing labour has acquired a special meaning during the pandemic when the phenomenon of retrenchment and dispossession has gained momentum. The issues of women's loss of livelihood and work assume far greater primacy in situations when millions

amongst the labouring poor are faced with hunger, malnutrition, and even death due to extreme poverty. The Covid lockdown has exposed the vulnerability of all labouring people.

The process of knowledge generation has over the last several decades, built up a rich repertoire of scholarship to advance analysis of the broader context and tools to understand the linkages between power, and domination which maintain relations of exploitation and unequal distribution and control over public resources. A continued dialogue between the women's movement and women's studies is crucial to understanding and resist the dispossession and violence in women's lives. Looking through the lens of challenges and resilience is expected to provide an answer to the much awaited question: what is to be done.

The conference looks forward to dialogues and discussions to fasten the bridge between knowledge base and struggle, between social, political, economic, cultural contexts and the axes of power shaping patriarchy. The conference will flag off the issues with policies in education, health, and labour along with discussions on peace and ecology. There will be ten Subthemes focussing on the different aspects of the lead question. There will also be Plenaries and Panels with special focus. Participation in the conference would mean sharpening our critical perspective and mobilising for movement and struggle for equality.

***The Conference theme will be divided into 10 Subthemes. Concept notes and submission details of the subthemes follow :***



## Women in freedom movements: Safeguarding Constitution, struggles and solidarity

### Concept Note

This panel invites papers on the Indian women's activism (individual and collective) towards developing legal frameworks to safeguard women's dignity and safety and to ensure social justice and rights in all spheres of life – both public and private. The panel seeks to bring together insights from the women's anti – colonial struggles, as well as struggles for justice through and within the Constitution. Issues such as child marriage, rape, widowhood, personal laws including inheritance/property rights, labour protections, voting rights for women and women's equality more broadly, amongst others came to be debated in the decades preceding and immediately after independence.

How did women engage with these and other questions of rights and justice in the legal debates in the lead up to the making of the Indian Constitution?

What do these debates indicate about how women's movements understood the role of women as constitutional actors? What perspectives – *whose* perspectives – were included within these discourses, and who/ what issues were rendered invisible?

What solidarities with other emancipatory movements do these engagements reveal, and what fissures within and between movements do they expose?

How have these engagements with Constitutional discourse near the founding of the republic shaped women's engagement with law and the Constitution since independence?

What does a study of such engagements reveal about the potential of law as a site for feminist imaginations, emancipations, and subversions?

The panel seeks insightful discussion on these and other aspects of women's participation in the making of a legal public sphere and in re - configuring themselves as an embodiment of the nation and of citizenship.

This panel also seeks rigorous engagement with the recent participation of women in various campaigns to safeguard the Constitution of India and its legacy from the attacks of the sectarian forces which threaten the basic civil liberties and tenets of constitution such as 'secular humanism', pluralism, rights of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.



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Women in freedom movements:  
Safeguarding Constitution,  
struggles and solidarity

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SUB THEME

The Panel invites papers on the following (but not limited to) broad themes:

- ▶ Women and the emergence of legal debates in 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India
- ▶ Women's struggle for inheritance and property rights
- ▶ Women's struggle for suffrage rights
- ▶ Women and the making of the Indian Constitution
- ▶ Women's legal battle against caste-based violence and for social justice/dignity
- ▶ Women's struggle against gender-based violence
- ▶ Women's struggle against sectarianism and secular humanism
- ▶ Women's struggle and landmark cases of the Indian Courts
- ▶ Individual women legislators and activists since independence
- ▶ Women's activism and contemporary politico-legal debates
- ▶ Women's Movement and Legal Reform

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## Women's Dislocation and Livelihood Struggles: Pandemic and Post Pandemic Contexts

### Concept Note

With already existing social inequality in India, the pandemic has only worsened the situation, especially for women and other marginalized sections. During the lockdown, various livelihood options of the poor, especially urban migrants, was completely taken away. Even though every section of the society was adversely affected by the pandemic and its aftermath, the intensity of this experience was severe on women cutting across caste, class, region, religion, sexuality, etc. Loss of employment, lack of access to health and sanitation, lack of support and economic reserve, unequal state response to risk and vulnerability led to crisis among large section of the population, particularly women. In India, on the one hand large number of women's work is unpaid and on the other, most of the paid women workers are largely employed within informal sector, which is the least protected sector in terms of labour laws. Most of the women

workers are not only least paid but their work is clustered within few employment categories.

