

Feminism, Education and the
Transformation of Knowledges:
Processes and Institutions

R E P O R T



XII National Silver Jubilee Conference of the
Indian Association for Women's Studies
Lucknow, 7-10 February, 2008

**Report on the
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	- 01
PLENARY PANELS	
I : Interventions in Education	- 04
II : Uttar Pradesh and Women's Issues	- 11
III : Fields of Knowledge	- 15
IV : Women and Knowledge Production in South Asia	- 24
V : Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives	- 28
SUB-THEME REPORTS	
1 : Issues of Gender and Development	- 35
2 : Feminism and Knowledges of Violence Theories and Methods	- 39
3 : Rethinking Feminist Methodologies in Contemporary Research	- 43
4 : Interface between Action and Research	- 48
5 : Gender, Science and Technology	- 53
6 : Generating new Knowledges around Sexualities and Genders	- 57
7A : Building Feminist Perspectives of Gender and School Education: Critiques, Challenges and new Directions	- 63
7B : Exploring Pedagogies of Gender Studies	- 65
8 : Tribe, Caste and Minority: Structures and Exclusions	- 68
9 : Language, Literature and Cultural Production - 72 : Special Session: Political Perceptions in Women's Writings	- 76
SPECIAL EVENTS	- 78
RESOLUTIONS	- 81

FEMINISM, EDUCATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF KNOWLEDGES: PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS

The XII National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies was held in Lucknow from the 7th to 10th February 2008. This is the Silver Jubilee year of the IAWS, which was established in September 1982, and represents a unique moment in the history of women's studies in India. In the run up to the Silver Jubilee Conference, the broad themes of education and knowledge production were widely discussed among members of the Executive Committee, in the regional workshops and the newsletters, and crystallized into the final programme. The occasion of the Silver Jubilee also provided a special opportunity to address the contemporary challenges facing the women's studies movement. The broad aim of the Conference was to reflect upon the transformatory potential of women's studies and feminism in many spheres of knowledge production, and across diverse institutions and contexts. Education, whether formal or non-formal, from schooling to higher education, has been a critical site for the women's movement and women's studies, since their inception. Today, major global and local developments compel us to take particular note of how educational structures and policies are changing and what implications these changes have for the future of women's studies. As this report testifies, the Conference fulfilled its promise by demonstrating how feminist scholarship constitutes an interventionary force, indeed a movement, for the production, dissemination and transformation of knowledges within and beyond the educational system. It is evident that; there is an urgent need to confront the existing agendas and processes of education itself, beginning with the troubled status of women's studies within universities.

The IAWS co-hosted the Silver Jubilee Conference with the Institute of Women's Studies, University of Lucknow and Isabella Thoburn (I.T.) College, Lucknow. We would like to record our thanks to both these institutions, especially Prof. A.S. Brar, Vice Chancellor and Prof. Rakesh Chandra, Director, Institute of Women's Studies, University of Lucknow, and Dr. Elizabeth Charles, Principal and the women's studies department, I.T. College for readily agreeing to co-host this major event. They provided the Conference with excellent venues and facilities, and did so at the height of term time with classes in full swing. The participation of a very large number of students added in no small measure to the vibrancy of the

Conference sessions and associated events. In spite of inclement weather at the time, about 500 participants from outside Lucknow and 300 local participants registered for the Conference, including a small but significant proportion of men. The IAWS also thanks the organisations that provided financial support for hosting the Conference – the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA, New Delhi), the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT, Mumbai), the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS, Netherlands), the South Asia Office of the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC, Canada), and the Ford Foundation.

The Conference extended over four days: an inaugural function held at I.T. College, followed by 5 plenary panels, 9 sub-themes running as parallel sessions, along with special exhibitions and events. This report begins with a short summary of the inauguration, followed by the plenary presentations and the sub-themes. It concludes with the main resolutions that were passed during the General Body Meeting of the IAWS.

Inauguration

On the morning of the first day, all participants gathered for a special inauguration in Isabella Thoburn College to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the IAWS. This began with the IAWS President, Sumi Krishna's Address (which has been separately published). This was followed by a felicitation of the founder members of the IAWS, that is, those who signed the Memorandum of Association and formed the initial Executive Committee of the IAWS. They included Hemlatha Swarup, Vina Mazumdar and Devaki Jain. Jyoti Trivedi, Neera Desai and Lotika Sarkar could, unfortunately, not be present. Madhuri Shah and Phulrenu Guha are sadly no more. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Lucknow, Prof. A. S. Brar, then made his welcoming remarks. He identified himself as a member of the scientific community and an academic administrator who had witnessed numerous instances of discrimination as well as insensitivity at the levels of policy, programmes and implementation. He spoke of the severe problems in society and the achievements of women's studies and the women's movement, drawing particular attention to the silence in the sciences. He concluded with thanks to the IAWS and to Isabella Thoburn College.

The Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture was then delivered by Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Entitled "Girls as Children", Prof. Kumar began by emphasizing his own lack and the absence of any serious engagement with issues of gender in education, and mentioned instances that had forced him into recognizing the significance of such issues – the interest aroused by his own published reflections on 'growing up male'; the CWDS photographic exhibition on visual representations of women in pre-independence India; and the work of scholars like Leela

Dube. Saying that the perspective of the child in education had barely emerged, in spite of the broad humanistic principles in educational philosophy, he characterized the child as a 'black box', subjected to everyday disasters within schooling but not worthy of being recognised. He emphasized that a meaningful paradigm for education must include two components – the agency of the child (knowledge is not something to be given; rather motivation has to be developed not killed) and the need for security, including emotional care. However, primary education has been conceived of in a 'babysitter' mode, the monitoring of children in the absence of their parents, which is not kind to either girls or boys. He went to say that there are very few studies of young children, with most work concentrating on puberty and the period following this, especially where gender is concerned. What happens to the five year old girl in school? Anxiety levels among parents are much higher where girls are concerned. At precisely the age where boys are given freedom to explore the world, this world is seen as a threat to girls. Girls become the object of the vigilant adult eye, constrained spatially and by time, always made accountable for what they do. In this connection, he referred to the work of Leela Dube on caste and women, her analyses of how women in the family are marked and constrained in their work, sexually and through ritual, so that women effectively have nowhere to hide. Modernisation has classified all these even more closely and marked out a girl's twin goals – marriage and motherhood – even before she has reached puberty. Boys, on their part see girls as competitors in their earlier years but take them less seriously from class 6 onwards. All these issues point to very serious processes that are in place at a time when freedom to grow and experiment ought to be paramount. Women's studies thus has to take on the enormity of the challenges posed by the gendered control of childhood in education.

**PLENARY PANEL 1:
INTERVENTIONS IN EDUCATION**

The panel on interventions in education was introduced by Mary John, (General Secretary of the IAWS) who emphasized the relative neglect in focussing on issues of education in previous IAWS plenaries. The first speaker was Maithreyi Krishnaraj, a major contributor to the formal inception of Women's Studies in India in the S.N.D.T. women's university, Mumbai, who dwelt on some of her concerns around the question of incorporating women's studies within the education system. She pointed out that already in 1981, when the first Conference of Women's Studies was held at SNDT, a broad consensus had emerged that the objective of women's studies was to be a 'transformative enterprise'. Syllabi from several universities in India were collected to examine how many did, in fact, give space to women's issues and in what areas. The findings were sobering — at that time the only women's issues which received attention were in labour economics. Since then the situation has changed, with some universities running women's studies as an MA course; some introducing a special paper on women in different subjects and still others setting up women's studies 'programmes' on a regular basis. Refresher courses in women's studies have become part of teacher training, and now there are women's studies centres and cells across the country under the sponsorship of the UGC. As the result of recent review exercises conducted by the UGC, along with other regional consultations and regional studies, a mixed picture has emerged of what women's studies stands for and how it is being promoted.

Prof Krishnaraj went on to say that, broadly speaking, while the teaching of women's studies is particularly uneven, there has been tremendous progress in research and publications. The setting up of *Kali for Women* as a feminist publishing house and *Manushi* as a more activist-oriented journal were major landmarks, along with the Biannual *Review of Women's Studies* in the *Economic and Political Weekly* and *The Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. Women's studies developed into a kind of interdisciplinary sub-discipline, with contributions from a range of disciplines and scholars, with distinct modes of theorizing and a set of conceptual tools. She argued that the impact of women's studies, however, has been more decisive in public policy, advocacy and the collective action of the women's movement. Its achievement lies in providing conceptual tools and modes of analysis that

can be translated into any discipline, through notions of gender, the sexual division of labour, patriarchy and so on; yet, these concepts have not percolated to the rank and file of the teaching profession. She felt this was an old conundrum: Does education change society or society change education? We have examples of how the latter is happening. She asked whether we were assuming that educational curricula alone would bring changes when the educational system itself was caught up in antediluvian modes of operation, examinations and rote learning, considering skills as equivalent to wisdom and losing the larger perspective of learning as opening one's eyes through critical inquiry. When after 60 years we have not provided a decent primary education to every child, how can we bring changes at the top of the hierarchy?

She mentioned the Kothari Commission's revolutionary suggestion of building a bridge between the haves and have nots through neighbourhood schools for all classes of children, that would be supported by the state. Studies all over the world have shown how the educational system perpetuates class disparities, to which one could add that the gender divide and established gender roles are also perpetuated, making it difficult for girls to get equal opportunities. The recent Pratham survey of India's primary schools should make us hang our heads in shame. It is by enhancing provisions that produce a truly educated society that women's studies can flourish and have an impact on the larger society — become the 'great tradition'. As of now women's studies centres live in outhouses on the periphery of the university, suffered to exist but not allowed to contaminate the mainstream. **Meera Samson, Anuradha De and Claire Noronha** of CORD (Collaborative Research and Dissemination, New Delhi) shared the findings of a study undertaken by them in 2006 — "Revisiting Education For All"— that builds on the 1996 PROBE survey. The study involved revisiting 200 randomly selected villages in the large north Indian states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, in which all educational facilities available in the village for the 6-12 year age group were covered. It tracks the type of progress that has been made over the past decade, towards the goal of Education For All (EFA). The context is significant — the education sector has been the recipient of a large amount of foreign aid, earlier for primary education, and now extended to include the upper primary level. Central and state governments increasingly feel the pressure to report the tremendous progress that they have been able to make to meet the Millenium Development Goal targets, whether they be gender equity or social equity.

Some of the major findings of the study were presented by Meera Samson as follows. The enrolment of children in the age group of 0-6 has gone up sharply and the gender gap in enrolment has narrowed tremendously. There has been a huge surge of enrolment in the age group of 6-12 amongst disadvantaged groups. However, social disparities are more than obvious when one looks beyond enrolment. Gender differences are quite obvious

when comparing the workload of boys and girls who are out of school, with household chores more demanding on girls than boys. Infrastructure like *pucca* rooms, drinking water, and toilets have been put in place to a large extent. A high number of incentive schemes have been introduced to make schooling less costly, such as uniforms, textbooks and scholarships. The introduction of cooked midday meals served in most of the schools has been a huge change from dry rations, which were being distributed earlier. There has been a massive increase in the recruitment of teachers. However, a little under half the teachers are on contract, and most of them are from the dominant sections and, therefore, less accountable. Their own socio-economic background and negligible pre-service training makes it unlikely that they will become “agents of social transformation”. Though community organizations have been set up in the villages, they are not able to do enough monitoring of the schools. Glaring indicators of non-performance were observed. Attendance of children was found to be low. Teaching activities continue to be focused on rote learning and writing. There has been a growing demand for private schools, particularly for boys. Public Private Partnerships are playing a greater role now, though they need monitoring. Overall, the study concluded that there is lack of equity in the school system and every government school needs support and monitoring if the goal of EFA has to be achieved.

Against the backdrop of the history of higher education in India, **Tejaswini Niranjana** (Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore) looked at the location of Women’s Studies in the higher education spectrum, with a focus on questions of pedagogy and curriculum. She started by saying that Indian women have been in higher education, in a modern education system, for close to a hundred years. But how many women are trained in women’s studies? Where are the women located in the higher education spectrum, and in which disciplines? What sort of education do they get? How does women’s studies feature here, and how many of the students are exposed to ideas coming out of it? A lot is known about the early history of women’s studies in India. Varied locations, diverse trajectories of interaction within the university and outside it are less well known, and comprehensive local histories would yield fascinating insights into the making of women’s studies in the country. Located within the university, women’s studies began to acquire some of the features of disciplines — legitimizing structures, syllabi, examinations. In many ways, it became a reluctant discipline. She pointed out that in the 1990s, the women’s studies classroom was where the most disquieting questions on campus were being asked. Students became agitated, they argued, resisted, but were always changed in profound ways. Some of the most significant questions were not only about classical patriarchy but also about how to leverage the category ‘gender’ to grapple with other forms of disadvantage and inequality. Today, both in the undergraduate and post-graduate humanities-social sciences classroom in India, we can witness the effects of the mainstreaming of gender questions. The success of gender mainstreaming, however, can appear somewhat

paradoxical. Middle-class students have begun to treat the analysis of certain crucial aspects of women's subordination as self-evident and commonsensical, if not superficial. For a generation of women who have benefited from the struggles of the women's movement, the social and political concerns of an earlier generation are seen as outdated.

Our current pedagogic situation, she argued, compels a rethinking of the relationship between culture and gender. In much of what used to be called the Third world or more broadly the non-West, the question of culture emerges as part of a colonial contestation; narratives of the nation-in-the-making were premised on the assertion of cultural difference from the West, with women often represented as the embodiment of that difference. Nationalist discourse in the non-Western world thus produces an antithetical relationship between modernity and culture at the same time as it aligns women with the *cultural* and the *authentic*. In India, while this process may have been quite thoroughly explored and critiqued in feminist scholarship, it does not usually feature in the teaching of women's studies. Neither do the complex critiques of modernity that inform social science discourse today.

The language question in its many ramifications is also something we have tended to deal with through endless deferral. For decades we have been admitting to the need to close the gap between social science vocabulary (which is largely in English) and the languages of cultural forms, practices, institutions. While small initiatives have been attempted, there has as yet been no large-scale multi-pronged conceptually-informed effort to tackle this problem. The language issue has surfaced frequently in the women's movement of the last three decades. Urban activist groups of the 1970s and 80s, for example, did grapple continuously with defining their constituencies, since the latter often included less-privileged women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Like several other issues, which seemed divisive, the language question wasn't substantially addressed at the height of the women's movement. In the last decade or more, however, minority women and Dalit women in particular have been articulating their dissatisfaction with the subject-positions offered by Indian feminism. Linguistic differences, often standing in for differences of other kinds, are also being fore-grounded. There are increasingly larger numbers of non-English-speaking women who see themselves as feminists and access feminist modes of analysis *in the regional languages*, having come to the women's movement through their involvement in other political and social movements or through literary debates in the different languages. It is largely from here that a demand for feminist translation is being raised, but one cannot accede to the demand simply by providing literal translations of material already available in English. Instead, the challenge would be to create a conceptual context in which the translation can take shape. Hence translation can become one of the most significant areas for intervention today. She concluded that women's studies could participate in

creating original work and translation that asks new questions and compels disciplines to re-organise or transform themselves, and in teaching that translates such research into exciting new curricula on different sites.

Chennai-based activist and researcher, **V. Geetha** raised questions about pedagogy and transmission that arise when 'gender' is done in the classroom or in comparable learning contexts. The manner in which textbooks constitute worthwhile knowing, is as important as what is deemed knowledge, she said. It is important to note that notional gender, caste and class-differences, though not explicitly present, nevertheless constitute content of pedagogy, and that the 'ideal learner' is almost always 'upper' caste/class and male. Thus, textbooks carefully and sometimes as a matter of routine do not contain anything by way of content or exercises, that is capable of producing conflict and unease in the classroom; social differences and contradictions are hurriedly acknowledged and almost immediately recouped within the grand, overarching narrative of nationalism, a sensibility which is granted immense pedagogic value.

V. Geetha categorised those who 'do gender' as those who are convinced of the importance of doing gender *critically*, that is the feminist teacher and the 'NGO' gender-trainer, both of whom are beset by a sense of unease and passion about unjust social arrangements, and those who come to gender, because willy-nilly they have become part of a women's studies centre or because, given the history of their discipline, they could not 'avoid' engaging with gender (as in some English Literature classes). Clearly, the instructor, of whatever variety, and whether in the classroom or out of it, bears the burden of the history of women's studies — that it stays relevant. How has the question of relevance been addressed or resolved in gender pedagogy, whether feminist or not? In urban, largely English-speaking classrooms, talking and conceptualizing experience can become self-evident exercises, by naturalizing sexual difference or accommodating all experiences as being due to equal victimization by the system. Yet, experience-sharing affords productive moments and often discussions on particular subjects turn into great and expansive interpretative occasions. But in some classrooms, especially if politically alive and dominated by students somewhat familiar with left ideology, the opposite happens with experience being seen as unrigorous, with class being advanced as an overarching category, even when class and gender are combined, as in the domestic labour debate. The second point about feminist pedagogy and experience sharing is that both in urban English classrooms and in mixed classrooms, where English and vernacular students study, caste and class differences, when aired and discussed, make for great unease. For example, issues such as untouchability, especially to do with women, produce embarrassed sorrow. In the mixed classroom — where students are clearly from different cultural and caste backgrounds, experiences marked by caste are equally ill-received: often, discussions in such a context veer round to

the question of the reservation policy, to caste-based parties, and whether it is right that leaders appeal to caste sentiments etc. Where there are a substantial number of Dalits, both Christian and Hindu, the classroom acquires a different character — there is a learnt militancy that marks debates. Similar problems can arise in the related pedagogic context of training sessions in women's groups and NGOs. How then does one help students conceptualize experience as valid, but which has to be necessarily illumined in a) the context of other, different and contradictory experiences b) social and economic arrangements that structure and mediate them?

Critical knowledge about gender, especially systematic knowledge of the sort that could be deployed in a classroom context is mostly available in English. Students from vernacular contexts seeking to examine 'reality' are thus expected to make that crucial move from what is richly familiar into the alienated world of social science concepts that strain at that reality. The time of the vernacular may not be and often is not the time of English, and historical change mutates differently in each of these linguistic universes. As far as the women's movement is concerned, such cross-cutting conversations, across languages and worlds, have happened in some contexts – for example, in Andhra in the 1980s, so eloquently embodied in *We were Making History*. Outside the context of struggle and movement, to do gender critically has meant to do it in English. Given this context, it becomes important to reconceptualise ideas of knowing — how does one achieve a critical pedagogy that is more than a mere respecting of the 'knowledge of the grassroots', to actively learn to speak in and across different class and caste registers, through practices of language learning and translations; learning to speak in two tongues or making the classroom a space where different languages speak critically — however uneasy and edgy the fit. V. Geetha asked what pedagogic models did we have that included not only the student, the teacher, and the classroom but also an enabling and critical context that would allow the pedagogy to measure its own worth? Legacies from the left, from Ambedkar, and also Gramscian "common sense" would mean committing time and energy to a labour that would help make complex arguments publicly available. The impetus to such a task could be as much ethical as political and the pedagogy would be one that envisages an active role for itself – and which seeks to keep itself alive by remaining accountable to what inspired it in the first place.

