

**SILVER JUBILEE**  
**1982-2007**



# Indian Association for Women's Studies

## XII NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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

Organised by IAWS with the Institute of Women's Studies,  
University of Lucknow and Isabella Thoburn College  
Lucknow: 7-10 Feb., 2008

The Indian Association for Women's Studies is a professional association that aims to further the perspectives of women's studies within and beyond educational institutions. It endeavours to strengthen the movement for women's equality through networking, conferences, workshops and research, and through collaboration with institutions and groups working for similar objectives. IAWS provides a forum for interaction among students, researchers, academics, activists and practitioners in different fields, both men and women.

IAWS completed 25 years in 2007. The XIIth National Conference is planned as a Silver Jubilee event to commemorate this significant landmark. The four-day conference is being organised in collaboration with the Institute of Women's Studies, University of Lucknow, and Isabella Thoburn College. It will be held at both these venues during 7-10 February 2008.

# XII National Conference on Women's Studies

**7-10 February, 2008**

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

*organised by*

**Indian Association for Women's Studies**

*at*

**University of Lucknow**

*&*

**Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow**

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**SILVER JUBILEE: XII National Conference: 7-10 Feb. 2008  
Feminism, Education and the Transformation of Knowledges**

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## Concept Note

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

The occasion of the Silver Jubilee in 2007-08 provides a special opportunity to confront the challenges facing the women's studies movement today. The broad aim of the XIIth National Conference is to reflect upon the interventions of women's studies and feminism as forces of transformation in the sphere of knowledge production 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 are forcing us to take particular note of how educational structures and policies are changing and what implications these have for the future of women's studies.

Women's Studies emerged during years of political and social upheaval in India in the 1970s and 1980s. The earliest impetus to developing women's studies came from a generation of scholars, activists and policy makers who were shocked to discover that, far from witnessing genuine development and progress, the lives of the vast majority of Indian women had not improved after Independence, sometimes even deteriorating at

an accelerated pace. The context of this discovery, as is well known, was the production of the *Towards Equality* Report at the behest of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, and its ultimate destination was the United Nation's International Women's Year gathering of 1975. Founders of women's studies questioned the Constitutional guarantees of gender equality and their own education for having rendered such processes invisible. New researches were conceptualised with the help of major institutions like the Indian Council of Social Science Research that sought to re-open the women's question, generate new data on women, especially the rural poor, and develop critiques of the social sciences and humanities. In the years that have followed, women's studies has expanded and grown, leaving no discipline untouched or question unaddressed in efforts to combat women's marginalisation in society.

Now several decades old, women's studies faces many fresh challenges in contemporary times, and this is an opportune moment for collective reflection and renewal. This Conference, therefore, seeks to provide a platform for reviewing our achievements, paying special attention to our modes of intervention, tools of analysis, political frameworks and institutional constraints. New knowledges have been produced and existing ideologies about women and gender questioned from myriad locations. Feminists have been simultaneously engaging with and questioning conventional disciplinary boundaries, while also initiating new approaches that validate the voices and experiences of those whom existing educational systems have too frequently excluded. While the initial decades of the 1970s and '80s were mainly focused on generating new research, since

the 1990s there has been a growing interest in issues relating to teaching and pedagogy. Schooling and the production of textbooks, curriculum development and courses in women's studies, along with action-research and grassroots empowerment have seen greater involvement from among activists and scholars.

Through its plenary panels and sub-themes, the Conference will be an occasion to deliberate on the past, present and possible futures of women's studies as a progressive force of and for change.

Madhuri Shah Memorial lecture: **Education and Educational Policy for the 21st Century**

Plenary Panel I: **Interventions in Education:** This theme plenary will focus on the different dimensions of gender and women's studies in relation to education. The CORD team (Anuradha De, Claire Noronha and Meera Samson) will revisit the 'Probe Report' on schooling and the education problems of the disadvantaged in India, and V. Geeta will speak on pedagogic interventions in the classroom. Tejaswini Niranjana will discuss higher education and new initiatives, Jaya Sharma non-formal education, and Maithreyi Krishnaraj revisit the founding moment of women's studies.

Plenary Panel II: **Special Panel on U.P. and Women's Issues:** This special panel is being organised by the Women's Studies Institute of the University of Lucknow and will draw in scholars from Uttar Pradesh on issues of current concern to women in the state.

Plenary Panel III: **Fields of Knowledge:** Women's Studies and feminism have been sources of critique of existing bodies of knowledge as well as contributing to a transformed understanding of the issues at stake. This plenary will offer examples of such interrogation and interventions in the following broad areas: Padmini Swaminathan on development and the economy, Janaki Nair on history, Abha Sur on science, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan on literature, and Pratiksha Baxi on the law.

Plenary Panel IV: **Special Panel: Women and Knowledge Production in South Asia:** In keeping with the IAWS practice of networking with women's studies scholars in the South Asian region, this panel will draw in speakers from the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Uma Chakravarti will moderate and introduce the panel, which will include Rubina Saigol, Suraiya Begum and Anoja Wickramasinghe.

