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XIII National Conference

**RESISTING  
MARGINALIZATIONS,  
CHALLENGING HEGEMONIES:  
RE-VISIONING GENDER  
POLITICS  
Wardha, 21-24 January 2011**

A REPORT

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XIII NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES  
21-24 JANUARY 2011

RESISTING MARGINALIZATIONS,  
CHALLENGING HEGEMONIES:  
RE-VISIONING GENDER POLITICS

ORGANIZED BY  
INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

WITH THE

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES  
MAHATMA GANDHI ANTARRASHTRIYA HINDI VISHWAVIDYALAYA  
WARDHA

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## 1. PRELIMINARIES

The Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) was established in 1982 to further the field of women's studies and women's studies perspectives in different disciplines and to help strengthen the movement for women's equality through networking, conferences and campaigns, and collaboration with institutions/ agencies working for similar objectives. IAWS is governed by its Constitution and is registered under the Registrar of Societies, New Delhi. It is voluntarily managed by an elected Executive Committee. Members include academics, researchers, students, activists, social workers, media persons and others, women and men. IAWS marked its Silver Jubilee in 2007.

From its inception, IAWS has continuously sought to further the engagement between women's studies, academics and the women's movement. Major platforms for this are the regional workshops and the National Conference, which is held every two or three years on themes of contemporary significance. The XIIIth National Conference was organized in collaboration with the Department of Women's Studies, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (MGAHV) in January 2011 at Wardha. The MGAHV is an Indian central university established in 1997 for the promotion and development of Hindi language and literature, through teaching and research. The district of Wardha lies in a region of multiple social and geographical locations. While it is part of Vidharbha in Maharashtra, it is also situated in Central India, and is culturally and linguistically diverse with Hindi and Marathi elements. A special feature of this conference was the very large student turnout during all the proceedings.

### **Concept Note of the Conference**

The first decade of the twenty-first century is witness to continuing marginalization of large groups of people, rendered invisible and inconsequential by the powers of the state, capital, and other social forces. There is an entrenchment of older inequalities even as newer voices assert their claims from the margins.

There are at present sustained and resurgent efforts to resist and challenge hegemonies in the spheres of the state, natural resources, labour, body, markets, culture and ideology, conflict, language, sites of law, boundaries of relationships and the interfaces of these arenas. While numerous struggles envision a polity and society with a meaningful citizenship, feminists are taking a fresh look at experiences from the field, rethinking several of the old questions and seeking new alliances in the face of emerging challenges.

In the market-dominated trajectory of development adopted, state and capital are seeking greater control over natural resources; and they are

also facing spiralling resistance, giving rise to varied sites of conflict, especially in the least developed regions of the country. Women are major participants in the new struggles of the day; they are challenging new forms of patriarchies and seeking to forge broader alliances and building alternatives.

It is not just against the state – women face conflict and confrontation even within family, caste, religious and ethnic groups, within professional institutions, in regional struggles, and other spaces. They experience conflict as part of collectives from forces outside, but also within them. They are targets of sexual violence within the family, in caste and communal conflicts and in situations of state repression. Social change and radical political movements sometimes provide the locus for challenging traditional gender roles and norms; simultaneously, however, newer forms of marginalizations are being engendered. The state is increasingly complicit with these processes of marginalizations present today more in its repressive, extractive and appropriative roles than the ameliorative one of providing constitutional guarantees. The state functions in the interests of a few and, therefore, fails to provide entitlements and citizenship rights to vast sections of the country. It is based on such an understanding of the state that the women's movements approach law recognizing its repressive role, but going beyond this, as a site of possible reform as well. We cannot but recognize that, for the marginalized, the law opens up new vistas through the language of rights, compensatory jurisprudence, and legal certification, while also exhorting vigilance towards issues such as patronage of vested interests, dominance of customary justice, and other reactionary processes.

The state, market, and family mediate the arrangements of women's labour within the larger domain of work. Recent restructuring of markets and developments in technology have contributed towards the marginalization of labour, with disproportionate impact on women. One result has been the increasing presence of women in streams of migration. Another has been the interlocking of markets in land, water, labour, marriage, education, health, which serve to perpetuate, even deepen, inequalities of gender. On the obverse, women workers have contributed greatly to innovations in strategies of collectivization and negotiation, providing new meanings to ideologies of contract and legitimacy of consent. Markets have become the sites of marginalization as well as of resistance—stretching from the local to the international.

Feminist discourses have just begun to understand the significance of the body as a cultural construct and as a site of disciplining. A complex interplay of power configures the body; those that are hungry, impaired, not healthy, considered fat, or altered by technology are an ever-present challenge to the dominant tropes of naturalization. The body is also central to questions of gender. Women's relationships to their bodies are extended as they

continually form, negotiate, re-build, and survive relationships they have with people, locations and ideologies. The most potent challenge is posed by women at the margins of the hetero-normative family, conventional conjugality and patrilineal inheritance; new relationships are forged through migration for livelihood and in confronting notions of stigma.

In the domain of culture and ideology, hegemonic nationalism prevails even as its newer versions are nurtured through the media and other cultural modes. Cultural and territorial hegemony reflected in the idea of the nation-state has been interrogated and articulated in nationality movements, specifically in the North East and Jammu & Kashmir. The misrepresentation and marginalization of women and their interests coincides with this hegemonic representation of 'Indian culture'. Understanding the significance of language as a tool of dominance has been central to the feminist project originating from international but also national spaces. The diverse voices emerging from the margins – those of the queer, sign-language enabled, dalit, adivasi, Muslim – are unable to enter into conversation with the mainstream or with each other due to the absence of translation. There are, however, also sites of resistance to sustain and revive cultures at the margin as well as inspire new egalitarian cultures. The new social movements such as the dalit movement assert their cultural rights through resistance, offering a counterdiscourse to dominant narratives of power and contributing greatly to an understanding of culture as a site of difference, multiplicity, contest, and negotiation. Women's movements too have contributed to such processes – through an articulation of resistance in the form of paintings, songs, films, documentaries, poetry, autobiographies and so on.

We have today a conjuncture of opposites – persistent exclusion of large sections of people and increasing privilege of a few, on the one hand, and the very real possibility of new connections and conversations, on the other. What kind of politics of gender is appropriate for this moment? This conference hopes to survey the existing field, capturing the resistances and challenges coming from the margins as well as prospecting for the future of our movements.

### **Why Wardha?**

Wardha is rather an unusual location for the conference. There are multiple reasons for which IAWS chose Wardha as the venue. For one, the location is provincial and appeals to a new constituency, which will help in focussing on regional diversities and their specific complexities regarding women's issues. This helps the IAWS in its outreach to marginalised regions and groups – a major objective of the Association. The relevance for organizing a National Conference at Wardha is also because of its accessibility from all parts of India and because of the important social and political issues which have

been an integral part of the district in the present juncture. Agricultural distress in the Vidarbha region has an important dimension related to the issue of land rights for women. The agrarian crisis has precipitated a spate of suicides in the state of Maharashtra as elsewhere. High levels of suicides among men and women farmers continue to be reported with an implication for the surviving women and their families. The adivasis/ tribals, dalits and other disadvantaged groups struggle against the loss of work, culture, space and dignity. These are symptomatic of the crisis of livelihoods and the accompanying social and cultural spaces confronting women especially in villages and forests.

The IAWS President in her inaugural address also described the historical city of Wardha as a fitting location for the conference. She recalled the close association of the city with M.K. Gandhi and reminded all present that the Sewagram Ashram was the centre of his political and social work, and many important events like the first temple entry of the dalits then termed 'harijans'. Wardha was also the centre of the cotton-plantation area and fed the cotton mills in Vidarbha and Marathwada before the mills went into decline. In recent times, however, Vidarbha has been in the news with the suicides of farmers which was a reflection of the crisis in agriculture. Thus, she looked at the conference in Wardha as providing a space to reflect on these historical and contemporary challenges.

### **The Scope**

The IAWS conference provided us with an important opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogues in order to articulate, analyze, understand and seek answers to the struggles and movements of dalits, tribals and women for some kind of equitable society. The engagements will help us put together alternatives that encompass policy, track change, build upon and connect to the insights of the women's movement. The importance of the theme of the conference, as Dr. Anita Ghai mentioned in the inaugural address of the Conference, was in the realization of a critical need to evolve an analytical stance through which the women's movement and women's studies organizations can understand marginalization. The objective of the conference was to interrelate, collaborate, create coalitions, and seek to challenge hierarchies and divisions in our theoretical understanding as well as in dealing with practical matters. The plenary and subtheme sessions at this Conference were attuned to understanding marginalization and hegemony and the ways in which women and other marginalized groups are offering powerful resistance to the social, economic and political processes underway. Thus the need was to explore how intersecting systems of oppression may create new conversations and further perhaps new political configurations. These issues have been foregrounded through the special panels on South Asia and on the

local situation, in this case, Central India, apart from sessions on marginalized knowledges of dalit, adivasi/ tribal and minority women.

Through its plenary panels and sub-themes, the organizers of this Conference invited participants to focus on a contemporary gender politics that captures the resistances and challenges that come from the margins. The subthemes of the conference have highlighted the trajectories such as state, natural resources, labour, body, markets, culture and ideology, conflict, language, sites of law, boundaries of relationships and the interfaces of these arenas.

### **Participation**

The ten sub-theme sessions saw around 270 papers being presented in parallel sessions conducted on three days of the conference. One of the indicators of success of the conference has been the widespread participation in the conference with a total registration around of 750 participants, with 500 outstation and 250 local participants. This included around 400 student participants. The participants came from different parts of the country, including the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Goa that need special mention. We had international participants as well with three speakers invited from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka for the South-Asia Plenary. Around 6 students who were foreign nationals and were studying in Indian universities also attended the conference. In addition to registered participants, we had around 400 local participants from colleges, universities and NGOs at Wardha and its neighbouring locations, who attended the various sessions and cultural programmes in the conference. The final total, including volunteers and participants from the host University, was 1200 on the first three days.

The participants can be broadly divided into the following groups:

1. Individuals affiliated to Women's Studies in colleges, universities and research centres
2. Faculty in colleges and universities who work on gender issues but are affiliated to other departments
3. Activists associated with NGOs, feminist collectives, women's organizations, and other social and political activists
4. Students, post graduate and graduate
5. Independent researchers
6. Lawyers, journalists, and other professionals engaged with women's rights issues
7. Filmmakers, theatre activists, feminist publishers and other media professionals

## **Conference Programme January 21-24, 2011**

### **PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP FOR STUDENTS: Thursday, January 20**

9:30 AM

Introduction to Workshop

10 AM to 1 PM

**Session I: Women's Studies: Pedagogy and Curriculum**

1 PM to 2 PM

Lunch

2 PM to 5 PM

**Session II: Women's Studies: Experiences and Concerns**

6 PM to 8 PM

**Cultural Programme**

### **DAY ONE: Friday, January 21**

10 AM to 11:30 AM

**Inauguration**

Anita Ghai handing over the Plant of Gender Equity and Democracy to VC

**Address by President, IAWS**

**Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture**

**Speaker:** Kumud Pawde

12 PM to 1:30 PM

**Plenary I**

**Marginalizations and Feminist Concerns: Resistances and Challenges**

**Chair:** Anita Ghai

**Speakers:**

Chayanika Shah

Jameela Nishat

Dayamani Barla

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Lunch

2:30 PM to 4:30 PM

**Sub-theme Session (parallel session)**

6 PM to 8 PM

**Cultural Programme**

Poonam & Group of Dancers from Nagpur

## **DAY TWO: Saturday, January 22**

10 AM to 12 PM

**Sub-theme Session (parallel session)**

12:15 PM to 1:35 PM

**Plenary II**

**Writing Resistance: Feminist Engagements in South Asia**

**Chair:** Uma Chakravarti

**Speakers:**

Shaheen Akhtar

Zaheda Hina

Najeefa Rooby (Penniya)

1:35 PM to 2:20 PM

**Cultural Programme**

2:20 PM to 3 PM

Lunch

3 PM to 5 PM

**Sub-theme Session (parallel session)**

6 PM to 8 PM

**Cultural Programme**

Nageen Tanvir and Bastar Band

## **DAY THREE: Sunday, January 23**

10 AM to 11:30 AM

**Felicitation**

Introduction: Pushpa Bhawe

Felicitation by Meera Velayudhan

**In honour of**

Malti Ruikar

Leela Chitre

Nalini Tadke

Nalini Sonkuwar

**Plenary III**

**Challenges Facing Women in Central India**

**Chair:** Ilina Sen

**Speakers:**

Usha Misra

Saroj Kashikar

Shubhada Deshmukh

Ilina Sen

11:30 AM to 1:30 PM

**Sub-theme Session (parallel session)**

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Lunch: Maharashtrian

2:30 PM to 4:30 PM

**Annual General Meeting**

5 PM to 7 PM

**Reviewing Pedagogy and Themes in Contemporary Women's Studies**

**Co-ordinator:** Rashmi Tikku

**Chair:** Nirmala Banerjee

**Speakers:**

Susie Tharu

Sharmila Rege

Kavita Srivastava

G.S. Jayasree

Indu Agnihotri



## DAY FOUR: Monday, January 24

10 AM to 11:30 AM

### **Plenary IV**

**Engendering Youth: Agency, Mobilization, Resistance**

**Chair:** Rukmini Sen

### **Speakers:**

Priyanka Bodpujari

Samhita Barooah

Karuna

Kamaladevi

11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

**Reporting of Sub-themes by Coordinators**

12:30 PM to 1:30 PM

### **Valedictory**

**Vote of Thanks:** Samita Sen

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Lunch

## 2. THE INAUGURATION

### **Pre-Conference Workshop for Students, January 20, 2011**

About 250 students from different states including Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Pondicherry attended this workshop.

The student participants saw gender/ women's studies as one of the outcomes of the women's movement. They stressed that more struggles have to be conducted within educational institutions to start women's studies centres and courses within disciplines and also for starting gender studies courses at postgraduate and higher levels. They discussed their varied experiences of how women's studies courses were conducted in educational institutions. They also spoke about the impact of women's studies on students as well as on main disciplines.

The social composition of students has undergone a change with students from diverse backgrounds joining the course in recent times. They face opposition from their family while discussing the contents of the course. Some students felt that women's studies was not just a question of equality of sexes but also an issue of human rights. Those girls who dropped out or married early before having completed their course, were able to, in some ways, negotiate on issues concerning their rights to continue their education. The students felt the need to develop theories which was in tune with current realities and challenges. In the education system itself, gender studies is not recognized as an effective discipline. It is also perceived as having no value in the employment market and is seen as a marginalized course taken by women. Discussions in the workshop revolved around the absence (or paucity) of posts for heads of departments/ schools/ centres of gender studies. Those having qualified in this field are not even being offered the post of a guest lecturer. Women's Studies seems to be bearing the onus of transforming society all by itself. While there is an ingrained politics within women's studies, changing society ought to be the purpose of all critical social sciences and not only women's studies, the students argued.

### **Day One: January 21, 2011**

Inaugural Session

### **President's Address**

The IAWS President, Dr. Anita Ghai, in her address, welcomed everybody to the Thirteenth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS). She expressed her gratitude to the co-hosts at Wardha and all involved for generously giving their time and fondly remembered and appreciated the efforts of the founding members of the IAWS. She further



emphasized the need to address the deep structural inequalities experienced by many marginalized groups. Dr. Ghai admitted that feminist ways of knowing always involve uncomfortable political questions about the sexual division of roles, power, subordination, gender and patriarchy and there are uncertainties and despair. However, women have no other option but to reflect on the sense of apprehension that is now universal in this perverse era of neo-liberalism and to challenge its hegemony. The only hope is to resist oppression, so that changes will emerge. Dr. Ghai ended her inaugural address by quoting bell hooks, “Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair.”

### **Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture**

**Speaker:** Kumud Pawde

The ‘Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture’ has become a special part of each National Conference. It was a privilege to have the noted dalit writer and former professor of Sanskrit, Kumud Pawde, for delivering the Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture in this conference, especially because of her association with anti-caste movements in Nagpur for many years. Calling herself a common person/ woman/ writer, she said that all constitutional principles of equality for the common people and, women in particular, had been violated if not crushed, particularly with the onset of liberalization in the 1990s. Though women are 50 per cent of the population, we find that except for 2-3 per cent the rest live under oppressive conditions. The reality is even more disturbing for the rural masses as their rights are being infringed upon in multiple forms.

Pawde described how the majority of women had not been a part of the formal process when laws for women were being framed. These laws were essential because women are subjected to patriarchal domination by men in the household. Such kind of dominance and oppression violate women’s rights both within and outside the household. Pawde cited the case of a woman divorcee, whose mother is living, and who has brothers occupying powerful social status, and yet she is unable to stay in her parental home because of the violence she faces there. There are restrictions on her mobility, she is not allowed to look for a job. Her brother physically beats her up regularly and has finally thrown her out of the house. He has also forced their mother to stay in an old-age home. Thus men control their families and create barriers in the path of empowerment of women in their families. Women also face alcoholic husbands/ men. There is a direct connection between violence against women and ways in which this affects their mental health. Women in the village are more vulnerable to such violence as they have lesser options and a weaker support system than found in the cities. Pawde pointed out that in the slums even today, women are considered to be in a *paap janma*, born subordinates. This is despite the fact that they contribute significantly to

their households. The men allege that women take away their jobs and spend their earnings on themselves. There is a need to study these connections. We need to highlight the impact of patriarchal norms and practices on women within the family and outside it. Women’s studies should also highlight the realities of different categories of women and study the various debates regarding intersecting categories. We need to bring these contexts into our research so that it reflects the real life gender experiences of women from rural and urban areas. We should bring about the required changes in our educational systems in the disciplines of science and social sciences. Pawde drew inspiration from Buddhist philosophy and emphasised the importance of research to eliminate violence from society and to help create a peaceful environment. She compared the problems faced by women in contemporary times as much more serious than those faced by the mythological characters such as Sita. She recognized and stressed the need for comparative studies of women, which will be a step forward in exposing the reality of a globalized world. It is important that the marginalized sections are coming out and voicing their needs. Our research and activism will help in making the new generation aware of our social issues and in creating new beginnings for themselves, Pawde averred.

### 3. THE PLENARIES

#### PLENARY I

##### Marginalizations and Feminist Concerns: Resistances and Challenges

**Chair:** Anita Ghai

**Speakers:**

Dayamani Barla

Jameela Nishat

Chayanika Shah

The first plenary titled “Marginalizations and Feminist Concerns: Resistances and Challenges” highlighted issues of marginalization, especially with reference to gender politics with an emphasis on resistances and challenges emerging from the margins. The three speakers – Dayamani Barla, Jameela Nishat and Chayanika Shah – spoke on their understanding of marginalization, violence and exploitation and explored the challenges faced by feminist politics.