Continued structural inequality along with withdrawal of the State from social sector spending, for the past few decades, have either pushed women workers to withdraw from labour force or has resulted in their overrepresentation in certain work categories.

Pandemic exacerbated and caused unuttered havoc in the lives of women. Though various attempts are being made to set right the post-pandemic economic slowdown, marginalisation of women continues.

Continued stagnation of women's work participation rate for decades and the recent marginal increase in women's work participation in rural India further reflects the worsening post pandemic situation for women. During pandemic, lakhs of women frontline workers like ASHA, paid domestic workers, sanitation workers, nurses, etc., were at the forefront of work with very less support from the state. Millions of migrant workers, mostly from informal sector, lost their livelihood. Many of them were women who had to return to their villages. The voices and experiences of many of these women workers remain unheard as their labour continued to remain invisible, their experiences undocumented and hidden by the mainstream media. These women were from different caste, class, religion, regions (rural and urban) etc., who were doing paid and unpaid work navigating between home, work, quarantine centres, market, and various other public spaces, even with restrictions imposed on mobility and lack of access to support systems during partial lock down and the new normal of post pandemic. The context of pandemic and



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and Livelihood Struggles:  
Pandemic and Post Pandemic Contexts

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SUB THEME

post-pandemic has emerged as an added challenge to the already existing discrimination and inequalities. Thus this sub theme would engage with various cohorts of women workers (paid and unpaid) to understand their livelihood strategies, navigation of various spaces, specific experiences of dislocation, struggle for their survival in organised and unorganised sectors, work life balance during pandemic and post- pandemic including unpaid care work, migration dynamics and women experiences, state response and policies, specific intersectional experiences of various marginal sections at work, home and other spaces, and solidarity networks. The abstracts of the papers can be sent around these topics but not limiting to these.

## Coordinators

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## Contemporary Women's Movements: Grassroots, New Forms, Strategies, and Challenges

### Concept Note

Women's studies discourse draws immensely from a wide array of intersectional women's movements that have been instrumental in shaping women's rights and gender equality as prerequisites to national and international policies across the world. After a long-drawn history of varied movements and phases across the globe, in contemporary times, women's movements have taken on new forms and strategies to address the ongoing challenges faced by women. Contemporary women's movements have their origins in grassroots activism and are inclusive of all marginalised genders. These movements have been driven by a range of factors such as economic inequality, gender-based violence, discrimination, and lack of representation in political institutions. In the past decade, we have witnessed social media platforms and digital spaces giving birth to and carrying forward movements such as the #MeToo movement, #BlackLivesMatter, Ni Una Menos, Iranian

women's protests etc. that gained international attention and response. One of the most significant achievements of these movements is their success in bringing up long ignored and tabooed issues to public debate cutting across gender, age, class, region, and ethnicity. Many of them have been pressure groups in shaping policies and/or legal reforms.

For example, the Women's March on Washington, which took place in January 2017, was organized in part through social media, and attracted an estimated 5 million participants around the world. Similarly, the #MeToo movement, which began as a hashtag on social media, helped to shine a light on the pervasive problem of sexual harassment and assault, and led to a number of high-profile resignations and firings. Another important feature of new forms of women's movements is their intersectional approach in addressing multiple binds of marginalised genders, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, among others. Although gendered digital divide is stark, social media platforms provided a space for a large number of women to share their stories, connect with others, and mobilize for change, which also resulted in the formation of sisterhood, synergy, and collectives, which were previously limited due to many reasons including women's restricted mobility.