Plenary Panel V: **Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives:** This panel will assess the questions, dilemmas and challenges facing the women's movement and women's studies at this point in the history of our region. Each speaker, while addressing general issues from the perspective of her regional and intellectual location, will enter them through special vantage points: Anita Ghai (disability), Susie Tharu (caste), Ponni Arasu (sexuality), Nighat Said Khan (South Asia). Nivedita Menon will introduce and moderate the panel.

## Sub-theme -1

### Issues of Gender and Development: Perspectives and Conflicts

Early development initiatives identified development with economic growth, 'modernity' and the transformation of 'traditional', 'under-developed/developing' societies by western technologies, institutions and values; women were largely ignored both in policy and practice. During the 1970s, at a time when development theory was being countered by arguments for structural changes in society and the need to recognise the power relations embedded in national and international interactions, the growing environmental and women's movements were also questioning conventional development. As the women's movement gained strength, women entered the global debate by challenging assumptions that development would automatically enhance gender equality. In the following years and in different ways, the Women In/And Development, Ecofeminism, Gender and Development and other approaches contributed to alternative theories and critiques of development. By the 1990s, the rhetoric of gender empowerment had entered development theory and policy.

In India, 'women's development', conceptualised almost entirely in terms of women's welfare, was a priority of the national planning process since its inception. In the late 1970s, following

the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, the language of 'welfare' was replaced by what was then seen as a more genuine 'development' recognising women as participants in a process that was to include health, education and employment. Women-centred schemes for increasing women's employment were started. In the 1980s, NGOs and educational institutions were drawn into programmes for poverty alleviation and in the 1990s, the passing of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments on decentralised governance and the concurrent thrust towards local management of resources seemed to open new possibilities for women. Following the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001), the declared emphasis was on economic and social empowerment, gender justice, and 'mainstreaming' gender perspectives in all sectoral policies and programmes. This seemingly progressive thrust has, however, been undermined both because of the pressures of a liberalised global economy and market orientation, and because of the continued assertion/ reassertion of patriarchal norms at the level of communities and societies. Feminists have critiqued the present development approaches as being instrumental rather than truly empowering. This is reflected in a range of current debates on, for instance, the women's component plan and gender budgeting; the pressures on the informal sector where the largest numbers of women are engaged; the gendered impact of new proposals related to mining and other natural resource development policies; the deep conflicts over trade, exports and the setting up of SEZs; occupational hazards in new industries; the violence associated with forced displacement, migration and trafficking etc. Indeed, development itself has been seen as a source of violence contrary to its assumed humanistic



underpinnings. While many argue for alternative forms and trajectories of development, some advocate non-development and/or a return to an imagined gender-equitable past.

Without romanticising the lack of development or denying the developmental gains made by sections of women, this sub-theme seeks to reflect upon and critique perspectives and conflicts related to gender and development. It is expected that papers will interrogate gender-bias in the politics and knowledge systems that have shaped the processes and institutions through which development policy has impacted on women, and will also explore alternatives. We invite both theoretical and empirical papers, particularly in areas such as:

- Feminist approaches to development including questions of data sources on women.
- Critical examinations of women-centred policies and programmes.
- The role of institutions in engendering development, including urban and rural governance, community-based organisations, NGOs etc.
- Auditing from a feminist perspective and the gender-budgeting exercises of the government.
- Conflicts related to the marginalisation of livelihoods and knowledge in a globalised economy
- The gendered impact of the labour market.

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## Sub-theme - 2

### Feminism and Knowledges of Violence

Feminist politics has struggled 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 is 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 are 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 is 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 we invite papers that are trying 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. Listed below are some of the possible areas for contribution:

- Counselling practices in the women's centres; in family counselling centres, police stations; psychology clinics and other community counselling locations.
- Other institutional responses to violence; sexual harassment committees, police stations, caste panchayats, law courts, etc.
- Medical knowledges that underwrite policies and advocacy on issues such as sex ratios, female infanticide, mortality rates and domestic violence; underlying methodologies such as epidemiological surveys etc.
- Knowledges on violence in relation to questions of minority status and difference: e.g. Muslim women in the framework of community and secularism; sex workers in the discourse of HIV/AIDS; the sexual violence on dalit women in relation to caste atrocities; tribal women and the violence of development.
- Modes of narrativising experiences of violence – as a report, complaint, petition, documentary, as biography and autobiography.
- Local contexts of addressing violence, especially the complex overlaps of family, community and the legal registers.

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### Sub-theme - 3

## Rethinking Feminist Methodologies in Contemporary Research

Over the last few decades the contributions of feminist scholars to social science and humanities research have been very significant. They have offered new perspectives and methods in researching women's lives and in analyzing the structures and ideologies that mediate women's everyday existence. Feminist interrogation of various disciplines has involved critical engagement with conventional research methods and approaches, and the sources for research in various disciplines. But there is yet to be a systematic documentation and reflection on what constitutes feminist research, on the feminist use of various research techniques, tools and methods, how these have offered possibilities for rethinking research within various disciplines and also on the interdisciplinary aspects of doing feminist research.