The first speaker **Dayamani Barla** was born in an indigenous community in Jharkhand, eastern India, and her family belonged to the Munda tribe. Dayamani is a journalist with *Prabhat Khabar*, the leading regional newspaper of Jharkhand. As an activist and a writer she voiced the collective exploitation suffered by the adivasis. She spoke about the struggles experienced by the adivasis due to displacement, rampant corruption, and environmental degradation caused by exploitation of natural resources. Being a poor adivasi woman, Dayamani’s struggles were far greater than any of us can imagine. Her struggle for survival began as a child when her father, unable to produce the required documents to prove his land rights, was cheated and evicted from his land. Dayamani had to work to support her own education throughout, first as a labourer, then as a house maid and later as a typist. To continue her education through secondary school, she moved to Ranchi and worked as a maid to pay her way through her university education. She sometimes had to sleep in railway stations in order to continue her education in journalism. Her distressing experiences continued till her entry into the Koel Karodam movement, which ultimately turned her into an activist. She is very critical of ‘development’ programmes and policies, as most policies are directed towards annihilating their native way of living. She is worried about the destruction of the rich natural resources of Jharkhand such as iron, coal, copper and wood. Her apprehension is that the government and the corporations will displace them on a large scale with almost no rehabilitation for big industrial projects and dams, many of which are funded by the World Bank. While she continues to fight for justice for the poor and exploited, she urged the audience to question what ‘development’ is and who is benefiting

from this ‘development’. As an activist she focussed on the need to understand the developmental agenda and urged all to participate in the fight for human rights, justice and equality. Dayamani has won the Counter Media Award for Rural Journalism in 2000, the National Foundation for India Fellowship in 2004 and Chingari Award for Women Against Corporate Crime 2008. Dayamani’s expertise with the pen has played an important part in bringing the villagers together. Her writings include a booklet on the anti-Mittal movement, which is a movement of tribal and indigenous people of Jharkhand against Arcelor Mittal’s intention to set up a 12-million-tonne greenfield steel plant in the area. Apart from causing massive displacement, the project will destroy the forests in the area. It will also have an impact on the water sources and ecosystems, thereby threatening the environment and the very source of sustenance for indigenous people.

The second speaker was the Hyderabad-based poet and activist **Jamila Nishat**, who is a member of Shaheen, a women’s organization. Born in Sultan Shahi, Jameela took a masters degree and a post-graduate diploma in theatre arts. As an activist, Jameela has dealt with identity issues of Muslim women. Her interactions with these women and their narratives made her realize that a commitment to social justice means a commitment toward those who are suffering the most. She critiqued the discourse of development, which highlights the hierarchy between different nations, regions, and communities. She refers to development as the development of people toward real and substantial change. She regrets not seeing this kind of development in the Old City of Hyderabad. She discussed the Sachar Committee Report, 2006, which classifies minority issues as those of identity, security and equity of Muslim women. Burkha and Hijab often come to define the *identity* of the Muslim women and form the core of identity politics in which they often have no role to play. The religious definition of collective identity often constructs a certain kind of ‘Muslim-ness’ that controls important aspects of their lives, often undermining their developmental needs and aspiration. The existing system excludes Muslims and treats women as immaterial or irrelevant to the functioning of the state. These women are only treated as cheap labour to be exploited and their bodies are looked upon as commodities to be sexually abused. Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular are poorly represented in the enforcement agencies. This, combined with a lack of understanding and sensitivity to the plight of the women, makes the situation of Muslim women seeking police support or protection vulnerable. Communal tensions further add to their feeling of insecurity. Women are, as Jameela mentioned, victims or easy targets and their position of social inferiority is an issue that needs to be examined.

Thus, Muslim women are doubly prone to exploitation and abuse—as women and for belonging to a minority group. While they are generally

exploited by men, as Muslim women they are associated with certain gender as well as minority stereotypes. Jameela spoke about how Muslim women suffer in silence the indignity of multiple marriages of their husbands. Muslim men, according to her, express a desire for younger brides, male children, and hunger for money and ostentatious prosperity; such ambitions can lead to multiple marriages. Both legal regulations and social norms legitimize such desire of the men of the community. Men of the community do not recognize women's autonomy and freedom and women are not allowed to lead their own lives by pursuing education. In case they continue to show their agency, Muslim men may even threaten to burn them alive. Jameela described a suspected case of honour killing, where the husband of an 18-year-old girl went and complained to the *basti* leader about his wife having an affair with another boy. The authorities in the *basti* felt that it was immoral of the girl to have an extramarital affair and burnt her alive in front of all the people in broad daylight. The incident did not invite any protest from the girl's parents as well.

In terms of equity, Muslim women remain deprived of opportunities that become available through economic development. The sense of inequity is not just one relating to perception but a result of discrimination. In the Old City of Hyderabad, especially among dalit Muslims, the *biradari* system consists of a group of male elders who have absolute power to take decisions regarding women. The group is embedded in a patriarchal structure of authority which gives no space to women's voice, even when she is wronged. The remedies to such violence become impossible in the face of these deeply embedded hierarchical and oppressive structures, so that often the solutions are part of the problem. Muslim marriage is a civil contract and divorce is dissolution of this contract. Marriage among Muslims is not a religious sacrament and so divorce is permissible. Jameela reminded us about how men take undue advantage of these laws and divorce their wives without their knowledge even on the slightest pretext.

Trafficking of women has emerged as a leading cause of violence in the lives of many women. There are many instances of families marrying off their young daughters to old, but better off, Arab men in exchange for money. Such marriages of convenience are designed to traffic young girls from poor families to be sexually exploited before handing them over to organized brothels. The normalization of the idea that girls are 'beautiful objects' has affected women and girls in Muslim community in such a manner that women see themselves as sex objects. The laws and policies in a democratic country like India need to be more alert and sensitive to counter illegal trafficking. She referred to cases where families play active roles in running a brothel at home from where they sell their daughters-in-law. While there have been narratives of resistance with some strong women coming out of this situation by taking

divorce, but a large percentage still succumb to this violence accepting it as their fate. The parents find a viable solution to their economic problems in getting their daughter married to a rich Arab and thereby earning some money. Domestic violence and abuse are, therefore, the premise on which such trends persist in the communities of the Old City area.

Taboos around sexuality, reinforced by the rise of conservative political forces, continue to generate and maintain oppressive constructs and misconceptions about women's sexuality. This not only prevents many women from having an affirmative approach towards sexuality and the opportunity to enjoy positive sexual experiences, but also infringes on fundamental rights and freedoms such as health, education and mobility, hindering equal participation in social, economic and political spheres. Conservative forces and the religious rightwing are fiercely trying to maintain or reinforce traditional mechanisms of control over women's sexuality and even creating new ones. In the last decade we have witnessed women's bodies and sexuality increasingly becoming arenas of intense conflict, Gujarat being an example.

Gender-sensitive laws should be framed and strictly implemented. There has to be an awareness regarding such laws in the larger society with both men and women respecting the rights of women to live a life free from violence. Women can claim their citizenship rights by becoming an important part of the workforce. However, only changes in the laws are not sufficient and there is an urgent need to change society, in particular the institution of the family. Women's movements, too, have a responsibility to collectively make it happen. We have a responsibility of empowering ourselves at the grassroots level by striving for equality, dignity and integrity.

The third speaker **Chayanika Shah** posed the difficulty of feminist re-imaginings in the face of growing violence and assault from the state, on the one hand, and rightwing fundamentalisms, on the other. Chayanika referred to a feminist re-thinking as challenging especially because we want to speak from our location of belonging to multiple identities and do not want to hierarchize any discrimination or violence. We are more concerned about the rights of all minorities and have attempted to speak of issues from the standpoint of the marginalized so that their issues get foregrounded, the structures that create their marginalizations are highlighted, and also so that the privileges that accrue from these structures are simultaneously challenged.

She warns feminists to be aware of their own privileges, especially of those privileges that seem to be natural and normal because in their very naturalness and normality inhere the reason for many marginalizations. Chayanika asseverated, "I speak of privileges of walking, of seeing, of tasting, of being a citizen with rights because I have some sort of mental health that can deal with this society and its sociality, of feeling comfortable in the body that I have so that I continue to be part of the process of structuring the world

in ways that facilitate this ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ state of being. I speak of lived experiences of people with no communities – at least no visible communities.” The lack of communities could be because – there is no access and mobility to go ahead and make these happen, as for disabled women; the communities that are formed could be excommunicated, as for sex workers; and of invisible or disallowed communities, as for lesbian/ bisexual women or trans persons especially those assigned gender female at birth. We need to look at these lived realities to forge our ways ahead.

These are difficult debates because they seem to pit us against each other. This awareness poses a challenge to our politics and our epistemologies. Chayanika emphasized the necessity to learn to pitch our debates not as two opposing poles but in ways that can help us figure some middle ground for conversation and learning from each other’s realities. We need to be reflexive in our thoughts and practice because without that there is just static knowledge and that is no indicator of movement(s). Chayanika used five examples to put her points across.

1. Sex selective abortions: As part of women’s movements, we took a stand that sex selection is not right but selection based on ability is alright. The women who are a part of the disabilities rights movements have questioned this stand. The issues are complex. We have persons with disabilities staking claim to society as equal citizens, reminding us that the violation of their rights is as much based on social structures and not in their individual biological condition as that of women. There may be no immediate answers to this conundrum, but conversations and reconsideration of our stands are essential.
2. Domestic violence: Over the years, there has been a slow and steady recognition of violence within the natal family in the campaign and the law. Chayanika raised important questions in this regard: How much have we foregrounded young people, their dependence on their families and the hierarchy of the family? We have not paid attention to couples running away and being hounded by the families, killed or being forced to kill themselves. As teachers and parents, it is imperative to ask ourselves how much we are willing to relinquish control over the young people in our care. As researchers, where are our studies of so-called ‘normal’ families? While we have a critique of family as an institution, we have not really been able to dislodge the centrality of the family by blood or marriage.
3. Family: As we critique the family in its existing form, we know we cannot just speak of independence and autonomy, values that we

have emphasized as feminists, without the values of interdependence. Lives of the disabled, of the older people, of younger children, of ill persons, essentially all our lives teach us the value of interdependence. Therefore, it is urgent for us to start talking of families in ways that support and cherish independence but also inculcate interdependence. These values have to be freed from a gendered existence, or else they will remain tied to the women of the family and be controlled by the whims and fancies of the head of the household.

4. Body: There remains the eternal question of the body– a reality through which we interact with the world. Most scripts of marginalization are written on the body and yet many marginalizations are rooted in the body as well. One is of being ‘woman’ itself and the other is further about what we do with it, which may contradict the societal understanding of who and what we are supposed to be. The issues of sex work and reproductive labour, especially with regard to commercial surrogacy, question our ‘natural’ assumptions about the body. Issues of sexual labour upset the scripts of love, sex, purity, virtue and morality; while issues of reproductive labour turn the debates on motherhood, family, genetics and infertility upside down. Many conversations between those located in different contexts are necessary to address the grey areas and areas of confusion that arise here.
5. Technology and body: As feminists, we have looked at the body as pure and pristine. In protecting our bodies from violations, we seem to have made it much more untouchable and pure. Our stand has been one of non-intervention in the healthy body. But then there are questions raised by people with disability and gender-transgressing persons who ask for specific change and want it to be done sometimes on otherwise ‘healthy’ bodies. The point is that we live a life full of contradictions. The line between beauty and health is a continuum with no real rupture. The rupture is actually imagined. So also is the continuum between ability and disability, between the female sex and the male sex.

Chayanika emphasises that shying away from these complicated debates of where and how to draw the line is a luxury that only the privileged can enjoy. For the rest of us, these discussions are crucial to our very existence and we look forward to the women’s movements and the women’s studies for a more engaged politics.



## PLENARY II

### Writing Resistance: Feminist Engagements in South Asia

**Chair:** Uma Chakravarti

**Speakers:**

Shaheen Akhtar

Zaheda Hina

Najeefa Rooby (Penniya)

The South Asia Plenary on “Writing Resistance: Feminist Engagements in South Asia” was held in the late morning on January 22, 2011. This was a somewhat unusual plenary as it was focussed on women’s writings, thus integrating the literary production of the South Asian women’s movement into a Women’s Studies Conference. Three feminist writers, **Zaheda Hina** from Pakistan, **Shaheen Akhtar** from Bangladesh and **Najeefa Rooby** from Sri Lanka, who writes under the pen name of Penniya, spoke about the contexts of their writings and then read from a selected text to a rapt audience. Listeners were led into multiple journeys, in three different languages, which was also a first-ever occasion in an IAWS conference. The large and attentive audience heard the nuances of languages they were otherwise excluded from and then proceeded to grasp the meaning of the texts in translation. The range of themes chosen by the writers made for a moving experience as Zaheda first spoke about how she became a writer after she accompanied her mother on her first visit to her home in Bihar. The father had moved his family to Karachi following partition. The mother’s emotional reunion with her sister left such an impact on Zaheda that she turned to words at the age of nine to express her feelings; she then read from a story titled “Kumkum Khairiat Se Hai” [Kumkum is fine], a tribute to Rabindranath Tagore’s *Kabuliwala*, which takes a fictional doctor great granddaughter of the writer to a war-ravaged Afghanistan and from where she writes letters to her grandmother Mini in Kolkata. The granddaughter’s visit to the *Kabuliwala*’s homeland is a poignant attempt to search for a common humanity that had linked a little girl in Kolkata and the *Kabuliwala* from Afghanistan in the past to today’s protagonists as the doctor struggles to reach out to a young tribal boy trying to escape from the war, even though they have no common language. The moving story, read in Hindustani, left many people in tears. Shaheen described the way her work at documenting the lives of women ravaged by the war of liberation led her to write a novel in which women turn the searchlight on the men who led the war and then left the women they had titled *biranganas* to be cast away from national attention while they went on to wheel and deal in the new political system. Using a powerful feminist lens, Shaheen told the tragic story of what happens to women when the wars are over.

Penniya spoke about her experience of finding a voice for herself as a Tamil Muslim woman from Sri Lanka through a number of poems dealing with kitchen, domesticity and the search for creative identity. She began her writing unaware of the society and world at large with its immeasurable problems. But slowly she began questioning things in her immediate surroundings and went on to explore other questions in the world outside and which began to be reflected in her writing. The South Asia plenary was a rich and powerful experience for the participants drawn from many regions in India who could engage with the creative work of women from South Asia, even though it was for only a few hours. A more lasting experience was made possible through the rush for translated copies of Zaheda Hina and Shaheen Akhtar’s works which were in a sense ‘released’ at the Wardha conference. The works were being sold at the book exhibition next door to the main marquee where the plenary was held.

The South Asia plenary session ended with a stunning performance by Ojas titled “Le Mashale” on Irom Sharmila’s unprecedented 10-year-long hunger strike for the lifting of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Afspa) from Manipur. Using a minimum of props, poetry and newspaper reports, Ojas recreated for us the indomitable spirit of Irom Sharmila as she lives out her lonely existence in a hospital room in Imphal where she is being force-fed by the government to keep her alive, while they decide what to do with the Afspa.

## PLENARY III

### Challenges Facing Women in Central India

**Chair:** Ilina Sen

**Speakers:**

Usha Misra

Saroj Kashikar

Shubhada Deshmukh

Ilina Sen

The third plenary in the conference was titled “Challenges facing women in Central Indiaes”. This was in keeping with the IAWS tradition that the issues of women in the area where we hold our conferences get highlighted through our efforts.

This plenary had two parts. In the first part we felicitated five older women from the region who had played a major role in taking forward women’s issues and their participation in public life. The histories of the individual women, and their contributions were briefly recollected by **Meera Velayudhan**, and the felicitation was done by **Pushpa Bhawe**, another legendary figure from

Maharashtra, who is a bridge between different generations and different regions of the state. Those felicitated were **Malti Ruikar**, carrying the legacy of the workers' movement in Vidarbha and Mahakoshal; **Leela Chitale**, freedom fighter and women's rights activist; **Suman Bang**, close associate of M.K. Gandhi; **Nalini Ladke**, Amravati's firebrand grandmother; and **Seema Sakhare**, whose decades-long fight has been in opposition to violence against women in Nagpur and Central India. **Iina Sen** was also remembered by friends and well wishers. Several of the women who were felicitated spoke about their lives and times as they responded. These responses offered a fascinating glimpse into the struggles of women in the region during the turbulent period of the freedom struggle and the first decades of independence. Malti-tai (Malti Ruikar) remembered their struggles for the preservation of jobs of women in the winding-and-reeling departments of the historic Empress Mills at Nagpur; Leela-tai and Suman-tai both took us back to their times in mobilizing women's support for the Quit India movement. Their testimonies gave the present generation a glimpse of the convergences between various facets of the struggle at the time.

The second part of the programme was the more detailed sharing of the experiences of some of the remarkable women who have taken forward the challenges faced by women in this region.

**Saroj Kashikar**, leader of the farmers' movement and former MLA from the Pulgaon-Deoli assembly constituency in Wardha District, spoke of women's participation in the farmers' movement. She began her presentation with a reference to the integration into market of the farmers of Vidarbha and western Maharashtra, and the perceived neglect of their interests that jelled into the movement under the banner of the *Shetkari Sanghatana* in the 1980s. She recalled that she began her work with the limited mandate of mobilizing women, but quickly realized that unless women had access to secure political spaces, it would be difficult to mobilize farmers in general for political purposes. She also discussed in detail the historic Chandwad conference, and the creation of all-women panels for the panchayat elections, many of which successfully governed areas of rural Maharashtra in the eighties and nineties.

**Dr. Usha Mishra** recalled the struggles of women workers before de-industrialization hit the region in the 1980s. In a sense, her presentation took off from the recollections of Malti Ruikar in the earlier part of the plenary, and traced the decline of the cotton mills and the coming of ancillary engineering industries in the various industrial estates of Vidarbha in which women found employment in most insecure of positions. She recalled the widespread prevalence of the contractual system, of the atomized work units, and how this defeated any access that women might have had to legal redress. Spatially, this presentation brought the discussion on regional issues closer to Vidarbha

and the next presentation located it further east, to the borderlands Maharashtra shares with Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

**Shubhada Deshmukh** spoke of the health and livelihood situation of adivasi women from Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh. Her presentation highlighted the neglect of the adivasi areas, the preponderance of *tendu patta* and other forest-produce collection as practically the only sources of money income, of rampant malnutrition, nonexistent health and maternity facilities, wasted lives, and the ongoing conflict in the region.

Concluding the session, **Iina Sen** spoke of the way in which the Central Indian region was home to major mineral and forest resources, and of the way the state's development priorities in the region were centred on extraction of these resources, by way of which people were denied access to even common-property resources that enabled them to survive in these conditions. All these tendencies have become accentuated as part of the priorities of a globalized India and have made the region a living witness to the divisive impact of development policies.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

### Reviewing Pedagogy and Themes in Contemporary Women's Studies

**Co-ordinator:** Rashmi Tikku

**Chair:** Nirmala Banerjee

**Speakers:**

Sharmila Rege

G.S. Jayasree

Kavita Srivastava

Susie Tharu

Indu Agnihotri

This panel discussion was specially organized as a need was felt to create a forum where concerns germane to Women's Studies could be expressed. Issues of both pedagogy and epistemology have been confronting the discipline over the last decade and were at the forefront in the last conference at Lucknow too. An almost existentialist crisis seems to be hovering between the needs for the standardization of pedagogical practices and the constant innovation required in the creation of new epistemes through engagement with the diversity of social movements and practices in the rapidly changing social environment in India.

**Sharmila Rege** highlighted the problems of definition of the field where, despite the UGC initiatives in promoting and financing new centres, the most interesting work in Women's Studies has actually come from outside the established pedagogical centres. The disconnect between curricula of

various centres, their lack of engagement with feminist scholarship, the nostalgia of the liberal feminists, were pointed out as areas of concern, but she also hastened to add that the so-called disciplinary crisis was also an opportunity for investing in the discipline and exploring collaborative teaching strategies and creating new methodologies.