Despite their many achievements, new forms of women's movements continue to face significant challenges. These include resistance and backlash from conservative and right-wing groups that reinforce traditional gender roles and control women's autonomy and agency; glass ceilings and lack of women's leadership, representation, and diversity in many powerful sectors; and internal challenges within women's



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Contemporary  
Women's Movements: Grassroots,  
New Forms, Strategies, and Challenges

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SUB THEME

movements. Sub theme 3 titled “Contemporary Women's Movements: Grassroots, New Forms, Strategies, and Challenges” aims to discuss the scope and models of various women's movements that emerged from the grass root to the social media in addressing gender issues, effective strategies to surpass challenges and backlashes, the potentials of synergising for collective bargaining and shaping these spaces more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

We invite abstracts and full papers, both analytical and empirical, documenting original and substantial research work on the following areas

- ▶ Changing contours of women's grassroots activism: Evidence from the field
- ▶ Emerging models of global women's movements
- ▶ Intersectionality and new women's movements
- ▶ The role of digital spaces in women's movements
- ▶ Ideological threats to new forms of women's movements
- ▶ Women's movements: Legal and policy reforms
- ▶ Contemporary women's movements: Strategies, challenges and way forward

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## Women's Contribution to Sustainable Ecological Development and Climate Solutions

### Concept Note

Climate change issues are gradually escalating and visible impacts are seen globally. From a coffee table discourse, climate crisis issues are receiving growing attention at the national level within most countries. It is also evident that the worst of the impact is being felt by who contributed least to the cause of climate change. Further, the marginalized, vulnerable and underprivileged neither have the knowledge of resilience nor have the resources or knowledge to deal with the crisis situation.

While ecological sustenance is being flagged off as crucial, the different roles and responsibilities of men and women still lack required mainstreaming. Cross cutting issues pertinent to women neither find any place in climate discourse nor are the contributions initiated by women in the field of resilience and development acknowledged.

People live in different conditions with diverse capabilities which impact their responses towards climate change. Various social conditions critically add to this problem by limiting the coping mechanism of marginalized groups especially women. Added to that, the adverse impacts of climate change continue to burden the marginalized populations making them more vulnerable where the social roles and status are crucial in this regard.

Gender not only determines men and women's ability to cope with environmental changes but underlying structural inequalities can also mean that those changes have a disproportionate impact on women. Several factors contribute to women's particular difficulties in redressing environmental challenges. These include insecure land and tenure rights, obstructed access to natural resource assets, limited participation in decision making, limited access to basic education, and lack of access to markets, capital, training and technologies. Women's ability to affect change is further impinged by additional burdens due to their responsibilities both inside and outside of the home. Collectively, these impediments present structural inequalities that restrict collective solutions being found to universal challenges.

Equity, inclusiveness and participation of all stakeholders are therefore, crucial for sustainable solutions to ecological preservation as well as develop climate resilience. Micro level actions, specifically women led, need to be acknowledged, scaled up and replicated. Qualitative participation of women at the policy formulation level as well as ground level implementation is essential and to achieve that, capacity building of women leaders should go parallel.





The panel seeks insightful discussion on these and other aspects to primarily document the role and contribution of women to sustainable ecological development & climate solutions.

Gender in the context of ecological degradation, climate change, sustainability, disaster preparedness, mitigation, resilience, climate change adaptation and allied discourses.

The Panel invites papers on the following (but not limited to) broad themes:

- ▶ Women as eco-social activism / Feminist eco-social activism
- ▶ Contribution of women to sustainable ecological development & climate solutions.
- ▶ Documenting women's participation in less studied contemporary ecological social movements
- ▶ Contribution of women to sustainable ecological development & climate solutions.
- ▶ Women's contribution to Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions
- ▶ Gender and climate governance & climate justice
- ▶ Women's Agency in Disaster Management
- ▶ Gender and Resilience
- ▶ Gender, Social Inclusion & Intersectionality
- ▶ Gendering Ecological Vulnerabilities

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## Women in STEMM and Building Scientific Temper

### Concept Note

The forthcoming meeting of IAWS is the first one after the world was taken over by the Covid-19 pandemic. WHO has declared an end of Covid-19 global public health emergency now. However, major disruptions of the so-called normalcy due to the pandemic and associated lockdown were extensively felt by women. As compared to women in many other sections of the society, women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine and Mathematics i.e., STEMM are considered privileged because of their educational achievements and hence there is a tendency to assume that the gender-based discrimination experienced by ordinary women may not be the fate of these privileged women. This happens to be quite untrue, as was amply clear during the pandemic. Women's traditional roles as mothers, wives, care givers, as an anchor for the household duties became a major burden even to women practitioners of STEMM. The swift shift of academic activities such as meetings, teaching, informal discussions within a laboratory that moved to 'online' or virtual mode during the pandemic turned out to be a double-edged sword. On

the one hand women in STEMM could deliver more talks and attend more conferences, but women remained overburdened with household chores and 24x7 demand on their time. Non-tenured women employees particularly felt the brunt with many more job losses.