The value of oral histories of women in relation to historical research on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods offers a form of 'history from below' in addressing experiences or perceptions that are often glossed over or excluded in historical research on momentous events, large-scale processes and prominent (usually male) figures of historical agency. Where the focus of research is on those who live on the margins and are

peripheral to the dominant discourse, oral testimonies also open up a window into the experiences of people lacking a written history or sense of rootedness. This has also redefined conventional understandings of what particular historical processes have entailed and offered innovative approaches to questions about voice and the politics of knowledge production. The use of different voices, multiple and intersecting discourses and an emphasis on polysemous, related meanings rather than the lateral narrative can capture complex historical processes. Earlier oral testimonies saw women as a category of analysis and subjects of power. At the next stage, researchers began to acknowledge the agencies of research participants, foregrounding their own positionality. The interview method, for example, was shown to carry the potential to foreground dialogical exchanges between the producers of research findings and the sources of these productions. Some of this has taken the form of documented conversations that convey intricate exchanges between speakers with different locations and vantage points. The position of the researcher and the researched then becomes a critical issue as also the structure of the entire research process. Life histories/ autobiographies have been termed as both 'alternative publics' and 'subaltern counter-publics' to show that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. The 'feminist standpoint' research representing reality from women's experience has helped to reconstruct the domain of conventional research with the use of a wide variety of qualitative

research methods such as the participatory observation, consciousness-raising methods, in-depth interviews, group diaries, documenting oral narratives and testimonies, photography or 'talking picture' techniques etc. Even as feminist research has more-or-less discounted quantitative methods such as statistical data collection for its standardised ideals of objectivity at the cost of subjectivity and for its trivialisation of the reality of women's experiences, some feminist researchers have been able to effectively and imaginatively utilise the quantitative data that is 'generalisable' about the experiences of women. In this context, it would be relevant to explore:

- a) How and why certain research methods have come to be privileged over others by feminists researching women's lives?
- b) How have research methods like participatory research, participatory rural appraisals etc. been able to modify these techniques and what are the advantages and disadvantages of using them?
- c) How have feminist researchers 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?

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.

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## Sub-theme - 4

### Interface between Action and Research

In recent years most of knowledge production in the area of women's studies is through research done by the women's studies centres and NGOs or women's groups working on women's issues. While the women's studies centres are constrained by the rules imposed by the UGC to implement action-based programmes, the NGOs are preoccupied with a more problem solving kind of research. In both kinds of studies the main outputs are in terms of a documentation of women's oppression or deprivation as a result of various programmes, policies, socio-cultural contexts.

A large number of innovative tools and methods are being developed by practitioners and academics to understand women's position. Oral histories, action research, participatory action research, etc. are some of the methods used and these have added immensely to the body of knowledge around women and relations between men and women. They have informed action and also helped in the process of theorisation in some of the new areas.

Action research is inquiry or research in the context of focused efforts to improve practice. It is popularly used by practitioners who look at research as a problem solving mechanism. It has also been used as a tool for programme or

project evaluations for mid term corrections. It gives new opportunities to reflect on and assess; to explore and test new ideas, methods, and interventions; to assess how effective the new approaches were; to share feedback with fellow team members; and to make decisions about which new approaches to include in the action programme. Importantly, it has challenged the notion that research is the prerogative of academics. Indeed, participatory action research is research by the people on issues that concern them most. The method has the potential to inform action, mainly because it is grounded in practical action, aimed at solving an immediate problem situation while informing theory. This method is useful for practitioners mainly because it believes that complex processes can be studied best by introducing changes and observing them.

While action research has the potential for relevant outcomes, a word of caution needs to be in place here. A lot of this research also comes as a response to the international discourse introduced by donor agencies. Research that promotes a sectoral understanding is also largely preferred over research that would help understand larger societal changes and gender relations within those changes. Inevitably, this would lead to a reductionist understanding of gender. Most of the research under the name of action research has neither contributed to action nor has it contributed to the development of theory. A large amount of research work by NGOs in the form of reports ends up as commodities for securing more funding. Such a narrow understanding of research is dangerous from the point of view of developing broader understandings of change.

We are at a juncture where there is need for research that would lead to serious theorising that will contribute to action, but not through a fragmented understanding of gender relations. We need to look at synergies between empirical and theoretical work where a coming together of practitioners and academics becomes critical.

In this sub-theme we would use the opportunity to critically examine recent research that can be categorised as action research in a larger perspective of how it has contributed to changing relations between men and women. We would welcome papers where action research has contributed to both building new understandings and theories that hold potential for change and direct action. Papers that have focused on problem-solving research but see its limitations would be useful to argue for a synthesis of empirical and theoretical research.