**G. S. Jayasree** spoke of the recent UGC initiative to frame a pan-Indian 'model' Women's Studies curriculum which led to a massive review of the actual curricula taught, of which Rege and she were a part. They had found a glaring discrepancy in the standards and work of the metropolitan centres and those in small towns. The hegemony of English in which most of the available scholarship was available was also pointed out as an area of concern. She felt that the need of the hour was to be inclusive and flexible in the approach to syllabus design so that the system was malleable enough to incorporate new challenges.

**Kavita Srivastava** spoke of her journey in Women's Studies as a trajectory that moved away from academics into activism; for she felt that it was only when women created experiential platforms of their own could they begin framing new questions and connect their immediate concerns with the larger world. She pointed out that the interventions in rape laws came from actual engagement and this inspired her to leave her academic ivory tower and engage in activism.

**Susie Tharu** disagreed with Kavita's binary polarization of the issues of activism and academics that favoured the former. She insisted that though the two were different, they were deeply connected and actually it was very important to create a space for scholarship for a reflective development of the discipline. The insipidity in Women's Studies that the earlier participants had noted was because academic investment in the required scholarship was not taking place. She strongly felt that a sense of critique was missing from the discipline. In its place, a depressing piling up of data at the expense of subjectively located knowledge was coming to pass. She felt that the need of the hour was to develop a critical, subjective energy which was rigorous and passionate at the same time.

**Indu Agnihotri** was not critical of what had been achieved by Women's Studies so far and felt that, for her, there was no disjunction between academics and activism. The Women's Movement had created the 'space' for reflecting on women's issues and from the beginning she had felt that there was an almost symbiotic link between the movement and academics. This link, she admitted, was now weakening however. She felt that the discipline was not engaging with the deeper linkages between marginalization and globalization and the new courses did not contextualize the history of the movement.

The panellists' diverse views generated a lively discussion on the challenges confronting Women's Studies today. Questions ranged from the choice of careers Women's Studies offered to research methodologies to be adopted.

#### **PLENARY IV**

#### **Engendering Youth: Agency, Mobilization, Resistance**

**Chair:** Rukmini Sen

**Speakers:**

Priyanka Bodpujari

Samhita Barooah

Karuna

Kamaladevi

This was the first time that IAWS had organized a Youth Plenary in its national conference. The plenary titled, "Engendering Youth: Agency, Mobilization, Resistance" had four young people in their early careers as media activists, or part of women's organizations, and in doctoral research. It was necessary to hear the voices of the future to understand how they respond to and resist older inequalities while seeing newer margins being constructed, and what are their ideas on re-visioning gender politics.

**Samhita Barooah** spoke of her association with the North East Network, a women's organisation working in the North East trying to involve women in creating alternative peace processes. **Priyanka Bodpujari**, working as a freelance journalist, narrated her experiences of listening to the life stories of women in conflict-ridden situations of Kalinganagar and Dantewada where women's bodies became sites of violence. **Kamaladevi** raised questions about the essence of democratic principles in our country through historically locating Irom Sharmila and her non-violent resistance to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. **Karuna** spoke about the inter-generational differences and patterns of engaging with the social movements of one's times, and the urgent need for more dialogue between actors in the women's movement and those in other people's movements, more so in contemporary times. The call for combining newer methods of protests, together with 'going back to the streets' and raising issues cutting across margins, were raised by most of the speakers. The youth plenary, introduced for the first time in an IAWS conference, worked out to be a good index of the continuing engagement of younger women with movements even as we sometimes bemoan the disappearance of the women's movement from street-based actions.



## 4. THE SUB-THEMES

The sub-theme sessions were conducted as parallel sessions on the first three days of the conference. The ten subthemes of the conference have highlighted the trajectories such as state, natural resources, labour, body, markets, culture and ideology, conflict, language, sites of law, boundaries of relationships and the interfaces of these arenas.

### SUB-THEME 1

#### CONTROLLING RESOURCES: THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

**Coordinators: Ranjana Padhi and Kalpana Mehta**

In the current political and economic scenario, there is a need to understand the control of resources and politics of exclusion from a feminist perspective. The rapid changes at the ground level demand a scrutiny and revisiting of many of our feminist assumptions regarding women's subordination. Women's relationship to land is complex. The capitalist assault on natural resources like land, water and forests seriously affects the possibilities of survival of large sections of adivasis, dalits and working class. The poorest of the poor are putting up a tough fight against the police and paramilitary who unleash repression of an unprecedented nature on behalf of corporations and state governments. State repression in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa often includes the sexual assault on adivasi women too.

The sub-theme sessions began with a critical assessment of India's progress on the millennium-development goals and emphasized the worsening of conditions of existence for large sections of the country which constitute the 'not-shining' 75 per cent of India. Very little attention has been paid to disparities based on caste, class, ethnicity, occupation, migrant status and religion. Indicators like skewed sex ratio, anaemic conditions of women and girls, and the lack of places of worship or burial ground for dalits are not included in our measures, sharpening the politics of exclusion across the country. State interventions, like encroachment upon common land and the new mining policy of India, were discussed in an engaged manner. The recently passed Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 2010, directly contradicts the basic principle of the Fifth and the Sixth Schedule as there is no acknowledgement of the rights of the adivasi women. The adivasis resisting this plunder of land and natural resources are facing brutal repression, especially since the beginning of Operation Greenhunt.

Oceans form 60 per cent of the world's ecosystem. The onset of privatization of ocean resources is causing unimaginable hardships for people. Littoral areas provide 80 per cent livelihood for the coastal population. Earlier, livelihood depended on conservation but today conservation seems to be

doing away with people and their means of sustenance. Though resources are made available for tourism and recreation, such conservation does not take into account the needs of, say, the fisherfolk. In the 1990s, neoliberal agricultural policies focussed on third-world agricultural development. This was preceded by the infamous green revolution which impacted the local population adversely due to the advent of cash crops, such as those grown in orchards. This directly led to the loss of women's employment and their access to natural resources. Class difference in perception of land use, conflicting views on land, unbalanced land tenure and enclosure of villages – have become pervasive features in these areas.

Development plays an important role in consolidating patriarchy, too – be it in Nagaland, Kerala or any other state. In Nagaland, the state is sold on the idea of giving away agricultural land for special economic zones (SEZs). The existing customary rights, too, are anti-women. Trapped in this dilemma, women in Nagaland, however, prefer the perpetuation of customary rights to state acquisition of land, though this leads to a further consolidation of patriarchy. In Attapady, Kerala, influx of people in the 1990s led to the exploitation of women by non-tribal men. This has resulted in more than 700 unwed mothers in Attapady. While culture and customs of the tribals undergo some change in their interaction with non-tribals, ultimately this phenomenon reasserts the presence of patriarchy and caste oppression. The children born of unwed mothers are not able to avail the benefits of being adivasi as they are perceived as belonging to their father's caste.

The discussions emphasized the exclusion of the urban poor – those at the bottommost rungs of the class and caste hierarchy – from public health resources. Only 20 per cent of health resources are invested in the public sector, although it is this sector that caters to 75 per cent of the population. 80 per cent of it, paradoxically, is invested in private healthcare which caters to a fourth of the population. Due to the lacunae in the public health services, people often turn to alternative medicine. This is done, perhaps, in response to, and to combat, the crude commoditization of health services. However, this movement away from state-sponsored public health inevitably becomes the root cause for the general ill health of women.

Exclusion operates in social and political spaces too. The queer space is seen as a resource which challenges varied forms of oppression and discrimination arising from heteronormativity. Just like the women's movement, the queer movement provides a space of support for those within the movement. There are, however, conflicting concerns regarding role and self-perception of bodies because conventional gender perspectives are visible within the queer movement too. Reckoning with these exclusions, though challenging, is also rewarding since they strengthen the queer spaces as a resource.

In the current development paradigm, the state and its institutions proactively protect the needs of capital by moulding and perpetually revisiting labour laws, health policy, mining policy and laws on forest rights. Access to common natural resources is contentious and is gradually declining with widespread land acquisition in many parts. Many structured inequalities are institutionalized through the continuing prevalence of customary laws where women continue to be excluded from equal rights to land and other property. This results in women becoming more marginalized in intra-household power-sharing. In forest management, the efficiency approach rules and the issues of equity and women's participation remain marginalized. Policies are conditioned by social and political factors and the participation of women continues to be restricted. Two alarming aspects of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 2010, need to be noted. Even in scheduled areas, the state can grant land lease to private mining projects—the permission of the gram sabha is no longer mandatory. Worse still, tribals have the right only on resources existing on the surface of the land but the control over all underground resources has to be ratified by the state. In such a context, women's struggle has to be renewed as women are already in a disadvantaged position, being at the bottom of the hierarchy of a patriarchal-capitalist social order and their situation, by all odds, seems to be deteriorating.

### **Participation of Women in People's Movements**

The theme of women's participation in mass struggles, and whether it lessens patriarchal control and helps women assume greater autonomy of their lives, was discussed. Combing operations in Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh affect the daily lives and livelihood of women. While participation of women in these struggles is high, women are seldom able to take their lives ahead as they continue to subsist bereft of the means to do so. Often, a political or feminist consciousness is there, but there is the countervailing sharp class divide too. If even the politically conscious and active women are unable to acquire more control over their lives, we can well imagine the plight of most other women. Women in such resistance movements may be termed eco-feminists, who continue to be excluded from the mainstream feminist discourse as they are fighting for land and livelihood, resource and survival, for themselves and their land and environment. Women's participation in the struggles of Nandigram, Singur and Lalgarh was discussed—names that have become synonymous to people's resistance. Women in Singur and Nandigram fought valiantly against land acquisition as they intuitively understood that their livelihoods and survival were at stake. However, they are disillusioned after the struggles. Women, in any case, have seldom been a part of the decision-making bodies. The struggle at Lalgarh is not for land or livelihood but for political right and self-respect from which people have systematically

been kept separated. From the perspective of women's participation, the formation of the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA) in Lalgarh seems to be a promising development, boasting a 50-per cent women membership.

In the Dandakaranya region, adivasis have fought against colonial subjugation of earlier years. The adivasi people of this region were influenced by Gandhian tenets during the nationalist movement. They even took the democratic path to fight for their rights. But it was of no use; in recent years, aggressive plans of land acquisition for mining and corporate interests have grown in the region. The present movement of the adivasi people against forceful eviction and ruthless state violence is supported by the Maoists. A question was raised that if Maoist adivasi women are killed, whether it is justified to keep silent or should one protest.

Violence and the legitimacy of its deployment was a contentious issue in the parallel session. It was argued that in the face of state-sponsored brutality, people will have to retaliate in some measure. How else can people withstand the onslaught? However, violence, even when retaliatory, was not acceptable to all parties. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that the two instances of violence—that perpetrated by the state, on the one hand, and that incurred in the process of resistance of the people in protecting their land, on the other—should not be confused and should be ideally considered separately. More importantly, even if irreconcilable differences persist on the issue, it must be remembered that the fight against the state, capitalism and patriarchy must continue, whatever be the modality of it.

The question whether patriarchy is replicating itself in these resistance movements was discussed. Ideally, resistance movements need to showcase women gaining control of their own lives even as they add vibrancy and strength to people's struggles. By observing whether women were getting wages for agricultural work, had rights to common resources and were active participants in the decision-making process in anti-mining and anti-corporatization struggles, one could determine the pro-women content of such people's struggles.

### **Questioning the Current Development Paradigm**

Extraction of natural resources is related to the advent of capitalism. The latter has always resorted to violent methods to sustain itself, as we have seen during the wars waged in the last 10-20 years. There is internal warfare now as we see in the North East or in central India, especially Chhattisgarh. Capitalism cannot do without colonies and, therefore, internal colonies are required. And as we know, the worst affected in the process are women.

Marxist concepts and especially socialist feminism came up for discussion in this regard. How do we as feminists conceptualize the violence

inherent in such development? The nexus between the modern state and capitalism, the so-called free market approach, and the plunder of natural resources, have given rise to a military state. Thus, the force of the state and capitalist greed threaten our environment. Development cannot be based on the endless extraction of non-renewable resources; we must protect these resources for future generations as well. The presentations demonstrated how by combining the realities of marginalized groups with a feminist understanding can only further strengthen such struggles.

While opposing state violence and aggressive capitalist assault, we need to simultaneously make sure that democratic and peaceful participation in decision-making is ensured. We must highlight a different kind of politics. We must also address the changing role of patriarchy and prevent it from being further entrenched in these periods of crises.

Some questions remain: those regarding women's participation in the workforce; women's role in both production and social reproduction; the conditions of displaced people, whether rehabilitated or not; the future of Chapter XVI, Section 377, of the Indian Penal Code; whether and how the struggles challenging heteronormativity should push forward; how precisely does a mass movement bring about change in social relations; and so on. Finally, new research and radical literature or new ways of challenging hegemonies can become more fruitful only if they are in synchrony with reality—by observing where and how one can support the people who are already resisting external control of resources and the politics of exclusion. To bring change, therefore, we need to question both feminist theory and praxis so that it becomes inclusive of these vast sections of women. We need to create something new—whether it is political-campaign strategies or analytical tools.

## **SUB-THEME 2**

### **CONFLICT AND RESISTANCES: CHALLENGES BEFORE THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

**Coordinators: Malini Subramaniam and Sharanya Nayak**

Women have been enduring varied forms of systemic and structural violence within the family and community. They have, however, not been passive victims of violence but have resisted injustice and inequality within family, community and state. Such resistances have taken place in varied forms of collective, where they have challenged traditional gender roles and norms. They have been important contributors in strengthening the larger community struggle. Their active participation in resistance movements has put forth unique ways in which they express their anger against repressive forces.

The emergence of different women's political fronts in Bihar, especially All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) and Indian People's Front, Naxalites and the JP movement, was discussed in the sessions.

One of the presentations narrated the unsung story of women's movements in Bihar from 1980 to 2010. The importance of the contribution of women of Bihar in creating resistance movements was discussed. The Naxalite movement was one of first movements that provided a platform for dalits and adivasis to break away from caste hegemonies. The Bodh Gaya movement was important in terms of raising the question of women's ownership of land, thereby making an important contribution to women's movement. The post-globalization era has thrown newer forms of challenges to women's movement which it has failed to address in a sustained way. While the women's movement was able to respond to incidents of atrocities, they were unable to attack the larger forces of repression. As resistance to injustice increases, the forces of repression also gather strength.

There was a presentation on the anti-displacement movements in Jharkhand, where the tribal women lead from the front. It is well known that there is conflict over natural resources in Jharkhand, with the situation affecting women. 70 per cent of women in Jharkhand are in a do or die situation. The importance of grassroots women's movements is well recognized as this leads women to find strength and solidarity in fighting for their rights. When corporatization of Jharkhand began, women realized that unless sustained efforts are made to resist acquisition of land, their very existence and survival will be at stake – it is then that tribals, non-tribals and women in particular joined in solidarity to oppose this. While it was important for women to think about their immediate loss it was of utmost necessity for them to foresee the long-term loss and gains for the development of the future generation. They have become educated in legal aspects through consultations with adivasi gram sabha, etc and have used the Right to Information Act to seek information on acquisition of forest rights. The women of Jharkhand have built solidarity with groups in Chhattisgarh and Orissa. They are also actively involving the local panchayat members, including sarpanches, thus politicizing the panchayats towards a pro-people understanding that is lacking in political parties. The strength of the resistance movement can be gauged by its ability to stall 101 companies to roll out their *memoranda of understanding* (MoU). The challenges faced by the movements range from threats from hired goons of the company, surveillance of their movement by the police to false charges slapped against them and refusal of FIRs from members of their groups.

Census data 1991 shows there are 2.5 per cent widowers while there are eight per cent widowed women. One of the papers focussed on the concerns of single women in particular as the self-help groups, government and World-Bank programmes have completely ignored their concerns. Thus, there has been a conscious attempt of organizing single women from Rajasthan and other states under the banner of National Forum for Single Women's Rights. Single women, defined as divorced, separated, widow, adult unmarried or

other women, who are not in a marriage or a marriage-like relationship, are part of this forum. Currently the forum has 80,000 members across seven states of India.

The 1994 study conducted by Dr Marty Chen broke the myth that the family takes care of single women. There was evidence that a large numbers of widows live independently and the study brought out the real issues of single women. A convention was held in Rajasthan where 450 single women gathered to extend solidarity and discussed their issues from their standpoint. The challenges that single women identified were: absence of support; loss of home; loneliness; lack of access to justice during disputes, as caste panchayats ignore single women's concerns; social ostracism; restrictions on dress, mobility and participating in social functions, etc.; rights to property and inheritance; exploitation as labourers; and, witch branding and related harassments.

The forum of single women collectively decides and raises their issues; the women find solidarity with one another and have been able to break the caste and patriarchal shackles and enjoy relatively more freedom. There has been resistance from families and communities but these women are able to challenge this by virtue of their solidarity to claim property rights, etc. Overt resistance is not the only form of challenging hegemonies, but that women negotiate within given spaces needs to be noted too.

A presentation focussed on the additional violence faced by women from caste-based private armies. With reference to Jehanabad, the speaker discussed the practice of witch-hunting and *dola pratha* (right over first night of a dalit bride). Interestingly, while *mirgi* fits of a lower-caste woman is reason enough to declare her a witch, a higher-caste woman suffering fits is referred as *devi kaa aanaa*. Most castes including dalits, such as the Paswans, also have caste-based armies who target castes lower than them. Women have found two means of resistance – first, through the panchyati raj system and second, by joining the Naxalites. Some of these women who were part of the Naxalite movement became sarpanches and renegotiated power within the villages, although upper-caste men remain the more powerful. The overpowering forces of patriarchy continue to persist within the Naxalite movement. Further, from the 22 dalit castes in Bihar, 18 have been declared maha-dalits which has fragmented their solidarity.

Another paper, through the Khairlanji case, attempted to locate dalit feminism within dalits as well as larger development issues. Although Khairlanji brought together many women, including women from the left and other feminists, post-Khairlanji dalit feminism did not build any character of its own; feminists too lost the opportunity to build on dalit feminism. One of the presentations focussed on the agency of women in the Khalistan movement and discussed how no independent identity of women was formed in the

movement. The women have always been presented either as victims of state violence or as supporters— as mothers, daughters, sisters— of the male militants. Women were raped by security forces to pressurize the menfolk to surrender and such women have been categorized as martyrs. The women preferred being martyrs rather than the *ahat maryada* (pious caretakers of the menfolk). Women were also pressurized to marry militants as a mark of commitment, forcing them to go underground. Women often also resisted this by sending away their children to faraway places like the UK. While men in the movement were presented as militants in the movement, women were never seen as fighters, their roles relegated to insignificance.

A paper titled 'Muslim women's leadership: Emerging as an Alternative Voice' discussed how Muslim women have come into the public fora in contemporary times via non-confrontationist and constructive approaches drawing in the menfolk of the community, including the clerics. This has helped construct the pluralistic, non-hierarchical image of the Muslim women to counter Islamization and ghettoization. Women's resistance has been visible in the family, community and the state. While the negotiation within family is for education, the resistance in the community is through model *nikah nama* and demand for codification of Muslim personal law. They negotiate with the state in terms of entitlements, seeking implementation of the Sachar Report recommendations, countering the nationalist debate. The Bharatiya Muslim Women's Movement provides the space to all kinds of women from the community. The movement faces a number of challenges like threat of ghettoization, negative perception from the state, etc.