IAWS has a history of holding subthemes on women in STEMM and previous coordinators have highlighted how women's presence is marginal and becomes worse as women rise up in the hierarchy. While there is a steady increase in the number and percentage of women as practitioners of science there is a need for much further improvement in their status, quality of professional life and hence inclusion of this theme while considering overall status of women in India is critical.

In the context of the disruption of life during pandemic, the flexi-timing necessitated by the limitations of the sudden move to online modes caused many disruptions in the lives of women scientists in STEMM. Experiences and work in this area should be one focus of this subtheme.

Looking at the interface between women's studies and women's movement, one sees poor engagement with the sub-theme's focus. One area that begs attention is that of women's health; an issue not commonly addressed in the women's movements. Although sciences and technology are documented to be gendered over a spectrum ranging from male-palm sized phones to cardiac medicines being tested on male mice, to availability of many diverse contraceptives for women, and not men the issue has not been studied deeply through women's studies. We ask, how do women's movements see themselves engaging with rationality and development of science and technology? Similarly, there is limited exposure of students of women's studies departments to STEMM issues, scientific research on



women's health issues, analysing the impact of technology on women's everyday life etc. This leads to the natural question if the way women's studies attempted, and partly succeeded, in mainstreaming gender issues in many social science disciplines, can natural sciences also be brought under the radar? Development and use of technologies in agriculture or medicine, for example, can be beneficial as well as harmful to women. There is a need to undertake such areas of research by scholars in women's studies in association with NGOs working in the field so that STEMM disciplines come under the lens of gender mainstreaming.

This subtheme also wishes to emphasize on building on scientific temper. New education policy (NEP), with its 'rationalisation' of syllabus, has received much support and much criticism. While decreasing the load on students in school has its merits, it is important to see which section of science textbooks are axed. Two major sections removed from biology textbooks of class 9 and class 10 are 'biodiversity' and 'evolution', respectively. With global warming, ecological disasters being major global concerns today and the fact that they will remain so in the future, should one see removal of a chapter on biodiversity an attempt to deny importance of biodiversity in the global warming and clip the rational thinking process of young minds? Similarly, does the removal of the Darwinian theory of evolution, in the backdrop of socio-political emphasis on culture and mythology, ensure the spirit of Article 51A(h) of the Indian constitution that requires every citizen of India to develop a scientific temper? What are the consequences for the intersectionality of this learning and gender?

Also, do institutes of learning infantilize women, much against the UGC-Saksham guidelines, instead of providing necessary infrastructure such as equal hostel timings, disengage women from careers in science? How does one see a way ahead to forge alliances between women's movements and women's studies even on this front?

Based on this background we would like to invite abstracts on the following themes:

- ▶ Impact of pandemic on women in science;
- ▶ Gender-specific roles and rules at workplace - boon or bane?
- ▶ New education policy and deletion of chapters from science textbooks - impact on pursuit of science, technology, scientific temperament and the minds of future generation;
- ▶ Inclusion of science, rationality, biomedicine and health as a part of women's studies curricula;
- ▶ Interaction and bidirectional learning between women's movement and women's studies focussing on science, rationality and technology development.
- ▶ Any other topic falling under the subtheme.

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## Local Self-governance and Women: Prospects and Challenges

### Concept Note

The local self-government in India is made up of democratically elected representatives of the local people. In rural areas, it is governed by the Panchayati Raj system and in urban areas it consists of municipalities/corporations. Local governance is the process of managing and governing at the local level where communities participate in decision-making and are involved in the implementation of policies/programs, which are meant for betterment of their lives.