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## Sub theme - 5

### Gender, Science and Technology

Critical studies of science indicate that in developing its hegemony over knowledge-making systems, modern western science not only marginalized traditional knowledge-making systems in the west but also erased knowledge systems of non-western societies dubbing them as less rational and less evolved systems. These critiques use categories of nation, class and race to demonstrate the imperialist, capitalist and Eurocentric character of science. Not surprisingly, these critiques do not include gender as a tool for scrutinizing science. It is the feminist movements and feminist scholarship that have fore-grounded the masculinisation of science both in its epistemology by privileging a disembodied notion of rationality and in its ontology by looking at nature as passive. Further, feminist critiques of science have demonstrated that the two sex-gender ideology leading to patriarchy was firmly cemented by science and technology. They argue that women's bodies, lives, experiences and spaces are both constructed by and marginalized within patriarchal science. Also 'masculinist' studies of science (that look at science from the point of view of an alternative masculinity) have argued against the Enlightenment philosophy (in which science is deeply embedded), and could provide a starting point of science criticism from the perspective of gender. They argue that science not only marginalized women but also variant

notions of men and masculinity. Also, modern science has been critiqued by a variety of social movements like the pacifist and the environmental movements. Moreover, social sciences like Sociology which had privileged science as a 'special case' in the range of knowledge making systems in a society and therefore exempted it from scrutiny, have in recent years not only questioned their own status as 'scientific' knowledge-making systems but have also brought science- as ideology and as practice- under their scrutiny.

We have also witnessed the so-called *Science Wars* around science as a knowledge-making system and its relationship to societies- their development and progress. The feminist critiques of science have been the centre-stone of this debate. While this polemics has played a role in sharpening the debates between the critics and supporters of science, it is necessary to generate a deeper scholarship along both ends of this axis- particularly within feminist thinking.

Feminist approaches to science and technology are varied. While some use scientific rationality to challenge patriarchy and also view technology as liberating women from the confines of tradition, others place science and technology within the power structures of patriarchy, implicating them in the problems faced by women. They argue that science is gendered in its very inception and technology- whether in the health and medicine sector or the IT sector- and has added to the oppression of women either by displacing them or by 'commodifying' them further. Feminist choices of reform or critique foreground alternative systems of knowledge production.



Feminist critiques of science began with the issue of the poor presence of women in science, examining the kinds of exclusions at play in the marginalization of women as scientists. This continues to be a significant area of concern.

This sub-theme invites papers/poster exhibitions/films within the above framework.

The areas that the sessions would aim to look at would be

- Philosophical and theoretical engagements with science- natural and social- from a feminist perspective- both critical and affirmative.
- Feminist engagements with alternative systems of knowledge production that enhance our understanding of science.
- Pedagogic issues in the teaching of science and gender.
- Role of women and their marginalization in popular science movements
- Impact of technology on women's lives in areas of health and medicine.
- Women's relationships to IT.
- Issues of women practitioners of science and the impact of their gender on their practice.
- Masculinist studies of science
- The construction of the body- male, female and hermaphrodite- by science and technology.

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## Sub-theme - 6

### Generating New Knowledge around Sexualities and Genders

There is a growing discourse, based on the critique of compulsory heterosexuality and the gender binary system, in conjunction with the feminist questioning of the role of patriarchy in the construction of both these notions. Earlier discourses have largely grown out of recognition of violations centred around sexuality such as sexual offences in the private and public domain; violence within hetero-patriarchal institutions such as marriage, family or community; the public control and regulation of women's bodies, their labour, sexuality and the like. There is now also a determined effort within the women's movements and within feminist scholarship to bring into the discussions the lived experiences of numerous people whose existences 'transgress' the normative and 'queer' the existing articulations of gender and sexuality.

These efforts have been highlighted largely due to the increasingly vocal queer movement and individual voices resisting and expressing dissent to the mainstream. These have challenged the institutionalisation of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality in every human institution and interaction, be it the law, family, community, science, religion, relationships, language, history, or any such other arena.

Women's studies began researching into and documenting women's lives, which had been (and are still in many ways) invisible, unvoiced and unheard. The invisibility of marginalised genders and sexualities is not just encompassed within the metaphors of social denial but also of stigma that violates their existence, while simultaneously legitimising the dominant norms of gender and sexuality. These voices and experiences still remain at the very margins and must be included to further the discourse; this is the challenge today for Women's Studies pedagogy and theory.

Expanding the frontiers of knowledge comes not just from an ethnographic lens that describes ways of life and cultures of other 'communities', of which there is an already existing body of literature. Knowledge also comes from the lessons we have learnt from standpoint feminism that all marginalised groups speak out within spaces that are, or are made to be receptive to hearing. It is, thus, that we expand the centres of knowledge formation while simultaneously extending the margins. While marginality is a spur for struggles against dominant discourses, the onus is on those within mainstream spaces to accommodate and thereby often change the parameters of social discourse and knowledge production.

In this sub-theme we would like to explore these issues. We invite abstracts and papers that address these concerns, raise pertinent questions, theorise on the issues, and give voice to the challenges (personal, political, collective) to the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. Presentations may also

include very short films (under 10-12 minutes), visual material, slides, etc.