Another presentation quoted extensively from the CPI(M) documents to state that though there have been attempts by the party to look at gender inequality within, they have been unable to restructure the party to create spaces for women. Even today, they fail to recognize that family is the site of gender politics and violence. When there is a marriage between cadres, the man continues to grow in party while the woman is relegated to the home. While party documents speak about the need for presence of women, little initiative is taken to recruit women as primary cadres or enable them to rise to state and national committees? LGBTQ issues are missing in the party's priorities; sexuality questions are rendered invisible by the party's women's wing as well.

One of the papers explored links between armed conflict and domestic violence. It was emphasized that sexual violence in war is a heightened form of violence against women. According to UN reports, in a situation of armed conflict there is increased violence against women by soldiers. The UN report also states that men at war are imbued with violence, resulting in an increase in domestic violence. The paper presenter tried to locate this in the Indian context specifically in the states of J&K and Manipur using National Family



Health Survey-II & III data and comparing the statistics to see the rise in domestic violence. In Manipur, while there is a four-fold increase between II and III, the incidents of domestic violence have gone down in Kashmir. In studying the impact of armed conflict and the factors responsible for domestic violence, she concluded that the impact of armed conflict leads to increase in both direct and indirect factors responsible for the rise in domestic violence such as lack of employment, high alcohol consumption, etc. Thus, even while in Manipur women do have high literacy level and high presence in the public domain, yet they have low status within their homes with an increasing prevalence of domestic violence. The customary laws in Manipur and the situation of armed conflict in the state impose restrictions on the movement of women in the community. She raised questions about how to differentiate between domestic violence in situations of armed conflict and in peace time and the differences in the kinds of intervention made by women's movement. How do women's movements engage with violence against women in general and violence against women during armed conflicts?

### **SUB-THEME 3**

#### **SITES OF JUSTICE**

**Coordinators: Kalpana Kannabiran & Vrinda Grover**

The issue of sexual violence is really at the centre of the women's movement. It has been an enduring concern conceptually, theoretically and in terms of activism. The concerns of the women's movement have made a significant impact on policy and laws, in everyday lives, at the margins, in regions of conflict. As we look at the different sites of justice, we realize that when it comes to women, facts and evidence do not underwrite the judgment. Instead, our patriarchal, heteronormative and casteist attitudes affect the final decision.

Ranjita Biswas in her paper on 'Enabling Justice in Sexual Violence' tried to think through the ways in which the court addresses and understands sexual violence. How has pain been understood? Feminists have critiqued the structures of knowledge that have excluded pain from their schema. However, they have often worked with the knowledge-experience binary intact. Ranjita argued that an unproblematic retrieval of experience cannot help us uncover the truth of the raped body. We need to rethink our modes of knowledge: we probably need a shift from a positivist to a phenomenological model. We should be focussing on not only the interpretation of facts to get to the truth, but also on understanding the psyche's response to pain. She argued for a different engagement with pain and subjective experiences in the courtroom proceedings. The courtroom trials, according to her, must be informed by the experience of pain, structured by her marginalization and exploitation. The lived experience should be made part of judicial knowledge

and proceedings. The paper suggests that pain can become an important resource for understanding sexual violence within the legal framework, especially when the very definitions of sexual violence are changing radically. There were concerns about the unproblematic retrieval and romanticization of suffering, as well as the implications of this finely tuned focus on women's testimonies. There were questions raised about the nature of the language of law: can such a language ever deal with pain? What kind of resources does one need to re-imagine the legal discourse in this context?

In another presentation on 'Reading Rape Post-Mathura and Bhanwari Rape Law', Monica Sakhrani, as a practising criminal lawyer, tried to unravel the possibilities and the limits of the Khairlanji massacre and the TISS rape case in the socio-feminist context shaped by the Mathura and Bhanwari Devi rape cases. She pointed out the various crucial issues that underwrite all the four judgements: consent, facts, evidence, truth, caste, violence and laws. Monica provided an interesting, insightful and nuanced reading of the judgments. In the absence of the raped women and their testimonies, how does the courtroom deal with bodily evidence? In the rape case at TISS, the woman was drugged and did not remember the details of her rape. In such circumstances, the onus of proving that the rape occurred continues to rest on the prosecution. Monica proposed that legal procedures in the context of rape need to be reworked in such a way that it is the accused who must explain his intentions and his actions. However, shifting this focus of proof was a real challenge and needs a lot of work before it can actually be put into practice.

In the context of the above two papers, Mamata Kumari asked a pertinent question – Why is there a need for a feminist interpretation of criminology? Since the burden of the criminal proceedings always falls on the marginalized sections of society, criminology will have to be understood differently at a very fundamental level. What is the relationship between the understanding of crime and the experience of the state by women? What is the citizenship that women experience? What was also realized is that the experiences of criminality in women are not part of the established structures of knowledge; women are given very limited roles as citizens. The moment they exceed those spaces, they are either called masculine or hysterical or seditious. The process of reconstituting criminology through feminism had a lot of potential but needed more work.

While female criminality is age-old, women are more often identified as victims of crimes. This affects the way research is carried out for a study of women who have been convicted of committing crimes. A study of women who have been convicted of committing crimes against women in Nashik jail by Sangeeta Chatterjee reveals that the highest number of women convicted for crimes are those related to dowry. In this study conducted in Nashik Central Jail, qualitative interviews were taken of seven women. All respondents

had themselves experienced domestic violence and in turn became perpetrators. Education emerged as a major factor in enhancing self confidence. They considered dowry as pre-requisite for a good marriage. All the respondents claimed that they were innocent of the crime they were charged for. They viewed violence as a normal occurrence in marriage. The family was looked upon as a site of emotional and physical oppression for women with women being both abusers and victims. A quote from a respondent needs special mention. She said, “A daughter-in-law is like a dog; you feed her and she does work around the house.”

The sub-theme also explored the relationship between justice, law and gender along the track of sexuality. The question of sexuality is tied closely to questions of choice in relationship and the important issue of consent. After the Delhi High Court judgment on Section 377, it was still necessary to study the private spaces where violations against lesbian, trans women take place. Family was one such space and Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (Labia) had conducted a study ‘Braking the binary’ among a varied cross-section of queer persons in the age group of 16 to 25 trying to understand concerns and realities of those assigned gender female at birth across a spectrum of lived gender identities (Pagfab– Persons assigned gender female at birth). While some of them could identify their genders as men and women, some could not for whom Labia used hir or s/he. The paper titled ‘No More a Criminal but Still an Outlaw: A Queer Tale’ emphasized the need for the queer movement to address violence in private spaces.

Most respondents spoke of feeling vulnerable and facing violence as they were still dependent on families. There was large-scale monitoring of what they could wear/ not wear, how long they could stay out and so on. There were problems after some underwent body changes, with one respondent admitting to losing all hir male friends after s/he changed to a woman. S/he was forced to change hir style of dressing and be more feminine. The pressure led hir to attempt suicide. There were instances of violence with many family members themselves being perpetrators of violence. Many run away. Many form balanced relationships over time. There were many respondents facing sexual abuse in their homes as well. This leads to loneliness and depression 18 of the 50 respondents had attempted suicide, mostly when living with the natal family. These have had strong links with pressure to marry as well. Many respondents who ran away could not finish their education. There were incidents of forced migration from smaller towns to larger urban areas because of tensions and family pressures.

Rachna Chaudhary’s paper on ‘Women, Sexuality and Judicial Discourse’ focussed on the judicial discourse to study how judges resort to patriarchal norms, practices and language to promote stereotypes on gender and sexuality. In the case of an unmarried woman who was convicted of

murder in a dowry case, the judge suggested that marriage was necessary as she was of marriageable age and was praised for her feminine virtues. The judges reassert patriarchy using a procedural device. In a case of kidnapping and rape of a minor, a judge of Delhi High Court observed that the minor girl enjoyed sex for four days and, therefore, was not kidnapped and raped. The judge also observed that her body was well formed and of an 18 year old and, therefore, it was assumed that she consented to sexual activity. In another case, a woman was referred as having a 'bad' character because she was living with another man. In the case of Seva Kaur vs. State of Punjab, where the woman murdered her husband with the help of her neighbour, with whom she was having an affair, the husband was not living with her as he was in the army. However, she was expected to be chaste. The anger of the man on realising his wife’s affair was ‘normal’, but the wife’s anger at being in an unhappy marriage was not considered. In Jami vs. State, where a newly married wife killed her husband, the woman remarried and her husband was projected in the judgment as her ‘saviour’ and her salvation lay in staying married. The judge assumed that she did not commit the murder as she ‘needed’ to have children. The social construct of the prostitute is also stigmatized and sex workers are treated with contempt in the court. Moreover, when lawyers are engaged, women’s narratives are muted. The defendant is ‘normalized’ and so they are shown to behave in gendered/ desirable roles so as to get a favourable order. Judges use gendered discourses to maintain power relations in society.

The presentation by Madhu from PLD, on ‘Revisiting the Family: Transcending Boundaries’ focussed on women in non-normative relationships with customs like *natapratha* practised in Rajasthan and Gujarat by lower-caste communities. In such customs, women are given away in second marriage (nata) if the first marriage does not work out as the reproductive labour of women is important. A very small percentage of women can exercise agency in nata marriages. The practice of *Maitri Karar* in Gujarat has continued. In Himachal Pradesh, there have been various kinds of relationships from polyandry (not so common now) to polygamy and bigamy, which is common. In Orissa, work in tribal areas show that when government officers are posted in such areas they take up a tribal woman as wife, but later abandon her once they are posted out. People make choices in abstraction– not in conformity with the law. The categories of the ‘second woman’, the unchaste wife, the second wife or the other woman, the cohabitee, women in same sex relationships, and poor/ impoverished women are excluded from access to justice. We have been unable to challenge the institution of marriage. There is a need to engage with rights outside the institution of marriage as well as look at the rights for single women. How do we allow women the choice to marry or not to marry (as an active choice)? There is a need to reformulate the term ‘second woman’ because she is second only for the man. Compulsory

registration of marriages is very problematic and the movement should oppose this administrative measure. Increasingly, emphasis should be on cohabitation and not registration of marriages.

The study of legal rights of Mizo women by V. Sawmveli showed how customary law governs Mizo marriage, both legally and socially. In 1980, Mizoram customary law board came into being because women were deprived of certain rights. Bride price is an important element of Mizo marriage and the Mizos believe that bride price is a sign of women's value. But the issue of divorce is controversial with divorced women often becoming destitute and homeless. Maintenance is unheard of in many Mizo villages.

While divorce rights are ignored, abortion rights have also not been understood as a right of women but as a tool for the state. Sayantan Saha Roy while interrogating abortion jurisprudence in India used various reports and judgments to show how judicial discourse has privileged the medical discourse over subjectivity of the woman. While the court assumes the role of determining whether the abortion should be permitted, the prejudices of the court rather than the concerns of the woman dominate the decision.

'Consent' is a controversial term in cases of heterosexual marital choices as well. Rimple Mehta's presentation on 'Honour Crimes against Women in Rajasthan: A Case Study' focussed on how the patriarchal notion of 'honour' varies across cultures and ways in which it is interwoven in daily, mundane lives. Women are the bearers of honour of family and community which is linked to protection of her chastity and virginity. Thus, it is important not only to control her sexual behaviour, but also to control anything that might lead to sexual agency. The notion of honour changes after marriage. There is also a strong link between honour crimes and mental health.

The paper by Jasmine Kalha on 'Security of "Body" and "Mind"? Mental Health Interventions by Shelter Homes for Women in Distress' looks at the larger conceptual framework in which gender determines mental health with respect to government and non-government shelter homes in Mumbai for women in distress. These homes provide shelter to women having a certain type of mental health problem. The treatment is also bio-medical (mainstream), which does not question why women are suffering from mental-health issues. The paper urged the need to deconstruct mental health. Mainstream practice relies on stereotypes of male and female behaviour— and, therefore, only bio-medical interventions can help. For example, women who are aggressive are seen as having 'anger problems' whereas this would be considered normal for men. People having alternative sexuality are seen as needing help.

The paper by Jagmati Sangwan based on *All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)*'s struggle in Haryana analyzed resistance by women and other social organizations against 'honour-crimes'. The institution of marriage, a turning point for girls, is also a site for subjugating them. The

society in Haryana is complex with pre-modern trends in society existing along with forces of globalization, and a consumerist culture. An individual woman exercising her choice in marriage challenges people who are used to exercising power and controlling her sexuality. Young people are attracted to upward mobility and modern ideas and they also exercise personal freedom. They are well aware of the consequences and are ready to make sacrifices. Socio-economically influential sections are involved in maintaining status quo and they legitimize the violence followed by self-arranged marriages. The khaps use the emotional issue of gotra to mobilize opinion and gain legitimacy for their conservative agenda. New social organizations now protest, petition the state authorities, and hold marches. In response, the government machinery obstructs and hinders their efforts to secure justice. However, the resistance movements have ensured that every district in Haryana has couple protection homes. Still an appropriate law is needed, which will shift the onus on the accused.

Minakshie Rode focussed on violence on dalit women in rural and urban contexts. The urban-rural divide in India is a factor that impinges on caste reality. Violence on dalit women cannot be just examined through the exclusive lens of caste, class or gender. The experience of domestic violence for dalit women is structured differently in city and village. Many dalit sarpanchs have faced severe problems. Panchayat reservation for dalit women should empower them; however the picture that is emerging is quite mixed. Dalit girls face sexual harassment and discrimination in colleges. Laws have failed to ameliorate the situation.

#### **SUB-THEME 4**

##### **COMPOSITE CULTURES AND HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGIES**

**Coordinators: Swati Dyahadroy and Anagha Tambe**

One of the major objectives of this sub-theme was to analyze how the hegemonic and 'normative' culture is produced, resisted and negotiated. We wanted to highlight how cultural hegemony is produced through subjection of marginalized groups, in particular women of different groups, through the domination of cultural practices alien and oppressive to them, the non-recognition or obliteration of their diverse cultural practices, its disrespect and humiliation in public spaces and in everyday life.

The papers presented were divided under following themes-

- 1) Studying the 'Popular' and the 'Folk'
- 2) Studying the 'Classical'
- 3) Exploring History
- 4) Analyzing Community and Practices
- 5) Reading 'Texts'



#### 6) Analysing Representations in Popular Media

The papers in this sub-theme had differential understandings of culture and the ways in which they integrated culture also varied.

In the session on studying the ‘popular’ and the ‘folk’, there were papers analysing the formation and contestation of gendered, regional and sexual identities through popular cultural spaces, ranging from television to cinema to internet. The papers in this session discussed the constitution of diasporic (*probaashi*) Bengali identity through regional television programmes, lesbian identity through literary, cinematic and organizational spaces, gendered identities through internet and regional Bhojpuri identity through women’s songs. There were papers analyzing how cultural spaces such as women’s songs or what was termed as folk songs were sites of consolidation of patriarchal hegemony as well as resistance. There was also an interrogation of what is folk culture to underline how some indigenous scholars have challenged the marginalization of little traditions but resisted its distinction as folk tradition.

In the session on studying the ‘classical’, papers attempted to understand and interrogate the classical/ high culture. How iconic classical motifs were revised through modern Indian dance and new identities for women were constructed was examined. The political economy of high art was also examined highlighting how women artists have historically intervened into and interrogated the masculine high art and created their own space.

In the session on exploring history, papers traced the cultural discourses exploring historically how traditional dai’s knowledge was represented in the western medical discourse as against the trained nurse in colonial India or how women’s desire was evoked in the cinematic discourse through studio films of Debaki Bose, and how the metaphor of Lakshmanrekha was constituted and negotiated across time and space.

In the session on studying communities and their practices, the constitution of and negotiation by communities was traced through diverse gendered cultural practices. There were papers such as on the conversion of Valmiki to Christianity, tribal community *korku*— their health related issues and corporate diasporic community in the first world.

In the session on reading texts there were textual analysis of women’s autobiographies across time and space, and Dalit women’s autobiographies read as resources for social history. How Bhakti text was used to create domestic woman out of so called lower-caste women, how autobiographies as a modern genre was evoked across time, space and social location, these were some of the questions raised in the session.

In the session on analysing representations in popular media, there were papers on exploring the production and consumption of media, especially television. The economics of production of television and its links with

corporate globalization, consumption patterns of television serials focussed on women’s issues, and constitution of women’s question through it – such were the issues analysed in this session.

#### SUBTHEME 5

##### LANGUAGES, VOICES, REPRESENTATIONS

**Coordinators: Wandana Sonalkar & Dilip Chavan**

Language has become a major site of contestation for women in recent times. We need to be careful of the new linguistic practices which are being thrust upon us by the state as well as international agencies, which generate their own terminology and slide them into the feminist discourse through their efficient mechanisms of dissemination, thereby co-opting some of our demands and challenges. We also need to keep track of the diverse voices within the women’s movements, whose concerns we have not addressed adequately so far. These voices have also challenged some accepted formulations and theories. Language is also a significant component of identity politics, and there is an urgent need to reflect on the implications of contestations and negotiations in this area.

The presentation by Sushmita Gonsalves was titled, ‘Against the Tide: *Jogwa*’. *Jogwa* is a Marathi film set in rural Karnataka. The film is about one of the social practices rooted in caste-patriarchy: the practice of dedicating girls and more rarely boys, to the goddess at a very young age. Gonsalves showed how the film depicts that the *jogta* and *jogtin* refuse to conform to the tradition which enjoins them to make a living by begging, and prohibits them from entering ‘normal’ domestic life. At the end of the film they finally break away from it. She also told us the film, especially its ending, was seen as disappointing by the Devadasis of Kolhapur whom she later met.

This was followed by a presentation by Adyasha Das, from the University of Hyderabad, on ‘Representation of Gender in Oriya Cinema’. She started with the assumption that cinema is a deeply gendered enterprise. People do not have control over what they view, and the representations of women are confusing. Stereotypical representation of women in cinema makes a negative impact on the audience. Surveying the Oriya cinema, she said that the first film was made in 1936 and even in 1951 there were only two films, financed by landlords and on historical themes. She also argued that movies which do not conform to the traditional norms and depict women in a positive light are not commercially successful. Women are often shown as victims of violence and glorified as possessing many virtues, but also shown as the root of all evil, and this affects gender roles in Oriya society.

Namrata Ganneri, in her presentation on ‘Situating the Icons of the Hindu Rights’, dealt with the iconography of the Hindu nation, especially

with regard to the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, the women's wing of the RSS, which is claimed to be the largest organization of women in India. She started by stating that the visual is constitutive of political realities, that it does not just reflect them. The icons for the Sevika Samiti include Jijabai, mother of Shivaji and thus the embodiment of motherhood; Ahilyabai Holkar, personifying the efficient execution of work (duty); and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, who represents leadership; but the most used icon is Ashtabhuja Devi, the eight-armed goddess who represents the ideal woman. The founder of the Samiti, Laxmibai Kelkar, is another icon. Namrata showed slides in which these icons were picturised. After discussing how the iconography is used for pedagogical purposes within the structure of the Sevika Samiti, she talked about a telefilm made on Laxmibai Kelkar's life. She demonstrated how the image of a mosque in an earlier poster is magnified in a scene of the telefilm to make it more threatening.