Jaya Sharma of Nirantar, Delhi, dwelt on the inter-linkages between literacy and empowerment and hoped that there would be an intensification of women's studies' engagement with the more marginal issue of women's literacy. As 'education' is virtually synonymous with school or university education, there is a concomitant 'invisibilisation' and marginalization of learning opportunities for those who are older, and who have had little or no access to formal education. A majority of these are women, particularly rural

women from economically and socially marginalized communities. It is necessary to look critically at what the state is offering and perhaps, even more importantly, to examine our own perceptions, responses and dilemmas as researchers, activists in the women's movement, with respect to adult women's learning. In a context in which the mainstream constructs the non-literate as 'ignorant', the women's movement has strived to show that literacy does not define the worth of women. While this is critical, the linkages between literacy and power have not been recognized. There are tangible ways in which literacy links to access to material resources, positions of leadership, further learning opportunities as well as the ability to reduce dependence upon the educated, including activists, members of NGOs etc. When rural women engage with mainstream institutions such as the police, courts and government departments, it is clear that the larger environment is an overwhelmingly literate one, and that their ability to negotiate, therefore, calls for "literate" skills. The situation is compounded by the manner in which the state has approached women's literacy. Seen only as a development target to be met in order to move higher up the international human development index ladder, women's literacy has not received the effort and resources required for it to become a meaningful and sustainable skill. This is a global, not Indian phenomenon. The world-over women's literacy is at the bottom of the structure, with educational inputs provided by the state in the name of adult and continuing education being narrow and instrumentalist, tying women into the stereotypic image of mothers whose primary objective is to facilitate the learning of their school-going children. Jaya Sharma argued that the crisis of education and literacy is best captured by the SHG and micro-credit phenomenon, the largest and perhaps most significant intervention in the realm of gender and development today. Driven by powerful interests, ranging from international finance, the neo-liberal state, donor agencies and banks, the micro-credit phenomenon has at its core the need to ensure regular savings and repayments. The implications in terms of educational opportunities for women are stark — the overwhelming focus of the trainings provided to women is on financial and group management. Secondly, the discourse generated by the SHG phenomenon has strengthened the artificial divide between 'social' and 'economic' empowerment. If the premise is that 'economic empowerment' automatically leads to 'social empowerment', there is clearly no need to invest resources in learning opportunities that promote gender justice and equity for women in SHGs. Despite overwhelming evidence that literacy is a key determinant in providing access to leadership, credit and capacity building inputs, virtually no such investments are being made. In the different context of sexuality also, there is a denial of empowering learning opportunities. Driven by a global narrowly driven HIV/AIDS agenda, the nature of inputs available are highly instrumentalist and often moralistic in nature. Not unlike literacy, learning spaces focusing on issues of sexuality (except for issues of sexual violence) as they relate to power and pleasure are considered a non-priority by most NGOs and even

women's groups. Given that learning opportunities for women from marginalized sections are governed by the priorities of civil society and the often instrumentalist agendas of the state and other players, it becomes imperative that we engage with this realm of knowledge and education to ensure a systemic response to the need of adult women for empowering educational opportunities. She concluded that the urgency is greater given the manner in which powerful global and local dynamics are constructing concepts of women's empowerment, sexuality and development — often in ways that are inimical to gender justice and social equity.

PLENARY PANEL - II: UTTAR PRADESH AND WOMEN'S ISSUES

The special panel on U.P. was chaired and introduced by Zarina Bhatti, (executive committee member of the IAWS) who, having been brought up in the city of Lucknow, recalled how the university had remained out of bounds for her due to the custom of purdah. In the course of her introduction she also recalled that Lucknow could claim many firsts in women's contribution to education and society, such as the appointment of Sarojini Naidu as U.P. governor, and the election of the first woman chief minister of independent India.

The first presentation addressed the status of Dalit women in the state. Beginning with a discussion of the political scenario in UP, **Subhasini Ali** (President, All India Democratic Women's Association) observed that the state has witnessed extraordinary political changes in the last two decades, with a considerable undermining of the political hegemony of a single party, the Congress, and of the 'upper' castes, specially the Brahmans. However, she said, the status of Dalit women has not undergone the kind of positive improvement it should have. UP is the only state in the country where a party committed to struggle for Dalit rights has achieved electoral success. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has come to power in the state four times. This in itself is a remarkable achievement and can be attributed to the extremely intelligent tactics of caste combination and mobilization. The other distinction of the party is that it is headed by a Dalit woman, Km. Mayawati. There is no doubt that she inspires tremendous authority and hope for the Dalits in the midst of hopelessness and despair. Unfortunately, politics based on caste combination and mobilization has a logic of its own. While it can catapult successful manipulators to the heights of electoral success, it also paradoxically acts as a brake on efforts to transform the lives of those whom it is supposed to represent. There are several reasons for this 'logic', especially in its application to the continued injustice, oppression, exclusion and exploitation suffered by Dalit women. Caste-based electoral mobilization creates tremendous polarization. The qualification and record of the candidate himself or herself are of very little importance — it is the caste and communal combination that is crucial. Winning candidates, therefore, owe their success

almost entirely to the arithmetic of caste combinations rather than to any developmental work done for their constituencies or any struggles and campaigns of concerns to their voters.

As far as Dalit women in UP are concerned, there are certain other aspects that impact their lives very adversely. Not only does a strengthening of caste identities reinforce patriarchy within communities, it also leads to heightened conflict between them. Since patriarchy views women as the repositories of the honour of the community, violence or punishment being meted out by one caste group to another is usually meted out to the women of the caste being so attacked. Another feature of the UP brand of politics is the ever-increasing criminalization of politics at every level, thus having a devastating effect on women and, most severely on Dalit women. While all women in the state suffer from low social indicators, Dalit women are the worst off, a fact substantiated by the state HDR report, various NSS surveys, and so on. Figures for the enrolment of girls in primary school, when coupled with their drop-out rates show that as far as Dalits are concerned, the situation is not going to change radically in the near future. It is not surprising that Dalit girls, who are in any case the victims of poverty, domestic responsibilities and gender inequality in the home, are fast dropping out from the school system.

Health indicators for Dalit women are shocking. Only 17% of Dalit women go through "assisted" childbirth. While this figure is telling, the reality is worse. About 40,000 women die in the state during childbirth every year and the majority of them are Dalits. Subhasini Ali concluded that it is not only the failure of the state to provide health facilities, trained midwives and ICDS workers that is responsible for this dismal state of affairs; caste and class prejudices along with greed have a very special role to play.

In his presentation "Negotiating Spaces: Gender in Classrooms for Girls in U.P." **Rakesh Chandra** (Director of the Institute of Women's Studies at Lucknow University) shared some of his complex experiences in the current struggle for gender justice and children's rights in the sphere of education, in a context marked by fundamental social inequalities and the failure of the state to its poor constituents. Referring to the interventions by a local civil society organization in Barabanki, he elaborated on the steps taken by the community which had been mobilized by providing space for a learning centre, selecting the staff, initiating enrolment drives and monitoring the progress of these alternative learning centres. Several hindrances to girls' education like poverty, early marriage, security, violence in schools, the responsibility for sibling care, and distance from the school prompted such action to counter the common reasons that keep girls out of school. Over a period of nine years, nearly 9000 children, mainly girls from minority and scheduled caste groups, completed schooling up to class V. Many postponed their *gauna* if already married, or helped their fathers. However, there is also a twist in the tale. One of the training centres revealed that

the notions of gender ideology being imparted were not transformative but conservative. Hence, gender training was needed to help introduce gender equality into the classroom and beyond. It became evident that girls' education and its instrumental benefits are more often emphasized than having equal rights. At a different level, gender issues for boys have barely been touched upon in India as a whole. It is necessary to address the situation of adolescent boys, both literate and non-literate, who are not finding wage employment, have no land, are taking to drugs and are becoming a potential threat to girls because their masculinity finds its easiest outlet in violence. Sex roles and the demand for occupational success lead to enormous stress on young boys.

He also shared a brief summary of a study on gender stereotyping which critically analyzed pre-UPBEP era textbooks as well as the BEP textbooks, focusing on male and female characters in their themes, illustrations and visuals. Not only was there over representation of male dominated themes but traditional sex stereotypes were also reinforced. Gender stereotypes of women as loving, modest, homely and affectionate were juxtaposed with strong, courageous, cool-headed male figures. A complementary study on the cognitive appropriateness of language used in primary school textbooks had led to the revision of these textbooks. The new textbooks have many gender-transformative elements.

Despite these small, partially successful interventions, UP's classrooms continue to display a vicious neglect of children. The children of the poor are no one's priority. Across UP schools, a single person is handling up to a hundred children, with many children sitting in open spaces, along with pigs and dogs. Teaching, as and when it happens, continues to be based on reading from textbooks and some explanation through writing on the black board. In the classroom, privileged spaces are often taken by boys, with girls in the last rows. Almost invariably, girls are not addressed by their names and are shouted at. When teachers try to be sensitive, they ask girls to sing but debates and speeches are usually for boys. There are still very few women teachers in village schools. Apart from a few girls' schools, the private schools have taken no special initiative on gender issues. This does not seem to be on the agenda either of city convents or unregistered private schools in villages,. Their textbooks, teachers' training and pedagogy show no gender sensitivity.

Interestingly, while some efforts on textbook reviews and training are still on at the primary level, there seems little noticeable effort to review the existing curriculum at the secondary and higher levels of education in UP and perhaps at the national level. Rakesh Chandra said that today frameworks are more enabling, but the historical weight of discrimination and our tendency to fall back on accepted modes of thinking remain formidable.

D. R. Sahu (Department of Sociology at the University of Lucknow) observed that the vast majority of women in UP lead lives restricted by harsh patriarchal and socio-economic conditions. Gender inequalities are severe and are mediated by regional, caste, class and many other disparities; 36.5 million women are still illiterate and at 707 the maternal mortality rate is the highest in the country. Atrocities against women in general and Dalit and Adivasi women in particular still continue on a very large scale. Official statistics reveal a high incidence of crimes against women and an over all grim law and order situation. On the economic front, there are widespread concerns about the adverse impact of economic reforms on the overall socio-economic environment of the state, leading to growing inequalities. The policies badly affect the livelihoods and employment opportunities of poor women. The denial of access to land and productive resources to women perpetuates poverty and dependence. On the positive side, UP recorded a healthy growth in female literacy in the last decade and during the same time, the female to male ratio rose. Women have benefited from the expansion of higher education and are visible in cultural, educational and administrative fields. A significant development has been the building of networks among women's groups and a vibrant civil society movement in parts of the state. Another sign of hope is the increased participation of women in panchayats.

The government continues to play a key role in shaping the future and in reducing gender inequality but sometimes the state poses challenges for multilateral agencies, the private sector and civil society as well. The path forward is by building partnerships between the people, the government, and civil society organizations, in which the state must be the leading partner. One of the biggest challenges before us, argued D.R. Sahu, is to make people recognize that there is a gender dimension to poverty and backwardness and that there is need to create awareness against the widespread discrimination meted to women. Mainstreaming gender concerns implies making gender empowerment everybody's concern and not just women's. Hence, there is a strong need for a gender audit of all policies and programmes. Facilitating the right to information and improving the access and quality of services; promoting women's security and the need for preparing a comprehensive gender directory every five years are some of the steps that can be taken.

The final presentation in the U.P. panel was by **Anupama Srivastava**, (Department of Women's Studies at I.T. College) who also addressed issues related to women in U.P. Against the backdrop of the basic tenets of feminist theory and general patterns of gender in the country, she provided a thumbnail sketch of a gender profile for U.P. which has some of the lowest gender indicators of the country. Women's situation has to be understood in a context where those who are dominant control the macro social structure while the work of subordinates is invisible and undervalued by themselves due to social ideology. International processes make these dominant power arrangements real and do not

acknowledge the contribution of subordinates, thus creating in women a constant fault line in their subjectivity.

U.P has the lowest HDI and GDI rank in the country and recorded 2059 dowry deaths during 2000, the highest in the country. On the other hand, U.P. was the first state to initiate a network project on local self governance. Moreover, there is no correlation between women's political participation and other considerations such as literacy. In the recent assembly elections there were 186 women candidates while male contestants were 4173. A particularly interesting experiment currently underway is that of the *Nari Adalat* by the Mahila Samakhya programme in the state.

She concluded her presentation with the following priority concerns – mainstreaming gender more broadly, separating women's issues from those of children, the need for security among unorganized women workers, adopting gender sensitization and conscientisation in the field of education, ensuring property rights for women, gender budgeting and auditing, transforming the welfare approach of the state, and transforming the theories of women's studies into the realm of practice.

PLENARY PANEL III: FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE

This panel was chaired and introduced by Sumi Krishna, with different presentations addressing the fields of history, development, science, literature and the law to see what kinds of interventions and changes feminism and women's studies had wrought.

Janaki Nair (from the Centre for the Study of Social Sciences, Kolkata) dwelt on the troubled relationship of history and feminism and acknowledged that history is among the disciplines to have been richly fertilized by the insights of feminism. Over the last three decades, Indian historians have not only uncovered new archives, but have plundered with impunity the methods of other disciplines to arrive at a fuller, richer account of the past. There has also been an impressive lateral spread of the historical method among a wide range of fields, from film studies to developmental economics. Yet this sophisticated body of work has done little to alter the sanctioned ignorance of the mainstream academy. In inverse proportion to the quantum of high quality writing on Indian history from the standpoint of women is the relative imperviousness of the discipline itself to feminism's insights. The disciplinary foundations of history, its thematic orientation, and its periodisation have remained relatively unchanged by the work of feminist historians, who are corralled within mainstream history programmes. Feminist history may add to, without reconceptualising, historical investigation itself. What clues does this provide about the field of history and its relationship to feminist critique generally? Has the massive institutional presence of Women's

Studies, of which women's history is a part and feminist history an even smaller part, been matched in equal measure by a theoretical presence within (or a bringing to crisis of) the conventional practices of historical research and writing, she asked.

It is well known that the questions and methods of feminist scholarship in India have primarily, and with powerful and insightful effect, been driven by certain critical political events. Janaki Nair discussed some examples from the Partition of India, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and caste based reservations, all of which have played a role in new explorations in feminist history. At the same time, it is a sobering fact that a division of labour within the Indian academy allows mainstream disciplines to carry on with business as usual, while the feminist scholar is left largely in dialogue with other feminists. The most benign form of this division of labour is the mode of peaceful academic co-existence. This was illustrated through examples – Lata Mani's pioneering study of sati in colonial India, Lucy Carroll's and Prem Chowdhry's examination of the operation of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. These contributions should have led to radical revisions of the historical commonsense regarding 19th century "social reform." There is no sign that such a widespread revision has occurred.

A partial victory of feminism's insights may be noted in the ways in which nationalism has been reconfigured: the representations of the Indian nation as feminine, the large-scale and unprecedented participation of women in the national movement, and the ambiguous legacies of the Gandhian moment have certainly become part of a larger historical commonsense. Even here, though, the irreconcilable differences between the claims on women by the family, the community and the state, so chillingly discussed by several feminist scholars, and raising doubts about whether indeed women have a "nation" at all, has been allowed to occupy a small corner of the field of nationalism without disturbing its general claims.

Is all history that turns its attention to women necessarily feminist history? Conversely, is there a feminist history that may not focus on women? And further, is gender the appropriate category of analysis in all instances where women are present? How may one resolve the tensions between the political and the intellectual missions of feminism? At least two recent books, both by sociologists, reveal the uses of history as a bridge between contemporary political and intellectual missions. How real and imagined female historical figures get summoned to perform the thoroughly instrumentalist role of providing contemporary female politicians with a genealogy is the concern of Badri Narayan's unusual investigation. What then of women who represent themselves, as in the Dalit *testimonios* that have been "re-rendered" by Sharmila Rege? Her re-renderings, her attention to the specific experience of Dalit oppression, and her striving to highlight the emergence of Dalit "counterpublics" are in order to challenge the historiographical orthodoxies that shut caste

out of the public sphere to render it a social, and not a political issue. In her discussion of scholarly understandings of dowry in contemporary India, Mary John points to a congruence between the tactics of the women's movement in its campaigns against dowry and the way in which sociologists have emphasized the economic functions and dimensions of dowry alone. That congruence, she suggests, has not necessarily yielded intellectual insights that are considerably more nuanced than the campaign against dowry, ignoring for instance the importance of the social and cultural dimensions to the problem.

Clearly, feminist historiography must strike out on a path that need not intersect with the goals and strategies of the movement, if it is to address the twin objectives of challenging the practice of history itself, while serving the movement sometimes uncomfortable truths. Feminist historiography must move away from the certainties of early modes of history writing, while maintaining a strong claim to plausibility through establishing what Sandra Harding has elsewhere called *parameters of dissonance*.

Padmini Swaminathan (from the Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai) took on the challenging question of development. She argued how the otherwise 'economically and socially developed' state of Tamil Nadu was in fact perpetuating development-induced 'violence' on its citizens, particularly women, adolescent girls and girl children, with the severity of this violence increasing for Dalit women. Not only did 'development violence' continue, the violence itself became more overt, with severe consequences for the poor and for women.

Across the country, the announcement of accelerating industrialization through the setting up of special economic zones [SEZs] and/or the allotment of land by the government to large industrial houses for specific projects has generated considerable opposition as well as discussion. Neither the centre nor the states have as yet issued a coherent document detailing, area-wise or SEZ-wise, the rationale for the area chosen, the rates at which land is being allotted, the proportion of the share going to government or the owner of land, the levels of employment to be generated, the nature and findings of environment impact assessment, and so on. Not only do governments (whether of the left or right) not provide such crucial and verifiable information, but they have gone on the offensive to label any opposition as being against industrialization and therefore anti-development. In the process, governments are skirting the real issues at stake. The issue is certainly not about being 'for or against industrialization' but about the transparency and accountability of elected governments to their own citizens.

The governments' penchant to periodically announce 'development' schemes have no built-in mechanisms to do a stock-taking of what similar measures announced in the past have achieved, and/or why such measures failed to industrialize the economy to the extent

envisaged. Schemes such as 'backward area development', promotion of industrial estates, export processing zones, etc. were then the order of the day, and a number of such estates and zones strewn across the country lie defunct and unused, to which governments keen to industrialize their economies can profitably turn. But then, the underlying purpose of the current phase of 'development through industrialization' is neither development nor industrialization. What is worse in all of the above is state complicity and facilitation through the silencing of dissenting voices and crushing of people's movements; further, women participating in agitations to protect their land and livelihoods have been the targets of rape and sexual assaults similar to caste and religion-based violence.

The theme of macroeconomic management and social policies is an area that has been critically studied by feminists. Despite exhortations to the effect that macroeconomics and social policies need to be integrated, the tendency in the macroeconomic domain has been to emphasize price stabilization and reducing the role of the state, while at the same time *adding* social policies to address issues such as poverty and women's empowerment. The adding-on-social policy-approach by definition cannot transform macroeconomic policies; rather, a transformational approach would, ipso facto, imply that we re-think our macroeconomic policies and our approach to macroeconomics itself. The theme of gender budgeting is a good example but needs to be critically studied. As of now, what is practiced in India is a loose form of gender auditing that is touted as gender budgeting; this audit of programmes for their levels of financial support to women-friendly policies is expected to 'transform' macroeconomic management. But the making of the Budget itself is not examined from a gender perspective. The signal contribution of feminists and gender studies to macroeconomics is of questioning the assumptions on which economic policies are anchored; the methodologies that limit our understanding and approaches to economic problems; and the solutions that are uncritically offered. Nevertheless, the relegation of gender to the social, at one level, and the anxiety of feminist researchers including feminist economists to be seen as 'practically relevant' all the time, at another level, are examples of the continuing tensions that keep surfacing largely because macroeconomic policies have failed in their basic objectives but have had no qualms in transferring these failures to the 'social sector'— a euphemism for 'women's issues'. How feminists engage with such reductionism is a challenge waiting to be addressed.

Abha Sur (from Women's Studies at M.I.T., Boston) dwelt on the debates surrounding the nature of science and its historical role in the legitimization of social inequalities based on race and gender. She argued for the democratization of scientific institutions and communities for realizing the liberatory function of science by ensuring greater participation of women and minorities in science. She said the debate about the nature of science in India had been reinvigorated in recent years. We have, on the one hand, a view of science

imbued with the promise of progress and enlightenment and an assertion of science as a value neutral knowledge system essential for the emancipation of the subaltern; on the other hand, there are constructs of science as an essentially alien, violent, and hegemonic order implicated in, if not directly responsible for, not only the colonial subjugation of the Third World, but also for the continuing exploitation of the poor. The debate has taken a rather curious turn, where the irreconcilable differences in the two interpretations of science are seen by some as exemplars of the ideological differences between the opponents and proponents of *Hindutva*. This is not only factually incorrect, but is a rather dangerous road to travel as it inevitably forces one to either accept imperialism or side with the forces of fundamentalism. Instead, there is a need for a philosophy of science which is alert to the democratic potential of science but does not simultaneously bury its historical and continuing role in legitimizing racial, gender, and class/caste discrimination.

It is undeniable that one of the crucial functions of science has been the legitimization of inequitable social relations. Through much of the nineteenth century, European and American scientists, in particular biologists and anthropologists, directed their research toward finding essential biological differences between men and women, blacks and whites, and the rich and the poor. Phrenology, craniology, and measurements of almost all parts of the human anatomy were employed to establish biological bases for the inequities of the social order. The devastating impact of these gender and race theories cannot be overemphasized. The scientific legitimization of intellectual and developmental inferiority of women and blacks forever haunts the society and with each new scientific field- psychology, genetics, and endocrinology, for instance, the intellectual inferiority of women and non-whites is reexamined and reestablished. The advent of genetics and of psychological testing provided scientists with new tools to reinforce gender discrimination. Debates about whether or not girls can or should do mathematics continue with increasing sophistication in the academia to this date.