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## Sub-theme - 7

### Pedagogies, Schooling, Gender Studies

This sub-theme has two components. Sub-theme 7A focuses more closely on questions of schooling, while Sub-theme 7B looks at other sites of the educational system both formal and non-formal.

#### Sub-theme 7A

#### Building Feminist Perspectives on Gender and School Education: Critiques, Challenges and New Directions

Gender has historically been an under-analysed and under-theorised dimension of school education in India. Several factors are responsible for this. Post-independence research and policy approaches on women and education were guided by a pervasive instrumentalism, that nurtured and sustained a development orthodoxy about the innate transformative potential of education for women. The politics of progressive movements in general, and feminist politics in particular, have also not informed educationists in the theorization of curricular and pedagogic practices; nor have they established the links of these practices

with class, caste, language, ethnicity and other markers of identity.

Since the 1990s however, new developments have provided some direction in thinking through questions of gender and schooling. For one, the state has begun to acknowledge the significance of gender as a social category in its policies and programmes. It is now obvious that even amongst the most vulnerable communities gender provides an adequate ground for discrimination whether it be in relation to the dalit, the tribal, or the Muslim girl child. It has also simultaneously constructed and tied up gender in specific ways with the school system- be it in relation to policy, programme design, pedagogy, teacher training, curricula design or research.

Recent initiatives by independent groups, organizations, and networks have also raised issues of social justice as part of their vision and practice of education. Innovations and practices integrating formal schooling with concerns regarding rights, justice and equity have been at the heart of efforts to democratize education. How has gender been articulated or 'visibilised' in these endeavours and how does it stand in relation to other social categories? Do feminist critiques and insights inform the understanding of equity, justice and rights in such initiatives?

If we are to extend the insights of feminist inquiry to the field of education, we will need to look at the nature of the claims being made today by the State vis-à-vis issues of inclusion in the arena of school education; the changing structures of education including privatisation; the gendering of schooling;

empowerment; and also sex education, or, more euphemistically, "life-skills" education. We will also have to assess the efforts made by non-state players in changing education and to establish gender as a critical social category. This theme invites papers that address some of these critiques and challenges, as well as recent efforts to engender education.

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## Sub-theme 7 B

### Exploring Pedagogies for Gender Studies

In its initial phase in the 70s and the 80s, when the mandate for Women's Studies Centres or Units was defined largely in terms of action-oriented research, matters of curriculum and pedagogy were accorded lesser importance. All the same several workshops and conferences on Women's Studies did focus on questions of the curriculum. Issues of pedagogy (the process of actual teaching) however were not as intensively discussed. The present need for concentrating on pedagogies though derives not so much from an effort to compensate for an earlier neglect but from an attempt to respond to developments that are more recent.

For one, there has been a shift from a concentration on women as such to an examination of *gender*; a shift that has implied radical change in the scope, approach and analysis of questions that were taken up even earlier. Socio-political debates in the last couple of decades have challenged the normative subject of feminism, i.e. the middle-class, upper caste, heterosexual, married, Hindu woman. This development has obvious and important implications for thinking through questions of curricula for Gender Studies as well as in relation to pedagogies. The task of deliberating on pedagogies is pertinent also because there has been an effort in various disciplines (including Economics or Political Science) to design curricula that are informed by gender politics. Moreover, there are now initiatives to introduce courses in Gender Studies in non-

Humanities, non-Social Science spaces such as in Law Schools or Institutes of Science. Presumably, all such attempts have required innovations in pedagogy that differ in varying degrees from what was practiced earlier.

In grappling with the issue of gender curriculum and pedagogy, the location of the students (in terms of geography, nature of institution, educational level, age etc.) too has become a critical issue. Furthermore, the increasingly observable shift from the University/College setting in which courses in Gender Studies have been conventionally offered to their housing in non-university research centres too is bound to significantly impact the structuring of the course as well as the pedagogy. The diverse developments in relation to the area of Gender Studies has thus reinforced the sense that the course cannot be a pre-determined monolith but has to be influenced by the context in which it is being transacted. The example of development organizations further underscores this point. If we do not limit our use of the term "pedagogy" to refer only to activities that result in the conferring of a degree but instead extend it to a structured set of interventions aimed at transacting knowledges, then it is imperative to recognize that the gender training programs offered by the development organizations too come within the ambit of our discussion on pedagogies as do sessions for adult literacy.

Pedagogies for gender studies as well as pedagogies informed by gender politics are thus in use in diverse settings, old and new. The sub-theme session on pedagogies seeks to bring together the many hued reflections on the subject onto a

common platform for further discussion. The topics listed below are only indicative of the range that could be taken up:

- Gender Pedagogy at Different Levels (undergraduate, postgraduate, M.Phil, Ph.D)
- Gender Pedagogy in Different Contexts (Formal, Informal etc.)
- Gender Training Modules
- Gender Pedagogy and the Media
- Gender Pedagogy in New Institutional Spaces
- Gender Pedagogy within Existing Disciplines
- Gender Pedagogy and Inter-disciplinarity
- Gender Studies and the Region