India is a country where women have historically faced discrimination and marginalization. Despite legal protections and affirmative measures, women in India continue to face many challenges. The ideology of division of labor compels women to be restrained to the private domain of life & restricts women's existence within domestic roles as wives & mothers. The male hegemony triumphs in the decision-making processes

both in private and public spheres. This patriarchal social structure of India is having a significant impact on women's participation in every sphere of the society, especially in governance. Accordingly, low women's participation in decision-making processes is falsely perceived as their incapability and incompetency in leadership roles.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments in 1992 has constitutionalized the elected grassroots level local governing bodies as the third strata of the Government structure. The Constitutional Acts have also set into motion a process that has made women's representation in local level decision-making a reality, through 33% reservation of women seats in local self-governance. These amendments can be considered as a landmark in the empowerment of women, as shortly after the 1992 election in Maharashtra, a total of 28,000 Panchayat Raj yielded positions of power to 93,333 women in various Panchayats as members & as chairpersons. Moreover, owing to outstanding performance of women in local self-governance, most of the states have raised their percentage of seat reservation for women up to 50%.

Women's political participation in local governance can play a critical role in addressing women's issues, as it provides a platform for women to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making processes. By engaging with local governments, women can advocate for policies and programs that promote gender equality and address the specific needs of women in their communities. In India, several successful local governance initiatives have been led by women. But despite many achievements, women's positions in local governance are shallow and are often in disguise. The elected women in



rural areas act as mere fronts for the male members of the family and are considered as proxy members or absentee members. New appellations such as “Sarpanch Pati” are used to describe husband chairpersons & members of Gram Panchayats, implying that they performed the Panchayat's work on behalf of their wives. As a consequence, the women's political participation in the local governance becomes a mockery and their voices remain unheard. This Sub theme aims to discuss women's role in local self-governance, scopes and prospects of women's political participation in addressing gender issues, effective strategies to overcome the challenges therein.

We invite abstracts and full papers, both analytical and empirical, documenting original and substantial research work on the following sub-themes.

- ▶ Reservation of seats for women in local governance: Precursor to Women Empowerment, or Development Myth?
- ▶ Gender stereotyping and Women's Leadership in Local Self-Governance.
- ▶ Women in Local Self-Governance and Self-Help Groups.

- ▶ Role of Civil Society in Promoting Women's Participation in Local Self-Governance.
- ▶ Women in Local Self-Governance: Legal and Policy Reforms.
- ▶ Role of Media in Promoting Women's Participation in Local Self-Governance.
- ▶ Sustainable Development Goals and Political Participation of Women in Local Self-Governance.
- ▶ Role of Education in Stimulating Participation of Women in Local Self-governance.

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## Intersectional vulnerabilities: Caste, Religion, Trans and Sexual minorities, Adivasis, Tribes and Disabilities.

### Concept Note

Women's Studies as a critical discipline has foregrounded women's visibility and engendered the lived realities of women. The recognition of multiple patriarchies in India has also revealed different strategies for empowerment and resistance, primarily through use of legal remedies. However such experiences and systemic exclusions still need to be unravelled as newer identity categories are created and recognized, while also highlighting the historical marginalization faced by women coming from non-dominant identity groups. Both overt and covert, incipient forms of marginality are principally observed in three main spheres—public (political) sphere, religious cultural sphere and economic sphere. Both the structural and experiential dimensions of marginality, without posing its problems and paradoxes solely in terms of established binaries of power-powerless; inside-outside; self-group (Bhattacharya and Basu 2018).

Women, coming from diverse social locations are often subjected to intersectional social exclusion, within social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems. Marginal and deprecated identities based on caste, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, etc, are further complicated by gender, leading to constraints on access to resources and opportunities, freedom of choices, and development of capabilities. Despite several legal provisions and some glaring gaps, women, naturally 'othered' are subjected to further and multi-layered discrimination because of their marginal identity markers, by social institutions, processes and systems and prevented from accessing power and privilege of various kinds. This panel hopes to raise and address questions around

- What situations of marginality do women from such 'othered' communities face in terms of their location in the social structure? Are their different ways of being marginal in society?
- How do they, if at all, articulate their experiences of marginality?
- How do such women from marginalized groups challenge and negotiate interlocking structures of oppression in their daily lives, and/or over generations?
- How have such socially excluded women encountered the collective entities of the State, civil society, market and law?
- What narratives of struggle, resistance and quest for dignity and justice, both passive and active are emerging from the field of both Women's Studies and the Women's Movements in India?