Prema Hallikeri's presentation focussed on Indian commercials and the representation of women. Since the man has the purchasing power, most advertisements are directed at them. The advertisements are heavily hegemonic. The media is changing slowly but has to change more.

Finally, Uma Chakravarti presented a series of posters from her personal collection, stating that they form a 'personal-political archive' of various political struggles in which she has participated throughout her life. She started by talking about the political atmosphere in the 1970s; there are practically no posters of the Emergency, for example. Yet this period, which saw the earliest examples of the phenomenon of 'fake encounters', was a period of 'secular fascism' even though a crisis of the legitimacy of the state emerged at this time. In contrast, she showed us some posters about L.K. Advani's *Rath Yatra* and the 'trail of blood' it left behind. Uma also showed some posters from South Africa, which made political statements about the apartheid era. She had some interesting posters from Pakistan, and pointed out that the work of visual artists were much more present in the political life of the left and in the women's movement of Pakistan where everyday incidents can become the basis for art and then that work of art is made available to feminists to make posters.

The discussion raised several questions. First, Smita Gandhi, a geographer, talked about the importance of the perspective of space which has not been brought out sufficiently in feminist analyses of the media. She felt that the relation between the harsh yet beautiful landscape of the Deccan plateau was an important part of the film *Jogwa*, for example. In general, political spaces shape the physical spaces available for women. Vijay Kumar asked why the caste dimensions of the film had not been brought out. S. Anandhi asked about regional aspects of political posters.

The first presentation in the next session was by Mallika Ghosh Sarbadhikary, titled 'Proficiency in English: The Indian Context'. The presentation traced the evolution of English-language writing beginning with Bankim Chandra to the contemporary novelists like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni or Jhumpa Lahiri. The presentation by Nirantar was an outcome of their project on content analysis of textbooks from standard I to X in four states, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. Nirantar chose only language textbooks as the polemical debates following National Curriculum Framework 2000 had focussed solely on history textbooks. The presenter, who chose to speak in Hindi, supplemented her presentation with a considerable amount of visual material to argue that a range of devices—national icons, poetry, fables, historical drama and biographical sketches—are used to construct the identity of the nation. The presenter also argued to have explored the content of the language textbooks through feminist lens. She forcefully argued that textbooks invariably address a male Hindu child, the 'default setting' being that of a Hindu framework.

The third presentation in the session was by Vivek Singh on 'The Politics of Representation: Rethinking Gender'. He commented on the nature of the representation of the female body. Citing from representations of 'sati' in contemporary newspapers and magazines, he argued that women were represented in two mutually exclusive ways: either as heroines able to withstand the raging fires or as victims coerced to submit themselves to the flames. Hence the focus was only on female body. The fourth presentation was by Nirmala Jadhav, titled 'The Unconscious: The Feminist Exploration'. She divided her paper into two parts: the first part detailed the role of unconscious in Freud while the second part focussed on the works of Sharad Patil in exploring the place of unconscious in ancient texts. Despite attacks on Freud by feminists, scholars like Juliet Mitchell sought to rescue Freud and make his work relevant in terms of the importance of psychoanalysis to femininity. In the Indian context, Nirmala argued, there existed very little work on the 'unconscious'. She made a plea for giving Sharad Patil his due for explicating the importance of 'Abrahmani knowledge traditions'. She cited the example of the goddess 'Niruti', celebrated as the goddess of fertility submerged in the subconscious and turned into the goddess of hell. Nirmala ended with a few provocative questions like the upper-caste women's support to the upper-caste men in episodes like that of Khairlanji or Godhra. The final presentation was in Hindi by Kalpana Shastri and titled 'Stree Swatantrya Ka Bhartiya Paripekshya'. Kalpana cautioned the coordinator as well as others present at the sub-theme session that her views may not go down well with those present. She began by invoking the glorious 'Hindu past', when women like Gargi and Maitreyi epitomised the greatness of Indian civilisation. Fusing the 'Indian' with the 'Hindu', Kalpana argued that the liberation movement in

India was aided by men like Phule and Karve and this was unlike the liberation movement in the west. She also argued that in the Indian context equal attention was paid to achieving equality, liberation as well as preserving the family whereas in the west little attention was paid to avoid disintegration of the family. She also lauded the contribution of Gandhi in instilling an ethic of feminine virtue in the public domain.

During the discussion session, Mandira Sen asked Mallika if an example for promotion of English education amongst Muslims could be found. Akshay requested Kalpana to comment on the ongoing session of IAWS and its 'Indianness'. Kalpana expressed her dissatisfaction with the larger programme of IAWS and voiced her protest. Namrata asked the presenter from Nirantar if she could supplement visual material from textbooks with the work of Carl Jung to bolster her reading on the unconscious. She also spoke of the work of Ajitha Chakraworthy on practising psychology in the Indian context as useful reference material. Mallika commented on Kalpana's presentation as being devoid of any bases of argument.

The diverse presentation was rounded off with concluding comments by Wandana Sonalkar pointing out the challenges of putting together a variety of papers on this sub-theme.

## **SUB-THEME 6**

### **STATE, NATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

**Coordinators: Sanober Kishwar & Nandini Manjrekar**

There have been ongoing debates in feminist scholarship regarding the relationship of women with the modern state. There are arguments that the state is a 'contested terrain' on which battles, both for and against patriarchy, are fought. In India, the repressive face of the state is the most visible today, with conflict situations existing in Kashmir and the North-East, where the struggles for self-determination of the people are being brutally suppressed. The age of neoliberalism under the garb of 'accelerating growth' of the economy has led to large-scale displacement and destitution of millions of marginalized people. Women, being in the forefront of the struggles, have been major victims of sexual violence. This sub-theme presented us with an opportunity to think about the possibilities for rethinking issues like legal empowerment, citizenship and to formulate our theoretical positions and action plans accordingly.

### **Perspectives on the women's movement and the state**

The five papers presented in the session revolved around transitions in the nature of engagement of women's movements with the state. Iliana Sen set the frame for the discussion. She said that a vision of free and equal citizenship

and belief in the constitutional framework provided the basis for engagement on legal reforms for gender equity and justice. However, the turning point was the onset of globalization in the 1990s, when certain shifts can be seen. The autonomous women's movement engages in efforts to implement affirmative action demands such as formation of documentation and legal aid centres, panchayati raj training etc. Now with global finance capital wreaking havoc on the lives of people, we have the gravest displacement met with the gravest resistance. The resistance we see is multi-layered but united in opposition to the particular model of development forced on the people by the state. The state responds with violence to this resistance, in which women are subject to sexual violence as well. In this context, the question is how we as feminist scholars/ activists understand the nature of the state. Is the state an agent of patriarchy or an agent of change? Unless we clarify and understand these disjunctions, we will not know what to resist or how to respond; and although strategies may be different, we must have a unified response to what has to be resisted.

Sneha Gole's paper looked at the changing face of the state and shifts in the women's movement in Maharashtra in the post-90s period. Through her study of responses of the Stri Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti— a coalition of women's groups in Maharashtra — to the draft women's policy, the paper brought out the new model of governance by which the state co-opts feminist NGOs as gender 'experts' in their planning process. The Sampark Samiti has opposed the politics of selective accommodation. The draft women's policy was circulated selectively to those considered capable of giving expert advice. People's organizations such as trade unions and others were completely left out of this process.

Supriya Pathak spoke about the state's use of the tribals in forming vigilante forces to suppress genuine movements of the people, with reference to the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh. She spoke about two ways in which tribal women are at the receiving end of this militarization. The Judum arrests innocent tribal women in the name of being Maoist sympathisers and they languish in jail for long periods of time because false cases are foisted on them. On the other hand, the female Judum members are sexually harassed and exploited by the male Judum members with impunity.

Shubra Nagalia through her discussion of the post-Soviet state and women showed how the rightward neoliberal shift in the polity and economy is taking place in all states the world over. She spoke about care work in post-1990s Russia where the earlier soviet 'culture of work' has been replaced by a culture of responsibility in which there is a conscious restoration of the 'natural order' governing women's lives reversing what the new Russian neoliberal state sees as the legacy of the earlier soviet state, i.e., over-pampered, over-

emancipated women and a parasitic dependence on the nanny state. Ravikumar spoke of the women's situation in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There was an engaging discussion thereafter in which several key questions facing the women's movement were discussed. V. Geetha brought up the question of looking at the relationship of class interests at this historical moment where the state is defining a new kind of female citizenship and weaving women into the structures of the repressive state through mediations of gender, class and caste. Sunita Bagal spoke of how in Maharashtra women's policy is more a set of schemes involving contracting and sub-contracting of gender expertise. She raised the question of access to participation in the process of policymaking which only reaches out to urban centres.

### **Women in conflict areas – Kashmir**

The session on women in conflict areas with special reference to Kashmir revolved around trying to understand the situation in the Valley and the kind of problems being faced by the people of the state. This was important to understand how the complex situation can be solved. There were some burning questions. Is dialogue possible? Is faith in engaging the state misplaced? How do we bring into the debate issues of violations against women in areas other than the Valley, in the refugee camps in Jammu?

Ritu Dewan's paper on 'State, Nationhood, and Citizenship: Women in Kashmir' initiated the discussions by describing how the state has made a systematic effort to divide Jammu & Kashmir into four zones composed of Leh and Ladakh, Jammu and Kargil. Her paper focussed on the problems faced by the inhabitants of Kashmir.

No demonstrations or public festivals have been permitted in the Valley since 1989, but women comprised more than 60 per cent of all the demonstrations and protests held earlier, as is evident in the photos of that time. Even in the feudal culture that prevails, it is the desperation of the situation that propels women to come forward. There have been a few mass demonstrations by women even after that like the one held by the women students of Kashmir University to protest the setting up of a CRPF camp outside the girls' hostel. The burqa was never common in Kashmir earlier. And even today, despite the infamous acid-throwing incident where militants had reportedly thrown acid at a woman who was not wearing a burqa, which most people say never happened, most women have not taken to wearing the burqa. Women in the Valley have always enjoyed control over their reproductive rights. A leading militant group, at the height of the insurgency, tried to challenge this declaring that no women could have an abortion without permission from the supreme Commander.

There are thousands of 'half widows' in Kashmir– women whose husbands have been missing for years, men who left home never to return,

who either joined the militants or were kidnapped by the army or the paramilitary forces. Such women are to be found in every village of the Valley. They should be given compensation to help them survive. Then there is the tragedy of the village of Kunan-Poshpora– the 'raped village'– where paramilitary forces raped almost all the women of the village. No one is ready to marry any woman from the village as a consequence and yet the state maintains that such rapes did not take place at all! Poverty is lowest in Kashmir despite the sustained conflict in the region. This is because this was the only state where land reform was carried out thoroughly. Hence, everyone has some land which can help them survive in the worst of times.

When we talk of the Kashmir question, we rarely include the tragedy of the Pandits in our discourse. The Pandits were forced out of the valley years ago. These people, used to living in spacious houses, are now packed into one small room per family, with no proper jobs and a measly government dole of Rs.2500 per family. In the Pandit camps in Jammu, too, the women face a great deal of violence from their men due to the frustration the latter face. The Pandits have not been declared refugees or even Internally Displaced Persons which would have given them more entitlements. Despite all these problems, the leadership has not taken a single woman's issue seriously.

Inshah Malik spoke on how the people of Jammu and Kashmir essentially want to have the state that they possessed prior to 1947, which included POK, and they do not wish to be divided by artificial boundaries drawn on maps. We have a protracted conflict as the stakeholders outside the region make sure that it continues. The sex ratio (of men to women) in Kashmir is 10:7. This is due to the disappearances and killings over the years. 'Kashmiriyat' or the nationalist syncretic identity which encompassed religious diversity of Kashmir is under threat too. The women, by not marrying outside Kashmir, have been the keepers of the ethnic/ national identity and rape by the army is therefore seen as sullyng the 'purity' of the community.

The space between the public and private has been reduced by the state and the Kashmir Valley is highest militarized zone in South Asia. This means that one sees army men four times a day but the father only once. In 1989, the governments of India and Pakistan shared intelligence about Kashmir in order to suppress the people's movement here. The Indian state formed an organization of surrendered militants called the Ikhwanis Muslimeen to kill local militants. Today, cultural harmony does not exist among the people. Because of the militarism, a wife cannot trust her husband and doubt and suspicion rules among the people. This is engineered by the state to kill whatever civil society there exists. No one can have an open organization. If they do dare, they are thrown into prison (like the Advocate General was) under the Public Security Act.



Militarism has also led to the 'emasculatation' of men in the valley. The men are powerless to act when their women are molested, raped, 'checked', etc. This powerlessness leads the men to take recourse to patriarchal structures and this gives rise to demands that women should wear the burqa, for example. Women's associations though are not treated with the same intolerance as similar attempts by men. This is because most women's groups in Kashmir are those formed by mothers of missing/ killed men which brings 'motherhood' to the fore. The state is comfortable with women speaking for peace. Where women's individual rights are concerned, the only voice in Kashmiri society regarding this is that of Asiya Andrabi of the Dukhtaran-e-Millat, from the platform of religion. Women in Kashmir are a part of the resistance – vocal or silent– as women, and as the oppressed. And feminists must look at women within the movement and raise the question of their rights as women and also as part of the Kashmiri nation.

Bela Bhatia's presentation was based on the experiences of a fact-finding team to Kashmir in October-November, 2010, of which she was a member. From June, 2010, 111 boys aged between 8-25 years have been killed in the agitation against the security forces. She showed, through photographs of the team's visit, how life had been totally disrupted with cycles of curfew and *hartal* and the constant presence of the armed forces; the situation can only be described as an occupation. The stone-pelters are not a specialized group, whatever the state may claim. They are part of spontaneous mass actions directed against the security forces, with support from all classes and regions. From July, 2010, Syed Ali Shah Geelani's calendars are followed, even though the protesters may not support Geelani. Apart from shooting stone-pelters in the streets, security forces have killed bystanders, even from considerable distance. There have been incidents where they have gone into hospitals, taken patients out and shot them. No protocols are followed in the firing and 515 people have sustained bullet injuries. Targeted catapults are also being used. Bela also spoke of how surrendered militants have been recruited for these operations and have now been integrated into the other forces including the local police.

### **Women, Development and the State**

The presentation by Nisha Biswas was about the Lalgargh struggle and the role of women. Contrary to reports, the situation in Lalgargh is not of recent origin; police repression in West Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia has existed since 2002, when a 16-year-old girl was raped by the police, who later arrested her husband, stripped her and made her declare she was a prostitute. There have been routine violations by the police in their combing operations against Maoists, 'checking' even school children by undressing them.

The PCPA was formed to counter police repression, and women's participation in its organization and its activities has been significant. Women comprise 50 per cent of the population in the district- and village-level committees. The isolation means irregular access to banks (even opening accounts for NREGS is difficult), inaccessibility to drinking water, electricity and schooling; the PCPA women have been restricting police entry into the areas. They have been active in PCPA challenging land takeover and have opposed polluting sponge-iron factories. The women's wing of the PCPA has been successful in controlling alcohol consumption among men and witch hunting. They have opposed takeover of schools by paramilitary forces, and in one protest set up tents outside schools and asked teachers to teach their children in these makeshift areas. Used condoms and pornographic literature was found in schools vacated by police camps, suggesting the sexual exploitation of local women and girls. The police repression against women has also increased. This was evident during the Sonamukhi incident when police conducted a night raid and raped and brutally beat up seven women. With most of their men underground or arrested, the Nari Bachao Samitis have become even more active in Lalgargh and are able to mobilize hundreds of women in rallies. There was, till recently, a local state government-sponsored vigilante force, the Harmac Vahini, which terrorised people in the area. There have been incidents of forced rape, and women were also forced to dance in the Harmac camps.

A critique of the tourism development strategy of the Goa government and its impact on women's health was presented by Shaila Desouza. Even though Goa is a high-income, high-literacy state, it ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in terms of anaemia among women. Further, 38 per cent have no piped water and 41 per cent do not have toilets. The sewage system is badly organized and there is infiltration of sewage into ground-water supply. Tourism in Goa has a large ecological footprint. Earlier, the tourist season encompassed half the months of the year, today it extends the year round. The tourist population is double the local population. This has resulted in many difficulties for the people of Goa. Agricultural labourers have been displaced. The cost of food has gone up and local availability of fish is decreasing. During the tourist season the local people even change their diet. While their staple diet is fish and rice, they have to forgo fish because it is so expensive during the tourist season. The BMI in tourist areas is lower than that in the agricultural areas. The per capita income is going up but the sex ratio is coming down. The following gender-sensitive development policies were suggested to remedy the situation: (1) Tax incentives for women and for equal opportunity employers; (2) Penalties for those who disinherit women; (3) State-controlled food prices; (4) Food cards for local residents; and (5) Supplementary nutrition for low BMI areas.

A presentation by Shoma Sen talked about how with the coming of globalization, and the accompanying assaults on the lives and livelihood, deprivation of common-property resources, and severe agrarian crises leading to farmers' suicide, women have been forced out of their traditional reproductive roles and made to handle tasks in the family and in public life hitherto monopolized by men. The autonomous women's movement is shrinking but women are more active today in nationality movements, in anti-displacement movements, and the movements in the North East and Kashmir. The question that confronts us is, do we negotiate spaces for women within the paradigm of the present state, or do we struggle to establish an alternative more equitable system altogether? The experience of Nepal is at hand. The pro-democracy movement led largely by Maoists gave an alternative citizenship to women and provided alternative avenues for developing their capacities (e.g. participating in the armed struggle). All this is not to say that there is no patriarchal element in these movements, but despite it, women have been growing from strength to strength. In the dalit and nationality movements, women participate in a big way and they will negotiate greater equality for themselves within these movements as they will in an alternative state.

M.S. Sreerekha discussed how within feminist discourse, the concept of 'empowerment' emerged in the 1970s as the Third World Women's critique of the Western development perspective. Tracing the trajectory of the concept since then, we see that by the 80s and 90s, empowerment has come to be understood as something that can be assessed qualitatively and quantitatively. Empowering individual women at a local level has become more important than debates regarding development policy and how it affects communities. Empowerment has resulted in a plethora of activities around capacity building, leadership, networking and skill assessment. The alternative development debate of the 1970s has been appropriated by this notion of empowerment. Is it possible for us to rethink and re-appropriate the term in the way feminists have re-appropriated the concept of 'queer'?

Acceptance of the theory of naturalization contributed to women's citizenship, argued Sunita Sharma. After 1947, however, citizenship is a multi-layered phenomenon and the community approach must be critiqued. Caste and religious minorities are at a disadvantage and Muslim women, in particular, have been marginalized. Cultural reductionism which reduces a community to one homogenous, monolithic block, as has been done to Muslims who have also been constructed as 'the other', has adversely affected Muslim women in the process of policy formation, and in access to health, education and employment.