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**Sub-theme - 8**

**Tribe, Caste and Minority: Structures and Exclusions**

In the contemporary debates on caste and tribe, women and gender relations have often been relegated to a peripheral position. The gender perceptions of both the patriarchal state and the caste-bound patriarchal societies have resulted in the creation of structures and institutions which, by and large, are not women-friendly. Even amongst communities enjoying tribal/ adivasi status, or which actually contain various tribal/ adivasi elements, in most cases the societal structures remain insensitive to the basic concerns of women. This happens even in the very few remaining matrilinealities in the country where societal values and socialisation processes are deeply patriarchal and the exclusions of women from social processes, whether in areas such as decision-making or developmental policies, remain unaddressed. Both caste and tribal situations, therefore, still remain areas where much new knowledge needs to be created and the existing knowledge re-assessed through a more gender sensitive approach.

Some major questions need to be raised from an understanding of the Indian reality that castes and tribe/ adivasi are neither homogenous entities nor do they exist in a uniform pattern. Enquires into why such variations exist and what the

ramifications are for understanding the workings of patriarchy could generate a significant knowledge base for studies on women.

A related issue is the impact of minority responses to dominant socio-political values and their consequences for women in those communities. While the term minorities could refer to a variety of social formations, in the context of this sub-theme it refers in particular to the various religious minorities in India. Enquiries into societal practices, societal attitudes and behaviour patterns and the creation of very distinct patriarchal formulations in minority communities are important for the development of a gender just knowledge system.

In this sub-theme we invite papers that raise questions related, for example, to the following issues:

- a) Conceptual formulations on caste/tribe: Do women have a place in the existing general concepts of caste and tribe? As some feminists have held many of the concepts that are commonly used are inadequate. How then do we redefine and re-conceptualise the widely used terms and concepts of caste and tribe so as to bring them into a new gender sensitive knowledge system?
- b) The significance of regional variations of caste, social structures, minority responses and gender: The caste perceptions embedded in societal structures and institutions are not uniform in India. Amongst groups in North East India, caste may not play a very vital role in determining gender

unlike in other regions. Such variations may also be seen in the context of the societal structures in minority communities. Interrogating why these differences exist and how they have been important for creating the specificities of patriarchy could be crucial to the knowledge base of the women's movement in India.

- c) The adivasi/ tribal situation vis-à-vis women: The term 'tribe' does not denote an easily identifiable system of historical developments or social, economic and political existence. For instance, there will be very few commonalities between the various tribal communities of North East India and the adivasi communities of central India and Orissa. Therefore, tribe needs to be contextualised in relation to specific regional locations. Even the collection of empirical information on where adivasi/ tribal 'stand in the contemporary perspectives', could be a very valuable addition to knowledge about women in these situations.
- d) Tribe, caste and matriliney in India: Matriliney can perhaps be viewed as a far more woman-friendly institution and therefore needs to be studied in the context of social structures in the past, present and future.
- e) Structures, exclusions and questions of livelihood and sustainable development for women in the context of caste, tribe/Adivasi and minorities: These could be seen in the context of access to resources, property, livelihood options, food security etc. The focus however should be related to

how caste, tribe/adviasi and minority realities impact the material conditions of women and thus gender relations in society.

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**Sub-theme - 9**

**Language, Literature and Cultural Production**

In the context of women writing in South Asia, the last two decades have been witness to powerful articulations of women's voices from different communities and ethnic groups. Women writers, critics, readers and publishers have challenged the perspectives as well as the assumptions of superiority of male writing or the male author. A deepened historical sense has helped unearth forgotten and neglected texts, and critical awareness has dispensed with the ideas of purity, organic wholeness and continuity of aesthetic traditions associated with male canonical writing.

Simultaneously, the hegemony of upper class and upper caste women in literature has been replaced by the growing presence of subaltern voices. Translations of women's writing from *bhasa* literatures have brought to the fore subject matter and traditional forms unique to each literary culture, changing the contours of our understanding of *sahitya* and *vangmaya*. They have also uncovered the power politics of marginalized languages and silenced voices. Comparative analysis of such translations, though as yet very rare, have opened up possibilities of effective research and action in women's studies, besides providing insight into the lived worlds of women's lives.



Feminism has taught us to see differently several female practices that were looked down upon by conventional society. Forms of women's literary expression that were denigrated earlier are now being rediscovered and infused with new meaning and significance. Thus diaries, personal testimonials, songs, ritualistic performances, oral narratives, jottings, recipes etc have acquired significance as alternative sources of knowledge, and as repositories of women's wisdom.

Critical engagement with language comprises one of the most dynamic aspects of feminist literary practice. It ranges from a total rejection of the masterly, didactic language of patriarchal discourse, to a critique of the prejudiced and sexist nature of dominant everyday language, to the variety of ways in which the "father-tongue" of patriarchy has been recast to articulate women's experiences and thoughts.