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Thiruvananthapuram  
Kerala

Intersectional vulnerabilities:  
Caste, Religion, Trans and Sexual minorities,  
Adivasis, Tribes and Disabilities.

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SUB THEME

Papers are invited along the following themes:

- ▶ Media representation of women from marginal communities
- ▶ Experiences of social and cultural injustice within communities
- ▶ Structural Exclusion of Marginal women: Education and Health
- ▶ Issues of Livelihoods of marginal women
- ▶ Impact of Covid 19 on women with intersectional vulnerabilities
- ▶ Resisting Marginality through collective action

## Coordinators

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## Human Rights violations: Gender-based Violence and Resistance

### Concept Note

Human rights violations in different spheres, be it socio-cultural, political or administrative, is a matter of grave concern, not only for the policymakers but for the individual social actors as well. A significant number of individuals suffer different forms of human rights violations rooted in their identity, power dynamics, and social structures across different countries and cultures. In the context of gender based violence, India remains alarmed at the gross violation of the human rights of women in private, public and work spaces.

The Conference aspires to co-create a feminist vision to bring together academics and activists to express growing concerns on issues of safety and protection of women. The human rights violations get worsened in the context of extreme volatility and vulnerability driven by pandemic, ethnic and natural conflicts, war, and shrinking democratic spaces, thereby, rendering

women's agency doubly vulnerable. Such a situation has heightened abuse and violence against women, and people of different gender expressions and sexual identities in all patriarchal and matrilineal societies across India. When it comes to violence against women, it's not only the commission of acts of violence, rather its threat or fear of violence also become a major factor in relegating women to subordinate positions, and restricting their access and use of different spaces and resources. The need of the hour is to question the different processes associated with violence, such as, normalization, naturalization and internalization of violence, so that both the individual and systemic patterns can be challenged and uprooted.

In this process, role of different stakeholders such as state and its machinery, civil society initiatives, societal institutions, etc. need to be critically examined, so that strategies can be formulated to move ahead towards the vision of a safe and equitable society.

This is a call for papers to find pathways to address and redress the different dimensions of human rights violations, especially focusing on gender-based violence, its redressal and resistance mechanisms formulated through formal and informal settings. Following are some of the focal areas for this Sub-theme:

- a) Socio-Psychological Perspective on human rights, justice, resistance and gender-based violence;
- b) Role of policymakers within the framework of local/national/international due diligence to eliminate gender-based violence against women;



- c) Examine the status quo in gender stereotypes perpetuated by social institutions in communities;
- d) Masculinities and the ideology of gender in times of war, conflict, and explicit militarism;
- e) Women's access to justice in both formal/alternative/customary processes towards safety, protection and recovery;
- f) Grassroots lived experiences and testimonies- success stories of feminist organizations in ending gender-based violence;
- g) Gender - based violence and harassment in workplaces;
- h) Protection and safety of the rights of marginalized women;
- i) Interconnectedness of gender-based violence with economy, health, law, media and education.

## Coordinators

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## Legal reforms, judicial system and emancipatory agenda

### Concept Note

Law is an important instrument of social change as well as emancipation. The emancipatory agenda of women's movement and women's studies have always exerted influence upon legal realm. The Indian Social Reformers and the British relied heavily on legislation to eradicate social evils which had an adverse effect on the status of women. There are significant legislations brought about as a result of the women's movement till date. The relationship between the Women's Movement and legal processes have been very crucial in getting new laws as well as in demanding enforcement of existing laws.

Prior to the *Towards the Equality report* the research on women issues focused on social reform which had an intention to question the western culture and British influence on Indian Society by glorifying India's cultural pride. The *Towards Equality Report*, 1974

exposed the social reality of women in India which laid a foundation of Women's movement in India. Women's movement coupled with women studies resulted in various researches enquiring the implementation of equal status of women guaranteed under the Indian Constitution. It focused mainly on identifying the need for policy changes, to integrate the scientific investigations of women's role and status in the country, to revisit the women's question which faded in the post-independence era.

Women Studies cultivates the scientific inquiry on the socio-economic and political status of women and also ensure the voices of women are documented. It has a significant impact on empowering women especially that of women belonging to marginalised section with dignity by increasing their contribution to the development of the nation.