The presentation by Geeta Charusivam was based on the experience gained by working with the Makkal Mandram ('Peoples' Forum') a mass organisation led by women of the Irula tribals in North Tamil Nadu. When

people displaced by government projects agitated before government offices demanding two cents of land as compensation, the response was totally antagonistic. The Collector abused the protesters and had them thrown out of the premises. The protesters were arrested for sedition under Section 124A of the IPC and jailed for 25 days. Is this what citizenship means – that people cannot even make demands from the administration for their due rights without being treated as criminals? When women held out against sexual harassment, they along with other village folk were arrested and charged with attempt to murder. If one demands accountability from bureaucrats, they use their enormous powers to repress the voice of the people instead of using the same powers to give them their due. Whenever citizens resort to democratic activity, even for asserting their space within the system, they are penalized for it.

### **State, Nation and Education**

The discipline of geography has roots in the colonial project of mapping for conquest of lands and resources. While the geography of gender has emerged as a critical intervention in disciplinary discourse, challenging the basis of the discipline and shifting the focus of geography to the spaces women physically occupy, what resources they access and how these relate to their productive capacities. Disha Mullik discussed how school textbooks remain untouched by these feminist re-imaginings of the discipline, holding onto a self-perception as an objective science – mapping, labelling and quantifying descriptions. In the last decade geography has also become the key site for debates and validation of issues of development and environmentalism and these are also reflected in textbooks. Nonetheless, the distance between physical and human geography is maintained, with women as markers of development through discussion of sex ratio, literacy etc. and never in relation to development processes.

Sadhna Saxena emphasised that while knowledge needs to be constantly scrutinised and analysed to expand our understanding of patriarchal regimes of power, we also need to examine educational institutions to see the relationship between institutions of the family, schools and larger society. A study on girls' education in Madhya Pradesh shows how feudal and caste-based social relations that characterise many parts of the state define the experience of education, in terms of whether and how long girls stay in school, the schooling experience itself, aspirations from education and notions of selfhood in girls and in what contexts they are able to assert this selfhood. There is a big demand for girls' education even among poor dalit and tribal communities, for reasons of status mobility through marriage, and as a way out of immiseration of agrarian communities. Critical to girls staying on in schools is success and a perception that learning actually takes place. Academic failure and a perception that there is nothing much to be gained by

incurring the high opportunity cost of education results in withdrawal of girls from schools. Security concerns are also significant since distance from homes involve fear and real experiences of sexual harassment. Yet girls fight to stay on in education, often not disclosing such experiences. The state has several schemes for girls' education like hostels, cycles etc. However none of these schemes, the study showed, can supplant the real need for good, affordable schooling close to homes, investment in which the state is showing increasing reluctance and actually withdrawing from. Moreover, it also showed that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which focuses on education up to standard eight, is not enough to cater to educational needs of girls. At the same time, girls themselves are showing great determination to continue their education.

Priyanka Gupta presented a study of one of India's only all-girls' military schools, Rani Laxmibai Mulinchi Sainiki Shala (RLMSS). The school was established in 1997 in Pune under the chief minister ship of Manohar Joshi, a self-declared RSS member and funded by Maharashtra Education Society—a trust started by RSS-influenced Hindutva leaders in Maharashtra and whose goal has been to impart education with a nationalist spirit. Her paper argued how nations are regularly worked and reworked upon in changing national and international contexts. With the rise of Hindutva politics and the ideal of 'one religion, one nation', the Sangh Parivar sought further to consolidate its ideology. There exists a strong relationship between gender and nationalist projects. She saw this school as a space where the everyday practices are not only gendered but Hinduised. Priyanka explored the relation between gender, religious nationalism and institutional education.

### **Patriarchy, Institutions and Citizenship**

Based on a study of four villages of Mewar district in south Rajasthan, Pragnya Joshi presented her findings on informal local-government institutions (ILGI). She discussed how the tribals have their separate councils which operate through the chain of villages interlinked with kinship ties. Each caste has its own council within the village (in case of large population). Most of the disputes are related to land/ property, customary caste obligations/ boundaries, inter-personal disputes in villages, 'family' disputes. All the matters related to women like *nata-jhagada*, divorce, adultery, violence against women are heard in the council of the particular communities. Women are denied entry to the *jajams* or council hearings so they have to depend on a *mautbir* (a kind of lawyer). If such matters are of inter-community in nature the ILGI invites *mautbirs* of respective communities. Similarly, any punitive action by the councils is communicated to the respective ILGIs to administer/ implement. Fines and ostracism are considered to be *normal* punitive measures. Earlier mostly the fines used to be in kind but now it involves monetary fines, mostly under tribal councils.

'Naya Nata' was a new concept that emerged in the 1990s. They introduced 'Social Reforms': banned the *Nakhara petis* of the bride, tabooed the dancing of women in 'public' and denied the right of women to marry men outside the community. They ordered: 'Go out to the mines and workshops in the town but only with men of your family.' The paper highlighted the patriarchal bias in changing tribal customary law.

Anindita Ghosh presented a paper on Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in two districts of West Bengal, namely Hooghly and Birbhum. The EWRs had no political background but were put up as electoral candidates by their male family members who have political connections and aspirations. Their functioning depended on their male relatives or colleagues in the party and in the office. The 'Pradhanpatis' take all the decisions and their wives who are the real pradhans act only as rubber stamps. The political parties do nothing to train their EWRs or generate leadership among them, though they do invest in training their male representatives. As a result, the EWRs return to their household chores once their term of office is over. Patriarchal structures prevail in the parties and in the gram panchayats. Male members of the political parties make women feel that they cannot do anything much politically.

Based on a study of some Mahila Gram Sabhas in Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh, Shraddha Chikerur argued that the EWRs cannot tackle and prevent no-confidence motions regarding corruption and embezzlement as adroitly as male elected representatives can do. The family is used as a weapon against women uniting, even if it means going to attend a Mahila Sabha meeting.

The findings of a study on a dalit basti called Ambedkar Nagar in Aurangabad city was presented by Lalit Bhaware. The basti was built when waves of migrations of dalits (mostly neo-Buddhist Mahars, and some Mangs and Vadaris) settled down after fleeing their villages either due to caste atrocities, drought, famine or lack of means to earn a living. Of the women, 56 per cent are literate, though from these, only 12 per cent reach standard XII. 44 per cent of the women here are housewives, 20 per cent are engaged in manual work, 12 per cent are fruit and vegetable sellers, 24 per cent are domestic workers. All those interviewed said that they preferred to live in the urban areas because they could choose the jobs they wanted to do, the wages were better, and the caste discrimination and atrocities were less than in the rural areas. Though the inhabitants of this basti belonged to different jaatis among dalits who did not see eye to eye on all issues, yet these contradictions never turned antagonistic.



## SUB-THEME 7

### NEW MARKETS AND INTERLOCKING INEQUALITIES: LABOUR, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND MARRIAGE

**Coordinators: Sudeshna Mukherjee & Suparna Kar**

In this sub-theme we have aspired to look at how patriarchal hegemonic forces and capitalism's inherent inclination for commodification structures gender relations in terms of interlocking inequalities in market situations in post-liberalization India. In the keynote paper as well as in the title we have tried to look at some markets with interlocking inequalities but the coordinators actually expected researchers to explore emerging markets and new interlocking inequalities from their own subjective perspectives and experiences. The sub-theme grew and consolidated through the ideas propagated by the paper presenters.

We received a wide range of papers from seasoned academicians to fiery activists and budding researchers. It was our privilege and honour to have esteemed scholars like Prof. Bula Bhadra, Dr. Devaki Jain, Dr. Zarina Bhatta and Dr. Nitya Rao to chair the different sessions spread over three days. With their thought-provoking interventions the ensuing debates and discussions scaled new heights and provided directions for further research. Among the 30 papers presented within Sub-theme 7, the following areas emerged:

- Emerging market and interlocking inequalities in the field of health and related issues – 7 papers
- Emerging markets and their inherent inequalities that define different women and work related issues – 8 papers
- Emerging markets in the field of body and beauty – 3 papers
- Burgeoning marriage markets with its inherent contradictions – 9 papers
- Emerging markets in education and related issues – 2 papers
- Others – 1 paper

Post liberalization, the emergence of new markets opened up job opportunities for women although mostly in informal, unskilled and lowly paid sectors. As a result of the transforming market, women today have become both consumers and producers within these markets and at times emerged as exploiters exploiting another class of women. Discussion ranged on whether women should question this position of exploitation of other women within these market forces or whether such is the need to survive in the market.

In the area of health, reproductive health attracted maximum attention. The nature of reproductive technology pertaining to assisted reproductive technology (ART), surrogacy, in vitro fertilization, was focussed upon. The scope and lacunae of the Draft ART Act, 2010, was discussed. The paper

presenters expressed their concern over the emergence of India as a site for clinical trials, medical tourism and a soft destination for surrogacy. State intervention on defining surrogacy and protecting the health and rights of the surrogate mother were strongly recommended. A strong representation was made against the unscientific and commercial use of the HPV vaccine. The marketing strategies of pharma giants and the state were revealed. Powerful recommendations were made in favour of exposing the emerging nexus between the state and the new markets operating in health dominated by global pharmaceutical giants.

Mental health became one of the strong focal points in the discussion on health issues. On one side, an intensive, longitudinal and ethnographic study on mental health and psychological harm that sex workers face on and off the profession was strongly recommended. On the other, it was pointed out that there is the need to look at pharmaceutical colonization and medicalization of children's everyday life because of the huge commercial incentive to construct mental illness, which changes our view of what it means to be a 'normal' human.

Within the broad area of 'work', a number of critical spaces opened up. Increased participation of women outside the home in urban areas like Delhi bolstered the need for domestic help which in turn led to the emergence of domestic service as a new market. This resulted in mass exodus of mostly poor Christian tribal women from states like Jharkhand in the post-1995 era. These papers looked at the productive value of the job which drives poor women out from their unpaid invisible domestic spheres to the big cities to satisfy their material aspirations, for providing financial support to their natal families and to aspire to a comfortable new urban life. The possible role played by the Church in this mass exodus was also discussed. The deliberations centred on their possible unionization and skill upgrade as well as the recognition of paid domestic work as a profession. Data revealed that the contribution of domestic work supersedes all other contributions to the service sector. Another paper explored the link between state policy, technological change and rural female labour and revealed a series of problematizations of the state's conception of women's work, the invisibility of women workers in most policy frameworks, the lack of acknowledgement of the intricate nature of women's work, and a neglect of the fact that modes of organization of women's work are deeply influenced by cultural values, which in turn reinforce these values in state policy.

Papers problematized the burgeoning field of state and non-state financed microfinance and microcredit. How microfinance promises a coping strategy to poor women largely affected by the neoliberal policies of development was examined. The papers sought to address these issues focussing on the politics of microfinance as part and parcel of the Structural

Adjustment Policy. Loan utilization was examined to unravel whether new opportunities and livelihood are at all created and whether the question of gender empowerment challenges patriarchal norms embedded in family and society. Discussion revealed regional variations in success and failures associated with microfinance and SHGs which requires a more intensive pan-Indian study which IAWS along with the 130 Women's Studies Centres across the country could initiate.

In the papers on body and beauty attempts were made to explain how a mystical social hierarchy is created where woman's image and well-being is primarily identified with the body. In the race to attain altered bodily appearance, women tend to equate health with physical appearance. Health is not seen as the general well-being of body and mind but as shiny skin and a flawless figure. The papers also explored how this confluence of body beauty and health remade bodies as a catalyst to find success and marriage in the global market.

There were varied areas that emerged out of the papers presented on the issues relating to marriage. An overwhelming dowry demand and the presence of customary laws pushed the poor Muslim women of Kerala often towards exploitative contractual interstate (Mysorekalyanam) and transnational (Arabikalyanam) kind of marriages. Poor families are forced to commodify and sacrifice one among their many children for the survival of the family. This raised questions regarding the perceived inevitability of marriage. Dowry demands and depleting sex ratio further created a new market for interstate marriages where grooms from Haryana and UP are supplied with brides from the relatively underdeveloped and poor areas of states like Orissa, Bengal, Jharkhand and the North East. Although these marriages diluted the rigours of caste, they are often equated with sexual slavery. Another study revealed an interesting correlation between dowry and bribes.

Couple of ethnographic presentations revealed that a huge amount of money is invested in marriages apart from dowry to showcase the growing disposable income of the Indian upper middle class. This has brought a significant change in otherwise simplistic marriage practices of the Sumi tribe of Nagaland and the Vaishnavite Assamese society. Other supporting industries in bridal make up and accessories as well as event management, to name a few, are emerging as a response to the new markets surrounding marriage and extending employment opportunities to many. Couple of studies emphasized the role of intermediaries, both traditional and modern such as matchmaking websites in the marriage market where choice is exercised on the basis of various categories. It was found that web-based marriages also reinforce the traditional criteria of caste, class, region and religion in spouse selection in a fashion similar to the traditional counterparts.

Although we expected a good number of papers on emerging markets in education with the advent of private and foreign universities in the country, responses were not very encouraging. One interesting paper was on how a person assigned gender female at birth (Pagfab) negotiates her access to education and subsequently livelihood opportunities with the realities of her gender identity which attempts to break the binary of male and female genders assigned at birth. In this light the imposing nature of school education and curriculum and its majoritarian heterosexual bias was also discussed.

## **SUB-THEME 8**

### **RE-IMAGINING RELATIONSHIPS, TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES**

**Coordinator: Mini Sukumar**

The sub-theme has a rather fluid boundary and it merges with many relevant themes of discussion within contemporary feminist discourse. The papers presented in the four sessions showcased this diversity of themes and ideas. Altogether 18 papers were presented in this sub-theme; a wide range of issues were discussed which included the implications of judicial decisions on interpreting intimate relationships, critique and re-invention of feminist space in social reform, rituals, political participation and gendering process in various social sites like schools and local governments and different modes of negotiations by women in their everyday life situations.

There were four sessions held on three days of the conference. In the first session, five papers were presented. Sumi Krishna chaired the session. Rukmini Sen presented a paper titled 'Judicial Decisions on Intimate Relationships: Prodding "Chastised" Spaces' in which she interpreted four recent judgments: the Delhi High Court Judgment on Section 377, on same-sex relationships; the Supreme Court judgment discussing live-in relationships between heterosexual adults; another Supreme Court judgment proposing the need to amend Section 498A of IPC; and the Supreme Court judgment on raped women with disability being asked to go ahead with her pregnancy, taking a position on motherhood. She pointed out that the judgment on 377 is a positive example of inclusiveness and intersectional jurisprudence. It addresses not only same-sex relations but also gives ample scope to address many other sections facing marginalization. In the other three judgments, the judiciary takes traditional marriage as the reference point and tries to reinforce newer hegemonies in intimate relationships. She noticed a clear shift from 1980s when the court had declared, 'The judiciary does not want to enter into bedrooms,' to the present when the judiciary clears intends to 'enter into bedrooms' and redefine relationships.

Sandali Thakur presented a paper on 'The Everyday Life of Live-in Relationships' that explored the various strategies and tensions involved in

dealing with the everyday life issues of couples in live-in relationships. She noticed that people coming from small towns, working and living in cities enter into live-in relationships for various reasons. In most of these relationships women are in a similar situation as that in legally married traditional families and bearing the burden of day-to-day life. Over time, the live-in relationships become like traditional marriages but without the support systems available in traditional marriages.

Sobha P.V. presented a paper titled 'Gender Justice and Fairness in Human Relations'. This paper looked into the relationship between the social 'constructedness' of gender and human capacity to look inward as persons having the ability of self-reflexivity. She argues that gender traps human beings into the language and subjectivity. She was questioned for taking an essentialist position.

Layana Aanand presented the paper titled 'An Investigation into the Power Relation between Husband and Wife within Marriages'. This paper was based on a study conducted in Malappuram district, Kerala. She put forward her finding that within married relationships, working women having regular employment have greater decision-making power in general. But this is not the case in many relationships when it comes to decisions regarding their personal needs and wishes. Many of her respondents revealed that they had to give full account of their activities and expenses to their husbands. An active interaction followed this presentation that put forward valuable suggestions on methodological and conceptual aspects.

The paper titled 'Puberty Rituals and Lifestyle Changes among Adolescent Girls' presented by Nithya P. was based on a study conducted among adolescent girls in the Vanniyar community living in the Union Territory of Puducherry. This was an investigation of rituals and practices related to the first menstruation of the girls. She described practices of seclusion, pollution and celebration related to the puberty rituals. The discussion that followed was on the revival of earlier customs related to puberty rituals and it concluded that it could be an expression of caste assertion by the newly emerging economic class among certain communities.

The session was highly interactive, reflecting on the nature of women's movement in Kerala, the definition of live-in relationships, etc.

The second session, chaired by Mina Swaminathan, saw five papers being presented. The session started with the paper titled 'Women and Higher Education: Critical Analysis on Current Status of Kerala Muslim Women' by Ramsheena C.A. She gave a general overview of the educational status of Muslim women living in the northern parts of Kerala, which is historically known as Malabar. Comparing the statistics, she said that these women are backward in terms of formal education despite enhanced socio-economic conditions as a result of Gulf migration.

The second paper titled 'Thus Speaks Puthur Amina... Renaissance of Muslim women in Keralam' was presented by Shamshad Hussain. It was a study of Muslim women's encounter with the process of social reform in Kerala during the early decades of the 20th century. She used oral histories, personal writings, articles and letters which had appeared in journals and newspapers written by Muslim women. She showed how the songs written and sung by women (mappila pattukal) were being used as a form of resistance and expression.

The third paper in this session was presented by K. M. Sheeba, titled 'From Caste Identities to Modern Subjects: Changing Forms of Sexual Controls on Women in Keralam'. She was trying to analyze the changing patterns of controls over female sexuality in a period of transition from pre-modern state to colonial state. She observed that Raja was the controller of female sexuality through taking decisions on rituals, observances and punishments and caste identity was important in determining state protection.

The next paper titled 'Paabandi, Izzet aur Galat Saubat: How Young Women Negotiate their Relationships in a Working-Class Muslim Neighbourhood' presented by Mahuya Bandyopadhyay and Amina Khatun. It was an ethnographical study conducted in a working-class Muslim neighbourhood in Kolkata. This paper looked into how the younger girls and women negotiated the restrictions imposed on them. The study showed that in most cases it was not the traditional restrictions that had to be overcome but newer forms of control.

The fifth paper titled 'Honour Killing: An In-depth Study' presented by Anju Thappa gave an overview of the background, reasons and impact of murders committed by the immediate kin on people opting to marry according to their choice.

There was a lively discussion over the arguments made and the session expressed the need to formulate new legislation to address the issue of honour killings. While concluding the session, Mina Swaminathan pointed out two important things: one, the importance of methodological rigour in doing research and, second, the importance of organized presentations assisted by appropriate new technological support. Referring to Shamshad Hussain's paper she said that it was the best example of feminist methodology of working on narratives of hitherto neglected areas of social life.

The third session of the sub-theme was chaired by Mangai. There were five papers presented in this session. The first two papers presented were on education. One examined schools and gender socialization, with respect to the interaction between teacher-student and student-student, conducted in Payyannur, in Kannur district, Kerala. The other examined gender awareness of primary school teachers in Puducherry. The discussion focussed on the

feminist understandings on conceptual and methodological frameworks and the limitations of conventional data analysis models.