Most of these reflections on the nature and politics of literary discourse and its relation to gendered knowledge are part of a global engagement with the cultural life world that literature both represents and embodies. However, it is imperative to consider the trajectories of these perspectives not just in global terms but also in the context of the nation and the historical and cultural forces of the subcontinent. This sub-theme thus invites abstracts for papers that will further elaborate the spectrum and significance of these concerns as they operate in literary texts, documents and cultural production. It is hoped that the presentations will focus on: comparative analysis of women's perspectives from different locations; writing the politics of body, sexuality and desire; women's language and the depiction of

women in language; the politics of translation and the revaluation of women's lives in the light of these translations; negotiations across class, caste, race, community and other significant trajectories of identity; critiques of conventions and canons; rethinking agencies and representations; redefining women's encounters with power and authority, and exploring silences.

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Sub-theme 9 contd...

## Political Perceptions in Women's Writings

This particular session under the sub-theme 'Language, Literature and Cultural Production' aims to develop conceptual clarity regarding notions of political perception. Keeping in mind that gender is a constitutive element of the most significant political processes of our times, it will explore the ways in which gender and political perceptions intersect each other. It will also question the terms of production of women's political perceptions since the time women led their own social and political organizations. On another level, the focus will be on assessing the ways in which research on women's political writings has shaped "the women's question" in South Asia.

The women's movement has generated new ways of knowing and seeing in the last 25 years. How has scholarship drawn upon these to approach political perceptions articulated in women's writings? How have these inflections equipped us, both methodologically and empirically, to reclaim women's history, and also to comprehend the ways in which national as well as sexual politics have shaped the culture of women's writings? How has the steady stream of research, that has dealt with the late-colonial period, the Partition, as well as the post-colonial years, examined the continuities and disjunctures between the earlier and the later decades, as well as between one region and another? This session hopes to address some of

these questions, and pave the way for a comprehensive yet wide-ranging appraisal of the impact of women's political writings in the sub-continent.

Women's writing here includes fiction; non-fictional prose in periodicals and newspapers; autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters; and reports, pamphlets and other documents written and produced by them through social and political organizations. It may even include transcripts of parliamentary debates and radio talks.

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## Provisional Conference Programme

- Day One: Thursday, 7 February**  
**Venue: Isabella Thoburn College Auditorium**
- 11.00 a.m. Inauguration  
Felicitation of Founder Members  
President's Address  
Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture  
Vote of Thanks by General Secretary
- 2.00 p.m. Plenary - I: Interventions in Education  
Plenary - II: Special Panel on U.P. and Women's Issues
- Day Two: Friday, 8 February**  
**Venue: University of Lucknow**
- 9.00 a.m. Sub-themes (parallel sessions)
- 4.00 p.m. Plenary - III: Fields of Knowledge
- Day Three: Saturday, 9 February**
- 9.00 a.m. Sub-themes (continued)
- 3.00 p.m. Plenary - IV: Women and Knowledge Production in South Asia
- 6.00 p.m. General Body Meeting
- Day Four: Sunday, 10 February**
- 9.00 a.m. Plenary - V: Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives
- 11.30 a.m. Sub-theme Reports  
Valedictory and Vote of Thanks

The Conference will also include relevant cultural events/ exhibitions, besides film and other visual presentations, and the display of publications and local handicrafts.

## **Information on Participation and Paper Presentation**

### **Participation**

Participation is open to all those who register for the Conference. IAWS Membership is optional but we strongly urge participants, who are not yet members, to join the association. The subscription details and membership form have been included in this brochure and are also available on the IAWS website: <http://www.iaws.org/> All participants and paper presenters are requested to complete registration formalities and make travel bookings early.

### **Paper Presentation**

If you would like to present a paper in one of the sub-themes, kindly prepare an abstract of about 500 words.

The abstract should clearly contain the following:

Title

Name of author/s

Full address for correspondence

Telephone and E-mail id

Abstracts should be sent to the Sub-theme coordinator concerned, preferably by e-mail.

**Abstracts should reach Sub-theme coordinators by 20 NOVEMBER 2007**

Acceptance will be communicated by 5 DECEMBER, 2007

Following acceptance of abstracts, sub-theme coordinators will communicate with you regarding paper presentation.

Abstracts will be published as part of the conference proceedings.

## General Information

**Registering for the Conference:** Registration forms should be filled in clearly and completely.

**LAST DATE FOR REGISTRATION: 20 DECEMBER, 2007**

Registration for Students (with proof of student status): Rs.100

Registration for Local Participants: Rs.200

Registration for Outstation Participants: Rs.500

Registration for Outstation Participants after 20 December: Rs.600

Completed Conference Registration Forms and Membership Forms along with Cheques or Demand Drafts drawn in favour of the **Indian Association for Women's Studies**, payable at **New Delhi** to be sent to Mary John, IAWS Secretariat (address on form).