Based on various social inquires in the form of research by scholars, NGOs, Commissions etc. many legislations have been enacted to address the gender gap that exists in the society. It is also pertinent to endorse the role of Judiciary which can give life to dead letters of law at the stroke of a pen through protectionist, sameness or corrective approaches. However, there is also criticism over the legal reforms and the role of judiciary in upholding a women centric approach in deciding policy reforms and delivering the judgments. In this backdrop it is important to focus on the emancipatory agenda of women's movement as well as women's studies and its influence on making law gender responsive and dynamic.





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SUB THEME

Area of the papers may be on the fall under the following

- ▶ Women's movement and feminist jurisprudence
- ▶ Law as an instrument of Women's emancipation
- ▶ Women's movement and the Legal Process
- ▶ Feminist Legal Methods
- ▶ Women's Movement and Access to Justice
- ▶ Impact of any law, executive policy as well as judicial approach on women's emancipation.

## Coordinators

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## Gendering the Digital Popular

### Concept Note

In the context of a massively expanding and globalized digital mediascape, the habitation of popular culture have undergone massive transformations, ushering in paradigm shifts in the very nature of social and interpersonal communication and feminist mobilisations. Thus, this creates new possibilities and challenges for activist interventions around gender justice, and new implications for the pedagogical exercises of gender studies and women's movements. With the 'liberatory promises' of new technology in changing the scope of traditional media in terms of access and democratic praxis, the crucial question remains whether the emergent 'democratized new media' does indeed engender an increasing scope of participation, opportunity and access of women, or further existing inequalities by deepening the structural schisms of power and patriarchal cultural norms. New technology constructs its own socio-cultural and

political-economic context with new social forms, practices and network. It is imperative for the feminist movements to be dialogically engaged with the emergent context and developments of the digital popular. In the new millennium the feminist critique of 'symbolic annihilation' with absence, trivialization and condemnation of women in popular media representations has paved the way for claiming new spaces in the digital media landscapes, with newer possibilities of forging action and network for women.

The new media spaces have opened up a possibility of relocation of transcultural and regional-local feminist practices and voices of dissent, alongside the integration of plurally defined quotidian dimensions of people's lives, thereby widening the breadth of gender sensitization goals. Digital media space has offered women 'leapfrog' opportunities by expanding the scope of economic earnings, especially during the pandemic period, collective action by creating communities, articulation of self-identity and access to knowledge and information. For the last few years, social media space has provoked gender sensitive conversations through 'me too' movements or anti-rape protests in India. The political tenor of intersectionality of women finds its presence in the making of a digital popular as well.

Despite attempts of democratization of the media space and egalitarian promises and potential of the new communication technology towards greater access and empowerment, new issues of inclusion, transparency, accountability, privacy, ownership over technology and digital divide are emerging as serious concerns for gender equality movements. It has been noted that new forms of sexism, exclusionary practices,



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gender-based violence mark the digital space with the rise of cyber-stalking, gender trolling, doxing, online pornography, misogynist images and different other forms of sexual harassment. Women's 'authentic' representation is challenged by new forms of 'femvertising', soft news, etc. reproducing gender stereotypes.

The subtheme would like to explore the critical relationship of gender and technology, the nature of the emergent digital popular, the dominant power dynamics of political-economic structures and cultural tropes that permeate the digitized popular culture in the post-reform 'digital India', exploring how 'Digital feminism' can recreate the feminist public in the network society in multiple ways. It would seek to critically interrogate how technology might have enabled or limited the democratizing potential of new media spaces and contributed to a new paradigm for Indian women's movements by opening new frontiers of struggle and knowledge.

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## Women's studies and Women's movements: Challenges and Resilience

*All abstracts with word limit of 500 words are invited from scholars and activists on the subthemes, which should also include title, full names and affiliations of author/s and key words. Please submit abstracts to the email mentioned in the respective subtheme concept notes.*

- ▶ *Last date for submission of abstracts: 05<sup>th</sup> July 2023*
- ▶ *Acceptance will be communicated by: 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023*

*Registration opens from 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 and closes on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023*

*Send your registration & all correspondences to [iawsnationalconference2023@gmail.com](mailto:iawsnationalconference2023@gmail.com)*

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