The paper presented by Jayati Lal, titled 'Re-Storying Gender: Indian Factory Women's Counter-Narratives of Family and Work' discussed the ways in which five women factory workers re-imagined the landscape of intimate relationships in their everyday life. She used theoretical concepts on re-thinking women's citizenship and the potential of gossip as a political act to explore alternate patterns of living and making 'subaltern publics'. She spoke of relationships created and re-created by women as gender outlaws, women who bend traditional kinship ties and structures.

Mayuri Chaturvedi's paper titled 'To live with Dignity: Life and Relationships of Single Working Women in Urban India' discussed the life experience of never married, single women in an urban setting. She observes that despite being negatively stereotyped socially, these women have power and control over their lives as earning members of the family.

The last paper in this session titled 'Taboo and Trauma: Beyond Fine-Tuned Femininity' was presented by V. Priya. Discussing two autobiographies published recently in Malayalam by a sex worker, Nalini Jameela, and an ex-nun, Sister Jesme, Priya looks at how identities are constructed in our contemporary debates. She is using the concept of routine violence and trauma that construct certain identities in women's lives. She links this with taboos created by distancing and othering from the normative.

The fourth session had a presentation of three papers. The session was chaired by Anandhi S. The first paper titled 'Forced Migration and Kashmiri Pandit Women: Remembering the Lost World' was presented by Hema Gandotra. Her paper was based on a study of the living conditions of Kashmiri Pandit women who migrated from Kashmir from 1989 onwards and were housed in the refugee camps set up by government in Srinagar. She presented the personal narratives of women about their life in Kashmir before migration. The discussion raised a valid question as to whether we can see the situation in these camps as different from any other relief camp of displaced people, such as after communal riots in Gujarat or internal war in Sri Lanka. Discussions pointed out the importance of foregrounding the historic and political reasons behind the migration of Kashmiri Pandits at different moments of history and the day-to-day negotiations of Kashmiri Pandit women, young and old, in their relationships within and outside the family.

The second paper on women's reservation in local self-government institutions in Kerala was presented by Soniya. E. Pa Sabarmathy. She was looking into the changes in the personal and public life of elected women representatives because of their newly assumed power. Her observation is that if women are engaging themselves as political workers while they perform their role of elected representatives, they can gain control over the decisions

regarding their personal and public life. This change has already created an unsettling effect on traditional patriarchal family dynamics of their homes, she observed. The discussion that followed raised doubts on this positive picture through examples of patriarchal ideological outlook in development policy and programmes. Another suggestion was to look into the new relationships formed between women, men, political parties and local public and the inter-sectionalities that influenced women's freedom and choice.

The third paper on women and sports by Ashitha was a very interesting attempt. She started with the first women's football team organised in colonial times. She mentioned the socio-economic problems faced by the sporting women in Kerala and the influence of negative social perceptions on them. While concluding the session Anandhi pointed out the importance of focussing on inter-relationships in feminist research. We must move beyond using gender as the only analytical tool and from considering only women.

## **SUB-THEME 9**

### **BODY TALK: INTERROGATING BOUNDARIES AND HIERARCHIES IN FEMINIST DISCOURSE**

**Coordinators: Paromita Chakravarti & NIRANTAR**

The women's movement has historically engaged with the body as a central theme. There are however certain areas of silence and elision, unease and anxiety about the body. The discourse is bound up in hierarchies and binaries. We tried to address some of these through our four sessions. In the first one on Pleasure vs. Danger, we focussed on the intersection between sexuality and violence. It is clear that there are many linkages between sexuality and violence, and that there is a need to change our frame of looking at violence, from a focus on gender to sexuality as well. For example, reasons underlying violence are, more often than not, linked to sexuality. Also in terms of understanding the phenomenon which many of us over the years have been so troubled and often frustrated by – that of women returning to abusive husbands – a sexuality perspective allows us to understand that one of the reasons might be the woman's sexual needs, which she thinks can be fulfilled only in the framework of marriage.

There is also a need to relook at who is the W in VAW work, which women are we talking about? It is largely heterosexual married women who approach VAW programmes, thereby excluding many women, including lesbian and bisexual women, sex workers, young women, widows and women who are in relationships outside marriage. It is, therefore, the good woman who is able to gain access to justice. Survivors of violence offer different narratives about their experiences, maintaining silence about their sexual transgression, in order to fit into this category of the good victim. Although programmes



have sometimes begun using the terminology of gender-based violence, transgender people continue to be excluded since the subject of feminism is largely the biological woman.

The binary between pleasure and danger was also challenged by the presentations on Bondage Domination Sadomasochism. Since this is a new conversation, to explain, BDSM, the acronym, refers to erotic acts, relationships and or lifestyles in which one performs the role of the dominant and the other/s the role of submission and which involves the giving and receiving of pain. Interviews with members of the BDSM community in India, threw up the need not only to challenge the binary between pleasure and danger, but to relook at what pleasure and danger might mean – that pain and surrender to domination might be erotic, enabling, agential and therapeutic.

The centrality of consent within BDSM was underlined and the processes of negotiation between the one who dominates and the one who surrenders described. It was also argued that this centrality of consent and the exercise of the will of the person submitting was why BDSM could potentially help to foreground the distinction between what is abuse and what is not abuse.

The question was also raised about what appears to be heteronormative but might not be. And this is because Bondage, Domination, Sadomasochism is not about power play but power exchange, where one party willingly, consensually, agentially chooses to surrender and to be dominated. This could be seen through the lens of the Foucauldian understanding of power not just being a top-down but as a relational phenomenon where the exercise of power is enabled only through the participation of the ‘powerless’. In the context of BDSM the self of the Master exists because the will of the slave exists. There was animated debate related to the issue of how what transpires in BDSM, which is based on consent, mutuality and agency, relates to false consciousness or collusion with the oppressor as we have tended to understand participation in domination in other contexts such as women’s oppression or class oppression. This is clearly only the beginning of a conversation that needs to unfold.

The other theme that was explored was that of Exploitation vs. Liberation. As part of this set of discussions, we continued with the theme of the virtue-and-victimhood binary. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century devdasi debates were framed within this binary which later became mapped on to feminist debates on sex work in peculiar ways. One way out of this binary is to consider the continuum related to ‘labour and longing’ in the lives of labouring women. To see labour in all its myriad forms includes sexual labour and conjugal labour. Efforts to understand the lives of labouring women might help to reframe pleasure, which could also be considered as momentary and coexistent with what may otherwise be seen as exploitation.

The Exploitation vs. Liberation binary was also challenged through an exploration of how women express their desires in a range of sites from physical spaces such as the bathing ghat, to contemporary sites such as cyberspace. The internet, although accessible only to certain classes, seemed to provide a space also for the creation of images such as Savita bhabhi, the highly sexual female character in the extremely popular graphic porn series, who could well be the healthy, heterosexual woman who the state invests in, but whose extraordinary sexual appetite could also be seen as subversive of Indianness, family and marriage. Technology as a site in which existing iniquitous social norms are reinforced but also challenged emerged in the discussions around assisted reproductive technologies. On the one hand, ARTs reinforce inequitable constructs, by allowing the possibility through technology of genetic imprint, but at the same time they hold the potential to subvert the constructs of parenthood and family and – through the issue of surrogacy, over which we are still highly divided the construct of motherhood.

The presentations on the gender and sex continuum made clear how limited the existing binary of male and female is to capture the rich diversity of gender expressions. The violations experienced by the intersexed sportsperson Shanti Soundarajan showed how threatened mainstream society is by transgressions from the male-female binary. The question about what implications gender and sex diversity has for identity-based politics is one that requires much more discussion, particularly in light of the co-optation of queerness within the nation state – the creation of a kind of homo-nationalism.

Attention was also drawn to areas of silence, not sexuality so much as areas that the women’s movement has not engaged sufficiently in the realm of what might be seen as ‘mainstream’ development, such as with issues like maternal mortality. The need for a much greater engagement was highlighted given the key gender issues that were at stake in the context, for example, of microcredit and NREGA– such as the construction of the good woman who saves and repays regularly, for the welfare of the family and community, the highly limited access that women have to work within NREGA and the nature of the division of labour.

The presentations and discussions, in particular those addressing issues relating to disability and sex work, showed that it is necessary for the existing marginalizations to be addressed not only because certain identities are being excluded but also because an engagement with these margins enables us to see the necessity of using different frames. For example in the context of disability, it is not only about inclusion of disability as an identity but also what it might have to say about what is normal, about how within the normative aesthetics and discipline of dance one could try to express ideas of disability and pain. Since dancing valorizes balance and beauty, how might we challenge the codes of dancing to challenge those very normative ideas.

To sum up, some of the key reflections for us were as follows: Who is the subject of feminism? Is it only the biological woman? Moreover is it only the 'good' woman? And in the context of violations, is it only the good victim that we are imagining as the subject of feminism? There is also need to recognise the need for a sexuality perspective to address gender-based violence, and beyond challenging the binary between pain and pleasure, we need to re-examine what pain and pleasure might mean.

The presentations and discussions underlined the need to use nuanced narratives and life stories rooted in material realities and changing contexts to help us capture the complexity of lived realities, challenge and transcend the binaries. Lastly, we have to underline the urgent need to address binaries. A focus on marginalizations is needed not only to ensure inclusion, which is critical, but also because there is a need for new frames to understand our rich, complex, messy and changing realities towards greater change, greater equity and justice.

## **SUB-THEME 10**

### **WOMEN, LABOUR AND QUESTIONS OF MARGINALISATION**

**Coordinator: Chitra Joshi**

The general focus of this theme was on issues of marginalization today and what it means in terms of the experience of women. We need to also look at situations in which men feel disempowered and emasculated. We intend to review the implications of recent trends in informalization, rural work, migration and organized resistance and study what it means for the politics of gender today. The sub-theme comprised sessions on Rural Work (5 papers), Gender and Migration (6 papers), Working in the city (4 papers), Spaces of the Domestic (5 papers) and Other work, Other spaces (5 papers).

It was important to have papers from across different regional contexts, both urban and rural, from migration in weaving households in Benaras or the Angami Naga women's weaving within households that is devalued, to varied experiences of working in the city within households to selling wares in the street. Many of the papers were based on very preliminary research, yet the presentations suggested how concrete studies from different regional contexts can complicate and nuance our understanding of how processes of marginalization impact women.

#### **Rural Work**

Sutapa Sengupta presented a paper on 'Women and Rural Work in Meghalaya'. Her paper focussed on the transformation in matrilineal practices in Meghalaya and showed how women were being increasingly marginalized. Although formally women had inheritance rights, yet this did not empower women in

any real sense. Women had no decision-making powers. Sutapa emphasized that the decline in traditional practices of swidden cultivation and the growing significance of plantation agriculture was important to understand the processes of marginalization of women. Within plantation agriculture, men were dominant. Women were employed in 'marginal' categories—as agricultural labourers for instance.

Nitya Rao's paper on 'Resource Rights and Gender Equality in Rural India' was based on her fieldwork in Dumka district of Jharkhand and Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh. It focussed on the contrasting experiences of women in the two regions. In Varanasi there was a large outmigration of men and in most families women did most of the agricultural work. Yet the contribution of women was not recognized: women were seen primarily as domestic workers and not producers. Women continued to be seen as 'secondary' farmers, despite the fact that men were away, in most cases. In Dumka, in contrast, the contribution of Santal women to production was acknowledged. At the household level, women's claims, their role in decision-making were contested. Women had to negotiate the terms in which they could exercise agency. Nitya emphasised how state policies reinforced patriarchal attitudes. Despite the discourse of gender equity, the experiences of women were quite different.

Meena Gopal's paper on 'Domestic Spaces, Productive and Reproductive Labour' was based on research on beedi workers in South Tamil Nadu, who are primarily home-based workers. However in visual representations, in photographs put up in Company offices, it is men engaged in packing and finishing who are represented. Women's work remains hidden from public view – it is carried on in the inner space of the home; and it is invisibilized in visual representations which foreground male workers. Women's work is represented as supplementary, as 'spare time' work. State policies were very ambivalent as far as women were concerned. The state did not recognize women as workers; it laid emphasis on their 'reproductive' and not their 'productive' labour. Women were seen in their role as 'nurturers'; and not as producers. For beedi manufacturers in Tamil Nadu, it was important that the industry continue to be represented as a 'cottage industry'. This label was conveniently used by manufacturers to deny women higher wages or an improvement in their conditions. Yet the industry was expanding rapidly and beedi manufacturers were making huge profits. Their power was evident in the way they could resist pressures for putting statutory warnings against smoking on beedi packets. Vitsou Yano's paper looked at Angami Naga women in Agriculture. She focussed on the significance of women's work in Naga society. Women worked in the fields and at home.

## Gender and Migration

The session was chaired by Indu Agnihotri, who introduced the session. She pointed out the need to understand the significance of examining the changes in the location of women's work and the ways in which the movement of women between and across regions impacts on the economy and on gender relations. The macro data on migration does not capture the short-term seasonal migration.

Neetha's paper 'Situating Female Migration in times of Economic Transformation' pointed to the problems with the macro National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and Census data. Economists tend to dismiss female migration and focus only on male migration. NSSO figures show an increase in migration. This increase is largely due to female migration. There is a decline in male migration. Marriage is the main reason for women's migration, which has seen an increase from 62 per cent in 1993 to 91 per cent in 2007-08. There was an increase in number of women who reported migration in terms of work and employment. Yet a large part of migration reported is marriage migration – i.e. they are not captured as economic migrants in macro data. Macro data on work participation shows a huge decline of women in participation rates. However, in findings of the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) survey in West Bengal and Orissa, marriage was given as reason by a small proportion of women. The picture emerging from the CWDS survey was very different from that in the available macro data. A large proportion of women migrated with families. Brick making, construction work employed the largest proportion of women. Migration did not help women to improve their position. They were employed in low-wage occupations and periods for which they were employed were very short.

Vasanthi Raman's paper on 'The Crisis in the Banarasi Sari Industry and its Implications for Migration of Weaver Families' talked about a crisis in Banaras's handloom industry with a decline in position of artisans. One of the reasons for this has been a rise in prices of Chinese yarn. Further, there has been a growing emphasis on blended fabrics and not natural fabrics. The production has been export-oriented. Women in weaving families were involved largely in pre-loom and post-loom operations. Migration from Banaras weaving households was largely family migration. Entire families migrated usually from amongst skilled weaving families. For example, from Madanpura whole neighbourhoods moved to Bangalore, Surat, and Ahmedabad. There was a discussion around how migration impacts on women's lives in terms of wages, in terms of questions of 'autonomy' and agency.

Rajdarsini Patra presented a paper on 'Recent Trends in Patterns of Female Migration' which focussed on Bhubaneswar. There are various determinants of migration namely marriage, family, work, struggle for existence, etc. This paper focussed on a study based on Census data. It showed 83 per

cent intra-district migration. The population growth in Bhubaneswar was related largely to migration. Women migrating to Bhubaneswar were largely from backward districts of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. They worked in construction sites and brick kilns and as domestics.

Manasi Mohanty's presentation on 'Gender and Migration: Oriya female workers in Kerala' described how almost 33 per cent of migrants from Orissa moved to Kerala and these were mostly OBCs and schedule castes. Although this district claimed to have successfully implemented NREGA, yet this did not prevent a large movement out of the state. A change from earlier pattern of male migration was observed. Manasi's study pointed to the large-scale migration of single women and divorcees. Migration does not really enable women to improve their position. They are usually employed in the urban informal sector, in low-paid and insecure jobs. Women had little agency in making decisions relating to migration. In most cases decisions to migrate were taken by parents. As a result, many women had to move back.

Sudhir Chandra Jena spoke on 'Migration and Tribal Women'. The paper focussed on migration of tribals because of the forcible appropriation of forest land. Sudhir argued that migration meant a movement from freedom to unfreedom for tribal women. Living on the outskirts of cities, women lost the kind of freedom they had in the past. Sashi Misra presented a paper on Women migrants in Mumbai. Her study focussed on women migrants involved in cane-basket weaving. She looked at the precariousness of women's lives particularly in a context where traditional basket making is threatened by the use of plastic substitutes.

## Working in the city

Sakshi Khurana's paper looked at women from two neighbourhoods in Delhi: a slum colony of construction workers in East Delhi and a resettlement colony inhabited largely by weavers and embroidery workers in North-East Delhi. The picture emerging from her presentation was different from standard accounts. She argued how women in the areas she conducted her research, in fact, continuously attempted to upgrade their skills. Many participated in training workshops. Despite this, women were never seen as 'skilled' workers; they always received lower wages even when they were doing the same work as men. Women beldars, for instance, were paid much less than men. Contractors denied this arguing that men received more because they worked at night.

Albeena Shakeel's presentation on 'Home-based workers in Delhi' was based on an AIDWA study. The paper focussed on the particular problems of home-based workers. This was work which was not recognized as work by the state or by the women themselves. Thus women in such work were not provided with any form of social security. Women engaged in home-based



work were employed on piece rates and earned similar wages for almost all kinds of work— whether they made whistles or were sticking bindis on paper. Hours of work for women were long – their working day extended from 9 to 17 hours a day. Albeena argued for the need to mobilize home-based workers and the need to have a common social security scheme for them.

D. Padmavathi's paper on 'The Masculinisation of Feminine Work: A Study of Women Street Vendors in Tirupathi' focussed on the transformation of occupations like street vending in recent times. This was an occupation which employed women earlier but with changes in patterns of consumption and a decline in commodities consumed and marketed on the streets earlier, vending is now a male activity. Padmavathi pointed to the need to formulate state policies that can help to improve the position of women.

Smita Gandhi presented a paper on 'Status of Women in Informal Manufacturing in Mumbai', based largely on data from 1980s supplemented with a sample survey of 1240 male and female workers. The paper focussed on the ways in which processes of liberalization have impacted on women. The spatial relocation of slums and shifts in location of industries has intensified processes of marginalization. Women are increasingly marginalized and employed in low-paid jobs. They were employed in jobs like beedi making, broom making and not in higher-paid occupations like diamond cutting.

### **Space of the Domestic**

Deepa E.'s paper on the 'Invisibility of Visual Categories in Understanding Gender Issues in Paid Domestic Work' looked at the transformation in domestic work in recent years and its implications for women. Paid domestic workers are employed not just by the rich but middle-class families. They constitute the single largest category among the urban poor. This has also meant a change in the nature of work. Domestic workers do not work in one house but do multiple tasks in multiple homes. Deepa argued that apart from the focus on caste and gender issues, studies on domestic workers should include age as an important category. Live-in workers were mostly unmarried tribal women, while part-time workers were drawn from higher age groups. The perception of employers was also important to analyze who is employed or who is not.

Uma Gupta, in her paper on 'Women's Movement in Urban Areas: Domesticity' opened with a discussion around the recent bill on sexual harassment in work places and its implications for domestic workers. The bill brought in various categories of women within its purview. However, the exclusion of domestics from its purview provides important insights into dominant perceptions of domestic work. Domestic work was not recognized as work; neither were domestic workers recognized as workers. Although there are innumerable instances of sexual harassment and violence against women domestics yet there is no protection for them. Uma's paper underlined

the urgent need to initiate measures to recognize domestics as workers and provide them with protection. The enactment of Maharashtra Domestic Workers Act, whatever its limitations, is important in this respect.