Unlike the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, where opposition to gender and racial discrimination in science came largely, though not exclusively, from non-scientists, there is increasing resistance to racist and sexist notions from within science today. Gender critiques of science have become more vigorous and sustained in the wake of the civil rights and feminist movements, where a number of women scientists began to look critically at their own disciplines. The inclusion of women in science has also raised awareness about gender discrimination in science and women scientists have become actively involved in analyzing and publicizing the different forms of gender and racial discrimination they encounter in scientific institutions. However, despite a growing body of gendered critiques of science, women scientists, by and large, continue to hold on to the notion that the content of science is value-neutral. Part of the reason lies in the erasure of

the history, sociology, and philosophy of science from the discipline of science. Recovery of the “social” in science is thus not merely an intellectual exercise in providing more accurate descriptions of science; rather it is necessary for the democratization of science itself.

Scientific knowledge is dependent upon prior earlier knowledges as well as upon the social conditions in which it is produced. One simply cannot disembodify scientific knowledge from the institutions, communities, and societies that produce it. Furthermore, the fact that science is socially located does not necessarily make it either true or false. Indeed, the authority of science derives in part from its robust explanatory and predictive power. As a creative form, not unlike art, literature and philosophy, science also functions as an ideology (scientism), providing society with world views, such as the mechanical view, the evolutionary view, and the probabilistic view. These views themselves are often just a projection upon nature of social norms of the time. Yet the norms are reinforced and quasi-legitimated through the mediation of science. Moreover, under different circumstances, depending upon whether the dogmatic tendency or the critical spirit takes the upper hand, science can either be stifling or liberating.

Finally, Abha Sur said it has to be emphasized that science does not create social inequality, rather its dominant role has been to reinforce the existing power relations of the society that nurtures it. Democratization of scientific institutions and communities is therefore essential for realizing the liberatory function of science. Indeed, it is for these reasons that we as feminists encourage and demand greater participation of women and minorities in science, even as we are aware that their participation will not necessarily remove the inequities of class and caste. For that to happen we need a socialist, Dalit, feminist movement — indeed a revolution!

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (from the Department of English, New York University) began her presentation with the observation that feminist literary criticism in India has not been able to have the kind of major, pioneering impact on the women’s movement that it had in the West — particularly on second wave feminism in the United States. Non-specialist large-circulation books like Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1968) had led the way, by exposing the misogyny that informed the central, male-authored texts that constitute the western literary tradition. That kind of impact was produced in India by a very different feminist document, the government-sponsored *Towards Equality* report. It is not that this kind of feminist contestation of hegemonic valorized images of women in our culture has been entirely absent in India. The supreme models of good femininity are to be found predominantly in Hindu religious myth and legend, and are reproduced and circulated in contemporary times via popular cinema and other media. There have been significant feminist interventions that have challenged, for instance, the ideology of good wifehood by highlighting subversive versions of the Sita figure in narratives from the ‘little tradition’;

and attempts have been made to seize different, more empowering images of militant goddesses and rebel women for feminism. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable reluctance even among secular progressives in India, including feminists, to be confrontational where religion is concerned.

The disciplinization of literary studies has followed varied trajectories in different contexts. The fact that disciplinary literary studies in India has for the most part focussed on canonical *British* literature, has required attention to two different but related issues: on the one hand, that of the language and nationality of the literature in question, and on the other, the institutionalisation and protocols of literary studies. The connections between the study of *English literature* and feminism in India are not far to seek, and they are not limited to the academy. Both in conjunction and conflict with the anti-colonial nationalist movement, representations of women in western literature were responsible for creating the model of the liberated female subject for the bourgeois Indian woman. The costs and limitations of the enterprise are only too apparent: a 'western' feminism that essentially promotes the individualism of the singular female subject, and access to which is mediated by an elitism of class and caste positions, is clearly limited and problematic.

The anomalous centrality of the academic study of English Literature in independent India has not, of course, gone unchallenged. In the 1980s, a flurry of conferences organized by English departments, and edited volumes arising from them, began to articulate questions about the relevance of English Studies; explore the histories of colonial education; recommend alternative texts, syllabi and pedagogical methods; identify the institutional constraints to change; or simply gripe — a phenomenon that might in hindsight be called the 'crisis in English Studies in India.' Furthermore, this moment was closely linked to a burgeoning feminist consciousness (and even an activist politics). The crisis in English Studies was not explicitly identified or acknowledged as a *feminist* challenge at the time — and it is true that many male participants would have remained outside that picture — but in retrospect the fact of the feminization of the discipline was not without political consequences. The connection was much more visible in the opposite direction — that is, women teachers of English, newly sensitive to the gendered aspects of literary production, began to locate the literary texts in the syllabus within the immediate 'local' context of classroom, institution, and society.

The response of the university system to the demands of students and teachers of English literature in colleges over the past two decades has been predictably slow in coming. The body of work to be allowed earliest entry, relatively unproblematically, was Indian writing in English, followed by Anglophone literatures from other parts of the world under the rubric of Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature, and finally Indian writing in English translation, each invariably in the form of a single optional paper. The piquant facts — or

contradictions — that follow from this model of literary studies in India are the following: one, that few of those who have been trained in English literature and continue in the profession of academics in India have actually published critical or scholarly work on British literature, unless it is from a specific ‘postcolonial’ perspective; and two, the majority of translations from the other Indian languages, and most of the critical and scholarly comparative work on *bhasa* literature have been produced, in English, by those who teach in *English literature* departments.

What those trained in literary studies bring to feminist scholarship is a theoretical understanding of the issue of representation, and skills in ‘reading’ a variety of texts. Their influence may be responsible to some extent for the perception of a cultural turn taken by theory in general, and by feminism in particular, in recent times. Feminist historians of South Asia, in particular, have shown keen interest in cultural studies and women’s writings (particularly women’s autobiographies). In the opposite direction, the reading of history as culture, and the law as text, has emboldened those trained in literary studies to cross into history and critical legal studies.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan cautioned against overestimating the influence of feminism on the disciplines: in literary studies in particular, and in the Indian university especially. Some room has been made for it but it remains the special interest of a constituency (‘women’, ‘feminists’). The pioneering years, roughly 1985 to 1995, as is generally the case, witnessed the greatest outpouring of publications in the field. Things have quietened down since then. But the interregnum is always a time for the consolidation of gains, of expansion, and the emergence of a new generation of scholars whose work is yet to come.

The paper by **Pratiksha Baxi** (from the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University) demonstrated that feminist understandings of law, be it through placing feminist theory within jurisprudence, through substantive areas of law or through specific campaigns authored by the women’s movements in India, have challenged the idea of legal centralism, a challenge that has been offered in different ways. First, the idea that state law itself is plural. Second, that non-state law offers a challenging context to understand multiple forms and techniques of gendered subjection. And third, that not only does state law intersect with non-state law, but state law also mimes non-state law. The attempt to bring diverse areas, forms and techniques of legality and illegality, (or state law and non state law) is to take seriously how feminist writings/women’s studies/women’s movement(s) have recognized multiple spheres of legal subjection, and thereby actually injected newness in the processes of producing knowledge about law and society in India.

There is a need to acknowledge the work that pre-existed the national law schools as well as to document how the creation of “women and law” as a separate domain of pedagogy

and research was domesticated. We need to document how the law schools “adjusted” to Women’s Studies by undercutting its radical politics and domesticating its interdisciplinary challenge to the entire canon of legal education to a “perspective”, rather than recognizing its epistemic challenge, thereby effecting the separation between the field “women and law” from feminist politics or feminist jurisprudence. The struggles of feminist academics, marginalised, (and even stigmatized) by being characterised as “soft” scholars must find documentation. Ironically, with the increasing “projectisation” of research in universities, gender has become an attractive resource for many academics, yet these academics also are able to pledge a distance from feminist politics. So much so that it is perfectly normal for women academics to ask: what is the relationship between gender justice and feminism? Today, the creation of ‘women and law’ centres in law schools cater to the crafting of women and law courses, gender sensitisation programmes for judges and judicial training.

The concept of law is complicated in feminist analyses and different conceptions of the law are at stake in feminist writings, without claiming to do justice to such a re-view. Feminists have explored the plurality of state law in different ways. They have looked at plurality in terms of different regimes of law and custom that create legal subjectivity, for example the impressive literature on personal law regimes. Feminists have also looked at the plurality of legal institutions or forms such as locating the place of gender in routine courts and family courts. Then, feminists have looked at the plurality of expert knowledges — especially the field of medical jurisprudence and practices of policing. Feminists have also paid attention to judicial language, although primarily through gender sensitization programmes of legal experts, especially judges. They have mobilized new measures of regulation through interpretations of constitutional law, in lieu of domestic legislation. Each of these deploys the notion of plurality to challenge the idea of a coherent, homogenous and singular technique of harnessing legal authority.

Yet plurality may often signal different and perhaps even contradictory meanings for the projects of emancipation or justice. The idea that state law is plural has been explored by looking at the different forms of legalities and illegalities that are constitutive of state law simultaneously. Hence, the fact that state law is plural is not only a listing of how law manifests itself at different sites, its heterogeneity or the lack of consistency within itself. Rather, feminist scholars detail the plurality of illegalities that sit beside legalities to constitute state law. State law is also plural to the extent it ceases to resemble itself in specific contexts. Plurality has also found exploration by directing attention to non-state law. Recent work on caste panchayats, *shari’a* courts or *nari adalats* poses a challenge to legal centralism by suggesting that we need to look at different sources of law, and different forms of subjection of women.

The richness of feminist scholarship on the concept of law cannot be separated from everyday political engagement with the law. If the critique of custodial rape began with state violence, today meanings of custodial rape span both the domestic and public context by including child sexual abuse as well as contexts of custodial rape during the dark times of mass scale conflict. The engagement with the law also has continually thrown up the question of feminist politics being over-determined by juridical categories, especially of appellate law. Many scholars have argued that if we demand for more laws for every aspect of women's subordination, we bestow legitimacy to the state, which denies, excludes, and silences women's voices routinely. The question is not about whether feminists choose to privilege law as a site of politics. Rather the question is what kinds of risks do feminists take when they bear the historic burden of having to engage with the law? It is not an exaggeration to say that we are constituted by a permanent state of emergency as suggested by the narratives from the North East, Kashmir, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh. We must all be compelled to listen to the voice of Binayak Sen. How does feminism find grammars of resistance against the terror of the state? Can we abandon the site of law in staking a claim to this grammar of resistance?

**PLENARY PANEL IV:
WOMEN AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN SOUTH ASIA**

The panel was introduced by Uma Chakravarti (feminist historian, and retired from the University of Delhi) in the light of the pioneering role played by feminists in simultaneously creating and politicizing the field of "South Asia". The first presentation by **Nighat Said Khan** (from ASR Foundation in Lahore, Pakistan) demonstrated the unique location of feminism in Pakistan in interrogating assumptions about Pakistan and its problems. She began by emphasizing how deeply the making of the Pakistani nation state has defined feminist agendas. Feminists from other parts of South Asia also need to be reminded that conditions in Pakistan did not allow for the emergence of women's studies within the formal university system, so that it was forced to develop from "outside". With the birth of Pakistan in 1947 citizenship was the issue for everyone, and the first decade was therefore preoccupied with rights under a new Constitution, finalized in 1956. Interestingly, women's rights were given special recognition at this time through women's double vote – one for the general constituency and one for seats reserved for women. Already in 1958 the military took over under General Ayub Khan, seeking to modernize Pakistan and open it up to capitalist development. In this context, changes were made in Islamic personal law by giving some rights to Pakistani women. With the coming of Z. A. Bhutto as the new President and then Prime Minister, there was some space for women since he was a liberal and progressive. However, he was also unable to withstand pressures of the Islamic parties

and it was during his regime that the 1973 Constitution reinforced Pakistan as an Islamic Republic and further that laws would be governed by the Quran and the Sunnah. As is well known, Bhutto was overthrown in 1977 by the military.

The period following 1977 under General Zia-ul-Haq has been seen as the fullest manifestation of a militaristic and Islamic regime and a turning point for Pakistan. This was the period when women became the focus of Islamisation resulting in resistance and confrontation from the women's movement. Along with fighting back from 1979 onwards, Pakistani feminists began reaching out to Indian feminists from this time. Feminists were the forerunners in the people-to-people movement between the two countries. The Pakistan women's movement was active on several fronts, including the peace movement, and the Sindh women's movement. Zia-ul-Haq was killed in 1988 and succeeded by Benazir Bhutto. The women's movement had a special if critical relationship with Benazir, given the seriousness of the targeting of women before her rule. That would also explain the sense of loss and tragedy that women's organizations experienced at the time of her recent assassination.

The subsequent history of the women's movement in Pakistan has been affected by the rise of NGOs. Women's studies has emerged from within the movement and as a reflection on it. Women's studies has never been understood simply as the study of women but rather as a development of the early slogan 'the personal is political', furthered by the Institute of Women's Studies at Lahore through their special residential courses. The last few years have seen a re-emergence of confrontation; the struggle continues despite the series of accusations that have been levelled against women's organizations and women's studies for the stands they have taken.

The presentation by **Suraiya Begum** (from Research Initiatives, Dhaka) looked into the lives of women from various marginalized communities in Bangladesh like the *Dalits* ('untouchables' e.g. Sweeper, *Rishi*, *Kawra*), *Bunos* (forest people), *Mundas* and nomads like *Bedes*. These communities suffer from acute deprivation and are constantly overlooked both by the government as well as civil society groups. Here, the women are doubly deprived both as women and also as members of their marginalised communities.

Among the sweeper community, Suraiya Begum asserted, the problem is not poverty but lack of respect from the larger community; which is also the main cause behind their poverty. According to the women of this community, excessive alcoholism among their men is one of the major factors for their poverty as well as their inferior status. The women from the nomadic *Bede* community suffer from illiteracy and low rates of immunization among their children. They are the main bread earners of the family but do not possess any decision-making power within the family structure. *Bede* women are also victimized by

other males as they visit different villages and towns in search of a livelihood. In the *Rishi* community, women are paid lower wages than men and are often subjected to sexual violence from 'higher' caste men. In another 'untouchable' community *Kawra*, women cannot participate in *Salish* (arbitration) in their community and have very few avenues for employment, as they are discriminated against.

Recently, some efforts are being made towards empowering women of these marginalized communities. A group of researchers from an organization 'Research Initiatives', Bangladesh, are working among these marginalized communities, using the methodologies of Participatory Action Research. While working in these communities it has become evident that women have moved ahead in forming research groups and are more regular in discussing different issues in group meetings. The group discussions give them a platform for self expression. On the other hand, men's groups were often irregular and did not sustain themselves over long periods of time. Since Participatory Action Research is fundamentally about the right to speak, women have found this kind of forum ideal for not only discussing their problems but as an outlet for taking collective action and forming mutual relationships. In this way, new social relationships are created, which in turn engender new knowledge. Coming from the discipline of geography, **Anoja Wickramasinghe** (Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka) began her presentation on how women's studies in South Asia, as in other parts of the world, made a revolution in academia, constructing a new knowledge paradigm, shifting and widening the horizons of conventional disciplines. The development of methods and instruments to gather and generate information in human laboratories, which are structured in patriarchal social systems, has been a challenge throughout. What are the features that differentiate feminist research from others; is it merely related to women's engagement with research about women or associated with feminist goals towards addressing women's issues? Most cases take the form of feminist inquiry where researchers acted in a flexible way to enable women to speak up. The reasons for adopting discussions, observations, recording narrations and ethnographies, and stimulatory tools like mapping social contexts and relations, resources, ranking etc. are multiple, and influenced by the local context, women's positions in society and the political settings within which women function. Flexibility as an essential element in feminist research has been questioned simply because it becomes difficult to validate and compare the results. This has made it difficult to execute feminist research in different places without testing the methodologies prior to their adoption.

Anoja Wickramasinghe asked: What are the areas demanding feminist involvement and how do we cross boundaries without being confined to the paradigm of 'women's studies'? Penetrating into the development mainstream globally, regionally and locally is essential, by creating space for negotiation. These circumstances point to the necessity for strategizing to accomplish broader interests. One possible strategy — that proved successful

at global forums such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, where women were involved as 'a major group' — is advocacy that could be practiced at regional, national and local levels. South Asia is rich in human capacities, knowledge and experiences in feminist research and activism, and in building alliances based on feminist research and women's studies across political boundaries.

Methodological expansion is also needed to feminize measures of scientific inquiry. Past experiences working in the fields of ecology and ecological degradation are quite strong in the sense that feminist principles on equity, justice and rights are opening new pathways to broaden development horizons. Feminist indicators assessing the impacts of development projects, programmes, and also tools like 'auditing' and 'budgeting' could serve our goals. Assessment of micro-irrigation systems, from sprinklers to drip irrigation systems combining scientific and feminist indicators enabled a look into neglected areas and restructuring logical frameworks. A challenge here is to find the right entry points to work out a feminist agenda, without struggling to see a full transformation at once. A 'process approach' to projects and programmes, where adjustments are made while rolling, would be a suitable strategy for the feminization of development. Crossing conventional boundaries also requires well prepared frameworks to deal with the ever expanding areas of interest and emerging situations like war, disasters, disease, growing threats to food security, economic advancement, health etc. Local policies and strategies for realizing global agendas on climate change, industrial development, pollution and sustainable development suffer from lack of response to women's issues. These are dominated by the scientific community whose concern for the grassroots seems inadequate. It is important that solid feminist frameworks are introduced to deal with emerging challenges.

In her paper, **Uma Chakravarti** asked what forms of knowledge production Indian feminism has taken. She recovered for feminist consideration one of the most neglected genres, not just in the field of knowledge production, but in general: the fact-finding report. Fact-finding reports have been published in post-Independence India mainly by democratic, feminist and left-leaning groups, are poorly distributed and not taken seriously by academia. Analyzing reports mainly by all-women fact-finding teams to Kashmir and the Northeast as a feminist democratic response to acts of aggression by the state against movements for autonomy, she offered insights from them as constituting serious advances in our understanding of militarised conflict in the two regions. As of now these represent the only feminist analyses of the way that cartographic nationalism and mainstream knowledge production have provided consent to repressive state actions in certain areas within the boundaries of the post-colonial nation state of India.

She went on to document even more elusive forms of protest and stressed the need to see them as producing knowledge, especially in relation to the critique of the nation-state.

These included the Manipuri women stripping in front of the army headquarters in response to the rape and murder of Manorama, read inventively alongside cultural protest in the form of Kanhaiyalal's Pebet and Savitri Heisnam's portrayal of Draupadi in it, and an analysis of the political thought of Mridula Sarabhai, a figure long-neglected in knowledge production by historians. This history includes repeated prison terms for insisting upon democratic governance and an adherence to a rule of law in Kashmir, a commitment which was cast as anti-national by those in power who had been erstwhile colleagues in the national movement. Because of the overwhelming power of the rhetoric of nationalism, even feminists do not have access to the histories of resistance forcefully articulated by a woman like Mridula Sarabhai, critiquing the repressive practices of the early post colonial nation- state.

Uma Chakravarti strongly rearticulated the early feminist call to look for sources of knowledge in forms and areas traditionally neglected by institutionalized academia and canonized gate-keeping and argued for an analysis of marginalized sources such as fact finding reports, pamphlets, protest actions, and other manifestations of democratic resistance groups by subjecting such sources to both rigour and inventive feminist nuance.

PLENARY PANEL V: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Introducing this plenary, **Nivedita Menon** (from the Department of political science, University of Delhi) flagged off two trends that have unfolded over the 1990s to the present in India in the kinds of knowledges produced about "women". One trend, arising from the politics of sexuality, caste and disability, insistently poses a question mark over the stability of this identity, while the second trend, arising from the governmentalizing drive of the state, has attached gender to development, so that gender is stabilized and looped right back to become a synonym for women – that is, "women" as they are located in patriarchal society. Both trends offer serious challenges to the women's movement in India; the one threatening to dissolve, the other to domesticate, the subject of its politics.

There are three strands in the first trend. Queer politics, the politics of sexuality, throws into disarray the certainty of recognizably gender-coded bodies, the male-female bipolarity, the naturalizing of heterosexual desire. Politics of caste identities reveals that Woman is not simply an already existing category that the women's movement mobilizes for its politics. Rather, there are bodies out there that respond differently to different sorts of political calls. The debate around reservations for women in Parliament reveals this most clearly, as the opposition comes, not only from patriarchal forces, but also from Dalit and OBC women making the claim that when it comes to the covering identity of Woman, one size does not fit all. The third strand of disability politics calls into question some of the key ideas of

feminist theory — that of the woman's body as sexualized by the male gaze and notions of autonomy that feminist politics values so dearly.