- ❖ Accommodation is being arranged for participants at different venues in Lucknow. A major venue for accommodation will be the Convention Centre located at the City Montessori College, LDA Branch, Kanpur Road, Lucknow, which is about 10 kms from the University of Lucknow. Contact Number: Academic Staff College, Tel.: 0522-2740848
- ❖ Closer to the time of the conference, further details will be available on the IAWS website, at the Central Office, or through enquiries to the following e.mail: [conference.iaws@gmail.com](mailto:conference.iaws@gmail.com)
- ❖ Accommodation cannot be guaranteed for participants registering on the spot
- ❖ Local transport will be provided during the day on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> February and the morning of Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> February from the railway station/airport to the place of accommodation/ Conference Venue. It would be best to arrive by the evening of February 6<sup>th</sup> or morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Kindly intimate time and mode of arrival
- ❖ Registered participants will be sent receipts along with more information on the place of accommodation and any other relevant details. Please retain your receipt and bring it with you
- ❖ Transport will be arranged for all outstation participants to and from the Conference venue on all four days.

## Conference Registration Form

Please fill in CAPITALS

### 1. Participant information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department/ Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/ Fax/ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you an IAWS Member?  Yes  No

If you have sent the accompanying Membership Form to New Delhi

DD/ Cheque No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Bank: \_\_\_\_\_

Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

Check appropriate category:

Paper Presenter  Participant  Sub-theme Coordinator

Details of Payment of Registration Fees:

DD/ Cheque No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Drawee Bank: \_\_\_\_\_

Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment to be made in favour of *Indian Association for Women's Studies*, payable at *New Delhi*.

3. Type of Participant  Student  Local  Outstation

### 4. Other information

Do you require accomodation?  Yes  No

Do you require special ground floor accomodation? (for disabled persons, senior citizens, pregnant women etc.)  Yes  No

Date of Arrival: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Departure \_\_\_\_\_

Mode of Transport: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Arrival: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return completed form with payment to:

### IAWS Conference Secretariat

C/o Centre for Women's Development Studies  
25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market)  
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### IAWS members can

- ❖ initiate activities along with the Association in an effort to augment IAWS interaction, networking, research, documentation and dissemination objectives;
- ❖ participate in various activities and conferences organised by the Association;
- ❖ participate in running the Association by voting on the membership of the Executive Committee and standing for the elected offices;
- ❖ contribute to and receive a periodic Newsletter that disseminates information about Association activities in different parts of the country, explores gender issues, and may include book reviews, announcements, seminar/workshop reports and lots more.

**Subscription:** The subscription for different Membership categories is as follows:

Individual Ordinary: Rs.700/- for 3 years; Life: Rs.1500/- ;  
Institutional Ordinary: Rs.5000/- for 3 years; Life: Rs.10000/- ;  
Student: Rs.250/- for 3 years (Age limit 18-25) proof of age and student identification to be attached); SAARC region: Rs.700/- for 3 years; Friends of the Association Rupee equivalent of US\$ 100 will be welcome.

The ordinary/student memberships run from 1st April of year one to 31st March of year three and may be upgraded to Life.

Subscriptions must be made out to the **Indian Association for Women's Studies** through a Money Order/ Demand Draft/ Cheque (preferably payable at par in **New Delhi**).

Note: Please ensure that the Membership form is completed in all respects and that it is sent to the following address: IAWS, C/o Centre for Women's Development Studies, 25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi 110001.

## IAWS Membership Form

1. Name (in full): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Address for Communication: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ PIN: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel.Nos (Off./Mob./Res.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Education: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Affiliation/ Vocation: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Interest in Women's Studies (Please tick categories applicable)

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching  | <input type="checkbox"/> Organisation & Activism      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Media & Communication        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research  | <input type="checkbox"/> Administration of Programmes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Any Other |   |

6. Type of Membership (Please tick categories applicable)

- |   |   |                               |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Student              | <input type="checkbox"/> Life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional (Ordinary) | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional (Life) |                               |

Details of Payment: DD/ Cheque No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_.

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Venue for the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the Conference:**

**Isabella Thoburn College  
IT Crossing  
Lucknow 226007**

**Venue for subsequent days of the Conference:**

**University of Lucknow,  
Lucknow 226007**

**Telephone Contact at Lucknow:**

**Academic Staff College: 0522-2740848.**

**Main Accommodation:**

**City Convention Centre at  
City Montessori College  
LDA Branch  
Kanpur Road  
Lucknow.**

**Main Contact Office:**

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Conference E-mail: [conference.iaws@gmail.com](mailto:conference.iaws@gmail.com)  
Website: <http://www.iaws.org/>**



**SILVER JUBILEE: XII National Conference  
Lucknow: 7-10 Feb. 2008**



## **PLENARIES**

- I. Interventions in Education
- II. Special panel on U.P. and Women's Issues
- III. Fields of Knowledge
- IV. Women and Knowledge Production in South Asia
- V. Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives

## **SUB-THEMES**

1. Issues of Gender and Development: Perspectives and Conflicts
2. Feminism and Knowledges of Violence
3. Rethinking Feminist Methodologies in Contemporary Research
4. Interface between Action and Research
5. Gender, Science and Technology
6. Generating New Knowledge around Sexualities and Genders
7. Pedagogies, Schooling, Gender Studies
8. Tribe, Caste and Minority: Structures and Exclusions
9. Language, Literature and Cultural Production

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