Upali Chakravarti's paper on 'Ethnographies of Care: Invisible Mothers' emphasised the need for initiating measures to develop institutional structures for the care of disabled children. While the state considered healthy children its responsibility, disabled children were not looked after. The responsibility for care falls largely on women. Upali critiqued dominant ideas about dependency, arguing how the construction of dependency was in fact socially constructed. Disabled children were seen as dependents, as non-contributing and, therefore, they were not provided for by the state. Upali's survey showed how deeply internalized these ideas on dependency were. Entrenched ideas about the 'low value' of such work, of work like this as dirty were important to understanding their attitudes. Most respondents saw it as their individual responsibility to look after their disabled children. Upali also underlined the different kinds of caring involved in looking after disabled. Unlike other situations where caring can end when children grow up, the work of caring for mothers of disabled children is continuous.

Anupriya Gaur, Nidhi Gaur and Nivya Nair presented 'Life in Bawana: The Childhood Experiences of Girls'. The paper looked at the meanings of childhood for girls in Bawana. Girls in these homes could rarely go out. They had to spend all day doing household work while their parents went out to work. Yet the girls did not see this as work. Only the paid work their parents did outside the home was seen as work. The lives of these girls were regulated and controlled by their father. He made decisions and controlled their movements outside the house. Within this repressive structure, girls in Bawana had learnt to negotiate their terms. Even while publicly conforming to norms, there were ways in which they negotiated their lives at an everyday level.

Sanjay Kamble's paper on 'Globalization of the Service Sector and Women' looked at the ways in which changes in the post-liberalization era have impacted women. An increasing number are employed in the service sector yet their work is low paid and of a marginal nature. He pointed out the mismatch between state agenda of empowerment and actual position of women.

An issue that came up for discussion in many of the sessions was the question of work. What constitutes work? Women's work is often not recognized as work. Men tend to devalue the work of women but women themselves misrecognise their work. State policies tend to reinforce such attitudes by not giving legal recognition to various kinds of work done by women. Flowing from this was the question of the space of home as a workplace. This is important in the case of women engaged in various home-based activities, like beedi making for instance. This is also an important concern for those engaged as domestics. Do women working in homes as domestics have

any legal rights? This emerged in the discussion on the widening of the Sexual Harassment Bill to include workers in domestic spaces as well as addressing the state to support care for the disabled too.

Much of the discussion was framed in terms of processes of marginalization leading to increasing disempowerment of women, absence of agency, and constraints on choices available to women. Some of the papers, however, did look at the ways in which women negotiate their lives at an everyday level. Often there were ways in which they did try to bargain or define choices. Women in different contexts – migrants, women remaining in villages in the absence of their male partners, women doing informal work–live precarious lives, yet they do have possibilities where they can have greater ‘agency’ in whatever limited way. How do we see and interpret such practices? Do they have any meaning in women’s lives? Or, do we deny them any significance because they do not have any transformative impact on structures of domination and oppression? These were some of the questions that led to discussions.

In conclusion the discussions from those who came into the sessions or that which took place outside the session conveyed the fact that although the sub-theme spoke on issues of labour and marginalization, similar changes and negotiations were also being addressed in other sub-theme sessions as well. This indicated the enrichment that comes out of the cross-discussions that happens in the various sessions of the conference.

## 5. FEATURES AND EVENTS

### Cultural Programmes

A major attraction of the conference was the wide range of cultural programmes performed by individuals and groups throughout the conference. Ojas put up a mono act performance ‘Le Mashale’ on Irom Sharmila after the South-Asian regional plenary as described above. There were other cultural programmes as described below. The conference was inaugurated to the tune of percussion from the Bastar Band, whose main performance was on the following day. There was a thirty-minute presentation of Lawani and other folk dances of Maharashtra by a troupe from LAD College, Nagpur, on the opening day of the conference. Lawani, a spirited dance, forms a part of the *tamasha* tradition of Marathi folk theatre.

Koya Paad (The Bastar Band) is a 25-member team of Adivasi performing artists from among the major tribes of Bastar that synthesizes and recreates the traditional music and performing arts of their ancestors. The band uses traditional string and percussion instruments (many of them nearly extinct today), and ritual music and dance. The more spontaneous music of the Dandami Madia, Dhurwa, Dorla and other tribes came alive through the performances of men and women of the group. Among the highlights of this orchestra were performances with Dev Mahir, Dhankul Baja, and Pak Tehendorar. The director and choreographer Anup Ranjan Pandey has worked for more than ten years to bring this group to life.

Another programme included Dewar Karma by Poonam Tiwari and others. Poonam worked in the Naya theatre from the age of 13 up to the time her husband, Deepak Tiwari, another iconic Naya Theatre actor, suffered a stroke and had to leave the stage. Niece of the famous Mala Bai, Poonam comes from a family of wandering performing artists belonging to the Dewar community. Her dance exhibited rare grace and freedom of movement, a legacy she has inherited from Fida Bai Mala Bai.

The conference played host to a concert by Nageen Tanveer. Nageen has been trained as a vocal singer as well as a theatre performer in the Naya Theatre created by the late Habib Tanveer. Although she trained as a Hindustani classical vocalist, she has a large repertoire of folk music, particularly those sung by women, documented as part of the work for a two-year fellowship on documenting women’s voices in folk music. Nageen presented a selection of 12 songs from the traditional renderings of women in central India.

The tribal women artists’ workshop from Madhya Pradesh was a five-day event from January 20 to January 24. Over the last several years the Bhopal-based Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalay and Bharat Bhavan have provided space and work opportunity to the tribal artists from many parts of Madhya Pradesh. Many of them have now established independent studios

and art groups at Bhopal. Through these efforts the world has become familiar with the work of artists like Jangadh Shyam, and the unique style of the Gond artists as well as others. Five tribal artists who are currently based in Bhopal displayed their art, work and taught their kind of art to interested students and workshop participants. The five artists who participated in our workshop were: Gangubai from the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, who works in the Jhabua style; Mangala bai, who is a Gondna (tattoo artist), is from Bharat Bhavan; the other artists were Deepa Bai, niece of Jangarh, an ex-Bharat Bhavan artist; Rupa, an independent artist in her early twenties; and Dhanaiya, an independent artist, formerly an artist at Bharat Bhavan. The last three work in the Patangarh style.

### Film Festival

A film 'festival' organized by Uma Chakravarti and T.N. Uma Devi ran parallel to the sub-theme sessions, as well as in post-dinner sessions when those attending the conference were free to watch the films. Students of the university also attended the screening sessions in large numbers which were described as 'quality time' by a faculty member of the university. The films focussed on the main theme of the conference and its sub-theme sessions: there were films on gender, caste, land and environment struggles, human rights and disability. The following films were screened during the conference:

1. *Morality TV and the Loving Jihad: A thrilling Tale* (30 minutes), Director: Paromita Vohra
2. *Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night* (26 minutes), Director: Sonali Gulati
3. *Ladies Special* (30 minutes), Director: Nidhi Tuli
4. *Delhi-Mumbai-Delhi* (63 minutes), Director: Saba Dewan
5. *Nageswara Rao 'Star'* (30 minutes), Director: Rajesh Mandapati
6. *We are not your monkeys* (5 minutes), Director: Anand Patwardhan
7. *Development flows from the barrel of a gun* (54 minutes), Director: Meghnath & Biju Toppo
8. *Gaon Chhodab Nahin* (5 minutes), Director: KP Sasi
9. *The Night of Prophecy* (77 minutes), Director: Amar Kanwar
10. *On my own* (30 minutes), Director: Anu Srinivasan
11. *The Advocate* (17 minutes), Director: Deepa Dhanraj
12. *Yeh Delli Hai Mera Yaar* (5 minutes), Director: Vani Subramanian
13. *Beyond the Wheel* (59 minutes), Director: Rajula Shah
14. *Taaza Khabar – Hot off the press* (31 minutes), Director: Bishakha Datta
15. *Meals Ready* (46 minutes), Director: Surajit Sarkar & Vani Subramanian
16. *AFSPA, 1958* (76 minutes), Director: Haobam Paban Kumar
17. *Where have you hidden my New Moon Crescent?* (28 minutes), Director: Iffat Fathima

18. *Paradise on the River of Hell* (30 minutes). Director: Abir Bazaz & Meenu Gaur
19. *Niyamgiri You are still Alive* (17 minutes), Director: Suma Josson
20. *Bitter Drink* (26 minutes), Director: KP Baburaj & C Saratchandran
21. *New (Improved) Delhi* (6 minutes), Director: Vani Subramanian
22. *Occupation: Mill Worker* (22 minutes), Director: Anand Patwardhan
23. *Sixth Happiness* (98 minutes), Director: Waris Hussein
24. *Had Anhad* (103 minutes), Director: Shabnam Virmani
25. *Sita's Family* (60 minutes), Director: Saba Dewan
26. *Tales from the Margins* (30 minutes), Director: Kavita Joshi
27. *Ribbons for Peace* (5 minutes), Director: Anand Patwardhan
28. *Images you didn't see* (5 minutes), Director: Anand Patwardhan

### Media Unit

For the first time, an IAWS national conference set up a media unit which not only set up a billboard but also fed local and national newspapers (Marathi and English) daily with press statements, focussing on the plenary sessions. The press unit coordinated by Meera Velayudhan and Meena Gopal (IAWS EC members) forged a successful partnership with the university's PRO unit, headed by Shri B.S. Mirge and his efficient team of volunteers. For the Billboard, a meeting was held with student/ teacher volunteers, a team was set up with two volunteers each having taken responsibility to report daily on sub-theme sessions to Meera who would summarize these for the billboard display. A technical team was also set up headed by Meena Gopal and included Anil, Dhanajay, Manish, Panchali and Madhurima. The press statements were prepared daily by Meera by the afternoon to be translated and disseminated to the press by PRO unit. After a day of collaboration, the PRO unit understood the spirit of the conference as well as the dialogues being conducted. The conference received wide coverage in English and Marathi newspapers. The enthusiastic PRO Unit played an invaluable role in facilitating the process.

### Crèche

The University crèche was inaugurated by Dr. Meera Velayudhan on January 19 and set up at Savitri Bai Phule women's hostel for the benefit of children of women teachers and employees. A long-standing demand of the women employees of the University, the administration and the childcare committee headed by Avantika Shukla (Assistant Professor, Women's Studies), worked overtime to complete the necessary preparations so that the crèche could be used by delegates to the conference during the conference dates, and by University staff afterwards. The inauguration programme was attended by various members of the University community, delegates who had arrived early, as well as some staff children. Speaking at the inauguration,

Dr. Velayudhan stressed the importance of socialised care for children of working mothers, families, as well as for the children themselves in these times of isolated family life. The crèche was used during the conference by 11 delegates and their children, and continues to serve the needs of the University. It may be regarded in this sense as an IAWS catalyst towards the fulfilment of the needs of the women workers on the host campus.

### **Stalls**

We made available a small number of stalls for books, food, craft items, clothes, etc to be displayed and sold. A total number of 24 stalls were put up on the four days of the conference. There were local food stalls, artefacts and other products which were a major attraction for the participants.

### **Zubaan Exhibition**

Zubaan had organised an exhibition at the conference venue that showcased a selection of posters focussing on different campaigns of women's movements. The exhibition documented the rich and multi-layered history of the movement by putting together a selection of about 80 posters that were created for different campaigns: there were posters on violence against women, women's labour, saving the environment, caste, sex-selective abortions, political participation, and beauty contests among many other themes.

### **Publications**

A range of publications were distributed to the participants of the conference. This included the following:

1. President's Address and Executive Committee Reports
2. A compilation of all regional workshops conducted between 2008-10 titled, 'Women from the Regions: Seeking New Directions—Workshops and Conferences 2008-2010'
3. A compilation of the abstracts which were sent by willing participants for presenting papers in different sub-themes in the 'Book of Abstracts'
4. A special issue of newsletter with a focus on marginalization and Wardha

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS**

### **Realized Objectives of the Conference**

#### **1. Outreach to marginalized groups and regions**

The organisation of the conference in a non-metropolitan location like Wardha has helped the IAWS achieve its objective of outreach to marginalized regions and groups. The region of Maharashtra has been witness to strong movement from the margins, especially dalits, tribals and women. The special plenary in the conference for the central region titled 'Challenges facing women in Central India' on January 23, highlighted struggles of women in this area and their experiences of being a part of such movements. While the regional plenary focussed on the issues of the region, the theme plenary on January 21, entitled, 'Marginalizations and Feminist Concerns: Resistances and Challenges' highlighted the issues of marginalization at a national level. Three speakers, namely Dayamani Barla, Jameela Nishat and Chayanika Shah spoke on their understanding of marginalization, violence, and exploitation and explored the challenges thrown up to the feminist politics from their location of multiple identities. Dayamani Barla, a tribal activist and a writer, spoke about the struggle due to displacement of adivasis, the rampant corruptions, and the environmental degradation due to exploitation of natural resources. The Hyderabad-based poet and activist Jamila Nishat, a member of Shaheen, a women's organization, spoke about the violence faced by Muslim women in the patriarchal structures of family, community and state. The third speaker Chayanika Shah spoke on the challenges of speaking from a location of multiple identities. She raised complex questions on the issues of disability movements, sex work, violence, body and technology.

#### **2. Outreach to youth and students**

One of the important objectives of the IAWS has been to expand the ongoing outreach to students and youth in all IAWS activities. In this context, the IAWS decided to organize a Youth Plenary for the first time entitled, 'Engendering Youth: Agency, Mobilization, Resistance'. Keeping in mind that there were around 400 students participating in the conference, the plenary held on January 24 successfully reached out to the younger generation of women, college and university students. The session had four young people in their early careers as media activists, part of women's organizations, in doctoral research. The importance of the plenary lay in the need to hear the voices of the future to understand the youth's vision of contemporary gender politics. A pre-conference workshop was also conducted with the students on January 20 with a focus on issues of pedagogy and curriculum of Women's



Studies. Nearly 400 students participated in the conference, an unprecedented presence.

### **3. Exchange of ideas between South-Asian feminists**

To carry the process of building the IAWS network in South Asia further, we had a South Asian Plenary, titled 'Writing Resistance: Feminist Engagements in South Asia', planned for the conference. The plenary, a platform for exchange of ideas on issues related to the theme of the conference from South-Asian perspectives and experiences, was held in the late morning of January 22, 2011. This was a somewhat unusual plenary as it was focussed on women's writings, thus integrating the literary production of the South Asian women's movement into a Women's Studies Conference. Three feminist writers, Zaheda Hina from Pakistan, Shahin Akhtar from Bangladesh and Najifa Rooby, who writes under the pen name of Penniya, from Sri Lanka spoke about the contexts of their writings and then read from a selected text to a rapt audience which was led into multiple journeys, in three different languages.

The above plenaries and the discussions which followed paved the way for beginning of new alliances and strengthening already existing ones to articulate an effective gender politics in contemporary times and in the future as well. This conference has been successful in providing the necessary platform for strengthening the network, capturing the resistances and challenges coming from the margins as well as prospecting for the future of our movements.

A special feature of this conference was the decision to film the pre-conference student workshop, the main plenaries and the cultural events so as to create a visual archive of the conference. These visual documents will be soon available in digitised form at the IAWS archive located at the SNTD Resource centre at Mumbai. Selected clips will also be put up on the IAWS website by June this year when the digitizing process will be complete. This will be one way of disseminating the main conference proceedings.

### **General Body Meeting: Some Recommendations and Resolutions Proposed**

#### **State Violence**

1. Caste-patriarchal violence perpetrated on the Bhotinange family is not just an exceptional event. The relationship between caste and patriarchy are premised upon the exercise of power which is achieved through the use of coercive power. The role of the state is that of either covering up or sabotaging such events. This is unanimously condemned. We resolve to stand together against the oppressive forces which have perpetuated caste order through ideology as well as coercion.

2. The state is engaged in the looting of natural resources in the name of promoting 'development' and 'national security' and waging war on its own people. This is happening especially in the tribal belts of the country; rampant sexual violence is being committed with impunity by military and paramilitary forces of the state. We demand the immediate withdrawal of Operation Green Hunt and the disbanding of Salwa Judum and other state-sponsored vigilante groups.
3. The Government of India should try its utmost to find ways to curb the rising prices of food items and domestic fuel in the last few years.
4. We solemnly resolve to fight for all the women of Jammu and Kashmir and the states of the North East who have suffered because of insurgency for many years. This conference strongly condemns the growing militarization and violence against women in the North East. We demand the scrapping of Afspa and withdrawal of armed and paramilitary forces there.
5. We condemn the government's decision to build a 10,000 megawatt nuclear power plant at Jaitapura in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district. We express our support for the uncompromising struggle being waged by the farmers and fisher folk of the area against the setting up of this nuclear plant on the grounds that it will endanger their health, lives and livelihood.
6. IAWS strongly condemns the arrest of political activists who are working with marginalized communities and challenging the hegemonic policies of the state. We protest against the false implications and incarceration of these activists, including many women who are prosecuted on criminal charges. We demand the repeal of the penal provision of sedition being deployed to curb dissent and to delegitimize democratic protests. We demand the immediate release of Dr Binayak Sen and justice for all struggling to uphold democratic rights.
7. We are deeply concerned about the harassment and intimidation of journalist K.K. Shahina for interviewing and publishing report of the case of Abdul Nazarmadani, Chairman of People's Democratic Party, one of the accused in the Bangalore bomb blast. She has been charged under Section 22 of UAPA, a draconian law designed to silence voices of dissent and denied anticipatory bail. We demand the withdrawal of case against K.K. Shahina.

#### **Laws and Policies**

8. As violence against women is increasing, Section 498A of IPC should be protected as it is the only law to protect married women and prevent married women's suicide and murder. The provision should



remain cognizable and non-compoundable, and there should be no changes in the law.

9. We demand that specific measures be undertaken to increase investment in agriculture with special emphasis on generation of livelihood opportunities in rural India and for making agriculture a viable activity. Steps should be taken to make rural credit available to women at easier conditions and interest rates. NREGA needs to be strengthened through increasing wages and addressing issues of women workers including child care needs. The Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Bill need to include domestic workers within the ambit of the legislation and should take away the provision of penalty for lodging false cases. The government needs to provide food security and universalize PDS. In the wake of modernization processes and international trade agreements, traditional sectors of the economy, artisanal industries have been severely affected. Weaving and handloom industry being a clear example. It is therefore a demand to take significant measures to revive handloom industry with specific focus on handloom. Steps need to be taken to introduce an urban employment generation scheme. This conference believes that globalization is not improving the condition of women in work but is further restricting the choices available to women and rendering them vulnerable to new forms of patriarchal and other forms of oppression.

#### **Women's Studies**

10. We recommend introduction of Women's Studies at Senior Secondary and UG levels in all universities. We want eligibility of Women's Studies to be recognised for Civil Services and government recruitment at all levels. We request the upholding of Karnataka High Court judgment of 2008 which stated that women's studies graduates were eligible to apply for posts in Women and Children departments but none of the departments are following this.
11. Inclusion of women with disability must be a part of Women's Studies; however, this inclusion cannot be done without addressing changes in infrastructure, pedagogy and curriculum.
12. Pre-Conference Student Workshop proposes the establishment of Women's Studies Centres/ Departments in all universities. We seek more dialogue between Women's Studies and women's movement and other democratic rights movement.
13. We condemn reduction of funding for basic social science research.
14. All universities in which Centre for Women's Studies exist should have a Board of Studies in Women's Studies.