Expressing deep concern over the co-option of the term 'gender' by the state and tagging it to 'development', Menon argued that the term has been domesticated and has become a synonym for "women"- women as they already are in patriarchal society. In feminist vocabulary, the term "gender" has a deeply destabilizing potential, but relocated within the vocabulary of "governance", it acquires quite another meaning. The concept of governance is meant to take us away from the old model of "government" as something carried on by the state, and to make "civil society organizations" (which have come to be understood as NGOs) responsible for basic necessities such as health, education and water. In keeping with the objectives of "governance", "engendering" development is about using "women" to regulate development. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (NPEW 2000) states as one of its objectives, "Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process." Mainstreaming gender or adding a "gender component" to development programmes planned within this agenda cannot possibly be a feminist goal. Essentially, this means using women's specific skills and experience produced by their location within patriarchal society (that is, precisely by the sexual division of labour), to make development programmes successful. Making gender a component of development depoliticises feminist critique, both of patriarchy as well as of development and of corporate globalization. Feminism is harmlessly transformed into "women's empowerment", an ally of the project of governance. It has been widely noted by NGO activists that government officials make it clear that they prefer the word "*stri sashaktikaran*" (women's empowerment) to "*narivad*" (feminism).

One aspect of this is seen in the response of the Indian government to steeply declining female sex ratios all over the country. Its concern arises from the governmentalizing drive to stabilize and control population in the interests of "development." While one aspect of "population control" is control of numbers, an equally important aspect is demographic stability of the population. The focus of concern in either case is not women, our bodies and our lives, but Woman as key to the stability and reproduction of society and the patriarchal family. The real issue is not the actual lives of women and girls but the embarrassing figures, since they are unbecoming of an "emerging global power". The problem for feminist politics is not "skewed sex ratios"— that is a problem for states with populations to manage. The feminist issue in the selective abortion of female foetuses is that it reflects the fundamental devaluing of women, which will have to be tackled in other ways, through consistent feminist politics. Such a politics would have to resist the domestication of gender through state policy, and engage seriously with the risks and challenges offered by the strategy of destabilizing the category of Woman. Conversely, it has been noted often enough that government programmes can produce new solidarities among women drawn into

them, and radicalize women hitherto unexposed to public activity. The point is that the radical moment is the one in which instability of given identities is generated, and such moments are the ones feminism should seize upon, even when the threat is to the very subject of its politics.

The presentation by **Ponni Arasu** (with the Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore) revolved around how a queer perspective could take forward feminist debates. When one attempts to identify a key area where a queer perspective could critique and advance ongoing debates in our context, marriage and family come in as possible institutions. There are multiple reasons for this. The first is the subjective position of living as a queer person. The inherent challenge posed to structures of the hetero-normative family is a central aspect. The absolutely essential need for support structures is another. This has led many to live lives where friendships, lovers and political camaraderie are taken much more seriously. The categories, of course, are not separate entities but intermingled. It is in these structures that we often seek support.

Another reason is the eternal dilemma of feminist lives/work. The brutality of many of the structures we work with often stops us from critical analysis of them and urges us to take on positions of blanket disapproval and emergency 'interventions'. Third, our critique of any institution, marriage, law, medicine needs to be updated, opened up to include our critical interrogation of gender and sexuality, initiated by the queer movement and research. This leads to several contradictions – between everyday activism and broader theoretical frameworks, blurring the lines between the normative and the non-normative, between direct opposition to the institution of marriage and the necessity of looking at systems of intimacy carefully. Some critiques of marriage as an institution, such as non-normative heterosexual marriage, pose a limited challenge in so far as the institution of marriage itself and its role in designing intimacy remains in place. It becomes necessary to observe how desire, intimacy, gender and sexuality are being structured. Some belittling of the institution itself may not be out of place, which can be gained from the experience of women pavement dwellers for instance, whose family lives may be beyond our comprehension. Marriage is a rather fragile system from the perspective of its practice, yet legally and imaginatively powerful. While there might be the concept of marital rape and opposition to all forms of sexual violence, there is a lack of language for the sexual, and of how to politicize intimacy. Simple critiques must therefore acknowledge the restricted imagination of intimacy and security, and the huge role occupied by issues of property ownership, parenthood and so on. In the lives of the marginalized all these questions take on a heightened urgency. The complexity of the normative/non-normative opposition can be made visible by distinguishing between a critique of oppression and the problematising of oppression.

How can so-called 'alternative sexualities' destabilize the imagination of the norm? In part by challenging notions of intimacy and the centrality of romantic relationships. For feminists this means looking more critically at whether our politics is reflected in our intimate spheres and making feminist engagements part of the interrogation of normative structures of desire, intimacy and support. Feminism may be more adept at bringing in a culture of care, nurture and companionship as well as comfort, contributing to the very essence of social change. The challenge then may be to embrace the reality and pleasure of chaos and vibrancy while using these for the productive processes of social change.

Anita Ghai (from the Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College, Delhi) dwelt on the challenges before Women's Studies from the vantage point of disability. Social movements are well recognized as characteristic phenomena of the contemporary era, yet neither social movement analysts in general nor feminist scholars in particular have paid serious attention to the disability movement, and drawing the two movements together remains a crucial issue. The last 30 years have seen disabled people organising themselves across impairment categories to demand changes to social structures. Instrumental has been the fight to redefine disability as a form of oppression, not a biological medical condition. The commonality between disability and the women's movement has been the assertion that both disability and gender are social constructs predicated upon physical characteristics. Hence, both the disability movement and the women's movement have argued that society should be changed in order to include all its citizens irrespective of their biology.

Notwithstanding the similarities, disabled people often confront a normative culture both in India and the world over that carries existential and aesthetic anxieties about difference which gets constructed more as a deficit and a lack. They have thus experienced acute marginalisation, discrimination and stigmatisation. As is always the case, disability is much harder for women, as the internalisations that disabled women carry in such a cultural milieu make disability a personal tragedy to be borne alone.

It is true though that disabled women, in general, do not deal with the same oppressions that non-disabled women do primarily because disabled women are not seen as women in an able-bodied society. However, this confinement is actually indicative of a negative rendering of their lives, as the usual roles such as marriage and motherhood are out of bounds for them. A body that does not measure up to societal norms becomes precariously unbalanced. A disabled woman faces dual oppressions, one on the level of 'disability', the other on the level of 'gender'. Many feminist thinkers in the field of disability have objected to this articulation of a double disadvantage, as such writings, they believe, do not empower. While we have to find a way of making our experiences visible by sharing with non-disabled people, both men and women, we do not have to do it in a way which undermines our wish to assert our self worth. An 'additive' framework in which the attempt is to understand

separate oppressions and then add them back together as if that would explain the whole experience marks this kind of thinking. An implicit assumption of this model is that gender, disability, impairment, and sex are binaries. As a result, disabled women are theorized about by adding the two “biological foundations” of sex and impairment together to conclude that disabled women are oppressed along the twin axes of gender and disability.

Another challenge is that disability within Women’s Studies is used almost synonymously with the identity of being a ‘woman’ such that its specific character does not receive its due and is lost in the concern for women’s rights in general. It is not uncommon to hear that “Being a woman is the biggest form of disability” or “We are all disabled” or “Disability is like belonging to the lowest caste possible”. There are several ways of understanding these analogies. One option is to look at the socio-cultural meanings ascribed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies. Both the female and the disabled body are excluded from full participation in public and economic spheres; both are conceived in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural superiority. Such comparisons can be both emancipatory and oppressive. If the objective of invoking such comparisons is to understand different people’s lived experience and grasp their authenticity, the potential is immense. However, if the underlying realities of the categories serve only at a metaphorical level, it can lead to a total erasure of the category which is being invoked.

Anita Ghai pointed out further challenges in the contested meaning of ‘care’. It is possible to identify many different approaches to care. Nowhere is this difference clearer than in the contrasting ways in which caring is described by feminist scholars and disability activists. This difference is, in part, one of emphasis. Generally, for feminist scholars, the emphasis is on the giver of care (usually female); whilst in Disability Studies, the recipient of care (male or female) is the locus of interest. Given the political agenda and standpoint of these two social movements, the contrast in focus is understandable.

Abortion is a central issue for both the disability movement and feminism. Disabled people have been highly critical of prenatal screening and selective abortion, seeing them as a new strategy of eugenics. Non-disabled feminists however, have largely welcomed prenatal testing, seeing it as another means through which women can gain control over their own reproduction. There seems then to be a conflict between this feminist perspective on abortion, and a disability rights perspective. If prenatal screening is to be made available, it must be accompanied by efforts to re-educate the public, including prospective parents, about disabled people’s lives. It has to be coupled with efforts to improve financial and other support systems for disabled people and their families. She said that to her mind, these dangers need to be acknowledged and resolved.

Further, the challenge is to redefine Women’s Studies departments and curricula to include disability issues. It would be helpful to understand the discourses of ‘critical disability

studies' to deconstruct and transform oppressive ideological and professional practices experienced by disabled people. Perhaps, it would also help to problematise 'feminist' writings within disability that prioritise subjective experience over more theoretical explanations of disablement. Though experience is the starting point for the production of feminist knowledge, experience alone cannot help in understanding the processes and practices that have to be seen as constituent parts of feminist epistemologies or knowledge frameworks. To repeat and describe what women might have to say, while important, can lead to individualisation and fragmentation instead of analysis. Feminism has to go beyond experiential level.

Susie Tharu (recently retired from the Central Institute for the Study of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad) characterized the present moment as one in which feminist politics is caught in a double-edged predicament. On the one hand is the imperative to *be applied*, to recommend policy to the state and devise development programmes for NGOs, to participate in national life in the governmental mode. For nearly two decades, there has been some legislative or institutional response to almost every issue raised in the women's movement. So, there is a plethora of ameliorative gestures forthcoming from the economy (self help, micro finance, loans for entrepreneurs), the government (policies, laws, special programmes) and NGOs (gender desks are now a compulsory feature), the Law (ready to defend the rights of women against orthodoxies, especially minority orthodoxies) and the media, keen to promote the gender question and indeed inciting feminists to do so ourselves. What this amounts to is a rapid translation system that shuttles between women's grievances and the "feasible or practical" solutions proposed for each one of them, resulting in the translation of all issues into injuries that can be redressed by the state, with important implications. When *the state* provides redress in this way, or even when an issue is configured for redress in this way, political questions — which are about the arrangements of the state/republic — are translated into social ones, the social being a sphere that the government secures or protects administratively.

On the other hand is the disruption and even dissipation of the subject of feminism as a result of what this panel designates as "new challenges." The concept of the private and the public — and consequently of the singularity of the family as an institution, or religion as outside the sphere of politics — notions of sovereignty, citizenship, rights, minority, even the idea of "speech" in speaking for oneself has been successfully put into question by feminist critique. And when we use these concepts, or relate to them, we do so with a certain skepticism, under erasure, as it were. Feminisms that have not participated in these critiques are, of course, far more comfortable with the sign of the global with which these concepts have appeared in recent times — as say in global human rights or the rights of Afghani women, or the managerial modes in which progress and efficiency are to be achieved if we are to accept the advice of "global agencies". There are difficulties we will

necessarily encounter with the underlying assumptions in the default modes of arranging these “new” issues as challenges for feminism, centering feminism and suggesting a certain equivalence as also in: new social movements, identity politics, exclusion, dislocation, intersectionality; or even an already known phenomenon: caste, class, sexuality...a position, standpoint and so on. These issues are not of the same form or the same order, they are not internally coherent, and crosshatching groups may have opposed responses to many issues.

In the contexts of personal laws and domestic violence, a strong voice has been of those who have critiqued the rights framework, the biases built into secular law with its assumptions of uniformity. Yet in relation, say to violence against Dalits, some of the very same people have worked with civil liberties orientations to insist that the state legally recognize the violence as violence, without dissipating the question in compensations or other compromises. One of feminism’s main contributions has been the critique of the family. Yet this critique has not been able to wrestle with the desire for the everydayness of conjugality or parenthood and other intimate relations. Let alone the fact that in a non-welfare state like India today, the family makes for economic viability and the most recent findings from a Kerala enjoying the benefits of its successful population control programme: social security for the young and the old alike. Across classes and castes, people with large families were more economically and emotionally secure. And yet again, it is in the realm of consumption — of food, alcohol, medicine, privatized education, banking loans and savings that Dalit women’s interests have been organized.

If the passage in that moment was *from* feminism towards other issues, in the contemporary moment — and the history of the debates over women’s reservation in parliament are an index of this — the passages today are from the caste issue *towards* the women’s question. The shift that has been made, in increasingly nuanced battles, from reservations without recognition of other differences, to reservations in which the other differences will be battled out on party grounds, may be dismissed as a way of undercutting the radical thrust of the initial proposals. But it is also a way in which women’s representation and women’s issues may become central in a new way.

We are today in the grip of important historical and political problems of negotiating a democratic polity amidst emerging claims and interests, on local ground and in contemporary times. What is more, caste movements are central, and perhaps paradigmatic, in this new politics. Might this moment open up ways of reconstituting the political edge of feminism? Does such a politics head the caste/ gender conundrum in another direction?

SUB-THEME - 1 ISSUES OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

(Coordinators: M. Indira, University of Mysore and Sandeep Joshi,
M.P. Institute of Social Science Research, Ujjain)

With Ester Boserup's work on women's role in economic development constituting a significant landmark, numerous researchers have been attempting to understand the impact of developmental policies on women. This has led to changes in the policies addressing women's concerns. Different approaches from welfare to empowerment have been the subject of debate in the Indian context. The main focus of the sub-theme on *Gender and Development* has been on understanding the different approaches to gender and development, the impact of globalization and liberalization policies on women, and a critical examination of policies adopted to address women's concerns and engender the development process based on grassroots realities.

The overwhelming response to this sub-theme was evident from the number of abstracts received. Around 75 abstracts were received from various parts of India and also from the U.K., Bangladesh, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. After a rigorous exercise of scrutinizing them, 57 abstracts were finally included in the abstract book.

In accordance with the general practice at the IAWS, an attempt was made to give opportunity to all those whose abstracts had been accepted. In an effort to accommodate the large number of presenters, two kinds of sessions were organized – one in which presenters were given a short time to present their papers and a discussion session, in which papers were discussed. 30 papers were slated in the Presentation Session (10 papers in one session), whereas 21 papers were included in the Discussion Sessions (2 sessions). Presentation Sessions were chaired by Padmini Swaminathan, Sumi Krishna and C.P. Sujaya, while Sailaja Nandini, Padmavathi, Shaila D'Souza, Ratna Kumari, Shiv Sidh, Nirmala J. and Dhulasi B. Varadarajan were the rapporteurs in the different sessions of the sub-theme.

Papers were grouped in the following three categories: i) Approaches to Development and Gender; (ii) Globalisation, Marginalisation, and Environmental Issues; and (iii) Women-centred Policies and Programmes. The report of this sub-theme follows the above structure.

Approaches to Development and Gender

The papers addressing approaches to gender and development questioned existing policies, which are made without having a clear understanding of the concepts of gender and empowerment. Due to this, though the approaches may be aimed at engendering development, outcomes are not at desired levels. Policy makers are unaware of the dynamics of the role played by women in the survival strategies of the households (Nirmala Banerjee). There appears to be a cognitive blackout in development thinking which ignores the concerns of *dalit* women (Trivedi). Development thinking is ignorant of the structural political perspectives. The challenge of analyzing the feminization of hunger from a structural, political perspective against conventional approaches by linking theoretical issues with empirical studies was discussed (Suranjita Ray). The influence of education on health and fertility decisions of poor women was examined to understand the approach of providing universal education as a tool to empower women (Claire et. al). In the wake of India endorsing Millenium Development Goals, a critical examination of these goals from a gender perspective was attempted to shown how they betray the philosophy of the women's movement. Ensuring reproductive rights as an approach to empower women was examined (Madhu Singh). Gender budgeting, which has recently captured the attention of planners to ensure equality in the allocation of resources was critically examined based on certain data and it was observed that there is a large gap between policy and the implementation (Ratna Kumari).

Globalisation, Marginalisation, and Environmental Issues

The papers under this session addressed the issues relating to the gendered impact of globalization in its various forms. Under the globalised regime, SEZs are promoted, which is resulting in major displacement. However, there are very few studies which look into the gendered impact of these displacements. The paper on the gendered impact of displacement showed that displacement affects women more adversely (Panchali Ray). Another direct affect of globalization is increased Foreign Direct Investment. But the R&R policies of the large industrial corporates are gender-blind (Urmi Mala Das & Amrita Patel). The paradox of agricultural transformation during the post-economic reforms period and women's shifting identities in the context of Kerala was analysed (Asha Gangadharan and Clare Madge). An analysis of the gendered impact of the growth of tourism, construction and mining industries under globalization has shown the gender-blind path of development in the context of Goa, which is a major tourist destination (Shaila Desouza). Critical issues relating to the rural livelihoods of poor in the context of globalization in India (Sagari and Nitya) and Bangladesh (Fouzia Mannan) were discussed. There were presentations which examined the invisibility

of women's work, the conditions of women workers and girl children in the unorganized sector (Geethika, Avantika Shukla). Quantitative measures of gender-specific issues were attempted in the form of the measurement of women's unpaid work (Shiv N. Sidh), gender-specific development indices focusing on *dalit* women (Mahamallik and Panth) and regional disparities in gender development (Velusamy) were presented. There was an analysis on the gender-blind approaches adopted for Tsunami relief (Dhulasi).

Women-Centred Policies and Programmes

Papers specifically dealing with the gender dimension of policies and programmes discussed theoretical issues as well as grassroots realities. One of the ways to assess the gender concern of government policies is through the analysis of five year plans to see how it is reflected in development approaches espoused in major policy and planning documents. A detailed analysis of the various programmes meant for women's empowerment under various plans was done (Padmavathi). The manner in which the whole issue of social reproduction has been addressed by the Indian state, in the post-independence economic debates and policies, was traced empirically. In doing so, it was also analysed as to how women, especially the poor, have been located in the articulations between a global economic discourse and state institutions (Sadhana Arya). Two papers specifically dealt with gender and health. The gender-sensitive claims with regard to the health sector were scrutinized in Orissa. Debating the issue at length the concluded that the state's approach towards the health sector is largely in tune with the dominant cultural values and patriarchal ideology (Madhumita Biswal). Another paper on health dealt with the NRHM and was based on a study conducted in a village of Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. Examining the impact of the project on rural poor women, the study found a wide gap between the policy and implementation at the grassroots level (Jyothi Rani). The contribution of women in the farm sector is significant and they have all the rights to have their share. Watershed development programmes can be very important and crucial for better livelihood for farm women (Nirmala).

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments are considered revolutionary steps insofar as political empowerment of women is concerned. Three papers took stock of the various dimensions and impact of the constitutional amendments on women. How far the reservation policy has enhanced women's participation and where the gaps in making active and effective female participation exist, were examined thoroughly (Sailaja Nandini). Women who remain otherwise marginalized cannot enjoy real power merely by the enactment of an Act. Women's education, capacity-building programmes and above all a liberal social view must be given more prominence in order to ensure their real participation in the overall process of development (Nalini Rewadikar). Strong linkages between the panchayats and women's self-help groups have opened new doors for women towards their economic empowerment

as well as their participation in the decision-making process with regard to raising resources and their distribution i.e. income, investment and expenditure at all levels (Seema Salgaonkar). During the discussions, it clearly emerged that the status of women is context-specific. This is also true for women in the panchayats. However, it was felt that the condition of women remains deplorable and a lot of effort is needed in order to enable them to be heard. Discussions took place around the issues raised to identify the necessary steps to incorporate such concerns in the overall development process. The group came to the consensus that the present development approach, though sensitive to gender concerns, is not successful in addressing the issues emerging out of the changing national and international scenario. The group urged for the inclusion of research findings in policy making. The following suggestions came up:

More area-specific studies with a broader base and coverage are needed to understand the impact of development policies. Gender-specific databases should be developed at local levels for effective planning. Other disciplines should be encouraged to generate knowledge about the impact of development policies on women. Community-based participatory research should be made mandatory for all the faculties in Universities to connect to those women who have not been reached. In view of the diverse socio-economic and environmental conditions in which women live, there is a need for greater flexibility in the implementation of developmental programmes to make them more effective and context-specific.

SUB-THEME - 2**FEMINISM AND KNOWLEDGES OF VIOLENCE:
THEORIES AND METHODS**

(Coordinators: A. Suneetha, Vasudha Nagaraj and K. C. Bindu,
Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad)

Theme-note

Feminist politics has struggled over the last three decades to make visible an entire range of social practices that are inimical to women and brought them under the broad rubric of 'violence'. By foregrounding women's rights as citizens, initiatives concerning violence against women have brought civil society, communities and families along with the state as responsible actors into the debate. Over this period, substantial evidence about forms of violence and the inadequacies of the state agencies in dealing with such violence has been collected. Prevalence studies/surveys about various forms of violence and behavioural or criminological studies have been conducted, largely by social scientists and epidemiologists. Case studies, experiential narratives, analysis of judicial pronouncements, records and procedures of public institutions have also been used to understand the issue.

This sub-theme had been an invitation to contribute to and reflect on our current understanding on violence against women. What have been the ways in which we have demonstrated violations of women's rights? What is involved in naming specific social practices and actions as violence against women, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, caste atrocity, and so on? How has violence been linked to other agendas such as development? How have the women's movement and feminism contributed to our understanding of the issues involved?

We were particularly interested in locating "violence against women" within the contexts of lived social relations and in different social situations. This would range from the contexts of nation, community, caste, development and culture to those of women's own investments in families and communities; places of work; educational institutions; "public" spaces and so on. How has the law functioned for women? To what extent has the law promoted the individual woman as the seeker of justice?

Addressing the issue of methodologies appeared equally crucial at this juncture. The methods of experiential narratives, judgements and institutional records pose their own challenges. There are many levels and processes of mediation from experiences of violence, accounts of such violence, the production of institutional records, the rewriting of women's complaints into the codes of law, and the functioning of a range of institutions themselves – whether sexual harassment committees, caste panchayats, police stations, or courts. Judgements, therefore, are an outcome of several mediations which may not be evident.

In this sub-theme, such papers were invited that tried to reflect on questions of violence on women: a) regarding the disciplines in which they appear such as medicine, social work and law; b) regarding methods that are used such as experiential narratives, case-studies, discourse analysis; and c) approaches and categories such as victim, agency/resistance; d) accounts of different institutional efforts to combat violence.

Organization of the sessions

The sub theme was organized into five sessions and two panels. In the first session on 'Witnessing violence', there were two papers, one by Pushpesh Kumar titled "Sanma Told Me: Biographical Narratives of Gendered Violence", based on the narrative of a tribal woman, the second by Madhumeeta Sinha "Witness to Violence: Documentary Campaigns in the Women's Movement". In the session on Gender and Public Spaces, there were two papers, one by B.N.Usha and Indu Subhramaniam of Hengasara Hakkina Sangha on "Sexual Harassment: Understanding Politics of Gender and Identities" and the other by Namratha Mogaral on "Gender and Meaning in the Public Space Such as Places of Learning and Work Today". The day's proceedings ended with panel presentations by Garima Mishra on "Violence Against Women and the Search of Selfhood" in Shashi Deshpande's novels and Shailaja Menon's "Genocidal Conspiracy: Gujarat 2002".

The second day had three sessions and one panel. The first on Citizenship and Violence had two presentations. One, on "Revolutionary Violence and Feminist Critique: Some Reflections" by Srila Roy, and the second on "Minority Women Negotiating Citizenship" by Deepa Dhanraj, K. Lalita and Diia Rajan. The second session *Women as Subjects in Public Health Research*, had one presentation by Lakshmikutty with the same title. The third session on Feminism, Domestic Violence, Public Institutions had two presentations. One by Veena Gowda on "Adjudicating Women's Cases" and the second by Madhu and Sunira of Jagori on "Feminist Counselling as Action". In the panel there were three presentations on "Mapping the Space of Marital Choice in a Hindu Family" by Nandita Dhawan, on "Sexual Harassment: An Obstacle For Women's Development" by P.Neeraja and on "Women in Punishment Systems: An Aspect Of Feminist Criminology" by Mamta Kumari.

Issue for further discussion

In this report we will highlight the main issues that were flagged in the discussions.

The first set of issues that came up for discussion are around the issue of the representation of violence - in varied domains such as ethnographic research, documentary film, UN report as well as the Indian media. What kinds of problems arise when an ethnographer uses universal categories to analyze a tribal women's experience located in specific community rationality, and names it as violence. Examining the documentary films, a popular medium for the women's movement for building campaigns around violence against women, it was discussed how this realist medium produces its own set of mediations which frames the discussion of violence against women. UN reports such as the UNICEF on the Status of Women produced in the context of international public health research, collate data of various local regions to create universal indicators to measure the status of women, erasing the effects of constitutive contexts such as culture, the specificities of the region and the local medical practices. In this kind of research, the responsibility of reducing inequality/discrimination/violence gets laid at the door of the family and the community, leaving the state and its policies.

The second set of issues was around the need to complicate the understanding of violence with the questions being asked by dalit and other minority politics. For instance, the workplace, it was argued, should be not only seen as a sexed one but also as charged with questions of class, caste, community, region and their associations. The often decried difficulties in the working of a sexual harassment committee should be understood in this context of tensions. For feminist politics another crucial issue in this context is: the sexualization of women's bodies in the workplace often arising solely in the register of a sexual harassment complaint.

The third set of issues raised the pertinent question of how we read Muslim women's engagements with the law, administration, bureaucracy and the community in post-riots Gujarat? How do we see the effects produced by the legal actions initiated by Muslim women where the state was the main perpetrator of violence? What are the tropes of female subjectivity produced in the discourse of the judgments and proceedings of these severely contested trials? Is agency the most viable conceptual tool to analyze Muslim women's everyday negotiations in this new set of circumstances? Should Muslim women's actions be read as in modern secular frameworks, or should they be read in the context of debates in Islamic feminisms?

The last set of issues focused on the questions of female subjectivity and agency that arise in the context of women's engagement with institutions. Feminist practitioners in

counselling and law are confronted with the recurrent scenario of women compromising and withdrawing complaints, returning to violent families/relationships, having unreasonable demands from the law. In making these institutions work for women, are we also reaffirming linear notions of victimhood? Considering the layered mediations required in appealing to the Law, how do we understand the legal decisions that provide copious amounts of data on violence against women?

The sub-theme thus raised a range of questions around taken for granted aspects of women and violence.

SUB-THEME - 3**RETHINKING FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES IN CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH**

(Co-ordinators: Dr. S. Anandhi, Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai and Dr. Meera Velayudhan, Senior Analyst, Centre For Environment & Social Concerns, Ahmedabad)

Introduction

A. Issues of this Sub-theme: In the context of the uneven reflection in women's studies on issues of feminist methodologies and related research issues, this sub-theme sought papers that would explore some of the following issues:

- i) How and why certain research methods have come to be privileged over others by feminists researching women's lives and what values these add to feminist theorising;
- ii) How research methods like participatory research, participatory rural appraisals etc. have been able to modify these techniques to suit their needs and what are the advantages and disadvantages of using these new research techniques in doing gender studies;
- iii) How and in what ways feminist researchers have been able to overcome the conventional quantitative and qualitative divide and how have perspectives evolved as regards the integration of both methods in feminist research strategies.

Besides reworking research methodologies, feminists have also come up with new concepts and perspectives such as 'empowerment', 'care economy' etc. that have been widely used across disciplines. It would be relevant to critically engage with these concepts to understand how and why these have been useful in understanding gender relations and social structures. Furthermore, given the varying and diverse interpretation of what feminist research is, especially in the context of criticism against feminist research for its class-caste exclusions, hetero-sexism and ethnocentrism, it would be significant to explore whether there could be a 'feminist standpoint epistemology' and whether feminist research could claim to speak for all women or represent their experiences.

B. The Process

A conscious effort was made to (1) elicit papers from diverse academic disciplines, (2) to reach out to women who had not published or were students and (3) keep in regular touch with paper writers so that they focus on methodologies in their papers. Fifteen papers were selected and other paper writers presented their findings during the open discussions. At the conference, the sub-theme received tremendous response, drawing a packed audience and leading to intense discussions. One special session was added to enable students and researchers from the University of Lucknow (who had not sent in their abstracts) to nonetheless present papers. The session was chaired by Dr. Kumud Sharma. Within the time available, six papers were presented although many more came forward enthusiastically to present papers.

Emerging Dialogue on Methods

A key point that emerged in the discussion was the limitation in theory itself for dealing with diversities and subalternity. Feminist theories and methods should generate knowledge from the margins. How caste and class constitute gender or gender in turn informs caste and class and how all these sources of identity interact with each other assumed significance in social science models. To capture such nuances, there is a need to find a balance between qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly since identities are porous. This issue came up in the paper presentation by Karin Kapadia. In this context, there is a need to study how spaces are gendered, looking at every day power relations, between men and women of different castes/ communities.

The interaction of feminist methodology with a parent discipline such as anthropology enables the capturing not only of gender differences but how such a difference intersects with caste, class and religion, how space is productive of such interactions and how each of these are mutually constituted. It is space that maps social structure, so that the production of caste through spatial and everyday politics needs attention. Feminist geography needs to engage with these categories: especially with spaces of worship, looking not just at the community but also at neighbourhoods, the sharply divided spaces in terms of family, caste, class and religion. Spatial mapping through clothing is also important. While there is a large literature on Muslim women veiling, very little exists on forms of clothing of other communities. New forms of seclusion (veiling) have not received adequate attention. While it is known that family and community defines spaces of women, their attire and behaviour, dramatic changes can be seen in the behaviour of women within public spaces as these are defined in kinship terms. These methodological and disciplinary challenges emerged in Janaki Abraham's presentation on "Studying Space and Gender in a small town in Rajasthan."

While undertaking research in urban areas where interviewing may appear a little easier, the problem is to capture, in the research, changing relationships and the fluidity of identities. For women facing different forms of sexual exploitation (eg. bar women in Mumbai), issues of status and respect accorded may be more than for sex workers, given the different position of men and the male gaze in both. The notion of exploitation itself is shaped by one's position in society. There has been a shift in terms of what distinguishes sex work exploitation from other forms, in notions of the commodification of women, and questions of morality. In spite of honest efforts in representing issues related to bar dancing and the dancers, the research nonetheless was about *their lives* and *this profession as one of the options that women* have chosen. The paper on "Shifting Conceptions of Work and Performance: Contributions from the Margins" by Apoorva dwelt on the need to focus, therefore, on the relationships between the researcher and the researched, by deconstructing the researcher's own moralism. It is important to recognize that different groups of women do not see each other in the same way. For example, upper caste women in a Tamilnadu village felt that dalit women "behaved like men". Gendering of women can be different even within a village.

The essentialism of "women" as a general category is a problematic one for academic research as well as for the women's movement in India. To capture identities that are in the process of change and how different identities impact each other and their power relations, there is a need for "direct voice": talk to women, men directly. Yet, surveys are needed to help locate the representative nature of such "voices", thus raising another set of methodological issues. The value of long term ethnographic work lies in the 'relationship' (between the field researcher and the researched), the depth of this relationship, and whether the findings are taken back for feed back. Oral traditions and eliciting invisible experiences need to be connected with issues at a larger level, as pointed out by Gabriele Dietrich. With localized research, there is a need to keep the larger perspective in mind and how to connect the localized voice to this. Qualitative work needs to be rigorous in terms of what is being done, who we are, sources of funding, and so on. Production of knowledge systems is a highly contested area. Who are the knowledge producers and how do they appropriate feminist methodologies and practices, such as international financial institutions, bilateral or multi lateral agencies. All of these issues require much more attention if not clarification.

The structured questionnaire method used in social science research is not flexible in eliciting women's responses as they are mainly administered at the household level, where gender inequalities and patriarchal power relations project the male as head of the household. Even if women do get an opportunity to respond, the questionnaire administrators may themselves carry gender biases. In the context of Manjeet Bhatia's paper on "State and

Community Interaction in addressing Domestic Violence”, in depth analyses of “women’s stories” also raised the issue of epistemology by drawing attention to inter-connections between knowledge and power. Women are thus able to look into their submerged consciousness, discover their sense of self. Feminist theology is, in this way, attempting to find a voice within gendered spaces, as discussed by Kochurani Abraham in “Diving Deep: A Scientific Search into the Unfolding Story of Women’s Lives.”

Within gender studies, very little theorization exists on non-traditional labour and identities. In this context, notions of labour were discussed as performance and work, mundane labour, aesthetic labour and sexual labour. With the introduction of government programmes and even the formation of a society for ethnic arts, questions have been raised about the politics of interpreting art forms and the intersection with class / caste politics and the reflection of these in Madhubani paintings. People who were drawing pictures closer to their own lives began to make changes for the market. Dalits attempted to paint the epics and even upper castes started painting and copying the styles of dalits. Aesthetic interpretations raise questions about meaning, as do the dynamics and pluralism in the reception of “art”. These issues came up in Sandali Thakur’s presentation “Identity, narratives and power: The Researcher and the Researched.”

Different methods used to give visibility and value to the “care economy” were discussed. In the time use survey methods the measurement aspect often dominates and much of the complexities of care work are overlooked. Unpaid work takes place continuously and intermittently. The response elicited depends on how women/men understand the questions and how the activities are put across to them. Men may under report care work activities that are not socially acceptable. As Neetha Pillai pointed out in her paper on “Care work and time use surveys: Methodological Issues” the multiplicity of activities of women are not well reported.

The law is very much a fraught territory, so where does the critique of gender epistemology of the law take us? How do we re-look at the notion of objectivity in the process of law-making? There is a need for dialogue to push for the recognition of experience, and the role of varied actors in the making of the law (e.g. Law Commission Reports). These issues were discussed by Rukmini Sen in “Generating Feminist Knowledge: Law and the Feminist Method”. While studying institutions (e.g. those that address gender-based violence), parameters for evaluation of gender sensitivity have to be developed across varied contexts.

Conversations about bodies have the potential of enabling adolescent girls to break inhibitions and invite them to address issues of rights through mediated student dialogues. In classes on reproduction and the male/female body, euphemisms and misplaced words

are used to refer to the body: commonly used word like chest instead of breast and uterus for vagina. This is a way of censoring words and also consciousness, thus limiting young girls in exploring their bodies. Though sex education is seen as teaching about sex, girl students become averse to participating in the discussions, as discussed by Pallavi Gupta in "Exploring Issues of Adolescent Girls from a Feminist Standpoint".

Cross-cultural methods acknowledge that reproductive technology is adapted differently in different places. For understanding new ways in which reproductive technology is being experienced, the paper by Victoria Loblay called for not only reconsidering "feminism" but also the entire concept of reasoning: choice, rationalism, faith in biomedical authority being called into question. The attempt was to develop a method in which the ethnographic "other" is the new reproductive technology.

A range of intertwined theoretical and methodological issues came to be addressed in this sub-theme with discussions carried across different presentations.

SUB-THEME - 4 **INTERFACE BETWEEN ACTION AND RESEARCH**

(Co-ordinators: Seema Kulkarni, Society for Promoting Participative Eco-system Management (SOPPECOM) Pune; Swatija Manorama, Marathamoli and Forum against Oppression of Women, Mumbai; with support from Surbhi Tiwari, MPhil scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Pune)

First coined in the mid 1940s, action research is known by many other names like participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research, but all are variations on a theme. When the women's movements questioned the paradigm of science and androcentric perspectives of history, the need to compile, observe, study, research and understand plural ways of seeing became the foundation of women's studies. And so action-research became the important intrinsic, inclusive aspect of women's studies.

In the opening remarks to the sub-theme, Maithreyi Krishnaraj emphasized on the need to get out of the 'problem-solving' mode and avoid water-tight compartmentalization of researches on action research. She warned against either action or research as they would remain isolated from field realities. Research in the absence of action would lack the corrections that field action provides. Mere action cannot on the other hand give a long term vision or be capable of taking macro-factors into consideration. Furthermore, one must also guide against over simplifying things, as theory is necessary for action research studies as reality in itself is very complex. But in the absence of overall knowledge and clear theories, complexity is translated in a simplified way leading to wrong representations and deductions.

Session 1: Meanings of Citizenship: Women, Conflict and Disaster

Three papers dealt broadly with issues of citizenship in situations of disaster and political instability. Navsharan Singh in "Negotiating a Feminist Practice of Citizenship: A Reflexive Look at Some Ongoing Action-Research Projects" discussed two kinds of action research programmes undertaken by the IDRC. Through these examples she showed how the political

climate and the goals of the agencies are determining the outcomes of the action research. The participatory approach to development has been a largely-used methodology and is no longer limited to projects but taken to policies as well. The paper by Bonita Aleaz, titled, 'Naga Mothers as Agents of Peace' concentrated on the engagements of the Naga Mothers Association (NMA). Given the long history of conflict in the region, the case was used as an instance to reflect on the possibilities of activism attainable by women. By extending familial ties into the wider society, they could be seen as mediators between the state and distressed communities. The last presentation by Jahnvi Andharia, 'Understanding Muslim Women's Citizenship in Gujarat', looked specifically at how Muslim women were sought to be mobilized, to ensure entitlements and reestablish livelihoods. Moreover, there was a need to look at how citizenship was shaped by issues of religious identity. There was a lot of discussion around the meaning of citizenship and how context are decisive for accessing citizenship for women.

Session 2: Health and Reproductive Rights

Women's health, women's abortion rights and control over fertility were some of the issues raised in the Indian context. Two presentations were made in this session. Sarojini, from the Sama Resource Group for Women and Health titled, "'Feminist", "Participatory" and "Action Research": How can the Voices be Heard? A Case Study on Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Women' discussed the implications of artificial reproductive technologies on women in the Indian context. The action-research undertaken looked critically at perceptions of family and kin towards childlessness, the need for different methods for understanding these stigmas involved and so re-examine notions of motherhood. The second presentation was by Swatija Manorama (Forum Against Oppression of Women), titled 'Of Erasures and Appropriations: Action and Research During and Following the Campaign against Sex-determination and Sex Pre-selection'. The paper discussed the appropriation of feminist research and politics by mainstream academia, with sex-selective abortions getting termed as female foeticide, an anti-abortion term. The dilemmas of co-option, mainstreaming of feminist research were the emerging concerns based on inadequate documentation of the campaign.

Session 3: Constructing Gender

Sujata Khandekar's paper titled, 'Construction of Masculinities and Femininities among Young Men and Women Respectively in Low-Income Communities in Mumbai' discussed how she chose her group from a low-income neighbourhood of Mumbai to study the changed sexual behaviour of young men. This was formative research to develop an understanding

around masculinities, to see how cultural and social stereotypes associated with masculinity and sexuality determine how safely or unsafely youngsters behave, apart from what they might know about the dangers and consequences of deviant sexual behaviour. Surbhi Tiwari's paper, 'Women's Studies for Clothing, Feminism for Dress? An Inquiry into Gender and Genre', drew on the relationship between women studies and feminist discourse and an analysis of clothing/dress codes to unwrap issues of sexuality and norms of women's behaviour at different historical moments. One of the questions that emerged in the subsequent discussion was why there is so little research on middle class urban men.

Session 4: Women, Work and Resources

This was one of the liveliest sessions, as it dealt with a spectrum of issues from urban work to rural. The session had six presentations. The first was made by Chhaya Datar titled, 'Methodology of Feminist Research: Studying Women in 'Motion' Bidi Tobacco Workers and Devadasis in Nipani' and centred on the devadasis and their agency. The presentation showed ambiguities and distinctions between devadasis and prostitutes, as well as with single women. The second presentation by Apoorva Kaiwar titled, 'Shattering the Silence: Research to Collective Action Amongst the New Industrial Women Workers' focused on how young girls are being inducted into the emerging ready made garments industry in some parts of the north and south. Contrasts were drawn between the early 80s when unorganized workers were unionized and the current situation, including the patriarchal use of their wages to earn their dowry. The third presentation by Sneha Bhat 'Victims or Survivors: A Study on Deserted and Widowed Women in Sangli District of Maharashtra' showed how little analysis there is of the extent as well as the caste, religion and class dimensions of desertion, and how action research helped bring the question of desertion on the agenda of the state. The fourth presentation by Sejal Dand 'Women's Land Rights: Rhetoric and Reality' discussed the land rights struggle in Gujarat, which took off from a feminist economic framework. The struggle highlighted some of the gaps in the initial framework especially in the context of capturing women's agency. Focus was therefore placed on the strategies employed by poor rural women to cope with changes in the Indian economy and its impact on gender relations. The next paper by Nancy Gaiwad '*Stree Gauki*: A Female's Force within a People's Movement' was an example of how experiences of certain kinds shape new forms of action and strategies to address the women's question. What started as a tribal people's organization, slowly but surely looked into the question of women's rights to productive resources. Finally, Shruti Vispute, 'Linking Action to Knowledge towards Sustainable Development: Rethinking Gender in Watershed Development in Maharashtra' looked at some critical aspects of resource rights and membership and the articulation of women's aspirations and needs in watershed programmes.

Each of the presentations generated lively debates on the main content of the papers. The session had some very interesting debates around the question of agency. Is agency that which acts towards bringing changes in the division of labour, the roles of men and women in the household outside? Is agency that which changes the ownership patterns of resources and reorganizes work accordingly or is agency merely an act where women either as individuals or collectives improve the welfare of their families as understood in the current normative framework? Two recommendations emerged out of this session a) one was the need for grassroots voices to come out more sharply in fora such as the IAWS; b) women should have access to resources such as land and water, and c) the need to think of strategies for the counter-politicization of SHGs.

Session 5: Violence has no boundaries

Rukmini Dutta in 'Building Knowledge into Action: Campaigning against Domestic Violence' showed how women's organizations have been using media as a forum, its different genres like posters, television and print advertising, booklets etc. to raise awareness against domestic violence and the various legal provisions available, and addressed issues of impact assessment. The second presentation by Surabhi Tandon Mehrotra and Shrutipriya on 'Safety and the City: Women and Public Spaces in Delhi' addressed similar issues by an impact assessment of an earlier initiative in Delhi. They tried to argue that understanding safety in the urban context has to include women's access to safe places — where they can be protected against violence. The next presentation by Madhu Bhusan 'Speaking Tree, and Women Speak: The Asia Court of Women on Crimes against Women Related to the Violence of Development' spoke of their experiment in the Courts of Women, initiated by Corinne Kumar that has sought to recover and recreate other paradigms of justice and human rights outside the dominant discourse for women. The court's feminist methodology is very important and unique in that it seeks to weave together the subjective and personal voices of the women with the objective and political context within which she is located, combining the affective and the aesthetic aspect of our senses with the logical and the rational.

Session 6: Alternate Forms of Expression

The last session consisted of three presentations drawing on alternative forms of expression such as media and other traditional forms. Mangai presented a paper 'Method in Madness: Theatre as a source and expression of difference and collectivity' using 'performativity' as a concept to convey the power that theatrical expression holds to stage the point of view of the exploited. Three instances were taken — dalit women's *tapattam*, transgender group's *kannadi* and the feminist history of Tamil Nadu. Nischint and Madhura from Vacha titled

'Explorations and Expressions: Girls speak Out' brought out the perceptions and experiences of girl children in shaping their action programme. The final presentation by Santosh Birwatkar addressed the issue of the elderly and the need to build networks among organizations working with senior citizens. There were overlaps, as could be seen particularly within the session on 'violence has no boundaries' and the session on 'alternate forms of expression'. Sumi Krishna gave concluding comments on the spectrum of issues that could be followed up from the debates taken up here. She put forward a few questions to take this theme forward a) Can all feminist research be termed as action research; b) the need to understand the broad spectrum of action which ranges from activism to extension work; c) the wide spectrum of research which begins from a mere documentation of action to that which can change the agenda for action.

Final Comments

Women's actions emerging from research are innovative and constructive in the sense that they illustrate the desire in two ways. Action is a demand for freedom and research based action is meant to show or help women to find ways of constructing a new world. These innovative actions also help research to evolve and go beyond dogma. But we also have to be cautious about how action research is used in today's NGO parlance. There is a large body of research coming out as a response to international discourses introduced by donor agencies. As serious feminist action researchers, we need to keep a bearing on this so that action research does not turn into a mere tool for problem-solving in a sectoral manner, but rather becomes a process for transformative politics. The challenges of globalisation and a market economy should be a priority of action research-based methodologies. Interface between action and research in the context of women's studies is the reconstruction, restructuring and remodelling of reality with a feminist vision. And that is why action is also of a multiple, varied nature, from documentation to the search for missing links in the perception of reality to visionary approaches towards an egalitarian world.

SUB-THEME - 5 GENDER, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(Co-ordinators: Gita Chadha, Department of Sociology, Bombay University and Ridhi Shah, School of Life Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

The GST sub theme began with an introduction by Gita Chadha, briefly locating the sub-theme concerns within science studies and the feminist critiques of science. Chadha also gave a historical overview of the relationship between science, development and Indian modernity and emphasized the need to critically revisit this relationship. She also appreciated the IAWS for including a sub-theme on Gender, Science and Technology, possibly for the first time in a national conference.

The concept note had set out the following themes:

1. Philosophical and theoretical engagements with science - natural and social - from a feminist perspective - both critical and affirmative.
2. Feminist engagements with alternative systems of knowledge production that enhance our understanding of science.
3. Pedagogic issues in the teaching of science and gender.
4. Role of women and their marginalization in popular science movements
5. Impact of technology on women's lives and spaces in areas of health and medicine.
6. Need for access to IT for women and yet problems of representation of women through easier availability of pornography.
7. Issues of women practitioners of science and the impact of their gender on their practice
8. Masculinist studies of science
9. The construction of the body - male, female and intersexed - by science and technology

The sub-theme received thirty-two abstracts, of which fifteen were finally presented. The sub-theme was divided into five sessions on *Health, Information Technology, Pedagogy, Technology* and *Women in Science*, apart from a panel discussion on *What is a Feminist Science?*

Theme 5 of the concept note, 'the impact of technology on women's lives in areas of health and medicine' attracted the maximum number of abstracts. There were five

presentations in this area. The presentations dealt with issues like the practice of midwifery, increase in the incidence of Caesarean sections, use of clinical trials, infertility, prenatal and genetic testing. Based on work on the “reproductive health apparatus” in Bengal , particularly focusing on the inclusion of the practice of mid-wifery in the state’s health programmes , Asha Achuthan’s paper ‘*Women as Knowers: Towards a feminist critique of science in Marxist spaces*’ argued that sometimes women are positioned as “ex-officio knowers”. Their knowledge is perceived as experiential knowledge but never as ‘scientific knowledge’ which is supposedly vetted by theory. Jyotsna Agnihotri-Gupta’s paper ‘*Indian women’s decision-making regarding pre-natal genetic testing*’ suggested “that in principle, pre-natal testing and screening create new possibilities of informed decision-making but....they also carry new potentials for coercion, stigmatization and marginalization” of women . Other papers in this session were “*Women and Infertility Treatment” A Rights Perspective*’ by Bhamini Mehta and Shagufa Kapadia, ‘*Increasing Trend in Ceasarean Section Delivery: A Threat to Women’s Health*’ by Sucheta Priyabadhini and ‘*Impact of Clinical Drug Trials on Women in India*’ by Sriranjini Sivasubramanian. The discussions revolved around problematising issues of the right to information and the growth of medical consumerism in India. It was interesting to note that the presentations largely dealt with issues related to reproductive health of women and not larger health issues.

The role and impact of women in the growing IT sector was another important area of the concept note that received a large number of abstracts. Four presentations were made on this and related subjects. The paper ‘*In Pursuit of a Knowledge Platform for Feminism and Women’s Studies*’ presented by Benu Varma of SANGAT posited “that the appropriation of traditional and emerging media” has the potential of being used “by women for women” thereby “feminizing online spaces”. The other papers presented were ‘*Ensuring safe motherhood by using ICT tools in Behaviourial Change Communication*’ by Anjana Maitra; ‘*IT: Problems of representation of women*’ by Tanushree Gangopadhyay and ‘*A Study of Women Workers in the ITES-BPO Industry in Chennai*’ by Padma Rani. The discussions in this session revolved around rather well known issues of how technology while empowering women can also be deeply oppressive, while ideas of liberation can be extremely enmeshed in patriarchal power relations.

In spite of the focus of the IAWS conference on education, the GST sub-theme received few abstracts on the pedagogy of science education and related issues. Asha Gopinathan’s paper ‘*Reaching for the Stars: The Indian Institutes of Technology and Girls*’ was based on empirical work in Kerala. Gopinathan argued that few girls appear for the joint entrance examinations of the IITs and even fewer manage to clear the examinations because of patriarchal social norms and the “lack of adequate preparation” respectively.

Meghna Kelkar's paper '*Local Knowledge, Scientific Knowledge: Building Strategic Alliances for Feminist Gender Concerns*' based upon an ethnographic study of villages in rural western Maharashtra critically examined the dichotomy and hierarchy set up between indigenous/traditional knowledge-systems and scientific knowledge. Based on her study of soil management, Kelkar takes a "middle path" which does not valorise local /indigenous knowledge-systems, yet seeks to place them centrally, along with modern western science and technology in soil management discourses. Nesar Ahmad's paper '*Gender, Technology and Institution in the Indian Coal Mining Industry: Exploring the Linkages*' argued that despite the coal industry growing due to technological upgradation and policy revisions, women's participation in the labour force has declined due to the prevalence of gender stereotypes about 'hard' physical work. Both these papers led to significant discussions relating to the tensions between indigenous and external technologies.

The session on *Women in Science* largely had invited papers. The session dealt with issues of under representation of women in science, gender bias in the organization and practice of science, the role of advocacy, and the role of a feminist consciousness amongst women in science. Vineeta Bal's paper '*Poor visibility of women practitioners of science: a question of numbers, quality, opportunities and rectifying measures*' indicated that while the absolute numbers of women entering natural sciences, particularly in biology and medicine, are steadily increasing, "their proportion in permanent jobs and senior positions in academia and industry have remained poor". Bal argued that women practitioners in America, influenced by the women's movement, took up issues of women in science that the Indian Women Scientists Association, set up in 1973, shied away from. B.K. Anitha's paper on '*Diversity Integral to Indian Science and Technology*' argued that productivity in science is positively correlated to diversity, cultural and intellectual, amongst its practitioners. One way to ensure this, Anitha argued, is to increase the number of women in fields of science and technology. Anitha suggested that faculty composition, performance measures and organizational cultures are alienating for women and require to be critically reviewed. Jayashree Subramanian's paper '*Women's Experience versus Dominant Notions: Gender Politics in the Sciences*' argued that under-representation of women in science is not the only issue that must concern feminist critics of science. Subramanian attempted to demonstrate that the notion of 'merit' in science is itself gender-biased and women's competence and commitment to do science are constructed not according to their capabilities or a gender neutral notion of merit, but according to patriarchal stereotypes of women's abilities.

The panel discussion on '*What is a feminist science?*' had Abha Sur, Chayanika Shah, Asha Achuthan, Vineeta Bal, Sumi Krishna and Gita Chadha on the panel. All the speakers contextualized their comments along their own trajectories into the critiques of science.

Vineeta Bal and Chayanika Shah, a biologist and a physicist respectively, debated whether their 'feminisms' had anything to do with their pedagogy or practice of science. While Shah suggested that her engagement with feminism informs her engagement with science and vice versa, Bal argued that such a project might lead us into the dangers of relativism. Chadha brought forth the need to look at natural science and social science on a continuum and suggested the possibility that feminist interventions in the social sciences might provide indicators for a feminist practice and critique of the natural sciences. While Abha Sur emphasized the need for intertextuality in the making of a 'feminist science', Asha Achuthan drew upon her own experiences as a medical practitioner to argue for an engaged and embodied science practice.

While the concept note of the sub-theme had set forth the theme of sexuality, it did not receive any abstract on the subject. Interactions between coordinators of the GST, Sexuality and Literature sub- themes led to a joint session called *Body-Construct, Fact or Fiction*. In this joint session, Unnati Tripathi and Asha Achuthan evocatively read passages from Emily Martin's '*The Egg and the Sperm*' and Nancy Oudshoorn's '*Sex and the Body*' elucidating the role of science in the making of gendered bodies. The selections were jointly made by Chayanika Shah and Gita Chadha. The sub-theme concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Riddhi Shah.

SUB-THEME - 6 **GENERATING NEW KNOWLEDGES AROUND SEXUALITIES AND GENDERS**

(Co-ordinators: Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), Mumbai and Meena Gopal, Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University)

It is no small measure of the distance travelled that after years of reluctance, even resistance, queer feminist articulations and concerns are today an integral part of women's movements as well as women's studies in India. In fact, as it turned out, this sub-theme was among the best attended and most lively sessions at the Lucknow Conference.

Two panels had been invited, and the first day's sessions began with the first, *Interrogating Gender*. Sharmila from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, provided an object lesson when she spoke of the ways in which 'caste feminism' has been challenged by Dalit feminists, and how caste feminists- in which category she included herself- have responded through various acts of commission and omission. There have been situations such as Dalit feminists rejecting the caste feminist's proud assertion that yes, we are promiscuous, and how "it took an agonizingly long time to discover that these voices were different from our mothers' moralistic voices". The point, then, is "to come together not as a unity but a solidarity." Sumathi Murthy from Lesbians, Bisexual Women and Female-to-male Transgenders (LeSBIIT) and Sangama, Bangalore, through interesting anecdotes about members of the LESBIT group, underlined the ways in which the binary of gender, male/female or masculine/feminine, are being challenged and yet re-emerge. The ironies of the lesbian couple who fought bitterly over who would be the man were reflected on -- each wanted the other to be like the 'wife' she herself had been in her own forced heterosexual marriage. In this queer community, it's about the roles people play, she pointed out, rather than rigid gender identities. Chayanika Shah was the last speaker. "Why do I call myself a woman?" she asked. Feminists have questioned 'gender' and allowed multiple ways of being masculine and feminine, but all of us still register people as male or female. These perceptions are based on the sex assigned to individuals, on the way individuals themselves identify, and finally on the roles they play. It's true, she pointed out, that as feminists we cannot afford to give up on 'woman' as a universal category and 'gender' as a political category. Complicating and layering this category through new forms of family,

of relationships, of community are bound to emerge, maybe in ways which we, as feminists, have not even envisaged.

Gender, Identity and Performance comprised three presentations that looked at how the gender binary is expressed and sometimes questioned in sites of performance. Gayatri Kumarswamy, read an account of her own journey, from a girl with a staunch Catholic upbringing who had a flair for dance and acting to a young woman questioning her religious beliefs in the light of her sexuality. Her involvement with playback theatre, in which the actors play back stories narrated by members of the audience, had helped her understand how boundaries between people could be broken down. One of the most difficult things for her to accept, she said, had been how class differences often acted as barriers to 'sisterhood'. The lesbian community to which she now belonged was a very heterogeneous one, but she hoped they could come together to address common causes. Sneha Gole, from the University of Pune, spoke about gender stereotyping within the pedagogy of Kathak, both in its texts and through the life practices of those engaged in the dance form. Thus the *lasya rasa* is all about being gentle, coy and feminine, while the *taandav rasa* is the prerogative of the male, embodying energy, aggression, vigour. There was a long and animated discussion about how the politics of nationalism had equated certain classical dance forms and other practices with Indian culture while marginalising others that were potentially challenging or transgressive. Many women shared their own childhood memories of being made to learn classical dance or music, and the sort of aura and values still attached to these in conservative upper caste and aspirational families. Sneha spoke of the rare breakthroughs: as in thumri singing, with many tawaifs and bais being given the status of performers with the advent of recordings on 78 rpm.

Geetha, from the Aravani community and part of the SUDAR Foundation in Tamil Nadu, spoke of her struggle to get a voting ID, a place to stay (after a ruling by the Madurai High Court), a ration card. With the inception of their theatre group in 2003, the Aravanis have been able to highlight the problems faced by them. She felt it was even more difficult to live as a Hijra in the south than in the north; while they survive through begging and sex work, other professional opportunities are almost absent. Yet today, many Hijras are educated and deserve to get work. Being able to express their dilemmas and difficulties through theatre had been an empowering experience for many of them. The first play they did was (titles translated from the Tamil) 'Call From the Heart'. The second was 'Unsettling Memories', which touched upon the rift with family that many Aravanis face. This play was not only about the oppressions the community faces but also made a case for attitudinal and policy changes. V Vasanthi, also from SUDAR, said that eight of the ten actors in the play had since been accepted in various ways by their natal families which had once disowned them.

The afternoon session was on *Sociological Perspectives*. Two of the papers offered intriguing glimpses into how female sexuality was constructed in colonial times: Aparna Paul from Jadavpur University, spoke of how the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 enforced Victorian notions of morality and sexuality in the Bombay Presidency area, where the disciplining of the prostitute's body became a channel to serve the needs of British soldiers. Shuhita Bhattacharjee quoted literary texts and missionary records to suggest how paternalistic initiatives in women's education in 19th century India generated certain sexual stereotypes. On the one hand, education was considered unnatural and "unsexing", a "masculinizing" force; on the other, educated women, especially English-educated women, were supposed to possess a transgressive, attractive sexuality (a paradoxical notion that has survived into our own time). On the other hand, the new *bhadralok* (gentry) wanted a more cultured *bhadra mahila* (gentlewoman).

Archana Prasad from Delhi read a paper that outlined some of the struggles of lesbian women in India, and pointed out that the questioning of gender had come not from the discipline of sociology but from the discourses of feminism. Sabiha Hussain from Centre for Women's Development Studies spoke of religious definitions of sexuality in Islam, and Islamic feminist responses that used the contexts of society, politics and history to support their arguments against oppressive or fundamentalist positions.

The second day began with two presentations on *Teaching Gender and Sexuality* that analyzed opposite ends of that troubled spectrum. Nandini Manjrekar from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay, looked at the uncritical production by the state, over time, of texts and materials for adolescent sexuality education, based on a decontextualised focus on the body, heteronormativity, guilt and shame, and the history of opposition to such teaching by political parties and other conservative forces. She cautioned that the attitude of the *teachers* who use these materials is extremely important; the children need to feel *safe*, which is not always the case; the *language* matters immensely. And finally, adolescent sex education can be dealt with only in a *feminist* way. Paromita Chakravarti shared her experience of setting up, in 2005, a six-month course in queer studies, the first of its kind in the country, within the postgraduate programme of the English Dept. She was surprised at how little resistance she faced. The transition of 'queer' from a noun to a verb was an important part of the process, and the queer reading of canonical texts by mainstream white Anglo authors became "a robust and stretching exercise" for her faculty colleagues as well as for the students.

In the animated discussion that followed, one question was about whether things got heated in the classroom, or trivialized, and did power equations between teacher and student come in? Paromita said that while the course was very participatory, evolving through discussion with students, things were often very fraught: some people used the

classroom space to come out; some responses were homophobic. The quandary was about whether to allow it all, or to stop it because the classroom wasn't the place and the teachers were not trained counsellors. Also, parents would ask their children "Why queer studies?" in order to know "Are you queer?" and as a result many students shied away from the course. Paromita too gets asked how come she "suddenly" began teaching queer studies! She recalled how people who taught gender or feminist studies used to get similar responses, but now no-one asks "Are you a feminist?"

The next session, *The Body in Business*, had three presentations. Deepa, an MA student from Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, showed a video that had interviews with sex workers from that region. It linked sex work to the devadasi tradition and spoke of oppression by brothel owners and agents, but offered no critique of the sex worker-as-victim model, as many people pointed out in the discussion that followed. Next, Manjima Bhattacharjya, a researcher based in Bombay, spoke of women in the glamour industry -- models on the ramp or in commercials. What they were doing, she said, was "performing sexuality". She offered the analysis that the old critique of the objectification of women's bodies had given way, over time, to a "normalization" of the profession. For many young people today, models are role models, yet there is a continuing stigmatization of women in modelling.

The session ended with a dialogue between Meenakshi, a sex worker from Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP), Sangli, Maharashtra, and Pushpa from Vanangana, Uttar Pradesh, coordinated by Point of View, Bombay. This novel form of presentation brought out the difficult personal and political journeys of both women. Meenakshi stressed that women in prostitution are not weak, or bad; they are supporting themselves and they have a right to their dreams, and to be recognised as women and citizens. Pushpa talked of how she used to avoid passing through the red light district, till they began dialogues through the NGO and began to understand how women in different situations have much in common: the routine violence they face; the oppressions they encounter when they begin to think for themselves.

The two days of presentations and discussions were brought to a memorable finish with the second invited panel, *Reading the Body: Construct, Fact, Fiction*. This was an impromptu and inspired joint presentation with the group that had coordinated the *Gender, Science and Technology* sub-theme at the conference. It focused on the various ways in which the "normal" body has again and again been "constructed"- in science, medical knowledge, legally, socially, and even within our feminisms.

Anita Ghai from Jesus and Mary College, Delhi, spoke of how people with disabilities are never seen as sexual beings. They can be teachers, they can be sisters! Their "needs" may be acknowledged, but their desires are silenced. In the US, there is the new concept

of “manually assisted sex” as a service being developed for various kinds of disability, and of course it raises all sorts of ethical and psychological questions, but it does represent a significant shift in thinking. Asha and Unnati then read out excerpts from texts that revealed how, since the 16th century, western scientific literature- supposedly “objective”- has talked about the difference between the male and female body in gender-biased and misogynistic ways, and how this is common even today. Satya Rai Nagpaul from Sampoorna (a transpersons’ collective), Bombay and Delhi, and LABIA, Bombay, read an evocative piece called *R(emoval) for Real*, which was personal, poetic and political at many levels. In it, he touched upon issues of gender, identity, change and desire that are part of the process of sexual reassignment, thus alluding not only to the physical but to other transformations as well. An excerpt was then read from the anthropologist and feminist Emily Martin’s work, in which she quotes and critiques the highly metaphoric and biased language used by medical science to describe the sperm and egg as being, respectively, active/ masculine and passive/ feminine, while overlooking the fact that a high rate of sperm mortality occurs in the attempt to penetrate a single egg!

Shalini Mahajan from LABIA, Bombay, explained some of the current thinking about intersex, and the issues this raises. One in every 100 births is a non-standard body, and even these “standards” are imagined ones. “Corrective surgery” is usually done between the ages of 3 to 5, though this is less common in India. Shalini spoke of how the intersex movement speaks of “gender variance” as a continuum, rather than of variations from the “norm”, critiques the pathologization of intersex by the medical establishment, and questions the privilege of “the normalcy of the so-called correctly sexed body.” Intersex people have raised the issue of feminists’ unwillingness to dialogue with them.

An extremely vibrant and wide-ranging discussion followed. A doctor wondered how, as a doctor and a feminist, she could know what the best, or right, thing to do might be for a patient who asked, or whose parents asked, for sexual reassignment. Satya responded that you have to listen, let the patient decide. But what, asked the doctor, if the patient was asking for surgery that reinforced stereotypes about the body- wanting, say, bigger breasts or smaller labia? What if there were societal or peer pressures at work? Chayanika said it was about listening with discernment and, as feminists, taking certain stands: just as we took a stand with regard to amniocentesis, for example, we must take a stand on the issue of “corrective” surgery done on infants.

A question to reflect upon was, “How much are we, as feminists, contributing to the making of the binary?” Satya pointed out that the trans community “is not that innocent either.” For trans people too, the role models remain the binary. Some may question and open up the sex-gender discourse, but for others it may close in further. A lesbian activist asked how one might counsel a small town butch-femme lesbian couple where the femme

wanted her partner to have sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) and the partner was confused. Satya said you reassign because you want to, not because your lover wants you to. With a gleam in her eye, Anita said that although she had a love-hate relationship with Freud because he had understood women so poorly, she wanted to quote one particularly apt observation of his: "The body is polymorphously perverse."

The afternoon ended with Shalini reading Kate Bornstein's poem on gender. It's a remarkable piece of writing that leaves you feeling reflective and is also, if you have begun to care about the issue at all, very uplifting. Certainly for those present it was a fitting end to a challenging and engaging two-day session. A brief quote:

Gender needs to be safe, sane, and consensual.

... ..

Sane gender is asking questions about gender – talking to people who do gender, and opening up about our gender histories and our gender desires.

Sane gender is probably very, very funny.

SUB-THEME-7A:

BUILDING FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES OF GENDER AND SCHOOL EDUCATION: CRITIQUES, CHALLENGES AND NEW DIRECTIONS

(Co-ordinators: Nandini Manjrekar, Centre for Studies in Sociology of Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Nirantar, Centre for Gender and Education, Delhi)

The first session of this sub-theme focused on examining the content of school textbooks. Here, both older texts and new efforts at reorganizing / reimagining both content and pedagogy were analysed. In the paper '*Challenging Population Perspectives in School Curriculum: Moving Beyond Numbers and Stereotypes*', presented by Sama, the perspective with which population and its links with poverty and development were represented in school texts was critiqued. The paper pointed to the absence of perspectives and alternative critiques developed by the women's movement and feminist scholarship in the content of school social science textbooks. Questions that emerged out of the presentation related to the hegemonic place of this dualistic representation of development and underdevelopment in school texts. The challenge to feminist scholarship is how the nuanced and multi-sectoral alternative critiques/ visions can become part of the content of school textbooks. *The Impact of Revised SCERT Social Science Textbooks: A Case Study in a Government School*, by Jyoti Srivatsava discussed textbooks that had integrated feminist research and knowledge into the concepts being developed. The criticality of the teacher in transacting new pedagogies was highlighted. In the absence of changes in the examination system and lack of training inputs to the teacher, the import of the revised social science textbooks was limited. Clearly, as brought out in the next paper *Feminist Pedagogical Options in Primary Education in Rural West Bengal* by Bipasa Mukherjee, the need to simultaneously work on structures and content was seen to be necessary if a feminist perspective was to inform mainstream education. This point was established strengthened by the paper on the study of school in rural West Bengal as part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan initiative. Here, structural issues, for example the student-teacher ratio, pointed to the impossibility of bringing a gender-sensitive pedagogy to the learner, despite state proclamation to the contrary in the SSA policy document.

SUB-THEME - 7A: BUILDING FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES OF GENDER AND SCHOOL EDUCATION: CRITIQUES, CHALLENGES AND NEW DIRECTIONS

The first paper in the second session, *From Feminine to Feminist: Re-thinking Research on Schooling*, by Sarada Balagopalan, looked at what the feminist perspective/methodology can contribute to educational research. Quantitative equality has left little room for serious engagement with the gendered spaces of schools and classrooms, and distances itself from questions of equity and exclusion that are of concern to policy formulation, as well as policy critique. Feminist theory brings to progressive pedagogy specific questions regarding voice and silence and issues of difference and conflict that need to inform feminist perspectives on education. In the discussion, it was pointed out that there is a need to undertake a mapping of the nature of research that exists on gender and school education from the 1950s onwards to understand its political content. The next paper *Sexualities, Masculinities and Femininities: Teaching Sex: The Case of "Life Style Education" in West Bengal, India* by Paromita Chakravarti, focused on the recent 'Lifestyle' education initiative of the West Bengal government. While the manual propagates a critique of brand consumerism, its middle class urban bias creates contradictions in the juxtapositions between these 'progressive' articulations against globalisation of the Left Front government, and notions of sexuality that are located within the context of marriage, articulated in a language of 19th century discomfort with tradition. In *Gender and Secondary Schooling: What Do Schooling and Classroom Processes Reveal?* Shobhita Rajagopal discussed her study of secondary schools in Rajasthan that examined how classroom and schooling processes reinforce existing gender relations. The study showed clearly how secondary schools maintain and reproduce normative gender roles in everyday school practice and experience.

The last session in this sub-theme addressed the gender pedagogies in one teacher training programme, the B.El.Ed programme of Delhi University. Two perspectives were presented: one by a teacher and the other by a student. The first paper by Deepti Priya Mehrotra addressed pedagogical processes within teacher training in relation to the teaching of the course on gender and schooling in the B.El.Ed. *programme*. Deepti shared her experiences of 'teaching' gender to women students training to be school teachers and focused on the *challenges* of simultaneously addressing issues of gender and education within an academic framework, as well as working with students' own experiences of gender oppression and discrimination in private and public spaces. The challenges and possibilities of collectively building a gender *lens* to understand education were addressed in this paper. Baljeet Kaur, in her paper, *Gender in the B. El. Ed. Programme*, discussed how 'learning' gender over the four years of this course enabled her own empowerment as an individual, and the sharpening of her understanding of gender issues in education. The third paper by Mamta Jaitley discussed the findings of a study conducted in Rajasthan on sexual harassment in rural and urban schools. The study found that schoolgirls face a range of sexual harassment both outside and within the schools. There is both socially

enforced and self-imposed silence of this harassment, the latter due to the fear of withdrawal from schools. The discussion of this paper focused on the limitations of the self-defence model to resist sexual harassment in educational institutions.

SUB-THEME-7B: EXPLORING PEDAGOGIES OF GENDER STUDIES

(Co-ordinator: Rekha Pappu, independent researcher, Hyderabad)

Paper presentations and discussions about pedagogies of Gender Studies were spread over three sessions with a cluster of four presentations in each session.

The first session, chaired by Tejaswini Niranjana, included papers that reflected on issues of pedagogy in well-defined academic spaces such as colleges and universities where papers and courses in Women's Studies are offered. Critical topics highlighted in this session related to questions of relevance, diversity of student composition, the overt and covert reasons for offering the course, student experiences and expectations, the manner of their articulation and the specific ways in which such student expectations shape pedagogic practices. P.Radhika's paper raised the issue of the diverse languages of (or registers within) feminism and the difficulties that arise when addressing them all in the classroom situation because these languages also often contradict one another. She however emphasized the need to introduce this diversity to the students and the consequent importance of building pedagogies that could handle the complexities involved. Sumita Paramar's presentation highlighted the hierarchical nature of teaching and explored the ways in which differences among students could be validated and their sense of themselves strengthened. Enakshi Dua explained the logic of offering the Women's Studies course on India in a Canadian University in terms of the larger feminist effort within Canada to decenter the national hegemony by offering trans-national courses on feminism. She sought to know how the particular concern that she was putting across resonated in the Indian context. Shilpa Phadke's presentation revisited some of the recurrent themes and concerns related to desire and pleasure that her students raise in classroom discussions on feminism. The pedagogic problem in such a context is linked to the tightrope walk that has to be performed in terms of problematising individualistic choices without dismissing or belittling the dilemma that has been articulated.

The discussion session included a range of responses from the audience. The question of dress codes for different contexts was discussed at some length. The blurring of lines between the personal and the political that had been flagged by the presentations was

taken up again during the discussion. The assumptions involved in the use of non-conventional materials such as films or literary texts in a Gender Studies course were also commented upon.

Mary John chaired the second session, which was scheduled for the second day of the conference. In contrast with the first session, the papers presented in this session emerged from pedagogic processes or teaching practices in non-academic, non-conventional sites such as gender training sessions in the NGO sector, the use of REFLECT as a pedagogic tool for conducting literacy programmes and online courses in Women Studies offered for students and activists. This session also included a paper on adopting a feminist pedagogy while teaching a course to students of law. S. Seethalakshmi's presentation elaborated on the different scenarios that obtain in relation to gender training exercises within the NGO space and of the various factors that shape the training process. While drawing attention to the fact that there was no dialogue or discussion among "gender trainers," she also gave some examples of approaches that she had found useful while facilitating training sessions. Members of the State Reflect Resource Centre, Kolkata made a joint presentation on the strategies used by the Centre to form REFLECT (**R**egenerated **F**reirean **L**iteracy through **E**mpowering **C**ommunity Techniques) circles within villages where literacy sessions were conducted. The presentation highlighted the fact that the programme was based on the experiences of the women who attended the literacy classes. Ara Johannes explained the various aspects of StreeNet, an online course offered by Akshara that combines a course in Women's Studies with the imparting of ICT (Information Communication Technologies) skills. She also discussed the different approaches used and responses received by the two different online courses offered through StreeNet – the activist course and the student course. Maithreyi Mulupuru contextualised the discussion of two courses she had offered to law students by pointing out that a fundamental assumption made by students of law involves equating law with neutrality and justice. She then went on to elaborate on the strategies she had to use in the teaching of the two courses, one on Taxation and the other on Feminist Jurisprudence, which had to contend with this basic assumption at all times.

The ensuing discussion related to the kinds of materials available for teaching in these diverse locations, of assessing the effectivity of the pedagogic process, of the different demands between situations where conceptual thinking is emphasized from those where action is privileged. The need for more systematic reflection and study of pedagogies in these different locations was also stressed during the discussion time.

The last session, chaired by Susie Tharu, began with a presentation by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan. He reflected on the different effects that the use of the notion of masculinity has in classroom or workshop situations where gender is the central concept that is being explored. The other three presentations in the session were based on experiences of teaching

Women's Studies courses within university and college spaces. Hemalatha H.M explored the implications of introducing Women's Studies as a compulsory course by drawing on the experiment carried out at Karnataka State Women's University at Bijapur. In her presentation, G.Arunima began by summing up the discussions that took place at the national workshop on Feminist Pedagogy at JNU, Delhi in March 2007. Following up on some of the issues that had emerged during those discussions, she highlighted the difficulties faced in the teaching of Women's Studies courses, especially in relation to questions of disciplinarity. Sunalini Kumar's presentation related to the teaching of a paper titled "Women in the Political Process" at the Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi. Her focus was primarily on the history of the introduction of the course, student response to the paper and to the classroom dynamics during its teaching. Issues of student resistance to Women's Studies courses, the figure / persona of the teacher, institutional impediments to teaching the course, interdisciplinarity etc. came up for further discussion following the presentations.

On the whole, though the sub-theme was aimed at discussing the pedagogy of Gender Studies, the presentations and discussions revealed that an exclusive focus on pedagogy was not possible at this point in time. Instead, the thinking through of pedagogic issues had to necessarily pass through, and was very closely linked to, issues of curriculum, the larger location of the pedagogic practice, status of Women's Studies departments, institutional support, classroom size, availability of teaching materials in the regional languages etc. In this respect, the sub theme on Pedagogies of Gender Studies was but a beginning in the effort to focus attention on the theory and praxis of teaching Women's Studies.

SUB-THEME - 8: TRIBE, CASTE AND MINORITY: STRUCTURES AND EXCLUSIONS

(Co-ordinators: Prof. Manorama Sharma, Department of History, North- Eastern Hill University, Shillong and Dr. Sutapa Sengupta, Department of Geography, Saint Mary's College, Shillong)

A total number of 24 papers were submitted to this sub-theme, but only 11 of the paper presenters attended the Conference and presented their papers. There were altogether 5 academic sessions held discussing issues such as the conceptual formulations of the theme, education and marginalized women, development strategies for tribal/ Adivasi, Dalit women, access to decision making among tribal/Adivasi, Dalit women, and stigmatization and victimization of marginalized women in the name of witch hunting.

Session I: Conceptualising some major issues

Chaired by Manorama Sharma, three papers were presented in this session by Carmel Christy, Apurba K. Baruah and Ashley Tellis. Carmel Christy in her paper: "Re-defining Sexualities, Re-locating Feminist Discourse: Towards a Critical Approach to Feminist Knowledge Production", focused on the "othering" of Dalit Bahujan women in Kerala who occupy non-middleclass and not-so-feminine spaces of work. She argued that issues of caste and gender often become illusive when confronted with real life situations, due to which thousands of Dalit Bahujan women are apprehensive of mainstream feminists, including Sexual Harassment organizations. Pointing out that the cultural construction of feminist knowledge often reproduces oppressive structures, the author stressed that there is an urgent need to redefine and relocate feminist frameworks to address issues of caste and gender. The second paper was presented by Apurba K. Baruah on "Women in Tribal Societies: Some Reflections on Khasi Matriliney". The thrust of the paper was on the point that even though Khasi matrilineal society may not be as egalitarian as romantically assumed and even while acknowledging that the transfer of property to the "*khadduh*" or the youngest daughter places more responsibilities than rights on her shoulders, yet, this system was at least more liberating for women than patriarchy or patriliney. The paper also highlighted that in the face of rising demands, especially among the Khasi elite groups, patriliney is

being brought in to preserve the question of Khasi identity. The author also stressed that it is necessary to examine the stratification of tribes in order to understand the changing dynamics of power *vis-a-vi* women's rights, liberty and empowerment. Ashley Tellis was the third presenter in this session and his paper entitled: "Tribe, Gender and Region in Northeastern Women's Writing: Some Theoretical Reflections" explored the categories "Northeast", "Tribe", and "Women's Writing" by examining some of the writings of Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai and Irom Sharmila. He examined how the Northeast is represented for and consumed by a mainstream readership. Emphasizing the need of coming out from both the usual exercises of *domesticating* or romanticizing the tribal identity he also stressed the need to destabilize monolithic feminisms at this juncture. The writings of the women he examined also need to be freed from the fixed framework of understanding gender in the tribal context.

The presentation of the papers was followed by a very lively discussion on the necessity to have a more realistic perception of marginalized women and on the need for developing more specific theoretical models for understanding the socio-historical realities of such women.

Session II :Literacy, Education and Empowerment

Chaired by Sutapa Sengupta, there were two papers in this session. M. Nagesh Kumari discussed the educational empowerment of tribal women taking the case of Thoda tribe to highlight the vast disparity in enrolment between the rural and urban sections. She further pointed out that most of the times the tribal population, the women in particular, are not aware of the schemes and programmes implemented by the Government for educational empowerment. The author further stressed that for a proper implementation of these programmes the Government should join hands with NGOs since NGOs can convince the people better. A lot of time could be given to discussion where significant interventions were made by the audience in highlighting similar situations that exist in other parts of the country among various tribal/ adivasi groups.

The second paper presented was by M.S.Sreerexha entitled: "The Development Onslaught and Women in Dalit and Adivasi Struggles". Sreerexha argued that due to an aggressive corporate globalisation aimed to bring "development" there has been a constant exploitation of natural resources (as for example in Nandigram). It is evident in most of the cases that in the struggles and revolt against such aggressions the women of the respective places have participated in large numbers or rather they have been forced to do so. Presenting the case of representation of Dalit and Adivasi women in such struggles of Kerala, she pointed out that in spite of the large representation of the women in such struggles and

revolts they do not enjoy any decision making rights in these struggles. Even when the question of compensation and rehabilitation comes it is the men among the dalits and adivasis who are benefited. Thus she concluded that it is necessary to democratize the dalits' struggles ensuring:

- A. feminist politics rather than mere numerical representation of women in the struggles
- B. an assessment of the rehabilitation programmes and access of women to them.

As the paper had raised a number of very interesting issues regarding women in mass movements within the framework of certain developmental paradigms there were very involved and sometimes even heated exchanges of views between the audience and the paper presenter. There were concerns expressed whether the terms "globalization" and "development" could be so generally used in reflecting concerns of women.

Session III: Women and Decision Making

Chaired by Apurba Kr.Baruah, three papers were presented in this session. V Sawmveli in her paper: "Issues of Gender Identity Among Protestant Mizos", a study conducted among the women of middle-class protestants, highlighted that Mizo Protestant women are still not assigned any notable religious responsibilities. She further pointed out that despite the claim that Christianity brought gender equality, one can still find some kind of inequality and gender inequality remains intact. The gender roles and relations within the community are decided by church, which she argued is not much in favour of women. The second paper was presented by Alok Chantia (et. al.) entitled "Position of Women within Tribal Structures and Exclusion from Development Process: A Study with Regard To Witchcraft". The authors analysed the position of women in tribal structures and showed how women have been marginalized and excluded from the mainstream of development process in the name of witchcraft. With an account of the phenomenon of witchcraft both in the past and present, the authors made an in depth analysis of the etiology of witchcraft and propagated for a strong legislation for punishing all those who in the name of superstition perpetuate all kinds of violence against women. To combat atrocities against women in the name of witchcraft they stressed that society, media, police and judiciary should play their respective roles in educating the masses. The third paper in this session was presented by Reyna Sequeira, entitled: "Caste Study of the Local Salt Making Women of Goa v/s the Migrant Salt making Women of Karnataka". She attempted a comparative study between the local salt making women and those coming from Karnataka and argued that whether it is the local or the immigrant group their status is more or less similar as far as the inequalities and disparities of income are concerned in comparison with their male counterparts. However, the author highlighted that these groups of women also resorted to innovative livelihood

strategies in this period of globalisation. It was pointed out that the immigrant salt working women in spite of earning less prefer to stay back since they enjoy a better status, and are allowed to take part in politics and contest elections.

These three papers stimulated a very interesting discussion on the issues of women in decision making. The matter of victimising women as “witches” was discussed in detail and members present expressed the fear that in the absence of any legislation to either enquire into or to punish such atrocities this might become a major means of exploiting and oppressing women in tribal/Adivasi/ Dalit societies especially in the context of these societies being gradually opened up in the name of “development.” There was therefore a consensus that these concerns of the participants be sent to the G.B. of the IAWS in the form of a resolution that the IAWS take up with the relevant bodies the question of putting in place the laws necessary to deal with the victimisation of women as “witches”.

Session IV: Case Studies

In this session, short discussions were held on a few papers all of which were case studies based on Orissa. P. Yasodhara discussed how industrialization and globalisation are having adverse effects on tribal women in the state as it is in other parts of the country since there is a large scale destruction of forests and other natural resources following industrialization. She further pointed out that though these tribal women enjoy fairly high status in their domestic lives but the incidences of domestic violence is on the rise. Meera Swain, in her paper highlighted the case of women of “*Kissan*” tribe of Orissa and stated that it is a misconception that tribal women enjoy a better status than their non tribal counterparts. She pointed out that though the *Kissan* women do not suffer from the tortures of the dowry system and are relatively free to move around within their respective villages but they do suffer from discriminations rooted in society which restrict them from entering the industrial sites for example.

D. Patnaik in her paper stressed on the plight of the Bharat Integrated Social Welfare Agency (BISWA) in Orissa which is trying to empower tribal women in the field of micro finance, micro enterprise and micro insurance ventures. Citing the examples of selected tribal women (Rajasini, for example) the author highlighted how BISWA is trying to improve the potential of tribal women through education and transformation of knowledge. These case studies also brought responses from the audience in the shape of references to a number of similar cases in the other parts of the country as well with which many members of the audience had firsthand experience.

The Session closed with the adopting of the resolution discussed in the IIIrd academic session and a general vote of thanks from the Chair.

SUB-THEME - 9:**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION**

(Co-ordinator: Mitra Mukherjee Parikh, Department of English, SNDT University, Mumbai)

The session on 'Language, Literature and Cultural Production' began with the co-coordinator Mitra Parikh spelling out some of the critical paradigms within which literary and cultural production in contemporary times were being located. 'Literature' as a category was being re-invented and re-visited in terms of reading, the margins asserting themselves, a shift from cosmopolitan centres, questioning of genres and the aesthetics which informed them, visibility of new corpus of literature as reflected in Women's writing, Dalit literature and translations. Feminist writings and scholarship have contributed immensely to this project of the radical re-visiting of the canon.

The first session was chaired by Saroop Dhruv. The first paper presenter Rashmi Tikku, in her presentation titled, 'Storytelling, Gender Politics and Female Agency', explored the role of women as storytellers. Women storytellers have de-stabilized received narratives and in this case Geeta Hariharan's 'Arabian Nights' and Anubai's 'the Forest' can be read as counter narratives wherein female agency gets foregrounded. These texts can be read as transgressive sites since they challenge hegemonic constructions.

The second presentation 'Towards a Pervasive Dalit Feminist Discourse' by N. Gayathri provided a critical reading of Geeta Nagabhushana. A Feminist Dalit writer who had won the Kendriya Sahitya Academic award in 2005, she had extended the horizons of Kannada literature by introducing the female subaltern subject. Her creative works drew attention to marginalized experiences by focusing on the lives of Devadasis. This in turn challenged the hegemony of upper class-caste male domination.

The third presentation titled 'Discerning the Underbelly: Mainstream Bombay Cinema and the Organization of Sexuality' by Karen Gabriel set out to examine the manner in which the articulation of pleasure and female body in terms of representation of the sexual caused rupture in the melodramatic narratives of Bollywood. Locating the shifting terrain of Bollywood productions in terms of the changing nature of film industry, the cultural politics of

representation and prevailing sexual economies, the representation of the sexual often can be read as a transgressive site.

The discussion which followed the presentations raised questions about the space between the original text and the revised text for the reader to create meaning, the power, nature and scope for melodramatic cinematic representation to make radical interventions, comparison between literature and cinema in terms of radical interventions and the nature of Dalit writings and their impact and the radical potentialities of these narratives to bring change.

The chairperson drew attention to the critical role of woman as story-teller and the challenges before her. For a woman storyteller it was the content and what kind of stories she could create was the challenge. Her voice is collective rather than individual, able to negotiate with multiple challenges and realities thereby transcending accepted traditions. The second aspect she drew attention to was the reception of regional literatures in the present globalised situation. The impact of gender as a factor further complicated the situation. As a feminist writer, writing in post-Godhra situation threw up many realities and challenges which as a writer one had to negotiate with.

The theme for the second session was 'Political Perceptions in Women's Writings' and the session was chaired by Indu Agnihotri from CWDS, Delhi. The first presentation titled 'Fragmented Political Narratives: The Fictional and Autobiographical Writings of Bengali Women' by Sutanuka Ghosh explored the manner in which the narratives of Bengali Hindi middle-class women tried to create alternative spaces by articulating political consciousness, which disrupted an ordered and linear understanding of certain historical events. The paper was a comparison of autobiographical writings of Sarala Devi Chauda Rani, Santisudha Ghosh, Manikuntala Sen and the fictional writings of Santisudha Ghosh, Sabriti Roy and Sulekha Sanyal. These women were active in the political arena and hence their writings moved back and forth between the public and the private selves. All the authors under consideration were active members of political movements pre and post independent India and the paper investigated the manner in which these texts could be read as disruptive texts since they interrogated and deconstructed the ideology of female emancipation located within the framework of liberal humanism.

The second paper titled 'Questions of Gender and Class: A Study of Two Telugu Autobiographies' by K. Katyayani and T. Jyothi Rani was a comparative study of Kroparaju Sita Devi's Janai Janma Bhoomisha and Devulapalli Sri Rangamma's Naa Jeevitham . Authored by woman belonging to different political ideologies, the autobiographies throw light on the manner in which questions of gender clashed with larger national issues. Women's emancipation through political struggle was interrogated in the paper.

The third presentation by Sukalpa Bhattacharjee on 'Gendered Constructions of Identity: An/other History, An/other Subjectivity' examined the visible and invisible spaces of women's politics of intervention. The paper foregrounded the grand-narratives of Partition writing in the context of the Sylhet Referendum pertaining to the Surma-Barak Valley in Assam. In the male imagination the category 'woman' was defined in terms of the male gaze. However, in other narratives like folklore dances and embroidery, the female presence is strong. The other sources where the female presence was strongly felt were diaries of Subarna Prova Das, Suhasini Das and Suroma Ghatak's Shillong Jailer Diary.

The fourth presentation by Achyut Chetan titled 'Women in the Constituent Assembly: Politics of Representation and Identity' investigated the heterogeneous nature of women's agency as located within the broad context of nationalist politics. The presentation was a study of Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, who was a member of the All India Women's Conference, who expressed her loyalty towards the Muslim community and Begum Qudisia Aizaz, another member of the Indian Constituent Assembly, who asked Muslims to give up their reserved seats. The study interrogated and challenged the notion of a unified women's movement.

The fifth presentation by the Gujarati poet, Saroop Dhruv on 'Voicing the Silence: The Genocide and After' drew attention to the silence among mainstream literary artists in Gujarat about the Godhra riots and their refusal to engage with the realities of state sponsored genocide. Fears of marginalization and the powerful presence of right wing politics has resulted in 'writings' not related to lived experiences and the figure of the protest writer is completely absent from the literary landscape. The two major literary organizations in the state—the Sahitya Academi and the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad — are completely dominated by Right Wing writers. However, there are a few women writers, who have broken the silence and they are Suvarna, Himanshi Shelat, Varsha Adalaja, Minal Dave, Usha Upadhaya and Rita Bhatt and their writings include writings translations, articles and short stories.

The discussion in this session raised questions about the gendered nature of public memory, and its role in re-writing Partition history, the use of literary sources to re-write feminist history to create not merely alternative knowledges, but to widen mainstream discourses. Questions were also raised about defining the nature of feminist writing post-Godhra and the manner in which this kind of writing can change the paradigms of women's writing in terms of the negotiations and confrontations reflected in them.

The Third Session began with the presentation titled 'Women Artists—Unearthing the Hidden' by Poonam Gandhi. The paper-presenter sought to investigate the category 'women artists' in contemporary India. Traditional art traditions in India did not provide space for individual artistic expression since it was the collective identity which was more important.

However recent feminist scholarship has sought to provide space for women artists and the presentation was the result of a study of 23 upper caste and class female artists, who had a diploma in Fine Arts. Some of the artists interviewed expressed their desire to be identified only as 'artists' while others wanted to be identified specifically as women artists. Their art dealt with oppression under patriarchy, motherhood, autobiographical elements and the need to be visible. Their artistic expressions also sought to redefine the process of viewing and appreciating art.

The second presentation by Amit Kumar Pradhan on 'Some Reflections on Language and Feminist Discourse' explored the manner in which the speech act philosophical theories of Austin can deal with the exclusion of women from language metaphorically. Three feminist issues were discussed in the presentation from this point of view— (i) do men and women use language differently, (ii) the presence of sexism and (iii) can women articulate their experiences in the oppressor's language.

The next presentation titled 'Feminisms, Knowledge Production and Citizenship: Representing Women in the 'War on Terror' dealt with the constructions of the Islamic world by elite Muslim women journalists and writers located in the West. While corporate media's reporting of the 'War on Terror' has come under criticism for legitimizing the Bush Administration's Afghan and Iraq policies, very little attention has been paid to the complex roles played by the above mentioned group in their capacities as women/feminist filmmakers/activists. The four films critically viewed were *Beneath the Veil*, *Faith Without Fear*, *Osama* and *Kandahar*. Locating the movies in the post 9/11 situation when Islamic terrorism legitimized Huntington's 'Clash of Civilization' theories, the paper focused on the rise of neo-Orientalism in the cultural productions. The themes common to all the movies were what was wrong with the Islamic world and Muslims, and the uncritical acceptance of Western view points for providing the solution. Rather than questioning racism, Islamophobia, erosion of citizenship, the movies endorsed the dominant Western hegemonic viewpoint. The paper also drew attention to the fact that the movies and documentaries were also integrated as course material in Women's Studies departments where there was no critical interrogation of these constructions.

The last presentation titled 'Women and Early Talkies: Encountering Conventions and Canons' by Madhuja Mukherjee examines the polysemic tendencies in 'Chandidas' a film about a Vaishnavite poet by Debaki Bose in 1932. The form of the movie adhered to what may be referred to as a 'popular-melodramatic' film. Partha Chatterjee's construction of the public/private realm with nationalist ideology becomes problematic when used as an analytical tool to read 'women's question' in the movie. Investigation of the 'women's question' in popular culture presents more vocal, articulate women, who in turn challenge stable 'bhadrak' woman narratives.

The session was followed by discussion on the need to read artistic creations as political interventions, the need to interrogate 'women's space' in art beyond essentialist frameworks, to interrogate the manner in which women artists have interrogated prevailing aesthetics.

**SPECIAL
SESSION:**

**POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS IN WOMEN'S
WRITINGS**

(Co-ordinator: Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, Sachetana and Ebong Alap, Kolkata)

This separate session on 'Political Perceptions in Women's Writing' was convened primarily to explore the terms of production of women's writings in the sub-continent since the time middle class women started entering the public domain towards the beginning of the twentieth century. So this session had a closer focus on women's writing as counter history and was convened to help us work towards a better understanding of the complex interplay between the 'public' and the 'private' in women's lives and what constitutes the 'political' in their writings. Another intention of this session was to locate some of the areas that have received scant attention in the steady stream of research that has tried to reclaim women's history in the sub-continent in the last 25 years.

The five papers presented in this session all made comparative analyses of women's perceptions from different locations—those of class, caste, religion, province etc—to try and understand how these locations shaped the contours of women's writings. The papers also problematized the condition and meaning of women's participation in the public sphere. Each of the presentations moved away from English literature into 'bhasha' literature and interrogated different kinds of sources, exploring how non-traditional sources can be used to reclaim women's history.

Sutanuka Ghosh's paper 'Fragmented Political Narratives: The Fictional and Autobiographical Writings of Bengali Women', examined how women have strategically used autobiographical and fictional writings to complement each other in the interstices of their negotiation with national and gender politics. K Katyayani and T Jyothi Rani's paper on two Telugu autobiographies did a close reading of the narratives of a nationalist woman Sita Devi and the memoirs of a Communist leader's wife, Srirangamma, which helped underscore the dynamics of women's participation in the Congress-led nationalist movement and the Communist movement in Andhra Pradesh from the 1920s to the 1950s. In general the two papers showed how the writers' burden of being responsible to society and nation, shape the way in which they engage with gender and nationalist politics in their writings.

Two other papers shed light on areas which have received very little attention so far. One was Sukalpa Bhattacharya's paper, 'Gendered Constructions Of Identity: An/Other (Hi)story, An/Other Subjectivity' which traced how experiential sources can be harnessed to locate other modes of articulation by women in the Surma-Barak Valley of Assam in the wake of Partition and in other times of ambivalence and conflict. The other was Achyut Chetan's paper entitled 'Women in the Constituent Assembly: the Case of Begum Aizaz Rasul,' which looked into the causes and configuration of the splits in the perceptions of the founding mothers of our Constitution on questions of representation and identity. Last but not the least, Sarop Dhruv, in her paper 'Gujarati Women Writing the Genocide' voiced the politics of literary silence surrounding the 2002 genocide in Gujarat and questioned the terms of literary production in a state plagued by the lack of any discourse except the Hindutva one. As in the other sessions dealing with Language, Literature and Cultural Production, this session too discussed how the new ways of knowing and seeing generated by the women's movement in the last twenty-five years or so, shaped the way we look at women's writing today. All the papers and the lively discussions that followed grappled with how political perceptions in women's writings could be made part of the historical body of knowledge in the sub-continent.

In parallel with the main events of the Conference, the plenary presentations and sub-themes, the Conference included a set of parallel programmes.

Cultural Programme

A special evening programme was hosted with Hindustani vocalist Sandhya Kathavate who provided a lecture demonstration "Sun re Sakhi: Women's Songs, women's voices". As a performing musician as well as a musicologist and music organizer, Sandhya chose songs from a variety of genres: classical, folk, ghazal, abhang and popular, composed by both men and women, but with a female protagonist, thus embodying a female voice or a voice construed as feminine. The singing was interspersed with brief comments on the content and contexts of the songs. The dearth of women composers for classical compositions, the conventional 'ashta nayika' motifs in love songs, which portrayed the eight kinds of heroines in a love tryst, the daily lives of women captured in folk songs, the profound insights into the compositions of women saints were some of the points brought out by her, thus extending the field of feminist knowledge from the perspectives of music. The IAWS gratefully records Sandhya Kathavate's willingness to perform on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee without charging any special fee.

Book Stalls

The book stalls located within the university consisted of a total number of 14 stalls, representing the following groups – women's studies centres, women's documentation centres, women's organizations, other organizations and regular book sellers. They constituted a significant location for the sharing of materials and publications of all kinds related to women.

Exhibitions

Three special exhibitions were made available to all the participants of the Conference as well as the college students of Lucknow University. These included an exhibition of poster women taken from the history of the Indian women's movement organized by Zubaan

Books; Representing Indian Women, 1880-1947 through photographs by the Centre for Women's Development Studies; and the thousand women exhibition organized by Sangat and Kriti.

Film Screenings

As in the previous IAWS Conference film screenings offered a stimulating space of engagement and discussion on issues of women and feminism. The following films were screened in a special session coordinated by Kavita Panjabi:

MORALITY TV AND THE LOVING JEHAD: A Thrilling Tale

(2007, 29 min)

Director: Paromita Vohra

A documentary on moral policing and tabloid culture set in Meerut. Paromita says: "Although my film speaks of moral policing and news television and tabloid culture, it is a clear mimicry and critique of the present media scenario."

LADIES SPECIAL: (2003, 29 min)

Directed by Nidhi Tuli

Produced by Public Service Broadcasting Trust 'Ladies Special' travels on a Mumbai train reserved wholly for women. For a brief while, the camera, crew and viewers become part of the spontaneous community of women that this train has engendered. With women boarding the same bogey daily, lives are shared, vegetables are chopped, birth ceremonies are celebrated, and clothes bought, as the 50 km journey becomes a space suspended unto itself. Many women speak of the commute as a cherished time when they can be themselves, instead of wives and mothers and workers and housewives. Ladies Special is a celebration of their lives.

BOL (8 min , 2002)

Director Shabnam Virmani

"Bol", eight one-minute films, were made by Drishti Media Collective, Ahmedabad, and telecast on major television channels in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Bengal to create awareness about domestic violence. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) collaborated with Drishti in making the film. "We had taken the conscious decision not to conceal the identity of speakers through shadow lighting or other technical device. We felt that would unwittingly reinforce the culture of shame and denial that surrounds this issue

Being part of this campaign, I think also worked as a public vindication of a very painful private struggle against violence in their lives.... It was when the process of making these films began to hold as much social value as the films themselves, that I felt we had been able to transcend the top-down nature of this medium called television..." *Shabnam Virmani*

AUTUMN'S FINAL COUNTRY (66 min, 2003)

Director : Sonia Jabbar

Four displaced women in Kashmir talk about their lives to Indian journalist and peace activist Sonia Jabbar in *Autumn's Final Country*, a devastating and sensitive film made when Jabbar, journalist and peace activist was asked to arrange for displaced Kashmiri women to testify at the South Asia Court of Women in Dhaka, August 2003. Unable to arrange the travel costs, she took a crash course in filmmaking, bought a camera and recorded their testimonies instead.

GIRL SONG (2003, 28 min)

Director: Vasudha Joshi

This half hour documentary enters the life of Anjum Katyal, blues singer, poet and mother, capturing her voice as she performs the blues in her home city of Kolkata, as she reads aloud from her poems and her journal to her daughter, as she converses with her mother and her daughter about the multi-religious, multi-cultural heritage that she so proudly owns to, and as she talks of confronting the climate of hostility and distrust towards minorities spreading through the country. In her interactions with her mother and her daughter, we see how a cultural identity proudly woven from many strands is increasingly under threat from narrow and exclusivist definitions of identity.

PRINTED RAINBOW (2006, 15 min)

Directed, Produced, Animated by: Gitanjali Rao

A big city. A tiny apartment. There, in solitude, live an old woman and her cat, stuck in their daily chores against the hiss of the city. The Windows look out into more windows with more desolate lives. The old woman, however, has a secret window: her precious collection of match boxes. Their printed labels open into a myriad of exotic worlds. The cat is the sole companion in her explorations of these magical worlds where beauty, imagination and wonder triumph over the insignificance of her existence.

Resolutions passed in the General Body Meeting of the XII National Conference:

1. Resolution for the release of Vinayak Sen: The XII National Conference of the IAWS at its General Body meeting, unanimously passed the following resolution in the context of the ongoing detention of the medical doctor and human rights activist Vinayak Sen:

The IAWS appeals for the release of Vinayak Sen who has been held in judicial custody under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 and the Chhattisgarh Vishesh Jan Suraksha Adhinyam 2005 (Chhattisgarh Public Security Act). The IAWS further demands the repeal of the unconstitutional Chhattisgarh Public Security Act that violates the fundamental rights of Indian citizens.

2. Resolution against violence in Nandigram and Singur: The General Body of the XII National conference strongly condemns the violence unleashed in Nandigram and Singur by the Government in West Bengal, against citizens protesting Special Economic Zones and Corporate Globalization as well as the Government's undemocratic moves to appropriate land for industrial use. We are particularly outraged by the State's use of sexual violence to intimidate a people and suppress protests. As feminists who have a shared political investment in opposing State violence, we wish to reiterate that commitment at this historical juncture.

3. Resolution on the status of UGC supported women's studies centres: The General Body of the XII National Conference wishes to bring to general and urgent attention the state of Women's Studies Centres in the Universities. Three issues are critical here: Women's Studies Centres are tied to the 5 year plans. This affects the continuity of the Centres and their programmes. Most of the WSCs function with a skeletal staff (faculty and non-faculty) and almost all of them are on contract. The funding received by the WSCs is severely affected because of its relationship with the UGC.

The General Body demands that

- (1) the UGC Standing/Advisory Committee Report on Women's Studies to be discussed and their recommendations to be made public.
- (2) funds be released immediately as all work has come to a grinding halt.

- (3) the Women's Studies Centres, and the faculty and other posts within these are made permanent in order to ensure the smooth functioning of Women's Studies in the institutional context.
- (4) those Centres that have received State Government support from out of the 10th Plan be made permanent.

4. Resolution on implementation of the Sri Krishna Commission Report:

This resolution is with respect to the implementation of the Sri Krishna Commission Report that investigated the 1992-1993 riots in Bombay following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The Commission's findings and recommendations have been pending through successive governments in Maharashtra. The General Body supports the campaign for the complete implementation of the report with immediate effect.

5. Resolution on victims in Khairalanji: The General Body of the XII National conference condemns the gruesome murder of dalits and the sexual assault and murder of dalit women by dominant caste men in Khairalanji in Maharashtra. We especially condemn the use of sexual violence to intimidate and silence dalits, specifically dalit women who stand up for their rights to a life of dignity.

6. Repeal of the AFSPA: The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, (AFSPA) despite it being an 'emergency legislation' that should be subject to review every six months has been in force in large parts of the North-Eastern States as well as Jammu and Kashmir for decades now. The AFSPA is a draconian law which grants undemocratic powers to the armed forces, resulting in gross human rights violation in all areas of its operation. As members of the Women's Movement, we stand in solidarity with all democratic struggles against draconian laws like the AFSPA. We speak as one voice with women like Chanu Irom Sharmila who continues her hunger fast against AFSPA for the 7th consecutive year. The impunity granted to the armed forces under AFSPA must end. The victims of militarization in the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir must get justice. The AFSPA must be repealed.

7. Resolution supporting Bilquis Bano: The General Body of the XII National Conference recognizes the courage shown by Bilquis Bano who pursued the charges of rape of a number of women and herself during the Gujarat genocide of 2002. This has resulted in the first historic conviction on rape during a communal conflict. However we note with concern that the judgment has acquitted the policemen and doctors who had sought to erase the material evidence of assault and murder, an aspect of the judgment that Bilquis herself has highlighted, and one that she continues to struggle against. We join Bilquis in this continuing struggle and demand that the relevant authorities appeal against the acquittal of state functionaries who were key accomplices in the systematic obstruction of justice and in which they almost succeeded, but for the persistence of Bilquis Bano.

Indian Association for Women's Studies
<http://www.iaws.org>